

# **The Century of Baronial Conflict The 1200s**

**May 1199  
(The Death of Richard the Lionheart)  
to  
July 1307  
(The Death of Edward I)**

**King John and his Legacy**

**King John and the Loss of the Plantagenet Empire**

**King John and his Struggle with the Church**

**Campaign Disaster, the Magna Carta and the First Barons' War**

**The Minority of Henry III**

**Henry III's Coming of Age and Friction with his Barons**

**The Sicilian Fiasco and the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster**

**Simon de Montfort and the Second Barons' War**

**The King's Last Years – the Lasting Achievements**

**The Accession of Edward I**

**Edward I and the Invasion of Wales**

**The Invasion of Scotland and the War with France**

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in Austria a decade before. This refusal in April 1202 to go before his overlord led to the confiscation of all of his French lands, with a sizeable amount then awarded to Duke Arthur of Brittany. Importantly, Philip Augustus decided to keep Normandy for himself.

John's first reaction to this was untypically robust with he and his army quickly rounding on Arthur who was besieging Eleanor of Aquitaine, John's mother and the latter's grandmother, at her castle at the Norman stronghold of Mirebeau. John's lightening march to his mother's defence led to the capture of Arthur, along with around 200 other knights who had sided with the young pretender. However, from this seemingly invincible position of strength John would soon ruin his chances of suing for a successful peace when he was presumed to have murdered his young nephew who disappeared soon after. Whatever the truth about Arthur's demise, it was clear that John's hold and popularity over his French lands was quickly slipping away, and he was further harmed by his decision to release most of the prisoners he had taken at Mirebeau.

Philip now went to work with all the expertise and stratagem expected of a martial lord who had come to battle for two decades with the Lionheart and Saladin. He began by driving a wedge across France from east to west that split John's Angevin empire in half, and soon marched northwards. A series of victories throughout Normandy resulted, and this, by the end of 1203, had forced John to flee from his French lands back for England. Within three years, the last remaining Norman barons loyal to John had sued for peace with the increasingly powerful Philip, and this was to leave John's empire, which he had inherited from Richard just six years before, in ruins. As a result, Normandy and England stopped being ruled as a single entity for the first time since 1066.

In London, this coincided with the completion of Old London Bridge in 1209. This had been commissioned by Henry II 33 years earlier and, spanning the Thames from the City to the south bank in Southwark, it was made up of 19 arches, with a drawbridge in the middle to allow taller ships access to the river further west. It also had a chapel built in the middle and was to remain in use

plunder, mainly of the priceless relics that had been collected under the Byzantine emperors over a thousand years. This led to the installation of the Count of Flanders, a political ally of the pope, as the city's new ruler with the territorial and military successes of the Fourth Crusade being won over, not the Muslim armies that protected Jerusalem, but rather over the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire. This concluded the Great Schism between the two churches that had begun in the 1050s.

In its primary objective, the recapture of Jerusalem, the Fourth Crusade was an abysmal failure and this was mainly because of the growing strength of the Ayyabid rulers who had come to dominate the Muslim armies of the region. This strong, resurgent Muslim force, however, did not deter many thousands of Christian European crusaders from trying to recapture the holy sites over the next few hundred years with the saddest of these perhaps being the Children's Crusade of 1212. This was led by the charismatic monk, Peter the Hermit, who led maybe as many as 40,000 children across Europe, with the majority dying from exploitation, hunger or disease. The lucky ones survived, but many of these found themselves sold into slavery throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

The Crusades of the later twelfth and early thirteenth century took place at the same time as the great Mongol expansion from the East. This took place under the leadership of Temujin, who in the 1190s united the Mongol tribes and who in 1206 was proclaimed Genghis Khan, the leader of all between the seas. Having united the warring Mongol tribes, he set about building a powerful army based on the strength, endurance and stamina of the small Mongolian horse and on the accuracy and the devastation of the bow and arrow. This force, under his command and then under that of his sons and grandsons, swept across Asia, China and the Middle East over the next fifty years. The violence and destruction of the nomadic Mongol Horde became legendary and, in the 1250s, a Mongol army of over 200,000 descended on Persia where Baghdad, the sumptuous capital of the Abbasids, was laid to waste.

As a result, the Mongol Empire was to become the largest land empire the world

preference to consult with the French courtiers that surrounded his court.

The king's position had also been weakened by unrest caused a series of famines, the worst of which was in 1257, that had a massive effect of a population that at the time numbered about 6 million. This Council was a crucial development away from the absolutism of the Norman and Plantagenet models of monarchy, and a crucial development in the evolution of a permanent parliament that, in time, was to find a home at Westminster.

### **Simon de Montfort and the Second Barons' War**

Soon the king's capitulation was complete, with the Council, dominated by the Simon de Montfort, effectively taking over the reigns of government. One of the great ironies of this was that this champion of the English barons was himself the very thing they raged against. For Simon de Montfort was a Frenchman who had only arrived in England in the late 1220s to further his claims to land and titles as the sixth Earl of Leicester.

However, de Montfort's rise within the king's court had been swift and, for much of the 1230s, he had been loyal to the king, showed himself capable and efficient, and had often been chosen to represent the king on royal business on the continent. This position of importance and influence was confirmed in 1238 when he married the king's sister, although this caused some problems as it was done without the king's consent, and in 1242, he even joined the king on his disastrous invasion of France. Again in 1248, he was sent to Gascony by the king on official crown business.

By the 1250s, however, the two had fallen out over a series of issues in which de Montfort, increasingly influenced by the radical philosopher Robert Grosseteste, who had written an influential pamphlet about the difference between kingship and tyranny and who was to become the first chancellor of Oxford University, was more and more inclined to take a radical line against his monarch. The great contradiction in de Montfort was that he was obviously gregarious and charismatic in public life, but remained deeply pious in his private life, keeping

It was here that de Montfort, with his five sons as his chief lieutenants, showed his acumen for military action and, by the end of the day, had captured both the king and Prince Edward. And this was despite conducting proceedings from the back of a cart, having recently broken his leg in a riding accident. After the battle, the royal side was forced to agree to the Mise of Lewes, signed on the night of the battle, which moved to shore up and extend the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster. A council of nine barons was appointed to oversee this, with de Montfort, now the de facto leader of England, very much in charge.

Indeed, de Montfort soon went even further than before and, on 20 January 1265, summoned a parliament of two knights from each shire and two burgesses from selected boroughs, ostensibly to discuss what to do with the captured young son of the king who, under the terms of the Mise of Lewes, was held as a hostage rather than as a prisoner. This first true parliament, a clear precursor to the House of Commons, met at Westminster where de Montfort's clear intention was to extend the franchise on which his new commonwealth was to be based.

De Montfort's military acumen on the South Downs may have won him control of England in May 1264 but his lack of political wisdom in the year that followed soon lost any advantage that this may have brought. De Montfort undoubtedly was a tyrant, particularly in regard to the royalist supporters who were his prisoners, and many barons who initially sided with him against the king soon came to resent this.

For these reasons and for others, Simon de Montfort's interregnum was to be short-lived and, within a year, he was to lie dead on a battlefield in Gloucestershire. This process began when he failed to ram home the obvious advantage that he had gained at Lewes and, with his star soon waning and facing royalist risings in the West Country collecting around the increasingly influential and powerful figure and Edward Longshanks, he was forced to re-muster his army and enter an unpopular alliance with the Welsh. In this, Edward Longshanks was very much helped by the defection of the Earl of Gloucester, de Montfort's right hand man and the most influential of the barons whose support

through money lending, chiefly lent in order to help abbey and monastery building, with his vast estate taken by the crown on his death in 1186. Four years after his death, a debtor who still owed money despite Aaron's death, attacked his businesses in York in 1190, provoking a massacre against the whole of the town's Jewish community who were slaughtered together at York Castle.

Edward I's dreadful treatment of the Jews of England was added to in 1275 when he issued the Statue of Jewry that forced all Jews over the age of 7 to wear a yellow badge of identification. This followed a papal edict early in the century when the pope ordered that all Jews and Muslims living under Roman Catholic across Europe should be forced to wear special distinguishing clothes. The persecution of the Jews in medieval England culminated in 1290 when the king ordered the expulsion of the whole of England's small Jewish community. This came about after a series of loans lent to the king by the Jewish community had landed them with a significant amount of English land and property. Edward's answer was cynical and calculating in the extreme. Having secured new finance from Italian moneylenders, he confiscated this land and expelled the Jews, who in total numbered about two to three thousand. They were not to return for another 360 years when they were invited back during the interregnum of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth.

### **Edward I and the Invasion of Wales**

Edward's political, economic and legal reforms were all brought about in order to allow the dual objectives that were to dominate his reign until his death in 1307. These were the unification of Britain under the English crown and the return of Plantagenet-Angevin ancestral lands in France. This was **partly inspired by the king's fascination with the life of King Arthur whose fabled feats, largely invented by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, a thousand years before were received as established fact.** The new king viewed Arthur as the embodiment of courtly and chivalric honour, and even constructed a round table for his knights at his court in Winchester.

Edward I's campaign to unite the island of Britain under Plantagenet rule began

Wallace himself escaped the battlefield and continued to pursue a guerrilla war against the English until his capture seven years later in the summer of 1305. He was then taken to London where he was tortured, hung, drawn and quartered with his body parts sent, as a warning to those who would rebel against his rule, to the four corners of Edward's newly acquired British kingdom.

Edward I's campaigns against the Scots attempted to stamp his authority on a country that nominally he had been conquered at Falkirk. But despite the eventual capture and execution of Wallace, these campaigns became more and more ineffectual as the ravages of disease and old age slowed the old king and as the complaints from parliament about over taxation became more and more loud. But his work earlier, in the 1290s, had led Edward Longshanks to become known as the 'Hammer of the Scots', and it was this that was inscribed, in Latin, on his coffin when he was finally laid to rest at Westminster after a bout of dysentery that ended his life in 1307. This was while he was preparing to invade Scotland for a fourth time, having nearly captured Robert the Bruce after his dawn victory at the Battle of Methven, near Perth, the previous year in June 1306.

His final wish was that his son should continue his work against the Scots and that his bones should be carried at the head of the English armies until Scotland came under the English yoke. However, the escape of Robert the Bruce to the Highlands in June 1306 and decisive events seven years after the old king's death left this hope unfulfilled with the Battle of Bannockburn giving Scotland independence until the accession of a Scottish king to the English throne in 1603.