

1215 Magna Carta: A Children's Version and Glossary

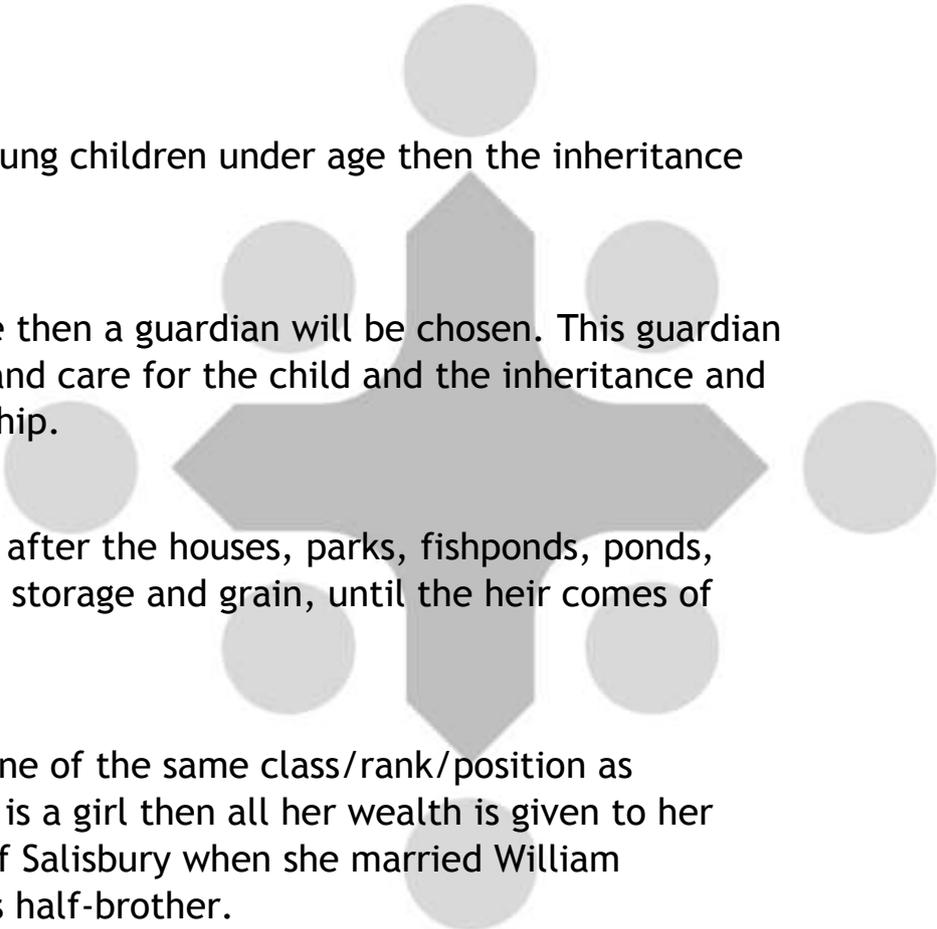
John, by the grace of God, King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots (men of the Church) earls, barons, justices, foresters, sheriffs, stewards, servants, and to all his bailiffs and faithful subjects, greetings - hello and welcome!

