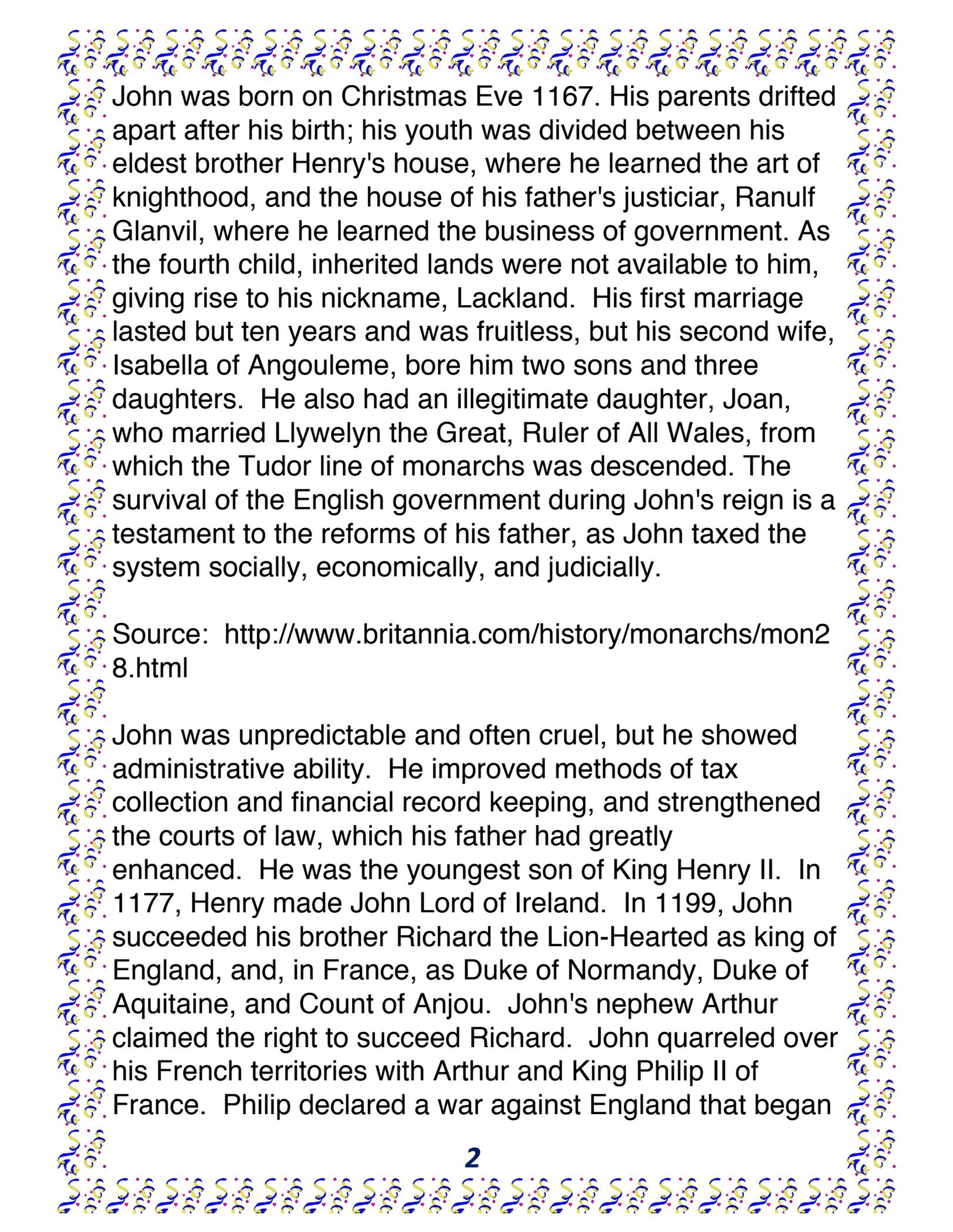


# English King John

Compilation by D. A. Sharpe

[John, known as John Lackland](#), was born December 24, 1167. He is remembered as one of England's worst kings. Perhaps the most historically significant event occurring out of King John's rein was his issuance of the Magna Carta. It occurred, in spite of him ... not because of him, trying to advance some good. John is my 10th cousin, 23 times removed. He is also the [13th great grandfather of Edward Southworth](#), the first husband of my seven times great grandmother, Alice Carpenter. He is my 21st step great grandfather. His death in battler was on October 18, 1216.

It is of Christian interest to me that King John of Lackland appointed Stephen Langton Archbishop of Canterbury on May 15, 1213. Stephen Langton (born about 1150 - died July 9, 1228) is believed to be the first person to divide the Bible into defined chapters. While Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro is also known to come up with a systematic division of the Bible (between 1244 and 1248), it is Langton's arrangement of books and chapters that remains in use today. So, though our family did not actually give chapter divisions for today's Bible, it was one of our family who appointed the man who did so, and it is a pleasure to claim that connection to an act of spiritual significance.



John was born on Christmas Eve 1167. His parents drifted apart after his birth; his youth was divided between his eldest brother Henry's house, where he learned the art of knighthood, and the house of his father's justiciar, Ranulf Glanvil, where he learned the business of government. As the fourth child, inherited lands were not available to him, giving rise to his nickname, Lackland. His first marriage lasted but ten years and was fruitless, but his second wife, Isabella of Angouleme, bore him two sons and three daughters. He also had an illegitimate daughter, Joan, who married Llywelyn the Great, Ruler of All Wales, from which the Tudor line of monarchs was descended. The survival of the English government during John's reign is a testament to the reforms of his father, as John taxed the system socially, economically, and judicially.

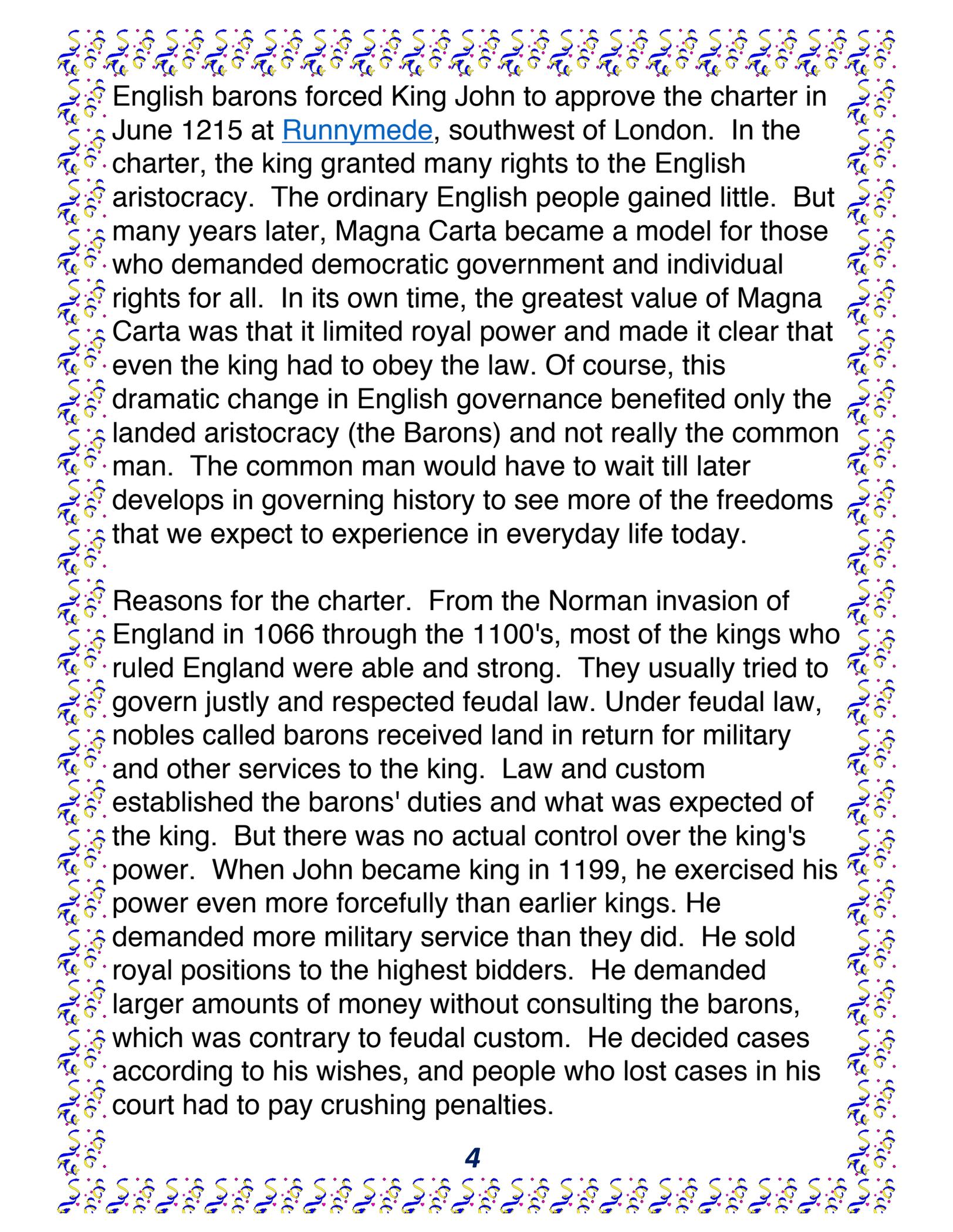
Source: <http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon28.html>

John was unpredictable and often cruel, but he showed administrative ability. He improved methods of tax collection and financial record keeping, and strengthened the courts of law, which his father had greatly enhanced. He was the youngest son of King Henry II. In 1177, Henry made John Lord of Ireland. In 1199, John succeeded his brother Richard the Lion-Hearted as king of England, and, in France, as Duke of Normandy, Duke of Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou. John's nephew Arthur claimed the right to succeed Richard. John quarreled over his French territories with Arthur and King Philip II of France. Philip declared a war against England that began

in 1202. The war was fought off and on throughout the rest of John's reign. John's mismanagement--and rumors he murdered Arthur--angered French barons who had been loyal to John and led to the loss of most English holdings in France.

John disagreed with Pope Innocent III over who should become archbishop of Canterbury. In 1208, the pope placed England under an interdict, which banned church services throughout the country. John was excommunicated the next year. His dictatorial behavior stirred discontent among the English barons. John feared his barons would revolt. To avoid this, he settled his argument with the pope in 1213. The pope then supported John, in return for liberties granted the church. But many English barons and some clergy revolted anyway when the king's plans to reconquer the lost territories in France failed. On June, 15, 1215, John grudgingly approved the settlement that became known as Magna Carta. It placed the king under English law and checked his power.

The [Magna Carta](#) (pronounced MAG nuh KAHR tuh) is a document that marked a decisive step forward in the development of constitutional government and legal ideas in England. In later centuries, much of the rest of the world also benefited from it because many countries followed English models in creating their own governments. The countries include the United States and Canada. The Latin words Magna Carta mean Great Charter.



English barons forced King John to approve the charter in June 1215 at [Runnymede](#), southwest of London. In the charter, the king granted many rights to the English aristocracy. The ordinary English people gained little. But many years later, Magna Carta became a model for those who demanded democratic government and individual rights for all. In its own time, the greatest value of Magna Carta was that it limited royal power and made it clear that even the king had to obey the law. Of course, this dramatic change in English governance benefited only the landed aristocracy (the Barons) and not really the common man. The common man would have to wait till later develops in governing history to see more of the freedoms that we expect to experience in everyday life today.

Reasons for the charter. From the Norman invasion of England in 1066 through the 1100's, most of the kings who ruled England were able and strong. They usually tried to govern justly and respected feudal law. Under feudal law, nobles called barons received land in return for military and other services to the king. Law and custom established the barons' duties and what was expected of the king. But there was no actual control over the king's power. When John became king in 1199, he exercised his power even more forcefully than earlier kings. He demanded more military service than they did. He sold royal positions to the highest bidders. He demanded larger amounts of money without consulting the barons, which was contrary to feudal custom. He decided cases according to his wishes, and people who lost cases in his court had to pay crushing penalties.

English barons and church leaders began to express dissatisfaction with John's rule early in his reign. Their unhappiness grew when he lost most of the English possessions in France in warfare lasting from 1202 to 1206. In 1213, a group met at St. Albans, near London, and drew up a list of demands based in part on the coronation charter of Henry I, who had been king from 1100 to 1135. After John lost an important battle against France at Bouvines (in what is now western Belgium) in 1214, civil war broke out in England. John saw that he could not defeat his opponents' army, and so he agreed to a set of articles on June 15, 1215. Four days later, the articles were engrossed (written out in legal form) as a royal charter. Copies of the charter were distributed throughout the kingdom.

Promises in the charter. Magna Carta contained 63 articles, most of which pledged the king to uphold feudal customs. These articles chiefly benefited the barons and other landholders. One article granted the church freedom from royal interference. A few articles guaranteed rights to residents of towns. Ordinary free people and peasants were hardly mentioned in the charter, even though they made up by far the largest part of England's population.

Some articles that in 1215 applied only to feudal landholders later became important to all the people. For example, the charter stated that the king could make no special demands for money without the consent of the barons. Later, this provision was used to support the

argument that no tax should be raised without the consent of Parliament.

Still other articles became foundations for modern justice. One article says that the king will not sell, deny, or delay justice. Another says that no freeman shall be imprisoned, deprived of property, exiled, or destroyed, except by the lawful judgment of his peers (equals) or by the law of the land. The idea of due process of law, including trial by jury, developed from these articles. In John's time, however, there was no such thing as trial by jury in criminal cases.

