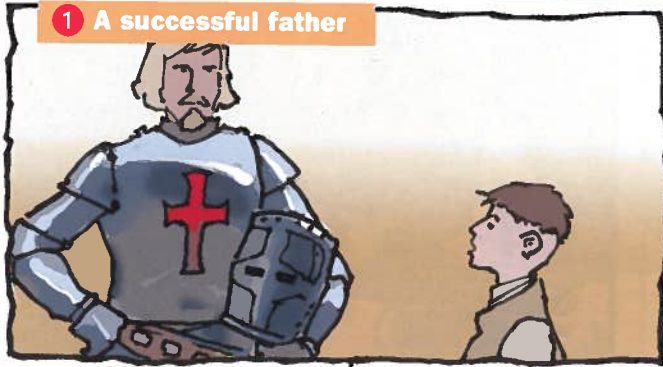
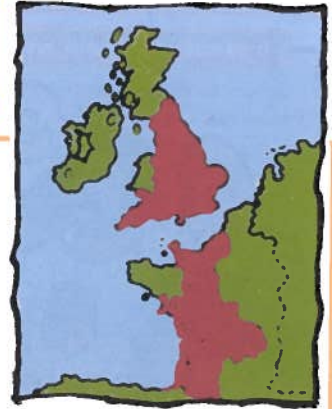


The career of King John

1 A successful father



John was born in 1167, the youngest son of King Henry II. Henry raised high taxes to pay for wars to defend his empire, which included half of France (see map). Henry was such a good soldier the barons paid up. He also quarrelled with the Church. He said he should choose the archbishops.



2 Lackland



Henry gave his eldest sons lots of land but had none left to give John, so John was nicknamed 'Lackland'. Then Henry sent nineteen-year-old John to rule Ireland. He upset the Irish barons by giggling at their long beards. They rebelled. John returned to England. He had failed to gain any land.

3 A successful brother



John's brother Richard was crowned king in 1189. Richard was an even greater soldier than Henry. He spent most of his reign on Crusade. He increased taxes to pay for his wars. While he was away, John plotted with King Philip of France to conquer some of Richard's land. But when Richard came home John didn't dare fight him.

4 A rival for the throne



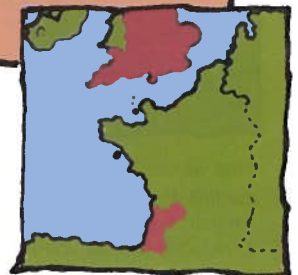
John became king in 1199. However, he had a rival. Some of the barons in France wanted John's twelve-year-old nephew, Arthur of Brittany, to be king. In 1202, John captured Arthur. Many people believed that John had Arthur murdered. Others said that John killed Arthur in a drunken rage and threw him in the River Seine.

5 Soft-sword



John divorced his wife and married a rich French girl called Isabella. She later gave birth to two sons but the marriage caused problems. Isabella had been promised to a French baron who complained to King Philip of France. This gave Philip an excuse to invade John's French land.

John did not go to France to lead his army. By 1204 he had lost nearly all his land in France (see map) and had got a new nickname: 'Soft-sword.'



6 John quarrels with the barons



John was desperate to win back his lands in France. He asked the barons to provide an army, just as they had for his father and brother. Some refused. They did not trust John. They did not like the way he took important decisions without consulting them. They did not see why they should spend money and risk their lives when their lands were in England, not France.

7 Raising money



Without the soldiers provided by the barons John had to raise money to pay for an army. To do this, he:

- increased the fines people had to pay in the courts
- charged rich widows as much as £3000 for the right to stay unmarried after their husbands died
- increased the tax people paid to the King when they inherited their parents' land. He charged one baron £6000 for land that was only earning £550 per year
- massively increased taxes on barons who refused to provide soldiers for him
- when one baron did not pay, he imprisoned him without trial until he paid.

By 1213 he had collected so much tax that almost half of all the coins in England were stored in his castles, ready to pay for a new war. This made him very unpopular.

8 John the judge



John worked hard as king in England. He was very interested in the law. He sat as a judge in the Royal Court and decided cases himself. But people said he was biased and he used the courts to help his friends and punish people he did not like. He also travelled around the country checking that the barons were keeping the laws. The barons resented John's involvement. After all, Henry and Richard had spent most of their time abroad. But John didn't have any choice as he'd lost most of his empire.

9 Who were his friends?



John did not trust the English barons. He preferred to listen to the advice of foreign mercenaries (men who were paid to fight for him) like Gerard d'Athee. John put Gerard in charge of three major castles in Gloucester, Bristol and Hereford after taking them from English barons.

10 Looking good



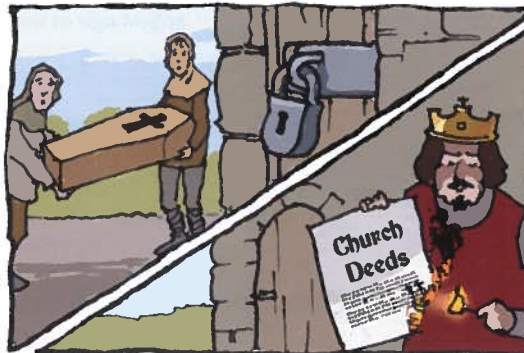
According to royal records the King had a bath once every three weeks. Each bath cost 6d, which means it was quite an elaborate ceremony – compare this with monks who were expected to bathe just three times a year! King John was also famously well dressed. He particularly liked exotic fur coats made of sable, ermine and even polar bear. When he was young he had thick, curly hair, but later he became bald and fat.

11 John quarrels with the Pope



In 1205 John quarrelled with the Pope, just as his father had done. They disagreed over who should be the new Archbishop of Canterbury. John refused to let the Pope's choice, Stephen Langton, enter the country. It had always been the King's right to choose the Archbishop and the barons agreed with him over this.

