

HENRY'S STORY



My grandpa Henry I left the throne to his daughter, my mum Matilda. But all of the nobles said they didn't want a woman in charge so they gave it to her cousin Stephen instead. She spent 19 years fighting to get her throne back. In the end, she and Stephen agreed I could have it instead. So in 1154, I became King of England.



My dad Geoffrey left me his lands in France, too. And I married the great noble Eleanor, duchess of Aquitaine. Between Eleanor and me, we had most of France, the whole of England and nearly all of Wales. Our lands are known as the Angevin Empire.



That's a lot to rule - even with Eleanor ruling her half.



Also, England had been ripped apart by civil war. I needed to restore law and order and government.

I needed men to help me rule - nobles with land and power and churchmen who could read and write and do all my law stuff. We needed law!



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Now, because my churchmen are so important in helping me rule my kingdom, I must have control over them. I must be able to appoint bishops and to punish priests who break my laws. I can't have another Henry of Winchester.



Churchmen should not be answerable to earthly kings, but only to God, or his deputy on earth, the Pope. Only he (and I) can appoint bishops. But I want to support the king, so I'm sure that we can come to some agreement.

In fact, I've got just the man to help you, Henry, this is my clerk, Thomas Becket.[†]

[†] See the life of King Thomas Becket



The Church



Not appoint bishops?
 The Pope's lost his marbles. Churchmen are my administrators. They are also big landowners: they are my tenants. They owe me everything that my other landowners do. And I want to appoint people I trust.

Who was whose boss was a matter for argument; King or Pope?

This is Nigel, bishop of Ely. He's in charge of my Exchequer. I trust



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Damn it, Nigel - I thought Thomas was my friend...

Henry was very upset that Thomas Becket wouldn't do what Henry wanted. It was really awkward for us bishops, as we help Henry rule the country and we help Thomas rule the Church...

Henry and Thomas' fall-out split our bishops. Some thought Thomas was right. Others, like the bishop of London, supported the king.

Luckily, by the time it got really bad, I had a stroke and was too ill to get involved. And then I died!

The EXCHEQUER is so called because all the king's accounts - money in and out - were counted on a chequered tablecloth. The exchequer was the most important treasury and it is still Britain's finance department. The minister in charge is called THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER. II



Thomas' murder was a nightmare. My popularity and authority fell. And I felt a bit bad, too.

I did penance and I worked out a compromise with my bishops. I conquered Ireland, and I founded St Thomas' Abbey in Dublin, in memory of my old friend. I gave lots to other monasteries, too. I think God forgave me, but I'm not sure.



And I had to back down over one of the things we fell out over - benefit of clergy - churchmen could be tried in church courts, and not my royal courts. Church courts were often less harsh...

KING'S COURT



Hang him!

Guilty of Murder!



You're sacked. Say 9,000 Hail Marys and eat bread and water for 7 months.

CHURCH COURT



© Monty Python

Robert of Merton



Henry's son Richard became King when Henry died in 1189. Richard vowed to make amends for his past wayward life and to help his Church by going on crusade. He was to spend more time in the Holy Land than in England. And so he needed us churchmen to look after England for him. He put William Longchamp, bishop of Ely, in charge...



I am the brilliant bishop of Ely. Because of my brilliance, King Richard made me regent (ruler in his place). But other nobles and churchmen, who were not as brilliant as me, didn't like my brilliance - they were probably jealous. They tried to kill me, so I fled England, disguised as a woman. Brilliant!



Your National Curriculum calls this topic

- Pupils should be taught about:
- the development of Church, state and society in Medieval Britain

Examples (non-statutory)
This could include:

- the struggle between Church and crown
- Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament

But I hope you can see that it's a bit more complicated.

I think we need to re-name it:

Was there a struggle between church and crown?

You can decide!



III

Robert of Merton



Merton Priory shows how the king got on with churchmen.

If we go forward 50 years from Thomas' death (I'm dead by then!), we find more Henrys - Henry III (the grandson of Henry II) and the prior, Henry Basing.

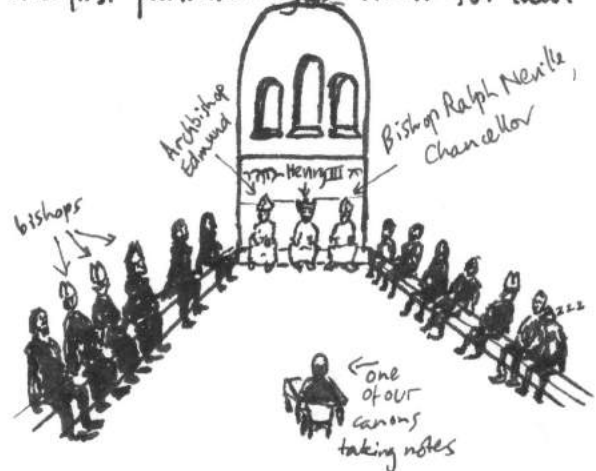
The year is 1236.† The occasion is Henry III's wedding party.

† or 1235. In my day, the new year began in March. So January could be either!

This royal wedding is a HEADACHE!
Have you got wine? Ale? Cider?
Yes... Yes... Yes
Remember, these nobles drink a lot.
Venison? Park? Swan?
Yes... Yes... Yes

Henry III married Eleanor of Provence, 1236. Their reception was at Merton.

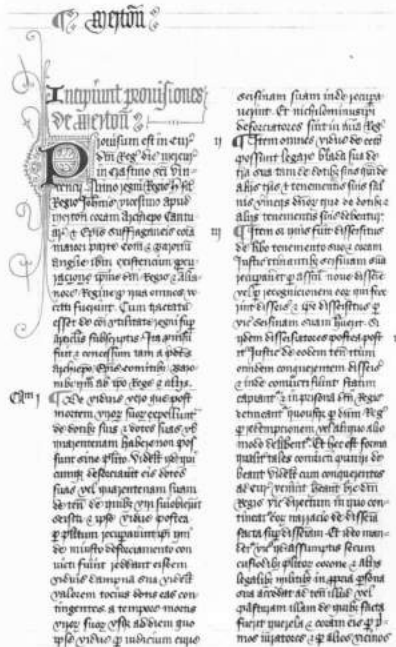
During the wedding celebrations, Henry met all his barons and bishops to talk, or parley (this is where parliament comes from!). They all signed the Statute of Merton, the first parliamentary statute, or law.



© Merton Priory Trust

The Statute of Merton was a bit like Magna Carta.

It was to keep the king in his place - under the law - and to give legal protection to his (noble) subjects.



This is Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, and honorary Canon of Merton. He saw it as his duty to keep the peace between the king and his barons.

The bishops helped Henry govern and helped him avoid civil war.



Edmund used to visit Merton a lot. Some other clerics who visited Merton lots were Henry's ministers, like John Mansel or Peter Chaceporc. Henry relied on churchmen for his ministers (civil service): he couldn't pay them, so they got their money from their church lands.

So, most of the time, King and church worked well together and needed each other. Besides, the king was very religious!