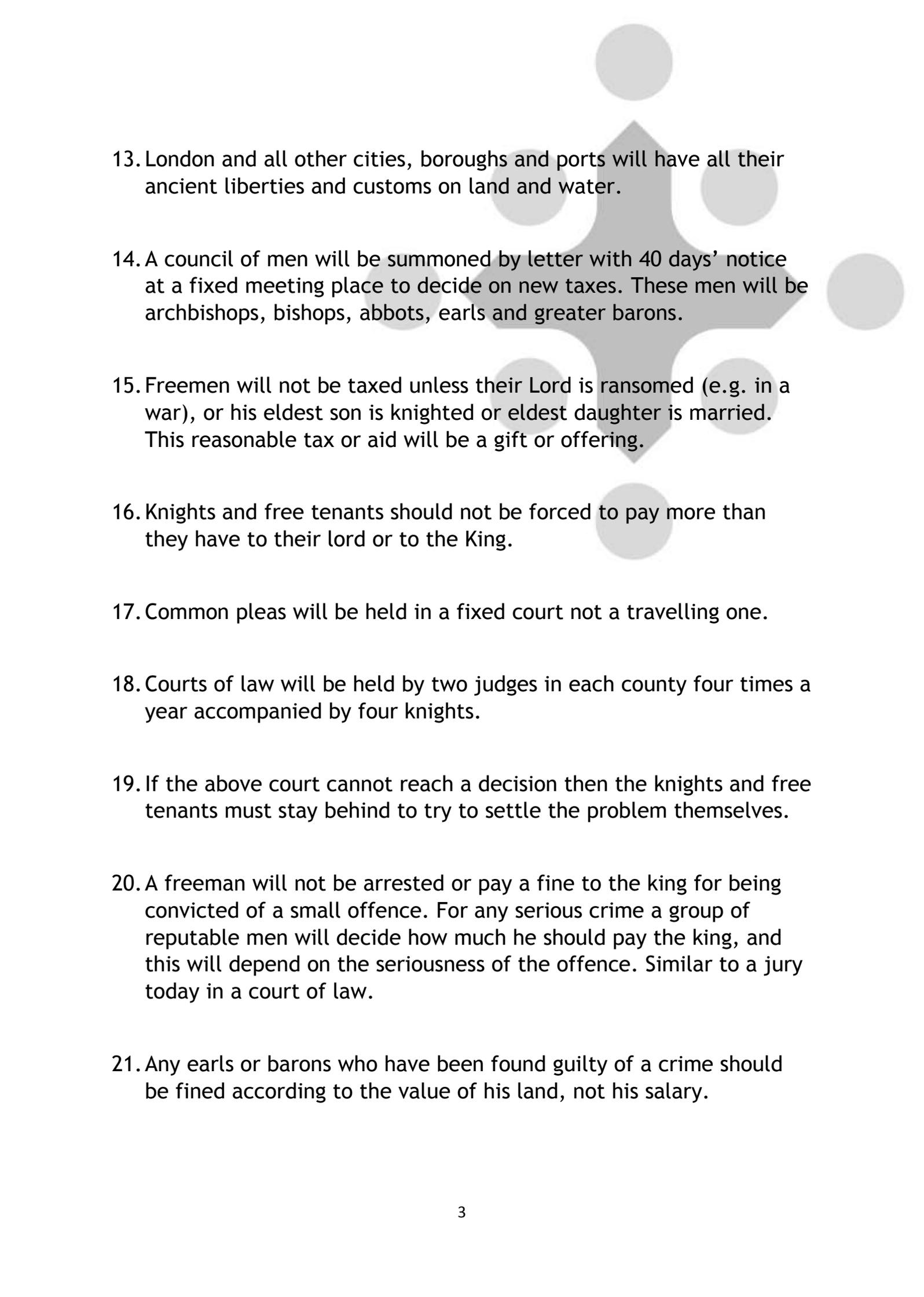
Know that we look to God for the salvation of our souls, and those of all our ancestors and heirs. We also look to the honour of God and the advancement of the holy Church, and for the reform of our realm, by advice of our venerable fathers:

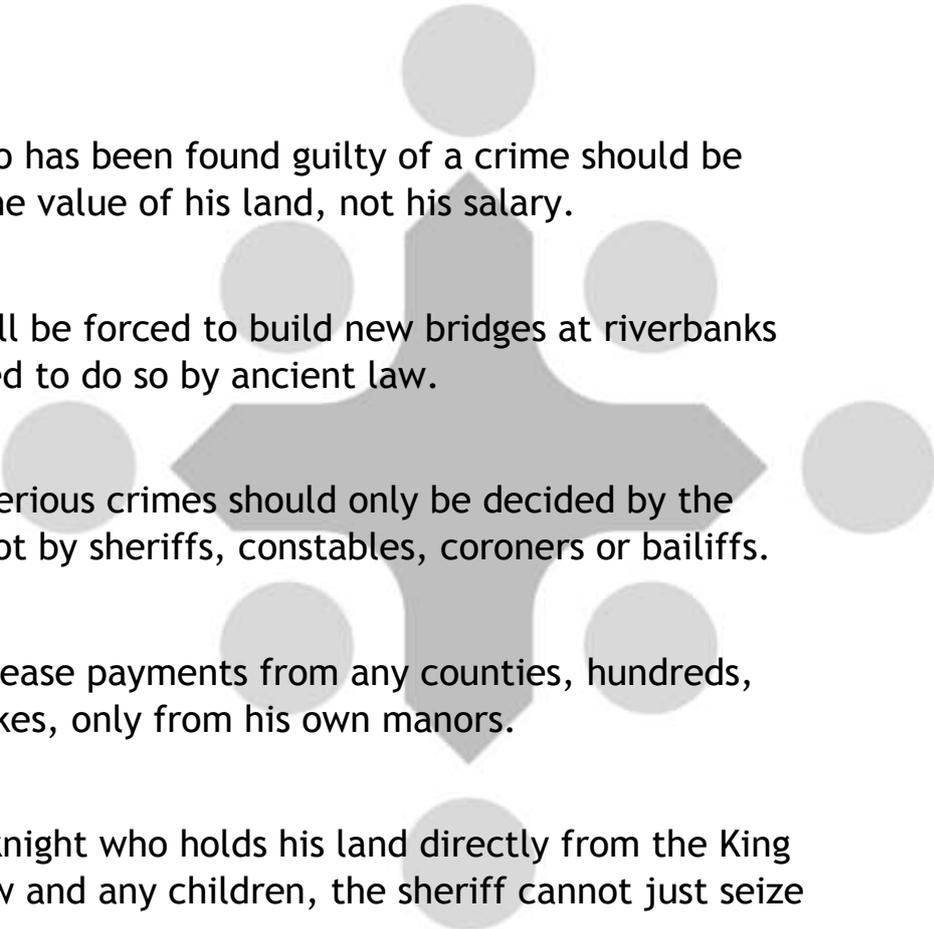
Stephen Archbishop of Canterbury, primate of all England and Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Henry, archbishop of Dublin, Bishop William of London, Bishop Peter of Winchester, Bishop Jocelyn of Bath and Glastonbury, Bishop Hugh of Lincoln, Bishop Walter of Worcester, Bishop William of Coventry, Bishop Benedict of Rochester, Master Pandulf, subdeacon and member of the household of our lord the Pope, Brother Aymeric (master of the Knights of the Temple in England),

