

# King John and the Magna Carta



## King John (1199-1216)

Brother of the popular King Richard I, who died shortly after his return from the 3rd Crusade. John was suspicious and had rebelled against both his father and brother. John inherited the cost of his brother's costly wars, but was a cruel and incompetent king.



## The Road to the Magna Carta

The barons were angry with John and no compromise could be agreed. The barons issued a royal charter of demands which John was forced to accept on the field of Runnymede on **15th June 1215**. This became known as the **MAGNA CARTA**.

Some of the key terms of this were:

- It promised the protection of church rights
- Protection from illegal imprisonments
- All people were to be tried by jury.
- New taxation only with the consent of the barons

The charter defined that a formal relationship should exist between the monarch and barons. The king was now subject to the law. These were radical ideas!

## Why were the barons angry at King John?

- Raised taxes for wars John lost!
- Took away barons power
- Tried to control the church
- Exerted power in Ireland, Wales and Scotland
- France rebelled against him

**Medieval monks** portrayed King John as an evil monster. This is because he tried to control the church and fell out with the Pope!

**Modern historians** portray him as an energetic king who tried to increase his power in difficult circumstances.

## Consequences of the Magna Carta

The power of the king was permanently damaged, and no king of England ever had 'unrestricted' power again. It was the beginning of democracy and formed the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).