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THE FIRST CENTURY OF MAGNA CARTA: THE DIFFUSION OF TEXTS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHARTER

Paul Brand*

INTRODUCTION

Much of the interest of historians and of the general public during 2015, the eighth centenary year of the ‘Charter of Liberties,’ was focused on the dramatic events leading up to King John’s concession of the Charter to his subjects in the meadow of Runnymede by the river Thames in June 1215. This Paper takes as its subject some of the story of what happened during the first century after Runnymede. In the first Section I will look at how knowledge of the text of the 1215 Charter and of the various revised reissues (those of 1216, 1217, and 1225) was spread by the making of multiple official copies for transmission to the localities and through instructions being sent for local public proclamation of their contents, and at how the similar arrangements made for the making of further multiple official copies of the authorized reissues of the 1225 version of Magna Carta—which took the form of letters of *inspeximus* and confirmation of the 1225 text issued by the king—in 1265, 1297, and 1300 were also accompanied by instructions for recurrent public proclamation of the reissued and publicly reaffirmed text. In the second Section I will look at what is currently known about the process through which unofficial copies of the text of Magna Carta (in one version or sometimes in multiple versions) started being made for institutional and individual use. In the third Section I will look at what is known of the further process of transmission of knowledge of the text through the translation of the Latin texts of Magna Carta into Anglo-Norman French and into Middle English. In the fourth and final Section I will look at the ways in which access to the content of Magna Carta came to be facilitated by the compilation of unofficial indexes to the text (and also at the connection between these finding aids and the numbering of the individual chapters of Magna Carta, which scholars and lawyers still use), and by the compilation of a précis version of the text.

I. OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE DIFFERENT ISSUES OF MAGNA CARTA, 1215–1300

Royal letters patent issued on 19 June 1215, not long after the sealing of the ‘Charter of Liberties,’ and addressed jointly to the sheriffs, warreners, custodians of river banks, and all other royal bailiffs of every county, spoke of the king’s charter

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(evidently the ‘Charter of Liberties’) as something which the king had (already) ordered to be read out publicly throughout each official’s ‘bailiwick’ (area of office) and firmly observed. An immediately following set of annotations on the Patent Roll of the King’s Chancery for the seventeenth regnal year (or a variant on it) was sent (but as a pair of letters patent, with the other perhaps being sent to the community of each county) to almost every county via named intermediaries, as well as to the city of London and to the Cinque Ports in Kent.¹ The late Sir James Holt (following earlier scholarly opinion) thought that this meant that copies of the Charter had indeed been sent to all these counties.² More recent scholarly opinion has, however, been skeptical about whether the counties ever got their copies. It notes that the same memorandum on the Patent Roll that mentions the letters patent referring to the ‘Charter of Liberties’ also refers to the handing over of just thirteen copies of ‘the Charter’ and suggests that the ultimate recipients of these copies were the thirteen bishops of England who were then in post (several sees then being vacant) and further notes that these were the only copies of the Charter that were sent out in June 1215.³ It is certainly the case that three of the four surviving copies of the 1215 ‘Charter of Liberties’ are now known to have been associated with particular bishoprics: Salisbury, Lincoln, and Canterbury.⁴ But there is also independent evidence, well known to historians from a 1974 article of the late Sir James Holt, to suggest that more copies of the ‘Charter of Liberties’ were made than those which were sent to the bishops.⁵ This evidence takes the form of an Anglo-Norman French translation of the 1215 Charter. This is, rather surprisingly, to be found in the cartulary of the leper hospital of St. Giles at Pont-Audemer in Normandy, which is now in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Rouen, and it seems to have been copied into that cartulary before 1234. Sir James argued, quite convincingly, that the translation was probably made locally in Hampshire for proclamation there from a copy sent to the county in June 1215 as was the immediately succeeding item in the cartulary, a French translation of King John’s writ to the sheriff of Hampshire of 27 June ordering distraint of the lands and chattels of all men of the county who refused to take the oath to the baronial twenty-five.⁶ There seems no reason to suppose that other copies were not sent to other counties as well.

The first revised reissue of the ‘Charter of Liberties’ of November 1216 was only ever intended as an interim, stopgap reissue, committing the young King Henry III and his supporters in principle to the continuation of many of the royal concessions

¹ THOMAS DUFFUS HARDY, *ROTULI LITTERARUM PATENTIIUM* 180b (1835). The only counties not included in the list are Herefordshire, Hertfordshire, and Middlesex. Some of the letters patent seem not to have been handed over until later, on 24 June. *Id.*

² J. C. HOLT, *MAGNA CARTA AND MEDIEVAL GOVERNMENT* 239 (1985).

³ DAVID CARPENTER, *MAGNA CARTA* 375–79 (2015).

⁴ *SOTHEBY’S N.Y., THE MAGNA CARTA* 56–59 (Dec. 18, 2007) (text by Professor Nicholas Vincent); *see also* CARPENTER, *supra* note 3, at 10–17, 477–80.

⁵ HOLT, *supra* note 2, at 239–57.

⁶ *Id.* at 241.

contained in Magna Carta, but removing some of those chapters that were most contentious (*gravia et dubitabilia*), relating to matters such as consent to taxation like aids and scutages and the procedure for obtaining such consent; the levying of debts owed to the Jews; freedom of movement in and out of the country, and about forests, warrens, rivers; and the administration of counties, and the running of county courts—for fuller consideration later.⁷ This reissue also permanently removed from the Charter the provisions about the enforcement of its chapters by a baronial group of twenty-five and certain other clauses for the redress of past grievances, and made detailed changes to a number of other chapters. We know almost nothing about the arrangements for its publication. There is only a single surviving original (sealed) official copy of this reissue. It is in the archives of Durham cathedral, now held in Durham University library.⁸ It may be no coincidence that the bishop of Durham at the time of its sealing (Richard Marsh) was also chancellor of England. It was perhaps the ‘official’ master copy. But the 1216 revised reissue must, I think, have been the ‘Charter of Liberties,’ which the king had granted “to the barons and all others of our kingdom” and that the legate had confirmed by his seal, which the sheriff of Worcestershire was ordered to read out at his county court in a writ attested by the earl Marshal of 23 June 1217, over six months later.⁹ The order does not make it clear whether a copy accompanied it, but it does indicate that the sheriff must have been in possession of a copy and also that the legislation was now being published locally, either for the first or for the second time.¹⁰ It is possible, but by no means certain, that other sheriffs may have been ordered to publish the 1216 revised reissue at the same time. The 1216 revised reissue also seems to have been the first version of the Charter sent to the lordship of Ireland. This was on 6 February 1217, under the seals of the legate and William Marshal, and it was sent together with a covering letter.¹¹

