13. What did Elizabeth Redmayn do all day?

'The challenge which life on a great estate presented is etched upon the evidence.
It was tough. It was demanding. It was often lonely. Above all it was endless.'

Dr Rowena Archer

Elizabeth was a wealthy woman and so, to modern eyes, that suggests she didn't have to do much at all. She had officials to oversee her household. She had servants to do the hard labour. She might have lived a life of languid leisure, sunbathing the summer hours away in the garden of Harewood castle or absent-mindedly embroidering a cushion while deep in fascinating gossip with her friends. And at times she may have done those things but, in the words of historian Dr Rowena Archer above, the lives of many women of Elizabeth's status were dominated by the tough, demanding, lonely and endless task of running their households and estates. So what, I wonder, were the many tasks that filled Elizabeth's waking hours and made her role so hard? What was it that she did all day in the early 1400s, as she moved from her mid-thirties towards her fiftieth birthday in 1413 or 1414?

My problem is, as ever, that there's no direct evidence to tell us what Elizabeth was doing or, indeed, whether she did take on those demanding responsibilities. If she really did spend her time sun-bathing and gossiping, then this will be the shortest of short chapters – but instead I'm going to make (and attempt to justify) two assumptions. The first is that Elizabeth did take on the many responsibilities of running the family estates and the second is that her husband, Richard, trusted her with those responsibilities. I can't be certain these assumptions are correct, but I do take confidence from Christine de Pizan's words in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* that:

> *'Any man is extremely foolish of whatever class he may happen to be, if he sees that he has a good and wise wife yet does not give her the authority to govern.'*

Happily, everything I've discovered so far makes me confident that Richard was not 'extremely foolish' and so did entrust Elizabeth with those responsibilities and, secondly, that Elizabeth was 'a good and wise' woman, well-capable of taking on the numerous responsibilities of running the family estates. It's worth noting that, by the time of her marriage to Richard, she had not only her youthful training in household management to draw upon but had over a decade of experience of running households, first as wife, then as widow and as co-owner of Harewood.

With those assumptions in place, I can begin seeking answers to my question about what Elizabeth did all day. Evidence of the kinds of activities that may have filled Elizabeth's days will come from the lives of other women of the time – and, if Rowena Archer is right about the 'endless' demands of running a household, then this chapter will be my longest yet, reflecting how busy Elizabeth was.

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I'll begin with Elizabeth's most important task of all – motherhood. Bearing children, particularly a male heir, was her most important role, regardless of all the time and effort she put into managing her household. Elizabeth, as we've seen, had already had one family before she married Richard Redmayn. Her marriage to Brian Stapleton had produced one son and, perhaps, another son and two daughters in the 1380s when she was in her late teens and early twenties. Then came her family with Richard, at least two sons and two daughters who were born from around 1397 onwards. There may have been other children but there's no definitive evidence of them in contemporary sources. Professor Anne Curry refers to a Thomas Redmayn (whose name appears in military records) as Richard and Elizabeth's son but it's at least equally likely that he was a nephew or cousin.

This uncertainty about the number of Elizabeth's children is frustrating but typical of the period. We rarely know the number of children in a family, even in the wealthiest noble families, unless they're recorded in, for example, a family's Book of Hours. Family histories and pedigrees from the 16th and 17th centuries often provide the names of children and can appear hallowed by repetition in later publications but, without contemporary evidence, we can't be certain such family trees are accurate.

All we can say, therefore, is that Elizabeth had at least five children from her two marriages, possibly nine and maybe more, and that takes no account of any children who died in infancy. It wouldn't be surprising if Elizabeth did grieve over the deaths of one or more infants, given the high level of infant mortality, not just in the Middle Ages but in all periods before the mid-twentieth century. Even in the early 1900s, my grandparents, George and Charlotte, suffered the deaths of two children before their first birthdays, infants who were never forgotten as my grandparents gave their names to my father and his sister. Such re-use of names may well have happened in medieval families, creating daily reminders of infants who died young.

Pregnancies, childbirth and post-natal recuperation were therefore a continuing feature of Elizabeth's life in the early 1400s, and essential context for understanding the impact on her of everything else she was doing in her 30s and 40s. Each birth may have seen her confined in her chamber in female company only (as explained in Chapter 12) for up to two months until her churching, although she may well have been out and around within the castle precinct towards the end of that period.