The Pope punished John by passing an interdict over John's lands. This meant that church services stopped. No marriages or burials could take place.



John retaliated by taking away all the Church's property.



In 1209, the Pope excommunicated John. This meant that John would go to hell when he died. Next the Archbishop threatened to excommunicate all of John's soldiers. In 1213, John gave in to the Pope.

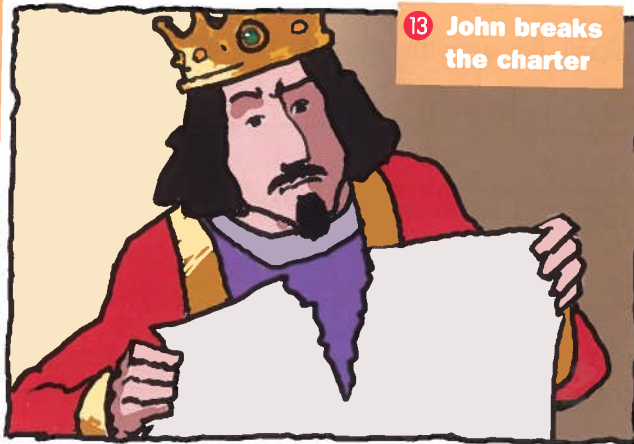
12 Disaster in France



And finally, there was John's biggest problem: his empire. He was determined to reclaim the land he had lost in France. In 1214, John and the Emperor of Germany agreed to attack France. But once again John did not ask his barons for their advice, and did not get their support. Many refused to fight, but John went ahead anyway. He raised an army of mercenaries and invaded the south of France.

He left the German Emperor to fight the King of France. It was his biggest gamble, and he lost. The Emperor was beaten by the French at the Battle of Bouvines. John's hopes of regaining his land in France were over. All those taxes had been wasted.

Solution 2: Rebellion!



13 John breaks the charter

John never intended to keep to the rules of Magna Carta. He objected to Clause 61 in particular because he believed that nobody could tell the King what to do. He had only agreed to Magna Carta to win time to build up an army to fight the barons. He was determined to beat them. He even got the Pope's support after telling him that he had been *forced* to sign Magna Carta.



14 Civil war

The rebel barons decided that it was time to have a new king. They invited Prince Louis of France to take over as king and captured London but John captured Rochester Castle. That was when he used the fat pigs (see page 82) as his secret weapon.



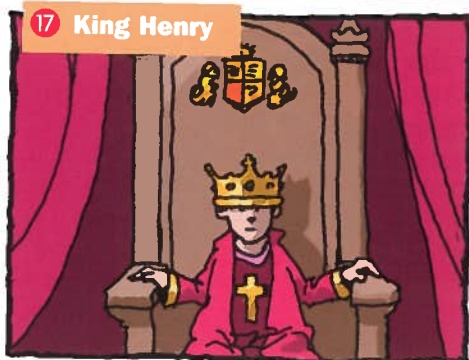
15 Destruction

The civil war went on for months. John led his army on a long march through his enemies' lands, burning and destroying whatever he could. It was like the Harrying of the North after the Norman Conquest. Neither side risked fighting a battle in case they lost, but gradually the rebels captured more and more of John's castles.



16 John dies

While taking a shortcut, John lost some of the Crown jewels when his baggage train sank in the quicksand of The Wash. Shortly afterwards, John died from dysentery (fever with serious diarrhoea) after eating too many peaches and drinking too much beer!



17 King Henry

Now John was dead, the civil war ended. The barons decided that there was more chance of peace if John's son, nine-year-old Henry, became king.

ACTIVITY 2

Discuss:

- Why did Magna Carta not solve the problems between John and his barons?
- Why do you think the barons fought a civil war with John in 1216, not in 1214, before Magna Carta?

Your enquiry – stage 2: How did the barons try to solve the problem?

Now you know why the barons gave John such a bad scorecard. After his defeat in France in 1214 they saw their chance. They did not want to get rid of him as king but they did want him to change the way he was ruling England. What happened next was one of the most famous events in English history.

Solution 1: Magna Carta

In January 1215 the barons met the King. They demanded he must change the way he ruled the country. John agreed to a meeting in April, but did not turn up!

It looked as though a civil war was going to start between John and the rebel barons, but there were also many barons who did not want civil war, including the great William Marshal (see page 50). They talked both sides into attending a meeting at Runnymede, near Windsor Castle, in June.

John agreed to some rules about how to govern the country. These rules were written down in a charter, known as Magna Carta – The Great Charter.

Magna Carta contained 63 rules (called Clauses) describing how the King should treat all freemen in the country. The freemen were the barons, bishops and merchants. Magna Carta did not say anything about ordinary people.

ACTIVITY 1

- 1 Here are seven of the most important clauses from Magna Carta, but they are incomplete.

If you had been one of the barons how would you have finished off each of these clauses? Use pages 107–109 to help you. Your teacher will be able to tell you what the actual document said.

- 2 Discuss with a partner why you think John especially disliked Clause 61.
- 3 One of these clauses is still very important today. Which one do you think this is?

Clause 1. The English Church shall be ... The King must not ... with the Church.

Clause 2. When a baron inherits land he shall not ...

Clause 8. No widow shall be forced to ... as long as she wishes to live without a ...

Clause 12. The King must not demand taxes without ...

Clause 39. No freeman shall be arrested or imprisoned without ...

Clause 51. All ... soldiers must leave the country.

Clause 61. The barons shall choose 25 barons to make certain the King keeps this charter. If he breaks the charter, the 25 barons can take action to make him keep it. They can take his castles and lands but must not attack the King, his Queen or his children.