

KS3 History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 6 lessons

# **The First Barons' War and Magna Carta**

Enquiry: Why did Kings struggle to rule England?

Mr Madeley



## Why did the barons dislike John?

The barons disliked John for a number of reasons. The first was that he made them pay high taxes and fines. This made them poorer. If the barons could not pay these taxes then they went into **debt**. John used these debts to control his barons and gave cruel punishments if they failed to pay them. These punishments showed that John did not want to give fair judgements. On top of this, John began to **sell justice** to whomever was willing to give him the most money. Money was more important than innocence.



## Plot of 1212

Two barons decided that England was better off without John. They planned to kill him. They decided to either kill him during his attack on Wales or leave him alone so the Welsh would kill him. This showed how far some barons were willing to go to in order to remove John.

John discovered the plot and marched the army to capture these barons. But he failed. John, already untrusting by nature, now lost all hope that his barons were loyal to him. So he turned to **foreigners** to help him rule.



# **What caused John to sign Magna Carta?**

Some barons decided that they had had enough after being forced to pay scutage to a king who could not win wars. They demanded that John started to rule England fairly and did not treat his people cruelly. John tried to get out of their demands. With John refusing to agree, the rebel barons gathered an army and captured London. John knew it would be a long and expensive war, so he gave up.



# Magna Carta 1215 - Why did this limit John's power?

John agreed to sign the Magna Carta in 1215. This document limited John's power in a number of ways. Firstly, John was no longer allowed to choose who worked in the Church. Secondly, John could not tax the barons without their permission. Thirdly, John promised not to sell justice or imprison someone without a fair trial. Finally, John had to rule the country with a **council** of 25 barons.

Magna Carta stopped John from having many of the rights used by previous medieval kings of England. But the Pope would need to agree to it.



# What happened in the First Barons' War?

John had no intention of following Magna Carta. He wrote to the Pope complaining about it. The Pope said that Magna Carta was illegal and anyone forcing John to follow it would be excommunicated.

The rebel barons turned to Prince Louis of France to become their new king. John lost no time in trying to end this threat. He marched north all the way to Berwick capturing rebel castles and then back south. By early spring 1216, it looked like John would win. But then King Louis of France invaded.



## **Death of John and the end of the war**

Prince Louis' invasion caused some loyal barons to swap sides. Louis quickly captured important towns such as Winchester and London. Seeing that John was losing, the King of Scotland invaded the north of England. To make matters worse, John lost his treasure. Losing the war and then his treasure, John died in October 1216.

John's son, Henry, was quickly crowned King of England. With John dead and young Henry re-issuing the Magna Carta, there were no reasons left to fight.



# Glossary

**Rebel** - someone who fights against the ruler

**Debt** - if you borrow money, you are in debt and need to repay it.

**Sell justice** - Someone who takes money to rule in a certain way  
- e.g. to rule that someone is innocent even if they are not.

**Foreigners** - People who come to someone else's country e.g.  
Someone from France is a foreigner in England.

**Council** - A group of people who work together to make a  
decision.





# Comprehension Questions

1. What made the barons dislike John?
2. What was the result of the Plot of 1212?
3. How did Magna Carta reduce John's power?
4. What caused the First Barons' War?
5. Challenge: Why did the barons want Louis to be King of England?

Sentence starter: The barons wanted Louis to be King of England because...

## Extension Question

Why did John struggle to rule England?

