



WESTHORPE HALL  
*Residential Care*

## *Sheet 7.*

# *History at Westthorpe Hall*

*“An established residential care home with historical connections.”*



### *A fascinating history*

Westthorpe Hall is unusual in the UK care field in occupying a fascinating place in England's history.

#### *Westthorpe Hall's 'royal' history:*

The village of Westthorpe is very proud of its Tudor and royal connections. Westthorpe Hall is central to both. In 1514 Henry VIII for political reasons pressurised his youngest and favourite seventeen year-old sister Mary to go to France and marry the then King, Louis XII. However this fifty-three-year-old died three months after their marriage, so Henry despatched his trusted friend Charles Brandon, the first Duke of Suffolk, to France to escort Mary home.

Henry was outraged when news arrived from Paris that Charles and Mary, who were already known to be fond of each other, had secretly married in March 1515. At the time this was a highly unusual occurrence for a princess to wed whom so ever she chose and even more remarkable that the man concerned was a commoner!

Whilst many in England feared for Brandon's life (after all he had technically committed treason by marrying this royal princess without the King's consent) Henry eventually,

through the intercession of another of Brandon's friends Thomas Wolsey, forgave them, though a fine of £24,000 (that's almost £10 million in today's money!) was imposed and scheduled to be paid off in regular instalments (it was never fully paid).

In the same year Brandon acquired the Manor of Westthorpe and he and Mary set up their home here. They quickly built Westthorpe Hall, spending the modern equivalent of £1 million on it to create a grand estate house with sixteen principal rooms arranged around a 38m square central courtyard, plus a chapel with stained glass windows. The house was surrounded by a moat and, beside a three-arched brick bridge, stood a porter's lodge. Architectural historians suggest Westthorpe Hall would have been very similar to Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk.

Outside of the moat were extensive gardens designed in the 'French manner' and the wider parkland contained both Red and Fallow deer.



### *The death of Mary Tudor*

Mary, who preferred the title the Queen of France (her official title was actually Duchess of Suffolk, for Brandon was a commoner and was regarded as beneath her), bore Charles four children, but died at Westhorpe Hall on 25th June 1533 aged just 37. Her body was embalmed and lay in the Hall's chapel before an elaborate funeral procession walked the coffin to the Abbey in Bury St Edmunds. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries her body was moved to St Mary's church in Bury where the tomb can be seen today along with some stained glass windows illustrating her life.

As Brandon had no male heirs, after he died in 1545 the manor of Westhorpe and the Hall were transferred to the Crown in 1555. Later it was passed to Anne of Cleves and Sir Thomas Cornwallis.

But the house was large and too costly to maintain for anyone in Suffolk to live in and was duly pulled down around the mid-1760s. The only feature remaining from that Tudor period being the three-arched bridge – one of the few remaining Tudor bridges in East Anglia – that can still be seen here today. It is Grade II listed and the moat it straddles was de-silted in 1991.

### *Up to the present day*

The present Georgian building, which is also Grade II listed, replaced the 'palace' and over time the Hall became a public house, then a hotel, followed by being a family home and finally a care home in the 1980s. Over this period it was extensively added to so as to create the complex of buildings you find here today.

### *The Barker family connection*

The Barker family bought Lodge Farm in 1957, then added Hall Farm, Westhorpe in 1960 and with this latter purchase came Westhorpe Hall. So the care home is an integral feature of the estate.

In 1984 it was the late Ella Barker's wish that the Hall became a residential care home and it reopened as such in 1985. Cousins Patrick and Brian Barker, Ella's grandchildren, took over the Directorship of the Hall in October 2012 under a new company name, Three Arches Care Ltd and, despite his farming duties, Patrick spends part of most days here.