These repeated experiences must have taken a toll on her physical energies and been a significant mental stress. Elizabeth knew that with each pregnancy she faced the real possibility of death. As Hilary Mantel has written, 'Every childbirth brought a woman to a liminal state, poised between this world and the next …' and Elizabeth would have known too many close friends, relatives and acquaintances who had died in or after childbirth to think otherwise. Like many women, she may have gone on short-distance pilgrimages to seek saintly intercession during pregnancy. She could have avoided such fears by remaining single in widowhood but had chosen to marry Richard and so risk pregnancy and her life.

And, of course, motherhood didn't end with childbirth though we can't know the depth of Elizabeth's bond with each of her children or the extent of her role in their upbringing. The children had wet-nurses (as her grandson did, as we'll see in Chapter 14) and there were servants to take on the 'chores' of motherhood but surely Elizabeth was still very engaged with the emotional

upbringing of her children – delight and relief when each one began crawling, walking and, later, riding; hearing their first words and sentences; watching for signs of intelligence and worrying over illness; hoping they would get on well together and with son (and possibly other children) by her first marriage; pride as they grew and matured.

And, as the children grew, Elizabeth and Richard would have discussed two vital questions en route to their adulthood. The first was which family's household each of their children should spend time in, and the second was who would they marry? As Elizabeth knew from her own marriages (and the distressing experiences of her sister, Sybil) the choice of husband or wife would have a profound effect on her children's lives. She and Richard needed to visit prospective in-laws (the parents and future sons and daughters-in-law), negotiate financial settlements and, in all likelihood, have back-up plans in case, for any of several reasons, the anticipated marriages did not go ahead.

Sadly, there are gaps in our knowledge of the resulting marriages. What we know is that:

> Their eldest son, called Matthew in the Redmayn tradition, married Joanna Tunstall whose family lived at Thurland castle in north-west Lancashire, only 17 miles from Levens Hall. Richard Redmayn and Thomas Tunstall, Joanna's father, may have known each other through royal service and it's likely that this marriage was planned early in the 1400s. Matthew and Joanna were still very young then but, as Matthew was the Redmayn heir, his marriage was essential for securing the family's future. This forward planning was successful as Matthew and Joanna's own son, the long-term Redmayn heir, was born in 1416.
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> Elizabeth and Richard's other known son was another Richard, probably the second son as he had his father's name. We don't know who Richard married but he appears to have lived at Bossall in Cumberland so perhaps he too married into a north-western family.
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> One daughter, whose name we don't know, married Richard Duckett of Grayrigg in Westmorland, just ten miles from Levens. Duckett fought under Henry V in France, served once as a Knight of the Shire for Westmorland and was trusted by Sir Richard Redmayn because, in his will, he gave Duckett partial responsibility for the family lands during the minority of his heir, his grandson.
>
> A second daughter, Joan, married Thomas Wentworth of Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire, probably the only one of these four marriages not with north-western families.

The gaps in our knowledge about Elizabeth's children and their marriages should not, however, distract us from the considerable time, thought, discussion, organisation and emotional investment that she put into her children's upbringing and, in time, into the early lives of her grandchildren. To add complexity to what is already sounding a very busy life, the arrival of Elizabeth's first grandchildren may well have over-lapped with the births of her own younger children because her eldest son, Brian Stapleton and his wife, Agnes, had four children between 1404 and 1413.

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Now for Elizabeth's role as manager of her household, that tough, demanding, endless task described by Rowena Archer. No records from the Redmayn household remain to tell us about Elizabeth's actions but I can summon help from another of her contemporaries, Alice de Bryenne, just as Christine de Pizan came to my rescue in Chapter 4. Alice was born a handful of years before Elizabeth, around 1360, married in her teens and was widowed in 1386, a few years before Elizabeth too was widowed. These chronological similarities help to explain why I chose Alice as my help-meet but, far more important is the survival of some of her household records, notably for the year 1412-13. These records provide a detailed picture of Alice's household and, while there were differences (Alice remained a widow, her lands were 'down south', not in Yorkshire and Elizabeth's household was larger and wealthier given Richard Redmayn's status and political importance) the roles of Alice and Elizabeth within their households were likely to have been similar – so how can Alice's records help us understand what Elizabeth did each day?

