

## Letter from King John

King John to William Fitz William et Geoffrey Fitz Geoffrey et al:

(1216)

I was born on Christmas Eve you know, propitious or what? But even Kings have an off day and I seem to have been having a few of these recently but not my fault.

Since becoming King I have been very good at financial admin and especially the collection of taxes but none give you any thanks for that do they? I stood up to Robin Hood and all his 'taking from the rich to give to the poor nonsense' when I was manfully holding this Kingdom together as Regent (and got no thanks for that either) whilst my brother Richard was on some sort of a Crusade doing something. Big mistake Richard, you got killed and I became King!

And most unfair to call me John 'Lacklands' just because I lost most of our Angevin Empire by 1205. Historians will come to see my wisdom in this as it will bolster the concept of the 'English nation' later on but gainsayers can be very petty and very cruel, can't they? In fact I was called Lacklands because I was the youngest of 4 sons and my father did not give me any inheritance, thinking I would never be King. How wrong can you be eh?

I have also been called 'John Softsword' by those who wish to usurp my authority by dwelling on English losses in France. Petty. I would say 'wake up and smell the coffee' but as we do not yet have coffee the comment cannot apply.

And yes, I admit I have been unlucky in love. Married two women of the same name and we lived together as a sort of menage a trois if you will pardon my French. One was much older than me and the other much younger and it was a bit awkward for a while but no harm done.

And yes, I did get England excommunicated by the Pope in 1209 for having an argument about his nomination for Archbishop of Canterbury, but I have not been the first King to get into trouble with the Papacy and I bet I won't be the last. And I did say sorry to Innocent III and we are back in again so what's the problem?

And I knew you would bring this up. Yes, I did sign Magna Carta last year at Runnymede. Something about doing what the Church says and not charging extortionate taxes and only punishing people according to the laws of the land. Well, we shall see about that and if the barons think they are going to get help from the Frenchies we shall see about that too. And anyway when I go my son will sort it out. Admittedly he is very young at the moment but never too soon to start learning the art of kingship from his father.

And yes, I did drop the Crown Jewels in the Wash fleeing from my enemies who were wishing to do me harm for some reason but it was a freak wave that caused

it and I had to abandon everything and run. Those Lincolnshire mud flats can be very treacherous you know. And this will give plenty of people something to do whilst holidaying in the Fens, spending hours and hours looking for my treasure which some historical commentator has described as 'like looking for Elvis in Waitrose' whatever that means.

Anyway I am confident that all future English kings named John after me (and I am sure they will be numerous) will remember me as a role-model for high-standards, humility and Kingship. I will be a hard act to follow.

Johannes Rex Primus de Anglicorum

### Footnotes

1. After 10 years of marriage John divorced his first wife Isabella of Gloucester on the grounds of consanguinity, an objection previously overruled by the Pope as an impediment to the marriage in the first place. He had a number of illegitimate children but no legitimate offspring with Isabella I. He then moved on to Isabella d'Angouleme. She was 12 when he married her and he housed both wife and ex-wife together until Isabella II became pregnant.
2. Google Maps has found what may be 22 baggage wagons lying deep in the mud of the River Nene raising hopes that John's treasure may yet be revealed.
3. John died of dysentery very shortly after this letter was composed, brought on according to the chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall by habitual gluttony. His son succeeded him aged 9.

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