

EDWARD I :

FROM WESTMINSTER TO BURGH-BY-SANDS

a public lecture, given at Burgh-by-Sands Village Hall, 5th July 2007,
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In a sermon preached shortly after his death seven hundred years ago this week, Edward I was compared to Alexander the Great. 'Truly,' said the preacher, 'if the deeds and works of our most illustrious lord Edward, king of the English, were set down in writing, as the deeds and works of Alexander were recorded in books, Edward's works would appear no less, indeed, perhaps more, worthy of praise and splendid than the works and deeds of Alexander.' Like Alexander, the sermon continued, Edward had ruled 'not with a tyrant's evil character, but with unmixed equity and justice, doing justice to all his subjects, great and small, and administering hard-hitting punishment to those who wished to play the tyrant and act unjustly'. Like Alexander, 'he ruled with the power of warring down his enemies', crossing to the Holy Land 'to war down the enemies of Christ and Holy Mother Church', and also fighting 'to war down and subdue all who wished to throw his people and his commonwealth into confusion'. He ruled 'with energy and wisdom of mind' – in this respect like Solomon as well as Alexander – and although he was now dead 'with respect to this animal and bodily life', yet he lived on, first in the body of his son and heir, whom the preacher urged to follow in his father's footsteps, and second, it was hoped, by joining Christ in spiritual and eternal life.

These words of high praise should not surprise us. For one thing, the preacher was lecturing an audience of prelates in France, and doubtless relished the opportunity for a bit of nationalistic boasting; with his praise of Edward, he may even have wanted to stir up his audience against their own king, Philip IV: Philip was also often compared to Alexander, but had recently been harassing the church in France and squeezing it for money. Yet a glance at Edward's achievements makes it easy to understand why the king might be presented in such flattering terms. He had conquered Wales and more or less conquered Scotland, occupying the great fortresses of Edinburgh, Stirling, Bothwell and Roxburgh, and twice marching in triumph up the eastern coast to Elgin, Banff and the Moray Firth. He had secured Ireland and Gascony, and had fought in Flanders and the Levant. His triumphs recalled those of King Arthur, who united the land of Britain and took his armies through Gaul to the gates of Rome (and Edward played on this Arthurian memory, holding round tables at Nefyn in North Wales and Falkirk in Scotland; if he had not quite invaded Rome, he had certainly forced Pope Boniface VIII to submit to his will). And his domestic achievements were just as remarkable. He had published a great series of statutes, which, together with Magna Carta and the twelfth-century writs and assizes, were the foundation of the common law, the law of the land. He had answered the grievances of his subjects in more than thirty great assemblies, so that parliament had grown, under him, into a regular institution. He had established the circuit judges, so that civil and criminal justice could be despatched efficiently, and when the wars with Scotland produced disorder, he came to the rescue with

powerful judicial commissions – ‘trailbastons’, as they were known, after the club-carrying gangsters they were aimed against.

Edward, then, was a great judge as well as a great warrior, and these were the two attributes most highly prized by medieval opinion – ‘Lo, to fight and to judge is all the office of a king’, declared the fifteenth-century political theorist Sir John Fortescue, and the royal seal, used to authenticate, or authorise, royal documents, echoed the point visually: on one side, it showed the king in battle, atop a horse and waving a sword above his head; on the other, it showed him in the seat of judgement, holding the sceptres of justice and mercy. Edward I fulfilled the two roles of his office with particular determination: he was still fighting the Scots at the very end of his life, aged 68, and that – as we’ll hear – was why he died here at Burgh; meanwhile, when his coffin was opened by antiquaries in 1774, it was revealed that he’d been buried holding the sceptre of mercy, with its little silver dove at the top – it was as if the king had been frozen in the act of judgement for centuries. What, one wonders, would he have made of the search that had hastily to be carried out when it emerged that one of the antiquaries appeared to have stolen ‘a finger of the great Plantagenet’.

