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Magna Carta

Houston Museum of Natural Sciences

Wednesday 19th February 2014

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. First, may I thank you for the warmth of your welcome this evening and, on behalf of Jane and me, the wonderful welcome to Houston and to Texas that we have experienced.

We were warned that “big” would be a word that occurred often to us while we were here, and it certainly applies to the way you make your visitors feel completely at home. This is our first visit to Texas, but rest assured that it will not be our last.

For some three years I had the great privilege of chairing the Hereford Cathedral Perpetual Trust, helping to raise funds for the fabric of that unique and magical building, for its wonderful, world-class choral music, and for the legacy of its artefacts across the centuries, the way in which they can speak to us today, and educate and inform future generations.

Now so many of you, by your generosity, and by your presence here this evening, are sharing in that great work. We feel that you have become members of the Hereford Cathedral family, just as we feel we have become members of the family of this amazing institution, and of the great State of Texas.

Now I must start with a confession. I am not a professional mediaeval historian, and I am not going to give you a detailed analysis of the political shenanigans which led to the sealing of Magna Carta nearly 800 years ago. Actually, of course, you might be quite glad of that!

But as the Clerk of the British House of Commons I think that I have rather a special perspective on the extraordinary event which was Magna Carta, and how it speaks to us across the centuries.

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Last year was the 650th anniversary of my office of Clerk of the House. My first predecessor was appointed in 1363, and he was called Robert as well – Robert de Melton. He was paid £5 a year for life – a salary on which you could live quite well in mediaeval England. He would almost certainly have heard the terms of Magna Carta read out at the start of each Parliament, and I like to think that he may well have drafted one or more of the Acts of the mid-1300s that reinterpreted the Magna Carta clause about “the lawful judgement of peers” as “judgement by one’s peers” and so the foundation of trial by jury.

In my role, I am well used to the way that old lives with the new. I believe this to be a comfortable – and invaluable – relationship, because history should be our inspiration, and not our jailer.

When the House of Commons passes a Bill, and it’s ready to be sent to the House of Lords for them to consider, I write on the Bill, in Norman French, *soit baillé aux Seigneurs* – let it be sent to the Lords. (In mediaeval times Norman French was the language of the aristocracy, and Latin was the language of record and learning. And the Bill is carried by me or by one of my colleagues, dressed in Court dress, wig and gown, through the echoing halls to the Bar of the House of Lords, where we bow and hand the Bill over. A ceremony which hasn’t changed in centuries. But at the same time the text of the Bill is on the shared drive between the two Public Bill Offices, using some of the most advanced text-handling software in the world. The old living with the new.

And that seems to me a good theme for understanding Magna Carta. How did this scrap of ancient parchment survive, and how does it speak to us today, 800 years after scribes laboriously copied it, in that far-off summer eight centuries ago?

That’s the journey that I want you to take with me this evening.

There’s an English nursery rhyme which says:

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*John was a tyrant, John was a tartar,
John put his name to the great big charter.
Every baron from Thames to Tweed
Followed the road to Runnymede.*

Let's follow the same road.

I'll start with what life was like for people in England at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The older Hollywood epics may give us a feeling that there was a bit of violence, and you were quite likely to get bashed with a sword or shot with an arrow, but at the end of the day it might be time for a warm bath and cocktails. Of course it wasn't like that – not even for the rich and powerful. Life for most of the population was hard, uncertain, and often short.

That's certainly what it was like in and around Hereford and up and down the border with Wales. To the West of Hereford are the Black Mountains. They're called the Black Mountains because that's the way they look when the sun has just set behind them. If in 1200 or so you were looking that way, you wouldn't be thinking much about the sunset, but about when the next Welsh raiding party might be coming your way, and – never mind whether they would take the ox, the cow and the pig which were your livelihood – whether you and your family would survive.

If I can put it this way: in the thirteenth century Hereford was a frontier town of the English Wild West.

I have a bit of a family connection with this state of affairs, as my mother's family is descended from Einion ap Collwyn, a Welsh chieftain whom the Welsh called Einion the Traitor, because he did a deal with the Normans in 1087 for which he was never forgiven by the other more warlike Welsh chieftains. (I'm not altogether sure that they have forgiven us yet, by the way.)

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So what was life like in this land which was about to produce one of the great documents of the world? London was by far the biggest town – it had a population of nearly a hundred thousand! – my goodness, just think of that. The population of the whole country was between three and four million, nine-tenths of whom lived in the countryside. A typical farm would have been between ten and thirty acres, and mostly you could reckon to live off that, as well as paying taxes to the King, rent to your feudal lord, and tithes to the Church. Today, with a tractor, we would expect to plough twenty acres and more in a single day. Then, with an ox and wooden plough, it would have taken forty days.

If you had five acres or less, or were landless, you were always on the edge of survival, and if the harvest failed, as it did in 1203, you would have been eating weeds and acorns to survive; or not. Disease was rife: typhoid, cholera, leprosy, pneumonia, parasites; and medical knowledge and medicines were limited and primitive.

Average life expectancy was about 30, although if you got to 20 years old you might well make it to 45, 50 or more. Having children was more dangerous for a woman than going to war was for a man. The good thing was that mediaeval teeth were good – sugar and chocolate hadn't reached them – and it seems unlikely that there was any heart disease.

I said that the population was between three and four million. About half of the population were “free men” in the sense used in Magna Carta, and it was those people who were to benefit from the protections and assurances granted by King John. The rest of the population were serfs (of various degrees). Not slaves, because they couldn't be bought and sold, but not very far off. They were bound to the lord and the land: they had to work for him, and if he sold the land they would go to the new lord.

Apart from a very few Roman roads remaining from those built a thousand years earlier, there *were* no roads – just tracks, sometimes well used, sometimes about to be reclaimed by nature.

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The Church was immensely powerful. When Hubert Walter, the Archbishop of Canterbury, died in 1205, King John is supposed to have remarked: “Now I can be King at last”. At the start of the thirteenth century the Church’s annual income was about £80,000 a year – in the money of the time, a truly vast sum, enough to wage a major war or buy a small country. Its priests were due a tithe – a tenth – of the ordinary man’s produce, and they were pretty good at collecting it. The bishops and abbots couldn’t take part directly in war but they were in effect warlords, required to provide the King with contingents of troops when the King demanded it.

The promise of salvation and Heavenly glory, or of damnation and eternal punishment, were real and ever-present in thirteenth-century England, and the Church had a monopoly of both.

The Pope’s power and influence ran throughout England. This became an important element in the accommodation that King John had to seek with the barons and, as we shall see, the Pope had rather strong views on Magna Carta. When after the death of Hubert Walter the Pope, Innocent III, ruled the elections of both successors invalid (there was a monastic candidate and a king’s candidate), he imposed his own candidate, Stephen Langton (whose name heads the list of bishops and barons in Magna Carta, and that is no coincidence).

John refused to allow Langton into England and seized the estates of Canterbury. In 1208 Innocent retaliated by placing England under an interdict, which meant that for six years no church bells were rung, there were no church marriages, burials in consecrated ground were not allowed, and there were no Sunday masses – the only service most of the population attended.

So that gives you a flavour of England and the English at the start of the thirteenth century. What about the politics that were to drive John to Runnymede in 1215?

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Magna Carta was sealed in the middle of an undeclared civil war. How did this come about?

John had succeeded his brother Richard I in April 1199, following Richard's death while besieging the castle of Châlus near Limoges. At that stage the English King's lands covered much of Western France, including Anjou, Poitou, Maine, Touraine and of course Normandy.

And the French King Philip II was casting envious eyes on these lands. He'd come to the throne in 1180 (and, in one of the strangenesses of the time, had actually been on the Third Crusade to the Holy Land with John's brother Richard). Shortly after John's accession, hostilities broke out, and war raged back and forth across western France for the next five years.

In March 1204 Philip took the castle of Gaillard on the River Seine (which had been thought to be impregnable) and in quick succession the fortresses of Falaise, Caen and Rouen fell. So by the end of June 1204 the only part of the Duchy of Normandy still held by the English was...the Channel Islands. (Which, by the way, we have managed to hang on to right up to today...)

This was a humiliation for John. He had inherited the lands of William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, and he had lost almost all of them (at some expense, too, given that most of his armies were mercenaries). And, just as serious, he had also lost all the taxes and revenues of those lands. So he drew in his horns and tried to recover his financial position by taxing England ever more heavily.

And did he tax! Our Customs and Excise and your IRS would have been green with envy!

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He made money from the sheriffs of the counties, charging them huge sums for their appointments, which they were just about prepared to pay, because the sheriffs could pass on a lot of the burden and more besides. He made money through a well-recognised system of bribes for the favourable outcome of court cases, and punitive fines.

He made money from the return to the Crown of tenants who died without heirs, and from the forfeiture of the lands of convicted felons. He made money from charging people to succeed to the lands they had been left – one baron was charged £4,500, and another £6,600 – huge sums in the value of money of the day, and enough to buy much of the lands to which they were succeeding.

And he made money through scutage. Now, scutage was a means whereby feudal tenants could pay money to the king instead of providing knights for military service. Not only did John charge scutage at unprecedently high rates, but he also did it more often. His father Henry II had raised eight scutages in 34 years, but John raised eleven in his 17 years on the throne.

This was a protection racket – actually, more racket than protection – on a grand scale. It was accompanied by an extraordinary web of semi-alliances, broken promises, insulted barons, cowed courtiers and seized estates which would take almost as long to describe in detail as it took to happen.

By 1213 the pot was ready to boil over. Pope Innocent had excommunicated John six years before, turning him into a spiritual outcast as well as the King who had lost half his kingdom, and paving the way for a godly alliance of barons and churchmen against an ungodly king. In 1213 that alliance was ready to invite the King of France to invade England. In July 1213 the Pope absolved John from excommunication and, in return, John acknowledged the Pope as his feudal overlord.

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In one sense this was an astute decision, because it made an implacable enemy – the Pope – into a strong supporter. But it didn't deal with the growing opposition to the King, which was shocked at John's capitulation to the Pope, and his readiness to surrender the Kingdom of England to direct Papal authority.

That growing opposition was fuelled by events such as that described by the Magna Carta scholar Nicholas Vincent:

In January 1214 John negotiated one of his more notorious pieces of financial business, auctioning off his first wife, Isabella of Gloucester, to Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, for a vast fine of 20,000 marks (about £13,000). The terms of this fine were such that Geoffrey had no real prospect of paying. Moreover, since Isabella had been married to John for ten years in the 1190s without producing offspring and was by now almost certainly beyond child-bearing age, Geoffrey could hope for few long-term gains from such a marriage...The effect was to throw Geoffrey, now Earl of both Essex and Gloucester, into the camp of the malcontents, significantly tipping the balance of power from the king to the barons.

All might have been well – or fairly well – had John not tried to win back the lands in France that he had lost. The destruction of the French invasion fleet off the Flemish coast in May 1213 was a promising start, but John's summons to the barons to take an army to France met with an angry response; a significant proportion simply would not go. But – as you will recall – John still had a well-filled treasury and sought to buy allies in France. This grand plan started well but failed dismally on Sunday, 27th July 1214 at the Battle of Bouvines, near Lille, on the modern border between France and Belgium, where his forces were decisively defeated.

By now, Runnymede is getting ever closer. John tries to repair his treasury with another raising of scutage; no-one will pay.

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He tries to do a deal with the Church. He spends Christmas 1214 at the Temple in London, where today the Inner and Middle Temple Inns of Court are based, and the negotiations take place in the Temple Church. In January the barons present him with their demands: the laws of Edward the Confessor (one of the last Anglo-Saxon Kings of England, ruling from 1042 to 1066) and the liberties of the charter of Henry I (we'll come back to that) should be confirmed. The barons' spokesmen are William Marshal, who was Earl of Pembroke, and Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, which shows how close the barons and the Church now are.

The King asks for a truce until Easter. This is a delaying tactic; he has no intention of giving in and needs the time to find some more money. As the truce runs out the opponents meet at Stamford in Lincolnshire, and then move south to Brackley in Northamptonshire. On the 27th of April William Marshal and the Archbishop take the latest statement of demands to the King, who flies into an hysterical rage, saying that to concede these demands will make him a slave.

In response the barons formally renounce their allegiance (a recognised process called *diffidatio*, which means that opposition to a king is not treason).

The barons now move south towards London, just as John orders all the sheriffs to take measures against the barons – an order which they are not going to obey. John bows to the inevitable, and William Marshal and the Archbishop take to the barons the message that the King “will freely accede to the laws and liberties which they asked”.

The meeting between the King and the barons now takes place on Wednesday 10th June in a meadow known as Runnymede, on the banks of the Thames about 20 miles west of London, and continues for five days.

