Magna Charta

The Magna Charta is perhaps the best known and most important document in English history. It is based on the concept that a feudal lord such as a king has certain obligations to his vassals; and that the king was subject to the laws of the land. Particularly memorable are chapters 12 and 39 which state: “No scutage or aid may be levied in our kingdom without general consent of our kingdom . . .” and “No freeman shall be taken, or imprisoned . . . save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land . . ..” Here we have the concept that parliamentary approval is needed to levy taxes and that people must have a proper trial prior to being imprisoned. Even to-day, residents of many primitive and less advanced foreign countries do not enjoy these basic human rights.

Most sources state that King John “granted” the Magna Charta, thereby suggesting that it was freely bestowed or given; but this was most certainly not the case. King John had behaved in a particularly heavy handed manner and there was a civil war in progress. A number of barons caught up with and cornered the king at Runnymede and essentially forced him to put his seal on the Magna Charta which allowed for a commission of twenty-five barons to monitor the king’s compliance and enforce its terms. These were the twenty-five sureties shown below. Also named in the Magna Charta were a number of advisors and friends of King John, also shown below.

King John welshed on the Magna Charta almost as soon as he had signed it. He appealed to the pope to disallow the Magna Charta on the grounds that he had been forced to sign and the civil war continued. King John had lost most of his French possessions prior to the Magna Charta; and the barons now invited Louis the Dauphin (son of King Philip II Augustus of France and later King Louis VIII “the Lion” of France 1223 - 1226) to invade England. King John faced the prospect of losing everything. It appears the strain was too much for him; he died on October 19, 1216. The young King Henry III (only 9 years old) was crowned on October 28, 1216 and his regents, led by William Marshal (See Marshal, Generation Three), renewed the Magna Charta on November 12, 1216.

The Twenty-five Sureties of the Magna Charta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk</th>
<th>William de Huntingfield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(See Bigod, Generation Four)</td>
<td>William de Lanvallei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh Bigod</td>
<td>William de Mowbray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See Bigod, Generation Five)</td>
<td>William Malet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard de Clare, Earl of Clare</td>
<td>John fitz Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See De Clare, Generation Seven)</td>
<td>Robert de Ros of Hamlake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert de Clare</td>
<td>Geoffrey de Say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See De Clare, Generation Seven)</td>
<td>William de Fortibus, Earl of Aumale *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saher de Quincy, Earl of Winchester</td>
<td>Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See De Quincy, Generation Three)</td>
<td>William Marshall, the Younger *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Fitz Walter of Dunmow</td>
<td>(See Marshal, Generation Three)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See Fitz Walter, Generation Three)</td>
<td>Roger de Mumbezou (or Mont Begon) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John de Lacy, Constable of Chester</td>
<td>Richard de Muntfichet*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See De Quincy, Generation Two)</td>
<td>Richard de Percy *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford</td>
<td>Eustace de Vesci *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See De Vere, Generation Two)</td>
<td>William de Hardell, Mayor of London †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William d’Aubene of Belvoir</td>
<td>* no known descendants past four generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford</td>
<td>† nothing known of him or his family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Persons Named as Advisors of King John

Nobles

Alan of Galloway, Constable of Scotland
(See De Quincy, Generation Four)

William Longespée, Earl of Salisbury
(See Longespée, Generation One)

William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke
(See Marshal, Generation Three)
William, Earl of Warren (and Surrey)
(See Warren, Generation Six)
William d’ Albigny, Earl of Arundel
Alan Basset
Thomas Basset
Hubert de Burgh, Seneschal of Poiltou
Warin fitz Gerold
(known issue extinct in 3rd generation)
Peter fitz Herbert
Matthew fitz Herbert
John fitz Hugh

Hugh de Nevil
John Marshall of Hingham
Robert de Roppel

Clerics

Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury
Almeric, Master of the Knights Templar
Benedict, Bishop of Rochester
Henry, Archbishop of Dublin
Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln
Joceline, Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury
Pandulph, Papal Legate
Peter, Bishop of Winchester
Walter, Bishop of Worcester
William, Bishop of Coventry
William, Bishop of London

King John

“King John died on Wednesday, October 19, 1216, in the 49th year of his age, after a most unhappy reign of seventeen years, seven months and ten days.”


Bad as he was — adulterer, bully, cheater, welsher and perhaps murderer — King John has a place in our family history as well. In all fairness to King John, he was a capable administrator and he took a close interest in the details of governmental and legal business. Please see Angevin Kings, Generation Two for further details.

Sources


Sidney Painter: William Marshal: Baron, Knight-Errant, Baron and Regent of England, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982

Frederick Lewis Weis: The Magna Charta Sureties, 1215, Baltimore, 1991

Douglas Richardson: Magna Carta Ancestry, Baltimore, 2005

Norman F. Cantor (ed.): The Encyclopædia of the Middle Ages, New York, 1999