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Events, Personalities and Reputations
The Thirteenth Century from 1216

The Statute of York in 1322 recognised that 'in time past ... troubles and wars have happened in the realm', blaming this on the various attempts to restrict royal power in the thirteenth century[1] Reform, sometimes led by the crown and sometimes imposed upon it, was a key theme in the reigns of Henry III (1216–72) and Edward I (1272–1307). Two other themes, focused on the king's interests beyond the borders of England, had significant effects on relations between the king and his English subjects, as the king sought to access their manpower, money and materiel. These interests were the king's claims to sovereignty over all Britain and protecting his remaining lands in France. When these factors all came together, as they did in the pivotal periods of 1258–67 and from 1294, it led to upheavals and strife in the realm which punctuated long periods of peace in England under both kings.

The Minority of Henry III: 1216–1234

Henry III had probably the hardest inheritance of any king of England. Only nine, he was the first minor to accede since 978 and did so in the midst of civil war and foreign invasion. When King John died at Newark (Notts.) on 19 October 1216, Henry was at Corfe Castle (Dorset). London was in enemy hands and so he was crowned just nine days later at Gloucester Abbey. In addition to Prince Louis of France, John's English opponents were aided by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, prince of Gwynedd, and by Alexander II, king of Scots, both of whom

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were seeking to undo concessions made to John. The rebels' greatest asset, however, had been John himself who had alienated so many of his subjects.

On the other hand, young Henry had five key factors in his favour. First, although many had deserted John, some key magnates had remained loyal. These included the two greatest marcher lords, Ranulf, earl of Chester, and William Marshal, earl of Pembroke, as well as the warlike foreigner cleric Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, England's richest see. Secondly, papal support for John's dynasty remained firm and it was the papal legate, Guala, who had crowned Henry. Thirdly, Dover Castle remained in the hands of John's justiciar, Hubert de Burgh, and while it did Louis's maritime supply lines remained insecure. Fourth, the advisors around the young king had, in Magna Carta, a ready-made offer for the realm. John's repudiation of the charter had precipitated the war in the autumn of 1215, but Louis had not adopted it. Suitably altered to make it more amenable to royal taste, it could be offered as a new deal between crown and people. The charter was reissued on 12 November 1216. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the young king was not his father. This 'fine little knight' was innocent of his father's sins.[2] For many, the reason for the war died with John.

Notwithstanding this, it still had to be fought and won. William Marshal, around seventy years of age, was chosen as *rector* of the king and kingdom and for a time the result hung in the balance. In 1217, however, the royalists won two crucial victories. Louis's forces were beaten at Lincoln in May, while in August Hubert de Burgh defeated a French fleet off Dover, thereby finally relieving the siege of the 'key to England'. The treaty of Kingston in September recognised Henry as king. Shortly afterwards Magna Carta was again confirmed.

In some ways, the remainder of Henry's minority was a success. He grew slowly to manhood and maturity under the guidance of de Burgh, and the latter's ascendancy was a generally peaceful period. Magna Carta was confirmed once more in 1225 and the fact of Henry's minority meant that Hubert relied on regular councils of magnates to ensure broad support for his regime and the decisions he was taking, as well as providing consent for taxation. By the late 1230s, these assemblies had acquired a new name: parliament. On the other hand, political

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tensions continued to simmer. A bloody siege at Bedford in 1223 precipitated the exile of the bishop of Winchester and Falkes de Breauté, one of John's cadre of foreign knights. In 1227, Richard of Cornwall quarrelled with his brother the king and with de Burgh. Not for the last time, the quarrel ended with Richard being bought off and abandoning his baronial allies.

Through all this, de Burgh retained Henry's confidence until failure in France in 1230. Louis VIII of France had overrun Poitou in 1224 and its recovery was Henry's priority. Louis's early death in 1227, and the accession of his young son, Louis IX, seemed to offer Henry an opportunity. Henry finally landed in Brittany in 1230 in alliance with its duke. The campaign came to nothing, however, and Henry returned to England disappointed. Peter des Roches returned in August 1231 and the bishop began to play on Henry's frustrations. Peter painted a tempting vision of a different type of kingship, encompassing the plenitude of royal power. Henry took the proffered apple, dismissing Hubert from his office of justiciar. A series of charters granted by Henry in the past few years were overturned by royal fiat. Most significant of these was the confiscation of the manor of Upavon (Wilts.) from Gilbert Basset, a close associate of Richard Marshal, earl of Pembroke, the greatest domestic magnate of all, who promptly rebelled. Although Marshal died during the rebellion, his cause triumphed and the bishop's party was removed by a chastened and penitent Henry in the spring of 1234. This marks the definitive end of Henry's minority and the start of his personal rule. Henry was twenty-seven and that we can date his personal rule as late as this says much about the king Henry had become.

