



The Demon's Brood: A History of the Plantagenet Dynasty

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The Plantagenets reigned over England longer than any other family from Henry II to Richard III . Four kings were murdered, two came close to deposition, and another was killed in a battle by rebels. Shakespeare wrote plays about six of them, further entrenching them in the national myth. Based on major contemporary sources and recent research, acclaimed historian Desmond Seward provides the first readable overview of the whole extraordinary dynasty, in one volume."

The Demon's Brood: A History of the Plantagenet Dynasty Details

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From Reader Review *The Demon's Brood: A History of the Plantagenet Dynasty* for online ebook

Colleen R says

This was a good overview of the Plantagenet Dynasty but hardly one that I would call authoritative beyond the ability to show chronological data. Seward used chronology to help the reader/listener keep track of all of the Henrys, Edwards, and Richards which helps to cement who each king was, what each did, and how they were perceived by their contemporaries. Of which very few resources were actually used. Thus much of his evidence for each King is unfortunately taken from rumor and nothing really groundbreaking or new. Just a regurgitation of dates and what may have happened.

What stood out for me was that his overview of Edward IV was far more rushed and centered more on superficial traits (i.e. he was very good looking but got fat because he was a glutton who overindulged in pleasure) than for the previous kings. Granted, I think there is a very good chance that Edward IV did contract with Eleanor Butler, given the imprisonment of Bishop Stillington, the imprisonment of George, and Edward IV's various mistresses. However I am not sure I believe that George was drown in a bucket of wine by someone other than himself. King Henry VI most assuredly was murdered, likely on Edward IV's orders, so I will give Seward that. Battles fought by Edward IV were glossed over and almost seemed insignificant compared to those of other kings. Finally hardly a mention was given about his close relationship with his brother Edmund except to say that Edmund and his father were killed during Wakefield and Edward took up Richard of York's claim as Henry VI's heir.

Another point that stood out was that Seward's chapter on Richard III was completely biased as if not even researched beyond Thomas More and Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare while brilliant was able to take a bit of fact and turn it into an engaging work of fiction. More wrote some 30 years later and used questionable sources who changed their views based on who was in power (i.e. Rous). I do think Richard III was a violent Duke and later a violent King, however using someone's disability (i.e. scoliosis) to show evidence of a twisted personality and that Shakespeare was right is hardly credible in today's world. Richard III did nothing new, including the disappearance or murder of other claimants some who may be children, from other Medieval kings before or after him. If in fact he is responsible at all. Arthur of Brittany's disappearance centuries before Richard III comes to mind.

Seward really should have refrained from belittling the Richard III Society. Evidence, such as the fact that they zeroed in on Richard III's grave location prior to contacting the University of Leicester, shows they used research methodology to weed out poor and misinterpreted information before the actual dig. For example John Speed's story about Richard having been flung in the river was completely false and created because Speed had searched in the wrong place for him. The society also presented a female line from Richard's aunt that DNA experts could follow that turned out to be accurate. They convinced university archaeologists that those in the society were serious researchers and not a bunch of romantics.

If one wants a great chronology of the Plantagenet Dynasty this one is fantastic, but the author simply loses authority with his final two or three chapters due to what appears almost spiteful towards anyone with a different perspective of Richard III. Was this possibly because the Richard III Society has been critical of Seward?

Beverly says

The author examines the Plantagenet kings through contemporary and Victorian writings. Although there are very useful family trees and a timeline it is still very difficult to keep all the persons straight. Too many Henrys, Edwards and Richards! And references to the various nobles are complicated by family names, given names and names of titles. There are 18 pages of notes.

