

DARK SECRET HISTORIES

Joe Murray Callaghan (ed.)

**Terrible Secrets
of Incredible
Iconic Historical
Figures**

feat. The Crusades, Saladin, The Darkhads, Ogedei Khan, Siddhartha
Gautama, Shakyamuni, Ercole Matthioli, Eustache Dauger

*... and Its Intriguing Dangerous
Splendour*

INTEGRAL

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Mask**

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The Lost King Who Did Not Speak English—Richard The Lionheart

Richard I—aka Richard the Lionheart—is remembered for being a chivalrous medieval king; for battling Saladin during the Crusades; and for rebelling against his father, Henry II (1133–1189). His name has become an English legend, but how much do you know about him? Writing for *History Extra*, author Douglas Boyd reveals eight surprising facts about Richard the Lionheart.

Was he really betrothed at the age of nine? Did he spend most of his time abroad, fighting the Crusades? And did King Richard ever meet the legendary Robin Hood, as the 1973 Disney film suggests?

Richard was born in September 1157 in what was then known as “the King’s Houses”, a palace built by his great-grandfather Henry I outside the north gate of Oxford city because it was a comfortable ride from there to his hunting tower at Woodstock. Standing near the present site of Worcester College, the palace was later demolished, but a commemorative plaque on the north side of Beaumont Street records its existence and the possibility that two kings of England may have been born there: Richard I and his younger brother John. However, Richard did not spend a great deal of time in England and he may not have learned to speak English. In his whole reign, he spent no more than six months north of the Channel.

At that time, half of England was owned by a network of 200 related Anglo-Norman families (and the rest by the crown and the church). In the century since the Norman Conquest, followers of William the Bastard and his successors married noble Anglo-Saxon women to form a new French-speaking aristocracy. Their wealth and even their food were supplied by the toil of their native Anglo-Saxon serfs, few of whom rose to greatness.

Traces of the racial and class divide of this time still exist in modern English. For the live animals herded, tended, milked and slaughtered by the natives we still use their Anglo-Saxon names like *sheep*, *calf*, *cow* and *swine*. For the cooked meat on the table, which only the French-speaking overlords were allowed to eat, we use the French equivalents: *mutton*, *veal*, *beef* and *pork*.

More cruelly still, the poor natives were not allowed to hunt wild animals for food in the forests, or even gather winter fuel there. Some modern placenames tell this story: Cannock Chase in Staffordshire is so named because “chase” comes from the French word *chasse* meaning “hunt”. It was originally enclosed land, where the game was reserved for the exclusive pleasure of the overlords. A peasant defying the “forest laws for the protection of vert and venison” risked a long term in prison—or even death.

At the age of nine, Prince Richard was betrothed to 9-year-old Princess Alais, daughter of the French King Louis VII. She was a pawn in the power struggle between the Plantagenet dynasty that ruled England—and much of France—and the Capetian French kings in Paris. Richard’s father, Henry II of England, was also Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy—titles that Richard would eventually inherit. Richard’s mother Eleanor was the Duchess of Aquitaine. So both were technically vassals of Louis VII for their French possessions.

Yet Henry II tricked the weakling Louis VII into handing over his young daughter, promising that she would marry Richard when she had come of age. Like most of Henry’s promises, this was never fulfilled, resulting in poor Alais being kept for 25 years as a prisoner, during part of which time Henry II used her as his mistress.

When Richard succeeded his father to the throne at the age of 31 in 1189, he had an obligation to father an heir for the kingdom in order to avoid the kind of chaos that did ensue when he died childless and his brother John succeeded to the throne ten years later.

But Richard's lack of interest in women and unwillingness to marry any of a long list of eligible princesses meant that the part of queen at his coronation was played by his formidable mother Eleanor of Aquitaine, the only noble woman to whom he showed any consideration.

