

From ‘Hammer of the Scots’ to ‘Lazy and Incompetent’ – Using Edward I and Edward II to compare how historians view kingship in the Middle Ages.

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Abstract

The Middle Ages was a period of change, where the ideals of kingship were significantly different to what we view as the ideal king in the 21st century. Kings of this period are held to a certain standard, a standard not expected of future generations. This period saw the reigns of some of the strongest as well as some of the weakest kings in British history. Edward I and Edward II are just one example of a consistent pattern in this period that consisted of a strong king being followed by a significantly weaker king. Modern historians have come up with a relatively accurate view of what would have been considered the ideals of kingship in this period. This essay is going to expand on that knowledge and use the reigns of Edward I and Edward II to look at each of the relevant factors, including the ideals of Kingship, Military Leadership, Historical Context, and Relationship with Nobility. These factors are going to be used to compare the reigns of Edward I and Edward II and look at how similar or different the kings really were and pinpoint what factors led historians to view them so differently, using both contemporary and secondary sources.

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‘The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you’ – BB King

‘One must always be careful of books and what is inside them, for words have the power to change us’ – Cassandra Clare

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Introduction

Within a period of 55 years, England saw massive law reform, great military victories, the strengthening of the crown, and a strong government under Edward I, followed by a weak government, military losses, and a forced abdication under Edward II. Consequently, Edward I has a reputation as one of the strongest medieval English kings; however, his son Edward II was known as an incapable and weak ruler.¹ The reign of Edward I has been widely studied by the likes of Thomas Tout, Louis F Salzman, Michael Prestwich and, a little bit more recently, by Marc Morris. These are all the well-known authorities for the study of Edward I. They look primarily at the entire reign of Edward, with a focus on his military accomplishments and his trailblazing legal reforms. Edward II's reign is researched by Kathryn Warner, Mary Saaler and Chris Given-Wilson, and this research focuses more on his failure to successfully lead his people, his embarrassing failure at the Battle of Bannockburn and his predilection to having 'favourites'. This research will challenge the view that Edward I was the perfect medieval king and Edward II was a total failure. This essay will explore the ideas and practices of kingship with regard to these monarchs. Edward I is known for his military success, his contributions to the legal system, and overall having all of the qualities his father lacked. Edward II is known for his frivolous behaviour, relationships with favourites and overall lack of the qualities his father had. The reigns of Edward I and Edward II still have questions that need to be answered. Questions to be answered include how the concept and practice of kingship varied between father and son, the circumstances that led to Edward I being considered a strong king, compared to the circumstances that led to his son's forced abdication and eventual death, the relationship between each Edward and their respective council/government, and how this affected the strength of their rule. A comparison

¹ Louis Francis Salzman, *Edward I*, (London, Constable & Company, 1968), p. 13.

of the two reigns will also raise questions about how different the father and son really were, and whether their strength or weakness was due to the kings themselves, or whether it was a result of the relationship, or lack thereof, between the kings and a strong and loyal council.

There is a pattern when we look at the kings from 1216-1399. There is a period of time where the reign of a 'good' king was followed by the reign of a 'weak' king, and so on. Henry III was known as a weak king, and he was followed by one of the strongest medieval kings, Edward I, who was followed by an even weaker king, Edward II. This pattern seems to continue until Richard II in 1377. This is a really interesting piece of information. You would think that kings would pass down knowledge and skills necessary to allow their heirs to thrive; you would expect kings to continue to get stronger through the period, not have the type of easily identifiable pattern that we see going on in this period. This essay focuses on Edward I and Edward II; this relationship is the most significant of the period. Edward I is perceived to be one of the strongest and most famous medieval kings, and Edward II was the first king to be deposed for his inability to rule his people. Edward I reigned after his father, Henry III, who was, like Edward II, seen to be a very weak king, who faced civil war due to his lack of skill. Edward III, however, reigned after his father, Edward II and was a relatively strong king. This makes Edward I and Edward II the perfect candidates for a research project that looks at how historians view kingship, military leadership, social climate, individual personalities, and the relationships with the nobility. As well as discovering how these factors affect how historians view the success of a king's reign. This research will look at the work of both medieval and modern historians with a focus on secondary modern sources, to try and discover the ways in which historians from the time and in modern day research view both kings based on the ideals of kingship.

Kingship

Ideas of kingship

There is no single, definitive definition of the ideal medieval king, but certain qualities consistently mentioned in literature make it easier to identify the characteristics sought after and deemed necessary for a medieval king to be viewed as successful, both at the time and hundreds of years later. A king should always put the interests of his realm before his own interests, and that this belief should be instilled in him from a young age,² this is common sense, especially for kings who grew up knowing they were destined to be king, this message would have been taught to them ever since they were able to study, a king should be ‘heroic’ and a ‘successful warrior leader’,³ battles were commonplace in the Middle Ages so all kings in this period would have had many a chance to prove how strong they could be as a military leader. A thirteenth-century legal definition of what makes a successful king comes from ‘The Needs of a King’ by Henry of Bracton, which states that for a king to rule well, he must have two things: laws and arms. Having both will allow a king to rule efficiently in both times of war and times of peace.⁴ Personal qualities of kings are also quite significant when it comes to strong rulers. A king must be prepared to be violent and ‘uncompromisingly forceful’, but he must also only do this in the right circumstances after careful consideration and the right counsel; he must not act to ‘satisfy bloodlust’ or for his own cause, gain, or ambition, but he

² Katherine Lewis, *Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*, (London, England: Routledge, 2013), p.25

³ Lewis, ‘*Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*’, p.25.

⁴ Henry de Bracton, *On the laws and customs of England*, c.1268, ed. by S. Thorne, (Harvard University Press, 1968-1977)

must be just and fair.⁵ Brown concluded that ‘The government of a kingdom required a king to have good sense, political judgement, ideally military ability, and considerable application to the everyday matters of government which flooded it upon him.’⁶ Although the personality of a king seems to be quite a relevant factor, it is worth noting that Lewis believes that ‘The specific personality of an individual king ... less important than his ability to fulfil ... basic criterion’.⁷ This is a sentiment that comes in handy when looking at Edward II, whose personality mirrored his father’s in many ways, but lacked the skills to follow the basic criteria set out for him.

The innate ability to lead an army and rule with an iron fist is an obvious quality that a medieval ruler would need to have; however, more personal qualities are necessary for an effective monarch. The ability to connect to others is a huge part of being a leader of any kind. Lewis suggests that it is imperative that a monarch have wisdom to protect his people, as ‘if he lacks wisdom, he will destroy them’.⁸ However, this skill is learned and not something a king is born with; many successful kings at the time, including Edward III, came to power as a child; the ability to take counsel from those with wisdom and the welcoming of others’ opinions seems like it is a far more necessary skill. The ability to speak and command the attention and respect of any person in any room is an essential part of being a leader; without this ability, a king would be unable to command respect from his advisers and his people. Without respect and loyalty, a king would falter.

⁵ Lewis, ‘*Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*’, p.25.

⁶ Alfred Brown. *The Governance of Late Medieval England 1272-1461* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1989), p.3.

⁷ Lewis, ‘*Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*’, p.25.

⁸ Lewis, ‘*Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*’, p.25.

The very first significant task a king must take part in is their own coronation. The coronation itself is a great indicator of what previous kings and advisors thought was substantial enough to include in the ceremony, and although the ceremony 'wording' is altered slightly based on each king, the premise is generally the same. A king's coronation is the first time they stand in front of their people as the official king of England. This is a significant event; it is the official confirmation of the king's regnal and divine power, and also the first time a monarch makes an official promise to their people. During the coronation, the oath they take includes four main promises. The first oath is to protect the church, the second oath is to 'do good justice', the third is to 'suppress evil laws and customs', and the fourth, which was added in the 12th century, was to protect the rights of the crown.⁹ This list is a prime example of what the church, nobility and kings of the time believed were the most important qualities a king should have and the promises they should keep with their people, to secure their throne.

Religion and piety in the Middle Ages, and even all the way up to more modern times, were a mandatory element not only for the monarch but for all people. Kings must be devoted to God. In the medieval period, it was believed that God divinely chose kings, that they had this divine power granted to them. John of Salisbury, a member of Thomas Becket's household, described the role God plays in the king's appointment. Salisbury believed that Kings were made in the 'image of God'; he was not a representative of the people but of God himself. God provided kings with the power they needed to rule, to punish evil and reward good. He believed that, as kingship was granted by God that any attempt on the king's life was an attempt against God.¹⁰

⁹ Marc Morris. *A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain* (Windmill Books, 2009), p. 99

¹⁰ John Dickinson. 'The Mediaeval Conception of Kingship and Some of Its Limitations, as Developed in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury', *Speculum*, 1, No. 3. Jul. 1926: 308–37, (1926).

Based on the evidence, it is accurate to state that the most important qualities a king should have are a competent and loyal council, a good sense of justice, the ability to lead and rule over his people, the ability to lead an army, a devotion to the church and God, and the ability to put his interests aside for the good of his country. It is now important to discuss if and how each of the Kings displayed these traits and whether or not they were effective.

Edward I – Ideas of Kingship

Edward I hit almost all of the contemporary criteria for what a king should be. His physical appearance and height alone commanded respect. Salzman described the change between Edward the Prince and Edward the King as the ‘fiery impetuosity of the prince had sobered down into the controlled, unflinching determination of the king’.¹¹ He had courage and piety in abundance, was loyal to his advisors and those he trusted, and he was generous. He had a temper, which we know, but he was also known to be fair and forgiving (to some extent). Spencer claimed that ‘Edward’s success, thus, was due to his masterfulness: the force of his personality was usually enough to cow any opposition and ensure that he got his own way.’¹² He was viewed as the ideal representation of kingship.¹³ Tout agrees with this notion, stating that he was ‘every inch a king’.¹⁴ Tout and Spencer have quite a positive view of Edward as a whole, which sometimes borders on flattery. However, in this case, Burt, who views Edward a little bit more critically, also believes that Edward came into the role with a ‘clear sense of

¹¹ Salzman, ‘Edward I’, p.42.

¹² Andrew M Spencer, *Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England: The Earls and Edward I, 1272 - 1307* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.35

¹³ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (Yale University Press, 2008), p. 559

¹⁴ Thomas Frederick Tout, *Edward the First* (London, England: Macmillan, 1893), p. 60.

what he needed to do' as king to successfully secure his power as monarch.¹⁵ This suggests that Edward did, in fact, fit in with the ideal characteristics of a medieval king.

Edward believed in justice and thought that all of his people, including the poor, deserved a chance at getting it.¹⁶ Edward himself stated this openly, claiming, 'I hold an office, and that office has its duties; let me look to it that those duties are rightly discharged'.¹⁷ In October 1289, Edward issued a proclamation stating that every person who had been 'aggrieved or oppressed by ... judges or other ministers ... exhibit their complaints'.¹⁸ The number of complaints received showed that the public trusted Edward and believed that he would keep his promises to rid his nobility of corrupt and unjust people. All the accused, except two, were convicted.¹⁹ Edward I prided himself on being a 'man of honour and integrity', a man who was 'quick to anger but just as quickly calmed'.²⁰ Good sense and a want to help the lower classes as well as the upper class and nobility is a quality that is necessary for a successful king. Edward I had an abundance of this; his personal belief that it was his responsibility alone to handle the corruption in his government for the betterment of his legal system, so that it would be as effective as possible for all people, was something that his father had failed at, in fact, something his father was complicit in making worse,²¹ is one of the things that highlights Edward's compatibility with medieval Kingship. Common laws as

¹⁵ Caroline Burt, *Edward I, and the Governance of England, 1272-1307*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.83-114

¹⁶ Salzman, 'Edward I', p.46.

¹⁷ Robert Benton Seeley, *The Life and Reign of Edward I* (Simmons & Botten, 1872), p. 37.

¹⁸ Seeley, 'The Life and Reign of Edward I', p.76.

¹⁹ Seeley, 'The Life and Reign of Edward I', p.82.

²⁰ Seeley, 'The Life and Reign of Edward I', p.15.

²¹ Prestwich, 'Edward I', p.599.

we know them today were not very common before the reign of King John and the Magna Carta in 1215, and still were not really used competently until the reign of Edward I. The legal system was made up of smaller groups based in different communities rather than one whole body, Kings made laws using charters and writs that could affect smaller groups, whole counties, or the whole country. The local peacekeepers, sheriffs and other law enforcement groups were in charge of enacting the laws and deciding whether or not there was a case to try and keep disorder at bay.²² Edward I was the first king to display an ad hoc approach to law and order, having a ‘direct and proactive involvement’ in dealing with crime and disorder.²³ Edward I also widened and increased law-making powers more than anyone else in a generation, earning him the nickname ‘The English Justinian’.²⁴ If we were to talk about medieval kings who were significant in developing the legal system, Edward I would be one of the first mentioned; his impact on the legal system was immense and long-lasting.

Edward knew the importance of building a rapport with his nobility, specifically his earls, after witnessing the period of civil war during his father’s reign, due to his ‘ineptitude in war and dislike of the aristocratic pursuits of tourneying’, leading to him having little to nothing in common with his nobility.²⁵ Edward knew that for him to be successful, he needed to build a rapport quickly with his nobility, a bond that was strong enough to potentially prevent another civil war. This was something Edward I was very successful at; he continuously showed loyalty to his nobility and could count on them in times of battle and unrest.

Prestwich believes that Edward I’s personality was a key part of his success on the throne,

²² Caroline Burt, “Law and Order in the Reign of Edward I.: Some New Thoughts,” in *Edward I: New Interpretations* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), p. 44–65

²³ Caroline Burt, “Law and Order”, p. 44–65.

²⁴ Seeley, ‘*The Life and Reign of Edward I*’, p. 99.

²⁵ Spencer, ‘*Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England*’, p. 37.

particularly in maintaining stability and avoiding any internal coups.²⁶ Although, as we mentioned earlier, a king's personality was not a significant factor when looking at a successful leader, Edwards' personality did, in fact, boost a lot of the qualities he already had, including the ability to rule an army and build lasting relationships with his nobility.

Henry III was a very pious king, with a specific devotion to the Virgin Mary. Henry tried his very best to pass this religious piety down to Edward, which he did.²⁷ Edward was known as a religious man; he was far more religious than the infamous Henry II, but nowhere near as religious as his father.²⁸ Tout states that Edward was a man of 'sincere and ardent religious feeling'.²⁹ Tout goes on to say that Edward was very orthodox and that he never questioned the rights of the Church in their ability to reign 'supreme' in all matters of faith. Edwards' personal faith is incontestable; he did, however, spend a substantial part of his reign contesting the papacy and other leading representatives of the church.³⁰ A view that is shared by Bachrach, who stated that Edward was extremely pious and believed that prayer would allow him to successfully defeat armies.³¹ A quote from Rymers' *Foedera* confirms this when he spoke about Edward I telling his men to pray before battle and assuring them that is the correct religious rites were performed by his army, he would then be able to 'pursue his

²⁶ Prestwich, *'Edward I'*, p.555.

²⁷ Charles Farris, "Edward I and the Blessed Virgin Mary," in *Edward I: New Interpretations* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), p. 125–42

²⁸ Salzman, *'Edward I'*, p.43.

²⁹ Tout, *'Edward the First'*, p.148.

³⁰ Tout, *'Edward the First'*, p.150.

³¹ David Bachrach, *'The Ecclesia Anglicana Goes to War: Prayers, Propaganda, and Conquest during the Reign of Edward I of England, 1272–1307'*, *Albion A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, (2004), 36.03: 393–406.

rights' and be able to 'expose his body' in battle with no fear of being injured'.³² Edward's piety is very important in determining his views on kingship; religious piety was a necessity for a king, and Edward I's painted chamber is a perfect example of how he himself viewed Christian kingship. Binski argues that the paintings chosen by each monarch to hang in the painted chamber is a very important and substantial political reflection of the kings.³³ References to Alexander the Great throughout the chamber that are almost certainly accredited to the time of Edward I, suggest that Edward had viewed himself as a man with 'unmixed equity, justice, and prowess of a Christian Monarch'.³⁴ This, compared to the work attributed to his father, Henry III, the painting of King Garamantes, commissioned in 1256, depicts the King being saved by his dogs from a rebellion of his subjects that was plotting against him. This choice is quite ironic considering Henry III faced rebellion from inside his own family, Simon De Montfort, his own brother-in-law. Henry III was like Edward II viewed as a very weak and incapable leader, and this did not start with the Second Baron's Wars. Henry III would have felt his barons' discontent at the time of commissioning this painting, suggesting again that these images do reflect how the kings themselves viewed their kingship or at least what they believed others viewed them as.³⁵ Edward viewed himself as a conduit for God, and he wholeheartedly believed that his piety would make him successful and would keep him on the right path, God's path.

Edward II – ideas of kingship

³² Thomas Rymer, *Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscunque generis acta publica, 20 vols.* (London, 16893), p. 639

³³ Paul Binski, 'The Painted Chamber at Westminster, the Fall of Tyrants and the English Literary Model of Governance', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, (2011), 74.1: 121–54

³⁴ Binski, 'The Painted Chamber'

³⁵ Binski, 'The Painted Chamber'

Exploring Edward II temperament and character will help with discovering the true nature of Edward, whether his temperament and personality were similar or opposite to his father, somebody who many believe was made for the role of king. Edward II had the makings of a strong king. He looked the part: tall (he was said to have been over six feet tall), muscular and handsome, with fair, wavy, shoulder-length hair.³⁶ He was generous, good-natured, and amiable, with a great sense of humour.³⁷ On the other hand, he could be stubborn and was known to bear a grudge, and, on occasion, to act through spite. Several historians have commented on his character, arguing that he ‘had neither the temperament nor the ability to fill the position he had been born into’,³⁸ and that ‘had greatness not been thrust upon him, he might have lived a life of great harmlessness’.³⁹ Considering Edwards’ attachment to the mundane, to the everyday tasks and hobbies of the working person, it would make sense that Edwards may have thrived in the world had he not been royalty or even so, if his older brothers had not died young, leaving him to be the heir. Edward’s most famous character flaw was his attraction to favourites: he would give men not from the normal circles of the nobility attention at the expense of the nobility. Further on in this essay, the topic of favourites is a focal point, a pivotal part of Edwards’ reign and probably the thing that caused him the most pain and damage to his reputation.

None of these flaws was necessarily fatal. His grandfather had shown similar traits.⁴⁰ Despite several crises, Henry’s reign lasted for half a century, and he died of old age. But Edward had one unacceptable foible: a predilection for hobbies beneath his dignity. Edward liked: rowing,

³⁶ Kathryn Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King* (Oxford, England: Amberley Publishing, 2017), P. 26

³⁷ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p.16.

³⁸ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p.14.

³⁹ Christopher Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship* (Harlow: Penguin Books, 2016), P.4

⁴⁰ David Carpenter, *Henry III*, vol. I (Yale University Press, 2020), p. 166–9.

digging, swimming, building walls, thatching homes, driving carts, making horseshoes and iron work. Although these activities would be praised in a monarch today, in the thirteenth century, they were considered fit only for peasants: nobles were expected to hunt, joust and fight.⁴¹ Subsequently, these activities were used in his deposition as evidence of his inadequacy and failure as king.⁴² It was common knowledge that Edward's "Personal likes and dislikes dominated his policy throughout his reign".⁴³ This did not work well in his favour in the eyes of his nobility. Spencer wrote that 'Edward II's failure to meet the aspirations of his nobility fatally hampered his kingship':⁴⁴ those aspirations were for a king who would ride out with them, listen to them, and take their counsel; not for a king who raised lowly men above them and participated in activities they looked down on. Edwards lack of support from his nobility hindered not only his success as king but also his success as a military leader as he was often rejected support from his most powerful nobility in times of crisis due to their lack of respect for Edward and also because of Edwards clear lack of respect for them and the laws put in place to keep Edward accountable for his actions.

Edward II piety is not as well-known as his father's or grandfather's; however, it is looked at in the Lament of Edward, a poem written in around 1327, believed to have been written either by Edward himself or somebody close to him; however, this is a disputed statement, and it is quite unlikely that Edward penned this piece himself. The poem talks about Edwards' fall from grace and his perceived betrayal by his close friends. Throughout the poem, the themes of religion are intertwined. Edward is depicted praying to God to pardon his sins and praying for mercy for his son, who has been forced to wear the crown. Edward spends most of the

⁴¹ Warner, '*The Unconventional King*', p. 24

⁴² Warner, '*The Unconventional King*', p. 25

⁴³ Warner, '*The Unconventional King*', p. 16

⁴⁴ Spencer, '*Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England*', p.1.

poem soul-searching and praying, further acknowledging Edward's devotion to God and Roman Catholicism.⁴⁵ Although this is unlikely to have been written by Edward, it is a primary source, written when Edward would have been alive and very likely mirrors Edward's religious dedication.

