

# Chapter 1

## Touring the Time of the Tudors

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Seeing how the Tudors were, and how far their kingdom extended
  - ▶ Governing the country
  - ▶ Coping with the Church
  - ▶ Living and dying
  - ▶ Getting clued up on culture
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**T**he old history books will tell you that 1485 was the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the modern world. It wasn't quite like that. What happened was that the last king of the Plantagenet family (Richard III) was defeated at the Battle of Bosworth by the first king of the Tudor family (Henry VII), and the rest is history.

The Tudors ruled England, Wales and Ireland for 118 years until Elizabeth I died in 1603. These years were a time of huge changes, many of them brought about by the Tudors themselves. For example:

- ✓ The nobility – rich, powerful, awkward – became a kind of civil service and worked for the king.
- ✓ Parliament got pushier.
- ✓ The Church changed from Catholic to Protestant.
- ✓ Trade took off and exploration increased.

In this chapter we take a walk through the Tudor times, from the monarchs and their Courts through to religion, education, health and the arts. So make sure your breeches and codpiece are in place or lace up your corset, and enter the world of the Tudors.

## Looking at the Tudor Kingdom

England had come to dominate the British Isles long before the Tudors arrived and, because of this, historians use the term ‘England’ to include Wales and from time to time, Ireland. Wales was a principality (since the 13th century, the eldest son of the king of England had always been Prince of Wales), but was regarded as part of England. Because of this, Welsh heraldry (featuring images of dragons, daffodils and so on) rarely appeared on coins.

From 1536, the various regions of Wales were turned into counties based on the English pattern. Those counties have disappeared since, though, so don’t try to find the Tudor county names in Wales today – Welsh place names are used again. The Tudor county names were quite quaint though; examples include Radnorshire, Merioneth, Flintshire, Carmarthen, Caerphilly and Gwent.

Although England in the 16th century had more than its fair share of intrigue, excitement and blood and guts, across the water Ireland had plenty of drama of its own. The Tudors thought of Ireland as something that, with a bit of luck, would go away. The Irish thought equally little of their English overlords and centuries of mistrust and misunderstanding were to lead to a running sore that only bloodletting could cure.



A lot of this book looks at events in Ireland in particular because it was a constant problem for the Tudors. Wales was quieter – perhaps because the ruler of England was Welsh!

## Getting to Know the Family

The Tudors were just like most people – proud, difficult, petty, loving, hating – but they also ran the country, and that made a big difference. You meet the Tudors all through the course of this book, but here’s a quick snapshot to put them in perspective. If you’ve already had a sneaky look at the Cheat Sheet, this is just a reminder:

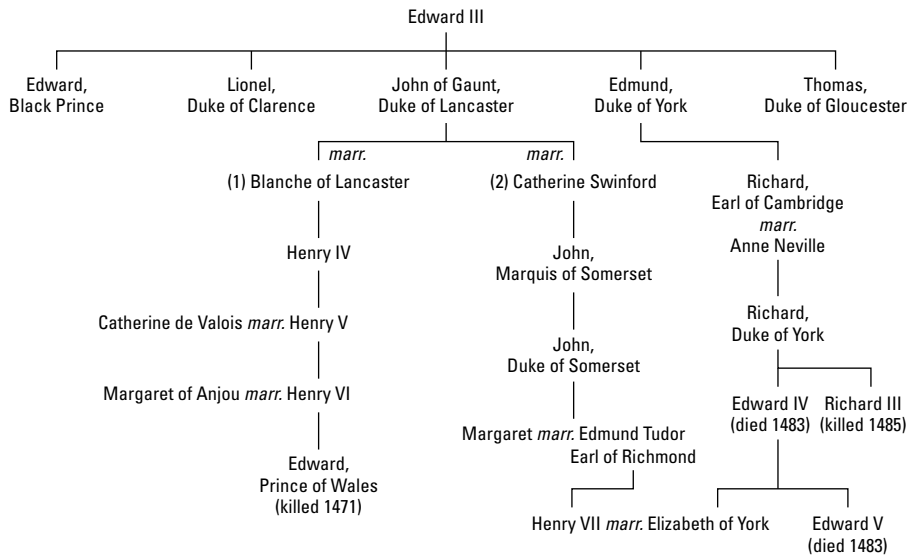
- ✓ Henry VII, born 1457 (reigned 1485–1509)
  - Married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV
- ✓ Henry VIII, born 1491 (reigned 1509–1547)
  - Married Catherine of Aragon (Queen 1509–1533)
  - Married Anne Boleyn (Queen 1533–1536)
  - Married Jane Seymour (Queen 1536–1537)

