

**In July 1215, King John spent two nights in
Chipping Campden.
But do we know why?**

After sealing Magna Carta King John probably wanted to get away from the argumentative barons who had forced him to give up much of what he considered his rightful powers. Of course, he had no intention of letting them get away with it - indeed he hoped that it would be annulled by the Pope - but for the time being he would travel with one of his strongest supporters, the Earl of Chester.

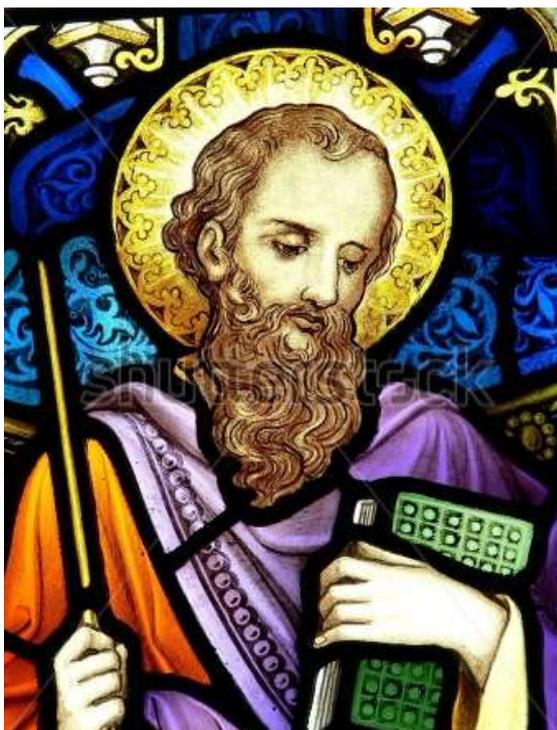
This was Ranulf de Blundeville, Lord of the Manor of Campden. He had been a staunch follower of Henry II, Richard I and now King John. His great and very obvious loyalty may have been due in part to his father having been dispossessed of his lands for a time for disloyalty. He has been described as both 'warrior and statesman' and was one of the richest and most powerful barons at that time.



They would have to be accompanied by a troop of soldiers as well as servants because the whole country was still very dangerous. He decided that the Royal Hunting Forest of Feckenham would be the place to go, but first he would consult some of his baronial supporters. They would travel by safe routes and only stay where he would be truly welcomed or where his soldiers could make sure he was properly looked after.

And so they came to Chipping Campden...

This was one of the manors belonging to the Earl of Chester and it was on more than one of the major routeways across the country. Here he would not only be made genuinely welcome but could celebrate the Holy Day of St James, which was the day they arrived. They were here on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th July. At that time there was certainly a Norman Chapel in (Broad) Campden but there may very well have been a small chapel or church at Berrington, close to the new town; there was certainly a priest named Osmund.



They may well have stayed at a recently built manorial hall at Berrington. There has been so much rebuilding in that area since that time and little archaeological work, so as yet no traces have been found of the hall. However it seems highly likely that such a wealthy baron would have swiftly had one built in that area close to the new town.

His reeve or bailiff would have been based there, with the duty of collecting the ground rents from the newly arrived burgesses and making sure that all the peasants worked their full due time on the lord's demesne.

Chipping Campden was probably then not quite 40 years old.

In 1086 - Domesday Book - there had been just the village of Campedene (now Broad Campden) with perhaps already the hamlets of Berrington and Westington. Once the manor had been held by King Harold himself but by 1086 it was one of some 200 held by a staunch follower of William the Conqueror, Hugh d'Avranches, first Earl of Chester. A later Earl had joined the wrong side when some barons revolted against Henry II, who took away his lands.

In order to increase the income from Campden manor, the King granted a Market Charter for a new town which was laid out along a well-used routeway and artisans and traders came from far and wide to take advantage. As most people then still spoke Anglo Saxon it became known as 'Chipping' or 'Market' Campden.



There shall be standard measures of wine, ale and corn (the London quarter) throughout the kingdom. There shall also be a standard width of dyed cloth Weights are to be standardised similarly.

In future no official shall place a man on trial upon his own unsupported statement, without producing credible witnesses to the truth of it.

No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land.

To no man will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.

We will appoint as justices, constables, sheriffs or other officials only men who know the law of the realm and are minded to keep it well.

**King John arrived as a guest in Chipping Campden on the feast day of
St James – 25th July 1215.**

Was it a coincidence that in 1216 Ranulph de Blundeville was granted a charter to hold an annual fair beginning on that day and for the two days following? At these fairs itinerant salesmen would sell luxury items such as ribbons and useful goods that could not be supplied locally such as needles.

Equally, was it a coincidence that, at the time of the Reformation, the dedication of the church was changed to St James?

What did King John have for dinner?

Alas, no contemporary recipe books are known but in one from a little later we find...

Stekys of venison or beef: Take Venyson or Beef, & seche & gredyl it up brown; then take Vynegre & a litel various, & a lytil Wyne, & putte powder pepir ther-on y-now, and powder gyngere; & atte the dressoure straw on powder Canelle y-now, that the stekys be aly-helid ther-wyth, & but a little Sawce; & then serue it forth.

In other words – steaks of venison or beef grilled on both sides, then slowly cooked in red wine with a little vinegar, lemon juice, ground black pepper and ginger, then served sprinkled with a little cinnamon and the sauce. It seems likely that spices became popular amongst royalty and the top gentry after they had been discovered by the first Crusaders.

As for a pudding, pears in wine syrup were certainly popular somewhat later as was a sweet cheese flan:-

Tart de bry: Take a croste inch depe in trape. Take zolkes of ayren rawe and chese ruayn. Medle it and zolkes togyd and do ther-to pouder, ginger, sugar, saffron, and salt. Do it in a trape, bak it and serve it forth.

A modern version would use Brie or another soft cheese, shortcrust pastry, egg yolks, caster sugar, saffron and ginger. In the thirteenth century honey would have been the sweetener, rather than sugar. However it is as yet uncertain whether some or even all of the spices would have been widely available in England at that time.



The route to Campden...

On Tuesday 16th July 1215 King John met with a number of his loyal barons at Oxford. The council meeting lasted until 23rd July. John took the opportunity to reward some of them. Ranulph de Blundeville, Earl of Chester, was given custody of the Fief of Leicester on 22nd July. After the council meeting John set out, accompanied by the Earl, through what was still the Oxford Royal Forest, to spend the night of the 24th July at the Royal Manor of Woodstock. The next day they and their cavalcade of soldiers and retainers travelled on through the Royal Forest past Chipping Norton.

Entering what is now Gloucestershire they came to the new town of Chipping Campden in one of the many manors held by de Blundeville, and he welcomed his sovereign to the hall where they would spend the next two nights. Saturday 25th July was the feast day of St James and they would have remained to attend mass on the next day. Thus it was not until Monday 27th July that they resumed their journey to the Royal Forest of Feckenham which stretched northwards from the very gates of Worcester.