

Claire Ridgway23:00

Hello! Welcome to tonight's live chat and a big thank you to Elizabeth for being here, and for her wonderful talk. So, the topic is the lives of Tudor women or Elizabeth's other research and books if you like. I'm sure we'll have others join as we go on.

Claire Ridgway23:01

To break the ice, can I just ask about books on childbirth and pregnancy, for example the idea that the soul entered a girl foetus at 90 days gestation - what's the source for that, if you can remember, as I really want to read more about it. Thank you!

Elizabeth Norton23:01

Hi everyone, Elizabeth Norton here. I'm really pleased to be here tonight to talk about the lives of Tudor women. Any questions?

Dawn hatswell23:02

Hi Elizabeth is there quite a lot of documented sources on women from Tudor times

Elizabeth Goodman23:04

Hi everyone!

Elizabeth Norton23:04

Hi Claire. I used contemporary medical manuals in the main. I got the 90 day figure from Nicholas Orme's Medieval Children book. Some medical manuals differed.

Claire Ridgway23:05

Thank you!

Lorna Wanstall23:05

Sounds a very strange idea

Elizabeth Norton23:05

Hi Dawn, it's quite variable. There are lots of contemporary works on Tudor life, such as medical books and religious texts. These often feature women, but are almost always written by men. There are also sources about specific women. I trawled through archives looking for women doing specific things, such as a female draper, Katherine Fenkyll, who I found in the archives of the Drapers' Company in London

Claire Ridgway23:05

The divided womb idea was strange too! Part of it for monsters??!

Dawn hatswell23:06

I found the book Weaker Vessel in a charity shop some months ago, have yet to read it have you read it, if so what is your opinion of it

Elizabeth Norton23:06

Lorna, it's pretty standard for the times. Women were just simply considered second-rate. There was a very popular book called 'Women's Secrets' which actually said post-menopausal women were poisonous - they could kill children with a glance of their eyes. This is the sort of thing Tudor women had to deal with

Lorna Wanstall23:06

Good Lord, and I thought the Victorians had some strange ideas

Elizabeth Norton23:07

Claire, the divided womb was again stated by reputable physicians. Knowledge of anatomy was pretty sketchy. Not all physicians believed in the monsters though!

Elizabeth Norton23:07

Dawn, it's an interesting book. Mine's better though ! 😊

Dawn hatswell23:08

Haha... well of course it is

Claire Ridgway23:08

What would you say is the most interesting story you found when researching for this book?

Elizabeth Norton23:08

Lorna, some of the ideas are bizarre. On education, one writer had noticed that girls seemed to learn more quickly than boys, but he reassured the readers that it was not true. No one could conceive of women outstripping men - they were just held to be inferior (hence Elizabeth I's 'weak and feeble woman' speech)

Elizabeth Norton23:09

Claire, there were so many stories. I really loved researching Elizabeth Barton, the Nun of Kent. Fascinating that a peasant girl could rise to have the ear of a king, a cardinal, an archbishop, a bishop, a lord chancellor and the pope's ambassadors. Amazing story

Lorna Wanstall23:10

True, and I suppose this is why men were against woman rulers as they thought they couldn't rule without a man

Elizabeth Norton23:10

I also liked the little stories. I researched the poor of Norwich, who were eeking out a living knitting or weaving, as well as many other women. The lives of the poor were fascinating.

Claire Ridgway23:11

I do find the stories of ordinary women so interesting.

Elizabeth Norton23:11

Lorna, monarch was about the only official role open to women in the period. Even that seemed inconceivable to Henry VIII - until Mary I there had been no effective female monarch in England

Dawn hatswell23:11

Although the female of the species was considered all things negative at the time there was actually some very canny, and clever ones too it seems who on the face of it worked their men folk with their charms for an end goal what do you think

Elizabeth Norton23:12

Claire, they're fascinating. Many lived very ordinary lives, which was interesting in itself. Others were extraordinary.

Claire Ridgway23:12

Most books focus on royals whereas the lives of everyday people can be just as, if not more, interesting.