Carole P. Roman says

Insightful and interesting book about the Plantagenet family. Desmond Seward writes a comprehensive history of the volatile clan who ruled England for hundreds of years. Well researched, this is history at its finest, coloring in the outlines of larger than life personalities but giving them realistic depth. He thoroughly describes each king, his wife, and children, delving into relationships, debunking myths with thoughtful and documented facts. He describes each leader with unvarnished honesty, and manages to leave the reader with an understanding of each of the quirks of their personalities. This is not a one dimensional cardboard representation, but well fleshed out recounting of each individual. In a few decisive paragraphs, he is able to give a definitive idea of each king, whether he is a madman or a quiet family man. A pleasure to read, with descriptive prose, he manages to paint a vibrant depiction of the medieval world, describing coronations, political climates, alliances and lastly a true picture of the life and times of thirteen different kings from one dynasty that shaped a country.

S.C. Skillman says

This is a compelling account of the Plantagenet kings, from Henry II to Richard III, which I think would be helpful for anyone feeling baffled and overwhelmed by all the Henrys and Edwards in Westminster Abbey. There has been a lot of popular interest in the Tudors; now perhaps it's the turn of their predecessors the Plantagenets. I enjoyed the read, packed with colourful and often grim and shocking details, and the way in which the author sets out each chapter, giving a little portrait of each king's personality, appearance and characteristics, as well as the details of the battles he fought, his political decisions and ill-fated manoeuvres (or otherwise) and his greatest achievements or disasters.

In addition, the illustrations of the kings, mostly photos of their funeral effigies, are captioned with a short summary of each king to make it easier to remember who's who. Such phrases as "Wolfish and half-crazy" "a thriftless, shiftless king" "dominated by greedy favourites and routed by the Scots" are interesting to refer to whilst reading the account - though it may help to think up your own phrase to apply to each king, thereby to remember him better!

The challenge in reading of the Plantagenet kings is to resist the temptation to place moral judgements on them from the standpoint of our own comfortable, privileged, stable lives. It can be difficult to comprehend why so much money and blood and human life had to be wasted over the centuries just so that the English King could become king of France too. But it helps to use the concept of "dynamic equivalents" - think of something you care deeply about in your own life and then imagine you're one of the Henrys or Edwards and what would you do with your power and resources and the realities of the times you live in, to try and achieve that thing?

Much is made in this account of the descendance of the Plantagenets from the grim-sounding Count Fulk the Black of Anjou, who in 999 had his young wife burned alive in her wedding dress in the marketplace in Angers because of her adultery with a goatherd. And from this event derives the Angevin family saying, quoted by Richard the Lionheart (who reigned from 1189-99): "From the Devil we sprang and to the Devil we shall go." We can think of that as we gaze at Richard's heroic figure on horseback, dramatically placed in front of the Palace of Westminster, for us all to admire today...

Rebecca Hill says

Desmond Seward gives us an indepth view on the Plantagenet reign. Starting with the conflict with Stephen and Matilda, we begin the Plantagenet line with Henry II, and go through Richard III. While Seward manages to mostly keep his bias to himself, there are a few monarchs (ahem, Richard III) that it seems to come out stronger with. For the most part, I really enjoyed this read. It was a great book, and for someone who is wanting to learn more about the many monarchs and struggles that make up the Plantagenet line, this is a perfect starting point.

Carolyn says

I loved this. I've read plenty of books on some of the kings we all know, Henry II, Richard I, John I, but I knew next to nothing on the others. This book gave me a bit more curiosity and now I will be looking for some biographies and histories by this author! Each section is short and sweet and covers the main concerns of each time period and each king. I highly recommend it!

Victoria Johnston says

A good overview of the Plantagenet kings - which given the popularity of the Tudors do seem to have been overlooked somewhat. Most people seem to know the odd King - i.e. Henry V and Richard III but know little about the others.

I already knew a fair bit on Henry II as my dissertation covered his introduction of the Common Law into England and being a history buff did know a fair bit about a number of the other kings. Those I didn't know much about however such as - Henry IV, Henry V, Henry III it was interesting to read about.

A good over view of the dynasty and a good starting point for those wanting to learn more. I recommend this book.