The Personal Rule of Henry III: 1234–1258

All three themes mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, those of domestic reform, the expansion of English royal authority over Britain and the defence of his French territories, were key elements of Henry's personal rule and also came together to bring it to a close with the revolution of 1258. At the heart of the narrative lies Magna Carta and the type of king Henry tried to be. The definitive 1225 version of Magna Carta was much shorter than its 1215 predecessor, thirty-seven chapters

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down from sixty-three, and was much less prejudicial to royal authority but it promised a version of kingship very different from the one proposed to Henry by Peter des Roches in 1232. A Magna Carta king would abide by his own laws, take counsel from the leading men of the kingdom and, above all, would behave regularly towards his subjects. Magna Carta was not a plea for *less* royal government and justice but an attempt to depersonalise and regularise it. Under Magna Carta, the king's subjects would know what to expect when they came into contact with the crown. Thus, the estates and dependants (widows and heirs) of tenants-in-chief were protected from arbitrary exactions from the crown, while those who came before royal courts would know that the king's justice would not be bought, sold or delayed.

There was much, however, that Magna Carta had left unsaid. There was nothing, for instance, on how the king's ministers should be appointed or on how the king might distribute patronage. Moreover, the security clause of twenty-five barons charged with the enforcement of the charter in 1215 had been removed. The cry of 'Magna Carta in danger' was a leitmotif of the years of Henry's personal rule. One final problem of ruling within the confines of Magna Carta was money. Henry was poor. The loss of most of the French lands, combined with a period of high inflation, had hit Plantagenet finances hard. Two key methods by which John had kept his coffers full were the manipulation of both royal justice and the feudal rights of the crown. With these now constrained, Henry urgently needed to find alternative sources of revenue to fund his ambitions. The most obvious source was taxation on the movable goods of his subjects, which could bring in easily twice the annual revenue of the crown. The problem was that during the course of Henry's minority, the idea had crystalised that such taxes could only come from an assembly of magnates. If parliament were to be persuaded, they first needed to trust the king to spend the money wisely and secondly they might demand concessions in return. Both were problematic in Henry's personal rule and repeated refusals of his demands followed.

Henry fell back instead on other methods of raising money which antagonised the layer of landholders below the barons, the gentry. Henry increased the amount of money that sheriffs had to produce each year; the judicial and forest eyres became more a vehicle for raising

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revenue than one designed to bring justice to the localities; and a series of heavy taxes on England's Jews forced them to pressure their own creditors, who were frequently local gentry. This, coupled with Henry's lax attitude towards the abuses committed by magnates, led to consistent calls for reform at parliaments in the 1230s and 1240s, most notably in 1244 when a plan for reform, the so-called Paper Constitution, was drawn up which bore striking similarities to that eventually imposed in 1258.[3] Unwilling or unable to reform voluntarily, Henry left himself vulnerable to having reform forced upon him. Henry's one significant attempt at reform came in the late 1230s, starting with the Statute of Merton and then temporary reforms to local government.[4] Two men were central to these efforts: William Ralegh, the author of the legal tract known as *Bracton*, and William of Savoy, uncle of Henry's queen, Eleanor of Provence, who arrived with her in 1236 and immediately gained Henry's trust. Unfortunately, reform stalled following Henry's falling out with Ralegh and William of Savoy's death in 1239.

Savoyard influence, however, did not end here. Henry cultivated the relationship with this powerful and influential family, making Peter of Savoy one of the great magnates in England, securing Boniface's election as archbishop of Canterbury and giving lavish fees to Thomas and Queen Eleanor's mother, Beatrice. Henry hoped to increase his influence on the continent in this way, also through his marriage alliance with the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, and by cultivating the lords of Poitou, all with the hope of regaining his lost lands in France. Such a strategy, however, came to nought when in 1242, after years of planning, Henry's key potential ally in Poitou, his stepfather Hugh de Lusignan, rebelled before Henry was ready. By the time Henry arrived, Lusignan had been defeated and Henry was chased humiliatingly back to Gascony. Frederick II was too engulfed in his own wars to aid him, while the Savoyards kept their powder dry, conscious of their marriage links with the Capetians. Henry's mother, Isabella of Angoulême, died in 1246 and the following year several of her children arrived in England seeking the patronage of their half-brother, Henry III. Henry responded with characteristic generosity and the Lusignans quickly established themselves as a rival foreign faction to the queen's Savoyard relatives.

With his ambitions in France frustrated, Henry began to look further afield, his gaze eventually alighting upon Sicily. Henry's pursuit of the

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Sicilian throne for his younger son, Edmund, was simultaneously utterly impractical and ruinously expensive. Henry's trust in the Savoyards, who were pushing the idea, and his devotion to the papacy led him into disastrous deals with successive popes that left him facing excommunication if he defaulted, the sulphurous displeasure of the English church, who were left to foot his bill, and the incredulous non-cooperation of the English baronage.

Henry's problems were compounded by a major rebellion in Wales. Up to 1256, Wales and Scotland had been two of Henry's more striking successes. The northern border remained relatively quiet, secured by royal marriages with both Alexander II and III. The seizure of Alexander III, still a minor, by Scottish lords in 1257, though, threatened temporarily to disturb the peace once again. More serious, however, was the rebellion of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in Gwynedd. While Henry had largely accepted the hegemony of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, he took advantage of the latter's death in 1240 and his astute purchase for the crown of the earldom of Chester to seize the four cantrefs west of the Dee from Llywelyn's heir, Dafydd, in 1241. As so often, however, Henry failed to follow through on a promising position. In 1241, Dafydd had promised that were he to die without heirs Gwynedd would escheat to the crown. When Dafydd died in 1246, however, Henry made no effort to make good on this promise at a time when the principality was divided between the rival sons of Dafydd's half-brother, Gruffydd. Instead, he allowed the brothers to fight things out and Llywelyn ap Gruffydd thus emerged as the undisputed ruler of Gwynedd by 1255. In November 1256, Llywelyn crossed the Clwyd into the four cantrefs held by the king's son and heir, Lord Edward, overrunning them easily. In June 1257, Edward's attempted counterattack was spectacularly defeated. Desperate for money, and with no help coming from his parents or the Savoyards, Edward turned instead to the Lusignans and moved in the winter of 1257–8 from the Savoyard to the Lusignan camp.

Henry's position was collapsing in the spring of 1258 when he summoned a parliament to ask once again for the realm's support for the Sicilian project. The king had alienated the church, the gentry and the Savoyard party. He was running out of allies. Henry's personal rule ended as it started, with a denial of justice in breach of Magna Carta.

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Then he had been repenting for the disseisin of Gilbert Basset and others; now he refused to give justice to John Fitz Geoffrey, a well-connected curial baron, who was appealing against Aymer de Lusignan, bishop-elect of Winchester. On 12 April, Fitz Geoffrey joined six other barons in a sworn pact of mutual support and on 30 April they marched in full armour into Westminster Hall, with Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk, at their head, and demanded that the king accept reform.[5] Henry, naked of all meaningful support beyond the Lusignans, had no choice but to agree.

Henry III – Reform, Rebellion and Peace-Making: 1258–1272

While Magna Carta sought to regularise royal authority, the reformers of 1258 intended to exercise that authority themselves.[6] It was corporatised into the hands of a council of fifteen magnates. A justiciar, Hugh Bigod, was appointed to hold a general eyre (in essence a super royal judicial commission that stood above all other jurisdictions) to investigate abuses. Henry was effectively shoved aside while the council undertook virtually all business. The reform movement began as a palace coup against the Lusignans, who were forced into exile, but it was not confined to the court. From almost the very start, however, there were splits about just how far-reaching reform should be. Some, like the queen and Peter of Savoy, were content with the expulsion of the Lusignans; others, such as Richard de Clare, earl of Gloucester, wished to reform the conduct of the king's ministers but not to investigate abuses by the barons' own men.

The man who emerged as the leader of the most radical reformers was Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester. Montfort arrived in England in 1230 with nothing more than a famous name, a silver tongue and a claim to the earldom of Leicester. By 1239, the time of his first quarrel with Henry III, he was earl of Leicester, had married the king's sister and had become one of Henry's closest counsellors. Following that initial quarrel, the two remained bitterly co-dependent upon each other: Henry requiring Montfort's military and diplomatic capabilities and Montfort needing Henry's goodwill to sustain and develop his landed position.

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Montfort never laid aside his material ambitions, but he was unwavering in his commitment to wholesale reform of the realm and clashed repeatedly with anyone showing less commitment to reform than he did. The path of reform in these years is complex to trace but falls essentially into three broad phases: first up to the finalising of the treaty of Paris in December 1259; secondly, the king's slow and uncertain recovery of power until the spring of 1263; followed by civil war until the summer of 1267.

Following the conclusion of the Oxford parliament in the summer of 1258, the three major achievements of the reform programme were Hugh Bigod's general eyre, the so-called Provisions of Westminster in 1259 which accomplished much legal and administrative reform locally and the treaty of Paris which sought to achieve a permanent settlement with the Capetians over the residue of the Angevin Empire.[7] Negotiations over a settlement had begun with Henry meeting Louis in 1254 and continued intermittently for several years afterwards. Under its eventual terms, Henry agreed to do homage to Louis for Gascony as duke of Aquitaine, obtaining residual rights in the strategically vital Agenais and the dioceses of Périgueux, Cahors and Limoges. In return, he gave up his other claims. The treaty was to have both major short- and long-term consequences, but it cemented the ties of friendship and kinship between the two kings.

Henry travelled to France in November to conclude the treaty and, safe in Paris and away from many of the council, he began to regain some freedom of action. Henry remained there until April 1260 and, on his return, conducted a cold war against his opponents as he sought to regain power. The two leading reformers were now Montfort and Lord Edward, the king's own son and heir, who, having first opposed reform, was now filled with youthful reforming zeal. Gradually, over the course of the next eighteen months, Henry gained the ascendancy and by November 1261 he had overthrown the council. He was aided by the pope's quashing of the reformers' oath and by Lord Edward's defection from reform. Most of all, however, he was aided by a general sense that being in the king's goodwill was a better place to be than outside it. Only Montfort refused to yield, going into exile bitterly complaining of the faithlessness of the English.

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Sadly for England, Henry had learned little from earlier mistakes. Errors abounded over the next two years. Most important of these were his failure to reconcile effectively with Montfort, leaving him as a dangerous outsider brooding on his wrongs; his factional persecution, led by the queen, of the former associates of Lord Edward who had been cast aside; his decision not to allow the eighteen-year-old Gilbert de Clare to inherit his father's lands early following Gloucester's death in July 1262; and renewed military defeat at the hands of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, who resumed hostilities in late 1262.

In April 1263, Montfort, invited by Edward's former friends, returned and Henry's position collapsed. Foreigners now became a particular focus for the rebels and a 'Statute against Aliens' was imposed in July 1263, alongside a general resumption of reform under the umbrella title of the Provisions of Oxford. It was not to last, however, and, following the return of Edward's former friends to the prince's fold, a strong royalist party emerged. Civil war was only averted in December 1263 by seeking intervention from Louis IX. The reformers' case was intricate and elaborate but it was Henry's much more simple case, that the king should have the freedom to appoint and dismiss his own ministers, that won Louis's approbation. In the mise of Amiens, issued in January 1264, he quashed the provisions utterly.[8]

Such a one-sided judgement, however, only precipitated civil war. Despite early success at Northampton in April, the king's forces were lured south and, at Lewes (Sussex) on 14 May 1264, defeated by Montfort's much smaller baronial army. King Henry, Lord Edward, Richard of Cornwall and his son all now fell into Montfort's hands and England came under the effective rule of 'King Simon'. Montfort attracted passionate support from many in the church and the younger members of the baronage and from many towns, especially London. He sought to secure broader support for his regime at the two famous parliaments of June 1264 and January–March 1265. Knights of the shire, two from each county, were summoned to both meetings and, at the latter, borough representatives too. Never had the authority of the crown been brought so low as at the Hilary Parliament of 1265 when Lord Edward was denuded of his estates in favour of Montfort and Henry agreed to sustain the current governmental arrangements, acknowledging the right, even the duty, of his subjects to ignore his

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commands and take up arms against him if he sought to resile from reform.

Regarded by the papacy and the French as a rogue state, Montfort's regime was vulnerable to invasion and to threats from within. As he and his family plundered royalist estates, Montfort was open to the charge of greed and tyranny. He had allied himself with Llywelyn, England's enemy, to aid him against the recalcitrant royalist marcher lords; royalist sympathy remained strong in the north; while his sudden imprisonment of the earl of Derby aroused the suspicion and fear of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester, the one man powerful enough to challenge Montfort for supremacy. In collusion with Gloucester, Edward escaped custody and joined up with the marcher lords and other royalists. Montfort came west but eventually found himself trapped at Evesham on 4 August 1265. Rather than retreat, Montfort decided upon a martyr's crown and was killed, along with many of his closest supporters. Such was the targeted slaughter, not seen on an English battlefield for two centuries, that one chronicler described it as 'the murder of Evesham, for battle it was none'.[9]

The royalists were victorious, but a permanent peace remained beyond their grasp for nearly two years, largely because of an ill-advised decision to disinherit all the rebels. This was reversed by the Dictum of Kenilworth in October 1266, which allowed the rebels to buy back their lands at agreed rates of compensation, but it was not until June 1267, after the earl of Gloucester occupied London, that a final peace was reached. Shortly afterwards, negotiations began with Llywelyn and in September a treaty was agreed at Montgomery that recognised him as prince of Wales, giving him the homage of all the other native Welsh rulers and conceding the four cantrefs.[10] It cost Llywelyn 25,000 marks but achieved the highwater mark of native Welsh power. It was not to last. In the final years of Henry's reign, the crusade returned to centre stage but this time with Lord Edward as the lead actor, joining Louis IX's crusade in 1270, going first to Tunis then the Holy Land where he won honour, if little else, before leaving Acre in September 1272. His father died on 16 November and Edward was proclaimed king in his absence. His long apprenticeship was over.

