

The Countess of Salisbury & the Order of the Garter



- England's greatest order of chivalry is said to derive from an occasion when a Countess of Salisbury was dancing beside King Edward III & to her embarrassment, one of her garters dropped to the floor.
- With ostentatious gallantry the king picked it up & wrapped it round his own leg.
- In reply to insinuating sneers the King replied "honi soit qui mal y pense", words which he made the motto of the order of chivalry which he founded some years later.
- Accounts differ as to whether the Countess of Salisbury at the centre of this tale was Joan of Kent (who was, for a while, the Earl of Salisbury's wife) or her mother-in-law Catherine, Countess of Salisbury, daughter of William, 1st Baron Grandison.
- At the time of the said incident, the king was in his thirties, Countess Catherine a year or two older & Joan in her mid-teens.
- Some say it happened at Eltham Palace & some say Calais. Others declare firmly that it was in Scotland - just north of the Border - at the castle of Wark, which, after its capture from the Scots, was held by the Earl of Salisbury.

- *Whilst the Earl was incarcerated by King Philip VI in France, Catherine, his wife, is said to have been in attendance when the King was campaigning in the vicinity.*
- *It may be unlikely that, with her husband locked up abroad, the Countess would have spent time in a dangerous location in the Scottish war zone*
- *.....but, it might have been considered desirable for her to be “on hand” in her husband's castle when the King was there.*
- *The Calais version is supported by the record of Joan attending a great ball in Calais, at which the King was also present*
- *Whether or not they are true, these stories do suggest that the title & symbol of England's most venerated order of chivalry may derive from King Edward's “courtly” flirtation with a lady whilst her husband was held in captivity by the king's enemies.*

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