The first thing that Alice's records tell us is that running a household was a very public task because of the number and variety of people who ate meals there. The daily record book kept by Alice's steward in 1412-13 reveals that, on average 45 meals were provided at her home each day, some for breakfast, most for dinner (usually eaten by 12 noon), others at supper. Higher up the social order, the household records of the Duke of Buckingham for 1507-8 reveal that he provided meals for around 70 people a day. Taking these two sets of figures into account and given the Redmayns' status and Richard's involvement in local and national politics, it's likely the number of meals provided at Harewood fell between those two totals of 45 and 70, with perhaps an average of over 50 people eating meals each day at Harewood, including visitors of high status.

On any one day, the people breakfasting or dining at Harewood might include (deep breath!) – relatives, friends and neighbours, Richard's colleagues from royal commissions and his work as sheriff of Yorkshire, fellow knights of the shire in parliaments, high-ranking ecclesiastics, members of the nobility, royal messengers and officials, craftsmen such as masons, carpenters and glaziers working at the castle and All Saints church, receivers, bailiffs and other officials from the Redmayns' estates, household officials and the servants, maids, wet-nurses and other workers in the castle and on its estates. There were probably also children from other gentry households or of merchant families spending time in the Redmayn household as part of their training to take their own places in society – and the most important of these visitors may have arrived with some combination of their wives, children, clerks and servants.

That's an extensive and varied list and, inevitably, some arrived at short notice with Elizabeth notified, not by the ping of an email in her in-box, but by the sound of hooves when a messenger brought word that Richard would soon be arriving with guests with whom he'd be discussing business over dinner or a working breakfast. Clearly, Elizabeth couldn't risk running short of supplies of food and drink and continual high standards of cleanliness were needed (no dusty tapestries!). There had to be freshly laundered cloths at table, the best plate available (Alice possessed silver goblets and salt cellars) shining glassware and vessels containing water for hand-washing and warm, well-aired, well-lit and comfortable chambers ready for those staying overnight. As we saw in Chapter 12, the beds in the best chambers had colourful and embroidered bedding. And, oh yes, all these important visitors had horses which needed stabling and fodder. One of Alice's regular visitors was a merchant whose horse was fed a special half-penny loaf as a treat.

In the midst of her responsibility for all this, Elizabeth had to offer a gracious welcome, sparkle in conversation with some visitors while Richard talked business with others, and show endless tact, smiling even if deeply bored. And she needed to be immaculately turned out, wearing the very best in fashion, textiles, head-dresses and jewellery to emphasise her status as the lady of the household and the wife of one of the most important men in Yorkshire and northern society.

Providing hospitality was a Christian duty, an essential and expected part of social behaviour, but generosity towards guests also demonstrated the Redmayns' status and built up their 'good worship', the respect in which they were held amongst friends, working colleagues and the 'influencers' of fifteenth century society, notably leading churchmen and members of the nobility. Thus we need to think of Harewood as not just Elizabeth's plush and comfortable home but also as a combination of high-quality hotel and business hub for The Redmayn Family PLC. As Dr Rowena Archer points out, another of the roles Elizabeth was expected to play was *'expanding and defending the mutual interests of the couple, contributing at every level to the preservation of the 'worship' of their husbands and sons'.*

Elizabeth's household management was therefore a very public and demanding responsibility, not least at religious festivals and family events such as baptisms, weddings and commemorations. Alice de Bryenne hosted 300 people at dinner at New Year 1413, so the Redmayns welcomed at least as many guests to their lower hall on occasion. Much smaller but even more important gatherings marked family anniversaries such as the deaths of Elizabeth's parents and brother, Richard's relatives and, maybe, even Edward Balliol, the Aldburgh family's benefactor.

Elizabeth had been brought up to this role but her position as Sir Richard's wife must have made increasing demands because of his deeper involvement in royal service and his frequent absences. It seems probable that, when they married, Richard knew that Elizabeth was well able to play this important role – and his expectations, given his years at Richard II's court, were likely very high.

