

BURY ST EDMUNDS

Magna Carta 800



King John and the Church

For much of his reign, John was engaged in a prolonged dispute with pope Innocent III, England's spiritual overlord.

This conflict began in the struggle to elect a new Archbishop of Canterbury. The pope's nominee, Cardinal Stephen Langton, was elected by the monks and was consecrated by the pope in 1207. However, John refused to admit Langton to England and drove out the monks of Canterbury.



King John receives chalice from priest

In response, the pope placed an Interdict on England in March 1208: mass could not be celebrated, the sacrament of marriage could not be received, and burials in consecrated ground were not allowed. John retaliated by seizing the lands and vast revenues of the church, but in November 1209 the pope excommunicated him.



Papal Bull of Innocent III accepting John's resignation of Kingdoms

By 1212, John had little choice but to make peace with the pope on terms which amounted to a virtual surrender. He resigned his kingdoms to the pope and received them back for an annual payment to Rome. In 1213, he agreed to accept Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury and to recompense the Church for his plundering of its revenues. Langton was at last able to return to England, after six years on the Continent, and in July 1213 he absolved John from excommunication at Winchester.



Pope Innocent III

But the usefulness to John of his new relationship with the pope was demonstrated most dramatically in the events which followed the granting of Magna Carta. John promised not to have the Magna Carta revoked but he knew that the pope (as England's new feudal overlord) would issue another papal bull to annul the Magna Carta after only ten weeks.

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