Throughout Edwards' reign, he did enact a variety of different laws and writs; however, his reign is mostly known for the laws enacted by his barons to keep him in check, laws known as the Ordinances. In 1311, Edward was very close to experiencing a civil war; his disrespect for his nobility had finally become too much, and his nobility were no longer confident in Edward's ability to rule, while he was being influenced by 'evil' councillors like Piers Gaveston. To combat the fears of civil war, the Ordainers created the Ordinances of 1311. Edward was very against the Ordinances and fought it at every point; however, he eventually conceded to most of the demands in return for Piers Gaveston's safety. The Ordinances included 41 separate points, which gave more control to the government over Edward's actions and councillors, with the intention of removing all evildoers from his inner circle (more specifically, Piers Gaveston).⁴⁶ The Ordinances also took control over the Royal finances, and Edward's ability to make war, and restricted the use of his Privy Seal. Edward confirmed the Ordinances, and this was proclaimed in London. The Ordinances were extremely hard to enforce; however, they were reformed multiple times before they were repealed in 1322. They also caused Edward significant bother during his reign, especially when it came to war with Scotland, where his most powerful nobles, including Thomas of Lancaster, refused to ride with Edward as he had gone against the Ordinances to make war

⁴⁵ Claire Valente, 'The "Lament of Edward II": Religious Lyric, Political Propaganda', *Speculum*, 77.2: 422–39, (2002)

⁴⁶ Mary Saaler, *Edward II: 1307-1327* (London, England: Stacey International, 1997), p.54

with Scotland without Parliamentary permission.⁴⁷ Other information regarding Edwards' laws is conflicting with the Brut stating that 'The land was without law, for Holy Church had no more reverence than it had been a brothel'.⁴⁸ However, the Scalacronica stated that 'the commons of Edwards' time were wealthy and protected by strong laws'.⁴⁹ It is likely that both of these statements are overexaggerated, but it does show that, at the time, many people believed that Edwards' laws, in particular, were not at all helping the common person.⁵⁰

Although Edward had the look of a king and the piety to go with it, he lacked in nearly every other element. His inability to form connections with his nobility, this lack of connections, detrimentally impacting his ability to lead his people and armies, almost always putting his and his inner circle's interests before the crown's. The Ordinances of 1311 detrimentally affected Edward's ability to rule; his nobility's lack of confidence in Edward made it very hard for Edward to do anything significant without their permission. The embarrassment of the Battle of Bannockburn is a famous example of how the Ordinances were used against him by his nobility, in ways no other king had been subjected to. Without the Ordinances, the nobility would have had no good legal reason not to ride with Edward and support him in his wars; however, as Edward had gone against the Ordinances, making war with Scotland, the nobility had the perfect reason not to help him.

⁴⁷ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p.56.

1.1.1 ⁴⁸ Brut Chronicle (1346 Continuation) (English MS 103)

⁴⁹ Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica: The Reigns of Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III* (Legare Street Press, 1836) p.70.

⁵⁰ Warner, *'The Unconventional King'*, p. 161.

Historical Context

The differences in the wider context of the historical events surrounding the start and end of the reigns are key to comparing how contemporaries viewed the kings. On 16th of November 1272, Edward received the news that King Henry III had passed away, making him the new King of England. Edward was still mourning the loss of his son John, who died the previous year in August. Edward, although having a complicated past with his father, mourned him greatly. It was documented that Edward commented, ‘a child can be replaced but a father cannot’ when people noticed that he had mourned his father more than he had mourned his son.⁵¹ On Sunday, 20th of November 1272, Prince Edward became King Edward I of England.⁵² Edward did not believe it was prudent for him to go straight back to England for his coronation and chose to travel quite slowly back to England. He did not reach English soil until Thursday, 2nd of August 1274, followed closely by his coronation on the 19th of August 1274.⁵³ Edward I gained the throne of England at a very inopportune time; Henry III had left England in a ‘state of extreme disorder’.⁵⁴ Only seven years prior, England was ending a catastrophic civil war against Simon de Montfort, leaving England in a vulnerable state. Edward himself had racked up debts from his vast number of loans he had to take out, both as prince and as a new king, for the funding of his crusades.⁵⁵ Edwards’ absence at the very start of his reign left crime rates in England to increase, and hostilities between some of the nobility. Edward came back to worries of a new civil war and unrest boiling in Wales. Edward was in a position where he was forced to increase taxes to keep up with loan

⁵¹ Salzman, ‘Edward I’, p.33.

⁵² Tout, ‘*Edward the First*’, p. 84.

⁵³ Salzman, ‘Edward I’, p.40.

⁵⁴ Seeley, ‘*The Life and Reign of Edward I*’, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Prestwich, ‘*Edward I*’, p.81.

repayments, which did not calm the uneasiness the English people were feeling at the start of his reign. Fear was one of Edwards biggest foes at the beginning of his reign, nobody wanted a repeat of Henry III, and although Edward showed potential he was known to be quite volatile and believing the crown should have a lot more power than it had, which put everybody on edge, waiting to see whether he would be up to the task or whether they would soon be raising arms against another king.⁵⁶ Records show that Edward had a massive reshuffle of officials at the start of his reign, purposely placing people in power who he was sure were completely loyal to him, those already in his inner circle, including Robert Burnell.⁵⁷ Edwards' determination to reform the legal system was legendary. What he was doing was not a new concept, but the scale he did it and the talent he and his loyal advisors possessed, were characteristics that rapidly lessened the fears of the nobility. Benton-Seeley, believes that Robert Burnell is the legendary mind behind Edwards' successful legislation, suggesting that Edwards' ability to choose and listen to reliable, competent, and loyal advisors was a skill he had since the start of his reign.⁵⁸

Edward I ended his reign quite successfully after defending the English borders against Scotland and defeating Wales, and also restoring his authority in Gascony, earning him the name 'Hammer of the Scots' and the legacy of a warrior. However, with a successful battle comes a significant cost, a cost Edward could not afford. Edward I took many significant loans out during his reign, and although he attempted to pay back as much as he could during the last few years of his reign, the debt was too high to pay. In 1305, Scotland was far from defeated, but England was seemingly on the winning side, or so it seemed; however, by the

⁵⁶ Tout, *'Edward the First'*, p.66.

⁵⁷ Prestwich, *'Edward I'*, p.92.

⁵⁸ Seeley, *'The Life and Reign of Edward I'*, p. 244

end of Edward's reign, there was a brewing war that would not be dealt with during his lifetime.

Edward II inherited quite a significant debt from his father when he became king, believed to be around £200,000. Edward II not only inherited significant debt, but also an upcoming war with no funds and little to no real experience with a powerful nation that his father, a mighty and decorated war hero, military leader, and king, could not stop, even with the piles of money he had spent over the years.⁵⁹ Edward I left Edward II with little to no money in his coffers, and also with ongoing and volatile 'unfriendly relations with France and restless magnates', a task a more suitable king would have found nearly impossible to handle.⁶⁰

Edward II's reign was not easy to predict. Edward had all the makings of a king but lacked the skills necessary to succeed; however, nobody knew this at the time. Hope that Edward II would become the great king his father had become was alive, and although Edwards unsuitability was already suspected by many, Edward I was also known as a youth to take part in activities that were unbecoming of a king and after growing up and gaining the throne he completely ceased these activities,⁶¹ so why would the nobility and others not believe that Edward II would take the same route. Edward I and Edward II had a turbulent relationship at the back end of Edward I's reign, mainly because Edward suspected his son of lacking the qualities needed to rule, Edwards' banishment of Piers Gaveston, a topic covered multiple times during this essay, was one of the many lessons Edward gave his son before his death to prepare him for the crown, it was Edward II's backtrack on these lessons almost immediately

⁵⁹ Prestwich, *Edward I*, p.554-555.

⁶⁰ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p. 25.

⁶¹ Prestwich, *Edward I*, P.64.

after his father's death that not only the historians of today but the nobility at the time believe was the first sign that Edward I had already been so enthralled by 'unsuitable' company and beliefs, that he would not change his ways now that he was king, like his father had.⁶² Childs and Schofield suggest that Edward II's greatest achievement was his successful economy by the end of his reign, hailing him the 'wealthiest king since the Conqueror'.⁶³ This might just be the only positive thing that Edward II managed to do during his reign that his father did not. Tout and Stubbs both believed that Edward was an 'unbusinesslike man'; however, evidence suggests that Edward was actually quite obsessive over the crown's finances, probably because of the problems his father had faced and the effort it took for him to properly sort out the royal finances at the beginning of his reign.⁶⁴ Edward had left an estimated sixty-two thousand pounds in the coffers when he was deposed, compared to his father's minus two hundred thousand.⁶⁵

⁶² Given-Wilson, *Terrors of Kingship*, P.11.

⁶³ Wendy R. Childs & Phillipp R. Schofield, 'Tyranny and Deposition', in *The Reign of Edward II, 1307–27* (Manchester University Press, 2023), p. 242–74

⁶⁴ Natalie Fryde, 'Royal Finance, 1321–6', in *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II 1321–1326* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 87–105.

⁶⁵ Childs & Schofield, *Reign of Edward II*, pp. 242–74.

Military leadership.

It is interesting to see how Edward I and Edward II are viewed based on their military wins and defeats. Military success was one of the most significant aspects of the ideals of kingship in the Middle Ages; it determined whether a king was viewed as God's favourite, a strong and powerful king, rather than a weak and inept king. Edward I became king at age 35.⁶⁶ Edward II became king at the age of 23.⁶⁷ This might not seem like it is relevant to their ability to rule an army; however, arguably, it is one of the most important factors. In this section, it is going to be discussing the military records of both Edward I and Edward II, comparing the two and making comments on why Edward I was seen as successful, and Edward II was seen as a failure.

Edward I's Military Leadership

Very little is known about the education of Edward I; however, hunting was not only a sport in this period but a training tool for war, and Edward I was allowed to hunt and 'disport' himself in Windsor Forest at as young as 8 years old. Edward was also very skilled in horsemanship and would have learned how to effectively use a sword and lance. What is known about Edwards' early years is that he started in tournaments at age 17, where he had started using appropriate armour and weapons, the type he would later use in war. Edward was quite successful at tournaments. Edward did not get any injuries during the tournaments, whether that be by skill or because people did not want to injure the heir, it is unknown, but he was likely at least good at jousting. Edward, like all nobles, was well-travelled and was

⁶⁶ Mark Grossman, *World Military Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary*, (New York, NY, USA: Facts On, 2006), p.97

⁶⁷ Mark Grossman, 'World Military Leader', p.99.

well-versed with all locations that held a royal residence, which is a tool that would come in handy when leading an army.⁶⁸

Bachrach states that scholars generally agree that Edward I was a very effective military leader.⁶⁹ In 1256, at just age 17, Edward I was left alone in Wales and put in charge of addressing the crisis that was about to occur.⁷⁰ Under Henry III, the Welsh people faced very poor conditions and ‘unjust’ treatment from royal officials. When Edward was handed over control of Wales, the people believed that it might have been different; however, in his youth, Edward was not the man he grew up to be, and the Welsh looked elsewhere for support, namely to Llewelyn ap Gruffudd.⁷¹ This Welsh conflict was one of Edward’s failures; he was determined to ‘check the rashness of the Welsh, to punish their presumption, and to wage war against them’; however, he was not used to the Welsh weather and this year, particularly, had rough weather that resembled winter pretty much all year round. Wales ‘was so wet and stormy that the entire country of Wales ... was utterly inaccessible to the English, and thus Edward’s labour and expenditure of money were fruitless and of no avail.’⁷² Edward ran out of money quickly and had no way of replenishing his coffers as he made multiple requests to his father, which were all denied. When the Welsh wiped out Edward’s army on the second of June (Edward not in attendance), Henry III finally intervened.⁷³ With this English defeat, Edward was determined to reshape his ‘entourage’; he no longer wanted his assets and company to be determined by his parents or Henry III’s advisors. He needed a group of

⁶⁸ Prestwich, *‘Edward I’*, P.7.

⁶⁹ David Stewart Bachrach, *‘Military Logistics during the Reign of Edward I of England, 1272-1307’*, *War in History*, (2006), 13.4: 423–40.

⁷⁰ Morris, *‘A Great and Terrible King’*, p.40.

⁷¹ Morris, *‘A Great and Terrible King’*, p.40.

⁷² Morris, *‘A Great and Terrible King’*, p.40.