- Married Anne of Cleves (Queen 1539–1540)
- Married Catherine Howard (Queen 1540–1541)
- Married Catherine Parr, Lady Latimer (Queen 1543–1547)
- ✔ Edward VI, born 1537 (reigned 1547–1553)
- ✔ Jane Grey, born 1537 (reigned 10–19 July, 1553)
- ✔ Mary I, born 1516 (reigned 1553–1558)
  - Married Philip II of Spain (1554–1558)
- ✔ Elizabeth I, born 1533 (reigned 1558–1603)

Where did the Tudors come from? Hold on to your hats – it’s complicated!

- ✔ Henry VII’s father was Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond. Edmund’s father was Owen Tudor, a fairly poor Welsh gentleman, and his mother was Catherine de Valois, the French widow of Henry V (reigned 1413–1422).
- ✔ Henry VII’s mother was Margaret Beaufort, daughter of the Duke of Somerset. Margaret was a descendant of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the son of Edward III (reigned 1327–1377).

We told you it was complicated! Thank goodness for Figure 1-1, a family tree of the families of York and Lancaster.



**Figure 1-1:**  
The York  
and  
Lancaster  
family tree.

No evidence proves that Owen Tudor and Catherine de Valois ever married, which makes the Tudor line illegitimate. That wasn't much of a problem in the 15th century unless, of course, you tried to claim the English throne. Henry's claim to the throne was weak, but he got lucky at the Battle of Bosworth in August 1485 (see Chapter 2) and, with the death of Richard III, went on to become king. At that time at least 18 people had a better right to the throne than Henry, including his own wife and mother. By 1510, when his son Henry VIII was king, the figure had increased to 34! Perhaps it was this insecurity that explains much of the changes in society that happened in the Tudor period.

## *Cruising the Royal Court*

The *Court* was much more than a building – it was the place where the king lived with his family, where the business of government was carried out and where key decisions were made. It was always full of people, courtiers, servants, ministers, priests, entertainers and hangers-on hoping to find fame and fortune. Until 1603 the Court moved from one palace to another, taking everything but the kitchen sink with it. Henry VIII had only one set of furniture that went wherever he did!

## *Mingling with the monarch*

The king or queen in Tudor England *was* the government. Although the monarchs worked through Parliament to an increasing extent, all major decisions came from the top, and the king or queen had to be consulted at all times.

In theory, the monarch:

- ✓ Appointed and dismissed ministers
- ✓ Called and dismissed Parliament (in theory, the nation's representatives)
- ✓ Collected taxes
- ✓ Commanded the army and navy
- ✓ Decided on issues like war and peace
- ✓ Worked with the Church but did not run it (the Tudors soon changed that)

In practice, the monarch:

- ✓ Believed in a hotline to God as 'the Lord's anointed'
- ✓ Set the fashion in clothes, education and entertainment
- ✓ Was the chief patron, giving out lands, titles and charity



Henry VII was the first king to be called ‘Your Majesty’. Before that, kings were known as ‘Your Grace’. Until 1485 the king was *primus inter pares* (first among equals) but the Tudors lifted royal status much higher. The Stuart family, who followed in 1603, tried to go further still, which resulted in the Civil War (1642–1648) and the execution of Charles I (1649).

## Breaking down the Court

The Court was divided into two main parts, the Household and the Chamber, followed by various councils and a few odds and ends like the Chapel Royal, the stables, the kennels and the toils (cages for the hunting hawks).



The Tudors, like all kings before them, loved hunting (see Chapter 3), so they had a huge team of servants just to look after the wolfhounds, palfreys (saddle horses) and falcons.

### Handling the Household

The Household hadn’t changed much since the 14th century. It had nearly 20 departments, handling every aspect of the royal family’s lives. The lord steward ran the Household and the controller kept tabs on the running costs in the counting house (in 1545 Henry VIII’s Court cost £47,500 to run – a huge sum at the time).