Whether Richard met the legendary outlaw Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, we do not know, although film buffs call him "Richard of the Last Reel" because he appears at the end of every Robin Hood film as the heroic, and supposedly victorious, crusader monarch returning to punish treacherous Prince John and the wicked Sherriff of Nottingham.

The truth is that, having insulted and alienated most of his Christian allies while on crusade against Saladin, Richard was unable to return to his kingdom except by sneaking in disguise through the territory of the Duke of Austria, one of the many enemies he had made in the Holy Land. Once caught, he was handed over to the German emperor, who demanded a huge ransom for his liberation, and the enduring legend of "Good King Richard" originated as a PR campaign by Queen Eleanor to persuade the citizens of the Plantagenet empire to stump up the crippling ransom.

Tournaments in Richard's lifetime were not the ordered ritual they later became, with noble ladies watching two knights charging at each other along separated tracks, each endeavouring to unseat the other with his lance. The *mêlée* of the 12th century featured two teams of heavily armed and armoured knights setting upon each other with whatever weapons they liked in a no—rules lethal forerunner of tag wrestling.

The painting of emblems on shields was originally to enable knights in a *mêlée* to recognise their own team—mates. The name Plantagenet comes from the habit of Richard's grandfather, Count Geoffrey of Anjou, wearing a sprig of bright yellow broom—*genêt* in French—in his helmet as a highly—visible recognition symbol. Often, the shock of head—on collision between two knights shattered the wooden shafts of their lances, with splinters penetrating the eye-slits of their helmets and blinding them.

In both battle and the *mêlée*, an unhorsed knight risked being trampled to death by the horses, which is what happened to Richard's brother Prince Geoffrey. Knights taken prisoner in a *mêlée* were freed after paying a ransom to their captors, which was calculated on their rank and wealth. So Richard could see nothing wrong with his subjects having to stump up crippling taxes to ransom so important a person as their king. In effect, this nearly bankrupted his kingdom for the second time in his short reign that ended in 1199.

To understand Richard's thinking, we have to take into account that, like many nobly born knights, he spent his whole life in warfare. The idea of chivalry and protecting the poor did not exist in the 12th century, when knights prosecuted their incessant power struggles not in pitched battles against a more or less equally matched enemy, but strategically by slaughtering defenceless peasant men, women and children, burning their humble homes, laying waste their fields and cutting down their orchards to bring starvation to the survivors, thus depriving their enemy of the support base that financed his unproductive way of life. It was, to use a modern expression, total war—an idea that the church struggled with, but could not stop.

On a lighter note: in those days of little hygiene, the cook was an important member of a noble household because his mistakes could kill his employer. After one particularly memorable feast, which

put Richard in great good humour, he impulsively knighted his cook, making him “lord of the fief of the kitchen of the counts of Poitou”. Arise, Sir Cook!

Outside the Houses of Parliament in London there stands a statue of Richard I seated on his horse as testimony that he was one of England’s bravest and greatest kings... or was he?—asks Ben Johnson

All English school children learn about this great king who reigned from 1189-1199. He earned the title “Coeur-de-Lion” or “Lion Heart” as he was a brave soldier, a great crusader, and won many battles against Saladin, the leader of the Saracens who were occupying Jerusalem at that time.

But was he really one of the greatest kings of England—or one of the worst? It appears that he hadn’t much interest in being king... in his ten years as monarch he only spent a few months in England and it is doubtful that he could actually speak the English language. He once remarked that he would have sold the whole country if he could have found a buyer...

Richard was the son of King Henry II and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. He spent much of his youth in his mother’s court at Poitiers. During the last years of Henry’s reign, Queen Eleanor constantly plotted against him. Encouraged by their mother, Richard and his brothers campaigned against their father in France. King Henry was defeated in battle and surrendered to Richard, and so on the July 5th 1189, Richard became King of England, Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou.

After his coronation Richard, having already taken the crusader’s vow, set out to join the Third Crusade to free the Holy Land from Saladin, the leader of the Turks.

Whilst wintering in Sicily, Richard was met by his mother along with a potential bride-to-be... Berengaria of Navarre. He initially resisted the match.

On the way to the Holy Land, part of Richard’s fleet was wrecked off Cyprus. The island’s ruler Isaac I made the mistake of upsetting Richard by badly treating his surviving crews. Richard had landed in Rhodes but immediately sailed back to Cyprus where he defeated and deposed Isaac.

Whether it was the magic of the island, the heightened senses from his victory or something else entirely, it was in Cyprus that Richard relented and married Berengaria of Navarre. An unlikely place perhaps for an English king to get married, nevertheless Berengaria was crowned Queen of England and Cyprus.

Richard continued with the Crusade, landing and taking the city of Acre on June 8, 1191. Whilst reports of his daring deeds and exploits in the Holy Land excited the folks back home and in Rome, in reality he failed to achieve the main objective which was to regain control of Jerusalem.

So in early October, after concluding a three years’ peace deal with Saladin he set off alone on the long journey home. During the journey Richard was shipwrecked in the Adriatic and eventually captured by the Duke of Austria. A heavy ransom was demanded for his release.

Kings apparently do not come cheap, and in England it took a quarter of every man’s income for a whole year to raise the funds for Richard’s release. He eventually returned to England in March 1194.

However he didn’t spend much time in England and spent the rest of his life in France doing what he seemed to enjoy most of all... fighting. It was while besieging the castle at Chalus in France that he was shot by a crossbow bolt in the shoulder. Gangrene set in and Richard ordered the archer who had shot him, to come to his bedside. The archer’s name was Bertram, and Richard gave him a hundred shillings and set him free.

King Richard died at the age of 41 from this wound. The throne passed to his brother John. A sad end for the Lion-Heart, and alas, also for poor Bertram the archer. Despite the King's pardon he was flayed alive and then hanged.

History can be re-read from various angles. As about the unconventional Richard, his education involved a good dose of chivalric medieval literature thanks to his mother's interest in the subject. Poetry was another favourite pastime and the king composed his own poems in both French and Occitan (a French dialect commonly used in romances). The young prince was said to have been a tall, blue-eyed, handsome fellow with reddish-blond hair and he was already noted for his courage.

This was a period of troubled and complex relations between England and France, and Richard, whose family had been the principal cause, would be involved in two rebellions against his father. The first bid to topple the king came in 1173 when Richard, his brothers Henry and Geoffrey, the Count of Brittany (b. 1158), and William the Lion of Scotland (r. 1165-1214) all conspired to join forces, almost certainly a pact orchestrated by Eleanor of Aquitaine. Eager to increase their own domains at the expense of the English crown, the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket (1162-1170), in his own cathedral in 1170 proved a rallying point, given Henry's alleged involvement in this shocking crime. Aged just 15, Richard had been knighted by Louis VII, another interested party in seeing the downfall of Henry, and dispatched on a campaign to invade eastern Normandy, then under the English crown. The rebels failed to oust Henry II thanks to his loyal barons and many castles, but Richard was pardoned after he swore allegiance to his father. Eleanor, in contrast, was imprisoned for her troubles. This was not the end of the affair, though, as Henry struggled to keep a grip on his kingdom in his final years.

Richard, as a prince, held the titles of the Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou (both in France and arranged by his mother), and he cemented his growing reputation as a gifted field commander and besieger of castles by quashing a revolt by the barons of Aquitaine. His taking of the once-thought impregnable castle of Taillebourg in 1179 was an especially splendid feather in his prince's coronet. Less splendid were the tales of his ruthless treatment of prisoners and forced prostitution of captured noblewomen. Still, despite his successes, Richard wanted more. Then, the fates intervened and Richard's chief rival for the throne of England, his elder brother Henry the Young King (b. 1155) died in June 1183. Henry II had gone so far as to make his son king-designate in 1170, but the young Henry's death from dysentery scuppered the king's neatly arranged succession plans. In addition, his other brother Geoffrey died in an accident at a medieval tournament on 19 August 1186. Richard was now in prime position to become the next king of England, but he was not prepared to simply wait for nature to take its course.

Richard again challenged his father in 1188-1189 when he and his younger brother John formed an alliance with Philip II, the new King of France (r. 1180-1223). The rebellion was again supported by Eleanor, and the war included the legendary episode in which the famous medieval knight Sir William Marshal (c. 1146-1219) fought Richard, had the prince at his mercy but chose to kill his horse instead. Notwithstanding their rivalry, or perhaps in gratitude for his chivalry, Richard later gave William Chepstow Castle, as had been promised him by Henry II. Losing control of both Maine and Touraine, Henry eventually agreed to peace terms which recognised Richard as his sole heir. When the king died shortly after, Richard was crowned his successor in Westminster Abbey on September 2, 1189. Also part of his kingdom were those lands in France still belonging to his family the Angevins (aka Plantagenets): Normandy, Maine, and Aquitaine. Richard refused to give John Aquitaine, as he had promised his father he would, and this only acerbated the rivalry between the two brothers.

Richard's first priority, indeed, perhaps his only one, was to make good on his promise made in 1187 to "take the cross" and help capture Jerusalem from the Muslims. The king emptied his kingdom's coffers for his mission, even striking up a deal with William the Lion—giving the Scottish king full feudal autonomy in return for cash. For a monarch who spent most of his reign outside of England, did not speak English, and recklessly spent the kingdom's wealth on foreign wars, Richard has enjoyed a remarkably favourable position in the English popular imagination ever since.

The Third Crusade (1189-1192) was called by Pope Gregory VIII following the capture of Jerusalem in 1187 CE by Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria (r. 1174-1193). No fewer than three monarchs took up the call: Frederick I Barbarossa (King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, r. 1152-1190), Philip II of France and Richard himself. With these being the three most powerful men in western Europe, the campaign promised to be a more favourable one than the Second Crusade of 1147-1149. Unfortunately for Christendom, though, the Crusaders only managed to get within sight of Jerusalem and no attempt was made to attack the holy city. Indeed, the whole project was beset with problems, none bigger than Barbarossa drowning in a river before they even got to the Holy Land. The Holy Roman Emperor's death resulted in most of his army trudging back home in grief which left only the English and French knights, who were not particularly fond allies at the best of times.

Still, despite the bad start, there were some military highlights to write home about. Richard, who took the sea route to the Middle East, first captured Messina on Sicily in 1190 and then Cyprus in May 1191. In the latter campaign the island's self-proclaimed ruler Isaac Komnenos (r. 1184-1191), who had broken away from the Byzantine Empire, was captured and the Crusaders would then govern until the Venetians took over in 1571. However, these detours were not really helping the overall aim of recapturing Jerusalem, even if Cyprus proved to be a useful supply base.

The Crusaders did eventually arrive in the Holy Land and managed to bring a successful conclusion to the siege of Acre (aka Acra) on the coast of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, on July 12, 1191. Begun by the French nobleman Guy of Lusignan, who attacked from the sea, the protracted siege finally worked when sappers, offered cash incentives by Richard, undermined the fortification walls of the city on the land side. The "Lionheart", as Richard was now known thanks to his courage and audacity in warfare, had achieved in five weeks what Guy had failed to do in 20. According to legend, the king was ill at the time, struck down by scurvy, although he had retainers carry him on a stretcher so that he could fire at the enemy battlements with his crossbow. Richard then rather blemished his "good king" reputation when he ordered 2,500-3,000 prisoners to be executed. Guy of Lusignan, meanwhile, was made the new king of Cyprus which had been sold by Richard to the Knights Templar.

