

# Fact File: Simon de Montfort

**The what, who and why of this pivotal moment in the history of democracy**

## Glossary

**Parliament:** from the French 'Parler', to talk. A group of people involved in making the law of the land, chosen or elected to represent different areas or interests. Simon de Montfort's Parliament of 1265 was the first to call for representatives from both towns and cities. Gradually Parliament became increasingly democratic with more people eligible to stand and more enfranchised (permitted to vote).

## Who was Simon de Montfort?

- ... a French nobleman granted land in England by King Henry III
- ... a skilled politician and military leader given great responsibility by Henry III
- ... became leader of a rebellion against the king
- ... called representatives of all the shires and towns to Parliament

## Who was Eleanor de Montfort?

- ... the king's sister
- ... married Simon de Montfort
- ... supported her husband in his fight against her brother, the king
- ... a powerful and influential woman at a time when women's involvement in big issues was limited

## Who was King Henry III?

- ... son of King John who had agreed to Magna Carta
- ... made and broke agreements, raised taxes but increasingly needed Parliament's say to do so
- ... was convinced that, with support people, he could defeat the barons' rebel army
- ... was captured by Simon de Montfort at the battle of Lewes



## **Key dates**

- 1208. (approx.). Simon de Montfort born
- 1215. (approx.). Eleanor born (the same year that Magna Carta was sealed).
- 1230s. Simon de Montfort granted lands and comes to England
- 1238. Simon and Eleanor marry
- 1258. Provisions of Oxford agreed
- 1261. The Pope cancels the Provisions of Oxford
- 1263. Simon de Montfort is asked to lead the barons
- 1264. Battle of Lewes, Henry captured
- 1265. De Montfort's Parliament first meets
- 1265. De Montfort killed at the battle of Evesham. Henry regains control of the country
- 1272. Henry dies and his son Edward becomes king and calls representatives to Parliament during his reign
- 1300s. House of Commons formed

## **Further background information**

### **Brief summary**

In 1258, the barons of England, fed up with the way Henry III had been governing England, forced him to agree to a set of reforms called the Provisions of Oxford. These reforms effectively removed the king from power and set up a council of fifteen barons who had the power to appoint ministers, and who were responsible to the 'community of the realm' through regular parliaments three times a year. In 1261 the king regained power and had the Provisions of Oxford cancelled. Most of the barons accepted this, but Simon de Montfort did not. In 1264 he captured the king and took over the country himself. He re-introduced the Provisions of Oxford and held parliaments, but in addition to the barons, he also invited representatives of the counties and towns of England to attend Parliament. This was the first time that they had been called to Parliament together. Although Simon de Montfort was killed in 1265 at the Battle of Evesham, representatives were summoned again to parliaments later in the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth century, these became known as the Commons. Representatives drawn from constituencies across the country have continued to make up the House of Commons up to today.

### **Conflict between the king and barons**

- From 1234 onward, King Henry III took over governing the kingdom, having been under the control of the ministers that had run the country while he was a child.
- Henry III lacked money and placed continued pressure on the people of England by collecting taxes. The government officials who collected these taxes were accused of abusing their positions.
- Henry III was criticised for being too generous to his close friends and family, handing out important jobs to them and protecting them from the law at the expense of everyone else. In particular people did not like the influence of two groups of 'foreigners': Henry's wife's family from Provence and Savoy (in modern southeast France, northern Italy and Switzerland) on the one hand, and his half-brothers from Poitou in western France, on the other. Each of these groups were also suspicious of each other.

### **The role and nature of Parliament and the Council of Fifteen**

- During Henry III's reign Parliament became increasingly important. Parliament was the name given to the occasions when all the barons met with the king and each other, usually at Westminster but also elsewhere. The idea grew up after Magna Carta that the king could only gain extra taxes by asking the barons first. As the king needed money he called the barons to Parliament much more frequently than ever before. In return for giving taxes the barons asked for reforms in government. They particularly wanted to be able to choose the king's ministers for him and they wanted him to follow their advice which he did not do.
- In April 1258, the barons were attending Parliament at Westminster and confronted Henry III with demands that he make reforms. They agreed to meet at Oxford in June where the Provisions of Oxford were agreed. The king and everyone present swore an oath to uphold these provisions which set out a series of changes in the way England was governed. The king agreed that he would accept the advice of a council of fifteen barons who could appoint and dismiss ministers, that parliament would be held three times a year. Henry III was forced to do this and effectively lost power over the government to the council of fifteen. One of the fifteen was Simon de Montfort.
- The following year, in October 1259, the Council of Fifteen carried out further reform, this time of local government, and introduced laws popular among the less powerful and wealthy members of society including knights, people who lived in towns, and peasants.