Think about your daily life and imagine an army of servants to doing all you chores for you. The various departments dressed and undressed the royals, provided water for washing, cleaned their rooms and made their beds. They prepared, cooked and served their meals and washed up afterwards. They lit candles and fires, looked after clothes and jewellery and emptied toilets (it was a messy job, but somebody had to do it).

Each department was run by a sergeant and most of the staff were men (the laundry was mostly female). Some staff were very specialist:

- ✓ The yeomen of the guard were the king’s bodyguard (check out the beef-eaters at the Tower of London – they still wear Tudor-style uniforms).
- ✓ The king’s music were the royal orchestra.
- ✓ The royal confessors were the king’s chaplains or priests.

In addition doctors, chemists, scholars and artists came and went, the greatest of them increasing the reputation of the Court in the eyes of the world. Hans Holbein is perhaps the best known of these great men; playwrights like William Shakespeare never got that close to the top, but Elizabeth certainly saw some of his plays.



The Tudor Court even employed pages (little boys) to take a beating rather than a naughty prince having to receive pain! They were called *whipping boys*.

Only the more senior servants were allowed to live with their wives, which made the Household a happy hunting ground for whores. Much of the lord steward's time was spent shooing harlots off the premises and preventing punch-ups between servants.

### *Channelling the Chamber*

The Chamber was the king's personal space. This was the centre of government and the servants there were gentlemen or even noblemen. The lord chamberlain ran the Chamber, but individual members vied with each other as royal favourites.



Having the 'ear of the king' was very important under the Tudors. Any gentleman who wanted to get on or any nobleman who had ideas he wanted carried out had to get reach the king to suggest things to him. Only the king could issue orders that would be carried out. This naturally caused rivalry and bitterness at times, but it was also a way for the monarch to keep his or her staff on their toes. In the reign of Elizabeth, for example, much of the discussion was about the queen's marriage and a number of courtiers put themselves forward as potential husbands.

Over the Tudor period, the role of the Chamber changed:

- ✓ Henry VII set up a Privy (personal) Chamber of new men – servants from relatively humble backgrounds – and dealt with his noble and gentleman attendants separately (see Chapter 2).
- ✓ Henry VIII modelled his Privy Chamber on that of the French king, Henry's rival Francis I. The men in his Chamber were his hunting and drinking cronies but he trusted them to carry out delicate diplomatic missions.
- ✓ Edward VI was too young to govern by himself and the closest advisers he had were his tutors. The Privy Chamber lost its central role.
- ✓ Mary and Elizabeth's accessions changed the whole set-up. Ladies in waiting became important, but women, apart from the queen, couldn't get involved in politics, so they tended to work on Mary and Elizabeth to get promotions and favours for their men folk.

For more on the Privy Chamber, see the nearby sidebar 'Being privy to the Privy Chamber'.

### *Counting the councils*

The royal Council was the fore-runner of today's Cabinet. Its members were the great secretaries of state who advised monarchs on any matter they considered important. We meet these advisers close up and personal in this book, men like . . .

- ✓ Francis Walsingham
- ✓ Robert Dudley
- ✓ Thomas Cromwell
- ✓ Thomas Seymour
- ✓ Thomas Wolsey
- ✓ William Cecil

. . . and many more.

But councils also existed for the North and for Wales and the West. At local level, the government was carried out by lords lieutenants of counties appointed by the monarch and landowners acting as justices of the peace. The lords lieutenants:

- ✓ Acted as judges in local cases
- ✓ Called out the militia (part time soldiers) in case of invasion or other emergency
- ✓ Collected taxes



Kings and queens weren't bound to take the advice of their councillors. As long as men like Wolsey and Cromwell got the job done for Henry VIII, they were fine. But if the advisers failed, they could not only be fired but also executed. But despite the risks of the job, some advisers were very close to their employer: Robert Dudley was Elizabeth's lover, and Francis Walsingham died bankrupt having spent so much of his own money to keep Elizabeth safe.

## Being privy to the Privy Chamber

The Privy Chamber was run by the chief gentleman or gentlewoman and was a showcase for the monarch. Under Henry VIII it was all about tournaments and lavish entertainments with French or Spanish fashions the order of the day. Under the dour Catholic Mary, it all got a bit heavy, with prayers, masses and constant discussions and gossip about the queen's two phantom pregnancies. Under Elizabeth, who

worked hard to push her image as Gloriana and the virgin queen, the Chamber was for courtship, music and poetry mixed with the harder realities of exploring the world in her name and keeping her safe from assassination. Under each of the monarchs the Privy Chamber was also a marriage market and the main way for kings and queens to keep in touch with the men who actually ran the country at a local level.

