Britain: Power and the people

Chapter 1  Constraints on kingship

In 1214, the English barons lost patience with King John. John was unpopular, partly because of his taxation policy. The most hated tax was scutage. This was a tax on the upper classes, and a way to raise short-term funds for long-term projects. The barons were unhappy; for example, John lost important land in France to the French King. The less likely they were to fight – so the higher the scutage they had to pay – the less likely they were to support John.

The six main clauses of Magna Carta

John was forced to sign the Magna Carta. The barons would not back out of the agreement, saying he had been forced to sign it.

SOURCE C

Part of the original Magna Carta at Runnymede that reads: ‘As a tribute to the historic Magna Carta, a source of freedom, liberty and democracy. Enshrined in their Constitution.’

British Library, London, 1215

The Republic of India also has a plaque headed ‘long-term impacts’.

The impact of Magna Carta

Identify key features

Magna Carta has long-term impacts as well as short-term impacts. It was an agreement between the barons and King John. The barons agreed to a number of clauses so John would change the power of the king and give the land back to the barons. The clauses included:

1. No one, not even the king, should be exempt from the law.
2. The Church should not pay scutage.
3. No new taxes should be introduced without the barons’ agreement.
4. Landowners should only have to pay scutage on a certain number of days of military service.
5. Every free man should have the right to a fair trial.
6. No one should be imprisoned without a proper trial.

The American Bar Association (of lawyers) erected this plaque in 1903:

‘The Magna Carta of 1215 was the first written constitution in the world and the first to be signed by a King. It served as a model for modern constitutions and charters. The United States Constitution reflects the influence of the Magna Carta in its guarantees of freedom and justice. The American Bar Association is proud to commemorate the Magna Carta on its 780th anniversary in 1995.’

British Library, London, 1215

Magna Carta was significant as it was the first written constitution in the world. It provided people with greater protection from the king.

The importance of Magna Carta

The Magna Carta is one of the most important documents in British history. It was a significant document because it was the first written constitution in the world. It provided people with greater protection from the king. The Magna Carta was significant because it was the first document to guarantee the rights of peasants and freemen. It was the first document to guarantee the rights of the people. Magna Carta was an important document because it was the first document to guarantee the rights of the people.

How to use this book

Written for the new AQA specification, the features in this book include:

Study Tip

These are hints to highlight key parts of Practice Questions and will help you answer the questions.

Timeline

A short list of dates identifying key events to help you understand chronological developments.

Key Biography

Details of a key person to help you understand the individuals who have helped shape history.
1.1 Why did the Vikings invade Britain?

This topic focuses on the people who came to and left Britain, and the different empires Britain belonged to and built, from c790 to the present day. Different groups of people have been moving to Britain and settling for various reasons, and have made lasting contributions to British culture. Britain had also taken over land in other parts of the world: at one point in time, the British ruled over more land than any other country before or since. However, there have been times in Britain's history when it has been controlled by another, more powerful nation, and has been part of their empire. What was Britain like before the ad790s?

The first Britons

The timeline below charts the history of settlement in Britain up to the time this thematic study begins.

Timeline

Before c4000bc: c4000bc: c500–43bc: ad43–401: ad401 onwards:

The first people who live in Britain are immigrants. They arrive from Europe around half a million years ago and are hunter-gatherers. They move around in small groups and learn skills such as lighting fires and making tools.

About 2500 years ago, a new wave of settlers begins arriving from central Europe. They are called the Beaker People after their beaker-shaped pottery cups; they also know how to make tools out of metal. The next tribes to arrive and settle in Britain are Celts: they too farmed the land and lived fiercely between themselves and with the people already settled here. Over many centuries, they merge with the original population.

The Romans arrive from Italy and conquer most of the British tribes. The Romans stay and rule for over 400 years, and the country becomes part of the huge Roman Empire.

By ad401, the Romans in Britain are called back to Italy to defend their homeland from invasion. The British who have lived under Roman rule are left to fend for themselves, and soon new tribes invade. They come by boat from Denmark and northern Germany looking for a better climate and good farmland. These tribes are called Angles, Saxons and Jutes. They soon become known as Anglo-Saxons and, after fighting with the British tribes, capture most of Britain (except Cornwall, Wales and the far north).

Fact

Historians sometimes add a 'c' before dates. This stands for 'circa', which means 'around' or 'approximately'.

The first recorded attack by another, more powerful nation, and has been part of their empire. What was Britain like before the ad790s?

The Romans were the first people to use the name 'Britannia' for Britain. The name was based on the word 'Pretannia', which is what the Ancient Greeks called Britain: they thought a Celtic tribe called the 'Pretani' lived there. In fact, the Pretani tribe lived mainly in Ireland, but the name stuck, and later became 'Britannia', and then simply 'Britain'.

From around ad400 onwards, Anglo-Saxons settled in villages next to their farmland. They set up a number of different kingdoms, led by lords and chieftains. The most powerful lords acted like local kings and fought one another to gain more land.

The strongest Anglo-Saxon tribal chiefs were known as Bretwalda or 'Ruler of Britain'. By ad800, most Anglo-Saxons had converted to Christianity, and merchants traded goods all over the country and into Europe, making some Anglo-Saxon kingdoms very wealthy.

The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, around ad700. The white areas in the south-west (Wales and Cornwall) were occupied by the original Celtic Britons. Over time, the area of Britain where the Anglo-Saxons settled became known as 'Angle-land', and later England.

Who were the Vikings and why did they attack?

In the mid-700s, the people of Scandinavia (Norway, Denmark and Sweden) began to explore, raid and eventually invade the countries around them. They sailed to Britain, Ireland, France, Spain and Italy. Others travelled by land, as far as Israel, Greenland and probably America. They were known as Vikings, or Northmen, and began their raids on Britain around the ad790s.

Fact

For 'circa', which means 'around' or 'approximately'. Historians sometimes add a 'c' before dates.

The Vikings attacked Britain because they had traded goods with the Anglo-Saxons for many years, and knew of their wealth. The first recorded attack was on the monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria in ad793, and two years later they attacked the Isle of Iona in Scotland. To begin with, they attacked in the summer when the seas were calm for their small ships. They raided villages and monasteries near the coast, and then sailed back with stolen gold and silver, cattle and even slaves. Later, they sailed up rivers and attacked further inland, and they sometimes stayed for long periods of time and built camps.

Key Words

empire immigrant hunter-gatherer Viking

INTERPRETATION D

A twelfth-century interpretation showing Vikings attacking the English; Vikings are often portrayed as wild, unsophisticated and bloodthirsty.