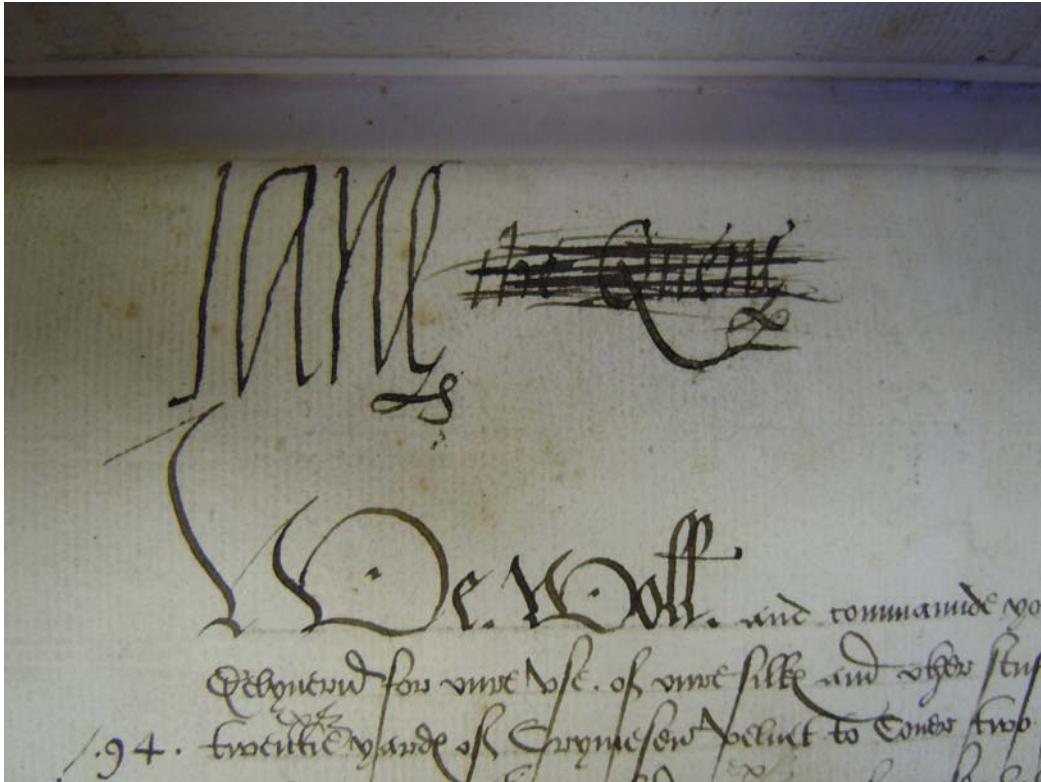


New College MS 328 and 'Jane the Quene'



New College MS 328, presented to College in 1710 by Rev. John Woodford, Fellow, is a collection of wardrobe warrants issued principally by Edward VI and Mary Tudor between 1550 and 1558. These documents were produced to facilitate the provision of clothing and fabrics for the Royal household. Hidden away in the middle, are two signed by an altogether more enigmatic, and ultimately tragic, monarch: Lady Jane Grey.

