

## Government in Britannia from the Romans to the Model Parliament – Outline

### I. Roman Britain

- a. Island of Britannia, and the native Britons who lived there, were ruled by the Roman empire
- b. Conquered in 43 CE under Emperor Claudius
- c. Roman troops pulled out by 410 CE as Rome declined
- d. Established city of Londinium (modern-day London)
- e. Ruled according to Roman law
- f. Germanic tribes began invading Britannia in the early 400s as Rome declined

### II. The Anglo-Saxons

- a. A collection of Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and more)
  - i. From Angeln, Lower Saxony, Jutland peninsula, and elsewhere
  - ii. Invaded along the eastern and southern coasts
  - iii. Settled in farming villages rather than in trading cities
    - 1. Pushed the bulk of native Britons to the west (to places like Cornwall and Wales)
  - iv. Spoke Old English
- b. Eventually converted to Christianity

### III. King Alfred's response to the Viking invasions

- a. Anglo-Saxon kings ruled various kingdoms, like Sussex and Wessex
- b. Alfred of Wessex – became first English king, Alfred the Great
  - i. Helped to repel Viking invasions which started circa 800 CE
  - ii. Set up the burghal system
  - iii. Alfred lived circa 849-899 CE, reigned 871-899 CE

### IV. Burghal system under the Anglo-Saxons

- a. Burhs (boroughs) established under Alfred the Great
  - i. Fortified towns
  - ii. Expensive to man and maintain
- b. Shires
  - i. Administrative districts
    - 1. *Shire* is synonymous with *county*
  - ii. Shire was expected to pay for the support and maintenance of its borough
  - iii. Shires were governed by a *shire reeve* or *sheriff*
    - 1. Reeve – term dating back to Old English that means a representative of the crown

**V. Danelaw**

- a. Danelaw describes the territory ruled by the Danes (Vikings), the treaties between the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons, and the laws of the Danish settlers
- b. *Weregeld* (*were* = man, *geld* = money) – payment for the death of a person
  - i. The higher the person's rank, the higher the payment
- c. But we would not recognize most of the Danish system of law and government

**VI. 11<sup>th</sup>-century kings of England**

- a. Canute (Cnut) the Great, reigned 1016-1035
- b. Harold Harefoot (Harold I), reigned 1035-1040
- c. Harthacnut, r. 1040-1042
- d. Edward the Confessor, r. 1042-1066
- e. Harold Godwinson (Harold II), r. January-October, 1066

**VII. Norman Conquest, 1066**

- a. Edward the Confessor died without a clear heir
  - i. Plenty of people wanted the throne
  - ii. Harold Godwinson ruled for most of 1066
    1. His sister had been the wife of Edward the Confessor
    2. Considered the last Anglo-Saxon king of England
- b. William the Conqueror (William I)
  - i. Illegitimate son of the Duke of Normandy and cousin of Edward the Confessor
  - ii. Won English throne from Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings
  - iii. Crowned on Christmas Day, 1066
- c. England under William I
  - i. Centralized government
    1. Kept 1/5 of the land for himself and divided the rest among his loyal followers
    2. King of England, but a vassal to the king of France (because of Normandy)
  - ii. William I and the French lords under him spoke French
    1. Development of Middle English (combination of Old English and French)

**VIII. Review questions**

- a. What group ruled the Britons from 43 to 410 CE?
- b. What group(s) invaded Britannia beginning in the early 400s?
- c. What group settled in England beginning around 800 CE?
- d. What was the burghal system?
- e. How and why did the Normans conquer England in 1066?

- f. How did William the Conqueror establish civilized government in England?

## IX. Henry II (ruled England, 1154-1189)

- a. Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine
  - i. Added Aquitaine to his lands in France
- b. Henry II's development of the English legal system
  - i. Circuit courts
    - 1. Royal judges visited each part of the realm at least once a year
    - 2. These royal judges heard legal cases and collected taxes
    - 3. Slowly, these judges started creating common law throughout the realm by using common sense and establishing precedent
- c. Jury system
  - i. No more trial by combat, etc.
  - ii. Loyal, respected citizens (men) who knew the parties in a dispute answered the judge's questions regarding the case
  - iii. Juries became extremely popular and spread
  - iv. Juries were part of the royal court system only

## X. King John (ruled 1199-1216)

- a. Henry II was succeeded to the throne by his son, Richard the Lionheart
  - i. Richard the Lionheart (Richard I) spent most of his time in France or fighting in the Third Crusade
    - 1. Fun fact: A lot of historians believe that the Robin Hood stories are set in the time when King Richard was abroad, and John was left in England
  - ii. Richard died, leaving the English throne to his brother, John
- b. King John
  - i. Foreign relations
    - 1. Lost all of his northern French lands to Philip Augustus
  - ii. Domestic issues
    - 1. Unfair ruler with harsh tax policies (taxes used to finance failed foreign wars)
    - 2. Tried to take power from the Church
    - 3. Threatened the self-governing charters of towns
    - 4. Nobles eventually had enough and revolted

## XI. Magna Carta (1215)

- a. Nobles met with King John at Runnymede, just west of London
- b. Forced King John to sign the Magna Carta (Great Charter)
- c. Due process of law
  - i. No unlawful seizure of a freeman's property
  - ii. Right to a jury trial
- d. Important idea:
  - i. In times of crisis, a monarch could be forced to relinquish or share power with others in order to get what he/she wanted (in this case, tax revenue)
  - ii. Magna Carta granted power to nobles

1. Later, other groups would move to have the rights of Magna Carta applied to themselves

## **XII. Model Parliament**

- a. King John succeeded by his son, Henry III (reigned 1216-1272)
  - i. Henry III succeeded by his son, Edward I (reigned 1272-1307)
- b. Edward I
  - i. At war with the French, Scots, and Welsh, and needed money for these wars
  - ii. Called a meeting of a parliament to establish taxes to support these wars
  - iii. Edward I knew that the nobles did not want to pay more tax money
    1. He needed another group to check the power of the wealthy, powerful lords
- c. Model Parliament – November, 1295
  - i. Edward I summoned bishops and nobles (lords)
  - ii. Edward I also summoned two burgesses (wealthy, property-owning non-nobles) and two knights from each county (a.k.a. shire)
  - iii. This mixture of commoners and the nobility deserved as a model for later parliaments

## **XIII. Development of Parliament**

- a. 14<sup>th</sup> century
  - i. Kings continued to call together this mixture of people when new taxes were needed
- b. Houses of Parliament gradually developed
  - i. House of Lords – nobles
  - ii. House of Commons – burgesses and knights
- c. Parliament was started by Edward I to check the power of the lords
  - i. Gradually, Parliament became powerful
  - ii. Parliament grew to be a check on the power of the monarchy
- d. Future monarchs would have to deal with the power of Parliament

## **XIV. Review questions**

- a. How did English law develop under Henry II?
- b. How did royal judges create common law?
- c. Describe how early juries functioned.
- d. Why was King John unpopular?
- e. What rights were established under the Magna Carta?
- f. In creating the Model Parliament, how did Edward I attempt to check the power of the lords?