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Runnymede – the name comes from the Anglo-Saxon for a regular meeting *runieg* and “*mede*” for meadow – was already an historic place when the barons met the king, for it was almost certainly the place where the King’s Council, the *Witena-gemot*, or meeting of wise men, took place during the reigns of the Saxon Kings two centuries and more before.

The Magna Carta of 1215 is dated 15th June, but the negotiations went on for five days. Copying out the Charter took the scribes some time, but its forerunner was the King’s Writ, witnessed by John on 20th June, at the end of the negotiations.

The Hereford Cathedral version, addressed to the Sheriff of Gloucester, is unique – the only one to survive and, as you know, it too is here in Houston. The King’s Writ announced that “a firm peace has been established between us and the barons and freemen of our kingdom” and that a copy of the Charter would shortly reach them to set everything out in detail. But the King’s Writ can’t have been a very welcome document for a Sheriff to receive, as it ordered that twelve knights from each county should be elected to inquire into “the evil customs of the sheriffs as well as of their officials”. Rather a nasty surprise.

In a moment I’ll consider the terms of the Charter and its importance for us today, but for a minute or two I want to talk about the actual physical thing that was the Charter, both as copied out in June and July 1215 and as copied out two years later in the Hereford Charter of 1217.

For me, the *things* of history, the actual artefacts, have a special magic. They bring history alive. I experience a sort of historical vertigo when I look at a manuscript score by, say, J. S. Bach. There it is, with his handwriting. He sat in front of it. He played over those last few bars on his harpsichord, perhaps wondering whether to change something. I experience it with the letters of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I which are in Hereford Cathedral Library.

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I experienced it very vividly seeing the actual Declaration of Independence in your National Archives – what would it have been like to have been in the room when it was signed?

Magna Carta, the actual document, has a powerful magic. Never mind the written words for a moment – let's look at what it actually is. A piece of sheepskin, soaked in a bath of lime, then stretched on a frame to dry – and so that you got the maximum surface area. Then it was scraped with a semi-circular knife called a lunular; that was to create a smooth surface for writing. Producing really good parchment was a time-consuming and expensive process, so you didn't waste space. That's why the script is so dense.

The ink was based on oak galls, also known as oak-apples. If you look at an oak tree, you can often see little pimples, frequently growing into a round ball. This happens when a particular sort of wasp (unimaginatively called the oak-gall wasp, by the way) lays its eggs in oak bark and the tree produces the gall by way of defence. Now if you crush an oak gall, you get a clear, acid liquid, which can etch a mark on parchment. (How on earth did they discover that, I wonder?)

Then you need to colour it, so you add ferrous sulphate, or iron salts. If you want it darker still, you add lampblack, which is simply the soot collected from where the flame of a lamp or candle touches the surface above it. And you then bind the ink with gum Arabic, which is the hardened sap taken from an acacia tree. The scribe who wrote the Hereford Magna Carta knew his business when he mixed the ink: it has faded, of course, but it has lasted pretty well over 800 years.

Then you took a quill – the flight feather of a goose, or possibly a swan. The feathers from the left wing were more in demand, because they curved away from a right-handed scribe (I don't think being left-handed was particularly encouraged in those days). You cut across the tube of the feather diagonally with a little knife (that's how it got to be called a pen-knife), and slit the end.

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Then you dipped it in the ink. Every line or two you dipped the quill again, and every few minutes you would need to cut a new end to the quill, because it had got splayed and blunt. And for the next six hundred years, that's how most people wrote.

Might I digress for a moment to recount that when I arrived on my first day in the House of Commons, in July 1972, I opened the drawer of my desk to find a box of quill pens, provided by a grateful taxpayer. Never let it be thought that we are not bang up to date.... I tried writing with a quill, and I can tell you that it is very difficult. The easiest thing to write is an ink blot. So I have a particular admiration for those far-off scribes.

And I hope that those of you who have seen the Hereford Magna Carta here in Houston, and who will see it, will agree with me about the magic of being able to see the object itself, and in your mind's eye imagine it actually being written.

It is written in Latin, quite heavily abbreviated, but the abbreviations would have been easily read by the literate of the day. It runs to a little over 3,500 words.