Elizabeth Norton23:13

Dawn, they did. Many women were truly exceptional. Katherine Fenkyll, who I mentioned above, took over her husband's business on his death and turned it into a very successful enterprise. As a woman, she was not permitted to join the Draper's Company, but she always sat on the top table at their feasts, surrounded by silver plate they had borrowed from her house

Elizabeth Norton23:14

Claire, I was very keen not to focus only on royals. Although the sources for them are much more detailed, their stories have largely been told. They are also not representative. It was exciting to uncover the lives of entirely ordinary women, such as Sister Fisher, first matron of St Bartholomew's Hospital, who seems to have ruled the hospital, with even the governors there in fear of offending her

Claire Ridgway23:15

I love finding women like that in the sources!

Dawn hatswell23:15

It must have been very frustrating for the ladies to hold their tongue where they had the edge on something and could see mistakes the menfolk made

Elizabeth Norton23:15

In the first chapter I deliberately paralleled two births - that of Elizabeth Tudor, second daughter of Henry VII, and Mary Cheese, a poor illegitimate baby who died a few days after she was born. I wanted to show that not all women led the same lives.

Elizabeth Norton23:16

Claire, it's brilliant. I never knew which direction my research would take me in.

Claire Ridgway23:16

Did you find anything while doing your research that really surprised you?

Elizabeth Norton23:17

Dawn, I agree. Men were masters in their households - married women had no property rights. They didn't even own the clothes on their backs. A major reason for Elizabeth I not marrying was because she did not want to cede place to a husband. If she had married, her husband would have become king and a king outranks a queen

Elizabeth Norton23:18

Claire, there was lots that surprised me. I was surprised at the volume of material that survives for women. So many of the sources used in the book came from archives and haven't been published or discussed before. Many of the stories were surprising too - I hadn't heard of Joan Bocher, for example, who was a Protestant woman burned for heresy during the reign of the equally Protestant Edward VI

Anthony Hillman23:18

Elizabeth, really random question but it's for my research, did tudor woman pluck and shape their eyebrows then?

Lorna Wanstall23:19

What else do you think turned Elizabeth off from marrying apart from what you have mentioned

Elizabeth Norton23:19

Joan Bocher was very outspoken, something which offended Archbishop Cranmer. She was also, effectively, the wrong kind of Protestant.

Claire Ridgway23:19

Poor Joan!

Elizabeth Norton23:20

Hi Anthony. That's an interesting one. They certainly wore cosmetics (often) and sometimes still plucked their foreheads (as women had done in the medieval period). I'm afraid I honestly don't know about eyebrows. I'll dig around and see what I can find out!

Anthony Hillman23:20

Thank you!

Dawn hatswell23:21

When you look at the inequality of the sexes, women weak in body and mind...it makes you wonder how they reached such an illogical conclusion when you look at the ordinary women the never ending daily tasks, preparing for the winter, pregnancy, giving birth, seeing to the needs of their extended family in some cases, it was a never ending cycle of harduous graft

Elizabeth Norton23:22

Lorna, I think the main reason probably was a desire not to share power. Also, of course, there were no examples of happy marriages in Elizabeth's immediate family. She may also have been frightened of childbirth - that was the official reason given for her changing her mind about marrying the Duke of Alencon. A very high number of women died in childbirth. Also, had she born a healthy son, he too would have been a rival. Most contemporaries believed that a woman should give place to a man - the Emperor Charles V ruled in place of his mother, Juana of Castile

Elizabeth Norton23:23

Dawn, it was a deeply patriarchal society. It was just inconceivable to contemporaries to consider that women could be equal to men. Everything they were taught said that they were inferior. Women's lives could indeed be really hard. They also tended to outlive men, with many of the very poorest in society being elderly widows. There was no retirement then, people worked until they physically no longer could

Anthony Hillman23:24

That is extremely poignant

Lorna Wanstall23:24

Thank you, I believe she was frightened of childbirth but I also feel that something happened to her when she was in catherine Parrs household

Dawn hatswell23:24

And do you agree that this attitude developed from religion...Adam and Eve etc

Elizabeth Norton23:24

That said, it wasn't all misery. Many women lived perfectly happy lives. Rose Hickman, for example, who I discuss in the book, seems to have had a happy childhood and two happy marriages. She was a religious exile for a time but, in general, life seems to have treated her well

Elizabeth Norton23:25

Anthony, it is poignant. Many of these old women seem to have inflated their ages - probably in the hope of being seen as more worthy of charity. In Norwich in the 1560s, for example, there were a high number of elderly women claiming to be 100. Possible, but not likely

Roland Hui23:26

Elizabeth - which of Henry's wives do you admire the most, and why?

Lorna Wanstall23:26

Certainly there are many woman who made names for themselves. Victoria colona was a poet

Elizabeth Norton23:27

Lorna, I talk about the relationship between Elizabeth and Thomas Seymour in my earlier book, *The Temptation of Elizabeth Tudor*. There were rumours of a baby born to the teenaged Elizabeth. I discuss them, but discount them. A deeply traumatic experience for the young Elizabeth though. She also always remembered Thomas Seymour. She referred to him during her sister, Mary's, reign and kept a portrait of Thomas when she was queen

Dawn hatswell23:28

Was there sex education for maturing girls.

Elizabeth Norton23:28

Dawn, the attitude had theological justification thanks to Adam and Eve, you're right. Man was always presented as the ideal - in contemporary medicine, men were considered to be hot and dry, while women were cold and wet. Women were almost always portrayed as inferior versions of the male ideal

Anthony Hillman23:28

I would love to have known which portrait it was she had of him!

Elizabeth Norton23:30

Hi Roland. I always used to say Catherine Parr. I do admire her greatly, as the first English woman to publish under her own name and the woman who survived Henry VIII. However, having researched her involvement in Thomas Seymour's relationship with Elizabeth in more depth, as well as her attempts to gain power after Henry's death (through a manipulation of Edward VI), I find her a more complex but less likeable character. I therefore think I admire Anne of Cleves more. She was good natured and pragmatic, in spite of some very bad treatment and seems to have been genuinely loved. She made the best of a bad situation

Lorna Wanstall23:30

Hello Phil hope you ok haven't seen you for a while

Anthony Hillman23:31

Good answer Elizabeth, Anne of Cleves is my favourite

Roland Hui23:32

Elizabeth - is your opinion of Katheryn Howard a more positive one or more negative? Or somewhere in between?

Elizabeth Norton23:32

Lorna, there were. It was difficult for women to step forward out of their households, but some did. Some on a less impressive scale. In the book I detail a group of women from Brentwood, for example, who armed themselves and took over their local chapel in an attempt to stop it being closed down. Women could and did take direct action and do remarkable things. Rose Hickman, who I mentioned earlier, wrote her autobiography. A number of women also practised as surgeons in the period

Lorna Wanstall23:32

Yes that's my perception of Anne of Cleves, I reckon if H8 had given his marriage a chance it would have been quite sussussful

Claire Ridgway23:32

Anne of Cleves seems to have been a lovely lady. It's just a shame that she didn't get much chance to be queen consort.

Claire Ridgway23:32

Snap Lorna!

Dawn hatswell23:33

Yes Anne of Cleve's expected nothing it seems but gained more in every aspect than any of the other 5

Elizabeth Norton23:33

Dawn, sex education would largely have come from the girl's mothers. It was supremely important that they learn (as one manual put it) to avoid the 'crocodile tears' of young men. An unmarried girl who became pregnant would be ruined - something which accounts for the high number of cases of infanticide that were heard in courts

Dawn hatswell23:34

So they knew what to expect on the wedding night?

Elizabeth Norton23:35

Anthony, it's the usual portrait we see of Thomas, with long beard and wearing a hat. There are verses in praise of Thomas written beside his head. These were composed by his servant, John Harington, who presented it to Elizabeth. He always admired Thomas, in spite of the fact that he was also arrested when Thomas fell, and evidently felt that it was a suitable present to present to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Norton23:36

Roland, I feel very sorry for Catherine Howard. I think much blame lies with Henry VIII, she was clearly (and obviously) entirely unsuited to be queen. I think she was guilty (even though she

denied adultery, the evidence is strong). She was certainly not a virgin at marriage. Most kings would have made her their mistress. Catherine was foolish, but she didn't deserve to die, I think

Anthony Hillman23:37

Thank you Elizabeth, I know which portrait you mean now, very moving to look at I think

Elizabeth Norton23:38

Lorna, Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves actually seem to have got on very well after the end of their marriage. They used to dine together - in fact Henry came to dine with Anne after both his marriages to Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr in order to inform her himself. He paid her debts, too, while he lived. They could have been a good couple!

Roland Hui23:38

I believe Anne of Cleves knew what to expect on her wedding night. That story about her not knowing about the 'birds and the bees' while speaking to her ladies in waiting was nonsense. I suspect that the gov'n't had the ladies make that testimony so it could be confirmed' that Anne was still a virgin as to facilitate her marriage annulment from H8.

Elizabeth Norton23:38

Dawn, most girls would have been aware of sex before they married. Anne of Cleves seems to have been something of an exception

Lorna Wanstall23:38

Agreed Henry's murder (because that's what it was IMO) of Catherine Howard was purely down to spite and vindictiness. It was a sort of "If I can't have you no one else will" moment

Elizabeth Norton23:40

Roland, it's not very clear exactly what Anne of Cleves knew or was expecting. She seems to have been raised very strictly. I think we can take the story of her words to her ladies with a pinch of salt. On the night that she was informed that Henry wanted to end her marriage, her chamberlain still required an interpreter to speak to her. I'm not sure she can have been fluent enough in English to have such a candid conversation

Lorna Wanstall23:40

Yes I believe Anne of Cleves lived well up until H*'s death it seems very strange that they should be come friends doesn't it

Elizabeth Norton23:41

Lorna, Catherine's own step-grandmother thought she would simply be sent home to her in disgrace. The marriage was easily annulled thanks to the evidence of a precontract with Dereham. There was no reason to execute Catherine other than Henry's anger. A very sad story

Roland Hui23:41

Yes, that Anne still barely knew English after months in England makes me think she never had that conversation with her ladies

Lorna Wanstall23:42

I would love to know what Anne was told about Henry.

Elizabeth Norton23:42

Lorna, it was strange. I think Henry simply wasn't attracted to Anne of Cleves. After Henry's death she lived in difficult circumstances. Inflation greatly lowered the value of her pension, while the government forced her to give up her two main residences: Richmond and Bletchingley

Dawn hatswell23:42

When I was fair and young and favour graced me, Of many was I thought their mistress for to be. But I did scorn them all answered them therefore . Go, go, go seek some other where, Importune me no more. A verse from Elizabeth I poem called Urania The Heavenly Muse

Elizabeth Norton23:43

Roland, I think at the very least the conversation must have been embellished (or that both Anne and the ladies misunderstood each other).

Lorna Wanstall23:43

Yes I believe at one point Anne was so desperate for money she wrote to her brother and asked him to send her money for she couldn't afford to pay her servants

Elizabeth Norton23:44

Lorna, I always think that Anne of Cleves got by far the worst end of the bargain. She almost certainly wouldn't have seen Henry's portrait. During earlier negotiations for Henry's daughter Mary to marry Anne's brother, Henry was outraged at the idea that Mary's portrait should be sent - he felt that her rank should be enough for the Duke of Cleves. Anne would have been given no opportunity to consider whether or not to marry Henry

Elizabeth Norton23:45

Dawn, I love that poem. Have you read 'On Monsieur's Departure'? It's almost certainly about the Duke of Alencon and very poignant. I deal with their marriage negotiations in the Lives of Tudor Women, as well as ending with the old age and death of Elizabeth I

Roland Hui23:45

Elizabeth - you've written about Anne Boleyn (I have the book - it's wonderful) - can you share with other s here, why you think she fell in the spring of 1536. There are so many different theories. Which do you favor?

