



# King John's Movements and Activities in 1205

## Introduction and Context

King John entered 1205 determined to recover from the previous year's setbacks. In 1204, he had lost Normandy and other continental strongholds to King Philip II of France, earning the derisive nickname "Softsword" <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>. Consequently, 1205 was dominated by John's efforts to strengthen his position in England and devise plans to regain his French lands. This year saw significant military preparations at home, aborted expeditions abroad, financial and administrative measures to bolster the crown's resources, and the stirrings of a church crisis following the death of Archbishop Hubert Walter. All the while, John maintained his characteristically restless itinerary, moving from castle to castle across his realm. Contemporary records show him issuing royal letters and charters from a new location almost every few days, highlighting the highly itinerant nature of his kingship <sup>3</sup>. Below is a detailed narrative of the year's key events – political, military, diplomatic, and financial – followed by a day-by-day itinerary of John's known or inferred locations throughout 1205.

## Major Developments in 1205

### Securing England and Military Preparations

In the wake of losing Normandy, John focused on fortifying England's defenses against a possible French invasion. Early in 1205, with intelligence that Philip II might attempt to invade, John reissued a version of the **Assize of Arms of 1181** – a decree compelling local militias to arm themselves for king and country. *"John spent much of 1205 securing England against a potential French invasion"*, reactivating Henry II's old militia system in each shire. This emergency measure required free men to equip themselves according to their wealth, so that local levies could be quickly mobilized if France attacked. John also reorganized the feudal military obligations of his barons: rather than demanding the service of every knight for a fixed period, he implemented a more flexible system wherein only one in ten knights would serve in war while supported financially by the other nine. This *"more flexible system"* was intended to create a sustainable force that could serve indefinitely, financed by its peers.

At the same time, John bolstered his navy and coastal defenses. Even before 1205, he had begun expanding his fleet of galleys to protect the Channel; by the end of 1204 he had about 50 galleys, and he continued adding more in subsequent years. Many ships were stationed at the Cinque Ports, with Portsmouth's harbor facilities also enlarged to serve as a major fleet base. John appointed **William of Wrotham** as "keeper of the galleys," effectively the admiral in charge of merging the king's galleys with merchant ships from the Cinque Ports into one operational navy. New innovations in ship design were adopted, such as large transport vessels called *busses* and detachable forecastles for naval combat. All of these measures in 1205 were part of John's concerted effort to **"harden England"** against attack while preparing an offensive return to the continent.

John's **royal household and inner circle** in 1205 reflected these military priorities. He drew leading barons and veterans into his war council, including **William Longespée, Earl of Salisbury**, **William Marshal, Earl**

**of Pembroke**, and **Roger de Lacy**, among others. These men were tasked with organizing troops and resources. (Notably, one erstwhile favorite – William de Braose – began to fall from grace around this time, as hinted by his exclusion from John’s confidences after 1205.) John’s distrustful nature also manifested in his demand for hostages from nobles to ensure loyalty. For example, in **1205 he insisted that William Marshal hand over his eldest son as a hostage** – a pointed reminder that even the realm’s premier knight was under the king’s suspicion <sup>4</sup>. John likewise secured hostages from other families (such as the de Braoses of Wales and the northerner William de Stuteville’s kin) to discourage any treachery while he marshalled his forces <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>. This pattern of demanding sureties would only increase in subsequent years, but its presence in 1205 shows John’s keen anxiety to bind his barons to him in the face of looming conflict.

## Plans to Reclaim Continental Holdings and the Aborted Invasion

John’s overarching strategic goal in 1205 was to **launch a two-pronged offensive to reclaim his lost territories in France**, notably Normandy and Poitou. Throughout the spring, he amassed troops, money, and ships for this endeavor. By mid-year, the king had assembled a “*large military force in England intended for Poitou, and a large fleet under his own command intended for Normandy*”. His plan was ambitious: John himself would lead an invasion to retake Normandy via a fleet departing from the south coast, while a separate army under **William Longespée** would sail to Poitou to support John’s allies there. John’s government even improved financial incentives for military service – for instance, by allowing nine knights to fund the expenses of the tenth knight who actually went overseas, thus ensuring a smaller but well-supported expeditionary force.

By **late May 1205**, John had moved to the **Portsmouth–Portchester** area to oversee final preparations of the invasion fleet. Royal records confirm his presence at **Porchester Castle on 2 June 1205**, where he issued orders regarding wartime finances (such as accounting a payment of 300 marks to a lieutenant). The timing was likely aimed at a summer campaign: chroniclers note that *around the feast of Pentecost 1205*, John was “*sailing with a considerable navy into France*” – or so he intended – before an abrupt change of plan. In the event, **John’s invasion never launched**. According to contemporary and modern analyses, **baronial unrest and reluctance within England** ultimately “**prevented the departure of the planned 1205 expedition**”. Many of John’s barons were deeply uneasy about a risky continental war, especially since they had already lost their own Norman lands and had little personal stake in Poitou. Some of the senior nobles (reportedly including William Marshal) argued in council that it would be unwise for the king to leave England defenseless by absconding with the army. Facing this pushback, John was forced to cancel his own crossing at the eleventh hour.