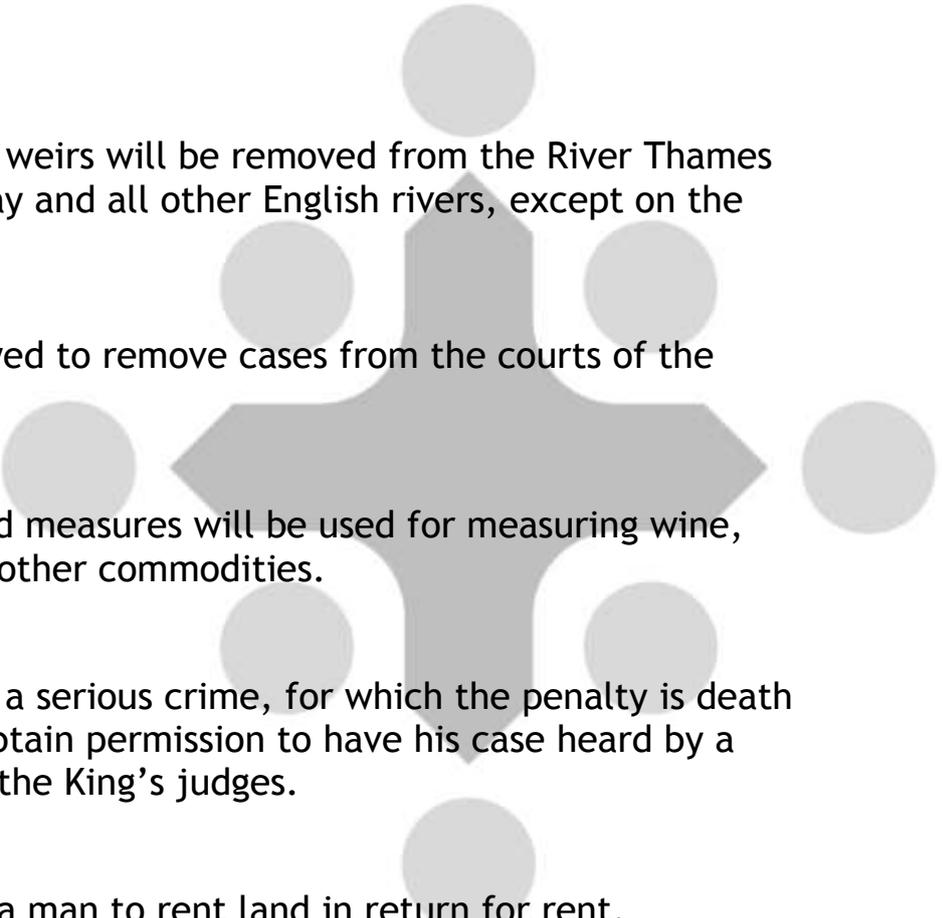
And of the very important men: William Marshall Earl of Pembroke, William Earl of Salisbury, William Earl of Warenne, William Earl of Arundel, Alan of Galloway (constable of Scotland), Waren Fitz Gerald, Peter Fitz Herbert, Hubert de Burgh (Seneschal of Poitou), Hugh de Neville, Matthew Fitz Herbert, Thomas Basset, Alan Basset, Philip d'Aubigny, Robert of Roppesley, John Marshall, John Fitz Hugh, and of other faithful subjects present today at Runnymede.

