

---

*Life in Tudor Times*. CD-ROM. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1999.

MARY L. HJELM  
EASTERN IDAHO TECHNICAL COLLEGE

*Life in Tudor Times*, like other Films for the Humanities and Sciences CD-ROMs, is difficult to load and get started, particularly for the first-time user or for those unfamiliar with CD-ROM installation and initiation. Information provided for startup is sketchy at best and some previous experience in using their materials is very helpful. Once the program is successfully loaded, additional problems crop up in that the "Help Screen" provides very little user information and standard Internet navigation tools such as buttons and pointers are not employed. Trial and error is helpful in remedying this, but it can be frustrating for those who expect to be immediately entertained or enlightened as happens with videos. The CD-ROM can be used with either Windows or Macintosh and requires at least 8MB Ram (16MB or more is recommended) and sound card and speakers. Windows needs a 486/66 or faster processor while Macintosh requires 68040 or faster. Installation can be made with Windows 96/NT, Windows 3.1, or Macintosh.

Once the user is familiar with the method of operation, *Life in Tudor Times* is interesting if awkwardly presented. A "timeline" button and bar (complete with racing car sound effects) provides the basic mode for moving around the events featured from the end of the War of the Roses in 1485 to the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. Users can click in the center of the main page for pictures, information (in both written and verbal contexts), and real-time videos of various Tudor characters explaining various events or daily occurrences. Or users can employ the ESP button in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen to access two categories (Ways of Life and Major Events, Personalities, and Monarch) for lists of topics such as Arts and Architecture, Town and Country, Life at Sea, and Court Life. From there more specific information on individual monarchs and historical events can be found. Volume controls will need to be adjusted for each screen and for each time each screen is accessed — an irritating distraction, but otherwise the only real flaw of this user format.

Each major screen has two or three possibilities for accessing information. Verbal explanations are provided by film or video clips in addition to textual screens that are often more interesting than the written counterparts. However, there is no consistency about whether the verbal or the written provides the most detail, making both valuable to the viewer for different reasons. Written texts do contain "hotspot" links to pop-up biographical pages on most of the main characters and events of the age. The real-time videos feature characters who may have

---

inhabited London during the Tudor period, including a surgeon-barber, a farmer, a merchant, a lady wife, a sailor, an actor, a courtier, a builder, and a street urchin. The voices of the narrators and actors are easily understood, even with accents, and are pleasing to the ear, making these features satisfying to employ. Some screens feature radio plays or music rather than real-time videos that are also very enjoyable. While the videos are largely “talking heads,” the information they give — some in several consecutive segments — provides an interesting and personalized perspective of Tudor life that will capture the imaginations of some types of learners. A brief performance of a monologue by the “actor” from *As You Like It* suffers as the actor is confined to one spot on the stage due to the limitations of the video format. The best of the real-time videos is probably the interior tour of Hever Castle, home of Anne Boleyn, given by the “builder” that includes lush photographs rather than the drab and washed-out drawings that accompany most of the other selections.

Unfortunately, for the serious Early Modern Era scholar, the information that *Life in Tudor Times* provides is so general as to be more applicable to newcomers to Tudor history than to those who have some previous background in it and would probably be of more value to the new and independent student who is seeking general information about the Tudor Period than it would be to History or English teachers. Teachers would need to be very organized in order to use this as a teaching tool as the really valuable sections are somewhat scattered, but the interactive nature of CD-ROM technology could appeal strongly to an independent or non-traditional learner. The simplicity of the information provided and the almost juvenile drawings suggest this CD-ROM is intended for a younger audience, perhaps at the junior high or early high school level. The cost, \$149.00, also suggests that this is intended as a classroom supplement and not an independent purchase in lieu of a textbook.