## Taking in Tudor Beliefs

In 1500 the English had a great reputation for piety. They went to mass, which was held in Latin, visited shrines like Thomas Becket's at Canterbury Cathedral, paid priests to say prayers for the souls of the dead and, in the case of the rich, left legacies to the Church in their wills.

But some people began to doubt the power of the priests and others resented the Church's huge wealth (see later in this chapter and also Chapter 6). New ideas of the Reformation were coming from Martin Luther in Germany, and of particular interest was the concept of *solo fide* (faith alone), which was about your own beliefs in God and had nothing to do with good works.



William Tyndale's English Bible (see Chapter 6) sold in huge quantities, especially when it was backed by Henry VIII who believed everybody should read God's word.

The Tudor era was a time of great religious change:

- ✓ Henry VIII fell out with the Pope, changed the calendar and destroyed the monasteries. Henry himself stayed Catholic, but breaking up with Rome was the only way he could get a son to continue the Tudor line. So he made himself supreme head of the Church and the idea lived on after him (see Chapter 6).
- ✓ Edward VI, under advice from his Protestant uncles, changed the Latin mass to English, brought in an English prayer book and stopped individual confession. This caused confusion and dismay for many (see Chapter 7).
- ✓ When Mary became queen she brought back the Latin mass and all the traditional ceremonies, causing confusion and dismay to all those happy under Edward's arrangements. Her religious package included kowtowing to the Pope again and she burned opponents at Smithfield in London (see Chapter 10).
- ✓ Elizabeth's Church of 1559 was a *via media* (a compromise) – part Catholic and part Protestant. She made herself supreme governor and brought in a new English prayer book. Over time, her Church became less and less Catholic, but she refused to bring in yet more changes demanded by off-the-wall revolutionaries called Puritans (see Chapter 14).



England was just as Christian at the end of the Tudors' reign as it had been at the start, but some things had changed forever:

- ✓ The Pope was now the Bishop of Rome, and the Church of England was totally independent.
- ✓ Confession between priest and man had gone, as had carvings of saints, wall paintings and pilgrimages.



- ✓ Good Christians did charitable works, went to church and read their Bibles. They did not go on pilgrimages; they did not say prayers for the dead.

## Seeing How the Masses Lived

The 16th century saw a dramatic population growth. Accurate figures don't exist (the first census wasn't made until 1801), but from Church and tax records historians can work out that in 1500 about 2.5 million people lived in England and Wales (Ireland was a sort of colony and was always counted separately) and by 1600 it was about 4 million.



Farming and agriculture were by far the most common jobs and this didn't change over the Tudor period. About 90 per cent of people lived and worked on the land and most towns were very small by modern standards. London was the exception, with about 50,000 inhabitants, but that was only a quarter of the size of, say, Venice.

## Following in father's footsteps

Most boys grew up to do the job their fathers did and most girls followed their mothers. For a minority of boys (never girls), that meant becoming apprenticed to learn a trade; the training lasted seven years. At the end of that time, the apprentice made a masterpiece to prove he was competent to go it alone in the world of manufacture. Some boys entered services at all levels, running pubs, teaching, fishing along various rivers or around the coasts, or learning nasty, dangerous trades, such as working in the tanning industry, which were known as *stink jobs*. Another tiny but growing handful became merchants dealing with the European centres like Antwerp and organisations like the Hanse. The vast majority of boys, though, followed their fathers to work on the land.

## Visiting the average village

Historians know a lot about the lives of the majority of Tudor men and women from *The Book of Husbandry* written by Sir Anthony Fitzherbert in 1523 and updated throughout the century.



Early Tudor England wasn't full of downtrodden peasants longing for the Reform Act of 1832 to give them power.

The average village was made up of:

- ✓ **Yeomen:** They rented their farms from landowners, served the community as church administrators or constables (sort of policemen, but don't expect too many arrests!), paid taxes and often sent their sons to school or even university.
- ✓ **Craftsmen:** Blacksmiths, carpenters, thatchers, innkeepers and many more provided specialist services for the village.
- ✓ **A parson:** The local priest ran services, baptised newborns, married betrothed couples and buried the dead.
- ✓ **Landless labourers:** They worked for yeomen farmers and were likely to lose their jobs if land was enclosed (see the nearby sidebar 'Encountering enclosure').



