

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Tony Diamond, Mary, Queen of Scots

At the September meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall, Tony Diamond told the story of Mary, Queen of Scots and explored her continuing influence on Britain and the monarchy.

In 1542 Mary Stuart became Queen of Scots just six days after her birth. She was the grand-daughter of Henry VIII's older sister, Margaret. She was crowned at the age of one and two years later became betrothed to the Dauphin, the heir to the throne of France. Mary went to live in France aged five in preparation for her marriage to the Dauphin in 1558. Mary's family was poor and so as her dowry she bequeathed Scotland and her claim to the throne of England to France if she died without children.

Sadly, her husband Francis II died in 1560. When she returned to Scotland 9 months later in 1561 as a penniless widow, she was in a very difficult position. She was hated by many people in Scotland as she was a devout Roman Catholic in the most Protestant country in Europe. She was also seen as a major threat to Queen Elizabeth in England. Mary had a strong claim to the throne of England through her grandmother whereas many people, especially Catholics, thought that Elizabeth should not be queen as she was the illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Popes encouraged Catholics to murder Elizabeth so that Mary would succeed her and return England to 'the true faith.'

In 1565 Mary married Robert Darnley who also had a claim to the English throne through his grandmother, Margaret Tudor. After the marriage, Darnley made himself very unpopular by his arrogant behaviour. He became jealous of his wife's friendship with her secretary, David Rizzio. When Mary became pregnant in 1566, rumours circulated that Rizzio was the father of her child, James Stuart. Darnley gathered a group of men and murdered Rizzio in front of the Queen in her apartment. This ended their marriage and Mary formed a new relationship with the Earl of Bothwell.

By 1567 there was a civil war in Scotland reflecting the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics, and powerful nobles vying for power and influence. The situation worsened when Darnley was murdered, and Mary and Bothwell were thought to have been implicated in the event. Mary married Bothwell which alienated much of her Catholic support as he was a divorcee. Her army was routed in 1568 and Mary was forced to flee to England in the hope that she could persuade Elizabeth to restore her authority in Scotland. However, she was just kept in various castles around the north of England as a prisoner for the next 19 years. During this period there were several plots by Catholics to murder Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne of England.

Eventually, in 1585 there appeared to be clear evidence of Mary's involvement in the Babington Plot. She was tried, found guilty and executed at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587. She was buried at Peterborough Cathedral without ceremony. Mary's death created the most serious threat to Elizabeth, the attempted invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588. It failed but Elizabeth constantly feared assassination until her own death in 1603. She was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, Mary's son who was a strict Protestant. He had been removed from Mary at the age of one and had had no further contact with his mother but he did have her body reinterred at Westminster Abbey in 1604. He too faced a threat to his life, the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. This prompted James to pass severe laws against Catholics and to settle Protestants in Ulster which still has political implications today. In 1689 Catholics were banned from succeeding to the throne in England, a prohibition which still exists.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be on Wednesday 26 October at Rickinghall Village Hall when Charlie Haylock will be talking about his work as the dialect coach on the film *The Dig*. All of the tickets for this event have been sold. Further information is available at www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy