

The end of King Richard and succession.

King Richard did not want any rivals trying to take his crown when he was away on crusade. To this end he named Arthur of Brittany (son of his deceased older brother, Geoffrey) as his heir to the English throne before he sailed from Sicily in 1190. Arthur was only 3 years old, so hardly a rallying point for any opposition.

Richard was extremely generous to John, giving him the title of Count of Mortain, Normandy. He gave him castles at Nottingham and Marlborough. He was made the Earl of Cornwall, Lancaster and 5 other areas of the country. John also held Gloucester through his marriage to Isabella. John controlled Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall which gave him a solid block of power. Richard did weaken his military power by keeping key castles in his own hands.

Even so, though he was not heir to the throne, John was a very powerful man.

While Richard was on Crusade John began plotting with the French king, Philip Augustus, who had come back early from the Crusade. Once John found out about Richard's imprisonment he rushed to Normandy to demand fealty from the Norman Lords. John agreed to marry Phillip's sister, Alice. He did homage to Phillip for Richard's French lands. Phillip marched into Normandy and recruited an invasion force in Flanders. John landed in England with a fleet of hired soldiers (mercenaries) and demanded recognition as king. Phillip and John even offered money to the Holy Roman Emperor to keep Richard in prison longer. John's demands were ignored however as decisions makers in England, supported by Richard and John's mother (Eleanor of Aquitaine) refused to accept that Richard was dead.

Richard was let out and upon his return he forgave John, labelling him as 'a child who had had bad councillors'. He stripped him of all his titles and lands. John realized he had to prove himself and fought very well for Richard against Phillip in Normandy in 1195. For his efforts he was given his old titles back.

When Richard died in 1199 there was some debate as to who should be king. Phillip wanted Arthur of Brittany to take possession of the French lands and the English kingdom; Arthur was in the custody of Phillip. After all, he had been named king. John had a real threat to his succession as Arthur had a very good claim to the throne.

In the end, John was crowned king. This was probably because Richard must have named him as heir on his deathbed. His mother fought for John to be king and not her grandson, Arthur. It was also believed that John had far more love of England than his Nephew who had grown up in France.



The Loss of Normandy:

In medieval times an essential measure for judging a king's success was their prowess in battle. In 1203/4 John lost his lands in Normandy. Normandy had been held by all English kings since William the Conqueror. This had a very negative impact on John's reputation. His brother Richard had gained a great military reputation while on Crusade. At the time people compared John's failure in Normandy to Richard's success on Crusade.

In 1200 John got rid of his first wife Isabelle of Gloucester and then married Isabella of Angouleme. Isabelle however, was already betrothed to Hugh le Brun, Lord of Lusignan. This offended Hugh but was an astute move from John, bringing castles threatening his lands under his control. Hugh appealed to John who treated him with contempt and took the lands of his brother (Count of Eu) in Normandy. The Lusignan's appealed to Philip Augustus, as John's feudal overlord, who in turn summoned John to come and see him in Paris during Easter, 1202. John refused to go stating he was only obliged to meet Phillip on the borders of Normandy. Phillip saw this as an opportunity for war and invaded Normandy, accepting Arthur's homage for his land.

John went on the defensive and remained in Normandy behind the walls of his castles. He had a long border to protect and this forced him to divide his forces too thinly. He soon learned that his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, was being besieged by Arthur and the Lusignan's at Mirebeau castle. John showed great leadership and was decisive in his decision making. He quickly marched south to Mirebeau (covering 80 miles in 48 hours) and surprised the besiegers, capturing Arthur (aged 16) and the Lusignan's. However, John was cruel and arrogant after his victory (22 prisoners died from poor treatment) and this angered some who were on his side. This saw more of his army defect to the other side. This made him nervous and in 1203 he decided to get rid of Arthur as a potential source of opposition and had him murdered (possibly by himself; the story goes that his jailer refused). This criminal act lost John more supporters.

John left the continent in 1203 and returned to England. He was planning his defense from afar. He suffered two crippling losses at the same time. He lost his strongest castle, the Château Gillard, this castle had protected the Seine Valley. Then his mother died and John was, for a time, incapable of making decisions. John's Norman Lords had seemed indifferent to his struggles and began to talk with Philip. This meant John needed to hire mercenaries from Poitou to fight. He even gave them positions of administration within his kingdom and important positions in his army. This increased his barons' mistrust and his supporters were more than ready to switch allegiance to Philip. Philip overran Normandy, and then took the Loire Valley and Poitou. John had lost Normandy.

John's attempts to recover Normandy.

