



## Queen Victoria

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By Irma West, MD

**She pioneered the use of chloroform, and carried the hemophilia gene.**

VICTORIA WAS THE ONLY legitimate child of the Duke of Kent, one of the sons of George III, the "mad" king who reigned during the American Revolution. George IV succeeded his father in 1820. His only child, Princess Charlotte, should have been the next queen but died after 50 hours of hard labor giving birth to a dead son. Losing two heirs to the British throne was too much for the attending physician, Dr. Richard Croft, who put a bullet through his head.

King William IV, who had no heirs, succeeded his brother, George IV. The Duke of Kent was next in line but had no heirs. He dismissed his French mistress of 27 years and married a young royal German widow, Victoire of Sax Coberg, who gave birth to Victoria in 1819. When Victoria was an infant, her father developed a persistent cold and fever. His medical treatment included the application of leeches and removing a gallon of blood. He did not survive.

Victoria lived in seclusion in Kensington Palace where her mother rarely left her. Their beds were side by side. Security was tight for good reason. Intrigue and financial shenanigans were rampant among some of the royals who would have preferred Victoria out of the way.

Victoria and her mother were estranged from King William's court. Her mother's wealthy brother, King Leopold of Belgium, was not only a kindly father figure for Victoria, but also provided financial support. Victoria did not know until she was well into her teens that she was heir to the throne. Her tutors felt she should find out by reading history.

When she became Queen at 18, the first thing she did was move her bed out of her mother's bedroom, and provide an apartment for her mother in a distant part of the palace; thereafter, she had nothing to do with her mother.

When Queen Victoria was 20, she proposed to Albert, the second son of her mother's brother, the Duke of Sax Coberg. (Protocol required she do the proposing.) He was one of several prospective husbands pushed in her direction by the European and English royals. Albert was the first choice of King Leopold who was delighted when they fell in love.

Queen Victoria was almost 5 feet tall. Albert, also 20, was a well-built, handsome and 5 feet 7. His education was superior to hers, particularly in the arts and science. He was well liked and a wise and effective consort.

Queen Victoria became a conscientious and hard working queen, at the same time producing five princesses and four princes. At the birth of her youngest son, Leopold, she became the first in Britain to use chloroform during delivery and was pleased with the result.

For recommending it, she ran afoul of the Church of England which decreed women must

suffer pain during delivery. The Queen ordered the Church to reinterpret the Bible and it complied. Dr. John Snow, Britain's first anesthesiologist, administered the anesthetic - the same Dr. Snow who had the handle on the Broad Street pump removed to halt London's severe cholera epidemic of 1854.

Prince Leopold was the only prince to inherit hemophilia. Some critics wrongfully blamed the chloroform. Queen Victoria was a carrier as were two daughters, one of whom passed hemophilia to her grandson, heir to the throne of Russia; he and his family were murdered during the Russian Revolution.

By most accounts Queen Victoria was a poor and at times cruel mother. She had no experience with children and was uncomfortable with them. She set up overly restrictive regimens and berated Prince Leopold for deformities caused by hemophilia.

When Albert died, possibly of typhoid fever, at 42, Queen Victoria sank into a deep depression, wearing mourning clothes for the rest of her life. When she emerged from her sadness, she erected statues and buildings named after him. One is the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Medical advice encouraged Queen Victoria to resume horseback riding. A trusted kilt-wearing servant, John Brown, was summoned from Balmoral Castle in Scotland. He brought Victoria's horse, Flora, and took charge of her riding program. He had been credited with saving her life twice, once when her carriage overturned. He soon became her constant companion, bodyguard and general assistant, generating no end of gossip. After rarely leaving her side for more than a day in 18 years, he died of erysipelas in 1883.

During the rest of her reign, Queen Victoria's popularity increased and she was given credit for the remarkable progress of Great Britain during her 64 years on the throne.

On January 17, 1901 Queen Victoria suffered a stroke, lapsed into a coma and died 5 days later. She designated items to be buried with her. They included an alabaster cast of Albert's hand and a picture of John Brown with a lock of his hair. Her oldest son subsequently went through the palace destroying statues of John Brown.

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