Lorna Wanstall23:45

True she would have been told she was marrying the King and would have to make the best of it

Anthony Hillman23:45

Unlike what Christina of Denmark had said haha

Claire Ridgway23:46

Elizabeth, were there any women that you didn't have room to include in your book that you'd like to write about in the future or research more?

Dawn hatswell23:46

I reckon she would have been told the usual all things wonderful

Elizabeth Norton23:46

Lorna, yes. She also took steps to try to annul the annulment of her marriage after Henry's death.

That would have meant that she could have claimed her widow's dower and been permitted to return to Cleves (something that was forbidden under the terms of her divorce). Her last years are actually quite sad, which is a shame. I always say that she is the luckiest of Henry's wives, but that they were a luckless pantheon

Lorna Wanstall23:46

Very true Anthony.. and yet Henry kept her picture even though she had insulted him

Elizabeth Norton23:47

It's interesting that the old women of Elizabethan Norwich sought to inflate their ages in order to gain sympathy and more charity, while Elizabeth I actively sought to try to turn back time. She hated any reference to her age, while it was rumoured that she refused to look in mirrors in her old age.

Kimberly Finney23:48

I always found Anne intriguing. She survived Henry. I found their relationship after the annulment to be odd. She is possibly my favorite of the six wives. I have also found less has been written about her, which is interesting. I am excited about your book Elizabeth! I ordered it last week from Amazon. It will be here Monday.

Lorna Wanstall23:48

Do you think Anne of Cleves would have returned home if she had been allowed to

Elizabeth Norton23:49

Roland, thank you - I'm glad you enjoyed the book. I think Henry had tired of Anne Boleyn. She failed to give him a son and he had already decided to marry Jane Seymour. I think the charges were trumped up (of course!), with Henry's approval, although Cromwell did the actual leg work. I simply cannot see how an intelligent man like Henry could have believed the charges. Chapuys, the Imperial ambassador, for one, thought that Henry made a suspiciously cheerful cuckold. All a pretext to get rid of his wife

Dawn hatswell23:49

Not sure Elizabeth but I have one that they think is relative to her passion for Earl of Essex

Elizabeth Norton23:50

Anthony, yes Christina of Denmark seems to have been quite sensible (if all is as was reported!)

Dawn hatswell23:51

"I grieve and dare not show my discontent....."

Elizabeth Norton23:51

Claire, there were many women that I would have liked to do more on. Bess of Hardwick is a glaring omission. I left her out really because I wanted to include less well known women.

Lorna Wanstall23:51

Elizabeth, I have also read, that Elizabeth 1 had a model made up of her young head and all artist used this model head to depict her in portraits.. The armada portrait I believe is one of the portraits that used this model head

Philip Roberts23:52

Lorna. That's interesting about the model head

Philip Roberts23:52

Hi everyone

Elizabeth Norton23:52

Hi Kimberly, I hope you enjoy the book! Yes, Anne of Cleves is fascinating and not studied enough. I wrote a short biography of her a few years ago - Anne of Cleves, Henry VIII's Discarded Bride. Other than that, she obviously features in books on the six wives. Retha Warnicke's The Marrying of Anne of Cleves is good

Claire Ridgway23:52

Hi Phil!

Dawn hatswell23:52

Wasn't there some rivalry between Bess and Elizabeth...and it is rumoured that Bess was the wealthier of the two!

Philip Roberts23:53

Hi Claire

Lorna Wanstall23:53

Yes I completely agree with you about Anne's downfall Elizabeth.. Henry told Cromwell he wanted rid of Anne and Cromwell cooked up the story.

Elizabeth Norton23:53

Lorna, I do think Anne of Cleves would have returned home after Henry's death, if she could. At first, though, she was worried about the dishonour to her family. When told of the divorce, she at first refused to write to her brother, telling the ambassador from Cleves that she thought her brother would slay her. William of Cleves was very pragmatic, however, saying only that he was glad that his sister had fared no worse.

Elizabeth Norton23:54

Dawn, there is a great edition of Elizabeth I's writings, which was published a few years ago. It's edited by Janet Mueller and others and called 'Elizabeth I: Collected Works'

Claire Ridgway23:55

What will be your next book project, Elizabeth? I know you're rather busy at the moment with your PhD.