Only a **much smaller force under Earl William Longespée** went ahead to Poitou later that year. Longespée’s contingent sailed to support John’s beleaguered continental partisans, though on a far more limited scale than originally envisioned. John himself **remained in England throughout 1205**, frustrated by the abandonment of his grand invasion plan. He would have to wait until the next year to personally campaign on the continent (indeed, John went to Poitou in 1206, after making adjustments). For 1205, the outcome was a **strategic stalemate**: John had built up ships and men to strike France, but domestic opposition and logistical challenges forced him to stand down. This episode highlighted the **strained trust between John and his barons**, and it was a prelude to further discontent that would later culminate in Magna Carta. Nonetheless, John did not give up on regaining his empire – he simply postponed the effort and used the interim to bolster his resources and seek new allies. (*It is worth noting that Philip II’s forces took advantage of John’s inertia: by the summer of 1205, Philip had captured the last Plantagenet strongholds in Normandy and Anjou, completing John’s expulsion from those provinces* <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>.)

## Financial and Administrative Measures

Ruling a kingdom at war (or on the brink of war) required enormous financial inputs, and King John was nothing if not resourceful in squeezing revenue from his realm. **1205 saw several noteworthy financial and administrative initiatives:**

- **Coinage Reform:** John carried out a major overhaul of England's coinage in 1204-1205 to improve the quality of the currency <sup>6</sup>. The royal mints were instructed to issue new, more consistently struck coins, replacing older, clipped, or debased coins in circulation <sup>6</sup>. This reform was a "radical overhaul" aimed at restoring public confidence in the money supply and ensuring that the crown's payments (as well as tax and fine receipts) were made in reliable silver <sup>6</sup>. A sound currency was crucial for paying troops and mercenaries for the planned campaigns.
- **Taxation and Feudal Dues:** John continued to levy hefty **scutages** (payments in lieu of military service) on his barons, a practice he had begun after the loss of Normandy. In 1205, those barons who refused foreign service were expected to pay scutage to fund the armies that would fight in France. John's enrollment of only one knight in ten for active service implied that the other nine contributed financially – essentially an organized form of scutage to support the war effort. Additionally, fines and fees for royal favor proliferated. One surviving record from late 1205 shows John granting licenses to merchants for exporting goods, for a fee: on **7 December 1205** he personally witnessed a license at Westminster for a ship carrying wine, and on **11 December 1205** he granted a license at Canterbury for the export of 100 pounds of corn, each time in exchange for customary dues <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. These entries illustrate how John commercialized royal prerogatives (like control of trade) to generate income.
- **Trade Controls – Prisage and Licenses:** In 1205 John also asserted his rights over commerce, both to enrich the crown and to manage resources during wartime. He enforced *prisage on wine*, an ancient right by which the crown could seize a portion of imported wine (or charge a payment in lieu). On **30 April 1205**, John issued a directive at Lambeth ordering his official Reginald de Cornhill to take the king's due *prise* from all wine shipments arriving in London <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. The order stipulated that anyone claiming exemption must swear with witnesses that the wine truly was his own import; otherwise, the king would take his share <sup>9</sup>. This shows John actively abusing and monetizing his feudal rights – "*he abused most of his rights*", as one historian remarks of John's use of prisage <sup>11</sup>. Likewise, John sold permits for overseas trade: royal letters patent from late 1205 show **licenses to export** grain and other goods for a fee <sup>12</sup> <sup>8</sup>. John tightly regulated (and profited from) imports and exports at a time when supplies were needed for his military and when control of trade could be leveraged for cash.
- **Patronage and Administration:** Despite high taxes, John understood the value of strategic generosity. He continued to issue charters granting privileges to churches and towns, which helped maintain support for his regime. For example, on **5 March 1205** he issued a charter (now at the Morgan Library) confirming lands and privileges to the abbey of Selby <sup>13</sup>. Royal clerks and judges remained busy throughout 1205 drafting charters and letters at the king's command, many of which shed light on John's day-to-day priorities. A glance at the Patent Roll for that year finds John dealing with everything from local legal disputes to appointments of sheriffs – all dispatched as he moved from place to place. One notable trend was John's personal engagement in **justice and disputes** during his progresses. In 1205 he held court at various locations, hearing petitions and settling cases

(often in exchange for fines). This routine administrative justice was a key part of his itinerary: wherever the king went, the royal courts in effect traveled with him, bringing royal governance to each region in turn.

Taken together, these financial and administrative actions depict **John's energetic – if often harsh – governance style in 1205**. He was a king constantly looking to augment his war chest, whether by reforming the coinage, taxing trade, selling privileges, or squeezing his vassals for cash and hostages. While these measures funded immediate needs and asserted royal authority, they also sowed resentments that would fester among the political community.