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Edward I – Command and Conquer: 1272–1290

Edward did not return to England until August 1274. In the meantime, he had spent time in Gascony, strengthening his administrative and diplomatic position there. Edward remained much interested in the duchy and returned for almost three years between 1286 and 1289. In 1279, at Amiens, Edward gained the Agenais and Saintonge from Philip III of France, fulfilling the terms of the treaty of Paris and securing Gascony's frontiers.

Domestically, Edward sought to restore the rights and prestige of the crown which had been laid low and to adopt those principles of reform he regarded as compatible with the crown's dignity. Parliament was the key vehicle through which these objectives were achieved. Edward's kingship in these years of success was parliamentary kingship. In most years, parliament met twice a year, sometimes with the 'commons' element of knights and burgesses and sometimes without. In parliament, the king could take counsel from his subjects, listen to their petitions and dispense justice. He could also, if he demonstrated necessity, obtain their consent for taxation, as in 1275, 1283 and 1290. Finally, what parliament offered the king was a platform for legislation. Between 1275 and 1290, Edward's parliaments passed at least ten major statutes which transformed the operation of English law and formed the bedrock of its functioning for centuries afterwards.[11] In local government, Edward generally appointed substantial local landholders as sheriff, long demanded by the localities, while through his *quo warranto* inquiries into the exercise of local franchises, he established the important principle that all franchises were held from the crown. Through investigation, through listening to and acting upon his subjects' concerns and in the interests of the crown, Edward was demonstrating that reform could enhance the power of the crown rather than diminish it.

A final plank of restoring the crown's position was in Wales. Llywelyn overestimated his strength and underestimated his opponent. Edward, with the full weight of the English state behind him, was much more formidable than he had been earlier. Llywelyn refused to do homage until his grievances were addressed and so Edward, having consulted parliament, declared war in 1276. All Llywelyn's gains at Montgomery were reversed in the short war that followed. A further

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rebellion in 1282–3 led to the death of Llywelyn in battle and his brother Dafydd on the scaffold. Independent native Wales disappeared and the future of Wales's relationship with England was established in the Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284.[12] The first English prince of Wales, the future Edward II, was born at Caernarfon that same year as the new castle, one of a ring of castles around Snowdonia that Edward constructed, was being built around him.

Edward I – War on All Fronts: 1290–1307

Edward took the cross once more in 1288 and determined to head east again, a desire made more urgent by the fall of Acre in 1291. This influenced his conciliatory approach to provocations from the new French king, Philip IV. Philip was listening to the strong anti-English faction at the French court who wished to unpick the concessions of the treaty of Paris and expel the king of England from France once and for all. A complaint by Norman sailors against the English and Gascon piracy gave Philip the excuse to summon Edward to appear before the Paris *parlement* to answer for the Gascons' actions. Edward was keen to avoid war and was prepared to accept the temporary surrender of Gascony as part of a secret negotiated settlement. Philip reneged on the deal, however, refused to withdraw the summons to the *parlement* and declared the duchy forfeit when Edward failed to appear.

Winning Gascony back would take a huge effort given that Philip's resources were so much greater than Edward's own. He would need military service not only from his English subjects but also, he believed, from Wales and Scotland and he summoned support from both. He also sought allies in the Low Countries to threaten Philip with a war on two fronts. It was Edward, however, who found himself at war with multiple opponents. His expedition to Gascony had to be curtailed to deal with a rebellion in Wales in 1294–5 and then he had to deal with the Scots after they concluded an alliance with the French.

Edward had maintained good relations with Alexander III of Scotland, building on Scottish support for the royalist cause during the Barons' War. The question of English sovereignty over Scotland, long claimed but rarely achieved previously, was left unresolved while Alexander lived. Alexander's death in 1286, followed four years later by

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that of his sole granddaughter Margaret of Norway, left Scotland vulnerable to civil war between the many possible candidates for the throne. The Scots turned to Edward to adjudicate. This was natural, any new king of Scots would need the approval of his powerful southern neighbour and, besides, many of the claimants, and their allies, were Edward's vassals anyway. At the close of the 'Great Cause' in 1292, Edward pronounced in favour of John Balliol, the man with the strongest claim.[13] All the candidates had been forced to accept Edward's overlordship of Scotland. Like Edward in France, Balliol quickly discovered how difficult it was to have a superior lord to whom your own subjects could appeal over your head. Despite his own experiences in France, Edward showed no empathy for Balliol's position in his handling of Scotland. It is not surprising, then, that the Scots sought French assistance to resist Edward's demands for service. Edward marched north in 1296 and within just a few weeks Balliol's kingship was overthrown. Rather than pass the Scottish crown to the Bruces, Edward relegated the status of the kingdom of Scots to merely a land under his direct rule, establishing an English administration under Earl Warenne.

