



John I, also known as "John Lackland" (*Jean sans-terre*) - a nickname coined by his father (see *1215: the Year of Magna Carta*, by Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, [page 86](#)) - was the youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Historians report John ultimately became his father's [favorite son](#).

The image depicted above is the effigy from John's tomb at Worcester Cathedral (in the city of Worcester, England). Living between 1166 and 1216, he reigned from 1199 until his death. One of Britain's most controversial rulers, John is still assessed differently by different historians. John Richard Green, for example, states:

The closer study of John's history clears away the charges of sloth and incapacity with which men tried to explain the greatness of his fall. The awful lesson of his life rests on the fact that the king who lost Normandy, became the vassal of the Pope, and perished in a struggle of despair against English freedom was no weak and indolent voluptuary but the ablest and most ruthless of the Angevins. (Quoted by Kate Norgate, in [John Lackland](#), immediately before Chapter I.)

The British Monarchy provides a [brief biography about King John](#) at its official web site:

John was an able administrator interested in law and government but he neither trusted others nor was trusted by them.

Heavy taxation, disputes with the Church (John was excommunicated by the Pope in 1209) and unsuccessful attempts to recover his French possessions made him unpopular. Many of his barons rebelled, and in June 1215 they forced King John to sign a peace treaty accepting their reforms.

This treaty, later known as Magna Carta, limited royal powers, defined feudal obligations between the King and the barons, and guaranteed a number of rights.

The most influential clauses concerned the freedom of the Church; the redress of grievances of owners and tenants of land; the need to consult the Great Council of the Realm so as to prevent unjust taxation; mercantile and trading relationships; regulation of the machinery of justice so that justice be denied to no one; and the requirement to control the behaviour of royal officials.

The most important clauses established the basis of habeas corpus ('you have the body'), i.e. that no one shall be imprisoned except by due process of law, and that 'to no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay right or justice'.

The Charter also established a council of barons who were to ensure that the Sovereign observed the Charter, with the right to wage war on him if he did not.

Magna Carta was the first formal document insisting that the Sovereign was as much under the rule of law as his people, and that the rights of individuals were to be upheld even against the wishes of the sovereign.

As a source of fundamental constitutional principles, Magna Carta came to be seen as an important definition of aspects of English law, and in later centuries as the basis of the liberties of the English people.

As a peace treaty Magna Carta was a failure and the rebels invited Louis of France to become their king. When John died in 1216 England was in the grip of civil war.

Click on the image for an expanded view.

See, also:

Image and Bio: Robin Hood - Robin Longstride

Image and Bio: King Richard the Lionheart

Image: Eleanor of Aquitaine

Video: Katherine Hepburn (Eleanor) and Anthony Hopkins (Richard I)

Video: Richard the Lionheart and the Third Crusade

Video: Richard and His Men Fighting in the Crusade

Video: The English Longbow - Machine Gun of the Middle Ages

Story: The Magna Carta

Credits:

Image: Effigy, King John I's tomb, Worcester Cathedral.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/King-John-Lackland0)
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/King-John-Lackland0>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/King-John-Lackland0)
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/King-John-Lackland0>

Media Stream



King John Lackland

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/King-John-Lackland1>