

Reviews

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**Eric Ives, *Lady Jane Grey. A Tudor Mystery*,
Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2011. 372 pages**

Eric Ives was (he died on 25th September 2012) emeritus professor of English history at the University of Birmingham and an expert on the Tudor period, particularly noted for his work on the life of Anne Boleyn.

In this biography, Eric Ives attempts to solve the mystery surrounding Lady Jane Grey, the “Nine Days Queen” between Edward VI and Mary I. The book is essentially a thorough, well researched and meticulous presentation of an event, namely being the proclamation of a relatively remote Tudor claimant to the throne, the subsequent ramifications which unfolded because of it and the series of events which preceded it. Ives takes each of the main characters in turn, looking at their motivations and their involvement.

In the first part of the book Ives is setting the scene and context of Jane’s short reign. How the year of 1553 came to have three different Tudor monarchs. He talks about the difficulty of researching Jane as “*A Tudor teenager who died at the age of sixteen is very unlikely to have left much trace on the historical record, and still less if female.*” He looks at historical evidence regarding her appearance, the portraits and likenesses that exist.

In the second part Eric Ives takes each of the main characters of 1553 and explains who they were, what drove them and what role they had to play. Ives looks at Jane’s background and is of the opinion that “*Par-entage too cursed Jane Grey, and she was another innocent.*” He talks of Jane being “*a puppet ready to hand*”. He also looks at Frances Grey’s reputation as ambitious and “*cunning and predatory*” and how Jane’s father was drawn into politics. Ives examines Jane’s role in the plans of Thomas Seymour and why she became his ward, Seymour’s arrest and the implications for Jane’s family, Jane’s education and intelligence, and her attitudes to life. Ives looks at the England in which Jane was brought up, the influence of Katherine Parr on Jane and how Jane would have come into contact with religious reformers.

Ives focuses on the contrast between Mary Tudor and Jane and their religious beliefs, Mary’s appearance and character, Mary’s childhood and background, and the devastating effect of her father’s actions. Then he looks at Dudley’s background, his military career and how he came to be a powerful man. Ives reveals that Dudley was an accomplished soldier who had to contend very early on in life with the ramifications of his father’s execution for treason shortly after the accession of Henry VIII. Thereafter Ives looks at Edward VI’s life, the myth that he was a passive victim who was manipulated, Edward’s character and his growing independence, his

involvement in policy and how he did in fact have a mind of his own. How this single political paper became central to the crisis of 1553, the different versions of the devise and the thoughts behind them, Edward's devise compared to his father's will, Edward's deteriorating health and the strong legal support that Edward had for excluding Mary – "*Right was on the side of Jane Grey. Mary Tudor was the rebel.*" He ends with a sequence of events from Edward's initial illness in January 1553 through the various version of the devise for the succession to the final version four in June.

Ives convincingly argues that Edward's devise for the succession was entirely his own invention and not that of Dudley. His role in these events only comes into prominence when Edward's health takes a serious turn for the worse, leading to Edward's "devise" as it would be called, supplanting his sisters as heirs in favour of the legitimate, Grey and her "heirs male". As Ives points out, such a devise was unrealistic, and as it could clearly have benefitted the heirs of Eleanor Brandon, or the remaining two Grey sisters and very possibly led to rival factions and conflict between the various heiresses, one analysing the plot in great depth, would hardly conclude that this was the work of John Dudley. Nevertheless the full details of the devise is divulged here in detail and surely reveals as much about the idealistic but deluded Edward at this time as it does about the other two main characters in the plot, Dudley and Jane.

In the third part is an examination of the thirteen days which made up Queen Jane's reign. What preparations were made for Jane becoming queen and why they did not take the obvious step of getting hold of Mary to neutralise her challenge. Ives focuses on Jane's marriage to Guildford Dudley, her reaction to learning that she was Queen, her entrance into the Tower and how "*the crown was a burden laid on her by God and one she would lay down with relief.*" Furthermore, he looks at the attempt to secure Mary, why Northumberland chose to retreat and why Jane's forces could not be successful against Mary. Ives concludes that "*the most convincing explanation of the dramatic collapse of Jane's privy council is that two key earls drew back from committing themselves to military action. Called on to up their stake in Queen Jane, Arundel and Pembroke chose to fold.*" Ives examines Mary's movements from the death of Edward to her proclamation as Queen and sifts through the myths. He looks at what inspired her rebellion, how she was supported and how she won.

In the last part, Ives gives all of the details how the story ended. How Jane was left to fend for herself as the council sought to protect themselves and the fate of Jane's supporters. He focuses on Jane's imprisonment, Mary's belief in Jane's innocence, Jane's trial, the death sentence, how Jane spent her time in the Tower and her faith. Mary's plans to marry Philip of Spain, Wyatt's Rebellion and the involvement of Henry Grey,

Jane's father, and why Mary had to finally take action against Jane. How Jane spent the last hours of her life and the letters she wrote, Guildford Dudley's and Lady Jane Grey's executions. How Lady Jane Grey lives on in art and (popular) culture.

I would recommend this book for anyone wishing to study not only the accession crisis in 1553 but also connected events and characters in greater depth.

JAN CHLUBNA

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