It seemed by 1297 as if Edward could finally turn his attention to France and in the nick of time, as in January an Anglo-Gascon force was defeated at Bellegarde leaving Edward's position in Gascony precarious. His plans to reinforce Gascony and to launch a second front in Flanders, however, were disrupted by protests domestically. The crisis of 1297 began over the king's demands for military service and metamorphosed into a crisis over taxation. Edward's demands for unpaid service overseas from all those with an income as little as £20 per annum met with mass non-compliance at the muster in July. Edward was forced to offer pay but with his expensively procured allies in the Low Countries getting desperate for Edward's arrival, the king was unable to wait for a parliament to grant him the necessary tax to pay for his army. Instead, he claimed consent for a tax from those around him in his chamber. The earls of Norfolk and Hereford, who had emerged as spokesmen for the discontented, described the tax as a tallage (an arbitrary tax imposed upon serfs) and attempted to prevent the exchequer from collecting it.[14]

Despite the widespread discontent, Edward nonetheless departed for the continent in August with a sizeable force. While his army spent more

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time fighting its allies than the French, its very presence forced Philip to agree a truce in October. Edward married Philip's sister, Margaret, in 1299 and a final peace was agreed in 1303. It had cost around £500,000 but Gascony had been saved. That still left Scotland to settle. While the seriousness of the domestic crisis in 1297 has been debated, what brought it to a conclusion was news of the defeat of Earl Warenne's English army at Stirling Bridge on 11 September by William Wallace. Though Edward beat Wallace at Falkirk the following August, a combination of persistent Scottish resistance, continuing political discontent at home and the difficulties of campaigning in Scotland meant that it was not until 1304 that Edward was finally able to pacify Scotland again.

With the war seemingly over, Edward was able to turn his mind back to domestic matters. In 1305, he got papal consent to overturn the political concessions he had made between 1297 and 1301 and began to deal with the criminal disorder that had emerged over the past decade through the so-called trailbaston commissions. After a decade of distraction, Edward hoped to return to his previous cooperative and responsive kingship. Such hopes were dashed, however, by the renewal of hostilities in Scotland. Robert Bruce, whose allegiances up to this point had been flexible, made a bid for kingship following his murder of his rival John Comyn at Dumfries in February 1306. The war remained in the balance when Edward I died at Burgh-on-Sands (Cumberland) on 7 July 1307.

If we return to the themes with which we began this chapter, Edward had demonstrated that through parliament he could reform the realm successfully as a Magna Carta king but the crown's demands on its subjects after 1294 led to administrative and judicial developments and tensions that persisted through the following reigns. Most significantly, while Wales had been pacified, England ended the reign of Edward I at war with Scotland and with the status of Gascony and the position of the English kings in France an open question once more. The fourteenth century was dominated by attempts to force an answer to that question.

Personalities

Henry III

One word dominates contemporary and modern discussion of Henry's character: *simplex*. 'Simplex' is not a 'simple' word to translate. It could

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mean honest and straightforward, but it could also mean unworldly and foolish and was used extensively in both senses by numerous chroniclers to describe Henry.[15] *Simplex* often came with religious overtones, and few would have disagreed with the Westminster chronicler that Henry was a 'devout worshipper of God'.[16] He had other positive qualities: a quirky sense of humour, uxoriousness, a warm heart, loyalty and generosity to his family and an eye for beauty in art and architecture.

Henry's essential decency may have saved his crown in 1264–5 but it did not, unfortunately, make him a good king. Henry was not stupid, but he was less wily than he thought he was and his elaborate plans on the continent came to nothing. Henry occasionally demonstrated flashes of royal anger, but these would often pass without any definite result which enhanced royal dignity or authority. He lacked fixity of purpose and confidence in his own judgements (perhaps a consequence of the reliance on the advice of others developed during his long minority), frequently changing his mind, and even having to guard against this sometimes in official documents, such as his order to the exchequer in 1241 that nothing be taken from his 'hidden' treasure at the Tower 'for any order that the king might make'.[17]

This order also plays to one of Henry's most conspicuous faults, his reckless capacity for overspending in the wrong direction. While the £40,000 spent on the new Westminster Abbey may have been justified, the huge amounts of money he gave to the Lusignans, Savoyards and their supporters produced less tangible results and, in fact, only served to create faction and tension at his court. Henry's open purse to foreigners who arrived at his court contrasts with his cautious patronage of his native nobility. Matthew Paris, the chronicler of St Albans Abbey, despairingly described England under Henry as like 'a vineyard without a wall, in which all who pass along the road gather grapes'.[18]

Part of the frustration the native nobility must have felt was that Henry did not share many of their interests. He loved falconry but showed limited interest in hunting and was hostile to tournaments. Unlike in the reign of Edward I, the great native magnates were not often in attendance at court, while military campaigns were relatively rare in Henry's reign and usually unsuccessful when they did occur. Henry, for all his grand designs, was at heart a peaceful man and, as he

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declared to the sheriffs in 1261, 'with our utmost desire and all our strength we have not ceased to study and labour . . . for the peace and tranquillity of one and all'.[19] Henry only ever wanted peace domestically: with his magnates, between his family and for his subjects. Unfortunately, too often his own actions almost guaranteed that conflict would emerge and, when it did, he was rarely skilled enough to control it.

