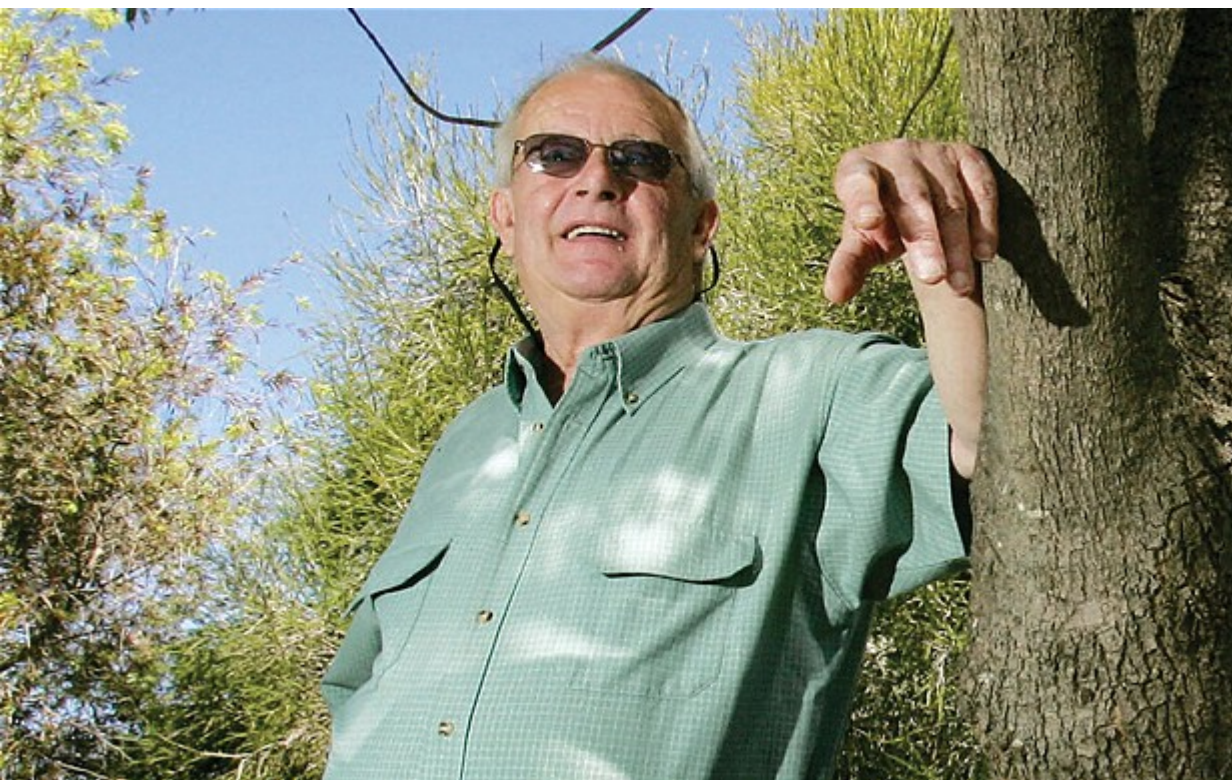


## 'Rightful king of England' dies in Australia

An Australian purported to be the rightful king of England – the 14th Earl of Loudoun, has died in his hometown where he worked as a forklift truck driver.



Abney-Hastings, who was 69, was widowed but has several children Photo: WILLIAM WEST/AFP/Getty Images

By Jonathan Pearlman, Sydney

7:06PM BST 03 Jul 2012

Michael Abney-Hastings, or "King Michael", was a British-born self-proclaimed republican who made international headlines in 2004 when a Channel 4 documentary suggested that King Edward IV was conceived illegitimately. It said the crown should have been passed down the Plantagenet line – ending at Abney-Hastings.

The reluctant, would-be king was born in Sussex and went to school at Ampleforth College in Yorkshire but moved as a teenager with his family to the small **Australian** town of Jerilderie, population 768, about 400 miles from Sydney.

His "claim" to the throne first became apparent after the documentary, Britain's Real Monarch, put forward a thesis by a historian, Dr Michael Jones, who said King Edward, who reigned from 1461 to 1483, was conceived when his parents were 100 miles apart.

At the time, according to a document unearthed by Dr Jones in a library in Rouen, Edward's supposed father, Richard, 3rd Duke of York, was said to be fighting the French near Paris, while his mother, Lady Cecily Neville, was at court in Rouen.

Furthermore, Lady Cecily was said to be spending a great deal of time with a local archer named Blaybourne and the two were rumoured to be having an affair. King Louis XI of France is said to have once claimed about King Edward: "His name is not King Edward – everybody knows his name is Blaybourne."

It was therefore proposed that Abney-Hastings, the direct descendant of George Plantagenet, 1st Duke of Clarence and brother of Edward IV, should be the rightful King.

When the claim was raised with Abney-Hastings at his farm in Jerilderie, he said he had been elected to the local shire council and would prefer to focus on his duties as councillor.

"When they told me I was surprised all right," he said. "But I don't think it will worry us too much. Titles don't mean much out here and I have no intention of leaving Jerilderie ... Why would you want to be King anyway? They can't do anything without someone on their back."

Abney-Hastings, who was 69, was widowed but has several children. He once joked that his eldest son would have to wait until he died before pressing a claim to the throne.

"He'll have to wait," he said. "It's not available till I go."

He had been battling a debilitating illness and had been in and out of hospital in the lead-up to his death on Saturday.

Though he did not budge from his support for Australia to become a republic, he did once note that his friends and family stood up and broke into God Save the King at a Christmas dinner shortly after the documentary was broadcast.

The new potential heir to the throne, Simon Abney-Hastings, the 15th Earl of Loudon, is a 37-year-old bachelor who works for a fabrics company in the town of Wangaratta, about 140 miles from Melbourne. He said he was aware he was "possibly" the rightful king but would prefer not to take the throne.

"I have always known about this – I have lived it," he said. "It does make you think about how things could be different. I am quite happy with how things have turned out. I have made my own life."