So Edward was more or less an ideal thirteenth-century king. But to us today, and no doubt to some of his contemporaries, he has a more mixed reputation. First of all, as every schoolboy knows, or might have done once, Edward I had three nicknames – ‘Longshanks’, on account of his great height (he was six-foot-two in his grave); ‘the English Justinian’, in reference to the Roman Emperor who produced the greatest collection of laws; and ‘the Hammer of the Scots’ – a sixteenth-century title which needs no explanation. This range of names fits in with what I’ve been saying – judging and fighting were the two main functions expected of medieval kings – but perhaps there’s more to explore here: we might expect the English Justinian to be the father of the English parliament, as Edward certainly was, but would we necessarily expect the same man to be the conqueror of Wales and the scourge of Scotland? One of my aims in this lecture will be to consider how these two sides of Edward’s career fitted together – not only in theory, but in actual practice.

And there’s a second way in which Edward’s reputation is mixed. The hero-king engaged in activities which it is difficult or impossible for a modern audience to approve. In 1290, for example, Edward expelled the Jews from his kingdom. An estimated 3,000 people were given orders to leave. They received royal safe-conducts, and efforts were made to ensure that ship-owners charged them a reasonable price for the crossing, but the fact remains that they were driven out of their homes, their non-portable assets were seized, and some were almost certainly robbed and killed on their journey to the continent. Edward’s wars in Wales and Scotland, meanwhile, were conducted with much savagery. The 1298 battle of Falkirk ended in the slaughter of the Scottish infantry: the lords having fled on horseback, it was the common men who paid the price for what the king regarded as a rebellion. The city of Perth was sacked that same year, the soldiers in the garrison of Caerlaverock hanged two years later; the Scottish leader, William Wallace, was subjected to a show trial, and hanged, drawn and quartered; the wives of the Scottish rebel earls, captured at Kildrummy Castle in 1306, were kept in iron cages. Faced with requests that the captured earl of Atholl should be spared on account of his noble blood, the king apparently replied that he should be hanged higher than

the rest. Edward fought his wars in an implacable spirit, refusing to call off the siege of defeated Stirling until he had had an opportunity to test out his new weapon, the 'Warwolf', and taking what steps he could to destroy the symbols of Welsh and Scottish independence – the *Croes Naid* and the stone of Scone, used in the coronation ceremonies of Welsh princes and Scottish kings, respectively; the arms of Scotland were ripped from the body of the hapless Scottish king, John Balliol, which is how he got his nickname, 'Toom Tabard'.

Edward, then, could be violent and vindictive – and there are plenty of other examples of these traits. He hounded the earls of Norfolk and Hereford, who had crossed him in 1297, forcing both to surrender their lands to him in 1302 and granting them back on precarious terms; he sent agents to the deathbed of the elderly countess of Devon, bullying her into signing away her estates to the crown for a knock-down sum; he beat a squire so badly at the wedding of his daughter Margaret that he felt obliged to send him £14 the next day as compensation. Edward may have been remembered as Alexander, but he pushed his subjects to the point of rebellion in the decade before he died, and the first act of his son's reign was a change to the coronation oath, so that succeeding kings were made to swear that they would keep the laws and agreements that they had made with their subjects. Within a few years of Edward's death, the English had been driven out of Scotland, and the North was beginning to experience two decades of violent raiding; the English army was roundly defeated at Bannockburn in 1314, and Edward's own son, Edward II, was deposed and murdered in 1327. No king can be held responsible for what happened twenty years after he died, but we need to remember that Edward's reign was not all roses, and some of its triumphs were short-lived.

Even so, the king who showed such harshness and cunning was the same man who was praised for his nobility and justice, and the same man who put up stone crosses in memory of his wife, at the points where her body rested on its last journey southward in 1290. In a letter to the abbot of Cluny a few months later, Edward wrote affectingly of Queen Eleanor 'whom we dearly loved when she lived, and do not cease to love while she is dead'. We need to understand how this feeling man, with his many talents and positive attributes, could also have done such dreadful things; we need to understand what was desirable, even necessary, to rule a thirteenth-century kingdom like Edward's.

