

'The Deaths of Kings and Queens'

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Forty four monarchs have ruled England since 1066 including Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector when England was a republic. We can never be certain of the causes of deaths in mediaeval times because death certification was only introduced in the United Kingdom in 1832.

Only 4 kings, Harold II, William I, Richard I and Richard III died in battle. Intrigues and mysteries surround the deaths of some including William II, Henry I, John, Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI, Edward V and Charles II. There has been intense debate among historians surrounding these deaths, not least the events surrounding the death of Edward II. Did he escape from Pontefract castle?

In mediaeval times murder, regicide, fratricide and patricide have all been implicated in the deaths of monarchs including Edward II and Henry VI.

Henry VIII is now thought to have been suffering from McLeod syndrome and the syphilis theory has been rejected. The madness of George III is now thought to be bipolar disorder rather than porphyria. Bladder stones affected Oliver Cromwell and James I. George V was 'euthanased' by his physician. Judicial executions accounted for Jane Grey, Mary I and Charles I.

An accident accounted for William II who died in the New Forest on a hunting expedition. William III died following a fall from his horse when he sustained a fractured clavicle.

In the Middle ages we see diseases such as smallpox, malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis and syphilis take their toll. Smallpox killed Mary II. Dysentery might have killed John and Henry V. Tuberculosis was the scourge of the Tudors and killed Henry VII and Edward VI. Syphilis probably accounted for the aortic dissection suffered by George II.

In more recent times alcohol and tobacco have played their part. George IV died from bleeding oesophageal varices. William IV also suffered from cirrhosis and asthma. Heavy smoking contributed to the deaths of Edward VII, who died of a myocardial infarct, George V, who suffered several lung abscesses, Edward VIII who died of throat cancer and George VI who died of a myocardial infarct following lung cancer.

Only 3 monarchs have reached their 8th decade. They are George III, Victoria and Elizabeth II.

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