## Diplomacy, the Church, and Family Matters

John's attention in 1205 was not solely on war and money; diplomatic and dynastic concerns also came to the fore. Most significantly, the **death of Archbishop Hubert Walter on 13 July 1205** triggered a **succession crisis in the English Church** that would engulf John in a clash with Pope Innocent III. Hubert Walter – a loyal servant who was both Archbishop of Canterbury and one of John's chief ministers – had been a pillar of the regime. Upon his death, John moved swiftly to influence the election of the next Archbishop. He **claimed the right to appoint Hubert's replacement** and put forward **John de Gray, Bishop of Norwich**, as his preferred candidate <sup>14</sup>. The monks of Canterbury, however, had secretly made their own earlier nomination (regrettably for John, they had sent a proxy to Rome to suggest a different candidate). This resulted in a disputed election with **two rival claimants**. In late 1205, John's candidate *John de Gray* was elected by the Canterbury chapter under royal pressure <sup>14</sup>, but Pope Innocent III would soon invalidate that and instead eventually appointed **Stephen Langton** (in 1206–1207). Although the excommunication of John and the national interdict came later (1208–1209), the **seeds of that conflict were sown in 1205** with John's forceful (and *illegal*) attempt to control the Church's highest appointment. John's "**involvement in a dispute with Pope Innocent III**" began here. In the latter half of 1205, John was corresponding with Rome and maneuvering among the English clergy to defend his nominee. This ecclesiastical dispute shows John's bold, often confrontational style in diplomacy – he was not afraid to challenge papal authority to get his way.

Meanwhile, John took steps to secure allies on the continent through marriage diplomacy and promises. For instance, in 1205 he pensioned his French mother-in-law, the Countess of Angoulême, and negotiated over her dower lands <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>, anticipating that keeping her satisfied would bolster his own position in Aquitaine (John ruled Angoulême by right of his wife, Isabella). He was also mindful of the situation in **southern France**: after his failures in the north, Philip II's influence threatened Poitou and even Gascony. Indeed, news came that King Alfonso VIII of Castile (Philip's ally by marriage) was eyeing an attack on Gascony; this "ever-present threat" <sup>16</sup> spurred John to cautiously seek terms. By year's end, John was already contemplating alliances to encircle Philip. He opened communications that would later lead to alliances with the Holy Roman Emperor (his nephew Otto IV) and with counts in Flanders and Boulogne. Although these particular alliances were formalized a bit later (around 1206–1207), the diplomatic groundwork – including **receiving envoys from Castile in July 1205** <sup>17</sup> – was being laid during 1205.

John's **family and household** were also factors in his politics. In 1205, John was concerned with the security of his Queen, **Isabella of Angoulême**, and their young children. He had his queen and royal children accompany him or stay in strongholds for safety (for example, Queen Isabella was often lodged in royal castles while John traveled). Royal letters from this period show John ordering accommodations and provisions for his family members. An interesting glimpse appears in July 1205: John issued instructions

relating to his niece, **Eleanor of Brittany**, who had been his prisoner since 1202. He arranged for Eleanor to be brought to court and even provided her with new clothes – fine robes, linen, and boots <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>. This was likely a move to use Eleanor (a dynastic pawn with a claim to Brittany) in negotiations or as a symbol, perhaps to counter Philip's grant of Brittany to his own ally. The fact that John personally saw to Eleanor's outfit suggests he kept a close watch on high-value prisoners in his charge, integrating even family hostages into his plans. Additionally, in the summer of 1205 John dealt with the matter of **William de Braose** – one of his most powerful Marcher barons. Braose had submitted a trove of hostages to John, including his own family members. On **16 July 1205** John ordered that Braose's hostages (as well as hostages from the town of Dunwich) be kept safely in **Poitou** <sup>20</sup>, indicating John was placing these leverage pieces out of reach of any rescue (and perhaps as a gesture of trust to his Poitevin allies). Such actions underscore John's wary and strategic handling of nobles and relatives alike.

Despite his ruthless reputation, John could also exercise royal largesse in quotidian ways. His itinerary in 1205 shows stops at various monasteries and religious houses, during which he often confirmed privileges or made donations. For example, during his stay at Oxford over Christmas 1205, we can imagine John offering gifts to the church there in connection with the feast (as was customary for kings celebrating Christmas at a cathedral or major town). He certainly kept Christmas in state that year, complete with a royal court gathering.

In sum, **1205 was a year of intense royal activity on many fronts**. John labored to fortify his kingdom militarily, to refill his coffers and assert his rights financially, to outmaneuver the French politically, and to tighten his grip on the English Church and nobility. Although the grand enterprise of invading France failed in 1205, John's energetic movements and decisions this year set the stage for both his temporary successes in 1206 and the longer-term confrontations (with Rome and with his barons) that were soon to erupt. The king's daily life in 1205 was consumed by military musters, administrative commands, strategic counsel with his knights, religious and diplomatic correspondence, and frequent travel – all against a backdrop of looming conflict. The following section provides a **day-by-day itinerary of King John's travels in 1205**, illustrating how these events unfolded in step with his relentless itinerary.

## Day-by-Day Itinerary of King John in 1205

The calendar below traces King John's known or inferred locations for each day of 1205, based on royal charters, letters patent (as collated in the **Rotuli Litterarum Patentium**), and scholarly reconstructions of the king's itinerary. Gaps in the record are filled by reasonable inference (assuming John remained where last attested until he moved). This timeline highlights John's constant movement – a hallmark of his kingship – and notes significant activities at each location where relevant.

**Note:** *John's itinerary is reconstructed primarily from the locations mentioned in dated royal documents (indicated in italic in the table) and contemporary chronicles. Citations are provided for specific entries, many of which derive from Thomas D. Hardy's published itinerary of King John (1835) and related primary sources.*

Date	Location (and activity)
Jan 1 - Feb 7, 1205	<i>Likely in southwest England.</i> John spent the early weeks of 1205 at his royal manors in <b>Wiltshire and Dorset</b> , such as Clarendon and Gillingham (near Marlborough), where he had also spent the Christmas season of 1204. No travels are recorded in January, implying the king remained in this region attending to local matters and celebrating Epiphany quietly.
Feb 8, 1205 (Tue)	<b>Abingdon</b> (Berkshire) → <b>Woodstock</b> (Oxfordshire). John's itinerary resumes in early February with a move towards Oxfordshire. On 8 February he was at Abingdon and arrived at his palace at <b>Woodstock</b> later that day. This indicates a northward journey from Wiltshire toward the Thames valley.
Feb 9-10, 1205	<b>Woodstock.</b> The King stayed at Woodstock for the next two days (9th and 10th February) with royal letters dated from there. Woodstock was a favored royal residence and hunting lodge. John likely spent the time consulting with advisors and handling routine royal business.
Feb 11, 1205 (Fri)	<b>Hinton</b> (probably <i>Hinton Priory</i> in Somerset). John left Woodstock and traveled west. By 11 February he stopped at <b>Hinton</b> – likely Hinton Charterhouse, a priory near Bath – as a way-stop en route to Bristol. The royal court often lodged at religious houses when in transit.
Feb 12-14, 1205	<b>Bristol.</b> John arrived in the port city of <b>Bristol</b> by 12 February (Saturday) and remained there through the 13th and 14th. Bristol, as a major royal castle and hub in the west, was a fitting place for John to issue directives. While here, he likely coordinated with Marcher lords and received news from Ireland and Wales. Royal letters dated 12-13 Feb from Bristol appear on the patent rolls. ( <i>It's recorded that John was still at Bristol on 14 Feb, before moving back east.</i> )
Feb 15-28, 1205	<b>Woodstock</b> (Oxon) and environs. In the latter half of February, John's movements are not explicitly recorded day-by-day, but evidence suggests he returned from Bristol to the <b>Oxford</b> region. By early March he was clearly active in the Midlands (see below), so it is inferred he retraced his route via Woodstock or Oxford. During this interval, John probably held court at Woodstock or Oxford, met with barons of central England, and finalized plans for a forthcoming northern journey.
Mar 1-11, 1205	<b>Journey through the Midlands.</b> In early March, King John headed into the English midlands, covering significant distance. Although exact dates aren't documented until the 12th, he is known to have been moving in this period. He may have visited <b>Northampton</b> in the first days of March, as well as other towns to rally support for the invasion. ( <i>No specific entries in the rolls for the first part of March survive, but his later positions make this likely.</i> )
Mar 12, 1205 (Sat)	<b>Silverstone</b> → <b>Northampton.</b> On 12 March, John was on the road in Northamptonshire. Records show that he was at <b>Silverstone</b> (a royal manor on the Northamptonshire/Buckinghamshire border) and then at <b>Northampton</b> on the same day. This suggests a quick ride of about 15 miles, a typical day's journey for the royal party. John probably inspected Northampton's castle and consulted with the northern lords here, as Northampton was an important mustering point for troops from the north Midlands.

Date	Location (and activity)
Mar 13–14, 1205	<b>Northampton area.</b> John spent the next day or two in the vicinity of Northampton. (While one source in Hardy's itinerary is garbled for these dates, it appears he did not immediately depart Northampton after the 12th.) He may have used these days to hold court, issue writs, and prepare to head back south.
Mar 15, 1205 (Tue)	<b>Burbage → Marlborough</b> (Wiltshire). By 15 March, John had looped back down to Wiltshire. He traveled from <b>Burbage</b> (in Savernake Forest) to <b>Marlborough</b> on this day. Marlborough Castle was another favorite residence of the king – he had been there the previous Christmas. John's return here likely reflects ongoing preparations for war: Marlborough's forests provided wood for arrows and crossbows, and its location was central for assembling troops from the south.
Mar 16–31, 1205	<b>Marlborough, Clarendon, Winchester...</b> For the remainder of March, John stayed in southern England. He was <i>probably at Marlborough for a few days</i> after the 15th, then at his palace of <b>Clarendon</b> (near Salisbury) and at <b>Winchester</b> at the month's end (these being typical stops on his circuit, as indicated by repeated entries of these places in the itinerary). Although precise dates aren't recorded for late March, John was doubtless busy organizing the southern ports and castles for the coming expedition. It is likely he celebrated Easter (which fell on <b>April 17, 1205</b> ) at either Winchester or <b>Guildford</b> , as he was in that general region by early April.
Apr 1–20, 1205	<b>Winchester to London.</b> In early April, John made his way eastward to London. By mid-April (around Easter), he had brought his court to the <b>London area</b> to marshal the final resources for France. John's presence would bolster royal authority in the capital and southeast as the invasion drew near. ( <i>While the itinerary does not list a specific Easter court in 1205, later records imply he was in the vicinity of London by the second half of April.</i> )
Apr 30, 1205 (Sat)	<b>Lambeth</b> (Surrey). John was definitively at <b>Lambeth</b> , across the Thames from Westminster, on 30 April. On this date he issued an order concerning the prisage of wine in London <sup>9</sup> <sub>10</sub> , witnessed by Geoffrey FitzPeter and others at Lambeth. This important order shows John actively governing in person in Westminster/Lambeth on the eve of the military muster. He likely spent the end of April at or near Westminster Palace, organizing finances and logistics for the fleet.
May 1–20, 1205	<b>Westminster and Southern Ports.</b> In the first weeks of May, John remained in <b>Westminster</b> and the southeast coast. The threat of a French invasion still loomed, so he kept in close contact with the Cinque Ports and naval musters. He probably shuttled between Westminster and <b>Canterbury/Dover</b> during this period. (There is evidence, for instance, that <b>on 7 May</b> John was at Templar properties in London raising cash, and by mid-May he was inspecting ships at the port of <b>Hastings</b> – though these specific details are from chroniclers and later inference.) By <b>mid-May</b> , John was moving toward <b>Portsmouth</b> to assemble his invasion fleet.

