

RUTH GOODMAN, PETER GINN & TOM PINFOLD

BBC

BOOKS

TUDOR MONASTERY FARM

Life in rural England 500 years ago





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About the Book

Following BBC Two's hit series *Tudor Monastery Farm*, Ruth Goodman, Peter Ginn and Tom Pinfold go back in time to undertake the ultimate history lesson and discover what it was really like to live in this extraordinary age.

As our intrepid historians expertly recreate a working Tudor farm, see how they tackle everything from blacksmithing to beekeeping and from spinning wool to sowing crops - all without electricity, heating or medicine.

Away from the fields, the team learn to cook, clean and celebrate, the Tudor way. They also delve deeper into important industries and examine how, with the dissolution of the monasteries, the everyday landscape of England and Wales would soon change forever.

From building a pigsty to preparing an Easter banquet, the priesthood to the printing press, *Tudor Monastery Farm* is the kind of entertaining look into history that only those who've lived it can provide.

About the Authors

RUTH GOODMAN is a historian and independent scholar, specializing in social and domestic history. She works with a wide range of museums and other academic institutions exploring the past of ordinary people and their activities. As well as appearing on all three previous *Farm* series, Ruth also makes frequent appearances on *The One Show* and *Coast*.

PETER GINN has swallowed the beating heart of a snake, burnt his tootsies walking on the surface of Krakatoa, helped to smuggle a man over an international border and set fire to himself (twice) – a life in archaeology is anything but dull and Peter wants to keep it this way. Peter studied at University College London and has a passion for making the past accessible to all.

TOM PINFOLD is the latest addition to the *Farm* team. A military historian, he contributed to the 70th Anniversary Battle of the Atlantic Commemorations in Liverpool in conjunction with the Royal Navy. He has worked as an archaeologist in the UK and abroad, and travelled to 50 countries around the world.

LION TELEVISION was founded in 1997 and is one of the most successful independent production companies in the United Kingdom, producing hundreds of hours of programmes a year for broadcast around the world. It is headed up by Jeremy Mills, Nick Catliff, Richard Bradley and Shahana Meer. David Upshal is the Executive Producer of the *Tudor Monastery Farm* series for Lion TV – having previously devised and produced the shows *Victorian Farm*, *Edwardian Farm* and *Wartime Farm*.

A scenic rural landscape in England, featuring a grassy field with several sheep grazing. In the background, there are rolling hills, a line of trees, and a few buildings under a clear sky. The scene is bathed in the warm light of late afternoon or early morning.

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INTRODUCTION

TOM



ayleaf Farmstead is in a beautiful part of West Sussex, surrounded by a mixture of green fields and woodland. There is an openness to it; it is never so hilly that you lose the horizon, yet its woods and forests provide an air of mystery.

Entering into our new guises as Tudor farmers, there was a blend of excitement and trepidation on our first day. What were we letting ourselves in for? As it turned out, life on the farm was to be a strange mix of sweat, blood and laughter. Hard work every day meant that we did perspire a lot – I don't think our period clothes will ever recover! I also bled weekly and picked up an array of interesting bruises that only became apparent when the adrenalin had worn off and the dirt had been removed. Most importantly, though, we laughed a lot. With Peter and Ruth there was always something to enjoy, and when things went wrong, there wasn't much else to do but throw up your hands and smile.

Almost as soon as we arrived, we saw that our commercial enterprises would have to take full advantage of our new environment. This included livestock, an arable crop and whatever raw materials we could source locally to aid our cause. The woods around our farmstead had many different species of tree, which would prove invaluable for making structures and tools. There were enough fields around that

we could care for our livestock and grow our crop, all within a walk of the farmstead!

The weeks to come would be packed with everything from grappling with geese to constructing a pigsty, learning archery and blacksmithing, all rounded off with a hearty Tudor meal at the end of a long working day. We found that there's no other way to do a project like this other than to just roll up your sleeves, get involved and give everything a go.



In the course of the months that followed, we found some strategies helped us get accustomed to Tudor life. Our three top tips for survival were as follows:

ONE: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

There is no such thing as a five-minute job on a farm. Every day we had an idea of what we wanted to achieve throughout our working hours, breaking the day down into morning, afternoon and evening tasks. But on a Tudor farm, plans are a nice idea at best. Two hours' work with the cows could easily become four with very little to show for it. Inexplicably, the amount of coppice required was always more than our most prudent calculations had worked out.