So, to follow Edward I's journey from Westminster to Burgh-by-Sands – his journey from birth to death, but also his movements from the centre of government and administration in London to the battlefields of France, Wales and Scotland – we need to know about the world of the later thirteenth century, the key events and dynamics of the period, the values and ideas that mattered, the frameworks of power. These can explain why Edward did what he did, and also why he was able to achieve so much. In the rest of this lecture, then, I'm going to tell the story of Edward's life, but also to try to explain something about his times.

Edward was born at Westminster – even then the principal royal palace – on 17 June 1239, the eldest son and first-born child of King Henry III and his wife Eleanor of Provence. He was named for Edward the Confessor, the last pre-Conquest king of England (apart from the usurper Harold), canonised in 1161 and by now patron saint of the royal house. The choice of name is revealing: Henry III was the fourth

Plantagenet king of England, grandson of Henry, count of Anjou, who, as Henry II, had seized the throne in 1154. Like their Norman predecessors, these French kings of England were at pains to emphasise their affection for English laws and traditions, in order to make themselves seem more legitimate; and none was more bent on this policy than Henry III – for two simple reasons. First, he was the son of King John, whose hated rule had ended in civil war, as he tried to overturn Magna Carta, the great charter of liberties he had been forced to grant his subjects. And second, by the time Henry began to rule in person, in the 1230s, he had lost almost all the vast French territories that had belonged to his grandfather: try as he might to win them back, Henry was stuck with being king of England and not a lot else. He seems to have been a weak man, unable to win battles or to convince his subjects that he was the master of his councillors and ministers. Like many unsuccessful kings, he put his faith in religion, spending tens of thousands on the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey; but the resulting financial shortages, the oppressions of uncontrolled royal officers, and the wild behaviour of Henry's favourites created serious political problems, and by the 1250s, when Edward was in his teens, the country was heading for civil war.

This war, which broke out in 1258, when a group of barons, led by Simon de Montfort, forced the king to accept reforms, had a profound influence on Edward, and set the conditions in which his reign took place. For these reasons I need to say a bit about its underlying causes. Feeble as Henry III was, the war of the 1250s and 60s was not all his fault; it was also the result of three big changes that were affecting the political system of England and many other countries; changes that reached a head in the middle of the thirteenth century.

The first of these changes was in the sphere of political ideas. Before the thirteenth century, political rule was mainly a matter of personal lordship. Great men did not so much govern territory as rule over people: underlings who owed them services, including obligations of hospitality, military backing and rent in cash or in kind. These underlings were called vassals, but they also had vassals of their own, to whom they acted as lords. Society was thus organised in a great hierarchy of lordship and service, and the chief lord, the king, was not really all that different from any other lord: he might claim divine appointment and play up the historic rights of his crown of England, but he spent most of his time ruling over his vassals – leading them in war, judging their disputes – and leaving them to rule the men beneath them. This, then, was a light-touch regime, leaving lots of freedom, power and authority in the hands of barons.

From the late twelfth century, though, under the influence of the Church and the revived study of Roman Law, a new model of authority began to influence rulers. It was a model much closer to our own notions of power, in which each territory has a government, which exists to govern all the inhabitants for their common wellbeing. Because this model was basically late-Roman, the form of government imagined was royal or imperial: the rule of a king-emperor, who was expected to govern all his subjects – not only his vassals – and to do so through laws. The fact that this government existed for the common wellbeing of all sounds like a nice idea – and in some ways it was: it inspired the king-emperor to hear his people's grievances, to seek their consent, to provide justice, and to make laws that would solve their problems – but it also entitled and encouraged him to draw the power and resources of his country into his own hands. If he was the guardian of his people, then they

