



# HISTORY MYSTERIES

## What happened to Arthur of Brittany?

Stone Age	Bronze Age	Iron Age	Romans	Anglo-Saxons	Medieval	Tudors	Stuarts	English Commonwealth	Stuarts (again)	Georgians	Victorians	Edwardians	World War I	Inter-War Period	World War II	Cold War	Modern
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King Richard I of England, or Richard the Lionheart as he is better known, was, as his nickname suggests, a fearsome king. However, he spent much of his **reign** away fighting in the **Crusades**, leaving his younger brother Prince John to run the country. Prince John was not a popular guy and even his own brother wasn't really a fan.

Arthur of Brittany was the eldest son of Geoffrey of Brittany, Richard and John's brother who had died in 1186. Richard officially named his nephew Arthur as his **heir** in 1191, but, when Richard died in 1199, it was his younger brother John who took the throne of England. At that time, Arthur was just 12 years old.

So, what happened to Arthur? Why did he never become King of England?

### Source A

On his deathbed Richard had named John his heir, but the rules of **inheritance** were still fluid and there were genuine doubts about who was the rightful **successor**.

*Richard Cavendish | Published in History Today Volume 52 Issue 8 August 2002*

### Source B

The king kept his prisoners in such a horrible manner and such abject confinement that it seemed an indignity and a disgrace to all those with him who witnessed his cruelty. At Corfe Castle twenty-two of these prisoners starved to death.

*William Marshal, a supporter of King John, describes the conditions in which John's prisoners were kept*

### Source C

With his mother at his side as witness Richard named his brother John as heir on his deathbed, not Arthur. It may be that Eleanor persuaded him to do so, or it might have been down to the fact that John was a grown man while Arthur was only twelve years old. Richard's deathbed wishes were not enough to stop King Philip, who immediately proclaimed Arthur as the real heir to the Angevin Empire.

*Almost Kings - Arthur of Brittany: [www.creativehistorian.co.uk](http://www.creativehistorian.co.uk)*

**Source D**

In July 1202 Arthur, and a force of knights, **besieged** his own grandmother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, at Mirebeau. John made a forced march to the rescue of his mother, surprising the besiegers on 31st July. One of John's barons captured Arthur on 1st August and handed him over to the King, who imprisoned him at Falaise. He was never seen alive again.

*From Arthur: England's Lost Prince by Sharon Bennett Connolly*

**Source E**

When King John had captured Arthur, he had him kept alive in prison for some time, but finally, in the great tower at Rouen, on the Thursday before Easter, after his dinner and when drunk and possessed by the devil, he killed him by his own hand, and, after a large stone had been tied to the body, threw it in the Seine.



*A chronicler of the Cistercian monastery of Margam, Glamorgan*

**Source F**

John's military campaign was one of the most complete and stunning victories won by forces under an English king. John was careful to rub it into the noses of everyone he passed slowly on his way back to Normandy. His prisoners were paraded, heavily manacled, as a public warning of the consequences of **rebellion**.

*Dan Jones, The Plantagenets (2013)*

**Source G**

Opinion about the death of Arthur gained ground, by which it seemed that John was suspected by all of having slain him with his own hand; for which reason many turned their affections from the King and entertained the deepest enmity for him.

*Reported by Roger of Wendover, a medieval chronicler*



What do YOU think?

**Glossary**

*reign* – the period of time that a king or queen rules for

*Crusades* – a series of wars fought between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East during the medieval period

*heir* – the person who has the right to someone's title or property after their death

*inheritance* – the things left to you by a person when they die

*successor* – the person who becomes king or queen after someone else

*besieged* – surrounded by armed forces

*rebellion* – an organised attack on official leaders

***Further Reading:***

*History VIPS: King John* by Paul Harrison

*Horrible Histories: Measly Middle Ages* by Terry Deary

*How to Survive in Medieval England* by Toni Mount

BBC Bitesize Pages on King John and Magna Carta:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zcyx2v4/articles/zcg66g8>