It was never signed by King John, of course: we know that he could read (at least, he borrowed books from monastic libraries), but there is no evidence that he could write. But in any event documents of state were not signed by the monarch but sealed with a seal made of beeswax and resin. Most mediaeval seals were single-sided, but the King's Seal, the authentic stamp of his authority, was double-sided, and the sealing of royal charters was the task of a royal official called a spigurnel. This still goes on today – as it happens, I am appointed directly by Queen Elizabeth by her Letters Patent, in other words, a sort of notice of appointment, and they have her seal on them.

So let us return to the terms of the Charter sealed in June 1215. I referred a few moments ago to the laws of Edward the Confessor and of Henry I.

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The political classes of 1215, by which I mean both the barons and the bishops, put a high practical and one might almost say emotional value on those laws and on the confirmation by the King, typically at his Coronation, that he would obey them. Clause 1 of Magna Carta guarantees the freedom of the English Church, just as the opening of Henry I's Coronation Charter did in 1100. Henry I also promised to end royal abuses of the barons' property rights, and to return to the gentler customs of Edward the Confessor. So there is a golden thread running from Edward the Confessor, last but one of the Saxon Kings, through the Norman Kings, to Runnymede.

But Magna Carta is altogether a more comprehensive document. It asserted a fundamental principle, that the King was subject to the law and could not treat his subjects in an arbitrary and so an illegal way. This principle is encapsulated in the Charter's two most famous Clauses:

Clause 39: *No free man is to be seized, imprisoned, deprived of property or outlawed or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we [that is, the King] proceed against him, save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.*

And Clause 40: *To no one will we sell, to no-one will we deny or delay right or justice.*

Magna Carta foreshadows the development of Parliament, even though the word parliament doesn't appear. Clause 12 says that there is to be no taxation except by the *common counsel* – the consent – *of the realm* – the principle central to your Congress and our Parliament. Clause 14 sets out how that consent was to be obtained, summoning the barons individually by letter and giving 40 days' notice.

It also sets out a systematic approach to the administration of justice.

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By Clause 17 the Court of Common Pleas, dealing with actions between subject and subject that did not involve the King, was to sit in one place rather than following the King around; and after 1215 it sat in Westminster Hall for the next 600 years. Clauses 18 and 19 prescribed how the assizes and county courts were to operate.

Magna Carta also dealt with wills, intestacy, borrowing, and weights and measures. It was in every way a constitutional document, and should have heralded a new era of peace and stability, not least because it set up a commission of 25 barons to ensure that its terms were observed. Alas no.

Once again, tricksy John had been playing for time. He hoped that the Pope (now, you will remember, the feudal overlord of England) would come to his aid, and in July he sent envoys to Pope Innocent seeking the annulment of the Charter. Innocent obliged, with a Papal Bull, a pronouncement dated 24th August 1215, declaring Magna Carta to be “as unlawful and unjust as it is base and shameful” and declaring it null and void.

The Great Charter had been legally valid for less than ten weeks – a rather shorter time, as a distinguished British lawyer has remarked, as Hitler’s promise to Neville Chamberlain at Munich.

Civil war broke out. The barons invited Louis, the son of the King of France, to England, offering him the crown, and in December 1215 there were 7,000 French troops in London. In 1216 John had enjoyed some military success in the eastern counties but had not tackled the core of the rebellion in London. In October 1216 John fell ill with dysentery, it is said from over-indulgence in peaches and new cider (don’t worry – Herefordshire cider is much safer than Lincolnshire cider). He then famously lost much of his baggage train and treasure in the perilous quicksands of the Wash – the huge bay and estuary on the east coast of England, where Norfolk meets Lincolnshire. And within the week, he died, on the night of 18th October.

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Dying was one of the very best things John did. His heir was a child, Henry III, and William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, that key figure from the negotiations leading up to Runnymede, was elected Regent by the barons, to hold power, together with the papal legate. Everyone knew that Marshal was to be trusted, and he was probably the single greatest factor in bringing peace to the realm. And one of the first things he did was in Henry III's name to reissue the Charter of 1215, first in 1216 (which was a quick reissue in a much reduced form) and then in 1217, which is the form of the Hereford Charter which is now in Houston.

That 1217 Charter was actually much more of a core constitutional document than the 1215 Charter; it included new clauses especially relating to the legal system, assizes and the conduct of sheriffs (those beastly sheriffs again; the 1217 Hereford Magna Carta says that they should not look for "opportunities for exactments", in other words extortion, which many of them might have thought was the main reason for being a sheriff in the first place). And the provisions on forest laws, were omitted and promulgated separately. The 1215 Charter was not at the time called Magna Carta; it was simply the "Charter of Runnymede"; the description "Great Charter" was first used in 1225 when Henry III came of age and reissued the 1217 Charter.

