

The Angevins



1. Use in the classroom or as homework

This module contains a sequence of maps showing the history of early Medieval England, especially during the period leading up to, and then including, the time when this country belonged to what is often called the “Angevin Empire”.

Please see **Appendix A**, below, for more on what the module is about.

The module seeks to contribute towards the teaching and learning of history at Key Stage 3 of the English National Curriculum, and a series of suggested activities are included below to help in this (please see **section 3**)..

Key Concepts and Activities:

Key Concept	Activity
1.1.: Chronological Understanding	1. Sequencing activity 2. Analysis
1.2.: Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity	3. Henry II 4. Key events
1.3.: Change and continuity	5. Interesting times
1.4.: Cause and consequence	4. Key events 6. The Angevins 7. King John 8. The Angevins and the Norman Conquest
1.5.: Significance	4. Key events 7. King John 8. The Angevins and the Norman Conquest

The controls are very simple.

- The date label shows the date of the map on the screen, and the “forward” and “back” buttons on either side allow you to navigate through the sequence of maps.
- The “info” button, below the date label, switches information hotspots on, and the “info off” button switches them off.

These controls allow the module to be used in several ways. If what is required is a simple background summary to the history of early Medieval England, a quick run through the map sequence, using the “forward” and “back” buttons, will give the class an attractive, visual overview, allowing a grasp of the key events and processes involved in the topic. To help you in this, **Appendix B** gives a commentary on the maps.

If on the other hand a more in-depth look at the history of early Medieval England is required, these maps will provide an effective tool, either as a background resource or as the main focus for the topic. The resource can be used on an interactive whiteboard, or on desktops with small groups of pupils, or as homework on pupils’ own machines at home. The notes below (see **section 3**) will help achieve this.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the unit is to give pupils an overall understanding of the Angevin period of early Medieval England:

- In what period of history did Angevin episode occur?
- Why did England become part of the “Angevin empire”?
- Who were the key personalities?
- What were the key events?
- What were the consequences for later English history of this episode?
- Why is the Angevin period regarded as so significant in English history?

To fulfil these objectives in a way that fits in with a teacher’s own approaches, the modules have been designed to work at two levels, (1) to provide an overview of the topic, and (2) to allow in-depth enquiry work by the pupils.

1) Overview

A quick run through of this module will offer a clear visual overview of the Angevin period, and therefore provide the required historical background for the study.

2) Depth

There is a large amount of information about the Angevin period stored in the maps and text boxes of this module. These will enable pupils to conduct their own enquiries, and allow fruitful consideration of a range of questions and issues.

3. Student activities:

Below is a selection of exercises, one or more of which you may decide to undertake with your pupils depending on their age or level of ability, and your time commitment to this topic.

The activities are all relevant to the English National Curriculum KS 3 Programme of Study (see above for a table showing which activities match which key concepts). In undertaking them, pupils will be involved in enquiry work, either as individuals or as a group. They will be asked to identify and investigate specific historical questions or issues, and reflect critically on historical questions or issues.

To access the huge amount of information linked to the maps, pupils will need to use the “info” button, below the date box, which switches the information hotspots on. The “info off” button next to it switches them off again.

1. Sequencing activity

What are the key events in the period of history covered by this module?

2. Analysis

[The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to think about the nature of historical processes – and how that nature changes over time: different factors at play, different kinds of events, different results, and so on.]

Divide the period covered by this module into divisions – where do the dividing dates come? What were the distinctive features of the different divisions?

3. Henry II

Henry II is one of England’s most famous rulers. How is it best to describe him – as an English king or a King of England?

In what ways does the way we answer this question affect our understanding of early Medieval England?

4. Key events

How does this module enhance our understanding of the events we remember most from the period, e.g. the death of Thomas a Becket, and the signing of Magna Carta?

It is generally held that the Irish were conquered by the English at this time – but is this really an accurate idea of what happened?

5. Interesting times

Go through the maps and information in the module and describe how the different events would have affected the life of

- A. an English peasant?
- B. a leading baron?

6. The Angevins

List the chain of events that brought England within the fold of the Angevin lands.