must expect to help him, with military service and grants of taxation, whenever the realm was threatened. Equally, they must accept that authority and the power to do justice belonged absolutely to the king-emperor: these things had been given to him for their benefit, and if he didn't have them, he couldn't rule them properly. These principles, then, entitled the ruler to possess all directive or governmental power within his territories, exhorted him to make sure he had it, and encouraged him to regulate his subjects in whatever ways seemed to him and his advisers to be good for them. In this way, the stage was set for confrontations between the lords, who were powerful and used to greater freedom, and a newly interfering king; it also raised the possibility of conflicts between subjects in general and the king over the question of what was in the public interest. In the Roman Law kingship that swept through Europe, and into England, in the thirteenth century, the 'nanny state' was born. Then, as now, the English were not sure how much they liked it.

I mentioned three big developments, and the other two help to explain why these ideas had such an impact. The second development was the rise of governmental literacy – the use of writing and record-keeping by governments, the birth of bureaucracy. This expanded by leaps and bounds from around the middle of the twelfth century, and its effect was to make the king's government much more interfering, unrelenting and ambitious. Other people kept records too, but, just like Whitehall today, the king believed his own records before anyone else's; he had the best records, and he had a growing army of clerks and officers to sort through them and act on them. While kings could be pretty relaxed about their obligations, they had a sharp eye for their rights, and were taking more and more steps to define and enforce them as the thirteenth century went on.

The third big development was unique to England: it was the rise of the common law – a legal system that was uniform throughout the realm. Again, this sounds like a good thing for the subjects, and, in many respects, it was. Possession of a common law united the English people; it helps to explain why, by the eighteenth century, there was no *ancien régime* of prelates and nobles with their own rights and privileges in this country (or not one as rigid as those of continental Europe, at any rate); and it helps to explain the English constitutional tradition – knowledge of a set of rules that were the same for everyone explains why representatives of the 'community of the realm' (as they called themselves) were able to club together and demand concessions like Magna Carta, in which the king agreed to be bound by the law. The common law really is the cornerstone of English liberties, and it came into being between about 1150 and 1300. The flip-side of the English legal system, though – and this is less widely noted – is that it involved a massive assertion of royal power. The common law was the king's law, and its creation meant the concentration of judicial power, which had once belonged to all lords in respect of their own men, in the hands of the king. It's not surprising, then, that the growth of the common law was accompanied by a series of conflicts between the king and the powerful, as he sought to monopolise the doing of justice, and they struggled to retain some control over it. The big dilemma for leading subjects was whether to try to cling to what they had as individuals, or to accept the royal takeover but try to regulate it collectively. By and large, and for a host of reasons, they tended to opt for the latter course, and this again helps us to understand why the English state developed as it did. The common law pointed

towards legal protection for the subject and the making of a national community, but it also derived from, and affirmed, a very strong government – probably the strongest in the world, then and since. The English are the most tightly-governed free people in history.

What, you may be thinking, does all this have to do with Edward I? The answer is that these developments help to explain both the successes of his reign and the conflicts within it – those with the Welsh and Scots and those with his English subjects. That, I hope, will become clear as we look in more detail at what Edward did. But first of all, I need to get back to the 1250s and 60s, and the civil war, which was underpinned by the things I've just been talking about – the changing ideas of authority, the growth of bureaucracy and the rise of the common law. Henry III may have been weak and a fool, but his government was increasingly powerful and oppressive. Small wonder that a group of reformist barons pushed for regulation of the king, and sought more legislation to solve the problems of society; small wonder that the king himself and his closest supporters sought to resist this pressure and keep things as they were – they rather liked running the royal machine in their own interests, and a king like Henry also let his friends run their lordships as they pleased, creating problems of disorder and feelings of injustice across the realm. As son and heir, Edward was in rather a quandary: it must have been clear to him that reform was necessary – that the king would have to run his own government in a more regular way and provide better justice – so he sided with the rebels between 1258 and 1260, and pressed the king to accept a series of reforms that would benefit the large majority of his subjects. At the same time, he could not accept measures that would rob the crown of its rights and freedoms, so he sided with the king after 1260, fighting against Simon de Montfort, and finally defeating him at the battle of Evesham in 1265. This change of sides earned Edward a reputation for slipperiness – he was like a leopard said the author of the *Song of Lewes*, a contemporary pamphlet: fierce and brave, like a lion (*leo*), but also spotted and unreliable, like a pard. But we can see why Edward behaved as he did: he had both to work for improvements and to preserve and uphold the authority of the crown, on which his own inheritance and the order of the realm ultimately depended. As he put it himself, in a writ to the justiciar of his earldom of Chester in 1259: 'if common justice is denied to any one of our subjects by us or our bailiffs, we lose the favour both of God and man, and our lordship is belittled'. This ambivalent statement – of heartfelt public duty and high self-assertion – was to be the keynote of his rule as king.

