

MOMENTOUS DECISIONS

King John and The Magna Carta

Questions.

- Who made the decisions? When?
Where?

- Why were the decisions made?

- Were they good or bad decisions?

- What were the results of the decisions?

- What might have happened otherwise?

King John, 15/6/1215 at Runnymede (near Windsor Castle)

What decision?

To force King John to sign The Magna Carta.

The Norman Feudal barons of England made King John sign the Magna Carta which thus removed his arbitrary power and made him accountable to law.

It gave them extra protection and rights.

It was the first document imposed upon a King of England by his subjects.



Results. 1

- It established, **in writing**, the principle of parliamentary government and power (see later slides for Anglo-Saxon government)
- King John evaded a lot of the conditions, however, it was modified and somewhat respected by later kings.



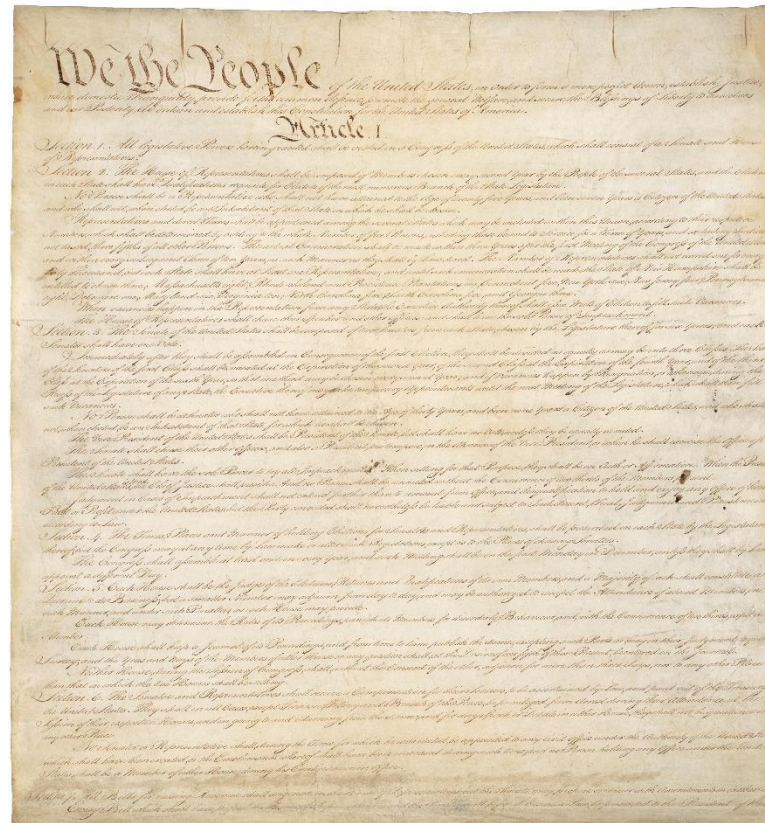
Results. 2

- It was used later as justification when the Roundheads led by Oliver Cromwell rebelled and eventually cut off the head of Charles the First.
- Most of its conditions have been repealed or altered so that English law now contains very few of its original statements.



They rejected tea and cricket but this British item was O.K.

- Americans used it in framing their constitution.



Origins of some consultation by the king

- The modern UK Parliament can trace its origins all the way back to two features of Anglo-Saxon government from the 8th to 11th centuries.
- These are the Witan and the Moot.



Witan council

- The Witan was the occasion when the King would call together his leading advisors and nobles to discuss matters affecting the country.
- It existed only when the King chose and was made up of those individuals whom he particularly summoned.
- Anglo-Saxon helmet from a ship burial at **Sutton Hoo**, near Woodbridge, East Anglia.

