**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

# **Execution of Margaret Cheyney**

# http://spartacus-educational.com/ExTEU14.htm

[Margaret Cheyney](http://spartacus-educational.com/Margaret_Cheyney.htm) (Lady Bulmer) and her husband, Sir [John Bulmer](http://spartacus-educational.com/John_Bulmer.htm), were arrested in early April, 1537, and accused of being two of the leaders of the [Pilgrimage of Grace](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDpilgrimgrace.htm). Margaret Cheyney was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death.

It is estimated that about 200 people were executed for their part in the rebellion. This included [Robert Aske](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDaske.htm), [Thomas Darcy](http://spartacus-educational.com/Thomas_Darcy.htm), [John Hussey](http://spartacus-educational.com/John_Hussey.htm), [Francis Bigod](http://spartacus-educational.com/Francis_Bigod.htm) and [Robert Constable](http://spartacus-educational.com/Robert_Constable.htm). Margaret was burnt to death at [Smithfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithfield%2C_London) on 25th May, 1537. Although a large number of women took part in the rebellion, Margaret was the only woman executed.

##### Primary Sources

##### (Source 1) Agnes Potten and Joan Trunchfield being executed in Ipswich.



#### (Source 2) [Sharon L. Jansen](http://sharonljansen.com/),[*Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour*: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dangerous-Talk-Strange-Behavior-Resistance/dp/0312160909/ref%3Dsr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1428485933&sr=1-4&keywords=Sharon+L.+Jansen) (1996)

Margaret Cheyney gave birth to another child, a boy, born in January... Her baby must have been born shortly before William Bulmer sent his congratulations on 25th January (1536). She would thus have been pregnant during the Pilgrimage of Grace.

#### (Source 3) [Geoffrey Moorhouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Moorhouse), [The Pilgrimage of Grace](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Pilgrimage-Grace-Rebellion-Shook-Throne/dp/0297643932/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1421773673&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Pilgrimage+of+Grace) (2002)

The Duke of Norfolk had Bulmer and his Peg arrested in Easter week and they were sent down to London; for some reason, a day or two apart. She went first and was imprisoned we know not where, but he was put into the Tower. We have no record of Margaret's confession, either, though it was doubtless extracted, but Bulmer refused to say anything in his that would implicate her and he pleaded guilty to the treason charge, possibly in the forlorn hope that this would exonerate her. Both of them, in fact, originally pleaded not guilty before changing their minds while the jury was actually considering its verdict and one view is that they did so because they had been promised the King's mercy if they admitted their guilt. Bulmer referred to Cheyney as his wife and nothing else right up to the end, much to the irritation of his accusers and the judge. After the legal system had exhausted itself on them in the middle of May, both were sent for execution on the 25th of that month, Margaret to be burned at the Smithfield stake, Sir John to face the gallows at Tyburn. There seems to be no record of what became of their tiny son.

#### (Source 4) [Jasper Ridley](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1466429/Jasper-Ridley.html), [*Henry VIII*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Jasper%20Ridley%2C%20Henry%20VIII) (1984)

Nearly all the noblemen and gentlemen of Yorkshire had joined the Pilgrimage of Grace in the autumn. Henry could not execute them all. He divided them, somewhat arbitrarily, into two groups - those who were to be forgiven and restored to office and favour, and those who were to be executed on framed-up charges of having committed fresh acts of rebellion after the general pardon. Archbishop Lee, Lord Scrope, Lord Latimer, Sir Robert Bowes, Sir Ralph Ellerker and Sir Marmaduke Constable continued to serve as Henry's loyal servants; Darcy, Aske, Sir Robert Constable, and Bigod were to die. So were Sir John Bulmer and his mistress, Margaret Cheyney, who was known as Lady Bulmer but was not lawfully married to him.

#### (Source 5) [John Bellamy](https://carleton.ca/history/people/john-g-bellamy/), [The Tudor Law of Treason](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Tudor-Law-Treason-Routledge-Revivals/dp/041571284X/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1428484861&sr=1-1&keywords=John+Bellamy,+The+Tudor+Law+of+Treason) (1979)

In theory the proper death for a female traitor was to be drawn to the place for execution and burned. The sentences passed on Anne Boleyn and Lady Jane Grey were that they should be burned, or beheaded, according to the prince's pleasure, although eventually it was the latter which was decided on. There may, not, in fact, in the period under review have been a single instance when a woman was burned for high treason.

#### (Source 6) Sentence of death passed on leaders of the [Pilgrimage of Grace.](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDpilgrimgrace.htm)

You are to be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, and there you are to be hanged by the neck, and being alive cut down, and your privy-members to be cut off, and your bowels to be taken out of your belly and there burned, you being alive; and your head to be cut off, and your body to be divided into four quarters, and that your head and quarters to be disposed of where his majesty shall think fit.

