

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPA GREGORY



Having written *The White Queen* and *The Red Queen*, what inspired you to further explore the story of Jacquetta, a lesser-known historical figure?

I found Jacquetta's influence on her daughter completely fascinating when I was doing the research for The White Queen. It was hard to track her life as she is only occasionally mentioned in the historical record, but her marriage to the Duke of Bedford marks her entry to the historical records, and her second marriage to Richard Woodville was an international scandal at the time. She seemed to me to be really worthy of her own biography and novel and since no one has yet written her biography I have researched and am publishing an account of her life in a non-fiction book: The Women of the Cousins' War: The Duchess, the Queen, and the King's Mother.

As the author of several international bestsellers, you have fans from all over the world. How has the increase in your success and popularity affected your relationship with your fans?

I am conscious that very many people use my book as a starting point for their own studies, that many people want to know more about me and my work and so I maintain my website with regular updates and material, and I am really grateful for their enthusiasm and affection for my work.



***The Lady of the Rivers* contains several references to the difficulty the women of this time face in a man's world. Did you find it challenging to research so many instances of women being subjugated, punished, even put to death because they dared to think and act for themselves?**

I think the women in this novel, as the women in many of my novels, are the heroines of women today – they are our fore-mothers. Their courage and struggle for their rights is an example and an inspiration to me. I love to write about them and bring their stories to modern men and women.

In 'The History Debates' section of your website, you pose the question of the difference between history and historical fiction. You write: 'The imagination is where the historians are almost indistinguishable from the novelists.' Can you expand more on this notion?

All historians have to work with their imagination to fill in the gaps in the historical facts. They have to imagine what is happening when we have no way of knowing for sure. Also, most histories consider the character and inner life of their subjects and this is exactly what a historical novelist does. No one could write a history of a character without imagining them.



Can you tell us more about your charity, Gardens for Gambia?

I visited The Gambia in West Africa when I was researching my novel on slavery, A Respectable Trade. While I was there I met a Gambian school teacher and together we have worked to put fresh-water wells into primary schools in The Gambia, a very dry and very poor country. The project has been so successful that we have now done almost 200 wells, and we are now setting up beehive co-operatives and we teach pottery-making, gardening, and batik workshops. In fact, we are the biggest well-digging charity in The Gambia and have recently completed a big project with Rotary International. If anyone would like to join with me in this wonderful work they can donate online at www.philippagregory.com.

Is there one historical figure who has particularly surprised or affected you?

I think I was especially moved by the early life of Katherine of Aragon which is not generally known but which shows a young woman in extraordinary circumstances. More recently, the story of Elizabeth Woodville who was an English commoner and rose to be one of the most glamorous and successful queens of England was a wonderful story to research.



**Do you follow the same process for research and writing or does it change from book to book?
Where did you write *The Lady of the Rivers*?**

I use the same process for all my books. I visit significant sites, I talk to specialist historians and museum curators, I read and read and read, and when I have completed about four months of research I start to write, and then rewrite, while continuing to read. The whole process takes about eighteen months. I work wherever in the world I happen to be, and I often travel with a box of research notes!

Are you planning to write more about the Plantagenet line, or will you shift focus to a different family or century?

I am going to write at least three more books on the Plantagenets, as I think they are a fascinating family.





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