A second, and more definitive, reissue of the Charter was issued some time in November 1217 (all the surviving official copies are undated) once peace had been made with Prince Louis of France and his supporters, and the civil war ended.¹² The ‘Charter of Liberties’ was now paired with a separate Charter of the Forest and became for the first time the ‘Great’ (or perhaps just ‘the big’) Charter (*Magna Carta* in Latin).¹³ There were further changes in the chapters inherited from earlier versions of the Charter, and six new clauses were added (though one was only a temporary

⁷ See CHARTERS OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM 14–16.

⁸ SOTHEBY’S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 60 (with picture). There is a second copy, which shows no sign of ever having been sealed, in the Archives Nationales in Paris. This is reproduced in MAGNA CARTA: LAW, LIBERTY, LEGACY 95 (Claire Breay & Julian Harrison eds., 2015).

⁹ I THOMAS DUFFUS HARDY, ROTULI LITTERARUM CLAUSARUM 336 (London 1833) [hereinafter ROT. LITT. CLAUS.].

¹⁰ See *id.*

¹¹ PATENT ROLLS OF THE REIGN OF HENRY III PRESERVED IN THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE: 1216–1225, at 31.

¹² See CARPENTER, *supra* note 3, at 412.

¹³ See *id.* at 4–5.

one authorizing the destruction of all castles built or rebuilt since the beginning of the civil war between John and his barons). For this reissue we know instructions were sent several months later (in February 1218 and, in at least one case, as late as April), perhaps because of delays in writing the large quantity of charters involved, instructing sheriffs to ensure the appearance in their county court of the barons, knights, and all the free tenants of their county to swear allegiance to the young king and to hear the reading of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest.¹⁴ There are four surviving original official copies of this reissue: three are now in Oxford at the Bodleian Library and one is at Hereford Cathedral.¹⁵

There was one more revised reissue of Magna Carta—the third revised reissue in less than a decade—in February 1225. Textually, this was close to the 1217 revised reissue, minus the clause about the demolition of castles, but plus an additional clause containing a promise by Henry III that neither he nor his heirs would ever seek any authorization for infringing or annulling the liberties contained in the Charter.¹⁶ There were two other distinctive features of this reissue. One was that it was the first to be sealed by the seal of the young King Henry III, rather than those of his guardians (he had been declared of age for certain purposes by the pope in 1223, though he was still only aged seventeen in February 1225 and thus still under the normal age of legal majority) and so the charter could plausibly emphasise in its preamble that it had been made ‘spontaneously and of the King’s good will’ (*spontanea et bona voluntate nostra*).¹⁷ The second distinctive factor is that there was an explicit *quid pro quo* for the regranting of the Charter of Liberties and of the Charter of the Forest. This was the granting by the “archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, earls, barons, knights, free tenants and all of our kingdom” of one fifteenth of all their movable goods by way of subsidy (taxation).¹⁸ There was also, therefore, a minor adjustment to the grantees of the charter as well. These were now said to be not just the “archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, earls and barons” but also the all-inclusive “and all of our kingdom” (*et omnibus de regno nostro*).¹⁹ Four original copies of the 1225 reissue survive.²⁰ One is in the Durham Cathedral Muniments in Durham University library (which may again owe its survival and its place to Richard of Marsh’s role as chancellor of England).²¹ One copy that is now in the British Library was once in Lacock Abbey, in Wiltshire.²² This bears a thirteenth-century endorsement indicating that it had been deposited there by the ‘knights’ of Wiltshire, presumably on behalf of

¹⁴ See ROT. LITT. CLAUS., *supra* note 9, at 377–377b, 378.

¹⁵ SOTHEBY’S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 61–64.

¹⁶ CHARTERS OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM 22–25.

¹⁷ See *id.* at 38; CARPENTER, *supra* note 3, at 420.

¹⁸ See CHARTERS OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM 26; CARPENTER, *supra* note 3, at 420.

¹⁹ See *supra* note 18.

²⁰ SOTHEBY’S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 65–68.

²¹ See *id.* at 65.

²² CHARTERS OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM p.2 preliminary table.

the county of Wiltshire—our first direct evidence of a surviving county copy of Magna Carta. A damaged copy survives in the United Kingdom National Archives at Kew among the records of the Duchy of Lancaster but is of uncertain ultimate provenance.²³ There is also a copy in the Bodleian Library, which may be the copy that was sent to Oxfordshire. Although the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta (and of the Forest Charter) is dated 11 February 1225 in the surviving copies, that does not seem to have been the date when the copies were sent out. A writ enrolled on the chancery Close Roll of 16 February is addressed to the sheriff of Yorkshire and seems to be intended to accompany copies of both Charters.²⁴ It ordered them to be read out and proclaimed in his county court and cautioned the sheriff not to take action on the Forest Charter until the boundaries of the forest in his county had been established.²⁵ There are also copies of simpler writs of the same date to the sheriffs of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire accompanying only a copy of the ‘Great Charter’ (because neither county had a forest) but to the same general effect.²⁶ There is another writ like the Yorkshire one, covering both charters, sent to the county of Rutland on the same roll, but this writ is dated 1 May.²⁷ The same roll also contains a differently formulated writ sent to the sheriffs of *all* of the counties of England dated 8 May, ordering the general publication (perhaps in French) and observance of the ‘Greater Charter’ (*majori carta*) of liberties and of the ‘Smaller Charter’ (*minori carta*) of ‘Liberties of the Forest.’²⁸ This writ sounded a different note at the end. Just as the king had freely conceded ‘their’ liberties and wished to have them observed, so ‘all and each’ (*universi et singuli*) of them were to keep (*conservent*) unharmed all of the king’s rights (*omnia jura nostra*) and ‘all of the king’s liberties’ (*omnes libertates nostras*).²⁹ It may thus only have been as late as May that most of the copies were sent out.