Hippiemouse420 says

I choose broad histories on purpose, to get a basic understanding of something or someone before I read a

more-detailed history, but then--I am irritated by the lack of details in the book. As always, I wish there had been tons more pictures. Now to find a good biography of Anne of Bohemia, the person who most piqued my interest.

S.J.A. Turney says

Every now and then you come across a non-fiction title that really stands out and is as much fun to read as a good novel. Such is Desmond Seward's history of the Plantagenet dynasty. In fact, I found it so interesting that I kept highlighting little sections,

It came as something of a surprise to me to see the range of dates and kings covered by the book. I had always thought of the Plantagenets as being the sort of Henry II through to Edward I or II sort of era. Surprised me to see that the story begins in the 10th century and only comes to a close in the Tudor era with the last lost scions of the family.

The book takes a specific format, beginning with the origins of the Plantagenets and then taking us through the dynasty one king at a time, and then finishing with an examination of the fading of the family from the limelight after Bosworth Field.

For each king, we are treated to a brief precis, then a chronological account of their life and reign, focusing on each important aspect separately, with an examination of their personality, the historiography, and then finally a summation at the end. This is a nice, neat way to deal with them and worked very well for me, with a sort of smattering of tit-bits that clung to the memory.

Another thing that struck me with the book is just how much I learned, even about the kings I thought I knew quite well. And, indeed, how interesting some of the kings I really knew little about (Henry IV for eg) compared with those I did (Richard I). So as I went through, I selected one little fact about each king that I hadn't known by was fascinating.

Here's a sample of what I learned:

Stephen & Matilda – if Matilda hadn't come out on top, we'd probably have had a king Eustace!

Henry II – was given Ireland by the Pope. Who knew?

Richard I – offered coastal cities & his sister to Saladin's brother if he would convert to Christianity...

John I – was unusually clean, with an impressive bathing routine

Henry III – was thoroughly happily married!

Edward I – rebuilt the sinking port of Winchelsea.

Edward II – he really did die in the gruesome manner we heard as kids. I'd always thought it exaggeration!

Edward III – at the battle of Berwick killed over 4000 Scots, but lost a knight, a squire & 12 foot soldiers...

Richard II – his clerk of the King's Works was one Geoffrey Chaucer!

Henry IV – fought in the Baltic crusades with the Teutonic knights. Fascinating.

Henry V – first king since the Norman conquest to use English for his written business.

Henry VI – was a very prudish fellow who abhorred nudity.

Edward IV – despite fighting some of the worst actions of his age, he never lost a battle!

Richard III – was a very capable sea captain and curtailed the menace of Scottish piracy.

See what I mean? Fascinating little facts, and there are thousands more waiting for you in the book.

The book was released by Constable yesterday, and I recommend it thoroughly, whether you have an interest in the Plantagenets or not. It's always good to learn more about our history, and this is to some extent the forging of the nation we know.

If I haven't managed to hook your interest with these tidbits then I never will. Go buy the book and have a read. You'll be fascinated.

Kathryn says

"Based on major contemporary sources and recent research" says the blurb. Seward repeats the 'red-hot poker' myth of Edward II's murder in 1327 uncritically as though it is gospel truth, even though only a handful of 14th-century chronicles mention it and the majority give other causes of death, and even though modern experts on the era reject the story. On the same page as repeating this stupid old myth, Seward claims that the Dominican friar Thomas Dunheved, who tried to rescue Edward from Berkeley Castle in 1327, "in 1326 had been to Rome seeking an annulment of the king's marriage." In a mere thirteen words, he makes three errors: the year is wrong (should be 1325); he fails to spot that in the 1320s the pope was in Avignon, not Rome, and had been since 1305; and he, again, uncritically repeats the story that Edward II was trying to annul his marriage to Isabella without bothering to check the primary sources (Edward was doing no such thing, and in fact sent Dunheved to the pope to complain about the archbishop of Dublin, as John XXII's own letters to Edward prove). Seward is remarkably judgemental, which I always hate to see: Edward II "had been an unmitigated disaster, without a single redeeming feature." Oh really? Not one single redeeming feature? Being the first person ever, and one of only two people in history, to found colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge universities, to take one example of many, isn't a positive? I really can't stand history books that are so black and white, that reduce complex human beings and complex events and relationships to such childishly simplistic 'analysis'.