⁷³ Morris, *‘A Great and Terrible King’*, p.41.

associates, some the same, many new, he came across a group which were known as ‘the lords of the March of Wales’, who were naturally enemies of Llewelyn, which made them natural allies of Edward.⁷⁴ The Lords of the March of Wales were all subjects of the English king, all of whom held land in Wales.⁷⁵ This benefited Edward greatly when he became king years later.

Edward I was a great military leader; however, Edward’s military success only started after a massive defeat under his father, Henry III. Edward first went to battle during the Barons’ War in 1264 in the battle of Lewes when he was 24 years old.⁷⁶ Edward and Henry had been captured after the battle of Lewes in May 1264; however, Edward swiftly escaped and led the royalist forces to victory against de Montfort in July 1265 in the Battle of Newport, and then again against de Montfort’s son, Simon the Younger, on August 1st 1265. Edward was determined to completely defeat Simon de Montfort and rescue his father from his imprisonment. Edward took up arms again, leading the army in the Battle of Evesham on the 4th of August, defeating de Montfort, who had died during the battle and rescued his father.⁷⁷ This was Edward’s first big military win.

Edward’s conquest of Wales took him 19 years and is one of his greatest military achievements. Conflict between Wales and England was far from a new concept when

⁷⁴ Morris, ‘*A Great and Terrible King*’, p.42.

⁷⁵ R.R. Davies, ‘*Kings, Lords and Liberties in the March of Wales, 1066–1272*’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (1979), 29: 41–61

⁷⁶ Tout, ‘*Edward the First*’, p.66.

⁷⁷ Mark Grossman, ‘*World Military Leaders*’, p.97.

Edward gained the throne; however, conflict between the two intensified under Edward I, with Llywelyn ap Gruffydd refusing to pay homage to Edward I at every invitation and Edward kidnapping Llywelyn's intended bride (Eleanor de Montfort) on her travels to Wales in an attempt to prevent another Montfortian uprising.⁷⁸ Edward intended to stop Llywelyn before a war was necessary; however, this was just not possible. Edward tactically used his boyhood allies, the Lords of the March of Wales, and their men, to protect English-held land from Welsh raids and appointed Welsh allies like Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn and Bogo de Knoville with the task of gaining more Welsh allies along the way. Edward's choice of allies proved successful as Gwenwynwyn gained Edward a considerable number of Welsh allies, and Knoville successfully persuaded the three most powerful men in Arwystli to stand with Edward in return for them maintaining their rights. Edward's plans in Wales were all very well thought out. Edward hit all the right points at the right times, successfully taking castles and other strongholds of Llewelyn. In April, Edward's major hit to Llewelyn struck when five of the strongest Welsh leaders, Rhys ap Maredudd, Rhys Wyndod, Gruffydd and Cynan ap Maredudd ap Owain and Rhys Fychan all appeared before Edward to perform Homage. This strategic plotting by Edward made it nearly impossible for Llywelyn to fight back with arms; instead, this led to a treaty between Edward and Llywelyn.⁷⁹ This was a massive humiliation for Llewelyn, although not a total victory for Edward, it was at least proof to many that Edward was a great strategist.

Edward's conquest of Scotland was near impossible; the Scots should have had the upper hand at every point. However, Edward's skill in modifying old-fashioned military tactics to

⁷⁸ John Edward Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I: A Contribution to Mediaeval Military History*, (Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 114

⁷⁹ Prestwich, *'Edward I'*, p.178-180.

account for any danger the Scots posed gave him the victory. Edward was brutal in his attack in the Battle of Falkirk (possibly his most famous victory), leaving many of the Scottish cavalry and archers running to find safety. Massive losses were felt on the Scottish side, whereas England only had two knights and a couple of 'common folk'. Edward was single-minded when it came to war. Over a period of six years, Edward continuously went into Scotland, slowly but surely taking over little sections.⁸⁰ The Scottish Conquest officially began to ramp up in 1303 with the Battle of Sterling. Edward brought with him a huge wooden machine that threw massive rocks at the castle, impossible to defend themselves; the Scots surrendered. Edward finally got the better of William Wallace, betrayed by his own people and brought to London for a trial. Edward charged him with treason and murder, and he suffered a very painful death, which is very often described as brutal and inhumane even for medieval standards.⁸¹ By the end of 1303, Edward I had successfully defeated Scotland and finally pushed them to surrender, using sheer force and brutality to keep Scotland under his rule for the rest of his reign. Edward had also finally made peace in Gascony at this point, with a peace treaty signed with France.⁸² Edward successfully defeated all of his major military enemies: Wales, Scotland, and France.

Edward inherited an 'efficiently functioning system of transportation resources' from his father Henry III, a system designed to supply royal households with resources all over the country. This system was crucial in wartime. One of the biggest killers at the time was starvation; this included troops, many of whom died from starvation before they had the chance to die during a battle. Edward increased the efficiency of the purveyance system used

⁸⁰ Tout, *'Edward the First'*, p.209-211.

⁸¹ Tout, *'Edward the First'*, p.216.

⁸² Morris, *'A Great and Terrible King'*, p.267.

by the court to gather supplies. He sent clerks and officers to the counties to buy supplies and arrange them logistically, making it easier to send them to the king and his armies when necessary.⁸³ The Welsh campaign in 1277 proved to Edward that this system worked effectively in short campaigns with limited needs; however, the more campaigns Edward did and the longer they got, the more and more issues they discovered, including delays and disruptions caused by using competing networks rather than one cohesive system, and insufficiency of food, supplies and vehicles. Looking at the later Welsh campaigns of 1287 and 1294 and the Scottish campaigns of 1296-1307, it looks like Edward had taken proactive measures to fix the problems he faced in previous campaigns. Edward specifically increased the number of vehicles available to carry heavier loads, as well as increasing the amount of 'drought animals' the crown was able to claim. Edward also changed the administrative element to this system, making it much more reliable, which Bachrach believes mirrors that of his development of the logistical system in England. Bachrach believes that this level of development and commitment from Edward to support his troops and win wars was a sign that Edward was a great leader, and that his council and officials demonstrated the ability to adjust and change their plans even as warfare evolved.⁸⁴

Although Edwards' military leadership skills are generally considered very successful and effective, his excessive use of war and battles during his reign placed a massive strain on his people and economy. Edward had spent up to 1 million pounds between 1297 and 1304 on war alone. To do this, he had to borrow money and repeatedly ask his citizens for funds, men, and food over the years. Even when he relied on his people, it was still not enough; he resorted to tactics he himself had criticised his father for, including seizing food and other

⁸³ Bachrach, *'Military Logistics'*,

⁸⁴ Bachrach, *'Military Logistics'*,

goods from his people without their consent and trying to raise taxes without his Parliament's approval. Additionally, his use of violence against members of his clergy had almost led to a civil war.⁸⁵

Edward II Military Leadership

Edward II was a good soldier; however, he lacked every other skill necessary to lead an army. It also does not help when Edwards' advisors, specifically those of Gloucester and Hereford, were nearly impossible to control. Edward II is known for his military failure in the Battle of Bannockburn and many other failed missions in Scotland. Bannockburn was one of four major Anglo-Scottish wars of the time, including Falkirk in 1298, Halidon Hill in 1333 and Neville's Cross in 1346. Bannockburn was the only English defeat.⁸⁶ It is stated in the Scalacronica that 'The king of England undertook scarcely anything against Scotland, and thus lost as much by indolence as his father had conquered'.⁸⁷ Geoffrey le Baker suggested that there had never been a royal army with as much of an inflated ego and arrogance as that of Edward II, and that his biggest flaw when it came to battles was overconfidence and his belief that, regardless of experience or lack thereof, all he had to do was show up at a battle for his army to be successful.⁸⁸ Bannockburn is the perfect example of Edward's failures; not only did England lose in the most embarrassing defeat of the time, but Edward himself showed his absolute lack of leadership skills. Edward did not fight on the first day of the Battle of Bannockburn; however, his earls Gloucester and Hereford did. The arguments that

⁸⁵ Morris, '*A Great and Terrible King*', p.267.

⁸⁶ Given-Wilson, '*The Terrors of Kingship*', p. 31.

⁸⁷ Warner, '*The Unconventional King*', p. 86.

⁸⁸ Warner, '*The Unconventional King*', p. 87.

occurred between the two about who should command the vanguard was only the start of Edwards failures, Edward had argued with Gloucester the first night of the battle where Edward accused him of treason, this led Gloucester to act out with the aim to prove himself, he and his men rode directly at the Scots army not waiting for Edwards command, where Gloucester was shamefully thrown of his horse and stabbed to death, many of his men died alongside him. Edward fought bravely and with ferociousness, described as fighting ‘like a lioness deprived of her cubs’,⁸⁹ even when it looked impossible, Edward continuously found a way to escape death, he ‘struck out so vigorously behind him with his mace, there was none whom he touched that he did not fell to the ground’.⁹⁰ The battle was lost, but Edward refused to stop, to his disgruntlement, Pembroke grabbed the king and ensured that he got to safety. Edward showed great courage and a great skill for fighting during this battle, however, the battle turned to chaos within minutes, his bannermen and earls did not listen to Edwards command and many died because of it, the death of Gloucester and the lack of respect shown by Edwards earls showed not only Edward’s lack of leadership skills but also showed that he did not have the ability or respect needed to control his army.⁹¹

Edward II faced challenges that would have been impossible for even his father to succeed in. The weather conditions Edward faced were treacherous, and the famine made it virtually impossible to keep his army fed. The harvest of 1314 was less than ideal; the weather conditions made it almost impossible to harvest corn, which pushed the price of food and

⁸⁹ John de Trokelowe, *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani 7 Volume Set: Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneфорde Chronica et Annales: AD 1259-1296, 1307-1324, 1392-1406: AD 1259-1296, 1307-1324, 1392-1406*, ed. and Trans by H.T. Riley (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 86

⁹⁰ *Scalacronica*, p.54.

⁹¹ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p. 89.

other essential goods to skyrocket. In January 1315, King Edward II imposed a cap on the highest price that sellers could charge for domestic goods, including animals. The summer of 1315 was not any better, with major flooding, which caused serious problems within the fishing community. Conditions made it extremely hard and dangerous to fish, and those who did manage to fish were usually quite unsuccessful, as the floods drove the fish further away. The floods also affected the harvest of 1315 as conditions were not ideal for the growth and harvesting of grains, corn, barley, and the curing of hay. The flooding of the grains meant that they had to go through a drying process to be completely dried out before being turned into flour (thus disturbing the amount of food available).⁹² As mentioned earlier Edward I further developed a transportation system for moving goods around the country that became vital to his success in wartime, however the famine in 1314/1315 up until around 1322 would have made it nearly impossible for Edward II to keep his army fed, and with the shortage of drought animals (which Edward I had increased years earlier to make the transport system more effective) mixed with bad weather it was leading to an 'existential threat'.⁹³

Coming full circle back to the previous comment about why age is a relevant factor for this particular section. Edward I became king at age thirty-five, a point where he had years and years of military experience both with massive losses and amazing wins, Edwards most successful battles and military wins came when he was king, which is expected, however, this battle hardened king did not always win his wars, in fact the battles he fought with Wales as Prince were huge fails, his army was slaughtered and he was not even fighting with them, he

⁹² Henry S, Lucas, "*The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317*," *Speculum*, 5.4: 343–77 (1930)

⁹³ Kathleen Pribyl, *Farming, Famine and Plague: The Impact of Climate in Late Medieval England*, 1st edn (Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), p.128

was captured in a battle during the Second Barons Wars alongside his father,⁹⁴ however because he was not king at this time, people do not really focus on the battles he lost as prince. Of course, later on in his reign, he managed to defeat both Wales and, temporarily, Scotland, which was a massive win for Edward and England, which makes Edward's nicknames as the Hammer of the Scots and a great military leader completely valid.

Edward II, however, was only twenty-three when he became king; he did not have years and years of experience in wars and battles as a prince to give him the skills he needed to win wars as a king. Edward II would have had great experience in tournaments and the best weapons trainers available, but none of that would have given him the experience needed to fight the wars that Edward I left for him. Edward II only officially got a military command in 1304 when his father's health had started to deteriorate.⁹⁵ The wars with Scotland were brewing, wars Edward I struggled to win. As mentioned previously, these inherited wars and treacherous conditions would have been nearly impossible for even the most skilled king to walk into. Edward II had the loss on the infamous Battle of Bannockburn, his lack of skill in keeping his nobility content and putting himself in a position where his nobility refuse to aid him with his wars is a significant reason why he failed to lead his army's and win wars, however, he did also have some really significant wins including his armies defeat of Thomas of Lancaster, who was his biggest opponent, who had the most power and influence out of all his nobility,⁹⁶ at the Battle of Boroughbridge in 1322.⁹⁷ Edward also had a successful first battle as a military leader at the end of his father's reign in 1304, where he led a successful

⁹⁴ Tout, *Edward the First*, p. 37

⁹⁵ Morris, *A Great and Terrible King*, p.274.

⁹⁶ Joel T Rosenthal & J. R. Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322: A Study in the Reign of Edward II', *The American Historical Review*, 77.2: 498 (1972), p.8.

⁹⁷ Rosenthal & Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster', p.4-6.

campaign in Scotland, regaining land England had lost to Bruce.⁹⁸ Phillips argued that Edward II ‘inspired a remarkable degree of loyalty among the military members of his household, many of whom had served him when he was Prince of Wales or had known him well before he became king’.⁹⁹ Hamilton agrees that the loyalty shown to Edward II by the household knights was very similar to that shown to Edward I during his reign, particularly before 1321, but in many cases all the way up to the end of his reign in 1327.¹⁰⁰ Arguably, Edward II had the makings of a strong military leader; however, his inexperience due to his age and his consistent lack of respect for his nobility made it impossible for him to thrive. Had Edward II had years of military experience before inheriting the throne like his father, he may have had a better legacy, and had Edward I not had years of military experience before gaining the throne, had he inherited the throne at age 24, before the end of the Second Barons War and before he had been captured would he still have been viewed as this incredible military leader, or would he have a similar legacy as his son?

Edward II loved physical exercise and anything that required him to be outdoors, there is no indication that Edward II was lacking in the physical skills necessary for battle; in actuality it seems like Edward II excelled in combat and horsemanship, however, it is quite clear that Edward did not have the skills required for leading an army to battle, a skill his father excelled at. There is not much evidence about Edward II combat lessons or any of his teaching for that matter, although he is not believed to have been lacking an education fit for a prince and we do know that his tutor was Guy Ferre,¹⁰¹ however, considering Edward I had

⁹⁸ Morris, ‘*A Great and Terrible King*’, p.274.

⁹⁹ Phillips, *Edward II*, p.608.

¹⁰⁰ J. Hamilton, ‘A Reassessment of the Loyalty of the Household Knights of Edward II’ in *FCE VII*, ed. W.M. Ormrod (Woodbridge,2012), p. 47-72.

¹⁰¹ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p. 21

experienced a country that fell into chaos because of an ineffective king who lacked leadership skills and the ability to get along with his nobility it would seem likely that Edward I would see the importance of instilling these skills into Edward II the minute he became the heir apparent. Had these skills been instilled in Edward II as a child, it seems very unlikely that he would have ended up in the same situation as his grandfather, but worse. So, to that point, how much is Edward I to blame for Edward II's failures as a leader? Edward I would not have had much of a hand in any of Edward II's education, except for any lessons or experience he gave Edward II in terms of building the skills he needed to be a successful military leader and the ability to run the country. Considering Edward seemed to have a normal prince/heir apparent education and was only lacking in the skills that Edward I was supposed to instil in him, maybe all of the blame should not lie with Edward II himself but with his father as well, a belief that Prestwich agrees with. Edward I and Edward II had a complicated relationship in adulthood, with the pair quarrelling on multiple occasions, with some accounts suggesting physical fights between the pair, instigated by Edward I. It also seemed likely that Edward I was aware that his son lacked the skills necessary to be a good military leader when he passed over his son in favour of his nephew John of Brittany for a military command role in Brittany and Scotland (which would have been expected to be given to Edward II),¹⁰² However, there is no evidence to suggest Edward I had any ill will towards his son as a child.¹⁰³ Edward II grew up with a successful king, one feared and respected by his people and did not experience the chaos that Edward I did; he would not have had the first-hand experience forcing him to become the king Edward I did, he would have had to learn these skills, which it looks like he did not.

¹⁰² Prestwich, '*Edward I*', p.132.

¹⁰³ Prestwich, '*Edward I*', p.127.

Overall, Edward II was a good soldier who had the potential to be great. Edwards' failure was mainly due to his inability to get along with other members of the nobility. Edward also faced multiple cases of sheer bad luck during his reign, including a famine which he would have had zero control over, which seriously impacted his army in times of need in a way even his father would not have been able to manage.

Nobility

The word 'Nobility' is used quite often in this essay, but the word also appears in almost all articles and books written about kings, the monarchy or even just the medieval period. It is difficult to say a definitive definition for the word 'nobility'; however, it is a term that is used primarily for those in the higher positions in society. This could include anybody who is a knight and those above them in the social hierarchy. The most influential of the nobility is certainly the barons and the earls, who were a small part of society which were given titles. These men were typically very wealthy and had vast amounts of land; however, this is not always the case.¹⁰⁴ The most influential and arguably the most significant of the nobility when looking at the success of kings is the earls. 'A king's relations with his nobility, particularly his earls ... did more to shape his reign than perhaps anything else'.¹⁰⁵ The relationship, or lack thereof, between a king and his earls could and would make or break their military ability, reach, and overall power as king. The nobility expected specific things from a king, such as military success, financial stability, a sense of justice, a good choice of government and an 'acceptable mode of life' for the period. It was only when the nobility felt a slip in these promises that conflict between them and the crown arose.¹⁰⁶

Edward I – relationship with Barons, Lords, and other nobility.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Tuck, *Crown, and Nobility, 1272-1461: Political Conflict in Late Medieval England* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1986), p.11.

¹⁰⁵ Spencer, 'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England', p.1

¹⁰⁶ Tuck, 'Crown and Nobility', p. 10.

Earl	Years active	Charters Witnessed	% of all the charters they were able to witness.
The earl of Lincoln (Henry de Lacy)	-1311	735	46.02%
The earl of Warenne (John de Warenne)	-1304	496	35.20%
The earl of Pembroke (William de Valence)	-1296	394	38.51%
The earl of Lancaster (Prince Edmund)	-1296	385	37.16%
The earl of Gloucester (Gilbert de Clare)	-1295	348	33.59%
The earl of Hereford (Humphrey III de Bohun)	-1322	252	47.81%
The earl of Lancaster (Thomas of Lancaster)	-1322	235	43.52%
The earl of Cornwall (Edmund of Cornwall)	-1300	226	19.72%
The earl of Pembroke (Aymer de Valence)	-1324	194	33.80%

Information from the chart can be found here¹⁰⁷

It may seem like an insignificant compilation of numbers, but they are crucial in determining Edward I's relationship with his earls. This chart was compiled with information from a similar chart made by Spencer. The numbers and percentages above are a good indication of how close Edward was to each earl. One important statistic that comes from this list is that

¹⁰⁷ Spencer, 'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England', p.47.

the majority of the earls who witnessed the most of Edward's royal charters were the wealthiest and generally the most powerful earls.¹⁰⁸ This is significant as each of these earls, especially the wealthier earls, would have had a lot of responsibilities in their own counties, which would keep them away from court for significant periods of time, but these earls have attended court and witnessed nearly half of Edward's charters.¹⁰⁹ This suggests that Edward was at least somewhat of a companion to the earls. A great example of this companionship linking to royal charters is the Earl of Lincoln, Henry de Lacy, who witnessed the most royal charters out of all the earls, and it has been noted that his loyalty to Edward I was 'consistent and striking'.¹¹⁰ On the same merit, it is also noted that Edward I gained 'unstinting support' from the earls of Lancaster, Cornwall, and Pembroke.¹¹¹ This is again shown in the data, as William de Valence and Edmund of Lancaster are up there as some of the highest attendees for witnessing Edward's royal charters, and Edmund of Cornwall is not too far behind, with about 19% of all charters witnessed.¹¹² Based on these numbers and the fact that Edward I made it his mission to ensure the earls of Lincoln, Hereford, and Lancaster, who were all involved with royal marriages, were close companions with Edward II throughout his childhood,¹¹³ supports my suggestion that Edward and his most powerful earls had some form of companionship away from just duty.

¹⁰⁸ Spencer, *'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England'*, p1.

¹⁰⁹ Spencer, *'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England'*, p.1.

¹¹⁰ Prestwich, *'Edward I'*, p.234-235.

¹¹¹ Spencer, *'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England'*, p. 44.

¹¹² Spencer, *'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England'*, p. 44.

¹¹³ Spencer, *'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England'*, p.45

Edward I was quite similarly aged to his earls, with Edward being thirty-five when he was officially crowned King of England. William de Venise and Earl Warenne were slightly older, with them being in their mid to late forties. The younger earls were all also within 10-12 years of Edward, Henry de Lacy of Lincoln was twenty-four when he became earl, Humphrey de Bohun of Hereford was twenty-four, Edmund of Cornwall was twenty-five, Roger Bigod of Norfolk was twenty-nine, Edwards brother Edmund was twenty-nine, Gilbert de Clare of Gloucester was thirty-one, Robert de Vere of Oxford was thirty-four, and William Beauchamp of Warwick was thirty-six. Spencer argues that this close age range and the fact that no earls died between 1275 and 1295 were a big factor in their predominantly peaceful relationship.¹¹⁴ The earls and the king shared years together growing up in the English court and high society, and the majority of them would have shared military experience. This shared experience would have solidified relationships or at least would have built some rapport between them, making it easier to build trust, and would have been great insider information on the temperaments and boundaries of the earls for Edward when it came to ruling, he would have understood where and when to push for his own agenda and when it would have gone too far.¹¹⁵

Edward I believed it was his kingly duty to “introduce new laws and a purer administration”.¹¹⁶ Edward believed that it was his kingly mission to rid his nobility of corruption, but he recognised the delicate balance of pushing and conceding; pushing them too far would do him no favours later on. Edward wanted to investigate the royalties and revenues of the crown and the nobility, and looked at land grants. However, many of the

¹¹⁴ Spencer, ‘*Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England*’, p. 196.

¹¹⁵ Spencer, ‘*Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England*’, p. 196.

¹¹⁶ Seeley, ‘*The Life and Reign of Edward I*’, p.37.

nobility resisted Edward's request to show lawful title deeds to their estates, including John de Warenne, with whom Edward had fought alongside at the Battle of Lewes. During periods of unrest in England in the previous reigns of King Stephen and King John, a lot of land was misappropriated by nobility and lacked lawful paperwork. During a conversation between Edward, I and Warenne, Warenne removed his sword and said, 'It was by this that my forefathers won these lands, and it is by this I mean to maintain my title.'¹¹⁷ Many of the nobility received their land in much the same way: Edward made concessions to ensure good relations with powerful barons who could be useful allies in future wars.¹¹⁸

Edward's success was not only down to himself, but also to his loyal advisors. Robert Burnell (future Chancellor of England) is a perfect example of the benefits a king can have if the right people surround him. A massive part of Edward I's reign was his progressive and extensive legislation. Robert Burnell was an integral part of the success of this legislation. He was almost perfect at writing up legislation, where it was virtually impossible to figure out which words were his and which were the words of the king. He joined his ability to craft legislation with the kingly leadership voice of the king.¹¹⁹

Edward II – Edward and his 'Favourites'.

It is a misconception that Edward only ever had two favourites, the famous Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the younger; he, in fact, had multiple groups of favourites throughout the years, however, the most significant and influential of all of Edward's favourites was

¹¹⁷ Seeley, *'The Life and Reign of Edward I'*, p.39.

¹¹⁸ Seeley, *'The Life and Reign of Edward I'*, p.40.

¹¹⁹ Seeley, *'The Life and Reign of Edward I'*, p.24.

definitely Gaveston and Despenser, both of whom used their influence on Edward to gain wealth and power and antagonised Edward's nobility at every point.

Edward loved Piers Gaveston greatly, and without shame, the nature of this love is unknown (and quite frankly irrelevant). There are no contemporary sources that suggest the relationship was any more than a bond of brotherhood, which later turned into a speculative attack on Edward and was popularised further by Christopher Marlow's play *Edward II* in c. 1592.¹²⁰ Regardless of the nature of their relationship, a statement that is quite accurate in terms of the significance of Edward's relationship with not only Piers Gaveston but his later favourite Hugh Despenser the Younger comes from Given-Wilson where he claims that 'it was not the nature of Edward's relationships with Gaveston and the Younger Despenser that lay at the root of his failure, but their intensity and exclusivity'.¹²¹

The first piece of evidence suggesting that Gaveston had an unnaturally strong hold over Edward II was when Edward was still a prince. Edward, in trying to appoint Gaveston as the Count of Ponthieu, angered King Edward I, who believed that Edward was prematurely trying to promote a lower-born individual to a higher station just to keep him in arms' reach. Edward and his father came to blows, and Gaveston was banished. Although Gaveston had not committed any action that would have warranted banishment, it is believed that the King had banished him in fear of the influence he was displaying over Edward and in fear that it would grow out of control.¹²² This fear was warranted. Gaveston was back in the country very soon after Edward died in 1307, a request that Edward II must have made quite quickly

¹²⁰ Warner, *'The Unconventional King'*, p. 26.

¹²¹ Given-Wilson, *'The Terrors of Kingship'*, p. 109.

¹²² Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p. 3.

after his father's death, based on the time that Gaveston arrived back in England. Gaveston was known to the court as an 'evil influence' who 'furnished his [Edward II] court with companies of jesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians and other naughty ribalds, that the King might spend both days and nights in jesting, playing, blanketing and other such filthy and dishonourable exercises'.¹²³ Gaveston's continuous influence on Edward II angered the court massively, and it never died down. Edward's appointment of Gaveston as the new Earl of Cornwall was a highly controversial decision. This position had previously been held by members of the royal family, and Gaveston was a Gascon native; for many of the nobility, it marked the official beginning of their growing weariness with both Gaveston and Edward. Gaveston was now one of the richest men in England, and he had the strongest influence over Edward. The other magnates hated him, 'The magnates of the land hated him, because he alone found favour in the king's eyes and lorded it over them like a second king, to whom all were subject and nonequal'.¹²⁴ The court was aggrieved by Edward's consistent and unwarranted support of Gaveston, who put himself at odds with the nobility, making ungentlemanly comments and creating insulting nicknames for all the nobles, including Thomas of Lancaster and other powerful earls.¹²⁵ Gaveston was again placed in a position the nobility believed him to be unworthy of in 1308, when Edward professed that Gaveston was the keeper of the realm in his absence, a position that was better suited for his young brothers Thomas or Edmund, with an advisor like Thomas of Lancaster, the king's first cousin and the most powerful earl.¹²⁶ Edward's judgment was and is continuously questioned throughout his entire reign for his decisions involving Gaveston. Gaveston had a military prowess that

¹²³ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p.2.

¹²⁴ Tuck, *'Crown and Nobility'*, p.52.

¹²⁵ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p.2.

¹²⁶ Warner, *'The Unconventional King'*, p. 36.

exceeded the majority of the knights, making him an even bigger threat to nobility than if he had only had the king's ear and wealth.¹²⁷

The hatred towards Gaveston by the nobility hit its limits in 1311, when Gaveston was again banished from the country (to Edward's disgruntlement). Gaveston returned to the country not two months later, completely disobeying the banishment order; this officially made Gaveston an 'enemy to the king and his people'. Edward went behind his nobles' backs and gave Gaveston his earldom back. Edward was now facing civil war; however, Gaveston was captured quite quickly by Aymer, Warenne, Percy and Pembroke. Warwick was not happy with Gaveston's imprisonment and believed he deserved to be tried for his crimes, kidnapping Gaveston from Pembroke. A small trial took place, and he was condemned to die. Thomas of Lancaster's retainers beheaded Gaveston in June 1311. Edward was devastated and vowed to get revenge for his death. Edward eventually (over a year later) had to make a truce with the nobility to prevent a civil war.¹²⁸

After the death of Gaveston, a new wave of favourites arrived at court in c.1317; this group included Hugh Despenser the younger. If the court was worried about the influence Gaveston had on the king, they were not at all prepared for that of Hugh Despenser the younger. Given Wilson states that Gaveston was 'charming and foolish', but Despenser was 'a clever and manipulative bully'.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p. 35.

¹²⁸ Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship*, p. 23-27.

¹²⁹ Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship*, p. 57.

Despenser the younger was just as unpopular in the end as Gaveston was and just as infamous. Hugh Despenser the elder was an advisor of Edward I, which might seem irrelevant; however, Despenser the elder skilfully had the confidence of Edward I and kept a great relationship with Edward II, allowing him to become the mastermind of the relationship between his son and Edward.¹³⁰ Hugh Despenser the younger did not have vast wealth at the beginning of Edward's reign, living comfortably but nowhere near the wealth of his immediate family. Despenser caught the attention of Edward on a trip to France, which led to Despenser's first political controversy. Despenser was awarded by the king a wardship of William Huntingfield, which was contested by Thomas of Lancaster, who believed as he was his tenant, it was his ward to take (which would have earned him a portion of money once the ward was married). This is likely where Lancaster's dislike of Despenser started, as he believed he was robbed. Although the king's relationship with Lancaster was in disrepair, he found a way to bring back some of the Earls to his side. He did this with monetary rewards. Pembroke, Hereford, and many other Earls received these cash gifts in return for their support in both peace and war.¹³¹

Hugh Despenser the younger was married to the eldest sister of the Earl of Gloucester in 1306. Despenser only gained his wealth after the Battle of Bannockburn, where his wife had inherited part of the Clare estate. His wife's two sisters were given to two more of the King's favourites for marriage, Hugh Audley, and Roger D'Amory. Despenser set out to become the Earl of Gloucester and get the rest of the heiress's inheritance from her sisters and fellow favourites.¹³² The Vita agrees that Despenser 'set traps for his co-heirs; this, if he could

¹³⁰ Fryde, *'Tyranny and Fall of Edward II'*, p. 28.

¹³¹ Tuck, *'Crown and Nobility'*, p. 71.

¹³² Fryde, *'Tyranny and Fall of Edward II'*, p. 35.

manage it, each would lose his share through false accusations and he alone would obtain the whole earldom of Gloucester'.¹³³ Despenser used his manipulative nature to connive himself into more of the land given to Audley and Damory, successfully manipulating Audley into swapping some of his land for a piece of land that was significantly less valuable.

Problematically, Edward himself was not above Despenser's schemes, helping him where he could, preventing John de Mowbray from getting his inheritance using a royal order (which was in his power, but many believe that his decision to get involved in this matter was questionable).¹³⁴

Edward also awarded him control over multiple different estates. Despenser was now one of the most powerful people in the country; his role as the Chamberlain of the Household gave him the power to control access to the king, making it much easier for him to control who the king met with, and put him in the prime spot to gain more favour from the king.¹³⁵

Despenser's influence over the king has been described in many different sources including the *Anonimale*, *Scalacronica* and in the contemporary chronicles of Geoffrey le Baker, (summarised by Given-Wilson), Despenser was viewed as 'not just a second king, but the ruler of the king, and he had bewitched the king's mind', it was also stated that 'If anyone wished to speak with the king, he did not dare to do so except in the presence of Sir Hugh'.¹³⁶ His influence over the king was feared by all. The years of Gaveston had made it very clear that the king was easily enamoured by those he chose as his favourites. It was said that 'his

¹³³ *Vita*, 115

¹³⁴ Given-Wilson, '*The Terrors of Kingship*', p. 59.

¹³⁵ Saaler, '*Edward II*', p. 113.

¹³⁶ Given-Wilson, '*The Terrors of Kingship*', p. 58.

commandments were carried out everywhere and in every way, and everyone feared and hated him from the bottom of their hearts'.¹³⁷

Edward's insistence on helping Despenser take land in a less than moral way led to the Marcher Lords in Wales now viewing Despenser as a threat to them all, a much bigger threat than Gaveston ever was, and in doing so, they were also beginning to resist the power of the king. The Marcher Lords were completely outraged with Despenser and with the king's complicity in his actions. The Marcher Lords, many of the household knights and twenty-four barons all band together to set out to attack Despenser's land, imploring Edward to place Despenser in the custody of Lancaster until a parliament could be held. Edward refused. The opposition was mobilising for war, a war that could be stopped if Edward agreed to banish the Despensers. Desperate to protect Despenser, Edward set out to do everything he could to deter violence; however, he did not have the support needed to be successful.¹³⁸ Despenser was coined 'a manifest traitor and enemy of the king and kingdom', and the Marchers were leaving violence and brutality wherever they went. Edward was now forced to submit and banish the Despensers.

Despenser finally got his wish between 1322 and 1326, where he not only gained all the land back he lost during his banishment, but as Damory had died and Audley was in prison, he finally got the whole Clare inheritance.¹³⁹ Edward declared his banishment unlawful, as the opposition dissolved. Suggesting Edward believed that he was finally in a strong enough place that he could do something reckless, like revoking the Ordinances of 1311 and allowing

¹³⁷ Given-Wilson, '*The Terrors of Kingship*', p. 58.