It's important to bear in mind at all times the central place of religion in ordinary people's lives. Fitzherbert says the first thing people should do when they get up in the morning is say their prayers (in Latin) and ask God to 'speed the plough'. Later editions drop the Latin bit in favour of the English Lord's prayer.



The daily work was different from summer to winter, the days longer or shorter, and therefore wages differed accordingly. But no welfare state existed in the 16th century. Poor people relied on handouts from the local community, but the *sturdy beggars* (men who were perfectly fit to work) were an ongoing problem for Tudor law and order.

While their men folk toiled, women also had plenty to do. In the *Book of Husbandry* it says that a husbandman's wife must:

- ✓ Clean the house
- ✓ Feed the calves
- ✓ Feed the pigs
- ✓ Go to market if her husband isn't available
- ✓ Help her husband fill or empty the muck cart
- ✓ Know how to make hay, winnow corn and malt
- ✓ Look after the poultry and collect their eggs
- ✓ Make clothes from wool by spinning and weaving
- ✓ Make butter and cheese
- ✓ Prepare all her husband's meals
- ✓ Prepare the milk
- ✓ Supervise the servants (if she has any)
- ✓ Wake and dress the children

## Encountering enclosure

The huge death rate caused by the Black Death (bubonic plague), which reached 50 per cent in some areas, led to countryside chaos in the 1350s. Some landowners hit upon the idea of enclosing land – putting hedges or walls around fields – and turning the common land that everyone could use into sheep farms for their own benefit (sheep rearing was more

profitable than growing crops). The various local rebellions by ordinary people, such as Kett's and the Oxfordshire rising (see Chapters 7 and 8), were often about this enclosure because farm labourers lost money and jobs as a result. When the population began to pick up again in the 1470s people demanded a return to crop farming to grow more food.

Sound familiar? Maybe, but these women had no birth control, no vote, only the most basic rights and no underwear worthy of the name. Women's lib was 450 years away.

## *Chartering towns*

The older and larger towns had charters given to them by previous kings. Smaller ones had charters from local lords. These charters allowed towns to hold fairs – like the Goose Fair in Nottingham or the Midsummer Fair in Cambridge – which were opportunities to buy, sell and have a good time.

The merchant guilds in these towns (today's chambers of commerce) were companies of skilled craftsmen, keeping out rival competition and acting as friendly societies, paying for their members' burials and looking after widows and orphans.

Councils under the mayor and aldermen ran the towns and you had to be a householder or a rich merchant to be elected. Chartered towns sent two representatives as MPs to the House of Commons in London.

## *Paying the price*

Inflation was running at 9 per cent in Edward VI's reign and got worse again towards the end of Elizabeth's. Wages always fell short of costs and that was the cause of much discontent in the countryside. It didn't help that various Tudor governments did their best to keep workers on the land (with the Statutes of Labourers of 1549 and 1563) and keep workers' wages low.



In 1556, historians know from John Ponet, the Protestant Bishop of Winchester, that:

- ✓ A pound of beef cost 4 pence.
- ✓ A pound of candles cost 4 pence.
- ✓ A pound of butter cost 4 pence.
- ✓ A pound of cheese cost 4 pence.
- ✓ A whole sheep cost £1.
- ✓ Two eggs cost 1 pence.
- ✓ A quarter (of a ton) of wheat cost 64 shillings.
- ✓ A quarter of malt cost 50 shillings or more.

People were so badly off that they used acorns to make bread and drank water instead of beer. Ponet put all this down to the fact that Mary had turned the country back to Catholicism.

## *Trading at home and overseas*

In the early Tudor period, most trade was local with village people driving their geese, cattle or sheep to market in the nearest town. Some specialist places already existed;

- ✓ Coventry made gloves and ribbons.
- ✓ Nottingham made lace.
- ✓ Sheffield made metal goods.
- ✓ Witney made blankets.

London, as the largest city, was a huge consumer market, swallowing up vast quantities of grain, cattle, cloth and sea coal. The market gardens of Essex and Kent supplied vegetables, and fish was brought up the Thames for sale at Billingsgate.

