

Name: John

Nickname: Lackland (“one without much land”), Softsword

Reign: 1199 – 1216

Actions

While his brother Richard was off fighting the Crusades, John tried to take his place as king. Richard returned and John was cast aside. Richard forgave John blaming not his but “his evil advisors” for the move. John served his brother loyally until his death. Upon Richard’s death John wisely allied with the French king and was able to claim the crown of England.

As king John focused more heavily on the people of England than any other king of the time. He was a very “hands on” king who visited many areas of his kingdom that had long been ignored. He was particularly interested in law appointing new sheriffs and judges throughout the kingdom. He was even known to act as a judge on cases himself, even ones for minor offenses.

Money was definitely an interest for John. Not only did he collect money from the fines he imposed as judge but he raised taxes many times. He also would demand lords and knights to go to war but then would offer them a pass if they paid him instead. He also charged people to become sheriffs. These sheriffs would then raise fines on their subjects to make up for it.

John further angered his people by defying the church. Ultimately John was excommunicated and responded by forcing the church to pay taxes as well. This left the people thinking they were doomed and had no chance at salvation.

The anger at John resulted in the writing of the Magna Carta. John signed the document granting great freedoms and rights to the freemen of England. However, he ignored it completely. Further, he had those who forced him to sign it rounded up and executed.

Witness Testimony

“Most historians today see John as hard-working administrator, an able man, an able general.” –John Bradbury, Historian

“Too late to be known as John the first, he’s sure to be known as John the worst.” – Robin Hood

Death

Killed by disease contracted in battle while at war with one of his subjects who rebelled against John’s rule. John contracted dysentery. Some have testified that his death was not natural and was in fact caused by poison or overeating but no clear physical evidence has been found.

