



# The Provisions



The official newsletter of  
Simon de Montfort 2014

January 2015

On 20 January 1265, nearly a year to the date of Louis' injudicious verdict that the king of England could rule as he pleased, Parliament opened in Westminster Hall with the king in attendance as mere figurehead. It was nearly thirty years earlier that the word 'parliament' was used for the first time in official records, to denote the summoning of the great council. At that time Henry wanted a tax, but the barons and clerics, clearly disturbed by the growing insularity of a court dominated by the king's relations (including his new brother-in-law Simon de Montfort), set conditions. Since Henry immediately reneged on them, it would be his last tax until near the end of his reign. The failure to get any money from Parliament led to all kinds of underhanded tactics, culminating in the Provisions of Oxford and the prerogative of summoning Parliament taken out of the king's hands. The struggle over Parliament eventually divided the reformers and thrust Simon into the forefront of the opposition. While remembered chiefly for the makeup of the January assembly, his determination to make Parliament the established institution for approving acts of state was a greater contribution. On this occasion, he wanted approval for his scheme to release Edward as a hostage for a permanent peace. It would take more than six weeks to wrap up this business, because other schemes were also in the works, most notably involving the feud between Montfort's sons and his fellow triumvir, the earl of Gloucester.



Westminster Hall –  
not exactly the House of  
Commons but getting there



Neither Henry nor Simon comes off well in an episode of the new series *Britain's Bloodiest Dynasty*. The presentation clearly has the gaming generation in mind, from the hip fashion and talk of presenter Dan Jones ('Simon's a zero-tolerance sort of guy') to his running an oily fingertip across archival material. That's supposed to be Montfort below, just before he gets chopped up by a hit squad moving in slow motion on the battlefield. Naturally we get to hear all about what happened to his testicles, nothing about his parliaments. With this kind of tiresome mindset, it's no wonder that Edward II was chosen for the subsequent episode and not his father. Don't wanna miss out on the tale of the red-hot poker, now do we?

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