A one-off reading of Magna Carta by all sheriffs in their county courts was ordered in May 1255, together with a mandate for them to ensure that it was firmly observed.³⁰ This was the first such order for a reading that was not associated with a reissue or a confirmation of the Charter and it is of interest because it clearly assumes that all sheriffs already will have possessed official copies of the Charter. The next official order for the public reading of the Charter came after the reissue of 13 or 14 March 1265. This reissue took the form of an *inspeximus* (an affirmation that the king had ‘seen’) the 1225 Magna Carta and Charter of the Forest followed by a full recital and express confirmation of those contents. First among the lay witnesses was Simon de

²³ *Magna Carta, 1225*, NAT’L ARCHIVES, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/magna-carta/magna-carta-1225-westminster> [<http://perma.cc/7JJY-TVWJ>].

²⁴ See 2 THOMAS DUFFUS HARDY, *ROT. LITT. CLAUS.* 70 (London 1844).

²⁵ See *id.*

²⁶ See *id.* at 70.

²⁷ See *id.* at 72b.

²⁸ See *id.* at 73b.

²⁹ See *id.*

³⁰ CLOSE ROLLS OF THE REIGN OF HENRY III PRESERVED IN THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE: 1254–1256, at 194–95 (1931).

Montfort, Earl of Leicester; this reissue took place during the period when King Henry III (in whose name the *inspeximus* was issued) was a virtual prisoner and de Montfort was the actual head of the English governmental machinery.³¹ Not surprisingly, there are no known surviving original official copies of this *inspeximus* and confirmation. A British Library manuscript (MS Harley 489) contains a copy of the writ of 13 March as sent to the ‘archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, earls, barons, knights, free men and all others of the counties of Somerset and Dorset’ containing this *inspeximus* and confirmation, that contains a full list of the bishops and laymen who witnessed it.³² A second British Library manuscript (MS Cotton Appendix XIII) has a similar writ of the same date addressed to a similar group in the county of Essex.³³ A third British Library manuscript (Cotton Claudius D. II) has only an abbreviated text of Magna Carta, but is in the form of a similar writ sent to the county of Middlesex, dated 14 March.³⁴ There is a similar text in a Bodleian Library manuscript.³⁵ This reissue was part of the peace settlement (*Forma Pacis*) made after the Battle of Lewes between the king and his baronial opponents. One of its other provisions envisaged that Magna Carta in the future would be ‘published’ by being read out twice a year in every county court at the first session after Easter and the first session after Michaelmas.³⁶ The defeat of the Montfortians at the battle of Evesham later that year will, however, have meant that only a single proclamation was made at the session of each county court held after Easter 1265. The recovery of royal power invalidated almost everything done during the period of Montfortian rule.

Much better known (perhaps especially in the United States and in Australia) is the next *inspeximus* and confirmation. This was issued on 9 October 1297 under the attestation not of King Edward I, who was then in Flanders, but of the regent, the future King Edward II, then aged thirteen.³⁷ It was again an *inspeximus* of the 1225 version of Magna Carta (and of the Forest Charter) but with an additional clause at the end promising observance of all of the ‘articles’ (chapters) of the Charter, even if some of them had hitherto not been observed.³⁸ Although there is nothing on the face of the document to indicate this, the 1297 *inspeximus* was (like the 1225 reissue) also quite explicitly something granted by the king (or his son) in return for a grant of taxation, in this case a ninth. This is clear from the mandate for publication attached

³¹ See CARPENTER, *supra* note 3, at 441–43.

³² BL MS Harley 489, fols. 4r–8r (and Forest Charter at fols. 8v–10v).

³³ BL MS Cotton Appendix XIII, fols. 4r–6r.

³⁴ BL MS Cotton Claudius D.II, fol. 128v. There is also a copy of this in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 70. *Cambridge, Corpus Christi C., Parker Library, DMS STAN.’S DIGITAL MANUSCRIPTS INDEX* (on file with Corpus Christi College), http://dms.stanford.edu/catalog/CCC007_keywords [<http://perma.cc/CBR6-KHAW>].

³⁵ Bodleian Library MS Additional C.188, fols. 1r–4r (and Forest Charter at fols. 4r–5r). These, however, are dated 15 February.

³⁶ *Id.* at 312–15.

³⁷ 1 *Edward I: 1275–1294*, in *THE PARLIAMENT ROLLS OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND* 85, 87 (Paul Brand ed., Boydell Press, 2005) [hereinafter *PARLIAMENT ROLLS*].

³⁸ *CHARTERS OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM* 33–36 (1297).

to the London copy.³⁹ It spells out that the *inspeximus* (and confirmation) had been given for the “relief of all the inhabitants and the people of our kingdom for the ninth granted by the laymen of our kingdom in support of the defence of the same kingdom” (*Quia in relevacionem omnium incolarum et populi regni nostri pro nona nobis a laicis de regno nostro in subsidium defensionis ejusdem regni concessa . . .*).⁴⁰ The basis of this deal had been spelled out in the summer parliament of 1297 and instructions has been given on 15 September for the choice of two knights to represent each county.⁴¹ They were to appear at Westminster in early October and receive their copies of the king’s confirmation of Magna Carta and the Forest Charter.⁴² That does not seem, however, to have been what happened. On 10 October, while parliament was still in session, Prince Edward seems to have agreed (in the so-called *Confirmacio Cartarum*) for the reissued charters to be sent out instead to the sheriffs of all counties and to the king’s justices, with orders to publish and observe them and with further orders that they be sent to all cathedral churches to be read out twice a year.⁴³ Although London’s covering writ is dated 12 October, a similar writ enrolled on the Close Roll for the version sent to Buckinghamshire seems to belong to around 17 November.⁴⁴ That would fit other evidence indicating that after Prince Edward had agreed to the *Confirmatio Cartarum*, it was sent to his father in Flanders for reissue at Ghent on 5 November.⁴⁵ It may only have been after the reissued *Confirmatio* came back to England that most, if not all, of the copies of the *inspeximus* were sent out. There is no evidence that the cathedral copies were ever issued. Certainly none of the surviving copies is associated with a cathedral.⁴⁶ Two of the four surviving copies went to counties and a third went to the sheriffs of London (both a county and a city) and the fourth was probably also a county copy.⁴⁷ One copy is now in the Parliament House at Canberra and was apparently the copy originally sent to the county of Surrey (and perhaps the county of Sussex, with which it shared a sheriff).⁴⁸ A second belonged to the American businessman and independent presidential candidate Ross Perot.⁴⁹ This was sold at auction in 2007 for over \$21 million.⁵⁰ It is now once more on display (but on loan) at the U.S. National Archives in Washington, D.C.,

³⁹ See *id.* at 36.