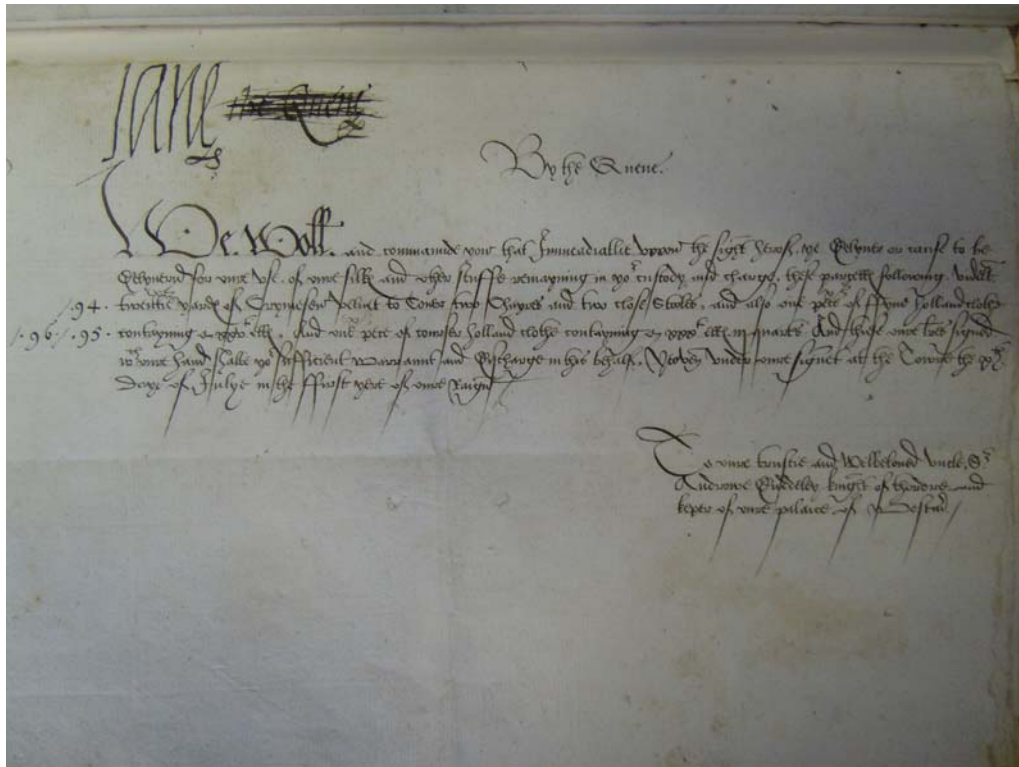
Born in 1537 (or possibly late 1536), Jane's mother was Lady Frances Brandon, the daughter of Mary, Queen of France, Henry VIII's sister. Jane was therefore a great-granddaughter of Henry VII and a cousin to Edward VI.

In October 1551 Jane's father, Henry Grey, was made Duke of Suffolk. Making appearances at Court, Jane caught the eye of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and regent to the teenage King Edward VI, the most powerful man in England. In May 1553 Jane was married to Northumberland's son, Lord Guildford Dudley. Edward was dying and Northumberland, a staunch Protestant, was desperate to prevent the Crown passing to the Catholic Mary Tudor who, along with her sister Elizabeth, had been restored to the succession behind Edward by the Third Act of Succession of 1544 (having been previously excluded on grounds of illegitimacy). Henry VIII's will had reinforced the succession of his children while also declaring that, should they have no heirs, the throne would pass to the heirs of his younger sister Mary – Lady Jane Grey's grandmother. A remote claim to the throne maybe, but one which did not escape the attention of John Dudley.

In a draft will written earlier in 1553, presumably under the guidance of Northumberland, Edward VI had altered the line of succession to exclude his two

sisters, and in favour firstly of any male heirs of Lady Frances Brandon (there were none), and then any male heirs of Lady Jane. In June 1553, and close to death, Edward altered this in favour of Jane AND her male heirs, effectively making Jane his successor. The will was made official through letters patent on 21 June, signed by over 100 people including the members of the Privy Council.

