While most formal institutions of power, parliament, the law courts and the Privy Council, were closed to English aristocratic women, the patron-client relations that characterised elite society were, as Sharon Kettering points out in her study of France, “informal, fluid, non-institutional, and well suited to the exercise of indirect power through personal relationships by women”.\(^1\) Similarly, in her analysis of Jacobean court women, Helen Payne has argued that women had the power “to influence or to mediate, the power to recommend a person or a suit, and occasionally the power to broker, but this power was wholly dependent on relationships with powerful men”.\(^2\) According to Payne, the one exception was Jane Drummond, Anna of Denmark’s First Lady of the Bedchamber, whose influence was dependent both on her mistress’s favour, as well as on the mistaken assumption that Anna wielded significant political influence over James I’s foreign policy.\(^3\) Though attendance at the Caroline court provided aristocratic women with similar influence, access and favour, necessary to engage in early modern politics, a position within Queen Henrietta Maria’s Bedchamber offered more opportunities for women than under the first Stuart queen consort. This was due to three main factors: first, the reorganisation of Henrietta Maria’s household structure in 1627; second, the close personal relationship of Charles and Henrietta Maria; and third, the ability of Caroline court women to engage in politics not only through their dependence on powerful men, but also through the favour of the queen. Consequently, aristocratic court women were able to engage in politics either independently or in collaboration with important

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3 Ibid., 170–1. For a detailed discussion of Jane Drummond’s politicking see Cynthia Fry’s chapter elsewhere in the present volume.
male figures at court, as both were ultimately dependent on the patronage of the king or queen.

Unlike Anna of Denmark’s household, which followed the organizational precedent of Elizabeth I’s establishment, in that her Bedchamber remained under the “umbrella of her Privy Chamber”, Henrietta Maria’s establishment from 1627 mirrored the argument set down by Neil Cuddy for the Bedchamber of James I.4 The separate regulations issued for Henrietta Maria’s Bedchamber in 1627, as well as the distinction made between the queen’s Ladies of the Bedchamber and Privy Chamber within the household regulations and court administrative documents, suggests that at this point there was a clear segregation of duties and function between Henrietta Maria’s Privy Chamber and Bedchamber.5 Only those officers that were “Sworne of that Chamber” or of Charles I’s own Bedchamber could now enter the queen’s most private and restricted rooms.6 The close personal relationship of the king and queen from 1628 onwards and the regular interaction of their respective establishments provided Caroline Ladies of the Bedchamber with privileged access to the royal couple and important male figures at court.7 This was a predominant source of power for Henrietta Maria’s Ladies of the Bedchamber, above all when the dissolution of Parliament by Charles I in 1629 and its recall in 1640 increasingly directed the focus of national and international politics onto the Caroline court. Consequently, when Kevin Sharpe points out in his analysis of the court and household of Charles I that the “politics of Bedchamber appointments was the politics of access and influence”, it is necessary to question the extent that this relates to the political inner workings of Henrietta Maria’s Bedchamber as well.8

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6 Household Regulations in the Reign of Charles I, BL, Stowe MS 561, fo. 15.
