

June 15th

Memory verse

He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.

(Ps. 147:4)

Younger children can learn the words in bold and understand that ““He” in this verse is the Lord God.

Something to read from history.¹

King John (1166-1216) had lost his lands in France. This meant he had lost a very important source of money. To make matters worse the wars in France had cost him a lot of money too. As a result he did everything he could think of to raise money. Almost every year he asked for scutage. This was a payment the nobles made to the king instead of going out to fight for him. In the royal courts huge fines were demanded as punishment for very minor crimes and the money went to the king. If a young tenant became his ward² he sold the villeins (workers who were little better than slaves) on the ward's estates their freedom, cut down the timber and sold off the livestock of the manor. John, of course, pocketed the profits of these transactions himself. If the owner was a widow or young girl he would sell her in marriage to whoever offered the most money. If she refused to marry the man of the king's choice, he made her pay a large part of the property as a fine.



The barons were very angry at this treatment. They also disliked John's habit of giving judgements in the Royal courts in favour of villeins who had complaints against their lords. This is one characteristic of John's which we might think good today but the barons decided they would have no more of it and determined to act.

When John came back to England from his wars in France he demanded heavy scutage from those barons who had not gone with him. This was the final straw. Led by Archbishop Langton³ the discontented barons gathered with their men-at-arms at Bury St. Edmunds. From here they marched up to London.

During previous reigns, the towns-people of London had always been on the side of the king when there was trouble with the barons. They did not want the baron's power increased and a strong king could keep them in check. This time things were different. The king's attempts to raise more money had been felt as strongly in the towns as in the country and the Londoners welcomed the barons to the city gladly.

John gave way to the barons. Langton told the king that the barons wanted him to agree to a charter stating the rights and privileges of his free subjects. John agreed to do this and the document was sealed by the king on a island in the Thames called Runnymede on **15th June** 1215. The barons brought their armed men with them to ensure that the king accepted the charter.

The pope was not pleased with the barons or with his Archbishop Stephen Langton. As England's feudal overlord, the pope did not like to see his vassal John sign such a humiliating document. He declared Magna Carta null and void and authorized the French to undertake another crusade on his behalf, this time on John's side, against the barons. John and the pope's men fought fiercely and

1 Adapted from *The Story of God's Dealings with our Nation* Volume 1 which is available here:

<https://www.creationresearchstore.com/s/search?q=The%20Story%20of%20Gods%20Dealings%20with%20our%20Nation>.

2 A ward is a person too young to manage their own affairs. Their affairs are consequently managed on their behalf. The guardian is supposed to do this for the benefit of the ward. John managed the estates of his wards for his own benefit.

3 Stephen Langton is the man who is believed to have divided the Bible up into the chapter divisions still used today.

hard against the English barons but in 1216 John died, leaving the throne to his nine year old son Henry III. Magna Carta was still in force.

The charter dealt mainly with feudal matters. It only applied to free men and of course at that time most ordinary people were not free, they were villeins. The time would come, however, when all English men would be free and the famous clause 39 would apply to everyone: “No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or disseised or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we [the king] go upon him nor will we send upon him except by the lawful judgement of his peers or [and] the law of the land.” The charter established one other very important idea. The law is not merely the will of the king. The king himself has to obey the law. This fact alone makes Magna Carta very important in our history.

In other countries in Europe there were struggles between the feudal barons and the king. In Europe, the barons acted as individuals. In England, the king was very powerful. This meant that the barons had to act together in order to get what they wanted from the king. “This experience of acting as a united body paved the way for our modern parliament.”⁴

Something to make

If you did not make an “ancient document” on 10th June or you would like to do it again you could make some “ancient” paper on which to write the famous clause 39 from Magna Carta.⁵

A poem to read aloud – and learn

The Reeds of Runnymede
Rudyard Kipling

AT Runnymede, at Runnymede
What say the reeds at Runnymede?
The lissom reeds that give and take,
That bend so far, but never break,
They keep the sleepy Thames awake
With tales of John at Runnymede.

At Runnymede, at Runnymede,
Oh, hear the reeds at Runnymede:--
“You mustn't sell, delay, deny,
A freeman's right or liberty.
It makes the stubborn Englishry,
We saw 'em roused at Runnymede!

“When through our ranks the Barons came,
With little thought of praise or blame,
But resolute to play the game,
They lumbered up to Runnymede;
And there they launched in solid time
The first attack on Right Divine--
The curt, uncompromising 'Sign!'
That settled John at Runnymede.

“At Runnymede, at Runnymede,
Your rights were won at Runnymede!
No freeman shall be fined or bound,
Or dispossessed of freehold ground,

⁴ Rayner, Robert *A Middle School History of England* vol. 1. p. 94.

⁵ If you want to look at the British Library copy you can see it here: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/magna-carta-1215>.

Except by lawful judgment found
And passed upon him by his peers.
Forget not, after all these years,
The Charter Signed at Runnymede.”

And still when Mob or Monarch lays
Too rude a hand on English ways,
The whisper wakes, the shudder plays,
Across the reeds at Runnymede.
And Thames, that knows the moods of kings,
And crowds and priests and suchlike things,
Rolls deep and dreadful as he brings
Their warning down from Runnymede!



Do you know what all the words mean? I've marked some in purple that you might need to look up in your dictionary.

Why do you think the poet says, “The lissom reeds that give and take, That bend so far, but never break,”?

If you began a poetry memorisation programme on 5th January (if not look at that lesson and begin one now) you could include this one in it.