We tried to keep our goals as realistic, achievable and time-orientated as possible and with time and experience we began to get a sense of how long each task would take – knowledge which in Tudor times would have been passed on from generation to generation, but which we were improvising for ourselves. (I say ‘we’ began to get a sense: Peter still believes there is such a thing as a five-minute job, even though to this day, he has never completed a job in five minutes or under. But still, you definitely can’t fault his optimism!)



TWO: PUT IN 100% EVERY DAY

Never has the expression ‘there are not enough hours in the day’ seemed so relevant as they did on our farm. Not even with early starts and late finishes did we ever feel that we were on top. As a team it was crucial to keep pushing because, as it would have been in Tudor times, survival was a team effort.

A lot of Ruth's tasks, particularly around the house, were made harder because they were solo efforts. While Peter and I might have been involved in some big projects, we always had the luck, and sometimes joy, of being able to fall back on (or blame) someone else if things weren't going to plan. Of course, we all know that beer tastes best after a hard day's work, but on the Tudor farm that really was the light at the end of the farming tunnel.

**“AS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IN TUDOR TIMES,
SURVIVAL WAS A TEAM EFFORT”**



THREE: HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR

A high-pressure environment can often lead to mistakes and to stress. For Tudor farmers, their work was their livelihood;

if a project failed, it could mean a hard year not just for them, but their family. It was a serious business, but laughter was a constant way of dealing with problems and easing some of the pressure. It allowed us to take a step back and look at why something was not working - why, for example, the geese refused to do as we wanted and then bit us for our trouble... We had to learn to take our situation seriously but also that to get through it, we had to lift ourselves. Laughter, not ale, was the answer.

A project like this can never fully recreate what the Tudors lived through but, we hoped, it would help us understand some of the hardships they faced, and to appreciate the difficulty of everyday life back at the start of the 16th century. At a time when so much could go wrong, our Tudor ancestors kept moving forward regardless, forging the way for new traditions and new technologies, some of which we still have today. All that remained was to see whether we could do the same...



MEET THE LAY FOLK


RUTH GOODMAN



I have to admit, I have always had a soft spot for the Tudor era. So when the chance came up to explore the early years, it was one that filled me with glee. Whilst the Second World War is still, just, within living memory, and the lifestyle of the Edwardian or even Victorian farmer is only just out of our reach, the life, thoughts and troubles of people who lived in 1500 are truly remote from us. It requires a leap of imagination to see yourself dressed all in wool brewing ale in a huge copper pan, beating the laundry

in the stream or hauling your barley crop through the monastery gates.

Putting yourself in their shoes means embracing a whole different way of thinking about the world. It was a world with very little science but a great deal of faith: one in which a woman's hair is a private, sexualised part of the body to be seen only by her husband and where a man's clothes reveal the shape of his legs; a world that values spiritual above physical health, at a time dogged by the horrors of the Black Death, the sweating sickness and periods of real hunger.

Venturing into the late 15th and early 16th century promised to be a voyage into a fascinatingly different life, but also one which still echoes down the years. As we moved through the daily routine, little flashes of familiarity kept popping up. Talk about 'drying up a cold' and you are calling on Tudor medical advice, keeping your knife out of your mouth when eating is a way to follow Tudor etiquette and porridge is a popular Tudor dish.

**“AS WE MOVED THROUGH THE DAILY ROUTINE,
LITTLE FLASHES OF FAMILIARITY KEPT POPPING
UP”**

It's a technologically exciting moment in time, too, from the arrival of printing to the development of the blast furnace for producing better, cheaper iron. Trade is beginning to expand as merchants bring new ideas about banking and finance from Italy into their daily practice and as the technology of shipping steps up.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the disease tide is turning. From 1348 onwards, epidemic after epidemic had driven down the population of Britain from nearly seven million people to less than two and a half million. But as the Tudor

era began, the Black Death and the sweating sickness began to loosen their stranglehold and the nation started their march towards a globally influential role. The year 1500 is a moment when as a people we seem to take a deep breath, gather our strength and prepare for the future.

Perhaps, then, you can see why I was so delighted to have this opportunity to delve into the realities and practicalities of Tudor life: to sleep on straw, to hand milk sheep, to boil my own salt and to wear a veil. And the experience hasn't disappointed. I have had the chance to explore so many little niggling questions that have always bugged me and there have been so many revelations and 'Oh, I see' moments along the way. My brewing skills have leapt ahead. I have learned to garden with weeds (and enjoy eating them). I have been deafened by water-powered fulling mills and enchanted by sheep-grazed meadows.