¹³⁸ Given-Wilson, '*The Terrors of Kingship*', p. 66.

¹³⁹ Saaler, '*Edward II*', p. 113.

Despenser back into the country after nearly facing civil war just to get him out.¹⁴⁰ Despenser went straight back to his old ways, with Edward not only protecting him but threatening those who opposed him, including his own niece, whom Despenser had threatened to get her to sign over her lands to him in exchange for lesser value land, which he also took off her later on. He cheated and threatened his way to a £7000 income per year, making him the richest man in the country after Edward himself.¹⁴¹

During the latter years of Edward's reign, he continuously refused to remove Despenser from his presence, bringing forward the invasion of Isabella, and once Edward was captured, Despenser was not far behind. Despenser was captured and given a rather gruesome traitor's death, which included being drawn by four horses, not the traditional two, being hung from a height, which he survived, he was then gutted and had his intestines burned and finally put out of his misery by decapitation.¹⁴²

Edward II – relationship with Barons, Lords, and other nobility.

Earl	Years active	Charters Witnessed	% of all charters they were able to witness.
The earl of Gloucester (Gilbert de Clare)	-1314	222	61.5%
The earl of Pembroke (Aymer de Valence)	-1324	449	49.8%

¹⁴⁰ Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship*, p. 71.

¹⁴¹ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p.162.

¹⁴² Fryde, *Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, p.193.

The earl of Hereford (Humphrey III de Bohun)	-1322	348	43.7%
The earl of Lincoln (Henry de Lacy)	-1311	79	40.3%
The earl of Norfolk (Thomas of Brotherton)	-1338	77	17.9%
The earl of Lancaster (Thomas of Lancaster)	-1322	102	12.8%
The earl of Warwick (Guy Beauchamp)	-1315	50	12%
The earl of Kent (Edmund of Woodstock)	-1330	18	9.7%

Information from this chart can be found here¹⁴³

Despenser and Gaveston are both very significant individuals when looking at the perception of Edward II's reign and his ability to rule; however, a group of people who are also very significant when looking at Edward's power are his nobility. Lancaster, Kent, Warenne, Norfolk and Warwick all had both personal and political reasons throughout Edward's reign that prevented them from witnessing charters; this is a major sign that the earls and Edward did not have the type of companionship that is evidently shared between Edward I and his earls. Unfortunately for Edward II, these earls were his most powerful and wealthy and had he been able to bond with the earls both politically and personally, he would have had access to significant wealth and formidable armies.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Spencer, 'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England', p. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Spencer, 'Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England', p. 48.

“Edward preferred the company of Jesters, singers, actors, carters, diggers, oarsmen, sailors, and mechanics to his nobility”.¹⁴⁵ Edward started his reign with a shaky relationship with the nobility, as he had already begun friendships and companionships with undesirable company. Edward’s intense relationship with Piers Gaveston had already developed before he became king,¹⁴⁶ and this was the catalyst for many of the problems Edward faced when it came to his relationship with his nobility. Edward II was loyal; however, arguably, he was loyal to the wrong people. Edward is famous for his incredible loyalty to those closest to him, commonly known as his ‘favourites’; however, these favourites tended to be widely disliked amongst the most wealthy and influential earls, putting Edward in a hard position. Edward was stuck between choosing to stay loyal to his closest companions and upsetting his advisors and allies or removing his favourites and keeping his earl’s favour. Edward notoriously made the wrong choice nearly every single time. ‘It was his inability to reward his loyal servants more equitably that ultimately cost him both their loyalty and his crown’.¹⁴⁷ This is a common belief among historians, including Given-Wilson, who believed that Edward II’s unsuccessful attempt at creating a ‘modus operandi’ with his nobility lay at the heart of his ‘failure’.¹⁴⁸ Edwards’ incapability to connect with his nobility was not the only reason Edwards’ nobility was weak; throughout Edwards’ reign, his nobility was also incapable of getting along with each other. Feuds between Lancaster and Warenne, Valance and Berkeley and Charlton and the De Le Pole family were all conflicts that impacted Edward’s parliament, with many refusing to be in the same room, making it near impossible for Edward to form a strong parliament.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. J. R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 9 vols (London, 1882), VIII, p.297-9.

¹⁴⁶ Hamilton, ‘Loyalty of the Household Knights’, p.81.

¹⁴⁷ Hamilton, ‘Loyalty of the Household Knights’, p. 77–92.

¹⁴⁸ Given-Wilson, ‘*The Terrors of Kingship*’, p. xi.

¹⁴⁹ Fryde, ‘*Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*’, p.150.

Edward's relationship with his earls soured significantly with the death of Gaveston. Edward was furious about his death and believed that those responsible deserved to be punished. However, an unlikely outcome came from the death of Gaveston, and one that was in Edward's favour. 'Gaveston's death destroyed the unity of his opponents.'¹⁵⁰ Edward's nobility all rallied against him because of his relationship with Gaveston and their belief that 'Evil councillors' must be removed;¹⁵¹ however, 'The death of Gaveston removed the most potent and unifying of the reasons for hostility to the king'.¹⁵² The group no longer had any reasonable opposition against the king, at least not one strong enough to keep them unified. The main contenders in Gaveston's death were Warwick, Lancaster, Hereford, and Arundel.¹⁵³ Some of Edwards' most powerful and influential earls.

The death of Gloucester at the Battle of Bannockburn was a massive hit to Edward, not only at the time but quite significantly later on during his reign. Gloucester was originally an ordainer in 1310; however, he did not have any animosity towards to king. Gloucester was a perfect moderator, loyal to the king but also shared some views with the opposition. Edward could not really afford to lose him. Gloucester was twenty-three when he died and left no heirs; his inheritance was split between his sisters.¹⁵⁴ This was one of the most important parts of the political conflicts Edward faced at the end of his reign.

¹⁵⁰ Tuck, 'Loyalty of the Household Knights', p. 66

¹⁵¹ Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship*, p. 21.

¹⁵² Tuck, 'Loyalty of the Household Knights', p. 67.

¹⁵³ Given-Wilson, *The Terrors of Kingship*, p. 24.

¹⁵⁴ Saaler, *Edward II*, p.105.

Mirroring Gaveston, the nobility rallied together to force the king into banishing Despenser. Despenser had continuously soured his relationship with other nobility, and in turn soured the relationship between the nobility and Edward. During this period, the marcher lords and nobility, specifically the Earl of Hereford, the Mortimers, Berkeley, Audley and Damory (3 of Edward's previous favourites) and many more, all ransacked Despenser's land and properties, whilst giving clear signs that a civil war was coming if the king did not remove Despenser from his inner circle.¹⁵⁵ The involvement of Thomas of Lancaster at this time showed the severity of the situation, as Thomas of Lancaster had not been very involved in Edward's politics in the couple of years before this conflict.

Despenser continuously antagonised the Queen, further deteriorating her relationship with Edward. He confiscated her estates, stating that it was for security in case France invaded and used her estates as a base. She received monetary compensation but lost control over her estates and her dower rights. She wrote to her brother stating that she was treated no better than a servant in her own home, and about how she had lost all her French servants as they had all been arrested.¹⁵⁶ In 1325, Edward sent Isabella to France to negotiate peace between the two countries. Edward's and Despenser's consistent disrespect of Isabella was likely the leading factor in Isabella not returning to England for 18 months, and on her return, she brought with her an invading force. Froissart, a chronicler born in 1337, suggested that Isabella was a persecuted victim expelled from England,¹⁵⁷ but his account is quite unreliable,

¹⁵⁵ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p.105.

¹⁵⁶ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p.110.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Froissart, *Chroniques de Froissart*, ed. by G. C. Macauley (New York, P.F. Collier & Son Company, 1904)

as are many other accounts from the period that dramatised the relationship between Isabella and Edward and made Isabella a martyr. It is much more likely that it was the Pope who suggested Isabella bargain for peace, as he had written to her for a chunk of time before her departure, calling her an angel of peace. Many chronicles written just after suggest that Isabella was a part of a conspiracy, that she had manipulated her husband into letting her leave the country so she could plot against him, and although it is well documented that Isabella hated the Despensers and what they had done to her relationship with Edward there is no evidence to suggest Isabella had any plans to plot against Edward before she had left the country. Isabella wrote to Edward multiple times on her journey, referring to him as ‘my very sweet heart’, suggesting that she was still affectionate with him even after her departure. Edward had later sent his son Edward III to France to pay homage to the king, in fear that his going would be too dangerous and that leaving Hugh Despenser in England alone or taking him to France with him would lead to his death. This was one of Edwards’ fatal decisions. Isabella had decided not to return to England or her husband and made a proclamation stating:

‘I feel that marriage is a joining together of man and woman ... and that someone has come between my husband and myself trying to break this bond; I protest that I will not return until this intruder is removed.’¹⁵⁸

Isabella went so far as to wear mourning clothes to show her dedication to removing Despensers and mourning her husband.¹⁵⁹ Isabella loved her husband, or at least believed that her marriage was a successful and happy marriage when it was not intruded on by

¹⁵⁸ Saaler, ‘Edward II’, p.110.

¹⁵⁹ Saaler, ‘Edward II’, p.199.

specifically Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser; she was always loyal to Edward and only ever showed any disobedience or anger to the two favourites when they impacted her own relationship with Edward. It was after this declaration that it is likely that Isabella and Roger Mortimer became allies. In September 1326, Isabella and her forces arrived in England after months of failed negotiations between the pair. Slowly, the nobility who hated Despenser just as much as she did started to join her, including Henry of Lancaster, who brought with him the Lancastrian retainers, treasure, and a war horse. Edwards' followers slowly dwindled, and his years of failure came to an end. Edward was betrayed and captured in November by a large group, including Henry of Leicester, Rhys ap Howel and John of Hainault. Edward was taken to the royal castle of Kenilworth under the charge of Leicester.¹⁶⁰ Edward's delegates all stated to Edward that they would pay homage to his son regardless of his abdication, so Edward's royal household no longer existed. Edward is said to have been distraught and begged for pardons for those who helped him, and Edward III was officially crowned king on February 1st, 1327.