⁴⁰ See *id.*

⁴¹ 1 *Edward I: 1275–1299*, in *Parliament Rolls*, *supra* note 37, at 85, 87.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ 1 *Statutes of the Realm* 123–24 (1297).

⁴⁴ *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward I*, Vol. IV: 1296–1302, at 137 (1906).

⁴⁵ 25 *Edw. I*, 1 *Statutes of the Realm* 124; *Charters of Liberties*, 1 *Statutes of the Realm* 37 (BL Cotton Charters VII, 9).

⁴⁶ *Sotheby’s N.Y.*, *supra* note 4, at 69–71.

⁴⁷ See *id.* at 69–70.

⁴⁸ See *id.* at 70.

⁴⁹ *Perot Purchases a Copy of Magna Carta*, *N.Y. Times*, Sept. 27, 1984, at A16.

⁵⁰ Anahad O’Connor, *Let Freedom Remain, Says Financier Who Bought Copy of Magna Carta*, *N.Y. Times*, Dec. 20, 2007, at B3.

in a specially constructed room paid for by its current owner, David Rubinstein.⁵¹ It seems originally to have been sent to the county of Buckinghamshire (and was perhaps shared with its twin county of Bedfordshire).⁵² A third copy is now in the London Metropolitan Archives, but it was formerly in the archives of the City of London and was evidently the copy sent to London, since it still has the writ to its sheriffs attached to it.⁵³ A fourth copy is in the UK National Archives among the records of the Duchy of Lancaster but with no evidence of its original provenance.⁵⁴

An *inspeximus* and confirmation issued in the name of the king but attested only by his son as regent did not look as good, or perhaps as binding, as one attested and confirmed by Edward I in person. It seems likely that the issuing and publication of just such an *inspeximus* and confirmation of both Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest was among the demands made of the king at the parliament which met in the New Temple and at Westminster in March 1300. This was certainly what happened. It took place after the representatives of the towns and counties had left parliament (on 20 March), but while parliament itself still officially remained in session.⁵⁵ The *inspeximus* and confirmation issued on 28 March has a long list of baronial witnesses.⁵⁶ This is the first of the reissues to be enrolled (together with the reissue of the Forest Charter) on the Charter Roll of the king's chancery.⁵⁷ Perhaps six authentic copies of this *inspeximus* and confirmation survive.⁵⁸ One comes from the archives of the city of London and is now in the London Metropolitan Archives;⁵⁹ one from Durham Cathedral archives and is now in Durham University Library;⁶⁰ one is in the archives of Oriel College, Oxford (its provenance is uncertain);⁶¹ one is in the archives of Westminster Abbey;⁶² and two come from towns that were part of the group of maritime towns in Kent and Sussex known as the Cinque Ports (Faversham and the recently discovered Sandwich copy).⁶³ The Faversham copy has an annotation showing it was the copy sent to the town.⁶⁴

⁵¹ Press Release, Nat'l Archives, National Archives to Open New David M. Rubenstein Gallery December 10, 2013 (Nov. 6, 2013), <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2013/nr13-129.html> [<https://perma.cc/XWH6-QGHY>].

⁵² SOTHEBY'S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 69.

⁵³ *Id.* at 69.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 71.

⁵⁵ 1 *Edward I: 1275–1294*, in PARLIAMENT ROLLS, *supra* note 37, at 94.

⁵⁶ *Id.*; CHARTER OF LIBERTIES, 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM 38–41 (1300).

⁵⁷ 2 CALENDAR OF THE CHARTER ROLLS PRESERVED IN THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE: 1257–1300, at 483 (1906).

⁵⁸ SOTHEBY'S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 79.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 73.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 79.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.* at 80.

⁶³ *Id.* at 79–80. For the Sandwich Magna Carta, see <http://magnacartaresearch.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/discovering-sandwich-magna-carta-by.html> [<https://perma.cc/G7S4-FJPY>].

⁶⁴ Lucy Guthrie, *Magna Carta—Faversham*, FAVERSHAM, <http://www.faversham.org/blog/faversham-magna-carta.aspx> [<http://perma.cc/VXA4-TK93>].

There is also a copy in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, though this is believed to be a “contemporary exemplification rather than . . . a product of the royal chancery.”⁶⁵ Regular publication of Magna Carta was now made the responsibility of the local sheriffs. They were instructed to have the charters read out and publicly proclaimed in the county court four times every year in the first county court after Easter, the first after Mid-Summer’s day (the feast day of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, 24 June), the first after Michaelmas (29 September), and the first after Christmas.⁶⁶

II. THE CIRCULATION OF UNOFFICIAL COPIES OF MAGNA CARTA (TO C. 1307)

All that these arrangements for ‘publication’ of the various versions of Magna Carta or their subsequent confirmations achieved for certain was an auditory acquaintance with Magna Carta on the part of those who heard them read out and ‘published,’ though we cannot rule out the possibility, perhaps even the probability, that once copies of Magna Carta had gone out to the counties of England or to bishops or their cathedral churches, this made actual texts of Magna Carta (and of the Charter of Forest) available for non-official copying, whether institutional or purely private. What is certainly the case is that such copies were in circulation from a fairly early date.