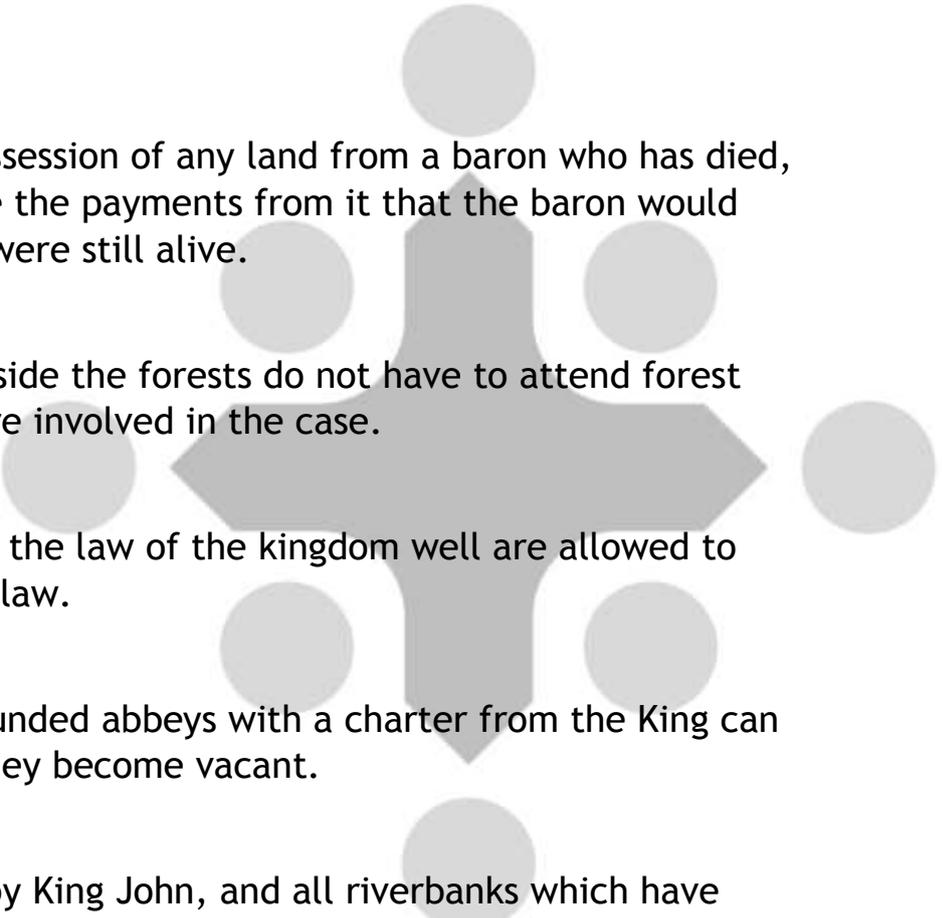
1. In this charter the church wants to make sure that for now and evermore the English Church will be free to elect and choose their own Bishops without the meddling of the King.
2. If a baron or knight dies there will be a set amount of money paid to the king depending on the dead man's position and rank. The higher the rank then the higher the fee because they have more money.

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3. If a baron dies with young children under age then the inheritance will not be taxed.
 4. If the heir is underage then a guardian will be chosen. This guardian must be trustworthy and care for the child and the inheritance and not sell the guardianship.
 5. The guardian will look after the houses, parks, fishponds, ponds, mills, farms and tools, storage and grain, until the heir comes of age.
 6. Heirs will marry someone of the same class/rank/position as themselves. If the heir is a girl then all her wealth is given to her new husband like Ela of Salisbury when she married William Longespee, King John's half-brother.
 7. When the husband dies a widow will have a portion of the inheritance and may live in the house for 40 days. After that she must rely on her own family's care for somewhere to live.
 8. No widow shall be forced to re-marry unless she wants to. If she chooses to re-marry then she must ask her Lord's consent.
 9. Barons or bailiffs will not seize and demand land or money for a debt owed.
 10. If a man owes money when he dies, his heirs will not have to pay interest on the debt so long as they are underage.
 11. If a man dies all debt will be paid off after the widow and any underage heirs are given enough money to live on.
 12. A council of men will decide a new tax set by the King unless it is a ransom, the knighting of eldest sons or marriage of eldest daughters.