Edward II – Thomas of Lancaster

Thomas of Lancaster, a name that is prevalent in pretty much all literature written about the reign of Edward II and his downfall. His name is synonymous with power, influence, and treachery. Thomas of Lancaster was the son of Edmund (younger brother of Edward I of England) and a cousin to Edward II of England. He was also the half-brother to the Queen Consort of France (who was Edward's wife, Isabella's mother). His noble blood from both his maternal and paternal sides put him above all the other nobles; his link to both the English

¹⁶⁰ Fryde, *'Tyranny and Fall of Edward II'*, p.192.

and French crowns gave him a lot of power compared to every other noble at the time.¹⁶¹

Thomas Lancaster was loyal to Edward I (like his father) and was regarded highly by the King in the final years of his reign. Edward I pardoned Lancaster's debts and other missteps he had taken during a campaign; he was gifted a manor, horses and even grants by the king. Lancaster's relationship with Prince Edward seemed to be one of friendship; they frequently spoke via letters, helping each other out on political matters and even reached out to each other when either one of them was ill.¹⁶² His relationship with Edward soured in the final years of Edward I's reign, and more so when Edward II became king; however, loyalty was not yet lost. Lancaster became Edward II's biggest opposition. Lancaster's opposition to Edward started because of Edward's intense loyalty and favouritism of the infamous Piers Gaveston. It is unlikely that the rift between the pair was not solely because of Piers Gaveston, as he was not in the country when Lancaster started publicly pulling away from Edward; it is likely a significant reason for the rift, but it is also likely that the pair had a clash of personalities. Edward and Thomas of Lancaster were very similar in temperament; they were both very stubborn and unable to separate their own opinions, likes and dislikes from policy.¹⁶³

The most important piece of legislation passed during Edward II's reign was the Ordinances of 1311. Thomas of Lancaster was a key player in making them possible and in Edward accepting them. The Ordinances were coined 'the Ordinances of the Earl of Lancaster' by a chronicler.¹⁶⁴ The Ordinances gave the Ordainers, specifically Thomas of Lancaster, much

¹⁶¹ Rosenthal & Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster', p. 2

¹⁶² Rosenthal & Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster', p. 4-6

¹⁶³ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ Tuck, 'Loyalty of the Household Knights', p. 64.

more control over the crown, and most importantly to Thomas, gave him the legal resources to get rid of Piers Gaveston once and for all. Thomas of Lancaster used the Ordinances to get the moderates on his side, slowly removing support for Edward. Lancaster was one of the key players in the death of Piers Gaveston, which Edward believed was a grave personal betrayal towards him.¹⁶⁵ After three failed exiles, the Ordainers had no other choice but to kill Gaveston, in fear that he would again defy the exile if he was exiled a fourth time.

¹⁶⁶Lancaster was said to have ‘took upon himself the peril of the business’ and it was his retainers who ultimately killed Gaveston. Although Lancaster received a pardon from Edward for his involvement, their relationship was never the same as when they were youths.¹⁶⁷

Lancaster had actually opened up a space for worse company to get involved with Edward and pushed other nobility support back to Edward because of their shock at the brutal death of Gaveston, who deserved exile, but to many had not committed any crime worthy of death.¹⁶⁸

A massive hit to their relationship was in June 1314, when Edward I summoned his earls to rally their soldiers for battle. Only three of Edward’s earls went with him to Scotland: Humphrey de Bohun, Gilbert de Clare, and Aymer de Valence. Lancaster outwardly refused to join the call on the basis that the king had failed to ask the permission of parliament to go to war.¹⁶⁹ This failure to comply with Edward’s calls made it impossible for Edward to win the battle against the formidable Scottish King, leading to what is known as the most embarrassing defeat in Edward’s reign, the failed Battle of Bannockburn.¹⁷⁰ Edward’s defeat

¹⁶⁵ Given-Wilson, ‘*The Terrors of Kingship*’, p. 26.

¹⁶⁶ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p. 73.

¹⁶⁷ Given-Wilson, ‘*The Terrors of Kingship*’, p. 24.

¹⁶⁸ Warner, ‘*The Unconventional King*’, p. 83.

¹⁶⁹ Given-Wilson, ‘*The Terrors of Kingship*’, p. 28.

¹⁷⁰ Given-Wilson, ‘*The Terrors of Kingship*’, p. 30.

at Bannockburn put him right in the hands of Lancaster.¹⁷¹ Lancaster became the glorified De Facto ruler of England for the next couple of years, reshuffling Edward's household with men loyal to him rather than Edward. Lancaster was at his most powerful at this time, and the Ordinances were the strongest between 1315-1316.

Lancaster and Edward came into conflict again in 1317 when Edward's favourites, Damory and Audley, Montacute and Surrey, kidnapped Lancaster's wife, and Edward refused Lancaster's request to remove them from his household. Edward had gained quite a bit more freedom at the start of 1317, bringing many of his old opposing Earls into his court through indentures. This pushed Thomas of Lancaster into near isolation.¹⁷² The favourites consistently antagonised Edward, giving him terrible advice, persuading him to continue being at odds with his cousin, possibly in hopes that Edward would divide Lancaster's vast lands and wealth between them.¹⁷³ Lancaster refused to meet with Edward if the favourites were not removed, and he removed himself from Edward's politics from this point, but was still far too important and influential for Edward to just ignore. Lancaster went after the favourites viciously, completely taking all of Surrey's Yorkshire properties, forcing the king to take all of Damory's land into his own hands to protect him from Lancaster's wrath.¹⁷⁴ Eventually, Lancaster had shown his power and influence, and Edward was desperate to get Lancaster on his side if he wanted to defeat the looming Scottish forces. After months of negotiation and the threat of civil war looming once again, Edward finally agreed to Lancaster's request. Edward stated that he would uphold the Ordinances, take counsel from

¹⁷¹ Tuck, "Loyalty of the Household Knights", p. 70.

¹⁷² Rosenthal & Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster', p. 203

¹⁷³ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p. 113.

¹⁷⁴ Warner, *The Unconventional King*, p. 113.

his barons and earls, and keep the peace with Lancaster.¹⁷⁵ Officially, Edward and Lancaster were now allies, and a unanimous parliament set them both on the path to the Siege of Berwick in 1319-1320. At this point, Edward was quite strong, and many believed that his previous tendency to favour the unfavourable had ceased. However, during the campaign, Edward is believed to have been very forward about giving out inheritances and estates from the battle that they had not yet won, to ‘despicable parasites’, and he claimed that he would seek revenge for Gaveston when the war was over. This is likely the reason Lancaster held back during the campaign. It was Lancaster who was blamed the most for the failure of the siege, for withdrawing too early. Rumours started spreading about Lancaster being in cahoots with the Scots as a traitor; some suggest he purposely withdrew, some state that he took £40,000 from Bruce to rig it in his favour. These rumours were all perpetuated by the king’s new favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger.

It was the rise of the Despensers that brought back supporters for Lancaster, who now did not focus on keeping the Ordinances but on violence against the king’s friends. Despenser had gone too far in Wales, and the Marcher Lords were seeking revenge. The Lords had lost their right to advise the king, the favourites had total control over Edward, who he spoke to, they took bribes to allow people to see him, they put people in jail for displeasing them or even just if they wanted their land. This common enemy was what drew Lancaster to the Marcher Lords. The Marcher Lords ransacked all of Despenser’s land and property, with no regard for Despenser’s tenants. They took control of nearly all of Hugh’s land and properties with little resistance, as the residents hated Despenser as much as they did. The marchers officially arrived at parliament with the backing of Lancaster (although he was not in attendance),

¹⁷⁵ Rosenthal & Maddicott, ‘Thomas of Lancaster’, *p. 218*.

Edward was warned that if he did not comply, it was highly likely that he would lose his throne, forcing him to exile the Despensers.¹⁷⁶

The contrarians were connected solely by their hatred for Despenser, and with him banished, they had no legal reason to stay in opposition to the king, as they no longer had the excuse that they were after Despenser, not the king, and would officially be viewed as enemies of the king if they continued. By 1322, Edward had regained some of his power, enough to bring back Despenser and legally go after the Marcher lords and Lancaster. Lancaster was captured near his Pontefract estate. Lancaster was executed by beheading (Which his royal blood afforded him). Lancaster's death was not the end of it for Edward II, as he was hailed a martyr. Edward was able to repeal the Ordinances with Lancaster dead and near enough all of his opposition dead or in prison.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Given-Wilson, *'The Terrors of Kingship'*, p. 66-68.

¹⁷⁷ Saaler, *'Edward II'*, p. 112.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research is important because it challenges the idea that Edward I was the perfect king, it also challenges the view that Edward II was completely incompetent, bringing forward a new angle that suggests that the nature of the relationship between Edward and his favourites was irrelevant but the intensity of said relations was the problem, as well as suggesting that Thomas of Lancaster plays a more significant role in Edwards inability to rule or exert his power than many contemporary's and secondary historians give him credit for. A unique take throughout this essay is the inclusion of age and how the difference in age at the time of being crowned king affected each king's reign and legacy. This is a point that is typically overlooked, which is why it is so important to this research piece.

Edward I is undeniably a very strong king who had considerable skill and an affinity for good luck. Edward's ability to choose and keep the favour of talented and loyal advisors is a skill that Edward II, to his detriment, did not have. Valour, bravery, and strength are all skills Edward I had in abundance; his military prowess has left him with an incredible legacy. Hailed as one of the best medieval kings, known for his strategic mind, brute strength, and brutality, Edward I has very little that suggests he was not the absolute ideal medieval king. Edward dominated both Scotland and Wales, as well as all other threats he faced during his reign, although he did not win every battle; he always emerged victorious in the long run. Edward helped develop the legal system, aimed, and successfully cracked down on corruption within his government and introduced what would have been considered 'progressive' legislation, all proving that Edward was, in fact, a very just man who took his position as king seriously. His piousness was undeniable; even when he was fighting with the clergy, he never stopped his religious dedication. Edward neared civil war near the end of his reign and prevented it completely, and still ended up with a loyal government and a legacy

that many medieval kings would have strived for. Historians, both modern and contemporary, view Edward in a positive light, with any negatives being about his brutality in Wales and Scotland and his debts at death. Edward meets almost all of the medieval criteria for a good king, which is reflected in the literature; however, he was not without his failures.

Edward II's choice of companions was undoubtedly his fatal flaw; he was easily manipulated by those beneath his station. Ostracising his nobility in favour of those deemed unacceptable, leaving himself without any sound and competent advisors. Edward lacked the military skills his father excelled in, an incredibly strong soldier but a poor and incompetent leader. Edward also faced hardships his father did not have to face, including famine and severe weather conditions; he also faced significant legal challenges to his power, enforced by his strongest nobility, forcing him to significantly decrease his own power in fear of civil war. Edward II also gained the throne at age twenty-three, compared to his father's thirty-five, putting them both at significantly different stages in life and with completely different levels of skill, experience and knowledge of what it truly meant to be king. Edward II is very rarely spoken about in a positive light by historians, both modern and contemporary; his positives usually include his loyalty (be that misplaced) and financial plans. The negatives are by far the focus of literature about Edward II. Historians focus on Edwards' relationship with his favourites and his failure to conquer Scotland in comparison with his father. This essay is showing the importance of being more critical of other parts of Edwards government and personal interests when viewing Edward II reign, Thomas of Lancaster being a key figure in Edwards downfall even after his death, Edwards inability to say no to his favourites being more significant than the nature of said relationships, the differences in age and experience of both kings at the start of their reign and Edwards complete lack of ability to form relationships

with his nobility, or keep them from having significant internal conflicts are all points that need to be looked at further in literature.

This essay started with a discussion about easily identifiable patterns between monarchs and how, throughout the Middle Ages, monarchs were usually paired up in literature for a multitude of reasons. Edward I and Edward II, King John, and King Richard and so on. This essay has set out a blueprint for researching and comparing the reigns of these paired-up monarchs, looking specifically at Edward I and Edward II; this method can and should be repeated on other monarchs of the period.

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