Elizabeth did not, of course, deal with every detail of such hospitality herself. She relied on a range of educated, highly-trained and experienced senior household officials whose work included keeping detailed records of the household's expenditure. The records from Alice de Bryenne's household suggest that Elizabeth's steward and other officials would have kept daily records of:

- How many meals were served in her household at breakfast, dinner and supper each day and the names or occupations of many of those who ate those meals.
- The number of loaves baked and then provided at meals, the quantity of ale brewed in the household and of wine consumed and where it was bought.
- Details of the meats and fish served at meals and whether they came from the household estates or were purchased elsewhere.
- The amount of fodder provided for the horses of members of the household and visitors.
- The purchases made for household use and their costs – food and drink, from basics such as fresh and dried fish to rarer items (e.g. raisins and almonds), spices (e.g. ginger and cloves), a wide range of varieties of cloth, wax, wood bought for fuel, pots and utensils for the kitchens and bakery, equipment for the stables etc.

- Spending on items which made life comfortable and displayed the Redmayns' status, such as gifts, clothes, building improvements, beds, bedding, furniture, tapestries, plate, jewellery and, very importantly, Elizabeth's gowns and head-dresses.
- Alms given to the poor and gifts to churches, abbeys and other ecclesiastical foundations.
- Travel expenses – including a separate account for the many journeys undertaken by Sir Richard on royal service but also travelling to Levens.

This all amounts to a huge quantity of record-keeping, compiled, written and tallied up by hand and very probably in Latin because that was the language used in many of the roughly five hundred surviving household accounts. This, in turn, means that Elizabeth probably read these accounts in Latin when approving them. With Sir Richard away so often, it would have been Elizabeth's responsibility to check them on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, perhaps depending on her confidence in her officials. She may also have initialled or made notes on the accounts, as did Anne Herbert, Countess of Pembroke when supervising her son's estates during his minority in the 1470s**.** All this work was essential for effective household management because it reduced the potential for over-spending, waste, corruption and mismanagement, kept costs under control, provided a focus for discussing value for money and the quality of items purchased and helped forward-planning so that the household would continue to run smoothly, however many high-status visitors arrived at short notice.

Such minutiae were clearly very important but Elizabeth also needed good 'people skills' to get the best out of the members of her household. Some she'd speak to daily, others at longer intervals but they were a varied group, mostly men with the exception of laundresses and maids. At the top of the household tree were the steward (in overall control) and the chamberlain (responsible for the contents of the Redmayns' private rooms), plus her chaplains and clerks. There were other officials too – the butler and the pantler (responsible for wine and bread respectively), the men in charge of the stables (perhaps the efficient Nicholas of Harewood who Sir Richard took with him in his work as Master of the Horse to Richard II), falconers, messengers, cooks (high quality, given the guest-list), farmworkers, servants, laundresses, gardeners, the bailiffs of outlying estates and others.

What Elizabeth wanted from all of them was efficiency, loyalty, honesty and continuity of service – qualities that might be enhanced if Elizabeth showed interest in their welfare and families. Elizabeth may have handed out gifts alongside the annual distribution of wages and cloth in the family livery colours which ensured that household officials and servants impressed visitors with their clean and uniform appearance. That people like Elizabeth and Richard did have long-lasting relationships with their staff is evidenced in numerous proofs of age, which reveal details of household officials and others attending baptisms, and in wills such as that of Elizabeth's sister-in-law, Marjorie Aldburgh, who left the very significant sum of £40 to her housekeeper (worth several years' income from some gentry estates) and a scarlet gown to her husband's childhood nurse.

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The attention to detail that Elizabeth gave her 'indoor household' also applied to her wider estates, including the fabric of Harewood castle, the other buildings around the castle (brewhouse, bakehouse, wash-house etc) and those on the Redmayns' wider estates. The castle was only fifty

years old but up-dating it, repairs, redecoration and re-painting of walls were needed to impress visitors and had to be carried out efficiently and cost-effectively. The stables, their staff and the varied range of horses would have been in tip-top condition, given Sir Richard's experience and horsemanship but, during his frequent absences, Elizabeth needed to ensure that everything equine was functioning smoothly.