There was also a famous victory for the English king over Saladin's army at Arsuf, in September 1191, but the advantage could not be pursued. Richard marched to within sight of Jerusalem but he knew that even if he could storm the city, his reduced army would most likely not be able to hold it against an inevitable counterattack. In any case, domestic affairs in France and England necessitated both kings to return home and the whole Crusade project was effectively abandoned. Richard salvaged something for all the effort and negotiated a peace deal with Saladin at Jaffa. A small strip of land around Acre and the future safe treatment of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land was also bargained for. It was not quite what was hoped for at the outset but there could always be a Fourth Crusade at some time in the future. Indeed, Richard noted that in any future campaign against the Arabs it could be advantageous to attack from Egypt, the weak underbelly of the Arab empire. It was precisely this plan which the Fourth Crusaders (1202-1204) adopted even if they again were distracted, this time by the jewel of the Byzantine Empire: Constantinople.

There were also some take-home technology innovations for the English king. The Byzantines had long used a fearsome weapon known as Greek Fire—a highly flammable liquid shot out of tubes under pressure—which, although a state secret for centuries, was eventually stolen by the Arabs. Richard must have acquired the formula from Arab alchemists he came into contact with on the Crusade for he used it to good effect back in England and on his later campaigns in France.

Before King Richard could return home, though, there would be one final sting of the ill-fated Crusade, for on the return journey in 1192 Richard was shipwrecked, arrested by Leopold of Austria (r. 1075-1095)—whom Richard had gravely insulted during the Crusade—and taken to Vienna. Passed on to Henry VI, the new Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1191-1197), the English King was held for ransom. Richard would only be released in 1194, and one can imagine the frustration for the swashbuckling king almost two years of captivity. The ransom was a massive 150,000 marks (which equates to several million dollars today) so that it was largely through new taxes in England and Normandy that the money was raised. Indeed, the sum was so high that even taxation could not raise enough, and Richard was forced to provide a number of noblemen hostages to make up for the shortfall.

While the king was fighting abroad, English politics was left in the capable hands of Hubert Walter, who was Bishop of Salisbury in 1189 and was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1193. Walter proved himself an able statesman and events would unravel which required exactly that at the helm of the ship of state. While captive in the Holy Roman Empire, Richard's younger brother John, conspiring with Philip II of France, made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the throne, but Walter managed to contain the usurper thanks to the help of another able if somewhat insensitive minister: he who looked after the realm's purse strings in Richard's absence, the chancellor, William Longchamp. The war was principally one of sieges and control of strategically important castles such as at Nottingham and Windsor Castle but in the end, the crown prevailed. Richard forgave his brother his excessive ambition and even nominated him as his successor. Hubert Walter was also responsible for raising the hefty ransom which had gained his king's release. In 1193 Walter was made Chief Justiciar and given overall responsibility for government, a position he held until 1199.

One area the King was wary of was tournaments, those events where knights attacked each other in mock cavalry battles. Richard only permitted their organisation under license—allowing five places to host them—and made knights pay an entrance fee. The latter measure and the imposition of heavy fines for anyone daring to hold an unofficial event were a useful means to fill the state's coffers which were so often emptied by the king's expensive military escapades. Still, Richard also appreciated that tournaments could be a useful training ground for his knights and, soon to be up against the French, whose knights were famed for their horsemanship, he would need as skilled an army as he could muster.

Given Richard's need to fund his armies throughout his reign it is perhaps not surprising that he was nowhere near the big spender on English castles that his father had been. There was a major investment in revamping and extending the Tower of London in 1189-1190 as indicated in the Pipe Rolls expenditure records but, otherwise, castle-building came to halt as the decade of the 1190s wore on. Yet another fund-raising strategy of the perennially cash-strapped king was to open up royal forests to local lords for hunting, with an appropriate fee, of course. Clearly, Richard needed all the money he could get his hands on for the conflicts yet to come.

After a brief stint back in England and a second coronation in April 1194 at Winchester, Richard then spent much of his time on campaign in France where he defended the Angevin lands against his former Crusader ally, Philip II of France. The pair had fallen out when Richard did not marry Philip's sister Alice, despite the pair being engaged for 20 years. Richard instead had married Berengaria of Navarre (c.