What did Henry look like? As a boy, Matthew Paris describes him as having a 'pleasant face and golden hair'.[20] The only surviving physical description of him as an adult, however, comes from Nicholas Trevet, writing in the 1320s. Trevet describes him as being of middle height but strong in build with a distinguishing feature of a drooping eyelid.[21]

Edward I

That drooping eyelid was inherited by his eldest son but, while Henry was of middle height, Edward 'towered head and shoulders above the average' according to Trevet, and when he was exhumed in 1774 he was confirmed at six feet two inches: he well deserved his nickname 'Longshanks'.[22] Clearly he was intimidating, so much so that in 1294 the dean of St Paul's apparently dropped dead with fear at having to gainsay the king. Edward's anger was fiercer and much more dangerous than his father's, especially when aimed against those he felt had betrayed him, as the Montforts, Dafydd ap Gruffydd and the Bruces discovered to their cost.

The most famous early description of Edward's character comes from the anonymous author of the *Song of Lewes*, a Montfortian tract composed in 1264:

> A lion by pride and fierceness, he is by inconstancy and changeableness a pard, changing his word and promise, cloaking himself by pleasant speech. When he is in a strait he promises whatever you wish, but as soon as he has escaped he renounces his promise.[23]

Later chroniclers, however, found Edward hard to characterise and it was common to fall back on historic exemplars rather than offer novel individual insights. There was no Matthew Paris or Jean de Joinville to shed light on Edward in the way these chroniclers did for Henry III and Louis IX respectively. We must seek to infer Edward's character, then,

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from his actions more than from descriptions. Edward was aided by his long apprenticeship and by the fact that he not only looked like a king but acted like one. He could be masterful certainly, but his interests – hunting, hawking, tourneying, Arthurian legends – were those of his greatest subjects as well. It is notable that Edward's relations with his earls were generally very good including, unusually, with those from the generation below him.

Edward's slipperiness, criticised in the *Song of Lewes*, was evident throughout his career, from his conduct in the Barons' War to his renunciation in 1305 of his earlier political and constitutional concessions. While he may have been untrustworthy at times, however, he was also single-minded, and it was a determination to restore the authority of the crown that ran through his career like a golden thread. Never again the humiliations of the period between Lewes and Evesham. If that meant making temporary tactical concessions which could be discarded later, then so be it. This single-mindedness was often beneficial but it could also become a hindrance. Edward rarely saw things from other people's point of view, which often led to resistance when he pushed his own interests too hard. Edward's achievements, nonetheless, were summed up well by the Westminster Chronicle in his obituary, writing that 'while you flourished in your power and might, Fraud lay concealed and honour came to light; Peace gladdened all the earth. The Scots were crushed, Afflicted, beaten, humbled to the dust.'[24]

Reputations The historiography of the thirteenth century and its kings was framed by William Stubbs as the 'struggle for the charters', and this focus has characterised much subsequent writing on the period.[25] In general, historians' judgements of Henry have been negative. Stubbs wrote of the 'series of his follies and falsehoods' which 'accumulated an irresistible weight of national indignation'.[26] R. F. Treharne's judgement in 1932 was much like that of many contemporary chroniclers: 'Though not wholly unattractive as a man, Henry III was devoid of all the qualities which enable a ruler to command success.'[27] The first great age of Henrician studies culminated with Maurice Powicke's two-volume study of *Henry III and the Lord Edward* in 1947. In Powicke's view, Henry was 'capable of energy and passion, watchful, critical and intelligent, quickly responsive to the grandiose, he lacked the dignity of

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true self-possession. Too often he appears in history as a petulant child or a magnificent potterer.'[28]

A new generation began to reassess Henry's reign in the 1970s, this time with much more attention to the voluminous public sources than previously. A huge amount of new material was produced by John Maddicott, Robert Stacey, Peter Coss, Nicholas Vincent and Margaret Howell and more recently by Adrian Jobson, Louise Wilkinson and Sophie Ambler, shedding new light on aspects of Henry's reign and especially those around the king, from Queen Eleanor to Montfort and his wife, des Roches, and the English church.[29] The big gap in the recent historiography, however, was a comprehensive biography of Henry himself, but David Carpenter has recently corrected this. His two volumes, over forty years in the making, offer the most complete and balanced judgement on Henry so far. He recognises the difficulties Henry faced and the achievements that can be ascribed to him, but, returning to the *simplex* trope, sums him up as 'a king *simplex* in the sense of being pious and innocent but *simplex* too in being naïve and foolish'.[30]