Was it likely that Elizabeth did engage with such issues? Evidence from Alice de Bryenne and other ladies suggests she may well have done. In addition, Christine de Pizan wrote that:

> *'It is proper for a lady to be thoroughly knowledgeable about the laws, taxes and all things within the jurisdiction of the lordship so that no-one can deceive her. There is nothing dishonourable about making herself familiar with the accounts. She will see them often and wish to know how they are managed … she will do well to be a very good manager of the estate and know all about the work on the land and at what time and in which season one ought to perform what operations.'*

If Elizabeth did follow these precepts, then ensuring the effective farming of her estates also occupied her energies. The greatest question facing landowners was whether to continue employing workers to farm the lord's demesne land or to rent out land to tenant farmers. With wages rising because there being fewer workers after the Black Death, many lords rented out some or all of their demesne, opting for the security of fixed rents rather than variable income from sales of crops. This didn't however mean that agricultural decision-making had ended. If the Redmayns made this choice they still needed to choose tenants carefully, selecting good farmers who would keep land and equipment in good condition. Tenancy agreements then had to be written in conjunction with lawyers and reports were needed from bailiffs and receivers on whether tenants were keeping those agreements and paying their rent, and on queries and complaints raised by tenants.

If crops were still grown on the Redmayns' land, finely-judged decisions were needed on which crops to sow to raise the most income (more barley given the demand for ale? And how much more?) and when to sell them to get the best prices (sell now or hold off for a week or maybe two?). More generally, Elizabeth may have overseen Harewood's version of an annual survey instigated by a 13th century abbot at Malmesbury Abbey which included questions such as:

> *How well were the lands being cultivated and the meadows, woods and pasture maintained?*
> *What was the state of the barns, accommodation for livestock, of the smithy, brewery and tannery?*
> *Were the cart-horses in good condition?*
> *Was the land being marled and manured appropriately?*
> *Were estate officials* – reeves, bailiffs etc – performing their duties properly?

On top of all this, an annual fair and weekly market were held at Harewood. They were clearly important to the Redmayns because an entry in the Patent Rolls in 1406 reveals that Sir Richard had sought confirmation of the right to hold them, a right dating from 1208-9 in the reign of King John. The market was held each Saturday, the fair on the first three days of July, adding to the work of the household, especially if the fair attracted a bevy of wealthy merchants from across the north.

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Far more predictable, perhaps, was Elizabeth's daily involvement with her religion. Her day began with prayer, perhaps following the words of Yorkshire religious and mystic, Richard Rolle, whose writings she probably knew, that *'ever as thou wakest, lift they heart to God with some holy thought*.' More formally, Elizabeth attended services and heard mass in the chapel adjoining the upper hall, and likely spent time discussing and reading her Book of Hours (a primer containing the most important prayers and a selection of other writings) and other religious texts with her chaplains (Alice de Bryenne had several chaplains) and, perhaps, with friends. Such activities were a central part of her day, essential for the salvation of her soul and also because, in religion as much else, she was setting an example for her community, her household at Harewood. Perhaps her religious observances also soothed her mind and eased her worries on her busiest days?

In addition to these regular religious activities there was another, very significant responsibility that took up Elizabeth's time over several years and which, belatedly, made me realise that Elizabeth must have been at home with something we might assume is only a feature of the modern world – formal meetings, complete with agenda, minutes and the fifteenth century equivalent of tea and chocolate digestives to revive flagging concentration! I should have realised this earlier – the household business I've listed can't have been done 'on the fly'. Elizabeth must have held formal meetings with her officials on many occasions, working through an agenda and keeping records of decisions. So what was the significant project that makes me believe that Elizabeth was used to formal meetings?

It was the weighty responsibility of the re-building of All Saints Church at Harewood in the years after 1406. We can date the beginning of this work because on 25 January that year Sir John Scot made his will in which he left 100 marks (£66) towards the cost of building the church '*on this condition, that the patrons of Harewood begin to rebuild the said church within the next year, and continue continuously to the best of their ability until it has been completely rebuilt; otherwise the 100 marks shall revert to my executors.'*

Scot, who may have lived at nearby Calverley but of whom we know nothing else, went on to say that he had already donated £20 of that sum, a detail which suggests that plans for the new church were already under discussion. As it took four years to build a comparable church at Catterick, All Saints may have been completed by 1410 or 1411. As for the cost of the re-building, it was probably at least £200 as that was the cost of rebuilding what Professor Nigel Saul describes as a similarly 'grandly conceived' church at Poynings in Sussex.

