

Hello and welcome to Day One of the Inspiration from Kickass Tudor Women minicourse. My name is Heather Teysko, and for those of you who don't know me, I started a podcast called the Renaissance English History Podcast in 2009, and have been podcasting for the past eight years about my favorite time period in history. I also lead history tours to England, design gorgeous planners and journals inspired by Tudor history, and do courses on podcasting. I live in Spain with my husband and three year old daughter, and before that I lived in London, New York, Los Angeles, and I'm originally from Amish Country Pennsylvania.

So that's a little bit about who I am. As this course goes on, I want to know more about who you are, about what inspires you about history, and what you get out of learning about it.

My first job in high school was as a student docent at a local home built by a Revolutionary War general, Rock Ford Plantation in Lancaster PA, owned by General Edward Hand, adjutant general to Washington. I spent five years there, and during that time I got to know Edward Hand really well. I handled his medical equipment, I touched his books, and I got to know him really well. But I really didn't know much about his wife. And, as someone who loved history, but also was interested in women's history, that really bugged me.

There are a lot of reasons why women don't make it into the historical narrative. One big reason is that most of the documents we have that tell the story of history are related to the government, and court, and of course this is a place where women didn't participate that much. There are, however, places where we can gather information about women. One area is in household expenses, which would have been managed by women largely. Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII's mother's, privy purse expenses are all available for the last year of her life, which gives us insight into what was important to her, and how her household was run. Women also appear in court cases from time to time, like Bess of Hardwich, a woman who continually fought for what she was owed, and that can give us an insight into their lives. There are also letters - Honor Grenville, Lady Lisle, was in Calais while her husband was Captain there, and her letters home give us a lot of information about where she spent her time, and what was important.

This week I'm going to look at five Tudor Women - some of them are very famous and you will likely have heard of, and others aren't so much. It's my hope that even if you know the women about whom I'm talking, you'll learn something new about them. At the end of the week, it's my goal that you have a deeper insight into the lives of 16th century women of various classes, have learned a lot about how varied and different their lives were, and have taken some inspiration from them that you can apply to your own life.

Today's woman will be someone who is likely known to you, and that's Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of the Tudor Dynasty. I chose her for the first day not just because she is at the very beginning of the dynasty, being the mother of Henry VII, but also because to me she embodies the very essence of what it takes to create something awesome in life. She solidly knew who she was and had a deep faith in herself and her role in life, but she was also adaptable, and quick to act once the opportunity arose.

We often remember Lady Margaret as this really religious dour older woman, who also had a reputation of being a Mother in Law from Hell to her daughter, the aforementioned Elizabeth of York. But there was much more to her, and in fact she was very warm, very committed to her family, and even quite funny. She was devoted to education, founding two colleges in Cambridge.

Lady Margaret was born in 1443, and her family is descended from the third son of Edward III, John of Gaunt, from his mistress-who-became-his-wife Katherine Swynford. When her father died at a year old, she became an heiress to lands throughout the midlands and South of England.

At the time, when a wealthy child became an orphan, they were Wards of the Court, and the King could decide who to give their wardship to. The person who controlled the wardship could decide the marriage of the ward, and so it was a valuable thing to have. Henry VI, who was King then, gave Margaret's wardship jointly to his half brothers, Edmund and Jasper Tudor. Margaret was married to Edmund when she was still very young.

At the time, the accepted age to have sex in a marriage was 12, but generally people waited even longer, understanding that bearing a child when you were that young yourself could be very dangerous. Margaret was pregnant at age 12, and then Edmund died, so she was a pregnant widow. She moved to Pembroke Castle, Jasper Tudor's home, and Margaret gave birth to her son Henry. It was a very long and difficult birth, which almost killed her. It likely damaged her fertility permanently, as she never had another child after that experience. Her son was called Henry.

Margaret married again three months after giving birth, to a Sir Henry Stafford, who was close to 20 years her senior, though it seems as if they were happy and comfortable together, and he was kind to her. The political situation was getting really awful as the Wars of the Roses was breaking out, and Stafford fought for the Lancastrian side at the Battle of Towton. The opposing side, the Yorkists, won that battle, and Stafford had to reconcile himself with the new King, Edward IV. Edward had a policy of being forgiving to those lords who had fought against him, but then joined him, and Stafford and Margaret both were able to keep their lands, and come to court, where Margaret served the Queen Elizabeth Woodville. Edward did, however, take her son from her, and move him to a Yorkist home. Henry Tudor, her son, could have had a claim to the throne, though it was tenuous at best, seeing how there was illegitimacy on his mother's side (from the relationship John of Gaunt had with Katherine Swynford), and the Tudors on the other side. For those of you who don't know, Owen Tudor had been a squire in the household of Henry V's queen Catherine of Valois. When Henry died, she married her squire Owen, which was actually kept secret for a while, and became a scandal when it was revealed. Her son Henry VI had become close with his half brothers, but there was still a taint around them seeing as how they came from a squire, and not a long line of nobility.

Still, Henry's claim was too much for King Edward to leave unchecked, and so Henry was sent to be raised in the home of a Yorkist sympathiser, and was stripped of his title. Of course at the time it was common for children to not be raised entirely at home, so Margaret would not have expected to have been with him continually, but she still likely would have been disappointed that she couldn't have chosen a home for him herself, and she would have worried about how he was being treated.

The wars of the roses is nothing if not complicated, and in 1470 the sides shifted again as the Lancastrians rallied, and Henry VI was put on the throne again. For Margaret this would have been exciting, as she could have seen her son again. This was all very short lived, as Edward, who had fled, came back with a vengeance. The Lancastrians asked for Stafford to support

them, but he stayed loyal to the Yorkists. The Battle of Barnet was the deciding battle of this part, and the Yorkists won. Stafford was critically injured in the battle, and died within a few months. This was also disastrous for Henry and his uncle Jasper, as they now would have been seen with a lot more suspicion, and they fled to Brittany, where Henry would stay until he came back to fight for the throne in 1485.