From the later 1260s, when he headed the government of his ailing father, right through into his own reign, Edward embarked on a series of measures that both restored the authority of the crown and answered the needs and grievances of the people. While he and his officers set about the potentially oppressive business of restoring order after the civil war, for example, he also gathered an assembly of 'the more discerning men of the realm, of high and low estate' at Marlborough in 1267. At this assembly, or parliament, the initiatives of the baronial rebels were discussed and many of them were made into law. By 1270, England was calm enough for Edward to depart on a crusade to the Holy Land, and though he was away when his father died in 1272, the work he had already done ensured that the realm remained orderly. He returned to England at the end of 1274, swearing at his

coronation to preserve the rights of both king and kingdom, and – in a dramatic gesture – taking off his crown, and saying that he would not wear it again until he had restored to it the lands and powers that his father had given away.

There followed about twenty years of peaceful revolution, in which king and people worked together on the rebuilding – even the extension – of royal authority. At the same time, they transformed royal government so that it was better able to provide the things that subjects wanted. The 1270s and 1280s, then, were the win-win years of the Edwardian polity, in which the king grew stronger, and most of his subjects benefited. Edward sent out commissions of enquiry to investigate lapsed royal rights and to hear public complaints. He assembled parliaments to make laws in response to the results of these enquiries – two a year up to 1294, except for the three years the king was in Gascony (1286-9). These parliaments were often well-attended: that of 1275 contained more representatives of shires and boroughs than any before the reign of Henry VIII. That particular parliament made the first statute of Westminster, a great collection of criminal and administrative law, answering many of the concerns that had caused rebellion under Henry III. Other statutes followed – Winchester, which covered defence; Acton Burnell, which protected merchants and encouraged trade; mortmain, which regulated grants of land to monasteries and churches. Edward's judges and officers seemed to be everywhere, discovering problems and producing solutions, restoring royal power, but, by and large, using that power for the common good. One of the more controversial measures of this period neatly captures this mixture of public service and royal assertiveness. Edward's 'quo warranto' inquiries asked by what warrant, or right, great lords held rights of jurisdiction: since all justice properly belonged to the king, could they show a royal charter in which they had been given these rights? If not, they must return them to the royal majesty. Privatised justice of this kind was a serious nuisance to the majority of litigants, so these proceedings were a public benefit, but the king's campaign also sought to extend royal rights over the property of his greatest subjects, and it led to confrontations. When the great lord of the Welsh Marches, Earl Warenne, was asked by what right he held the judicial powers of his Welsh lordships, he threw a rusty sword onto the table before the king's judges: it was the conquests of his forefathers that had given him these rights, he claimed, not a royal grant. The king, on this occasion, had to back down, and various lords were allowed to keep their ancient liberties, but Edward did get his own back on Warenne, putting him in charge of Scotland at the height of the Wallace rebellion, and commenting to friends, according to a chronicler, that 'when you get rid of a turd like that, you do a good job'.

