

◆ King John's first question: who started Parliament?



"What happened to kings and Parliament after Magna Carta? I've already got a couple of theories. This is what I think ...

The barons started Parliament. It makes sense! No king would have come up with the idea. I think that the barons became more confident after they forced me to agree to Magna Carta. They started Parliament which then took away the king's power.

I must have been the last king with any real power."

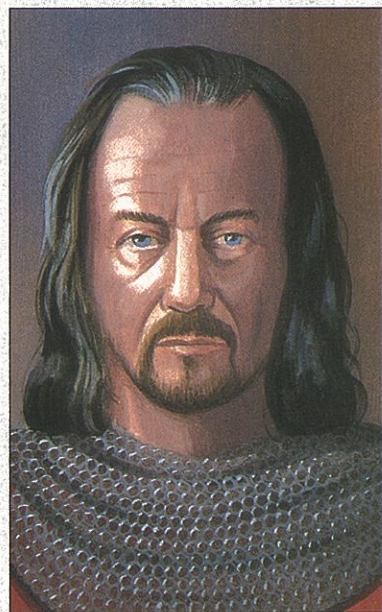
ACTIVITY

It is now time to find out if the first part of John's theory is correct and the barons really did start Parliament. Once you have read the reports on the suspects, write your own report to King John. Don't forget to explain whether or not you agree with his theory before you tell him your own theory.

Suspect

number
1

Name: Simon de Montfort, baron



When?

In the 1250s, during Henry III's reign (1216–1272).

Why?

Henry III was King John's son. He was extravagant and untrustworthy. He upset the barons by demanding high taxes. He also gave all the important jobs to his wife's French relatives. The barons felt they were being ignored.

What happened?

By 1258, the barons, led by Simon de Montfort, were determined to make Henry change his ways and keep to Magna Carta. They forced him to agree that a council of fifteen barons should govern the country and that there should be regular meetings of barons called parliaments. However, Henry broke the agreement and this started a civil war.

In 1264, Henry was captured at the battle of Lewes and Simon took over the running of the country. He called a parliament. He invited the barons and bishops who were on his side. He also

invited two knights from each county and two merchants from each of the large towns, because he realised that he needed the support of as many rich men as possible in his war against Henry.

Did it last?

No, this new type of parliament did not last long. In 1265, Simon de Montfort was killed by Henry's son, Edward, at the battle of Evesham. With Edward's help, Henry soon regained control of the country. Parliament did not meet regularly, and, when it did meet, it was just like the councils which had taken place in King John's reign because only bishops and barons were invited.

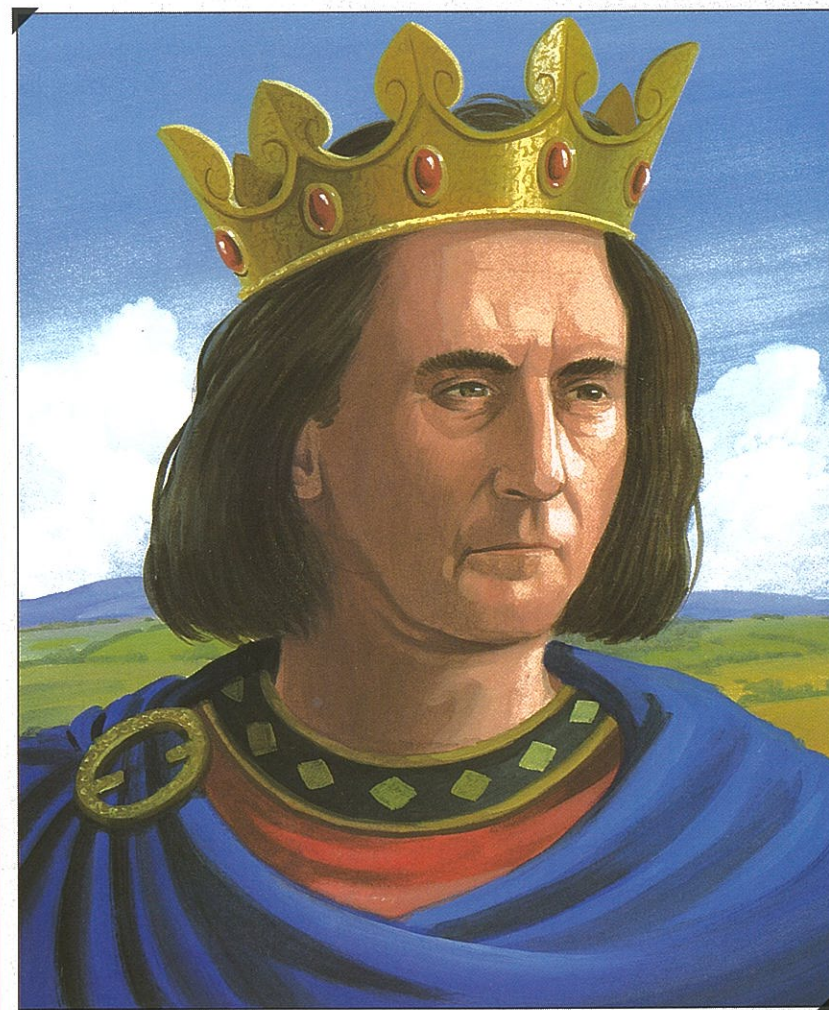
KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did the barons oppose Henry III?
- 2 How was the parliament called by Simon de Montfort different from earlier meetings?
- 3 Did this type of parliament go on to meet regularly?

Suspect

number
2

Name: King Edward I



What happened?

Edward knew that the barons and wealthy merchants were more likely to agree to taxes if they could discuss them with the king. It was also easier for Edward if he could talk to everyone at once about taxes. In 1295, he invited representatives from the towns and the counties, as well as the barons and bishops, to a parliament. His parliament was called the Model Parliament. It was made up of Lords (barons and bishops) and Commons (knights and merchants).

Did it last?

Yes! Edward I called Parliament many times after 1295 because it was very useful to him. It was a convenient way to get people to agree to taxation. Edward was still firmly in control of government. Parliament met when he wanted it to and it discussed what he wanted it to. Parliament continued to meet regularly after Edward's death, because later kings needed money as badly as he had.

When?

Edward I ruled from 1272 to 1307. He was Henry III's son.

Why?

Edward was energetic, cunning and tough. The barons obeyed and respected him. He made them feel that they were involved in running the country. He also improved law and order.

Edward was a very good military leader. He conquered Wales and regained the whole of Gascony in France. By the time he died he had almost completely conquered Scotland. However, all these wars meant that he always needed to collect taxes. Unlike today, people did not pay tax every year. They only paid taxes for special events, usually wars. This meant that if there were no wars they might not pay tax for several years.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was Parliament set up during Edward I's reign?
- 2 Did Edward I's Parliament continue to meet regularly?
- 3 Who was in control of Edward I's Parliament – the barons or the King?
- 4 Is King John's theory right? Did the barons start regular meetings of Parliament? Explain why you agree or disagree?