



3 THE CHANGING POWER OF THE KING

THIS CHAPTER ASKS

- How and why did kings become more powerful?
- What problems did some kings face?
- Why did parliament become so important?
- How bad was 'bad King John'?
- Did Magna Carta really protect English freedom?

HOW DANGEROUS WAS IT TO BE A KING?

The title of this BIG PICTURE sounds rather sexist. After all, what about the queens? Well, with the exception of the Empress Matilda in the Twelfth Century, every ruler in the Middle Ages was a man. And even Matilda had to fight a **civil war**, because a man – her cousin Stephen – had made himself king before she could be crowned!

Between 1066 and 1500 there were 18 English kings. Of these four were overthrown and murdered. Another one, William II, was killed in a hunting accident in the New Forest which might not really have been an 'accident'. Kings had power and wealth and sometimes other people wanted to take it from them. But most kings did not die this way. Most ruled the land and died in their beds. In fact, by the end of the Middle Ages most kings were more powerful than those at the beginning.

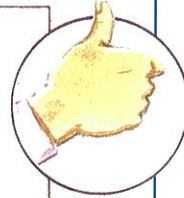
IN WHAT WAYS WERE KINGS STRONGER?

Kings improved the way they collected **taxes**. Around 1110 an organisation called the Exchequer was set up by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, a trusted friend of King Henry I. Henry liked him because his church services were short. The Exchequer checked all the money that should be paid to the king and kept records of who had paid. This made the king wealthier. More money helped kings to build castles and fight wars. Henry II spent £21,000 on castles. Today this would be worth about £33 billion. This helped kings defeat rivals and rebels and stay in power.

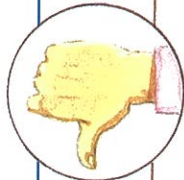
Royal law became better organised. Judges travelled and tried people accused of crimes at county courts called assizes. Records were kept of cases and sentences. Other courts were set up in London to decide on disagreements about land. This meant kings were more in control. And money paid in fines went to the king.

In 1199 King John began keeping a record of all his official letters. This grew into an organisation called the Chancery. This made it easier to know what was going on in the country and to check decisions kings had made.

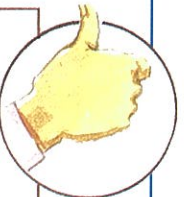
SOURCE A



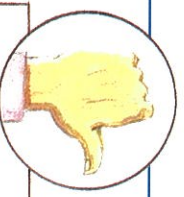
Henry II, 1154–89.
Clever soldier, built many castles. Government well run.



John, 1199–1216.
Short of money, lost wars in France, fell out with Church and barons.



Edward I, 1272–1307.
Clever soldier, punished rebels, built castles. Conquered Wales and invaded Scotland.



Henry VI, 1422–61, 1470–71.
Defeated by French, mentally ill, beaten by rivals twice in Wars of the Roses. Murdered.

▲ Some strong and weak kings.

THE CHANGING POWER OF THE KING

WHAT THINGS HELPED INCREASE THE POWER OF KINGS?

Changes in the way the Christian Church was run improved the education of priests. The Church encouraged the setting up of universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. Better educated people were given jobs by the king and helped improve the way the government was run.

When kings respected the Church, it supported them and said it was a sin to rebel because God had given the king his power. This did not always work. Henry II fell out with his friend Thomas Becket, when Thomas became Archbishop of Canterbury. Henry wanted to have more control of the church and, in 1170, Thomas was murdered. But trouble like this did not happen very often.

Success in war helped a king too. He could reward his followers with land and property taken from a defeated enemy. Even if some of the king's **barons** opposed him it was hard to defeat a king who was a skillful soldier.

NEW WORDS

- BARONS:** the most powerful landowners.
- CIVIL WAR:** when people from the same country fight each other.
- TAXES:** money paid to the government.

At Christmas, 1124 the men who made coins for Henry I were accused of stealing silver that should have gone into the coins sent to his army fighting in France. They all had their private parts and right hands cut off.

SOURCE B

Bishops crown him. The Church supports him. **The 'orb' shows he has authority over all his people.**



The 'sceptre' shows he has power to carry out justice. **The barons support him.**

▲ Picture of King Edward III at his coronation in 1327. It shows what the artist thought made a king 'strong'.

- Q** 1. Make a Spidergram to show ways in which kings became more powerful.
2. Colour code it to show which ways were **religious** (to do with God and the Church), **economic** (to do with money), **political** (to do with how the government worked).
3. Look at **Source A**. Choose two 'strong kings' and explain why they were strong. Then do the same for two 'weak kings'.
4. Does **Source B** show *all* the things that made a king strong?
5. Using all the evidence, explain how and why Medieval kings became more powerful.