7. King John

Magna Carta is seen today as one of the great events in our nation's history (and even in world history). For the average baron, knight or clergyman of the time, what would have been the most important feature of John's reign?

List the consequences of the loss of the Angevins' French lands during king John's reign – which was the most important of these, do you think?

8. The Angevins and the Norman Conquest

How do the events of the period covered by this module affect our understanding of the Norman Conquest?

What are the links between the two periods? List the ways the one set the scene for the other?

If the Norman Conquest had not taken place, or had not been successful, how might the history of England in these years been different? (Go on, use your imagination!)

APPENDIX A: What is this module about?

The module tries to bring out a fact that can be lost in studying early medieval England.

The political history of England in the Middle Ages can not be understood without reference to France. England was essentially an outlier of France during this period; even though formally independent, she was tied to rulers and their families whose ambitions remained very much focussed on French soil.

There was no such thing as an “English king” for at least 200 years after Norma Conquest.

- The Norman Conquest drew England into the French orbit; this country effectively became an adjunct of a collection of French principalities, a source of power for French princes which they used to further their ambitions in their homeland
- No king of England could speak English until at least John’s time, probably later; Henry IV (1399-1413) was the first king whose mother tongue was English.
- French was the language of the court throughout most of the Middle Ages; indeed, the English court was a major centre of French literature
- No king of England sought an English wife until Edward IV (1461-1470)
- Henry II, the central figure in this unit, would have been astonished to learn that he would come to be regarded as a great English king. He could in fact understand English – but then he could understand all the languages within his broad realms, including Gascon. He could speak and write only in French and Latin. He spent two-thirds of his reign in France, not England, and his focus was primarily on affairs to do with his French territories. When an Irish chieftain went to Henry’s court to plead for help in his struggles, he had to go to France.
- Government, justice and education were conducted in French until the later 14th century

It is no wonder that, throughout the Middle Ages, the hopes and ambitions of English kings lay where their hearts were, in France. So far as the period of this module is concerned, no key event can be understood unless this is understood.

- The quarrel between Henry II and Thomas a Becket must be seen in the context of rivalry between Louis VII of France and Henry II. This in turn was due to the sheer extent of the Angevin “empire”, which of course posed a challenge to the king of France (who was the ultimate feudal lord of all those parts of the “empire” which lay on French soil).

- Not to labour this point too much, we may think of the tension between Henry and Becket as being one between London and Canterbury; it is more accurate to think of it as between Rennes, the city in Brittany which was Henry's base at that time, and the court of the French king, the protector of Becket for years before his murder. It was also a conflict between two Frenchmen, not two Englishmen (Becket's parents were both from Normandy, though he himself was born in London).
- Richard I is often castigated for not being in England more. In fact he did spend much of his reign within his realms – but in his French territories, which were to him and all his family those parts which they valued most.
- For contemporaries the major event of John's reign was the loss of the Angevin "empire"; the events surrounding Magna Carta were a direct result of this loss.

This French-ward focus on the part of the government had a profound effect upon English history. The wars of the kings of England were either conducted on French soil or for purposes over issues whose origin lay there. Also, they required huge expense, and the raising of money for their wars was a major preoccupation of the Medieval kings of England. Magna Carta and the rise of parliament were a direct result of this preoccupation.

The purpose of this unit is to help with this understanding in a quick and easy way. The use of these maps can do so without diverting the attention of the class for too long away from the traditional preoccupations of Medieval England at KS 3.

This module on the Angevins starts after the time of the Norman Conquest, for which there is a separate unit. It goes onto the time when the Angevin lands were more or less confined to England, a situation which, on the one hand provoked a desire in "English" kings to become again a power where it really mattered, in France, and on the other, did create the conditions whereby a truly English monarchy could in due course arise.

APPENDIX B: Commentary of Maps

The following notes give background details to each map in the sequence. If you do not want to go into depth, and just give a brief overview of the Angevins, the first paragraph (in bold) for each date will give you a summary of the information.

Some questions are included for discussion.

1087

This map shows the situation in England and France in 1087, at the time of William the Conqueror's death. The box on the left is the start of the family tree of the kings and queens of England in the early Middle Ages, between 1087 and 1216.