Was £200 a large sum? It's always hard to relate the value of sums of money in the past to prices today but £200 was a very large sum, the annual income of a member of the lower ranks of the nobility. More, in fact, may have been spent on All Saints, given that John Scot contributed £66 and it seems a fair assumption that the wealthier and more powerful Richard Redmayn and William Gascoigne made even greater financial contributions.

Returning to the question of Elizabeth's experience of formal meetings, I feel certain that such meetings were held because such a long-term and expensive building project needed considered

discussion and precise accounting to ensure it was completed to the standards expected by the people John Scot refers to as 'the patrons' of the new church. So who were the people who regularly gathered around a table at Harewood castle to review progress?

My 'informed imagination' tells me that Elizabeth and her sister, Sybil, were at that table because they were co-owners of the Harewood estates in which the new church stood and because it would contain a chantry chapel first established in the old church by their grandfather, John, Lord Lisle in 1353. Since then, six chaplains from Bolton Priory (north-west up Wharfedale) had been saying daily masses for the souls of the Lisle family. For Elizabeth and Sybil, continuing that commemoration and intercession in the new church was of central importance.

Sir Richard Redmayn was probably there too on occasion, given his heavy involvement in politics and administration. In 1406, for example, when work on the church began, he was at parliament at Westminster for much of the year. Richard's absences may therefore have increased Elizabeth's role and made the building of the church a frequent topic in the letters flying between them.

There were others round that table too. One notable figure was the Prior of Bolton Priory or one of his senior colleagues. Elizabeth's grandfather, John Lisle had not only initiated the chantry chapel but had granted the church to the Priory which therefore held the advowson, the right to appoint the rector. The Redmayns' neighbour, Lord Chief Justice William Gascoigne (or another of his family) was also present as one of John Scot's executors and because a chapel was set aside in the south aisle for the Gascoignes and for William's tomb. Scot's other executor, Sir Robert Waterton, another leading member of Henry IV's household, may have been there, alongside one of the Franks family of Alwoodley (three miles from Harewood), whose members were commemorated in stained glass in All Saints. There may have been other gentry, lawyers and parishioners plus clerks to take minutes. I do hope the clerks shared in the wine and pastries provided for the patrons!

What was on their agenda? Early meetings led to the appointment of the mason in charge, his role a mix of architect (providing architectural drawings for the patrons to discuss) and master-builder. Discussions, minuted for future reference, must then have focussed on negotiations over the scale, cost, schedule, decorative details and furnishings of the church. Much of this decoration is difficult to imagine, given the bare stone walls of All Saints Church today, but the new church must have looked very different and far more colourful with a rood screen between chancel and nave and the statues of saints in niches. Maybe there was a painting of St Christopher opposite the south doorway for Sir Richard and other travellers to pray to before setting off on journeys and maybe even a doom painting showing souls either being saved or sent down interminably into hell? Such decisions would have been needed to determine which paintings were to be commissioned.

After all that, came the drawing up of a detailed contract with the mason. And then, at intervals, came meetings to report and discuss progress, changes to the plans, the choice of craftsmen such as glaziers and carpenters. In the midst of this, (a thought prompted by my wife's experience of major engineering projects), someone had to make day-to-day decisions when the mason needed approval for changes to the plan or additional expenditure – too much time would be lost if they waited for the next meeting of the patrons. I wonder if that person was Elizabeth? Sir Richard and Chief Justice Gascoigne were often absent so, unless Bolton Priory sent someone to remain on site, Elizabeth may

have been best-placed to liaise with the mason and keep the building on track until the day when All Saints was complete. Perhaps her memories of the building of the castle may even have been useful?

For Elizabeth and Sybil, the completion of the church must have been a joyful experience, especially the consecration of the church by the local bishop, presumably the Archbishop of York himself. Elizabeth and Sybil would have watched the Archbishop and his entourage sing prayers while circling the building three times. Then sand was sprinkled inside the church in the form of a cross that linked all four corners of the church before the church was anointed twelve times and the high altar was blessed. What a day that must have been for the two sisters. Theirs was the greatest emotional commitment to the new church, a homage to their family and where they too would be commemorated, with their tomb chests nearest the altar in the places of greatest honour in the church. Hopefully all those meetings had been worthwhile.

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After this immense catalogue of activity, I'd like to finish this chapter with a mental image of Elizabeth with her feet up, her dogs at her side and a cooling drink to hand. Was there ever time for Elizabeth to relax? What did she do for fun? What made her smile and laugh?

Some of the probabilities are predictable, others surprising but I hope she found time simply to stand and stare, restoring her energies, perhaps when walking around the gardens at the castle or standing at a window or on the rooftop walkway to enjoy the views over Wharfedale. She also visited and exchanged news and gossip with her sister Sybil and friends such as the Vavasour and Roos families, the Franks of Alwoodley and the Arthingtons, a local gentry family whom The Redmayns must have known well because Richard Arthington was one of the godfathers at the baptism of their grandson in 1416.

A good deal of Elizabeth's time was also spent dictating letters to her clerks, many on business but hopefully others of a less urgent nature to friends and relatives. Perhaps, as she did so, she enjoyed treats from the kitchen, as did Alice de Bryenne. Hopefully she enjoyed writing to and hearing from Richard during his absences, that their letters were not solely about estate business and political developments. In 1465 John Paston wrote what Helen Castor has described as 'cheerfully dreadful' poetry to his wife, Margaret, at the end of a business letter – perhaps Richard was inspired by his knowledge of Chaucer and others at Richard II's court to do the same? Maybe he too addressed his wife as '*mine own dear sovereign lady'* and signed himself '*your true and trusty husband*'?

And there were pets too. We've already seen Elizabeth's dogs, frolicking round her skirts on her effigy. Most pet dogs were small but she may also have had greyhounds – if their temperament was the same then as now, they made calm companions. Other possible pets included cats, multi-tasking as ever as pets and mousers, rabbits, ferrets, songbirds in cages – thrushes, nightingales, finches and others – and even green parakeets which can be seen on a misericord at Wells cathedral. The wealthy and fashionable (and brave) may also have flaunted squirrels wearing collars and leashes and even monkeys. I can't help hoping that Elizabeth didn't have either squirrel or monkey but if one of her circle of friends acquired one then maybe they became fashionable.

To this growing list we can add other activities – buying and wearing elegant new clothes, riding out for hawking and hunting, playing and listening to music, singing and dancing, exchanging and discussing books with friends, playing chess, embroidery, visiting York (perhaps for the Mystery Plays at Corpus Christi in early summer) and, on occasion, London.

We have no idea which of these pastimes she enjoyed or which were her favourites but hopefully some of them made her smile – and I hope she enjoyed celebrating her 50th birthday in 1413 or 1414, a human landmark then as now.

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I feel quite exhausted just contemplating the many activities that may have filled Elizabeth's days and given all those activities, it's no surprise this has turned out to be the longest of my chapters on the Redmayns. Of course, it's important to stress that we don't know for certain that Elizabeth did undertake these responsibilities because there's so little evidence about her life and, in addition, I may be guilty of wish-fulfilment, of falling into the trap that historian Livia Visser-Fuchs warns us about, that '*in most biographies of medieval women today there is a wish to establish that the subject of the book was a 'strong' woman … these women may indeed not have done much more than bear children and wave their men good-bye'.*

I confess that I have tried to ensure that Elizabeth is visible in these chapters, that she doesn't disappear behind the details of Sir Richard's career, but I think there are good reasons why the picture I've built up in this chapter is at least reasonably accurate, that Elizabeth did do more than bear children and wave Sir Richard good-bye. Here are five arguments, the first two relating to practical aspects of Elizabeth's life:

- Sir Richard was so busy and so often absent that Elizabeth needed to be centrally involved in managing their estates.
- Elizabeth needed to be a model for her daughters, teaching them through her actions how to run a household. If she didn't provide that model, she was letting her daughters down.

And now three arguments relating to the lives of other women from this period:

- records from other households reveal many examples, such as Alice de Bryenne, of ladies who performed such tasks with great efficiency, tough, demanding and lonely though it was.
- the letters written by and to Margaret Paston in the mid-1400s reflect how much responsibility she bore during the absences of her husband and sons and how she took initiatives, on one memorable occasion in 1465 giving the local justices a piece of her mind for failing to defend her family.
- there are many examples of advice written for ladies in Elizabeth's position. Christine de Pizan, for example, said *'[Wives] should have all the responsibility of the administration and know how to make use of their revenue … Every lady of rank (if she is sensible) should know how much her income is and how much the revenue from her land is worth … She must adopt a man's heart (constant, strong and wise) to consider and pursue the best course of action.'*