The earliest evidence for this comes from the copies of Magna Carta included in books of various kinds made for religious houses. There is, for example, a text of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta (and of the reissue of the Charter of the Forest of the same year) under this date in the annals of the Staffordshire Abbey of Burton on Trent,⁶⁷ and several copies of a hybrid of the 1215 original and 1217 reissue in various chronicles associated with St. Alban’s abbey.⁶⁸ There are also texts of the 1225 versions of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest (as well as of a lot of other thirteenth-century legislation down to 1285) with other documents associated with Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire in a register now in the National Archives.⁶⁹ A register of the Yorkshire priory of Malton now in the British Library compiled after 1250 includes a text of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta but of no other legislative texts.⁷⁰ Copies of the 1225 text of Magna Carta and of the Forest Charter (and of the 1236 Statute of Merton and of the 1259 Provisions of Westminster) are to be found with rentals of 1240 and 1285 and documents relating to the dispute between the hereditary sheriff of Worcestershire and the bishop of Worcester over franchisal

⁶⁵ SOTHEBY’S N.Y., *supra* note 4, at 80.

⁶⁶ 1 STATUTES OF THE REALM 136.

⁶⁷ 1 *Annales Monastici*, in CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND DURING THE MIDDLE AGES 225–36 (Henry Richards Luard ed., 1864) [hereinafter *Rolls Series*].

⁶⁸ See *Hybrids of Magna Carta 1217 and 1225*, MAGNA CARTA PROJECT, http://magna.cartaresearch.org/read/magna_carta_copies/Hybrids_of_Magna_Carta_1217_and_1225 [<http://perma.cc/U5RH-BBVF>].

⁶⁹ TNA: PRO E 164/24: edited in *Registrum Malmesburiense*, ed. J. S. Brewer & C. T. Martin (*Rolls Series*, 2 vols, 1879–80).

⁷⁰ BL MS Cotton Claudius D. XI, fols. 33v–34v.

rights claimed by the bishop and other materials relating to the priory in a register associated with Worcester cathedral priory.⁷¹ Stranger is the appearance of a text of the 1265 reissue of Magna Carta in the middle of the episcopal register of Richard of Swinfield, bishop of Hereford (1283–1317), between documents of 1294 and 1295 but with other earlier documents.⁷² Swinfield had been a clerk in the service of his predecessor, Thomas Cantilupe, from 1264 onwards and Cantilupe had been chancellor of England at the time of the 1265 reissue, which probably explains how he obtained and why he preserved this semi-official copy.⁷³

Evidence of copies of Magna Carta passing into the hands of those with more narrowly ‘legal’ and/or administrative interests begins around the middle of the thirteenth century. This takes the form of legal books that contain sections of statutes including Magna Carta and other legal material, but not much else. One of the earliest of these is a manuscript now in the British Library (BL MS Additional 25005). Its main contents are a *beta* text of the first Common Law treatise, *Glanvill* (at fols. 7r–57v), followed by a copy of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta (at fols. 57v–60v), followed by copies of other legislation and royal mandates mainly with a specifically Lincolnshire connexion of the period 1233–1234 and ending with a text of the Statute of Merton of 1236 (at fols. 60v–67v). These are followed by a ‘register of writs’ (the formulas of original writs available from chancery for the initiation of litigation) which seems to belong to a slightly earlier period (1218–1229),⁷⁴ and a copy of the original and earlier version of the set of questions and answers on law and procedure which comes to be called *Judicium Essoniorum* and which belongs to the period 1218–1230 (at fols. 73v–78r).⁷⁵ It has been long believed that this manuscript (and a related manuscript) were both written only c.1300, but Dr. Sarah Tullis has convincingly argued that it was written around the middle of the thirteenth century and thus not long after the latest material it contains.⁷⁶

⁷¹ See generally REGISTRUM SIVE LIBER IRROTULARIUS ET CONSUETUDINARIUS PRIORATUS BEATE MARIE WIGORNIENSIS 138a–144a (Magna Carta), 144a–147b (Forest Charter), 149a–b (1253 *Sententia Lata*), 163a–168a (1259 Provisions of Westminster), 168a–171a (1236 Statute of Merton with additions), 171a–b (watch and ward) (William Hale ed., 1865) (Camden Soc., old series, xci, 1865).

⁷² REGISTRUM RICARDI DE SWINFELD: EPISCOPI HEREFORDENSIS 1283–1317 (William W. Capes ed., 1909); see David Carpenter, *Simon de Monfort’s Changes to Magna Carta: The Reliefs of the Earl and the Baron*, MAGNA CARTA PROJECT, http://magnacartaresearch.org/read/feature_of_the_month/Dec_2014 [<http://perma.cc/BZ8Q-EWFE>].

⁷³ REGISTRUM RICARDI DE SWINFELD, *supra* note 72, at i.

⁷⁴ The limitation date in the writ of novel disseisin (at fol. 70r) is that applicable between those two dates; in the writ of mort d’ancestor (fol. 70r) that applicable between 1218 and 1237. *Id.*

⁷⁵ On this work, its two versions and its date, see Paul Brand, “‘Nothing which is new or unique’”? A reappraisal of *Judicium Essoniorum*, in *THE LIFE OF THE LAW: PROCEEDINGS OF THE TENTH BRITISH LEGAL HISTORY CONFERENCE 1–7* (Peter Birks ed., Hambledon Press 1993).

⁷⁶ Sarah Tullis, *Glanvill Continued: A Reassessment*, in *LAW IN THE CITY: PROCEEDINGS*

More difficult to date, and less a purely legal work, is a roll of eight membranes, sewn together head to tail in the style of the Chancery, now in the National Archives (as E 175/11/3) among the records which once belonged to the King's Remembrancer's office of the Exchequer. It is for the most part a cartulary containing copies of charters going back to the early thirteenth century, all apparently relating to lands subsequently acquired by Adam de Stratton in and around London: at Bermondsey and Rotherhithe in Surrey, at Edgware and Stanmore in Middlesex, at Borehamwood, Elstree and Shenley in Hertfordshire, at Barking and Ilford in Essex and also in the city of London itself, but with some copies of plea roll enrollments of the 1270s also involving Adam.⁷⁷ The remaining contents of the roll include a text of the 1225 reissues of Magna Carta and of the Forest Charter;⁷⁸ a text of the January 1237 ratification by Henry III in general terms of all the liberties he had previously granted in Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest notwithstanding the fact that he had made these grants while he was still under age;⁷⁹ a text of the *Sentencia Lata* of 1253 recording the public proclamation of a general sentence of excommunication on all those breaching the provisions of the Charters; a text of the Statute of Merton of 1236 (which includes at the end a summary of separate legislation of 1237 on limitation dates);⁸⁰ and an imperfect text of the 1259 Provisions of Westminster breaking off at the end of clause 14, and omitting part of clause 3.⁸¹ It is followed immediately, and without a break in the roll, by a version of the articles of the view of frankpledge and a text of the *Expositio Vocabulorum*, providing a French translation of the Anglo-Saxon terms of art found in pre-Conquest charters.⁸² This collection of legal material seems to belong to no later than the early 1260s and it seems to be in the same hand as the transcripts of deeds. Although membrane 5 of the roll contains only legal material,⁸³ membrane 6 has both legal material and transcripts of deeds,⁸⁴ suggesting that they were always intended to form part of the same roll. Adam of Stratton was not a lawyer but had become a clerk in the Exchequer by 1256 and subsequently held a variety of offices there.⁸⁵ He was also at the same time the financial controller of the affairs of Isabel de Forz, countess of Aumale, and a private money-lender to