### **Increasing tensions and civil war**

- In 1261, Henry III asked the Pope to cancel the Provisions of Oxford and he regained power over the government. Most of the more powerful barons accepted this, but Simon de Montfort refused to break the oath he had made to the Provisions of Oxford, and left the country for France.
- In 1263, Henry III lost the support of some barons who then invited Simon de Montfort back to England. He arrived in April 1263 and began fighting against Henry III and his royalist supporters. Simon de Montfort had a lot of popular support from people across England who thought that foreigners had too much influence.
- The two sides agreed to let King Louis IX of France decide between them. The king of France decided that the Provisions of Oxford should indeed be condemned and Henry III should have full powers over the government. Simon de Montfort and his supporters refused to accept this and civil war broke out.

### **The battle of Lewes and Magna Carta confirmed**

- On 14 May 1264, Simon de Montfort captured Henry III, his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, and the king's son, Edward, at the Battle of Lewes. Having done this, Simon took control of the government himself, appointing a council of nine, mostly made up of his own friends and allies. He confirmed Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford.

### **What happened next?**

- Unlike in 1258, Simon de Montfort did not have the support of many powerful barons. Most of his supporters were less powerful barons and knights. He was also popular among the wider population. In order to strengthen his position, he summoned to parliament representatives of minor landowners in the counties, and of the people of the towns. Two knights were to be chosen in each county, along with two representatives of each city and borough (called burgesses), and they were to come to Parliament at Westminster. Before this, only barons had attended Parliament, though knights had occasionally been called.
- On 4 August 1265, Simon de Montfort was defeated at the Battle of Evesham. He was killed and his body was horribly mutilated. Henry III, together with his brother, Richard and son, Edward, regained power over the government. They continued with the local reforms that had been popular with the less wealthy and powerful people, but not the reforms that restricted the king's power.

## **The House of Commons**

• When Edward became king after Henry III died in 1272, he once again began to call representatives of the counties and towns to Parliament. This happened more and more frequently, and these representatives eventually formed the House of Commons in the fourteenth century. The House of Commons continues to contain representatives of the people of the country to this day.

## **Useful links**

### **Houses of History**

Interactive timeline organised by themes including 'Journey to democracy'.

[http://assets.parliament.uk/education/houses-of-history/main.html?theme=votes\\_for\\_all](http://assets.parliament.uk/education/houses-of-history/main.html?theme=votes_for_all)

### **The Simon de Montfort Society**

<http://www.simondemontfort.org/>

### **BBC This Sceptered Isle – Simon de Montfort**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/sceptred\\_isle/page/26.shtml?question=26](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/sceptred_isle/page/26.shtml?question=26)

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## Simon de Montfort and the Origins of Parliament Timeline

- 1215**  
**15 June** Magna Carta issued at Runnymede.
- 1216**  
**October/November** King John dies. His son, aged 9 is chosen as his successor and is crowned King Henry III. England is ruled by a group of ministers while the king is a child.
- 1234** King Henry III, now in his late twenties, takes charge of the government himself, removing the main ministers, the Justiciar (like a chief minister) and the chancellor (in charge of the government's administration).
- 1254** The first time each county in England was represented at parliament.
- 1258**  
**April** While the king is holding a parliament at Westminster, he is confronted by barons unhappy with the way he has been governing and who demand that he reforms.
- 1258**  
**June** Provisions of Oxford decided at a meeting of the king and barons at Oxford. The king is forced to accept the control of a Council of Fifteen. The offices of Justiciar and Chancellor were to be revived, and parliament was to meet three times a year. The Justiciar was to travel the country and hear people's complaints of injustice. The king and all the barons swear an oath to uphold the Provisions of Oxford.
- 1259**  
**October** Council of Fifteen carry out further reform, this time of local government, and introduce laws popular among the less important people, including knights, people who lived in towns, and peasants.
- 1261** King Henry III regains power and the Provisions of Oxford are dropped. Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, who is one of the Council of Fifteen, refuses to accept this and still supports the Provisions of Oxford.
- 1262** Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, leaves England for France.
- 1263**  
**April** Simon de Montfort returns to England and civil war begins between De Montfort and his supporters on one side, and the king and his supporters on the other.
- 1264**  
**14 May** Battle of Lewes – Simon de Montfort's army defeats the king's and Simon captures King Henry III, his son Edward, and the king's brother, Richard, earl of Cornwall.
- 1264-1265** Simon de Montfort rules England by controlling the king.
- 1265**  
**January to March** Called by Simon de Montfort, representatives of the counties and of the towns of England come to parliament for the first time.
- 1265**  
**4 August** Battle of Evesham – Simon de Montfort defeated by an army led by Edward, the king's son who had escaped from prison in May. Simon de Montfort is killed and his body mutilated. His head is sent home to the wife of one of the royalist leaders.