After he died, Margaret was again on her own, this time in her late 20's, and with the Yorkists in power again, her son fleeing, her loyalties to them may have been suspect. A lot of people conjecture that Margaret always believed that her son would be king, and I even thought that for a while, but the more I learn about her, the more I see that she was a pragmatist, and her main goal at this point likely would have been to stay alive. Plus, after this point, Edward's reign looked very secure. He had sons, England was thriving, the Lancastrian side was in shambles, and she likely would have been simply looking for a way that she could be reunited with her son, and stay alive.

She married quickly, a man called Thomas, Lord Stanley. The Stanley's have become the most well known vacillating noblemen of this time period, never actually fighting, or declaring support for either side, and yet continuing to rise no matter who was King. It was really quite extraordinary, and Margaret picked well with him as the Yorkists thought he was a strong supporter of their cause. He was a widower and already had children, so he was content to not have children with Margaret. She went to court occasionally, but she seemed to spend most of this time at home on his estates in Lancashire.

After a period of almost a decade without seeing her son, and trying to rebuild her loyalties and survive at court, she began negotiating with King Edward over how to bring her son back out of exile. There was talk of him coming back and being restored to his titles in exchange for declaring loyalty for Edward and marrying one of Edward's daughters, though it's unlikely how this could have worked out. Of course, this exact plan is the one that Margaret would hatch with Elizabeth Woodville, Edward's Queen, after Edward died.

Edward died unexpectedly at the age of 40, and the country was thrown back into the Wars of the Roses with different factions vying for power. Edward's younger brother Richard deposed Edward's sons, who have become known through history as the Princes in the Tower, and likely killed them, though there's not much more than circumstantial proof, and if you're a Ricardian you will take issue with what I just said.

Richard III was crowned, and Margaret actually had the high honor of carrying his Queen, Anne Neville's train during her coronation ceremony. She was also in contact with the former Queen, Elizabeth Woodville, who had retreated into sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, and this was likely the point at which she saw the opportunity for her son to take the throne. She was also writing letters to the Duke of Buckingham.

This is important because the Duke of Buckingham planned a revolt against Richard. He was saying that he was acting in support of Henry - he wanted to claim the throne for Margaret's son, but likely he just wanted it for himself. This is one of the areas of intrigue that historical fiction authors have fun with - was Margaret pretending to support Buckingham to get his support for Henry, and who was lying to who. Either way, the rebellion failed, and Margaret's loyalties were very much now out in the open, and that didn't bode well for her with her

relationship with Richard and the Court.

This would have been a difficult time in Margaret's life. She was attainted by an act of Parliament, and stripped of her lands. But to keep her husband loyal, he was given the lands, and she was kept under house arrest in his castles in Lancashire.

Buckingham wasn't the only one who was disloyal to Richard, and soon there were dozens of loyal Yorkists headed to Brittany where Henry had promised that if he was successful in taking the throne, he would marry Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter, and their heirs would be united Lancaster and York.

Henry arrived in England in the summer of 1485, and beat Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Not only could she now be reunited with her son, but it was with him as the King, and her as the mother of a King.

Henry always understood what he owed his mother, who probably had a better claim to the throne than he did. But all of her property was restored to her, she was given new lands, and she became known as My Lady, the King's Mother.

She stayed married to Stanley, but she took on an active role managing her life and at court during this time. Henry gave her the title of femme sole, which was generally only given to unmarried women or widows, and it meant that she manage her land and her properties independently without her husband. It was also the status given to a Queen.

There are letters from foreign ambassadors talking about how much influence she had over the king, but it wasn't that she ruled through him. They had a close relationship because she was the only person he trusted completely, and remember that he had been in exile for so long, he needed her help in negotiating the loyalties and the politics of this new land where he was King.

She devoted her later life to education and charitable works. She patronised William Caxton, who brought the printing press to England, and as I said before, she founded two colleges in Cambridge, St. John's and Christ's college. She took an active role in these charities - not just sending them money, but also recommending people for jobs, and continually asking after them. There's a story that at Christ's college she had rooms made for herself so that she could stay there whenever she wanted. Once she was there, and saw a teacher hitting a wayward student too hard, and she yelled down telling them to do it more gently. Of course, at this time, beating children was expected, so she didn't necessarily tell him to stop, but she told him to not do it so hard.

Also interesting is the fact that she was largely responsible for her granddaughter, Margaret's marriage to the King of Scotland being delayed until she was old enough. Margaret remembered what happened with her own experience of bearing children too young, and she was adamant that her granddaughter not go through the same thing that she did.

She outlived her son by 2 months, and was able to see her grandson Henry become Henry VIII, which was the first bloodless transfer of power in 50 years.

What I love about Lady Margaret is that she had this real fighting spirit, and she stuck up for

Inspiration from Kick@ss Tudor Women

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what she knew was right, and who she knew herself to be - which was an heiress - she never doubted that. She tried to make the best of her situation at the Yorkist court, and tried to get her son back on reasonable terms, but as soon as she saw an opening, she acted without hesitation. She was both strong, and flexible, and I like that.

So I have more resources about Margaret listed on the website below, and I hope you've enjoyed learning about her, and if you already knew about her, I hope you learned something new. Tomorrow we're going to talk about female entrepreneurs in the 16th century, and I'm going to talk about someone that you may not know that well.

Talk with you tomorrow, and please feel free to share anything you want to talk about in the Facebook group, too!