OF THE SEVENTEENTH BRITISH LEGAL HISTORY CONFERENCE 15–23 (Andrew Lewis et. al. eds., 2007).

⁷⁷ Exchequer: King's Remembrance and Treasury of the Receipt Parliament and Council Proceedings [hereinafter TNA] E 175/11/3.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at membrane 5, 6.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at membrane 6. This was also enrolled on the Charter Roll, and three individual exemplars of it survive. See 1 CALENDAR OF THE CHARTER ROLLS PRESERVED IN THE PUBLIC OFFICE: 1226–1257, at 225–26 (1908).

⁸⁰ TNA, *supra* note 77, at membrane 5.

⁸¹ *Id.* at membrane 5d.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.* at membrane 6.

⁸⁵ ACCOUNTS AND SURVEYS OF THE WILTSHIRE LANDS OF ADAM DE STRATTON xv (M. W. Farr ed., 1959).

individuals and to religious houses on a large scale until the time of his disgrace in 1290.⁸⁶ This roll seems to have come to the Exchequer as result of the forfeiture of his lands and chattels.⁸⁷

Two rather different British Library manuscripts give us collections of mainly legal material put together in the 1270s which include texts of Magna Carta. Harley manuscript 746 contains not just a text of *Glanvill* (by now almost a century old) (at fols. 4r–48r), but also texts of the twelfth century law books *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* (fols. 49r–55r) and the *Leis Willelmi* (fols. 55r–58v), of the Coronation Charter of Henry I (by now of antiquarian interest only) (fols. 59r–v), of the *Instituta Cnuti* (fols. 77r–84r) and the *Willelmi Articuli* (fols. 84r–v). This is accompanied by material on the kingdoms of the heptarchy and on episcopal sees (fols. 75r–v), the archbishops of York and Canterbury (fol. 75v), the seats of the bishops of England in council (fol. 75v), the length and breadth of England (fols. 76r–v), and the genealogy of the dukes of Normandy (fol. 84v). There is also a section containing a copy of the 1215 Magna Carta (fols. 59v–64r), of the 1217 Forest Charter with emendations from its 1225 reissue in margin (fols. 64r–65v), of the 1217 reissue of Magna Carta again with emendations from the 1225 reissue in margin (fols. 65v–68v), of the 1234 order on the holding of wapentakes and hundreds (fols. 68v–69r), and the 1236 Statute of Merton (fols. 68v–69r). This is then followed by a register of writs (fols. 70r–74r), whose limitation periods and contents suggest a pre-1236 date. At the end come copies of later legislation: the 1267 statute of Marlborough (fols. 87r–90v), the 1275 statute of Westminster I (fols. 91r–98v) and the 1275 statute of Jewry (fols. 98v–100r) and a copy of the multivariant instructional text *Casus Placitorum* (fols. 100r–103v). Felix Liebermann, the great German editor of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman texts, ascribed this manuscript to 1325 but apparently only on the basis of later material added to the manuscript at its beginning and end.⁸⁸ The original text is mainly in a single hand and belongs to around c. 1275. The compiler seems to have been interested in any material on English law he could get his hands on, but not to have had the kind of focus on relevant and up to date material one might have expected of a professional lawyer or someone focused on providing material for such a lawyer.

That description fits the other manuscript (Harley MS 409) much better. This starts with a register of writs (fols. 1r–44v) in which the first specimen writ is dated 10 May 1278 and which in substance looks like a register belonging to that date. There is also a section of the common law instructional treatises popular in this period (at fols. 59r–123r) including one on the Court Baron, *Fet Asaver*, the treatise called *Hengham Magna*, and the pleading treatise (or form book) known as *Brevia Placitata*. The volume also contains two separate sections of statutes. The first (at fols. 45r–58v) includes copies of the most recent statutes: those of Westminster I, Jewry, and the Distraints of the Exchequer, all of 1275, and the statute of Gloucester

⁸⁶ *Id.* at xiii, xv, xxii–xxiii.

⁸⁷ *Id.* at xxii.

⁸⁸ *See generally* 1 FELIX LIEBERMANN, DIE GESETZE DER ANGELSACHSEN xxxix (1903).

of 1278, followed by the 1275 Statute of the Exchequer. The second (fols. 123r–136r) includes copies of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest, the 1253 *Sentencia Lata*, the 1236 Provisions or Statute of Merton, the 1267 Statute of Marlborough, and the 1266 Dictum of Kenilworth.

From the 1280s onwards this kind of legal compendium comprising a register of writs (often containing an initial writ bearing a date that looks a plausible one for the date of copying), a collection of shorter instructional treatises and a section of statutes beginning chronologically with Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest and ending with the most recently enacted statutes, becomes a common (and relatively commonly surviving) phenomenon. I know of at least eight such compendia dating from the 1280s, thirty-one from the 1290s, and twenty-four from the first decade of the fourteenth century. I am sure there are more and will once have been many more than this. Prior to the Edwardian reissues of 1297 and 1300, they most commonly include a copy simply of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta, but sometimes they contain copies of the 1217 reissue,⁸⁹ or of the 1265 reissue,⁹⁰ or of both the 1215 charter of John and the 1225 reissue,⁹¹ or of both the 1217 and the 1225 reissues.⁹² More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that at least five of these legal compendia have texts of the 1297 reissue of Magna Carta despite its relatively rapid supersession by the 1300 reissue and that all of them also have texts of post-1300 legislation but not of the 1300 reissue itself.⁹³ Not, of course, that there were any significant differences in substance between them.

