

Thanks for coming back to Day 2 - I hope yesterday was enjoyable, and thanks to everyone who posted in the Facebook group! It's so good to have a group learning about this stuff together, and if you haven't checked it out in a while, head on over there soon and say hi!

Today's kickass woman is one who exemplifies how women could have multiple roles in their lives, and there's this narrative that they only worked at home, or managed the home in a domestic capacity, but that's not really always true. A woman who shows us that is Katherine Fenkyll, who was a draper.

Katherine exemplifies the way in which marriage could really be seen as a partnership, where wives were expected to share in the work of their husbands' trades, and some could even then parlay that into becoming major players in London industry.

Of course this wasn't the norm. Only 73 women were apprentices in London in the 16th century, to the thousands of men who were. There was normally nothing legal against women practicing a trade in the city, something called the Freedom of the City, but in general women weren't accepted. In 1550 the Ordinances of the Weaver's Company stated that no weaver could reveal his trade to any women.

There were areas of work that were considered totally appropriate for women to enter, and the cloth trade was one of those. Working in spinning, or even dressmaking, was totally respectable for women, and you could easily have an apprenticeship that way. It's interesting to note that during this time, wives had no legal status apart from their husbands. They could not own any property, or anything, really. Even their clothing belonged to their husbands. The flip side of that was that they could not be sued. Any debts or wages that they took on while married were their husband's.

So let's look at Katherine, our aforementioned draper. Nothing is really known of her early life, and I can't find any images of her of course, but she demonstrated a common path for women entrepreneurs, which was to take over their husbands' business once he had died. She likely left home towards the end of the 15th century, when Margaret Beaufort was entering her life of quiet retirement content as the King's mother.

Katherine married the draper Sir John Fenkyll between 1497 and 1499. She was his second wife. Her husband was at the center of trade in London, and he was regularly part of official business. He voted in City elections, and served as an alderman from 1485 until he died, and was also the Sheriff of London at one point. He represented the City in Parliament, and was knighted, and had a coat of arms. So this was a really good match for Katherine, seeing as how we know nothing of her early life, and so she likely came from a humble family.

Sir John was a draper, and that meant that he sold cloth. Generally drapers sold cloth for clothing, but it could be cloth for anything. He also bought and sold iron goods, and imported wine, so he was really active in his trade. He had a good sense of what would sell - once on a

trip to Portugal he brought home a barrel of marmalade, knowing it would be popular. He owned ships, and sometimes sold his cloth to the Continent in those, and other times he rented ships. During this time Katherine would have worked with her husband assisting him, but she had no independent role in the business.

That being said, women could have autonomy. We talked yesterday about Margaret Beaufort being considered a femme sole at the end of her life. According to the City of London, if a woman was married but, "followed any craft within the said City by herself apart, with which the husband in no way intermeddles" she could be, "bound as a single woman as to all that concerns her said craft." If she were sued, she would be treated as a femme sole. So while women didn't have any separate legal status, they could enter contracts like that on their own.

For Katherine, her chance to come out into the light on her own in 1499 when her husband died. Sir John had left her in charge of his business affairs. Childless widows were entitled to half of her husband's money and goods, but Sir John also left her a life interest in their home, land outside of London, and the remainder of his estate. He named her an executor of his estate, and so she was dealing with the administration of this complex set of contracts, and work.

Sir John had requested that two of his associates who wanted to use his ships could do so for three years after his death, as long as they paid all the charges, and they would receive $\frac{1}{3}$ of the profit, with the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ going to Catherine. At the end of those 3 years, the ship was to pass to the executor of the will.

She was a very wealthy widow, and had no need to get involved in the draper's business, and could have lived a contented life working with charities and seeing out her husband's wishes. She had a large house, and he left a lot of charitable bequests that she could have seen through. But she didn't. She set up her own business selling cloth, and her own trading business with goods sailing to distant ports in other countries.

She worked with her other executor in the time immediately after Sir John's death handling the estates affairs - which was a lot of work. They were still handling debts a decade later. Sir John's nephew brought a case against her saying he should have received more of the estate. He even claimed her house, and she went to court saying that he had "imagined" this claim.

She engaged 2 male apprentices in 1511 and 1513, and by 1515 we see her in court bringing a case before the Drapers' Company about silk she had bought from the wife of a man named Matthew Boughton, saying that it was, "non lawful and not after the sample." Basically, that the sample didn't match what she was sold.

Katherine was single for 12 years until she married again in 1511. Her new husband was also well connected in the Drapers' Company, and had been a member of parliament. This was a gamble for her - she had had over a decade of freedom, and had enjoyed the status that being

Inspiration from Kick@ss Tudor Women
Day One: Katherine Fenkyll

the widow of a knight afforded her. But it was likely a love match. She moved immediately into his home, and as we see from the dates of the court case, she didn't give up her business.

They were married for 15 years before he died, and he left her again half of his goods and chattels for her to do with what she wanted. She was again left a widow, with her second widowhood as filled as the first one. This one was a little more perilous for her, though. She was obviously a wealthy widow, and people were out to take advantage of that.

She was sued when two claimants, James and Nicholas Lewson, said that her late husband had guaranteed the debts of a Thomas Barnaby, a London citizen and haberdasher. But, she said, of the two possible witnesses to the agreement, Barnaby was, "beyond the sea about his business," and her husband was dead. So there wasn't any proof either way, and she wasn't going to pay the bill, which was more than 270 pounds, for something that there was no record for. She asked for time so that she could search the papers of her husband, and she said she wasn't about to pay anything without checking into it further. Unfortunately we don't actually have any record as to how this suit turned out, but I don't think Katherine would have paid if she wasn't absolutely sure that she wasn't the victim of fraud.

Another example was when a George Hubbard from Norfolk showed up saying her husband owed her 100 pounds, and she needed to pay it immediately. She was suspicious and said it was odd that he hadn't tried to claim the money during her husband's lifetime. She refused his demand, and then he said he would leave if she only paid him "a little sum of money." She looked at the document he had, noting that it wasn't sealed with her husband's seal, and she refused to pay one penny. He could take her to court.

Hubbard then tried to bad mouth her throughout the City, trying to hurt her business. Katherine told her lawyers to bring a case against him.

Though she was never a member of the Drapers Company, being a woman, she was always invited to attend their feasts and would supply her own silver to the table.

Katherine spent over 30 years as part of the drapery business, and her identity, while that of a wife, always was to her business first.

So I hope you enjoyed learning about Katherine today!