

# 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 wretched 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

**Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk**

(See *Bigod*, Generation Four)

**Hugh Bigod**

(See *Bigod*, Generation Five)

**Richard de Clare, Earl of Clare**

(See *De Clare*, Generation Seven)

**Gilbert de Clare**

(See *De Clare*, Generation Seven)

**Saher de Quincy, Earl of Winchester**

(See *De Quincy*, Generation Three)

**Robert Fitz Walter of Dunmow**

(See *Fitz Walter*, Generation Three)

John de Lacy, Constable of Chester

(See *De Quincy*, Generation Two)

Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford

(See *De Vere*, Generation Two)

William d’Aubenev of Belvoir

Henry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford

William de Huntingfield

William de Lanvallei

William de Mowbray

William Malet

John fitz Robert

Robert de Ros of Hamlake

Geoffrey de Say

William de Fortibus, Earl of Aumale \*

Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex \*

William Marshall, the Younger \*

(See *Marshal*, Generation Three)

Roger de Mumbezon (or Mont Begon) \*

Richard de Muntfichet\*

Richard de Percy \*

Eustace de Vesci \*

William de Hardell, Mayor of London †

\* no known descendants past four generations.

† nothing known of him or his family.

## 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 Poitou

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.”

. . . Richard Thomson: *An Historical Essay on the Magna Charta of King John*, London, 1829, page 491

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

Richard Thomson: *An Historical Essay on the Magna Charta of King John*, London, 1829

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