In an immediate sense, as we have seen, Magna Carta was a peace settlement. Henry III's confirmation of its principles when he came of age was a pact between King and realm. It wasn't legislation, of course, because there was no Parliament to pass legislation as we understand it.

So what makes Magna Carta special, and how does it speak to us today?

The great British jurist Lord Bingham, whom I had the privilege of knowing, said that the sealing of Magna Carta was an event that changed the constitutional landscape in England and, over time, the world. He gave four reasons for this.

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The first was that, in contrast with other European charters of the period, it was a grant to all free men throughout the realm. As I said earlier, of course not all men were free at that time, but it did apply to a significant proportion of the population.

Second, Magna Carta wasn't an instant response to King John's behaviour. Its roots went much deeper, to Edward the Confessor, the Coronation Oaths of previous kings, and the coronation charter of Henry I. The Coronation Oath of British Sovereigns still contains a promise to exercise justice and mercy in all judgements, and was sworn by our present Queen on her Coronation in 1953.

Third, Magna Carta "represented and expressed a clear rejection of unbridled, unaccountable royal power, an assertion that even the supreme power in the state must be subject to certain overriding rules". It was the rule of law in embryo.

Fourth, said Lord Bingham, "the significance of Magna Carta lay not only in what it actually said but, perhaps to an even greater extent, in what later generations claimed and believed it had said".

So it was in 17th-century England, when the House of Commons in 1625 and 1626 denied King Charles I the money to conduct military operations abroad. The King decreed a forced loan and imprisoned those unwilling to pay it (a rather loud echo of King John's scutage here!). The so-called Petition of Right in 1628, reluctantly accepted by the House of Lords and by the King, quoted Magna Carta as an authority.

And as England descended into civil war in the 1640s, Charles I claimed, as had his father James I, that he ruled by divine right and need take no account of Magna Carta. Sir Edward Coke, the Lord Chief Justice, insisted that Magna Carta made the King subject to the law like everyone else.

But here comes a parting of the constitutional ways.

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Making the King “subject to the law” meant the law as enacted by Parliament and agreed to, more or less willingly, by the King.

That was the English interpretation, and we see it again in the Bill of Rights, which was Parliament’s statement of conditions for William and Mary being offered the throne in 1688 after the deposing of James II. So, rather subtly, the rule of law becomes the rule of Parliament.

It wasn’t the same on the other side of the Atlantic. Here many of those who framed your Declaration of Independence and then your Constitution were able lawyers, well versed in the English common law, and it was natural for them to think of a Constitution in overarching terms that could not simply be made or unmade by Parliamentary means.

On 20th March 1788 “A Freeman” as he described himself made the point perfectly to the Freeholders and Freemen of Rhode Island.

He said that the British Parliament “are the supreme Legislative, their powers are absolute, and extend to an abolition of Magna Carta itself.” Congress, on the other hand, had powers that were “not supreme, nor absolute, it being defined by the Constitution; and all powers therein not granted, are retained by the State Legislatures”.

I think you can see where I am going with this; it is that you in the United States, and not we in Britain, are the real heirs of Magna Carta. It is no coincidence that your federal and state courts so often cite Magna Carta – and indeed, that your Supreme Court did so in more than sixty cases between 1940 and 1990.

And this concept of overarching legal authority also finds expression in the European Convention of Human Rights, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations on 10th December 1948. Some of the provisions of that Universal Declaration have a remarkable resonance with Magna Carta:

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Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing... in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 17: No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

We have come a long way from that meadow next to the River Thames on a few summer days eight centuries ago, but the spirit of Magna Carta seems as fresh and relevant as it did then.

And it is a particular pleasure for us to see how Magna Carta is valued in the United States. The Magna Carta memorial, close to the spot where King John met the barons, was created by the American Bar Association. Members of the Association met there in the year 2000 “to celebrate Magna Carta, foundation of the rule of law for ages past and for the new millennium”, and they will hold a ceremony there next year on the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Charter.

For our part, our Hereford Magna Carta coming to Houston reflects that common tradition, our shared values and our friendship.

It has been a privilege to speak to you this evening.