Ship yards were springing up along the coast from Newcastle in the north to Falmouth in the south west. By the 1530s Henry VIII was building ships at the Royal Docks at Deptford, 3 miles (5 kilometres) from London. Ships like this traded with the great European centres such as Antwerp and Bruges.

## Building Dream Homes

Everybody knows what a Tudor house looks like – it's black and white (half-timbered) and made a reappearance in the 1930s as 'Mock Tudor'. The royals were great builders – see Chapter 19 for ten great houses that have survived.

Throughout the period:

- ✓ Oak remained the basic building material, with infill of the framework made of *wattle and daub* (wood and clay).

- ✓ Brick began to replace wattle and daub.

- ✓ Increased prosperity meant more large houses.

- ✓ Traditionally, an Englishman's home was his E-shaped residence built around a courtyard.

The E shape has nothing to do with Elizabeth – houses of this style were on the market long before she was born.

- ✓ Roofs were made of slate or thatch.

- ✓ Staircases replaced ladders to get from floor to floor (Amy Robsart, look out! See Chapter 12).

- ✓ Fireplaces and chimneys kept rooms largely smoke free.

- ✓ Rich people built specialist rooms in their houses – kitchens, sculleries, larders, libraries and dining rooms.

- ✓ The poor continued to live in hovels in the countryside or were crammed into tiny tenements in the towns.

- ✓ Homes didn't have bathrooms and toilets, called *privies*, were usually holes in the ground.



## Tutoring the Tudors: Education

Before the Tudors came along the Church ran all schools, as well as the two universities in England: Oxford and Cambridge. Books were expensive because they were hand-written, but the arrival of the printing press by the late 15th century changed all that.

Education was a class thing:

- ✓ The nobility learned to hunt, ride, handle weapons, dance and have good manners. In Elizabeth's reign, Sir Christopher Hatton was a member of the royal Council, but he was also the best dancer in England.

- ✔ The gentry followed the nobility and both groups could afford to hire clerks to do their writing for them.
- ✔ Merchants needed to be able to read, write and do their own book-keeping. The investor John Lok's accounts from the voyages of the explorer Martin Frobisher still survive and include everything down to the cost of nails. Grammar schools (like Henry VIII School in Coventry) taught boys to be able to go on to university or join a profession.
- ✔ Everybody else learned what they could, but most laymen were illiterate because they had no need to be anything else.



In the 1490s Henry VII made sure his sons, Arthur and Henry, got the best humanist education, which stressed knowledge of the Bible, but also the Classics and Latin and Greek culture. The universities largely opened the way to a career in the Church – although mavericks like Christopher Marlowe became playwrights and spies instead! The Inns of Court in London were training grounds for lawyers and by the end of Henry VIII's reign (1547) anybody who was anybody in the corridors of power had qualified there.

## Dying in Tudor England

The three main illnesses of the day were:

- ✔ **Influenza:** The most serious killer of the time. There was so much sickness in the army that the generals had to call off an attempt to recapture Calais in 1557–1558.
- ✔ **The Plague:** Bubonic or pneumonic, the Plague was caused by a bacillus (a type of bacteria) on a flea on a rat. No cure existed in the 16th century and outbreaks occurred from time to time. In 1603, 38,000 people died in London. 'Plague doctors' were useless. The best remedy? Travel far, travel fast and get out of town. Henry VIII always did.
- ✔ **The Sweating Sickness:** This broke out in England in 1485 and again in 1517 and 1551. It all happened quickly: men were merry at dinner and dead at supper. But the sickness wasn't always fatal. It was probably a type of flu and was called *Sudor Anglicus* because only the English were said to catch it.



Tudor medicine was dreadful. If you were sensible, you'd stay away from doctors, but check out the hilarious scene in *Shakespeare in Love* when Joseph Fiennes' Shakespeare goes to see Anthony Sher's Dr Moth because he's got writer's block (a very rare disease in any age!).

## Distaff learning

Women's education never really got off the ground under the Tudors. They had no schools of their own and couldn't join their brothers in the grammar schools. If a man was rich enough and saw any point, he might get a tutor for his daughter as well as his son; Thomas More's

daughter Margaret was very well-read as a result – you can see her gabbling away in Latin to the king in the film *A Man for All Seasons*. Some highly educated women were at Court besides the queens, like Mildred Cooke, who married Elizabeth's chief minister, William Cecil.