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13. London and all other cities, boroughs and ports will have all their ancient liberties and customs on land and water.
 14. A council of men will be summoned by letter with 40 days' notice at a fixed meeting place to decide on new taxes. These men will be archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls and greater barons.
 15. Freeman will not be taxed unless their Lord is ransomed (e.g. in a war), or his eldest son is knighted or eldest daughter is married. This reasonable tax or aid will be a gift or offering.
 16. Knights and free tenants should not be forced to pay more than they have to their lord or to the King.
 17. Common pleas will be held in a fixed court not a travelling one.
 18. Courts of law will be held by two judges in each county four times a year accompanied by four knights.
 19. If the above court cannot reach a decision then the knights and free tenants must stay behind to try to settle the problem themselves.
 20. A freeman will not be arrested or pay a fine to the king for being convicted of a small offence. For any serious crime a group of reputable men will decide how much he should pay the king, and this will depend on the seriousness of the offence. Similar to a jury today in a court of law.
 21. Any earls or barons who have been found guilty of a crime should be fined according to the value of his land, not his salary.

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22. Any church clerk who has been found guilty of a crime should be fined according to the value of his land, not his salary.
 23. No village or man will be forced to build new bridges at riverbanks except those required to do so by ancient law.
 24. The punishment of serious crimes should only be decided by the King's judges, and not by sheriffs, constables, coroners or bailiffs.
 25. The King cannot increase payments from any counties, hundreds, ridings and wapentakes, only from his own manors.
 26. If an earl, baron or knight who holds his land directly from the King dies, leaving a widow and any children, the sheriff cannot just seize his chattels.
 27. If a free man dies without making a will then his chattels are to be given to close family and friends with the help of the church.
 28. No corn or chattels will be taken by a constable or bailiff unless a payment or agreement is made.
 29. A knight is excused payment and duty when guarding a castle if he is on military service.
 30. No sheriff or bailiff will take a free man's horse or cart without agreement.
 31. No one will take another man's wood or timber for work on castles or homes unless the owner agrees.
 32. If you are a convicted criminal or prisoner in jail then your land will be returned to your lord after 1 year and 1 day.

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33. From now on all fish weirs will be removed from the River Thames and the River Medway and all other English rivers, except on the coast.
 34. The King is not allowed to remove cases from the courts of the barons.
 35. Standard weights and measures will be used for measuring wine, ale, corn, cloth and other commodities.
 36. Someone accused of a serious crime, for which the penalty is death or mutilation, can obtain permission to have his case heard by a jury and not just by the King's judges.
 37. A Fee Farm allowed a man to rent land in return for rent.
 38. No bailiff is allowed to put someone on trial without providing trustworthy witnesses.
 39. Every free man has the right to trial by his peers and the law of the land.
 40. The King will not sell, deny or delay justice.
 41. Merchants will be safe to travel to and from England on land or water and to trade freely, except in times of war and if they are from a country at war with England.
 42. Anyone is free to leave and return to England by land or water unless they are a criminal or from a country at war with England.

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43. If the King takes possession of any land from a baron who has died, he must only receive the payments from it that the baron would have received if he were still alive.
 44. People who live outside the forests do not have to attend forest courts unless they are involved in the case.
 45. Only men who know the law of the kingdom well are allowed to work in the court of law.
 46. Barons who have founded abbeys with a charter from the King can have them back if they become vacant.
 47. All forests created by King John, and all riverbanks which have been enclosed by him, must be returned to their original state.
 48. Twelve knights in each county, to be chosen by trustworthy men, will have forty days to abolish any bad and evil things that the King's foresters and sheriffs are doing in the forests.
 49. The King must return any hostages and charters given to him by Englishmen in return for peace or faithful service.
 50. The King will remove from England all these people and their families: Gerard d'Athee; Engelard de Cigogne; Andrew, Peter and Gio de Chanceaux; Gio de Cigogne; Geoffrey de Martigny and his brothers; Philip Marc and his brothers, and his nephew Geoffrey and all his followers.
 51. As soon as the war has ended the King will send all the foreign knights and soldiers who fought against England back to their own countries.

