

***In Bed With The Tudors,***  
***The Sex Lives of a Dynasty from Elizabeth of York to Elizabeth I***  
by Amy Licence

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Reviewed by Ruth E. Richardson M.Phil., author of *'Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante'* see: [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com)

The Tudors of the title range from Elizabeth of York, queen of Henry VII, through to the wives of her two surviving sons, Arthur and Henry VIII, this Henry's mistresses, and then to her grand-daughters Mary I and Elizabeth I. The book, therefore, covers over a hundred years from 1485 to 1603. The format is chronological and the eleven chapter headings have dates attached for easy reference. The ladies concerned are Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, Elizabeth Blount, Mary Boleyn, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, Catherine Parr, Mary I and Elizabeth I. However, in addition to the information on the domestic areas of the Tudor courts, the comparative life-styles of other women of the time are discussed: for example, that of Jane Yate of Berkshire.

In fact, the topics covered are far more numerous than the rather misleading title would suggest. They include: the position of women, all the arrangements of the wedding ceremony, suitable clothes, the dynastic backgrounds of the participants, establishing paternity, arranged marriages, arrangements for birth and how these changed, midwives, illegitimacy, religious icons and how these reflected the changes in religion, what could go wrong with a birth, poor hygiene, herbs and remedies, methods to preserve breasts and skin, breast-feeding, wet nurses, relevant poetry and songs, the Tudor understanding of how the body worked, why women were considered to be inferior males, why an ill body was considered to be the product of an ill mind or behaviour, punishments for lewdness, menstruation, the evidence for the non-consummation of Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Arthur, that the possibility of deprivation in her late teens was a cause of Catherine's difficulties in having children, worship at shrines, pilgrimage, infant mortality, poor nutrition and famine, the age of consent to marriage, Mass for expectant mothers, miscarriage, deformation, twins, churching, christenings, astrology, homosexuality, masturbation, two different standards of behaviour for women and men, and more. This is a cornucopia of really interesting information. It even points out that the significance of Henry VIII growing a beard was to indicate sexual prowess 'with facial hair being equated with the production of sperm and may have paralleled his desire to successfully father a male child'.

Unfortunately, however, the format makes this a difficult read. It is sad that the text is not more user-friendly. The paragraphs are far too long. The text would have seriously benefited from side-headings, or an old-style summary of contents, with relevant page numbers, at the start of each chapter. While sincerely appreciating the depth and scale of the author's research, she has been ill-served by the lack of any real editing. This has resulted in needless repetition and even factual misinformation. Margaret Beaufort, King Henry VII's mother, was not the Queen Mother for she had never been queen in her own right or married to a king. The Queen Mother was, in fact, Elizabeth Woodville wife of Edward IV but the text is apparently referring to Margaret not Elizabeth. It was Kirk O'Field in Edinburgh that was 'blown apart by gunpowder' resulting in the death of Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, husband of Mary Queen of Scots, not the palace of Holyrood. The order of succession in Henry VIII's Will was: Edward VI and his children, Catherine Parr's children by Henry VIII, then Henry's daughter Mary and her children, his daughter Elizabeth and her children, and only then to the heirs of his sister Mary Rose, etc. Only if either daughter married without the consent of the

Privy Council would she forfeit the succession. Therefore, it is not true that the succession was 'entailed upon the heirs of Henry's sister Mary Rose , rather than his own daughters Mary and Elizabeth'. On a later page the succession as set out in Edward VI's Will is described and this did exclude Mary and Elizabeth. There is no clarity in the text to explain the differences in these Wills and the result is apparent contradictory information confusing to a reader not conversant with the historical details.

There are useful references for each chapter, a bibliography and an adequate index. The coloured illustrations are a delight with short explanatory captions. However, what may be wrongly thought of as the niceties of accuracy are important because if facts are inaccurate how can readers be certain of the reliability of other details with which they are unfamiliar? This lack of editing is a very great pity for there are some excellent accounts in this book. A notable example concerns the changes in allowable legal devotion to shrines over the period. Therefore, this is a book that is informative, and fascinating, but is directed to those with historical knowledge of the period, or who wish to investigate, and search for, particular aspects of domestic life.

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