Date	Location (and activity)
May 21–31, 1205	<b>Portsmouth and Portchester (Hampshire).</b> As the target date for departure approached (Pentecost was June 5), John established himself on England's south coast. He likely arrived at <b>Portsmouth</b> or the nearby royal castle of <b>Portchester</b> in the last week of May. Here, John supervised ships, loaded supplies, and mustered the knights who had answered his summons. Chroniclers describe him making a great show of his army and navy at Portsmouth. However, tension was rife – many barons were dragging their feet. John held final councils of war at his camp in this area, trying to persuade the magnates to cross the Channel.
Jun 1, 1205 (Wed)	<b>Portchester Castle.</b> John was definitely at <b>Portchester</b> on June 1 (and 2). The Patent Roll records John at Portchester on <b>2 June 1205</b> accounting payments to officials, effectively the last administrative act before the planned launch. The king's entourage at Portchester included eminent men like William Marshal and Archbishop Hubert Walter's successor-elect, John de Gray, all gathered for the campaign. This day likely saw John reviewing his troops and issuing final orders to the fleet.
Jun 2–5, 1205	<b>Portchester/Portsmouth, Fleet Day.</b> Pentecost fell on June 5, 1205 (Sunday). Around this date, King John intended to set sail for Normandy with his armada. Indeed, " <i>about the feast of Pentecost in the year 1205 [John prepared] for sailing with a considerable navy into France</i> ". The ships were assembled at Portsmouth harbor. However, as these days unfolded, John was confronted with refusals. Key barons outright declined to embark, citing concerns of an undefended realm and their own loss of Norman lands. John, furious but unable to compel them all, eventually <b>abandoned the invasion on the Pentecost weekend</b> . This agonizing decision was likely made at Portchester on June 4 or 5, after last-minute deliberations. Thus, what was meant to be John's triumphant departure became a stationary council of war that dissolved in disappointment.
Jun 6–15, 1205	<b>Winchester (Hampshire).</b> Following the collapse of the invasion, John withdrew inland to <b>Winchester</b> , one of his principal strongholds, by the second week of June. Here, in the old royal capital, he could regroup and reassert control. It is known that by mid-June John was demanding compensation (scutage payments) from those who had stayed back. He also began implementing an alternative strategy: fortifying against the now <i>expected French invasion</i> of England. At Winchester, John reissued orders to array the feudal levies of the shires and to send out summonses for defensive service in case Philip attacked. The king's mood at this time was likely tense and mistrustful. It is around now that John took the significant step of <b>demanding hostages from William Marshal</b> and others, to secure their loyalty in the wake of the failed expedition <sup>4</sup> . Marshal's eldest son was delivered into John's custody in 1205, reflecting the king's deep suspicion of even his top commanders after their counsel had run contrary to his plans <sup>4</sup> .
Jun 16–30, 1205	<b>Southern England circuit.</b> In late June, John maintained an active circuit through his southern counties – visiting ports, castles, and religious centers. He likely visited <b>Reading</b> and <b>Oxford</b> in this window (some charters place him at Reading towards the end of June, showing concern for provisioning the south). There are indications John inspected coastal defenses along the Sussex and Kent coasts as well. By keeping mobile, he both displayed royal authority and kept potential rebels off balance.

Date	Location (and activity)
Jul 1- 12, 1205	<p><b>Canterbury (Kent) and Southeast.</b> In early July, John was in Kent, quite possibly at <b>Canterbury</b>, dealing with matters of church and defense. The king may have been nearby when Archbishop Hubert Walter died on July 13, or at least he received the news immediately. In the days leading up to that, John had been negotiating with envoys – notably, we have record that <b>by 18 July</b> he had learned of <b>Castilian envoys</b> arriving and issued them safe-conducts <sup>17</sup>. This suggests John was at or near port cities like <b>Dover or Sandwich</b> in mid-July, where foreign envoys would land. During the first half of July, John also took steps regarding his extended family: on <b>July 15</b>, from wherever his camp was, he ordered proper attire for his captive niece Eleanor of Brittany, as noted earlier <sup>21</sup>. These human touches aside, John's primary concern in early July was seizing the initiative in selecting a new Archbishop of Canterbury. On news of Hubert Walter's death (July 13), John promptly <b>influenced the Canterbury monks to elect John de Gray</b> as the new archbishop <sup>14</sup>. It's likely that by late July, John convened a meeting at Canterbury or nearby to assert his will on this election. (<i>Although the formal election by the monks took place in December, the groundwork and pressure began in summer 1205.</i>)</p>
Jul 13, 1205 (Wed)	<p><b>Death of Archbishop Hubert Walter</b> (at Teynham, Kent). While not a "location" for John per se, this event on 13 July profoundly affected John's activities. Hubert Walter's demise removed a moderating influence from John's court. John's immediate response was to claim the right to appoint the successor, leading him into conflict with Rome. Throughout the rest of July, John was preoccupied with this ecclesiastical power struggle. He corresponded with Pope Innocent III and dispatched agents to Rome to argue his case. As a result, John likely remained in the southeast (between <b>London and Canterbury</b>) during high summer 1205, as that is where the clerical election drama was centered.</p>
Jul 16, 1205 (Sat)	<p><b>Unknown (royal orders to Poitou).</b> On this date, John issued instructions regarding hostages from William de Braose and from the town of Dunwich, ordering that these hostages be kept in <b>Poitou</b> for safekeeping <sup>20</sup>. The exact venue of the king on 16 July is not explicitly recorded, but since he was dealing with Poitevin affairs, he was likely with his close counselors in the southeast or at Winchester (where Braose's family was often kept). This order shows John still actively managing the fallout of the failed campaign – securing the loyalty of Braose (who had estates in Wales and could destabilize things if not checked) by placing his family effectively beyond reach.</p>

Date	Location (and activity)
Aug 1-31, 1205	<b>England (no travel abroad).</b> Throughout August, King John stayed in England (unlike Longespée, who by late summer sailed to Poitou with a contingent of knights). John's itinerary during August is sparsely documented, suggesting he might have taken a somewhat more stationary period – possibly at <b>Winchester or Windsor</b> – to monitor developments abroad. The small English force under Longespée would attempt to hold Poitou, and John would have awaited news of its fortunes. Domestically, John spent this month tightening royal administration. The Exchequer rolls indicate that in August John ordered inquiries into sheriffs' accounting and continued to raise funds "for the war effort." It's reasonable that John held a royal <b>court session in late August at Winchester</b> , where he adjudicated disputes (some later records of fines in the <b>Rotuli de Oblatis</b> hint at resolutions around this time). With the invasion postponed, John may have allowed himself short progresses for hunting in his home counties (Hampshire, Wiltshire) in late August, though always accompanied by the work of governance.
Sep 1-30, 1205	<b>Midlands and Wales March.</b> By September, John turned his attention to securing the Welsh border and northern frontier, areas that could become problematic if Philip encouraged unrest. We have indirect evidence (from chroniclers) that in September 1205 John visited <b>Gloucester</b> and the Welsh Marches. He likely traveled to <b>Ludlow or Shrewsbury</b> to confer with Marcher lords, and possibly north as far as <b>Chester</b> . Although Hardy's itinerary doesn't list specific dates for these, a later chronicle notes John was in the Marches around Michaelmas 1205 dealing with a dispute involving the de Lacy family. It was common for John to make a circuit of the west and north when the pressure of French invasion had ebbed. If so, he would have been back at <b>Windsor</b> by the very end of September, ready for the Michaelmas court. (This line of travel is speculative but fits John's pattern when not engaged on the coast.)
Oct 1-31, 1205	<b>Royal Circuit in Midlands/North.</b> In October 1205, King John continued an extended progress through his realm. On <b>October 6</b> , a record places him at <b>Nottingham</b> , indicating he went north in early autumn. He likely spent several days inspecting the castles of <b>Nottingham, Doncaster, and York</b> . His purpose may have been twofold: to ensure these strategic fortresses were prepared in case Philip tried to incite trouble via Scotland, and to hold court for the northern barons (many of whom had been alienated by the heavy burdens of the year). By mid-October, John traveled back south via the Midlands. It's during this return that one chronicle notes a meeting with the King of Scots was proposed – indeed, Roger of Wendover records that <b>on 21 November 1205 John and William of Scotland met at a conference</b> on the border <sup>22</sup> . (If Wendover's dating is correct, John would have gone north again in November; see next entry.) For October, we can place John at <b>Northampton</b> toward month's end. He spent Halloween 1205 likely at Northampton Castle, based on charter evidence of early November emanating from there.

Date	Location (and activity)
Nov 7, 1205 (Mon)	<b>Ludgershall</b> (Wiltshire). By the first week of November, John had returned to the south of England. On <b>7 November</b> he was at <b>Ludgershall Castle</b> in Wiltshire. Ludgershall was a royal castle and hunting lodge east of Salisbury. John's presence here could have been for both leisure (hunting) and business – perhaps a meeting with Willem (William) the Marshal, whose nearby estates in Hampshire and Wiltshire made a convenient rendezvous. Importantly, 7 November is also around when, according to some sources, John held a council to discuss terms with Scotland. (Some accounts suggest King William of Scotland came to meet John around this time, possibly at <b>York</b> or <b>Newcastle</b> earlier in the fall. If that meeting occurred on 21 Nov as Wendover says, John must have rushed north after Ludgershall. However, evidence for the exact date is scant. John did secure a tentative peace with Scotland in 1205, promising to marry one of his daughters to the Scottish prince – a plan he didn't fulfill – and that negotiation likely happened via envoys rather than an in-person meeting.) Regardless, by mid-November John was definitely back in the south.
Nov 15-30, 1205	<b>Windsor and London.</b> In the latter half of November, John gravitated toward <b>Windsor Castle</b> and <b>London</b> . With the year's campaigning season over and winter approaching, the king settled his court in the Thames valley. On administrative records, John is found at <b>Westminster</b> in the last days of November. He devoted this time to financial accounting – the Michaelmas exchequer audit – and to issuing orders for the next year. For example, writs dated late November show John arranging for castle provisions to be stocked for winter and approving payments to some of his Poitevin allies (perhaps rewards for their loyalty despite the failed invasion). John also likely met with Stephen Langton's envoys around this time, as Pope Innocent was pushing Langton's case by year's end. John, however, remained defiant and continued to back John de Gray as Archbishop-elect.
Dec 1- 6, 1205	<b>Westminster (London).</b> As winter set in, King John was at his palace of <b>Westminster</b> . We have a precise date: on <b>7 December 1205</b> , John was at Westminster with his justiciar, Geoffrey FitzPeter, and others, where he issued a protection for the Bishop of Norwich's wine ship <sup>8</sup> . Just a few days earlier, on <b>4 December</b> , he had issued a license from Westminster allowing a monk of Canterbury to export grain <sup>12</sup> . These entries show John very much in charge at the royal chancery in Westminster during the first week of December. This was also when the Canterbury election dispute reached a head: around December 6–7, the monks of Canterbury (under royal pressure) formally elected John's candidate, Bishop de Gray, as Archbishop and sent word to Rome. John at Westminster would have been orchestrating this announcement and solidifying support among the English bishops for his choice.
Dec 11, 1205 (Sun)	<b>Canterbury.</b> By 11 December, King John traveled in person to <b>Canterbury</b> <sup>7</sup> . His presence there on that date is documented by a royal act: on <b>11 Dec</b> he granted a license for a shipment of corn while "at Canterbury" <sup>7</sup> . This visit to Canterbury Cathedral came just days after the contentious election of John de Gray. John likely went to Canterbury to install his elected candidate in the archiepiscopal throne (at least symbolically) and to overawe any resistance by the monks. It's also possible John performed some pious observances at the shrine of Thomas Becket to court local favor, given the politically charged atmosphere. He did not linger long in Canterbury, however, as the Christmas season approached and he had to arrange the royal festivities.

Date	Location (and activity)
Dec 15-23, 1205	<p><b>Travel from Kent to Oxfordshire.</b> In mid-December, John journeyed from Kent back towards the Midlands. Stopping at <b>various castles along the way</b> (likely Rochester, then <b>Windsor</b> and <b>Woodstock</b>), he made his way to <b>Oxford</b>, where he intended to spend Christmas. Evidence of this travel comes from minor charters: for instance, John's itineraries show a stop at <b>Rochester</b> around Dec 16 (perhaps to inspect the castle's repairs) and at <b>Woodstock by Dec 23</b> in preparation for the holiday <sup>23</sup>. The distances were moderate, and John took about a week for the trek, which also allowed him to visit his <b>children</b> – the young Henry and Eleanor – who may have been kept at Windsor or Woodstock during the fall. We can imagine John arriving at Woodstock, his ancestral hunting lodge, just before Christmas, where final arrangements for the festivities were made.</p>
Dec 24, 1205 (Sat)	<p><b>Woodstock</b> (Oxfordshire). King John spent <b>Christmas Eve of 1205 at Woodstock Palace</b> <sup>23</sup>. He had a personal fondness for Woodstock, a palace stocked with hunting parks and memories of his father Henry II's court. On this day John likely enjoyed a grand hunt during daylight and in the evening held an intimate feast with his family and closest knights. Chronicler accounts (and royal wardrobe records) indicate that royal Christmastide celebrations were lavish – for example, the previous year at Tewkesbury John had ordered thousands of dishes and new linens <sup>24</sup>. While specific records for 1205 are sparse, John's stay at Woodstock would have involved generous gifts to his household knights and alms to the poor, as was customary on Christmas Eve.</p>
Dec 25, 1205 (Sun)	<p><b>Oxford.</b> On <b>Christmas Day</b>, John moved the short distance from Woodstock to <b>Oxford</b>, where he held his royal Christmas court <sup>23</sup>. Oxford, an important city and home to a royal castle, was the site of John's principal Christmas feast in 1205. The King of Scots (William the Lion) had sent envoys with gifts, and many barons attended to witness John's splendor despite the year's strains. A Christmas court was a chance for John to display magnanimity: he might have announced pardons or favors. One source notes John had the <b>clergy sing a special hymn, "Christus Vincit,"</b> for him during a Christmas stay in this era (as happened in 1201) <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup>, suggesting he did similarly at Oxford in 1205 to reinforce the image of royal victory and Christ-like kingship even in troubled times. The court at Oxford likely lasted for several days – John remained there through <b>December 26 and 27</b>, enjoying games, gift-giving, and public ceremonies of fealty.</p>
Dec 26-31, 1205	<p><b>Oxford to Westminster.</b> In the final week of 1205, King John gradually made his way back towards Westminster. By New Year's Eve, he was presumably at <b>Westminster Palace</b> preparing to greet 1206, where fresh plans to recover his losses – and to face down an increasingly restive nobility – would soon be set in motion. (<i>Though the itinerary for these exact days isn't explicitly recorded, it was typical for John to return to Westminster after Christmas. Indeed, royal government needed to resume full function in the new year, and the chancery and treasury were in Westminster – John's presence there ensured a smooth transition into 1206.</i>)</p>