"Based on major contemporary sources and recent research" my foot.

Brett Van Gaasbeek says

I am extremely interested in the Plantagenet dynasty and will read anything about them. While this book gives a basic synopsis with some interesting tidbits of stories and brief bios, it is not on the level of the newer volume by Dan Jones on the entire family line. This book may not be as exhaustively researched or written in the same style, but it is a serviceable book on the subject.

Carolina Casas says

The Plantagenet Brood continues to fascinate us and no less because of the recent explosion of costume dramas and revisionist historians. However Seward still believes in many of the old Victorian and stereotypes pertaining to this dynasty and adheres himself to the view that those who were famous were so because they were successful, never mind their circumstances that allowed their success, and those who weren't were because they were unfit or to simply put it, mad.

Surprisingly he disagrees with only two of these popular held views: Henry V and his son, the last Lancastrian monarch, Henry VI. In his book he dispels myths about the popular English hero (which I was

happy for the most part since Shakespeare and English history propelled him to the level of sainthood where the man could do no wrong, Seward shows that he was far from perfect and he committed too many atrocities that call into question his so called status of a 'hero') classifying him instead as a murderer, zealot, power-hungry, amoral being. While his son, had the bad fortune of inheriting his father and uncle's problems and could not cope with the enormous pressure of ruling both England and France. While these views highlight his great understanding of the era and dispel the common held myths that one was a hero who could do no wrong and the other a 'mad king'; he goes to the other extreme casting Henry V as the worst kind of human being there could have existed while forgiving other kings (Edward I -who interestingly enough, Seward did not comment that he had as many people persecuted and ordered a mass expulsion of the Jews in 1290; Edward IV; John I who although Seward points out his flaws, he doesn't put examples of his persecution towards the Jews and other 'heretics' nor of those that followed). This double standard is very troubling, as is his use of sources. He relies heavily on Victorian historians and views of his subjects to explain why they were good or evil, and secondary sources which he sometimes puts above primary sources (like when it comes to Edward IV and Richard III whom he says deserves all the bad reputation he got from the Tudors). I do not disagree with using secondary sources but when you are writing about a book that you claim uses contemporary evidence, you can't place secondary sources above your primary ones. Also you have to take into account that every source has a bias to it and you have to explain to your readers why the author(s) chose to write that way about said king or queen. It's not a bad book but it isn't great either. Entertaining and accessible but it gives nothing new to this dynasty and the author's refusal to use primary sources over secondary is very troubling, as is leaving many important details and factors out that contributed to these kings' failures and successes.

Megan M says

Bad bad bad. I will not be completing this book after finding serious inaccuracies and Victorian fanfiction being passed along as pure fact in just the first 40 pages. Very unhappy to see that this was published and with such a great title and cover.

Sarah says

Wow. This book may have cured me of romanticizing the medieval time period. All I'm going to say is "funnel." YIKES.

This is also a fantastic read for anyone who thinks we live in the most intolerant and violent times the world has ever seen. (Spoiler alert: not even close. Not in this country anyway.)

Madison says

Because this was a "comprehensive" history of the Plantagenets, I expected some comparisons between the various kings; I got basically none. I also was reading a blind hero-worship history, where he presented one chronicle's story without referencing any others or what historians think of the story's credibility. That's damaging when people are only reading books like this, especially when it comes to the interpretation of historical women, who get so little page time in history as it is. (This dude does not like women, lemme tell ya.) In general, it was well-written, and he did present some theories (which he didn't state were theories but

whatever) that were new and Interesting. So 2/5, but even that second star is iffy to me
