

6.4A Where did our Parliament come from?

Kings had always asked rich, powerful landowners (called barons, earls, lords, and nobles) for advice on things like raising money or going to war. When kings met with advisors it was often called a **Great Council**. Sometimes there were arguments at these meetings... but the king nearly always got his own way!

This all changed in 1215 when King John ruled. The rich landowners rebelled and forced him to sign the Magna Carta, which said that the king couldn't do whatever he wanted! However, King John died in 1216 and his son became King Henry III when he was only nine years old. So what happened next? Would young Henry also agree to follow the rules laid down in Magna Carta... or would he just ignore them and rule however he wished? And how is all this linked to **Parliament** and the way Britain is ruled today?

Mission Objectives

- Examine why King Henry III argued with the barons.
- Discover the origins of Britain's Parliament.

The boy king

To begin with, young King Henry regularly met with the Great Council and took advice. But Henry didn't stay a boy forever – and when he got older, and got married, he began to ignore advice and ran things how he wanted. As you might imagine, this annoyed members of the Great Council. The cartoon below sums up their complaints.



Enough is enough!

By 1258 the barons had had enough. They were fed up with high taxes and the fact that Henry listened more to his wife than to them. So the barons threatened to fight King Henry unless he agreed to meet up to discuss things. At a meeting in Oxford, the barons showed Henry a document called 'The Provisions of Oxford' (see **Source B**). As you can see by reading the document, if Henry agreed to this, the barons would have a lot more power... but Henry felt he had no choice – and signed it.

However, the king's son, 19-year-old Prince Edward, was furious that his father had been treated this way... and swore to get revenge!



SOURCE A: This picture shows Henry III meeting with Parliament. By 1258 the barons were utterly fed up!

Be a Top Historian

Top historians know that some things **develop slowly over time**. Parliament is a good example of how something that began in medieval times evolved over several centuries into the important body that it is today.

The Provisions of Oxford

- The king cannot make decisions without the Great Council's agreement.
- The Great Council should choose the king's main advisors.
- A Parliament consisting of fifteen members of the Great Council, plus twelve other barons, has to meet at least three times a year.

Signed,
Henry III and the Great Council

SOURCE B: The Provisions of Oxford was signed in 1258. The word 'parliament' is from the French word 'parler', which means 'to talk'.

Wise Up Words

Great Council Parliament

Work

- Write a sentence or two to explain the following terms:
 - Great Council
 - Provisions of Oxford
- Make a list of things that made Henry unpopular with his barons.
 - Which of these things do you think upset the barons the most? Make another list, putting them in order. Start with what you think annoyed the barons the most.
 - Can you connect the different problems in any way? Explain how some of them are linked.