

Chapter 42: Fundamental Texts in the UK

- In 1066, after his conquest of Great Britain, William the Conqueror decided to unify the four kingdoms. He also replaced the assembly by the *Common Council* which, of course has evolved since this time, but is still an important part of the English government.

MILESTONES

1066 : Union of the four kingdoms

1215 : Magna Carta

1258 : Provisions of Oxford

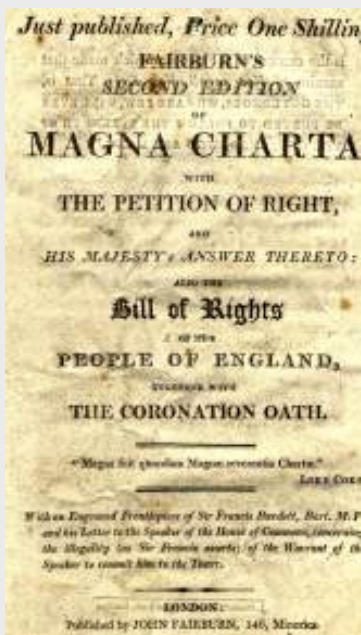
1259 : Provisions of Westminster

1628 : Petition of Rights

1679 : Habeas Corpus Act

1689 : Bill of Rights

1832-1969 : Reform Acts



- A baron's assembly forced King John Lackland to sign the *Magna Carta* in 1215. This text contains three fundamentals: 'The king is not above the law and may not infringe the law, the levy of taxes can only be decided after a vote of the assembly, and any freeman must be judged by his peers. The text obviously inspired the US constitution; it is one of the first texts representing the democracy in the modern world (maybe the first).

- In 1258, under pressure of Simon de Monfort and others English barons, Henry 3 drafted the *Provisions of Oxford*, which abolished the absolute monarchy. It consists of the creation of a council of 15 barons which controls and supervises the royal government and the launch of a constitutional reform by the council, named *Provisions of Westminster*, in 1259. Its clauses were modified in 1267 in the *Statute of Marlborough*.

- In 1628, the *Petition of Rights*, one of the first texts setting out individual liberties, was signed by Charles I, but he quickly ignored it. It led to the civil war. His guarantees can now be found in bill of rights.

- *The Habeas Corpus Act* was signed under Charles II, in 1679. It looked a clause of the Magna Carta, in response to abusive detention of prisoners, without legality.

- In 1689, after 1688 glorious revolution, the *Bill of Rights* settled reduces of sovereigns of power, with the House of Commons now elected with entire freedom by people. It contains 13 points, in the case of protecting people against abuse of the justice, and provides freedom of speech for everyone.

- The 1832 reform bill allowed all men, aged over 21 to vote in case of a small rent. In 1867 and 1884, with the second and the third reform act, any man aged over was allowed to vote. Women could only vote in 1918 (over 30) and finally over 21, in 1928. The 1969, Representation Act reduced the minimum age to 18.