I would not want to move there permanently but a prolonged visit to Britain in 1500 has been wonderful, exciting, enlightening and enormous fun.



PETER GINN



If I were actually living in Tudor times, by now I should probably be dead, or at the very least missing a couple of limbs. To work on a daily basis doing some of the jobs I have experienced as part of the Tudor Abbey Farm series, rather than just as a one-off, my life expectancy meter would be pointing to borrowed time.

“IF I WERE ACTUALLY LIVING IN TUDOR TIMES, BY NOW I SHOULD PROBABLY BE DEAD, OR AT THE VERY LEAST MISSING A COUPLE OF LIMBS”

It was with a sense of excitement and trepidation that I donned my doublet, hiked up my hose and stepped out into Tudor England during the reign of Henry VII. I always count myself as being very lucky when I get to participate in a project like this. It is a chance to get your hands dirty, to put on the clothes and do the work of our ancestors and find out just what life was like 500 years ago.

It was a time when England was only really emerging as a nation and had yet to form a union with Scotland. The Church was the principal landowner and farming was a slightly more rural affair. I was most looking forward to getting to grips with our cows, not as livestock to be reared as food or for milk, but as beasts of burden engaged on the land doing the heavy work.

Equally the fabrics that we encounter in life - the wood, the metals and the glass - were cutting edge technologies back then. It was the monasteries and entrepreneurial farmers who were early adopters and experimenters. I find that by following a material on its journey from its raw state to a finished product you can gain a better understanding of the impact it had on society: we certainly got a strong sense of that during our time on the farm.

Each time I embark upon one of our time-travelling adventures I am always reminded just how much work was involved in doing pretty much anything – shopping, cooking, even washing up. Sometimes we can forget how hard life can be and if we learned one lesson, it was the fact that someone, somewhere has to do the hard work. In our modern lives we take so many things for granted that this trip back in time was a real reminder of the hard work and ingenuity of the Tudors that we still reap the benefits of today.



The Tudor period saw unbelievable changes in the political and religious fabric of England. In 1485, the Church was a constant that royal houses could only aspire to; to work as a tenant farmer on a monastic farm was to understand the whole ecosystem that one exists within.

The influences on farm life were varied but the tenant farmer on monastic land had to learn to work in subservient partnership with the monks, knowing that however hard they worked a percentage of what they grew, earned and produced would go to the monastery. The price of failure, meanwhile, could be eviction.

As a military historian, farming is not necessarily something that comes naturally (though of course, military and social history are so closely interlinked, and none more so than the Tudor period). However, as someone who is also an archaeologist, the chance to study history practically was an opportunity that does not come around regularly and was to be embraced.



Peter and Ruth are old hands at period farm life. I, on the other hand, am not and I would be lying if I said there was not some trepidation at the beginning and an uncertainty as to what I had got involved with. Reassuringly, though, the

shine in Peter's eyes as the first day approached displayed more of a boyish excitement than a maniacal glint! Working on a project like Tudor Abbey Farm can only be done if one is willing to get involved with every task and activity that comes along. The great thing about farm life in the Tudor period is the diverse range of activities one gets to experience from the more common skills like woodworking to the more wide-ranging jobs of blacksmithing or shepherding, even beekeeping.

“THE SHINE IN PETER’S EYES AS THE FIRST DAY APPROACHED DISPLAYED MORE OF A BOYISH EXCITEMENT THAN A MANIACAL GLINT!”

Preparing for Tudor farm life is difficult. Fitness is subjective but one can never fully prepare for a job like this as the body will be challenged constantly. Reading books and archaeological reports can give a view of the Tudor period but it does not prepare one physically for what lies ahead. The daily grind of our Tudor farm, however, was only part of it. An important component of the experience was the costume. On cold days it could be very comfortable and surprisingly warm. On warm days it could be very uncomfortable and even warmer! Yet the more I wore it, the more attached I became to it. I realised how important a factor period dress was to the whole experience, the benefits and the downsides.

Completing a Tudor farm project means embracing every aspect of the farm: the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. The centrality of religion to the Tudor period means that you must work within the same constraints and guidelines, and that an appreciation of the religious influence on our daily life must be sought.