#### (Source 7) [Charles Wriothesley](http://spartacus-educational.com/Charles_Wriothesley.htm), diary entry (25th May, 1537)

Margaret Cheyney, other wife of Bulmer, was drawn after them from the Tower of London into Smithfield, and there burnt, according to her judgment, God pardon her soul, being the Friday in Witsun week; she was a very fair creature and a beautiful.

#### (Source 8) [Francis Elizabeth Dolan](http://english.ucdavis.edu/people/directory/fdolan), [Women on Scaffolds](http://spartacus-educational.com/WomenonScaffolds%20%281%29.pdf), [Modern Philology](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/journals/journal/mp.html) (1994)

Although non-noble women could be whipped or hanged... no women of any class were ever disemboweled and quartered, or hanged in chains.... Understood as men's property, women's bodies played important roles in defining and securing masculine power... The executioner (of someone being hung, drawn and quartered) would appear as a brutal rapist.

#### (Source 9) [Madeleine Dodds](http://www.sclews.me.uk/m-dodds.html) and [Ruth Dodds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Dodds), [The Pilgrimage of Grace](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=Madeleine+Dodds+and+Ruth+Dodds,+The+Pilgrimage+of+Grace&rh=n%3A266239,k%3AMadeleine+Dodds+and+Ruth+Dodds%5Cc+The+Pilgrimage+of+Grace) (1915)

The depositions show only that she believed the commons were ready to rebel again, and that the Duke of Norfolk alone could prevent the rebellion. In addition to this she kept her husband's secrets and tried to save his life. She (Lady Bulmer) committed no overt act of treason; her offences were merely words and silence. The reason for her execution does not lie in the heinous nature of her offence, but Henry was not gratuitously cruel, and her punishment had no object. It was intended as an example to others. There can be no doubt that many women were ardent supporters of the Pilgrimage.... Lady Bulmer's execution... was an object-lesson to husbands... to teach them to distrust their wives.... Lady Hussey and the dowager Countess of Northumberland were both more guilty than Lady Bulmer.

#### (Source 10) [Sharon L. Jansen](http://sharonljansen.com/),[*Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour*: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dangerous-Talk-Strange-Behavior-Resistance/dp/0312160909/ref%3Dsr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1428485933&sr=1-4&keywords=Sharon+L.+Jansen) (1996)

On 25 May 1537 Margaret Cheyney was taken from the Tower of London, where she had been imprisoned since early April, and dragged on a sledge to Smithfield, in the old City of London, a site known for its meat market and its public executions. There she was burned alive at the stake.

Only ten days earlier she had been indicted of high treason by Henry VIII's government, the charge arising from the role she was accused of having played in a series of rebellions that had erupted in the northern counties. Although she did not admit to acting or speaking against the king or his government while she was being investigated and examined, she still pleaded guilty to the charge. Her sentence - burning at the stake - was the prescribed method of execution for any woman convicted of high treason. Even so, it was not the usual sentence carried out on those who were found guilty. Just a few months earlier, in an act of relative mercy, Anne Boleyn had been beheaded after her conviction for the same crime.

Margaret Cheyney's execution followed several others on that Friday. Earlier in the day six prisoners also judged guilty of high treason had suffered public execution at Tyburn. Sir Stephen Hamerton and Sir John Bulmer, enjoying the privilege of knighthood, had been hanged and beheaded. The others - Nicholas Tempest, esquire; James Cockerell, the former prior of the Augustinian priory of Guisborough; William Thirsk, the former abbot of Fountains Abbey; and John Pickering, a Dominican of Bridlington - had suffered the full penalty of the law. They had been hanged, disembowelled, and quartered, their heads, according to a contemporary chronicle, "set on London Bridge and diverse gates in London."

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##### Questions for Students

Question 1: The main events of the Pilgrimage of Grace took place during the final months of 1535. Study source 2 and explain why some historians believe Margaret Cheyney did not play an important role in the Pilgrimage of Grace?

Question 2: Margaret Cheyney and her partner, John Bulmer, both pleaded guilty to the treason charge. Does this mean that they were both guilty of this charge? It will help you to read source 3.

Question 3: Read source 4. Why did Henry VIII not order the execution of all the leaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace?

Question 4: Can you find the mistake made by the author of source 5.

Question 5: What was the punishment imposed on those involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace? Why was Margaret Cheyney not punished in this way?

Question 6: Why did Henry VIII insist that Margaret Cheyney should be executed for her involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace?