**Anglo-Saxon Culture** **1st year**

**King John and the Magna Carta**

Magna Carta (Latin for Great Charter) or The Great Charter of the Liberties of England, is a charter originally issued in Latin in June 1215. It was sealed under oath by King John at Runnymede, England in 1215. It greatly reduced the power of the King and allowed for the formation of a powerful parliament. The Magna Carta became the basis for English citizen's rights and is widely known throughout the English-speaking world as an important part of the extended historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law in England and beyond.

The Magna Carta was a result of a series of feudal abuses mainly by King John of England. Ruling from 6 April 1199 until his death in 1216, John was the son of King Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine. When war with France broke out again in 1202, John achieved early victories, but shortages of military resources and his treatment of Norman, Breton and Anjou nobles resulted in the collapse of his lands in northern France in 1204. He was a highly intelligent man but untrustworthy and cruel, evoking little loyalty. Significantly, he was unsuccessful in his most important wars as well as his internal policy.

In 1205 King John had an argument with the Pope, who was at the time Pope Innocent III over the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Pope was keen to see Stephen Langton take the title, but King John was against it. In 1209, the frustrated Pope Innocent III made the decision to excommunicate King John from the church. The Pope also took the decision to ban parish churches from performing traditional church services, and this had a dramatic impact on King John’s ability to rule, as his citizens were influenced by the decision and actions taken by the church. Faced with these two religious’ problems, King John had to succumb to the religious pressure from both his people and the Pope, and he agreed to allow Stephen Langton to take the position of Archbishop of Canterbury. However, the Pope ordered King John to pay him large sums of money.

In addition to this, other exhausting taxes were levied were to fund a renewed attempt to regain the land he had lost in Aquitaine, Poitou and Anjou. However, the Barons started questioning the king’s methods for ruling the country. Questions quickly became quarrels and quarrels led to fierce and bitter disputes between the king and his Barons who were led by the Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton. By 1214, further losses in France caused King John to return home looking for more money in taxes and more troops. The barons decided that the influence and the power of the King needed to be limited, and they felt it was right to make him govern by the old English laws that had prevailed before the Normans had invaded and taken the sovereignty away from the Anglo-Saxons.

The demands of the Barons were fully documented in the 'Articles of the Barons' in January 1215. They took up arms against their king and captured London in 1215 forcing him to sign the document on June 10, 1215. However, the document was not respected from both sides which led to the Barons War which ran between 1215 and 1217. The rebel barons had th support of the son of the king of France, Prince Louis. In 1216 Prince Louis invades England and marches to London where he receives support and was proclaimed and accepted as King of England (although not actually crowned). King John dies in October. The Barons turn on Prince Louis and supports the nine-year-old son of King John who then became King Henry III of England.

The Magna Carta is considered to be the foundations of a constitutional government in England. It led to a great change in the perception and the power of the king. It changed the kind of power a parliament could exert on king and the country, and it also established a basic set of civil rights for citizens residing in England. It demonstrated that the power of the king could be limited by a document. It is considered as the document that provided the foundations for English liberties and influenced modern notions of democracy. The influence of Magna Carta can be seen in some of the most important documents in American history, the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Many of the laws written in the Magna Carta are not used today and don't apply to the current system of democracy. However, the act of citizens being able to guarantee their own rights was a major step in forming modern democracies. Among the most important rules from the Magna Carta that we still use today is the writ of “Habeas Corpus”, which means "may you have the body?" in Latin. This rule means that the government can't arrest people without cause or in secret and guarantees the right to due process. This rule was written as the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and still guarantees the rights of our citizens to a fair trial in court.