John feared a French invasion in 1205. He took extreme measures to prepare for this, for example he ordered all males over the age of 12 to take an oath to oppose all foreigners. This invasion didn't happen.

John then launched an invasion in 1206. He succeeded in reasserting control in Gascony, but nothing more.

He planned a huge invasion for 1214 but this never happened. After this he was forced to turn his attention to Wales and Scotland where he had considerable success.

John needs money...

John struggled for money throughout his reign. This was not all his fault as it was partly due to the legacy of Richard I and his crusade, ransom and constant warfare. There were other factors too. The costs of war had gone up. Castles were costing on average 1000 pounds a year to build, maintain and repair. Specialists had to be hired to work advanced army machinery. It had become important to be able to keep an army in the field for long periods of time, meaning more pay.

When John came to the throne he had to fight a campaign against Arthur of Brittany and Philip. Then he lost Normandy in 1203, which meant he lost all of its wealth and resources that had been a financial lifeline for previous kings. By 1206 he had lost all of his lands in France bar Gascony. Add to this the fact that John enjoyed luxury living and spent money on the castles he lived in to make them extravagant and it becomes easy to see why John struggled for money. But he needed money if he was to fund a campaign to take back Normandy and run his kingdom effectively.

John was a very successful administrator. He used a number of innovations to try and gain more money for the Crown. As he had lost his French lands he looked to England for places to find money. The ways in which he got this money and just how much he demanded angered his Barons who did not think it was right the king held so much power with nobody to keep him in check and say whether his methods were fair, or not.

How did John collect money?

John imposed Scutage Tax (literally meaning 'Shield tax': a tax which was paid by barons instead of sending knights). He did this 11 times in 16 years compared to the previous 3 kings before him who had done it a combined 11 times in total. He even demanded the tax for campaigns that never took place. This angered his Barons. John then used this money to buy mercenary soldiers from Poitou and he gave them powerful positions in both the army and government, which further angered his barons.

John imposed a tax on all goods coming into or out of the country (known as import and export duties). In 1202 he demanded that 1/15th of the total value of each cargo should go to him. This bought him a lot of money and was a very new tax.

In 1207 he created the idea of general taxation insisting on taking 1 Shilling of every Mark. This was known as the 'Thirteenth' (there 13 shilling in a Mark) and was collected from all types of people rich, poor, and the Church. This collected £60,000 pounds but

was not for any specific military campaign, which annoyed his people, as they had never had to pay it before.

John also tried to make money in some devious ways:

When a Baron died, in order to pass on his land to his son the son had to make a payment to the king. This was called a 'relief payment' and was a tried and accepted method, used by previous kings, of passing rented land on from father to son. John, however, set the value of relief payments phenomenally high meaning some could not afford it and had to borrow money, which put them in debt to the king.

John demanded prompt payment of any debts that were owed. If debts were not paid quickly then John would take the debtors land off them as payment. However, John was not consistent because if John liked a person he would forgive them their debt or let them pay it off slowly, if he didn't like them, he took their land. He used this as a way to control his barons and make them do as he wished. Do you think this was fair?

At this time it was the right of a baron to control the life of any widower whose husband had sworn fealty to him. John took this right for himself and controlled all widows, selling them off to the highest bidder.

John created 'Forest Laws'. This meant that if anybody wished graze their animals in the forests they had to buy a permit. If any Barons wished to hunt in the forests, they had to buy a permit. Forests at this time did not simply mean a wooded area. They were areas designated by the king that could include villages, fields or common land, though they did usually contain wooded areas.

If a person had made a mistake and was in trouble with the law John could sell them a 'pardon'. This was a very expensive payment but would get them off the hook. John also sold high positions of government (such as the position of sheriff) and releases from jail.

John's Struggle with the Church

Even after Thomas Becket's struggle with the Church in the 1170's there was still disagreement over who elected bishops, should it be the king, or the church. 20 out of the 43 bishops elected since Becket had come from the kings service. Innocent III was the Pope at the time of this struggle with John and he was determined that Church had the power to run its own affairs.

John inherited Archbishop Hubert Walter of Canterbury from Richard I. Hubert was a king's politician who was also very religious. He balanced the two worlds very well and both sides were happy. He died in 1205 and a new archbishop was needed. John's issues with the church began here.

King John believed it was his right to elect bishops. The Church believed it should run itself independently of the king and therefore elect its own bishops.

After Hubert Walter's death King John visited Canterbury Cathedral and the monks claimed their right to elect the next archbishop. King John convinced them to postpone the election and the monks appealed to the Pope. When King John left, the monks elected their candidate. When John found out about this election he was furious and returned to Canterbury Cathedral, questioning the monks. They then stated no election had taken place and proceeded to elect the king's man, John De Gray, in December 1205.