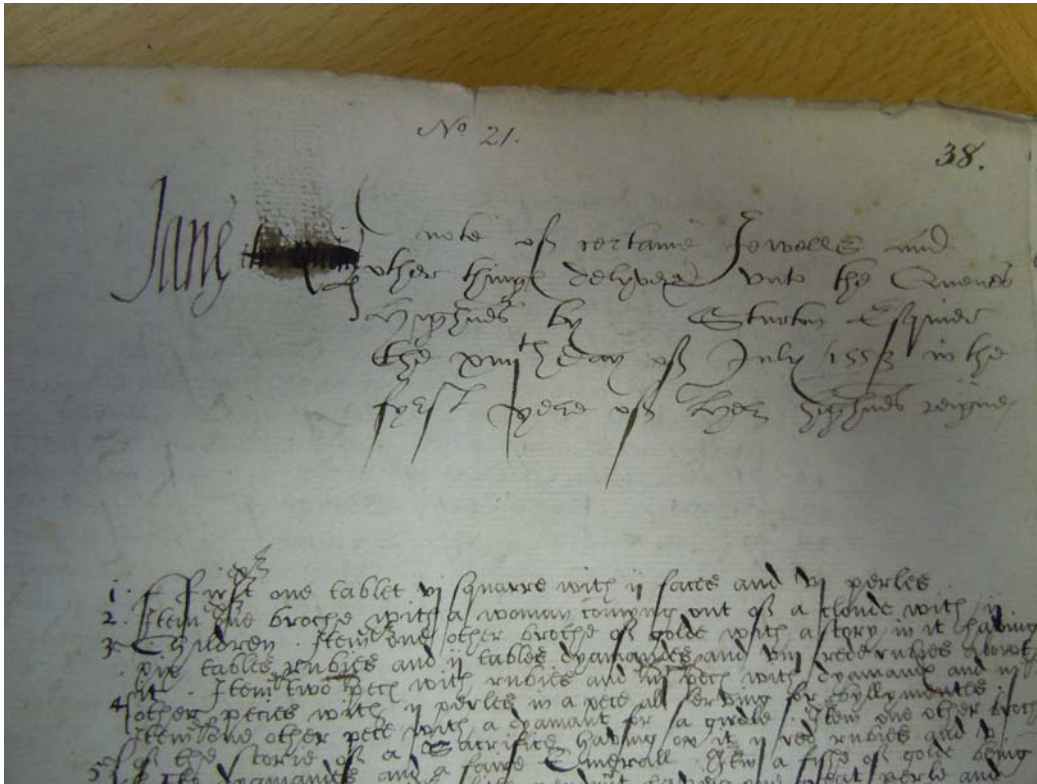
Edward died on 6 July 1553. Jane was informed of her accession to the throne three days later and on the following day, 10 July 1553, she was officially proclaimed Queen of England. It is fascinating to note that the first of our two wardrobe warrants was signed by Jane, as Queen, on this very day.¹



Having eventually heard of her brother's death, Mary had moved to her estates in East Anglia to drum up support. Knowing he had to check Mary before she could reach the capital, Northumberland left London with his army on 14 July. It is on this day that the second of our warrants was signed by Jane.² With Northumberland out of the way, the situation in London changed dramatically. The Privy Council abandoned any support for Jane and, on 19 July, proclaimed Mary queen. Having reigned for just nine days, Jane and her husband Guildford were imprisoned, separately, in the Tower of London. Support for Northumberland crumbled and Mary entered London on 3 August.

¹ A warrant for the delivery of 20 yards of crimson velvet to cover two chairs, 'and other stuffe'.

² 'A discharge to Sir Andrew Dudley for jewels and other things delivered to the Queen by [] Sturton Esq.'



Northumberland was executed on 22 August. Jane and Guildford Dudley were tried in London on 13 November; they were, of course, found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death, which for the time being was suspended. One of the charges of which Jane was found guilty was that she had signed several documents as ‘Jane the Quene’ – precisely the signature we see on our two wardrobe warrants. As can be seen, following Jane’s fall from grace, someone saw fit to strike through the words ‘the Quene’.

It seems very possible Mary may have spared Jane’s life, but it was the involvement of her father and his brothers in the Wyatt rebellion of early 1554 (Sir Thomas Wyatt’s response to Mary’s plan to marry Philip II of Spain) that finally tipped the balance of favour against Jane. On 12 February 1554 Guildford Dudley was executed on Tower Hill, while Jane was beheaded in the more private surroundings of Tower Green.

How John Woodford came to collect these warrants together is unknown. That he should have presented them to his College is something for which we should be grateful, offering as it does a tiny glimpse into a brief but turbulent period in England’s history, and into the short life of one of its most tragic figures.

As a footnote, it is interesting to see that MS328 also includes, at the end, two notes similarly relating to the procurement of cloth signed by none other than John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, the first dated 20 May 1553, the day before Jane and Guildford Dudley were married.

Jason Morgan (New College Library)