You could get medical help (or hindrance) from four places and they were all expensive.

- ✔ **Apothecaries** handled drugs and herbs. A lot of their medicine was experimental and most of it nonsense.
- ✔ **Barber-surgeons** had their own company set up by Henry VIII and they carried out amputations on soldiers and sailors. Archaeologists have recently found the toolkit of the surgeon on board the *Mary Rose*, which sank in 1545 (see Chapter 3).
- ✔ **Physicians** believed the ideas of the ancient Greeks and still followed the Four Humours rubbish of Galen (2nd century AD). 'Cures' usually involved potions, leeches (which sucked your blood) and money.
- ✔ **Surgeons** set bones and carried out operations with no anaesthetic, so only the toughest (or luckiest) survived. Surgeons also tried to treat venereal disease, which was blamed on the French (of course).

## Coping with Crime

The growing population meant more crime and more people seeking justice. The law changed throughout the Tudor period, bringing in new offences (such as witchcraft from 1542) and setting up new courts like the Petty Sessions, which focused on the powers of the justices of the peace.

In Tudor England no police force existed. There were constables of the watch, who were a bit of a joke (see Dogberry and Verges in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*). The local law officer in the county was the sheriff, who had powers of arrest. Nobody thought very highly of these officers – remember the 'baddie' in the Robin Hood stories is the Sheriff of Nottingham – and the chances of you getting away with your crime were huge.

Different courts tried different types of crime:

- ✔ The Manor Court sorted out country disputes over land boundaries and straying animals.
- ✔ The Archdeacon's Consistory Court handled charges of adultery. Sex crimes were regarded as sins and so the Church dealt with these. If you slept with your neighbour's wife or one of his servants, you were usually *excommunicated* (cut off from the Church) for a limited period. Most people got around this by doing some sort of penance, which involved public shaming.
- ✔ The Quarter Sessions handled theft or violence and were run by the justices of the peace with a jury of locals. You could be sent to prison, somewhere like the Fleet in London, which was dangerous and unhealthy, not to mention expensive because you had to pay for food and drink while you were inside.
- ✔ The Mayor's Court covered the breaking of town rules. The punishment was usually the pillory or stocks, wooden frames you were chained to while people hurled abuse at you as they walked past.



Spitting was in fashion during the Tudor period. You spat at people in the stocks. Women spat at touchy-feely men; churchmen spat at each other during religious arguments.

The death penalty was reserved for serious crimes, but over 200 of these crimes existed and many of them you'd find laughable today. Religious heresy (see Chapters 10 and 14) was a Church crime, but because the Church wasn't allowed to shed blood, actual punishments were passed to the secular (non-Church) courts for carrying out. Ordinary criminals were hanged with a rope over a tree branch or wooden scaffold. The nobility received the quicker 'mercy' of the axe (or in the case of Anne Boleyn, the sword – see Chapter 5).

## Acting Up

Not all the dramas of the Tudor era happened between real people at Court. Theatrical entertainment was popular among all classes. The nobility had boxes at theatres or sat on the stage to watch the action up close; the groundlings stood for the whole show. But the whole audience got the jokes!



William Shakespeare, the 'upstart crow' from Stratford, has cornered the market in Elizabethan literature today, but many others were brilliant, like Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd. Comedies, tragedies and histories wowed theatre-goers up and down the country.



## Pregnant pause

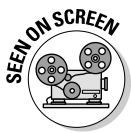
Childbirth was a dangerous business in the Tudor era. Contraception was almost unknown and women became pregnant for as long as their fertility lasted. So births of ten or more children were common – check out memorial brasses on church tombs throughout the country. Three in every five children died before reaching adulthood – see the Tudor family’s own body count in this respect in Chapter 5. Doctors were all men and knew little of the

conception process. Midwives probably knew more, but they had no status and were the source of countless old wives’ tales that did more harm than good at childbirth. Most women gave birth in a half sitting position, surrounded by people wearing their day clothes with no awareness of hygiene. For the births in important families, astrologers were consulted to foretell the child’s survival likelihood from the position of the planets.

## Pleasing the crowd

The popular types of plays were:

- ✓ **Comic interludes:** These were sketches performed in town squares by travelling troupes, but this could land you in jail as a vagabond, so actors made sure they got powerful patrons like the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Leicester or Baron Hunsdon. That way, they got to perform in great houses and even at Court.
- ✓ **Mystery plays:** These were sponsored by the merchant guilds and were all about heaven and hell. These plays lost popularity by the end of the Tudor period.