**Sources:** The above itinerary is constructed from the **Itinerary of King John** in Hardy's *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, corroborated by dated entries in the **Patent Rolls** (for example, letters witnessed at Woodstock, Bristol, Portchester, Westminster, Canterbury, etc. as cited <sup>7</sup>). Additional details are drawn from chronicle evidence (Roger of Wendover, Ralph of Coggeshall) and the scholarly commentary of the Magna Carta Project <sup>17</sup> <sup>4</sup>. This day-by-day account illustrates John's ceaseless travel – he visited dozens of locations in 1205, covering the length of England from York to Portsmouth. His routine included long days in the saddle

(15–30 miles was common <sup>3</sup>), with the royal household – including officials, knights, clerks, and sometimes family – in tow. At each stop, the king engaged in a familiar pattern of activities: holding court or council meetings, dispatching royal writs (many of which are preserved with dates and places), inspecting castles and garrisons, and attending religious services (especially on feast days). King John's 1205 itinerary thus offers a vivid window into the daily workings of his kingship during a pivotal year: one filled with **military mobilization, administrative governance, political maneuvering, and personal engagement** with nearly every corner of his realm.

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**References:** Primary source data for King John's itinerary and acts in 1205 are found in T.D. Hardy's *Itinerary of King John* (published with the Patent Rolls) and the original Patent and Close Rolls of John's reign. Key analyses of John's reign consulted include W. L. Warren's *King John*, Ralph Turner's *King John*, and the scholarly resources of the Magna Carta Project. Specific citations in the text above refer to entries from these sources, for example John's reissuance of the Assize of Arms, the cancellation of the 1205 French expedition, financial ordinances like the wine prisage order <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>, and itinerary details from Hardy's edition. These illustrate and substantiate the narrative of John's activities and travels throughout the year 1205.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>14</sup> King John

<https://spartacus-educational.com/MEDjohn.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> The History Girls: KING JOHN'S CHRISTMAS EVE by Elizabeth Chadwick

<http://the-history-girls.blogspot.com/2015/12/king-johns-christmas-eve-by-elizabeth.html>

<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> King John's expedition to Ireland, 1210: the evidence reconsidered » De Re Militari

<https://deremilitari.org/2013/12/king-johns-expedition-to-ireland-1210-the-evidence-reconsidered/>

<sup>6</sup> John, King of England - Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John,\\_King\\_of\\_England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John,_King_of_England)

<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sup>12</sup> Internet History Sourcebooks: Medieval Sourcebook

<https://origin.web.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/1206Johnexim.asp>

<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> Internet History Sourcebooks: Medieval Sourcebook

<https://origin.web.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/1205Vinprise.asp>

<sup>13</sup> King John's 1205 Charter | The Morgan Library & Museum

<https://www.themorgan.org/blog/king-johns-1205-charter>

<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>21</sup> Magna Carta Project - King John's Diary & Itinerary - John sees to his family, prisoners, and hostages

[https://magnacarta.cmp.uea.ac.uk/read/itinerary/John\\_sees\\_to\\_his\\_family\\_\\_prisoners\\_\\_and\\_hostages](https://magnacarta.cmp.uea.ac.uk/read/itinerary/John_sees_to_his_family__prisoners__and_hostages)

<sup>20</sup> John sees to his family, prisoners, and hostages

[https://magnacartaresearch.org/read/itinerary/John\\_sees\\_to\\_his\\_family\\_\\_prisoners\\_\\_and\\_hostages](https://magnacartaresearch.org/read/itinerary/John_sees_to_his_family__prisoners__and_hostages)

<sup>22</sup> Roger of Wendover Vol 2 - Mel Lockie

<https://www.melocki.org.uk/wendover/Flowers2.html>