

News Items Over the Years

The *Hartford Times*, June 27, 1831

Gibbs and Wansley, THE PIRATES!! The proprietor of the wax figures, representing the Salem murder, for the purpose of gratifying the curious, has at great expense obtained the most accurate delineation of the features of the pirates Gibbs and Wansley, in casts taken by Ball Hughes, Esq. immediately after their execution. He has also procured dresses the same as those in which they were hanged, and the halters which hanged them – of the genuineness of all, which he has the most ample and satisfactory testimony. From these casts wax impressions have been taken, which, in the costume of the murders, is now exhibiting at the first door east of the Hartford Hotel, State Street, for a few days only.

In addition to the articles above enumerated, he has parts of the gallows itself, with the ropes and hooks attached to it, all of which will be exhibited, in the attitude in which they stood previous to the execution. The proprietor has spared no expense to obtain them, and hopes to be remunerated by the patronage of a generous public.

(Same paper, same date)

A Boston paper says: “A young man named Phillips hung himself with a handkerchief; he was, however, discovered before life had fled. Phillips’ father was amongst the first who was alarmed, and seeing the first person who arrived preparing to save the suicide, the considerate father called out, ‘take care, don’t cut the handkerchief, it is almost new.’”

The *Limerick (Ireland) Chronicle*, August 2, 1797

“The following is the price of provisions at the Cape of Good Hope: - Bread, very coarse, dearer than in England. Mutton, from 2 pence to 3 pence per lb. Beef, very bad, almost carrion, the same price as mutton. A fowl, from 2 pence to 3 pence. Pork and veal, very bad, and hardly any to be got, 6 pence per lb. Eggs, 2 for 6 pence. Milk, 6 pence a quart bottle, and bad. A cabbage, 6 pence and every other vegetable very dear. Firewood (no coal) very dear, 6 dollars a cart-load. A house, unfurnished, for a small family, from 7 pounds to 8 pounds per month. India and European goods near 100 per cent.

(Same paper, July 31, 1797

Shrine of King John

“On Monday last, in consequence of a general reparation of the Cathedral Church of Worcester, the venerable shrine of King John was opened, wherein the remains of that illustrious personage appeared entire; the robes in which he was interred are undecayed, but the color, through length of time, is indiscernible; on one side of him lay a sword; the bones of his left arm lying on his breast; his teeth quite perfect; his feet stood erect; the coffin, which is of stone, lay even to the surface of the floor of the church; his remains measured 5 feet 5 inches, being his stature when living.

It is somewhat singular, that after lying there 582 years, the body was not more decayed. This preservation is the most ancient one extant in England, of the lineal ancestors of his present Majesty [George III]. That of Henry I, which is the only one known of an earlier age, lies in the chaos of ruins, the Abbey of Reading”.

“King John died at Newark, in Lincolnshire, October 19, 1215; and was buried, according to his own desire, in the Cathedral Church at Worcester.”

It is peculiar to read the almost reverent tones used in the forgoing article in reference to King John, as he was certainly not one of the favorite monarchs to rule England.

He was the youngest of three sons of King Henry II. As the younger son, the most important roles were reserved for his older brothers, but his father attempted to give him important positions, one of which happened in 1185, when he was sent to govern Ireland. He returned in a few months covered in disgrace, having alienated the loyal chiefs by his childish insolence and entirely failed to protect his citizens from foreign invaders.

Soon after, the 3rd crusade was undertaken, and his older brother Richard, now king after the death of Henry II, left for the Holy Land, leaving behind a document designating his nephew, Arthur of Brittany, his successor in case some event should keep Richard from returning and reclaiming his throne. John was incensed at this, and immediately began intriguing to have himself placed in line for the kingship. Richard eventually did return, and for whatever reason, pardoned his younger brother, and things went along quietly for the next five years, when Richard died. On his deathbed he changed his successor from Arthur to John, although Arthur was actually in direct line for succession. John saw to it that Arthur was captured and imprisoned, where he mysteriously died.

John was originally accepted as a political necessity, but he soon came to be detested by the people as a tyrant and despised by the nobles for his cowardice and sloth. He treated his most respectable supporters with base ingratitude, reserved his favor for unscrupulous adventurers, and gave a free reign to the license of his mercenaries. His high handedness against both his people and his nobles grew worse and worse, until he was forcibly made to sign the Great Document, or Magna Carta in 1215, granting certain rights for all classes of his subjects.

It is for these reasons that it seems the writer of the article in the Limerick paper needed to brush up on his history before referring to King John as an “illustrious Personage”.