III. TRANSLATIONS OF MAGNA CARTA INTO ANGLO-NORMAN FRENCH AND MIDDLE ENGLISH

The existence of one Anglo-Norman French translation of King John's 'Charter of Liberties' of 1215 (the original and soon superseded version of what became Magna Carta) has already been noted.⁹⁴ The other is less well-known. It comes from a largely legal manuscript of the late thirteenth-century (BL MS Additional 32085) which contains many statutes and a register of writs.⁹⁵ The translation is wholly independent of that in the Pont-Audemer cartulary. While it is possible that this is a later thirteenth-century translation, that seems unlikely. The volume already had a Henrician revised reissue of Magna Carta in Latin.⁹⁶ What would have been the

⁸⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Rawlinson C820; BL MS Harley 1120; Trinity College, Cambridge MS O.3.20.

⁹⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Additional C188; BL MS Harley 489.

⁹¹ LI MS. Hale 140; BL MS Additional 62534.

⁹² CUL MS Hh.4.1.

⁹³ They are BL MS Landowne 652 (at fols. 146v–147r); Harvard Law School Library MSS 56 (at fols. 1r–9v), and 184 (fols. 9r–12r); Huntington Library MS El. 1122 (at fols. 6r–12r); Philadelphia Free Library MS LC 14.21 (at fols. 18r–27v).

⁹⁴ See *supra* Part I.

⁹⁵ BL MS Additional 32085, fols. 102r–106r.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at fols. 7r–9v.

purpose of translating a clearly obsolete text of the 1215 charter for this volume in the very late thirteenth century? The likelihood seems to be that the compiler of this manuscript had access to a different translation made in 1215, suggesting that at least one other county also received its copy of Magna Carta in that same year and that like the first it may have been made for the purpose of oral proclamation, in a language more readily understood by most of those attending local county courts. There are also Anglo-Norman French translations of later reissues of the Charter. Translations of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta (and of the Forest Charter) are to be found in BL MS Additional 38821, a legal compendium compiled and written in the 1280s.⁹⁷ It is in a section which contains Anglo-Norman French translations of a number of other statutes known to have been enacted in Latin like the Statutes of Ragman of 1276, Mortmain of 1279, Merton of 1236, and Marlborough of 1267, side by side with copies of statutes like the Statutes of Westminster I of 1275, of Jewry of 1275, and of Acton Burnel of 1283, which had been originally enacted in Anglo-Norman French and thus required no translation.⁹⁸ These translations seem to have been made for the use of those who found Anglo-Norman easier than Latin to read and to use (a group that perhaps included most common lawyers), though the possibility cannot be excluded that this Magna Carta translation (and some of the others too) may ultimately be derived from versions which had been made for oral proclamation. Another translation of the same reissue of Magna Carta and the Forest Charter is to be found in a Folger Shakespeare Library manuscript, again accompanying translations of a number of other statutory texts and other material normally found in Latin,⁹⁹ and an Anglo-Norman translation of the 1300 reissues of Magna Carta and the Forest Charter in a Harvard Law School Library manuscript.¹⁰⁰ Again its context is a volume with translations of many other statutes originally issued in Latin (such as Merton, Marlborough, Westminster II, *Quia Emptores*, *Quia Fines*, Ragman and Mortmain), and again it looks as though the translation was made for the ease of those more comfortable with Anglo-Norman.

By the early years of the fourteenth century, Magna Carta had also been translated into Middle English together with a whole series of other Edwardian statutes and instructional treatises. This we know from a manuscript now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Rawlinson B 520) which has recently been edited (or rather as yet only partly edited) by Claire Fennell.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, only the first folio of the text of this translation of Magna Carta survives. It is enough to show that it is a translation of one of the Edwardian reissues but not enough to show whether it is the reissue of 1297 or 1300. All we have is a text of the opening, the first ten chapters,

⁹⁷ *Id.* at fols. 86r–88v & 88v–90r.

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.a.256, fols. 14r–25v & 25v–31v.

¹⁰⁰ Harvard Law School Library MS 12, fols. 2r–3v & 3v–4r.

¹⁰¹ A MIDDLE ENGLISH STATUTE BOOK, PART I: STATUTA ANTIQUA (Claire Fennell ed., 2011). Part II has yet to appear.

and the beginning of the eleventh.¹⁰² Its modern editor suggests on the basis of the linguistic evidence and some internal evidence pointing to an Oxfordshire connection, that the volume as a whole may have been written and translated at the Augustinian priory of Cold Norton close to Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire and she suggests that it may have been intended for a female religious institution like Godstow priory on the Thames just outside Oxford.¹⁰³ It is very much a singleton. There is no other known translation of Magna Carta into Middle English, though there is a fifteenth-century ‘reading’ (or lecture) on the first seven chapters of Magna Carta in Middle English which leaves the main text in the original Latin.¹⁰⁴

IV. THE MAKING OF INDEXES AND SUMMARIES OF MAGNA CARTA

None of the original authentic texts of the 1215 ‘Charter of Liberties’ or of the different revised reissues of 1216, 1217, 1225, 1265, 1297, or 1300 is divided up into separate numbered chapters or clauses, though the scribes or clerks who copied them did use paragraph marks and capitals to mark some of the obvious breaks in the text. The practice of dividing up the text of Magna Carta (and that of other thirteenth-century statutes) into numbered chapters seems only to have begun during the 1280s with some of the compilers of the legal compendia volumes already mentioned.¹⁰⁵ Thereafter it becomes a common, but not an invariable, feature of such volumes. This was not numbering for its own sake, however. From the beginning it seems to have accompanied the practice of making a kind of preliminary index to Magna Carta and the other statutes. This normally precedes the text and gives a very brief summary of the subject of each of the chapters (in Latin) in numerical order.¹⁰⁶ Most commonly (in those I have checked) these list thirty-three chapters, but sometimes there are thirty-five, thirty-six, or even thirty-eight (though these are all variants on the thirty-three chapter version). A single British Library manuscript has a quite different index which divides Magna Carta up into fifty-three chapters.¹⁰⁷ There are also three such indexes in French rather than Latin in a British Library manuscript, a Harvard Law School Library manuscript, and in a Folger Shakespeare library manuscript, which divide it up into thirty-six, thirty-seven, and forty-seven chapters

¹⁰² *Id.* at 3–5.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at xvi–xx.