Well, Edward *was* doing a good job, and as he improved the lot of his subjects, he increased the power of his government at the same time. His restoration of royal justice increased his control over the kingdom, enabling him to compel people's attendance at parliament and to oblige their communities to stand by whatever the representatives agreed (again, we need to remember that representative assemblies work both ways: they press the king to listen to public concerns, but they also allow him to harness public support and public resources). Pretty soon, the representatives found themselves agreeing to royal tax demands, and on the unimpeachable grounds of defending the realm and its rights. Three large taxes

were agreed in these early years of Edward's rule – in 1275, 1282-3 and 1290 – as much tax as Henry III was able to raise in his entire 56-year reign. Taxation, and better justice in turn, enabled the king to solve the problems of military recruitment that had bedevilled his ancestors: with a realistic chance of wages, men would be much more willing to serve; meanwhile, judges and officers of the king could also act as recruiting agents – 'commissioners of array', they were called. In the more orderly, king-focused shires of Edward's England, raising troops to support the crown was a much more straightforward business.

As Edward moved into the 1280s and 90s, then, he had the makings of a powerful political and military machine, and the capacity to use it for anything which the prevailing ideologies of right and justice dictated – the right of the king and the right of the realm. This, of course, was the essential background to the king's wars in Wales and Scotland. The king had historic claims over both countries – ancient ones deriving from the British past and more recent ones dating back to the reigns of the Norman and Angevin kings, who had frequently campaigned in the north and west of their island kingdom. As king of England, Edward was the heir of the ancient prince Locrinus, eldest son of Brutus, the friend of Aeneas who had fled the fall of Troy and founded the kingdom that bore his name (Britain was thought to be named after Brutus – Brut, pronounced 'Brit' in Welsh, the language of the British). The rulers of Wales and Scotland descended from younger sons – Camber and Albanact – and were thus subject to their English neighbour. Or so the English argued: the Scots claimed to be descended from an Egyptian princess – Scota, daughter of Pharaoh, an even more impeccably ancient figure – but the superior arms and resources of the English meant that our version of made-up history had more impact. By the 1270s, the Welsh princes were tied into a network of oaths and treaties which corroded their influence over their own vassals, and made it difficult for them to defy the English king. The kings of Scotland had been luckier – they had not had to acknowledge English superiority since early in the thirteenth century, and the two kingdoms were at peace for most of the next few decades – but peace allowed the English king to win allies in the Scottish kingdom, and when disaster struck the ruling dynasty with the death of King Alexander III in 1286, and that of his only heir in 1290, Edward I was able to reassert his overlordship in the context of helping to settle the Scottish succession.

The wars which came along in 1282, when the chief prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, challenged Edward, and in 1296, when the new Scottish king, John Balliol, refused to supply troops for Edward's war in France, need to be seen in the context of the reassertion of royal justice. Of course, Edward fought these wars because he could – he had the men and the money he needed. And he fought them because he wanted to: war in a rightful cause was glorious, and by making war the king engaged his greatest subjects in lucrative and memorable adventures – his barons were as eager to fight as he was. But he also fought these wars because he believed he ought to, because justice and the rights of the crown demanded it. Both wars broke out over legal and judicial questions – Llywelyn had refused to accept Edward's judgement in a land dispute in north Wales; Balliol had broken the terms on which Edward had made him king. They were fought in a remarkably legalistic way: in neither war did the king move at once to conquest – he had defeated and reinstated Llywelyn once already, in 1276-7; in the early years of the war in Scotland,

he respected the rights of the Scottish kingdom as he understood them. It was only when King Edward was checked or betrayed that he decided to do away with Wales and Scotland as political entities, correcting and replacing their old laws, providing them (in Wales, at least) with English shires and sheriffs, annexing them to his crown of England, and saying of the ancient kingdom of Scotland that 'though it has the name of kingdom, it is but a lordship or an honour ... like Wales, or the earldom of Chester or the bishopric of Durham'. Because these areas were under Edward's crown, and because those entrusted with them had defaulted, justice demanded that the king resume them – and if it emerged that any holder of authority in either place would be likely to betray the king, then justice required him to eradicate its separate identity. By the 1300s, then, Scotland was being referred to as a 'land' – a purely geographical term – while Wales, then as now, provided the title and some of the income of the monarch's eldest son. These same attitudes also explain some of Edward's harshness in the Scottish wars: his opponents were not, in his view (and to some extent in reality) foreigners, but rebels, unnaturally fighting against their true and rightful lord. This is why they were not given quarter when they were defeated: in the view of Edward, and also in the view of his English subjects, and a certain proportion of his Welsh and Scottish ones, they should not have been resisting in the first place.