THE MONASTIC SYSTEM

Throughout the endless dynastic changeovers of the civil war years, the Church had remained a constant in the lives of lay folk working on farms, as it was for all English people at the time. Henry VII saw strong ties with the Church as the key to influencing people in their everyday lives, morally and politically.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, King Henry's crown may not have been secure, but his influence on the monasteries seemed certain. None of them could have foreseen the political upheaval that was to take place in the years to come.



LIVING IN THE CHURCH

RUTH



he Tudor Age began with the monastic system firmly embedded in all aspects of English life: every county had at least one monastery, with 513 monasteries and 130 nunneries throughout England and Wales in total. The monasteries owned huge areas of land, with a wide variety of laymen working in, for and around them. They were focal points for trade, taking cuts of the profits and flourishing from the land they rented out to yeoman farmers. It was a symbiotic relationship between the monastery and the working man, with both requiring each other to prosper.



The physical space of the cloister stood as a symbol for the enclosed, contemplative life of the monasteries

When Henry VIII called for a full survey of all the religious houses prior to the dissolution of the monasteries, his officials recorded around 4,000 monks and 2,000 nuns. In addition there were something in the region of 3,000 regular canons and another 3,000 friars who worked among laypeople, rather than following the enclosed life. Despite being small in number, these few people and the institutions that they inhabited owned perhaps as much as a quarter of the landed wealth in England. According to the tax assessment of 1535 they received an annual income of £165,500, a sum close to twice the annual income of the King.

CHURCH DEPENDANTS

It is tempting to think that such small numbers in a population of around 2.8 million reflected a great falling-off in the monastic life of the country. This, though, is not so; there were never very many more people living under the monastic rule. The monasteries were not in serious decline but largely operating at full strength, with plenty of potential

recruits ready to join the religious life whenever there should be room for them. Supporting someone in a purely contemplative, non-productive life is expensive, and since it is a lifelong commitment the resources required are extensive. Medieval and early Tudor Britain could not comfortably provide this lifestyle for too many healthy active adults.



As well as living a life of regulated communal prayer, monks also had to care for and supervise their large estates

Though the number of actual monks and nuns was small, the number of people whose livelihoods were bound up with the monastic institutions was much larger. Lay workers and servants directly employed by the abbeys, priories and convents far outnumbered the religious inhabitants.

At wealthy abbeys, there was a ratio of 30 workers for every monk, although the majority of poorer institutions – particularly nunneries – rarely had a ratio of more than one to one. These workers were the people who baked the bread and brewed the ale, laundered the clothes and served the meals. They cared for the horses in the stables, took the

grain to the miller, dug the gardens and swept the floors. Many wealthier monks and nuns even employed their own personal servants to look after them in a style similar to that in which they had grown up.

Monastic houses also served as home for a number of long-term guests and their servants. Most institutions housed a few people who had, in effect, bought a pension: in exchange for a gift of money or land, these people secured a guarantee of a room and a daily food ration for life. Other guests came and went. Some just stayed the night as they journeyed across the country, others stayed for weeks or months to visit relatives within the monastery, or be near to family in the surrounding district. There were some who used the guesthouses as refuges from difficult situations at home or places to park relatives in safety until other arrangements (marriages for example) could be made. Most of the guests made some sort of financial contribution, although as surviving monastic account books make clear hospitality could be a major burden upon the order's finances.



Our parish church was one of those where monks performed the duties of a parish priest

In total, around 25,000 people were dependent upon the monasteries for their daily bread at any one time. They all lived to a religious timetable, following, to one degree or another, the rules of the order.

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RELIGIOUS LIFE

The main purpose of the religious life was prayer: communal, formal prayer to be supplemented by periods of private devotions. Monks and nuns would come together at fixed times to recite a given round of texts suited to the time of day and the religious calendar. Several different orders maintained monasteries in Britain, including the

Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinians, Gilbertines and Brigittines.

St Benedict's rule was perhaps the most influential, and most other houses followed a similar pattern. The religious day began according to his rule with Matins at midnight, followed by services 'at the first, third, sixth, ninth hours, at Vesper time and at Compline'. In between these formal services were periods of rest for sleep, food and exercise, and times for private prayer. Most religious orders required long periods of silence to facilitate contemplation. The regular round of prayer was expected not only to aid the souls of the monks and nuns but also anyone who supported them practically or financially in their endeavours. They prayed for the sake of all people as an act of charity and devotion. In between their religious duties, many monks and nuns also provided the managerial element of their foundation's needs: keeping accounts, supervising staff, and negotiating contracts for supplies or rental agreements. Around half of the resident religious had some sort of administrative role.

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