Pope Innocent III did not accept this election and demanded Stephen Langton be elected archbishop in December 1206. He stated that if John would not accept this he would **consecrate** Stephen Langton in Rome himself, which he then did. Innocent III then threatened to impose an **interdict** on England if John would not accept Langton.

John did not accept Langton as he felt his royal rights to run his own country were being ignored. After all, the Archbishopric of Canterbury was a very influential position. So upon hearing of Langton's consecration he forced the monks of Christ's Church into exile and took their property. He refused to let Langton into the country. The Pope retaliated, laying an interdict on England due to John's lack of cooperation. John viewed this as an act of war and confiscated all the land and goods of any bishops or priests who did not celebrate church services (banned under the interdict). This greatly improved his financial position as he gained money from the Church lands and positions that were empty.

During the interdict John filled 5 vacant bishops' positions at the request of Pope Innocent and demanded an assurance Langton's election didn't set a precedent for papal authority. The Pope could not agree to this so still John did not accept Langton. Innocent III thought John was simply not going to cooperate and so threatened John himself with excommunication. Even now John would not accept Langton and so he was pronounced excommunicate in November 1209.

John did not seem to mind as he was receiving all the money from the church lands and bishops in England still held some services. He held out until 1213 when Innocent III encouraged Philip Augustus to invade England. John had lost a lot of friends through his treatment of barons and dealings with the Church; he feared half of his barons would support the French invasion. So he did a complete U-turn. He gave up the crown of England and Ireland and gave it to Pope Innocent III. He then paid him homage and fealty. He now held his crown as a vassal of the Pope. This meant Innocent stopped Augustus invading and encouraged the Barons to support John. John had turned a powerful enemy into a close friend but it lost him a lot of respect in the eyes of his Barons.

John's struggle with the church meant he was portrayed very badly in all contemporary writings (as more often than not chronicles were written by monks)

Interdict: (in the Roman Catholic Church) a sentence stopping a person, or esp. a place, from ecclesiastical functions and privileges (e.g. no church services or last rites etc.): *a*

papal interdict.

Consecrate: Install (someone) to a sacred office, typically that of bishop: *in 1969 he was consecrated bishop of Northern Uganda.*

Precedent: an event or action that is regarded as a standard for all similar events

The effects of Magna Carta: (For events and description of Magna Carta read pg. 68-9)

In 1215 King John had used the Magna Carta to try and buy time for himself to gain an army and take his country back. He had even persuaded his new ally, the Pope, to state that he didn't have to abide by the Magna Carta. However, John died in 1216. His son Henry III was 9 years old and needed the support of the barons if he was to rule. To convince them of his good intentions he reissued Magna Carta in a revised form in 1216. Then in 1225, he desperately needed money for the war to keep his lands in Gascony so he issued a final revised version (condensing the 63 clauses into 37). Stephen Langton played a large part in influencing this revision as he had also done in the original. This 1225 Magna Carta became the definitive text.

This was not the end of the story, however, as the Magna Carta still had some way to go before it became law and formed the basis of our system of government today. One of the clauses stated that the king could not force taxes on the population without baronial consent. In the 1230's councils were being convened to gain this consent (these councils became known as parliaments or 'speak together's'. In other words, to parley).

Successive kings were obliged to reissue Magna Carta when they began their reign as a symbol of their good intentions. In the 1250's and 1260's Henry's financial mismanagement resulted in a group of barons seizing power, they were led by Simon De Montfort. Keen to expand his base of support De Montfort summoned a parliament calling not only barons (or 'Lords') but also the 'commons'. This was the beginning of today's system of the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

By the time of Edward I, King John's grandson, war in France was again pressing. While Edward was in Flanders fighting the French, William Wallace led an uprising in Scotland. To gain a deeper level of support and finance the king's son, the soon to be Edward II, reissued Magna Carta for the final time. In 1297, sealed by Edward I, the Magna Carta was written into the King's royal roll of statutes and as such, is still law today.

The Magna Carta of 1215 served to limit the power of the king and establish the power of the common law. It also dealt with baronial grievances at the time. From 1215 to 1297 it evolved to the point where the reissuing of the Charter had provided the basis firstly for the creation of parliaments, then the basis of our governmental system today, eventually becoming a part of modern law in 1297.



(Left) The houses of Parliament at Westminster found their beginnings in the 'Speak Together's' of the 1230's. **(Right)** Simon De Montfort first convened the Commons in 1265. It would eventually evolve into our modern day House of Commons.