The same concern with right, justice and order underlay some of Edward's other disreputable activities. His expulsion of the Jews came as part of a series of reforming and punitive measures that followed the king's three-year stay in Gascony, 1286-9. While the royal cat was away, the mice in the royal administration had lived off the fat of their offices, and the king returned to a chorus of complaint against those who enjoyed royal protection, the Jews among them. We do not have to condone Edward's actions, but we do, I think, have to understand them. Late in the thirteenth century, there was a Europe-wide public panic about conspiracy, and lurid tales spread about the Jews, in particular, who were believed by some to capture and kill children for use in their rituals (indeed, one of the most popular thirteenth-century English saints, Hugh of Lincoln, was regarded as one of their victims). Edward's action made perfect sense to his subjects and to the other rulers of Europe, who quickly followed suit. It also fitted the mood of learned opinion as 1300 drew close: the turn of the century was supposed to usher in a new age of the spirit, in which Christ would return to earth and the Jews could legitimately be obliged to convert or face death as rebels against their true lord. Once again, Edward was doing what many of his contemporaries understood as true justice.

A similar complex of ideas underlay the political crises of Edward's last decade or so. The king's wars were expensive, especially in the 1290s, when, with characteristic ambition, he was fighting on three fronts simultaneously – in France, Scotland and Wales (where a major rebellion broke out in 1295). The predictable consequence was a sharp increase in taxation, with huge levies in 1294, 1295, 1296 and 1297, plus seizures of foodstuffs to supply the king's armies, and new impositions on goods entering or leaving the country (these last known as the *maltolt*, or 'evil tax'). Edward did at least assemble parliament in 1294, 1295 and 1296, and put to the representatives a near-undeniable claim to be defending the realm and its rights. In 1297, with resistance mounting, and against the background of urgent war and a conflict with the Pope, the king took his subjects' consent for

granted, levying a fourth tax, of an eighth of the value of people's movable goods, and, stretched for troops, imposing a new burden of compulsory military service into the bargain. The result was a serious uprising: the earls of Norfolk and Hereford arrived at the exchequer with a small army and prevented the collection of the tax; they also refused to muster troops for the 1297 campaign, and the king was brought to terms.

Edward did not come quietly. A propaganda letter from the summer of that year shows what a smooth and determined operator he could be. The king, it said, 'desires always the peace and quiet and welfare of all the people of his realm', and would soon attend to it, once the wars conducted 'for the honour and common profit of his realm' were over. Mystified though Edward was by the claims of some who 'might say, and give the people to understand, things that are not true', he set out his version of the events of 1297, denying that he had broken any understandings, expressing his deep grief at the burdens borne by his subjects, but also reminding them that he was 'sparing neither his own person nor his possessions to relieve them and himself of the great privations they had suffered', and making the clinching point that 'he could not defend either himself or his kingdom without help from his good people'. Over the next ten years, the king made a series of agreements with his subjects – abolishing the *maltoit*, suspending the seizures of goods, limiting military service – only to break his word as soon as taxes had been granted and parliament had dispersed. He was quite unrepentant in this, insisting on his obligations to his crown and agreeing to limit his activities only if his subjects would swear, on the faith they owed him, that he could make such concessions 'without infringing his coronation oath and without disinheriting the crown'. In effect, Edward put a gun to his subjects' heads. If MPs 'dared to advise him' to make such large surrenders, he was 'quite willing' to make them. In fact, MPs did dare, more or less, but Edward's control of the executive, his force of personality and determination to prevail, and the support of the powerful men who were fighting alongside him in Scotland, meant that his concessions remained empty, even if the tax burden was reduced in the last years of the reign. True to his notion of justice, Edward had defeated his subjects, and he had done it – as he saw it – for their own good. But this went against the grain. Time was not on Edward's side: his subjects had learned from the constitutional developments of his reign, and no future ruler would be able to push them around in quite this way – not, at least, until modern times.