Edward I's reputation has fluctuated rather more than his father's, while remaining generally high. 'With a new reign', Stubbs commented, 'the old antipathies vanish, and the nation rises to its full growth, in accord, for the most part, with the genius of its ruler.'[31] Frederick Tout was less forgiving than Stubbs of Edward's autocratic tendencies, but Powicke ensured that Edward's stock remained high by the 1950s: 'a very great king' was his considered verdict.[32]

This image was clouded, however, from the 1960s, first by Bruce McFarlane's criticisms of Edward's 'masterfulness' in his management of the earls and then the development of this picture by Celtic historians such as Geoffrey Barrow, Rees Davies and others who demonstrated the effects of this masterfulness on Scotland and Wales.[33] Michael Prestwich's Yale biography was published at this 'cyclic low' as he described it.[34] While still critical of the king, Prestwich did much to restore the reputation of a 'formidable king' whose reign was 'a great one'.[35] Since Prestwich's biography, a series of new work on Edward's rule by English historians such as Marc Morris, Caroline Burt, Andrew Spencer, Andy King and Kathleen Neal has further enhanced Edward's reputation. As a recent judgement puts it, Edward's reign 'shows how the powers available to a king of England might be utilised by an intelligent

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and determined man, with an ability to recognise and employ other intelligent men. Few, if any, wielded them to greater effect.'[36] This flurry of new research on both Henry and Edward shows little sign of slowing down and demonstrates how this period remains one of intrigue and debate for historians. This should come as no surprise as it was a momentous century and many of its political and constitutional questions remain relevant to English and British geopolitics.

Notes

1. *EHD, 1189–1327*, no. 103.
2. *The History of William Marshal*, trans. N. Bryant (Woodbridge, 2016), 187.
3. *EHD, 1189–1327*, no. 34.
4. Ibid., no. 30.
5. Ibid., no. 36.
6. Ibid., no. 37.
7. Ibid., nos. 40–1.
8. *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion, 1258–1267*, ed. and trans. R. E. Treharne and I. J. Sanders (Oxford, 1973), no. 38.
9. *Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. W. A. Wright, 2 vols., RS (1887), II, line 11,376.
10. *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers, 1120–1283*, ed. H. Pryce with the assistance of C. Insley (Cardiff, 2005), no. 363.
11. *EHD, 1189–1327*, nos. 47, 49, 51–4, 57–9, 62–4.
12. Ibid., no. 55.
13. The key documents of the Great Cause are in *Anglo-Scottish Relations, 1174–1328: Some Selected Documents*, ed. and trans. E. L. G. Stones (Oxford, 1965), nos. 14–20.
14. *EHD, 1189–1327*, no. 73.
15. Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols., RS (1872–3), III, 164–5; 'Annales Monasterii de Osneia, AD 1016–1347', in *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard, RS, 36 (1864–9), IV, 77; *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, ed. H. Rothwell, Camden Society, Third Series, 89 (1957), 201.
16. *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, 3 vols., RS (1890), III, 28.
17. *CCR, 1237–1242*, p. 376.
18. Paris, *Chronica Majora*, V, 514.
19. *Foedera*, I, i, 408–9.
20. Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. H. T. Riley, 3 vols., RS (1867–9), II, 196.
21. Nicholas Trevet, *Annales Sex Regum Angliae*, ed. T. Hog (London, 1845), 280.

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22. Ibid., 281–2.
23. *EHD, 1189–1327*, no. 232.
24. *Flores Historiarum*, III, 330.
25. W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England, in Its Origin and Development*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2012, reprint), II, ch. 14.
26. Ibid., II, 4.
27. R. F. Treharne, *The Baronial Plan of Reform, 1258–1263* (Manchester, 1971, reprint), 47.
28. F. M. Powicke, *Henry III and the Lord Edward*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1947), I, 156–7.
29. N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics, 1205–1238* (Cambridge, 1996). For the others see Further Reading in this chapter.
30. D. A. Carpenter, *Henry III, 1258–1272: Reform, Rebellion, Civil War, Settlement* (New Haven, CT, 2023), 639.
31. Stubbs, *Constitutional History*, II, 4–5.
32. Powicke, *Henry III*, II, 725.
33. K. B. McFarlane, 'Had Edward I a "Policy" towards the Earls?', *History* 50 (1965), 145–59; G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1965); R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000).
34. M. C. Prestwich, *Edward I* (New Haven, CT, 1997), xi.
35. Ibid., 567.
36. *Edward I: New Interpretations*, ed. A. King and A. M. Spencer (Woodbridge, 2020), 8.

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