52. Anyone who has had their castle, lands, liberties or rights taken by force by the King will be given everything back at once. Any disagreements about this will be considered by the 25 chosen barons (see Clause 61 below). As soon as he gets back from his crusade, the King will also give back anything taken by his father, King Henry, or his brother, King Richard.
53. When the King returns from his crusade, he will look into many other matters including the forests created by his father and brother and problems any barons have with their land or abbeys.
54. No woman can have a man imprisoned by what she says unless it is to do with the murder of her own husband.
55. Anyone who has been illegally fined by the King will have his money returned to him immediately. They can ask the 25 barons (see Clause 61 below) and the Archbishop of Canterbury to make a judgement if there is a dispute.
56. Any Welshman who has had his land or possessions taken illegally by the King shall get them back immediately. Any disputes about this will be judged by men in the March by English and Welsh laws.
57. On his return from his crusade the King will give full justice to any Welshman who had his land or possessions taken illegally by King Henry or King Richard.
58. The King will free the son of Llewellyn and all other Welsh hostages.
59. The King will return to Alexander, King of the Scots, all his sisters and hostages. They will have the same rights and liberties that English Barons have.

60. The customs and liberties in this Charter must be observed by all men of the kingdom, including clerks and laymen. All offers of money unlawfully accepted by the King are to be returned or dealt with by the 25 Barons mentioned in chapter 61 or some of them together with the Archbishop of Canterbury (Stephen Langton) if he is available, and anybody else that he wants to be involved. If Stephen Langton cannot be there himself then the case must still go ahead. A baron cannot run his own case in court, there must be an unbiased judge present.

61. The barons will select a council of 25 barons who will have the power to take the King's castles, lands and possessions if the King, or any of his men, do not obey this Charter. The council's decisions are to be based on a majority vote.

The points above to do with customs and liberties will be observed by all men of the realm, including clerks and laymen.

62. The King will forgive and pardon everyone who has fought against him.

We men here today will make peace with the king and settle this argument. We wish all these things mentioned to be enjoyed now and in the future. All men need security in their own lands and homes. For this security we need promises from King John or war will continue.

The barons here today will choose/vote for 25 barons from the realm who are trusted and promise to keep the peace, liberties and freedoms agreed to in this charter.

If any judge, bailiff or minister is not doing his job properly and they are reported to the officials then they will be taken to court and may lose their job, land, castle and possessions if found guilty (even if they work for the King).

If one of the 25 dies then another good and trustworthy man will be chosen to take his place.

63. The King agrees that the English church to be free and agrees to grant all the liberties, rights and mentioned in this charter to the barons for ever more.

An oath has been sworn by the English Church, barons and King today. All issues will be observed and carried out in good faith and without evil intent.

The King gives this charter with his seal in the meadow called Runnymede between Windsor and Staines on 15 June 1215.

Glossary for Children's Magna Carta

Liberty/ liberties - independence, freedom - the state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority (king) on someone's behaviour, religious or political views

Freedom - the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants -not to be imprisoned or enslaved because of what you say, believe or do

Inheritance - a thing that is inherited - an estate, birth-right, bequest, legacy

Heir - a person legally entitled to the property or rank of another on that person's death - the eldest son in medieval times

Guardian - a person who protects or defends something or someone e.g. a child underage sometimes called a 'ward' (the Guardian can be a Godparent)

Custody - the protective care or guardianship of someone or something - care, guardianship, charge, keeping, safe keeping, ward-ship, ward

Widow - a woman whose husband has died

Debt - a sum of money that is owed or due

Bishop - a senior member of the Christian clergy, usually in charge of a diocese and empowered to confer holy orders

Justiciars - an administrator of justice, a regent and deputy presiding over the court

Bailiff

A bailiff of the hundred court, who was appointed by the sheriff. The responsibilities of these bailiffs included assisting judges at assizes, acting as process servers and executors of writs, assembling juries, and collecting fines in court. This type of bailiff evolved into the court officials we're familiar with in the U.K. and U.S. today.

or

A bailiff of the manor, who was selected by the lord of the manor. These bailiffs would oversee the lands and buildings of the manor, collecting fines and rents and acting as accountants. The bailiff was the lord's representative, and was usually an outsider, that is, not from the village

Scutage - a payment taken by a lord instead of military service due to him by a knight who wants to stay at home instead of going to war

Aid - a tax or payment made by (feudal vassals) servants to their lord on special occasions.

Venerable - accorded a great deal of respect, especially because of age, wisdom, or character

Common pleas - personal small claims and complaints

Oath - promise

Vindictive - cruel - mean - nasty

Keep adding to the list!