Taken together, I think these arguments do suggest that Elizabeth took on many or all of the responsibilities I set out earlier in this chapter. Overall, I'm glad I took the risk of writing this speculative chapter as it's given me a much greater understanding of how Elizabeth probably spent her days and of the depth of responsibility she carried, especially on the many occasions when she must have been juggling a variety of different responsibilities. It's been easier in this chapter to explore her tasks by listing them separately but, in reality, she was constantly multi-tasking. To take just one example, the early months of 1408 saw Elizabeth with her daily household responsibilities to oversee, her religious observances to maintain, a range of visitors to welcome to the castle and the building of All Saints church was continuing – but this was also the period when the issues surrounding Sybil's marriage to William Ryther were coming to a head at the Archbishop of York's court (see Chapter 10) and Sir Richard was engaged in dealing with the latest Percy rebellion which ended at the Battle of Bramham Moor. That was a period of very demanding juggling and a time when she needed to rely on her efficient household staff! More juggling must have been needed because Elizabeth and Sybil were co-owners of Harewood. Did they alternate or sometimes share residence and use the same or different senior officials? We simply don't know how that worked, hence I haven't attempted to discuss this issue.

Whatever the precise answer to 'what did Elizabeth do all day?', writing this chapter has also helped me identify some of those 'cat-sitting' moments when I can see Elizabeth as a human being:

- her pride when her children took their first steps and spoke their first words and on seeing them married.
- feeling drained and exhausted by constant problem-solving at short notice and at times when she didn't know which problems to prioritise.
- moments when she just wanted to close the door behind her, tired of being on show and of smiling through gritted teeth.
- feeling exhilarated by the success of her plans and the efficiency of the members of her household, times when she knew that 'Team Redmayn' had impressed influential visitors.
- kicking off her shoes at the end of a long day or when meeting friends and feeling off duty, relaxing in the knowledge that someone else would carry the responsibilities for a while.
- discussing plans or reflecting with Richard on how things had gone – perhaps while out riding or in bed at night.

What, in the end, do I take away from this chapter? If there's one word that sums up Elizabeth's life, I think it's 'responsibility' – she and women like her carried a wide-range of weighty, challenging and varied responsibilities while also constantly aware of the need to set high standards for the members of their households. There was no let-up, not even the chance of a lazy lie-in! As Christine de Pizan wrote:

> *'The lady should get up early in the morning, for in an establishment where the lady usually lies in bed until late it is unlikely that the household will run smoothly.'*

When I next visit All Saints Church I shall be much more aware of how fitting it is that Elizabeth's effigy is as powerful a presence as that of her husband. She worked for it (I'm 99% certain!).

How do I know?

Notes on my sources and reading for Chapter 13

In addition to the biographies, Calendars of Patent Rolls and other sources listed for earlier chapters I found the following most helpful.

My opening quotation is from:

> Rowena Archer, 'How ladies … who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates: Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages', in P J P Goldberg (ed), *Woman is a Worthy Wight, Women in English Society c1200-1500*, 1992.

The quotation from Hilary Mantel on page 2 is from:

> Hilary Mantel, 'On Keith Thomas' *New York Review of Books*, 2012, reprinted in *A Memoir of My Former Self: A Life in Writing*, 2023

For Alice de Bryenne:

> Ffiona Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman: Life in a Gentry Household in the Later Middle Ages*, 1999.

Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies,* Penguin edition, 1985

Diana Watt, *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, 2004

Helen Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family and the Wars of the Roses,*

Peter Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life: The Multons of Frampton and their World 1270-1370*, 2010

Jennifer C Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages*, 1992

Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household, 1250-1600*, 1988

C M Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*, 1999

Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets,* 2012.

Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520*, 2002

David Stone, *Decision-Making in Medieval Agriculture*, 2005

Tony McAleavy, *Malmesbury Abbey 670-1539: Patronage, Scholarship and Scandal*, 2023

For All Saints Church, Harewood

For the will of Sir John Scot see *Testamenta Eboracensia* volume I, Surtees Society*, 1836,* p. 346.

L A S Butler, 'All Saints Church, Harewood' in *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, vol 58, 1986

Nigel Saul, *Lordship and Faith: The English Gentry and the Parish Church in the Middle Ages,* 2017