¹⁰⁴ See generally G.O. SAYLES, *A Fifteenth-Century Law Reading in English*, in *SCRIPTA DIVERSA* 301, 301–12 (1982).

¹⁰⁵ The earliest examples I have noted are in BL MS Harley 489 (but the scribe gave up after the first two chapters) and part II of Lambeth MS 179.

¹⁰⁶ In at least one manuscript, however, the numbers of the chapters are given in the margin and the summary is rubricated in the text before each chapter: BL MS Lansdowne 467, fols. 4v–6v. The same MS also includes a separate index to Magna Carta at fol. 36r followed by the longer Latin précis of its clauses (at fols. 36r–37r).

¹⁰⁷ BL MS Egerton 656, fols. 66v–67v (but there is no text of Magna Carta in this volume, so it is impossible to match the index with the numbers).

respectively.¹⁰⁸ These indexes were clearly intended for practical utility: for the user who wanted to be able to find a specific passage in Magna Carta without having to read through it all, whether as a potential litigant, lawyer, or justice. Ironically, it was this wholly unofficial numbering scheme which with the advent of printing became the official numbering scheme adopted by scholars (from Blackstone onwards) and the numbering scheme used by lawyers and judges to refer to the chapters or clauses of Magna Carta.

More puzzling is the existence of a Latin (and not an Anglo-Norman French) précis text of the 1225 Magna Carta. This is fuller than the brief few words of the index entries but is also (like the index version) divided into thirty three chapters. I have so far transcribed only the versions found in the British Library manuscript Lansdowne 467, Bodleian Library manuscript Tanner 400, and Library of Congress Law Library manuscript 1,¹⁰⁹ but I know of the existence of at least one other version of what seems to be this same text and I think there may be more.¹¹⁰ In all four there is a similar précis of most of the other main thirteenth-century legislation and in three of the four manuscripts the précis version is found in addition to the ‘index entry’ summary of Magna Carta.¹¹¹ I have described it as a précis, but I am not sure that is quite the right term since it does do a little more than just summarize. There is at least one cross-reference to later legislation (the statute of Westminster II of 1285) in its summary of chapter 10,¹¹² and the précis sometimes imports a specific understanding (or misunderstanding) of the meaning of the clause. It may perhaps have been intended as a Latin summary of Magna Carta for those who could not gain access or could not afford a full copy of the text; indeed in three of our four manuscripts there is no main text of Magna Carta and the précis has to stand in for it.

CONCLUSION

It may well be true that a relatively large proportion of the adult inhabitants of England knew of the bad relations between King John and his baronial and other opponents and that they had reached some kind of settlement in the summer of 1215, but it can only have been a much smaller proportion (perhaps only those who were directly or indirectly involved in the negotiations leading to the ‘Charter of Liberties’)

¹⁰⁸ BL MS Hargrave 433, fols. 1r–1v; Harvard Law School Library MS 12, fol. 1r; Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington MS V. a, fols. 2r–3r.

¹⁰⁹ BL MS Lansdowne 467, fol. 36r; Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Tanner 400, pp. 12–16; Library of Congress Law Library MS 1, fols. 17r–21v.

¹¹⁰ Philadelphia Free Library MS LC 14.3, fols. 134v–135v.

¹¹¹ The Philadelphia Free Library MS is the exception.

¹¹² *Capitulo xº dicitur quod communia placita non sequantur curiam regis set teneantur in aliquo loco certo. Dicitur autem quod recogniciones nove disseisine et mortis antecessoris non capiantur nisi in suis comitatibus (de quorum processu et ordine plenius tractatur in secundo statuto Westm’).*

who will have had any knowledge of what it was that the king had granted the ‘free men’ of his kingdom in June 1215 and what that meant. For that knowledge to spread it was essential that the terms of the ‘Charter of Liberties’ were effectively publicized. It is difficult to know how effective such oral publication was, even if that publication was in an Anglo-Norman French that is likely to have been understood more readily than the Latin of the original, and even if “throughout the sheriff’s bailiwick” was more than just a single reading at the county court (as it seems to be), for Magna Carta was a long document and it was not arranged in a way that greatly aided comprehension (or memory). Oral publication in the county court was also envisaged in 1217 (for the 1216 revised version), in 1218 (for the 1217 revised version), in 1225 (for the 1225 version), and in 1255. In 1265 for the first time we hear of plans for twice yearly readings of Magna Carta at the more fully attended sessions of the county court held after Easter and Michaelmas but these plans were associated with the Montfortian regime and were ended by the death of Simon de Montfort at the battle of Evesham. They were revived in 1300 but with plans now for Magna Carta to be read out and publicly proclaimed no less than four times each year.

‘Publication’ may well, from the first, have meant more than this. One of the surviving copies of the 1225 Magna Carta was deposited at Lacock abbey by the ‘knights’ of Wiltshire, presumably acting on behalf of a ‘community of the county,’ suggesting an archive available for consultation (and for copying) and the order given in 1255 for the reading of Magna Carta by sheriffs in their county courts (but without any reissue of the charter itself) suggests the existence of a similar archive under shrieval control in all counties. The best, and the most useful, kind of knowledge of Magna Carta was that which was obtained from copies in private hands (whether institutional or individual) and, as has been shown, there is increasing evidence of this over the course of the thirteenth century. Even more useful for many users were copies (of the various different texts of Magna Carta) in the vernacular and there is good evidence of their existence in the Anglo-Norman of the legal profession and the gentry, if only thin evidence of the equivalent in the Middle English of the common people. And last, but not least, there is evidence, too, from the thirteenth century of efforts to make Magna Carta more accessible, partly through the creation of indexes (and the numbering of the clauses or chapters), and partly through the creation of summary versions of Magna Carta. By 1300 a great deal of public and private effort had gone into spreading knowledge of Magna Carta in its various different versions and it was well launched on its long career as the first piece of English legislation with which the English (and other Common Law) legal profession and the judiciary had any acquaintance and of which they might make some use.