England and Normandy are shown in the same colour because, since 1066, both regions had been governed by the same ruler. This was William, duke of Normandy since 1035 and king of England, by right of conquest, since 1066. Even after conquering the much larger kingdom of England, William remained pre-occupied with ruling and defending his Normandy (which he held as a feudal subordinate of the king of France), only visiting his new kingdom when he needed to.

England was what in modern terms would be described as a “colony”. It was a conquered land. Its entire native ruling class had been replaced by a new one, composed of Normans and Frenchmen. Only a few isolated Englishmen had kept their position and lands. The bulk of ordinary Englishmen were kept in check by the many castles which the Norman invaders had built up and down the land.

France was at this time a collection of regional principalities, such as Normandy, Blois, Anjou and Aquitaine, each was under its own duke or count who owed feudal allegiance to the king of France. The French king’s direct power only stretched to a comparatively small area around Paris, but his prestige was immense – he who occupied the French throne was regarded as the undoubted overlord of the other rulers.

The Irish did not form a unified nation at this time, but formed a collection of tribes, each under its own chief.

Scotland was mostly under the rule of one monarch. These were descended from the chiefs of an Irish tribe, called the Scotti, which had settled in western Scotland and had gradually extended its control over the rest of the country.

The Welsh lived in a number of small kingdoms, each under its own ruler.

Question for discussion:

How is the situation of England and France in the early Middle Ages different from that of today, and in what ways is it the same?

1087 (2)

William the Conqueror had had several children. This diagram shows three of them (there were several others, but they and their descendants did not have an important role to play in future English history).

1087 (3)

In accordance with the normal practice of the time, when William the Conqueror died, his eldest son Robert inherited his family’s ancestral territory, Normandy. This left the second son, William Rufus, the kingdom of England.

All William the Conqueror's daughters (apart from Cecily, who became a nun) were married to the rulers of principalities in northern France, in the neighbourhood of Normandy. This was part of William's plan to surround his duchy with friends and make Normandy's borders safe from enemy attacks.

Adela was married to Stephen-Henry, the count of Blois, sometime around 1083. Blois was a powerful and wealthy principality in central France, a potentially dangerous enemy (or a useful ally) of Normandy.

1100

On William Rufus' death in a hunting accident, William the Conqueror's youngest son, Henry became king.

Even though Henry seems to have taken his role as king of England more seriously than his elder brother, like him he was intent on gaining control of Normandy from his elder brother, Robert. This he managed within a few years, and, as with other kings of England, much of his attention was then devoted to making Normandy safe from attack by negotiating alliances with neighbouring princes.

1128

To ensure Normandy's safety, Henry was determined to arrange a marriage between his family and that of the counts of Anjou (Anjou was the principality which bordered Normandy to the south).

He thus planned to turn one of Normandy's most dangerous enemies into an ally. With this in view he sent his daughter, Matilda, who as his only surviving child was also his heir, to marry the count of Anjou.

In the meantime, Adela and Count Stephen-Henry of Blois had had a son, Stephen, who, as the grandson of William the Conqueror, would have powerful claim to the English throne.

1135

When King Henry I died, he only had one surviving child, Matilda. Henry had had his barons promise to accept her as queen, but the idea of a woman ruler was not one they were comfortable with – especially one married to their hereditary enemy, the count of Anjou.

Stephen of Blois, as the grandson of William the Conqueror and nephew of king Henry I, was the male with the nearest claim to the throne of England (apart from his elder brother, who showed little interest). He had spent much time in England, had been a particular favourite of the king, was popular with the English barons and had a reputation as a good soldier.

Geoffrey, count of Anjou, and Matilda, had had a son born to them in 1133. He was named Henry after his grandfather.

Question:

What do you think will happen next?

1135

Stephen rushed to England to advance his claim to the English throne, and, receiving the support of the barons, was crowned king. Matilda arrived four years later, and a long civil war began.

There were very few set battles in this war, but the conflict led to a general lack of law and order in the country, which caused great suffering to ordinary people.

Whilst his wife Matilda was in England, championing her claim to the throne, Geoffrey of Anjou invaded Normandy and took it from Stephen's control. Thereafter he styled himself duke of Normandy as well as count of Anjou.