The charter tried to make the king keep his promises by establishing a council of barons. If the king violated the charter and ignored warnings of the council, it could raise an army to force the king to live by the charter's provisions. But these measures were unsuccessful.

The charter issuance in 1215 of the Magna Carta did not end the struggle between King John and the barons. Neither side intended to abide by the charter completely. [Pope Innocent III](#) canceled the charter at the king's request, and war broke out immediately. After King John's death in 1216, however, his son Henry III and later English kings promised to abide by the charter, issuing several copies over the years. The most famous of these promises was that of Edward I in 1297. Through these promises, the charter came to be recognized as part of the fundamental law of England. This was chiefly the version issued by King John's grandson, Edward I

Much later, in the 1600's, members of parliament used Magna Carta to rally support in their struggle against the strong rule of the Stuart kings. These lawmakers came to view the charter as a constitutional check on royal power. They cited it as a legal support for the argument that there could be no laws or taxation without the consent of Parliament. These members of Parliament used the charter to demand guarantees of trial by jury, safeguards against unfair imprisonment, and other rights.

In the 1700's, [Sir William Blackstone](#), a famous lawyer, set down these ideals as legal rights of the people in his famous Commentaries on the Laws of England. Also in the 1700's, colonists carried these English ideals on legal and political rights to America. The ideals eventually became part of the framework of the Constitution of the United States.

Four originals of King John's 1215 charter remain. Two are in the British Library in London, one in Salisbury Cathedral, and one in Lincoln Cathedral. For many years, the document was commonly known as ana Charter. But in 1946, the British government officially adopted the Latin spelling, Magna Carta.

Sources: World Book Encyclopedia Contributor: Emily Zack Tabuteau, Ph.D. Associate Professor. of History, Michigan State University.

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Swindler, William F. Magna Carta: Legend and Legacy. Bobbs, 1965.

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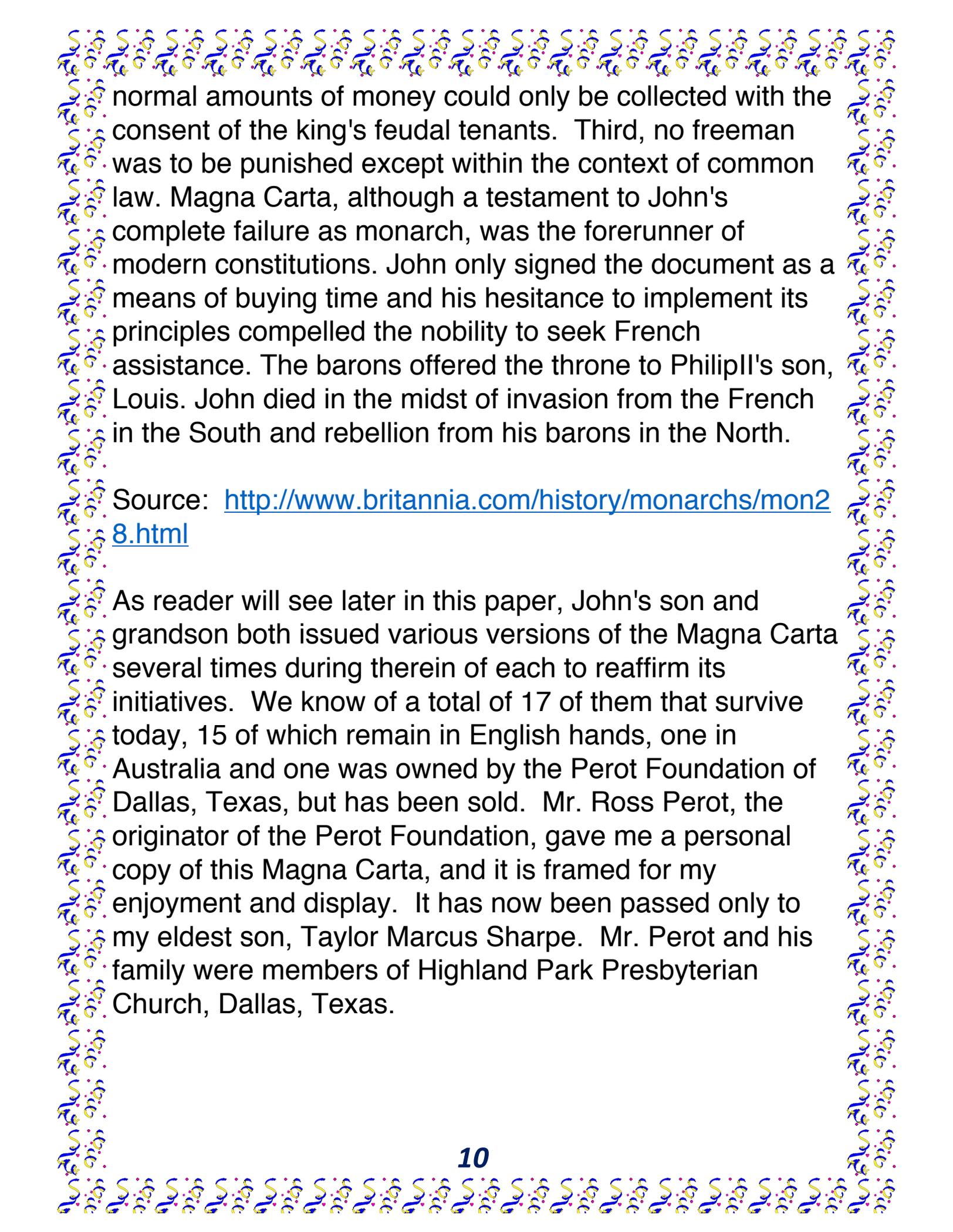
As history turned out, King John's son and grandson, both English Kings, issued other versions of the Magna Carta with essentially the same effect. In total, the three generations of Kings issued 17 Magna Carta's, all of which are still preserved. Fifteen are in various British institutions, one is in Australia and one is in America, previously owned by the Perot Foundation of Mr. H. Ross Perot, Sr., an acquaintance of mine and a member of the church where I was an administrator for 22 years prior to retirement. The Perot Foundation sold its copy for \$23.5 million, having originally purchased it a decade earlier for \$1.5 million.

The Angevin family feuds profoundly marked John. He and Richard clashed in 1184 following Richard's refusal to honor his father's wishes surrender Aquitaine to John. The following year Henry II sent John to rule Ireland, but John alienated both the native Irish and the transplanted Anglo-Normans who emigrated to carve out new lordships for themselves; the experiment was a total failure and John returned home within six months. After Richard gained the throne in 1189, he gave John vast estates in an

unsuccessful attempt to appease his younger brother. John failed to overthrow Richard's administrators during the German captivity and conspired with Philip II in another failed coup attempt. Upon Richard's release from captivity in 1194, John was forced to sue for pardon and he spent the next five years in his brother's shadow.

John's reign was troubled in many respects. A quarrel with the Church resulted in England being placed under an interdict in 1207, with John excommunicated two years later. The dispute centered on John's stubborn refusal to install the papal candidate, Stephen Langdon, as Archbishop of Canterbury; the issue was not resolved until John surrendered to the wishes of Pope Innocent III and paid tribute for England as the Pope's vassal.

John proved extremely unpopular with his subjects. In addition to the Irish debacle, he inflamed his French vassals by orchestrating the murder of his popular nephew, Arthur of Brittany. By spring 1205, he lost the last of his French possessions and returned to England. The final ten years of his reign were occupied with failed attempts to regain these territories. After levying a number of new taxes upon the barons to pay for his dismal campaigns, the discontented barons revolted, capturing London in May 1215. At Runnymede in the following June, John succumbed to pressure from the barons, the Church, and the English people at-large, and signed the Magna Carta. The document, a declaration of feudal rights, stressed three points. First, the Church was free to make ecclesiastic appointments. Second, larger-than-



normal amounts of money could only be collected with the consent of the king's feudal tenants. Third, no freeman was to be punished except within the context of common law. Magna Carta, although a testament to John's complete failure as monarch, was the forerunner of modern constitutions. John only signed the document as a means of buying time and his hesitance to implement its principles compelled the nobility to seek French assistance. The barons offered the throne to Philip II's son, Louis. John died in the midst of invasion from the French in the South and rebellion from his barons in the North.

Source: <http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon28.html>

As reader will see later in this paper, John's son and grandson both issued various versions of the Magna Carta several times during their reigns to reaffirm its initiatives. We know of a total of 17 of them that survive today, 15 of which remain in English hands, one in Australia and one was owned by the Perot Foundation of Dallas, Texas, but has been sold. Mr. Ross Perot, the originator of the Perot Foundation, gave me a personal copy of this Magna Carta, and it is framed for my enjoyment and display. It has now been passed only to my eldest son, Taylor Marcus Sharpe. Mr. Perot and his family were members of Highland Park Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas.

Information compiled by:  
[Dwight Albert \(D. A.\) Sharpe](#)  
805 Derting Road East  
Aurora, TX 76078-3712

817-504-6508  
[da@dasharpe.com](mailto:da@dasharpe.com)  
[www.dasharpe.com](http://www.dasharpe.com)