By the 1590s London had many theatres like The Bear, The Curtain and The Globe. The authorities frowned on the theatres because they encouraged fights, prostitution and theft. At times of plague, they were closed altogether and the religious extremists called Puritans wanted them shut for good. For a brilliant glimpse of Elizabeth’s theatre, see the film *Shakespeare in Love*.



Women weren’t allowed to act, so all female roles were played by boys in drag. Maybe that’s why even in romantic stuff like *Romeo and Juliet* the stage directions don’t mention much rolling around!

## Hum me a few bars: Tudor music

Every film on the Tudors has got it – fantastic, thumpy tunes played on long-forgotten instruments like kits and shawms. In Henry VII’s reign all official music was dirge-like and solemn, written for the Church. Under Henry VIII and even more under Elizabeth, musicians wrote bright, lively tunes for the

Court and men like Thomas Tallis and William Byrd were the Andrew Lloyd Webbers of their day. Everybody still thinks Henry VIII wrote *Greensleeves* (see Chapter 3).



It isn't true that the use of the augmented fourth musical interval in Church music could result in excommunication – although, because it's the chord used by modern composers in scary music in films, you can imagine that perhaps it wouldn't have sounded right in a solemn mass. It isn't called the 'chord of evil' for nothing!

## Strictly . . . Tudor style

Elizabeth loved dancing and many of the entertainments in her Court revolved around it.

Try this at home:

- ✓ **The Pavanne:** For the over 50s. Slow, sedate – you can wear your long gowns for this one, guys and gals!
- ✓ **The Galliard:** Getting faster. Probably best not to wear your rapiers for this one, gents!
- ✓ **The Volta:** Whoa! The rock and roll of its day. Men, lift your partner, throw her in the air (and it was a bit naughty – you got to squeeze your partner's waist!).

## Suits You, Sir

Clothes, like education, were all about class. The Tudors even passed strict rules, the Sumptuary Laws, which fined people who tried to dress above their status. The Tudors reigned for 118 years, which is a long time in the fashion business, so I'll just give you a glimpse at the start, middle and end of the era.

In 1485:

- ✓ Men dressed as they had for 300 years with shirts, *doublets* (jackets) and *hose* (tights). Genitals were covered with a triangular codpiece and shoes were pointed.
- ✓ Women wore long dresses to the ground, with tight-laced bodices and *kirtles* (petticoats) underneath. No knickers, no bra!

Throughout the period:

- ✔ Noblemen and gentlemen wore knee-length wide coats, open in front. Check out Hans Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII and his 13-year-old son Edward VI.
- ✔ The middle class man wore a robe to the knee. It was the equivalent of today's pinstripe suit. Vicars, barristers and graduates from universities wear such robes today.
- ✔ Everybody else continued to wear the basics, made of wool and leather.
- ✔ Caps and hoods changed size and shape, especially as French and Spanish fashions hit the Court and filtered down through society.
- ✔ Bright clothes were in under Henry VIII, blacks and browns under Mary, dazzling colours under Elizabeth.

In 1603:

- ✔ Breeches had replaced hose for men. The nobility and gentry wore short cloaks slung over one shoulder, a fashion called *colleywestonwise*, and carried rapiers (by law, no more than 3 feet, around 1 metre, long).
- ✔ Both sexes wore *pattens*, wooden lifts on their shoes, to raise them above the muddy streets. Shoes now had rounded toes.
- ✔ Women wore *farthingales* and *stomachers*, a pointed bodice with a framework dress that stuck out from the body.



No zips or elastic existed until the late 19th century so everything was fastened with laces, ribbons and buttons made of wood, metal or bone.

Check out the various portraits of the Tudor monarchs. With the exception of Mary they scream bling, from beautiful, huge ruffs to pearl headgear and diamonds sewn to sleeves. This was a statement – 'I dress like this because I rule one of the richest countries in the world' – what was everybody else going to do about it?



Only the lowest of the low and young girls went bareheaded. Everybody else wore headgear all the time. Men wore their hats indoors and during meals. Henry VIII was quite unusual in that he took his hat off in the presence of ladies. Both sexes even wore caps in bed.