1151

Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, died in 1151. His eighteen year old son, Henry, became duke of Normandy and count of Anjou.

In south west France the dukes of Aquitaine had amassed a huge territory. Like the other French princes, they ruled as the feudal subordinates of the king of France, but governed their territories as semi-independent rulers. In 1137 a 15 year old girl had succeeded to the duchy of Aquitaine. Her name was Eleanor. She was the wealthiest young woman in Europe, and a little later she had married the king of France, Louis VII.

1153

Eleanor, duchess of Aquitaine, and her husband, the king of France, were divorced, and almost immediately she married the 19-year old Henry, duke of Normandy and count of Anjou. In accordance with the customs of the day, Henry therefore became duke of Aquitaine by right of this marriage. This made him the most powerful ruler in western Europe, even though he was still theoretically a subject of the French king (who directly controlled a far smaller territory).

By this time Stephen had effectively won the civil war against Matilda, but during this year his son and heir, Eustace, died. As a result Stephen agreed that when he died Henry of Anjou would inherit the throne.

1154

Stephen died in 1154, and the English throne passed to Henry of Anjou as agreed. He was now unquestionably the most powerful ruler in western Europe.

In the civil wars between Stephen and Matilda the barons of England had taken the law into their own hands. Henry now brought them firmly under royal control again. To do this he extended royal justice at the expense of baronial power, so laying many of the foundations for the future development of English government and law.

1189

Even though Henry was king of England, the majority of his reign was spent in his French possessions, seeking their security, and putting down rebellions. Henry's great rival, King Louis VII of France, was always seeking to undermine Henry's power and to support rebellion against him.

For example, Louis offered support and refuge to Thomas a Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, which limited Henry's ability to deal with his quarrel with him. Several rebellions were also led by Henry's own sons, Henry, Richard, Geoffrey and John (only the future kings of England are shown in the family tree), impatient for power in their own right.

In 1189 Henry died, and his eldest surviving son Richard inherited all the Angevin lands.

Ireland

Early in his reigns Henry had gained the agreement of the pope to invade Ireland and bring it firmly into the Catholic fold. However, it was conflicts between the Irish chieftains that drew some of his barons into Irish affairs, and these soon found themselves in a control of much of the island. Henry then intervened to have himself acknowledged as overlord of the Irish (1171).

Question for discussion:

Does this map help explain Thomas a Becket's murder in 1170?

1199

As king, Richard was to spend hardly any time in England. In the first years of his reign most of his energies went into leading the Third Crusade. After 1194 he devoted his attention to securing the defence of his French territories. He seems to have seen England simply as a source of funds for his other activities. He was actually in England for a total of only a few months during his ten-year reign.

On Richard's sudden death in 1199, John succeeded to the rule of the various Angevin lands.

1214

John's insensitive handling of his barons in his French territories led to the outbreak of several rebellions. These played into the hands of the cunning French king, Philip Augustus, and to the swift loss of most of the Angevin lands in France. This mostly occurred as the barons in these territories transferred their allegiance to the French king (who had, after all, been their ultimate feudal superior all along).

Question:

What do we mean by "ultimate feudal superior"?

1215

John's efforts to recover these lands were unsuccessful, and his efforts to raise funds for the campaigns involved harsh treatment of the English Church and barons. This led directly to the civil war in England and to his being forced to sign Magna Carta, in 1215.

The loss of extensive lands in France was a situation no Angevin king could tolerate for long. John's efforts to secure the funds needed for his French campaign led him to squeeze money out of the English church and barons very effectively, but involved harshly abusing of his feudal rights over them. In 1214 civil war broke out, with the barons demanding that he treat them fairly. These demands were enshrined in a document, Magna Carta, which they forced him to sign in 1215. He repudiated the document almost immediately, but later generations came to regard Magna Carta as a charter which guaranteed the basic right of all Englishmen to be treated fairly by the monarch and his government.

Gascony

This area of France remained in the hands of the English kings for more than two hundred years. In that time it developed a close link with England, especially in the field of trade. The Gascon wine trade in particular became an important source of wealth to English merchants (and, through customs paid on the wine, to the English exchequer).

Question for discussion:

How does these maps help in our understanding of the historical background to Magna Carta?