That reference to modern times reminds me that I need to bring the reign, and my talk, to a close. By the early years of the fourteenth century, Edward had twice defeated the Scots, and looked to be on the point of victory. The parliament of 1305, which met at St Andrews, the ecclesiastical centre of the Scottish kingdom, made arrangements for the rule of the conquered land and announced a review of Scottish laws, on the model of that carried out for Wales in 1284. Within a year, however, everything was in turmoil once again. Robert Bruce, one of Edward's most important allies, had turned against him, raised the west, and got himself crowned king of Scotland. An expedition in the summer of 1306 decimated the rebels, but the king was too ill to lead it, and – perhaps for that very reason – Bruce's position revived in the early spring of 1307. In the last few months of his life, Edward I must

have been full of anxieties – his health was failing, the Scots continued to resist, and his son, on whom the future rested, did not look promising. The old king rallied after a winter of illness, and rode out of Carlisle on 3 July 1307 for what was to be his final journey. We do not know what brought him to Burgh – he may have meant to raid in Dumfriesshire, or maybe he came for hunting or falconry on the moor at the sea's edge; perhaps, like today's tourists, he wanted to stand on the ancient wall of the Roman emperors and look across to Scotland, the fleeting prize that just evaded his grip. Suffering from dysentery, he spent the night in the village, and when his servants came to raise him for breakfast, he died in their arms. Edward, son of Henry, king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Aquitaine and count of Ponthieu was no more.

What, then, should we make of Edward I? He was the product of his times, for better and worse. Medieval kings were people like ourselves, but they were also the keystones of a political system, and Edward ruled at a particularly formative time in the history of the English state. That explains something of his striking mixture of imperialism and representativeness, solemnity and savagery, charm and harshness. Yet he was also a remarkable man – six feet, two inches tall, with a drooping eye and hair that turned from silver in youth to raven black in middle age and snow white by the time of his death. He truly loved his first wife, and fathered 15 children, eight of whom survived childhood. Whatever we think of his behaviour, it is hard to deny that there was a strand of greatness in him. Like all great people, he must have been impossible to live with, and his subjects probably breathed a sigh of relief when he was gone. An Italian visitor would later remark that the English generally hate their present king and revere previous ones; certainly, they soon learned to revere Edward amid the disasters of his son's reign, and not until the heyday of Edward III, in the mid-fourteenth century, would the English know such excellent kingship again. Edward Plantagenet, born at Westminster on 17 June 1239, dead at Burgh on 7 July 1307, is a strong and bright thread in the fabric of our history, and seven hundred years later, we do well, I think, to remember him.

Acknowledgements

John Watts is Fellow and Tutor in History at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He would like to thank the Burgh by Sands Parish Council for inviting him to give this paper and for their kind hospitality. The ideas in the paper are mainly drawn from two decades' experience teaching Edward I's reign to undergraduates, but he would like to acknowledge the influence of Michael Prestwich's work on Edward's reign, in particular his book, *Edward I*, which supplies many of the historical examples cited above, and also Gerald Harriss's book, *King, Parliament and Public Finance* and the articles of John Maddicott on 'Magna Carta and the Local Communities' and 'Edward I and the Lessons of Baronial Reform', which are crucial for understanding thirteenth-century governmental developments. The quotation from the sermon on Edward's death at the beginning comes from *The Death of the Prince* by David D'Avray, and the quotations from 1267 and 1297 are drawn from translations made by Harry Rothwell, in *English Historical Documents, vol. II, 1189-1327*. All mistakes are the responsibility of the author.