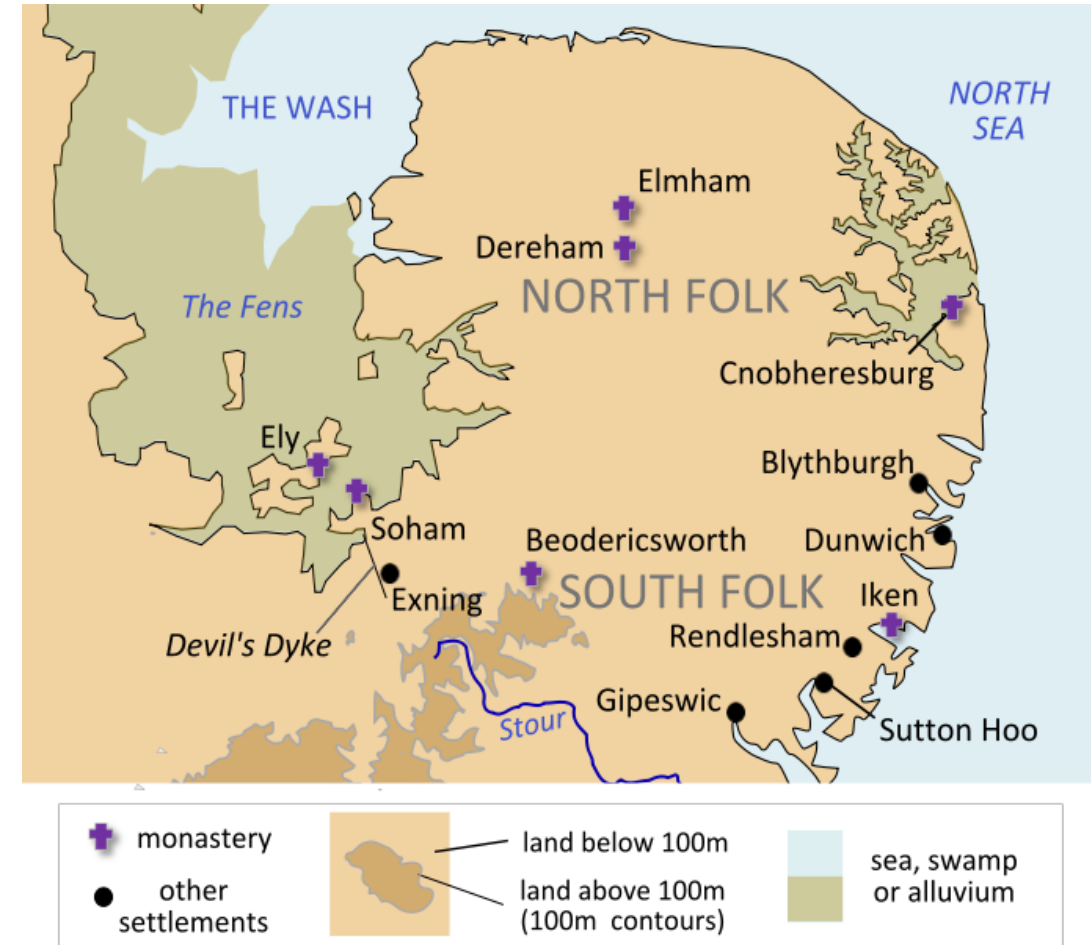


There would have been a lot of moot points

Also, under the Anglo-Saxons there had been regular meetings, or moots, for each county (or shire) where cases were heard and local matters discussed.

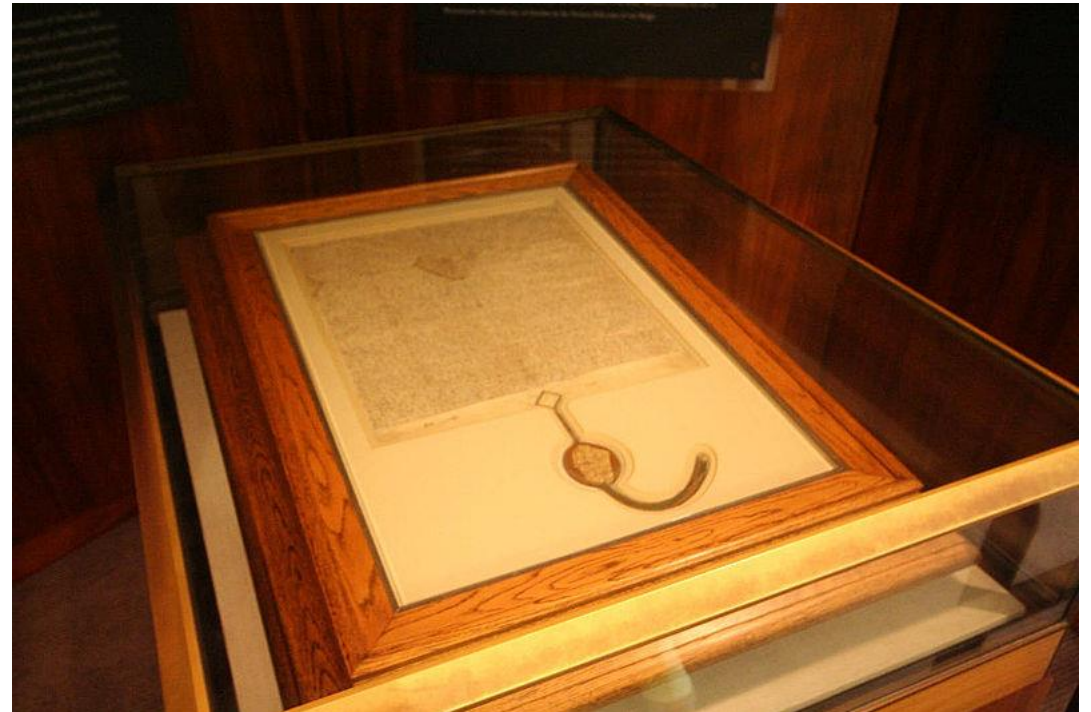
The 'shire moot' was attended by the local lords and bishops, the sheriff, and most importantly, four representatives of each village.

The kingdom of East Anglia during the early Anglo/Angle-Saxon period.



Related facts (this slide and the next)

- The Magna Carta was preceded and directly influenced by the Charter of Liberties in 1100, in which King Henry I had specified particular areas wherein his powers would be limited.
- Magna Carta (1297 version, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia).



Richard I, the Lionheart, and John were Plantagenets

- The Plantagenets ruled over an area stretching from the Pyrenees to Ireland during the 12th and early 13th centuries, located north of the kingdoms of Navarre and Aragon.



Disputes with Phillip II of France and the Pope

- In 1205, King John quarrelled with the Pope Innocent III about who should be archbishop of Canterbury. The Pope wanted a man named Stephen Langton to be archbishop, but King John swore he should never come to England.
- In 1206, John lost most of his territories in France to Phillip II of France.
- In 1209, the pope excommunicated King John and banned all church services in all parish churches.



Revenge.

- King John lost the support of the Roman Catholic barons because the churches were all closed, so he conceded victory to the Pope.
- Pope Innocent made the king and people pay him money whenever he demanded it.



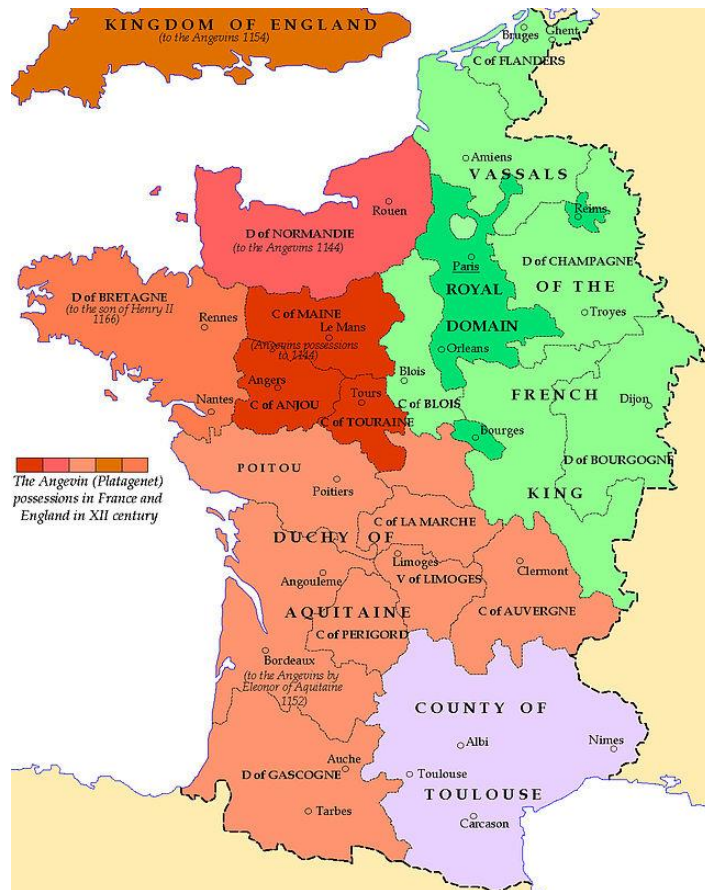
Excessive taxation.

- Taxes levied by King John were extortionate. His reprisals against defaulters were ruthless and his idea of justice was considered avaricious.
- In 1212, King John imposed extra taxes on the barons in his attempts to regain the lost lands of Aquitaine, Poitou and Anjou in France.



Comparison maps

- Left: shows the whole of France.



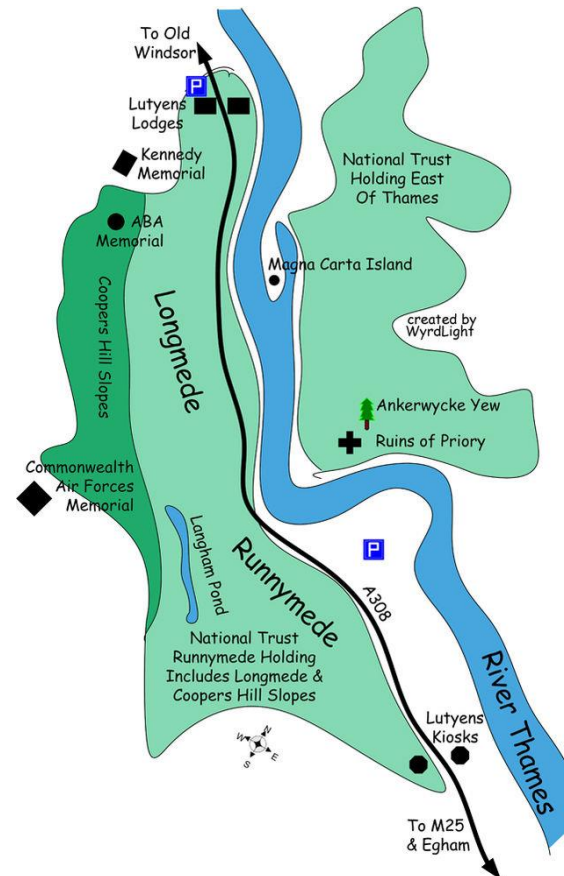
Prelude to Magna Carta

- The barons and Stephen Langton decided to curb the King and make him govern by the old English laws that had prevailed before the Normans came.
- The demands of the barons were documented in the 'Articles of the Barons' in January 1215.
- Stephen Langton (c. 1150 – 9 July 1228), Archbishop of Canterbury.



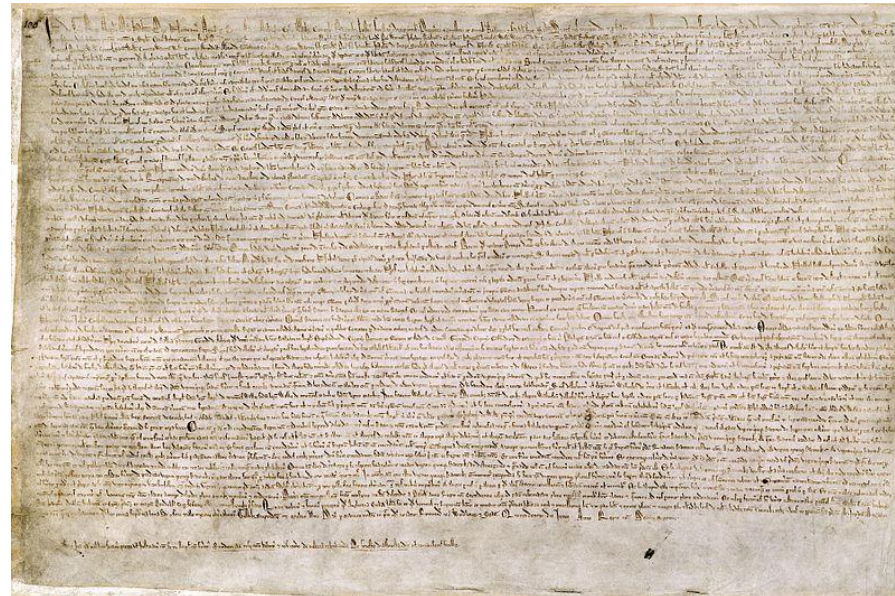
The barons triumphant

- The Barons took up arms against King John and captured London in May 1215.
- In June, the Barons, in full armour, took King John by surprise at Windsor and he agreed to a meeting at Runnymede.



A significant date

- King John signed and sealed the document on June 10, 1215.
- The barons renewed the Oath of Fealty to King John on June 15, 1215
- The royal chancery produced a formal royal grant, based on the agreements reached at Runnymede, which became known as Magna Carta.



The First Barons' War (there was a later one against Henry III)

- Copies of the Magna Carta were distributed to bishops, sheriffs and other important people throughout England
- King John had no intention of abiding by the Magna Carta.
- His duplicity led to the Barons' War between 1215 - 1217.
- The rebel barons supported the son of the king of France, Prince Louis in preference to King John.



Invasion of England

- In 1216, Prince Louis invaded England and marched to London where he received support and was proclaimed and accepted as King of England (although not actually crowned).
- King John died in October.
- The Barons turned on Prince Louis and supported the nine year old son of King John who then became King Henry III of England.



Was it a good decision to sign the Magna Carta?

View over Magna Carta Island towards Runnymede.



What may have happened otherwise?

- This British memorial to the assassinated President Kennedy was jointly dedicated at Runnymede in May 1965, by Queen Elizabeth II and Jacqueline Kennedy, prior to a reception for the Kennedy family at Windsor Castle.



A strong statement.

The memorial consists of a garden and Portland stone memorial tablet inscribed with the famous quote from his Inaugural Address:

‘Let every Nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty’.



Footnote

- King John was the wicked Prince John in the Robin Hood legend.
- Robin Hood statue in Nottingham.