Elizabeth Norton23:55

Lorna, I hadn't heard about the model head. Interesting. It is certainly the case that her later portraits are not intended to be as she really appeared - they are an image of queenly majesty and eternal youth

Elizabeth Norton23:55

Hi Philip!

Elizabeth Norton23:56

Dawn, there was indeed rivalry between Elizabeth and Bess. Bess also had designs on the

succession when she married her daughter to Charles Stuart, younger brother of Lord Darnley and great-grandson of Henry VII. She wanted her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart, to succeed Elizabeth

Philip Roberts23:56

Hello Elizabeth. Really enjoyed reading your comments tonight. Thank you

Dawn hatswell23:56

I have a small collection of poems in a book entitled The Queen's Garland. Contains Tudor poems by Raleigh, Robert Earl Essex and people I haven't heard of

Elizabeth Norton23:57

Claire, I'm not currently working on a book - I'm open to suggestions! I'm currently just finishing off my PhD, which is on the Blount family (Bessie Blount's family). I do need to come up with another book though!

Lorna Wanstall23:57

Yes but Poor Arabella was to suffer under the reign of James

Elizabeth Norton23:57

Thanks Philip

Elizabeth Norton23:57

Dawn, that sounds like a great collection

Anthony Hillman23:58

I think whatever you choose next elizabeth will be amazing, all your books have been great in their own way

Dawn hatswell23:58

This book was put together for the present Queen

Claire Ridgway23:58

The Garland is brilliant, Dawn, I love it.

Claire Ridgway23:58

I'm sure we can come up with lots of ideas!

Dawn hatswell23:58

Another charity shop find! Years ago

Elizabeth Norton23:58

Lorna, Arabella indeed suffered. It's another disadvantage of being a woman. Royal women tended to be more at the mercy of their sovereign. Look at the Grey sisters, who were forbidden from marrying and kept with Elizabeth at court. Their cousins, Lord Darnley and Charles Stuart had much more freedom

Elizabeth Norton23:59

Thank you Anthony!

Elizabeth Norton23:59

Claire, do. What would everyone like to read about? 😊

Lorna Wanstall00:00

Yes indeed but the Darnley boys suffered as much in the ways as poor Arabella. Charles died very young and Henry was blown to bits..

Claire Ridgway00:00

Do answer Elizabeth's question re what she should write about, but it's just turned the o'clock.

Thank you so much to Elizabeth for giving up her time to be with us tonight. It's been a fun and enlightening time. Thank you to members too for coming and asking such great questions. Anthony Hillman has been picked as the winning participant tonight and he wins a copy of Elizabeth's "The Lives of Tudor Women" which we will send out.

Elizabeth Norton00:01

Lorna, they did, but I think they had more freedom. Elizabeth was furious when she heard of Charles's marriage, but she did not separate him from his wife as she did the Grey sisters from their husbands

Lorna Wanstall00:01

Well done Anthony, happy reading Xx

Anthony Hillman00:01

Oh my goodness, thank you! 😊

Elizabeth Clayton00:01

I would love to read about Bess of Hardwick. I recently visited Hardwick Old Hall and Hardwick New Hall and found it amazing.

Elizabeth Norton00:01

Hi Claire, thank you very much for inviting me to chat tonight. I've really enjoyed it. Congratulations Anthony, I hope you enjoy the book!

Dawn hatswell00:01

Flippin Eck!! That went quick...well done Antony

Lorna Wanstall00:01

This is true.. I'm reading about the Grey sisters now as it happens

Kimberly Finney00:02

As am I.

Anthony Hillman00:02

Thank you Elizabeth! I will do indeed 😊

Lorna Wanstall00:03

Thank you Elizabeth, feel free to pop into our forum and make a comment on any post that tickles your fancy..

Claire Ridgway00:03

Thank you everyone! Good night and enjoy the rest of your weekend.

Kimberly Finney00:03

Thank you for chatting Elizabeth!

