

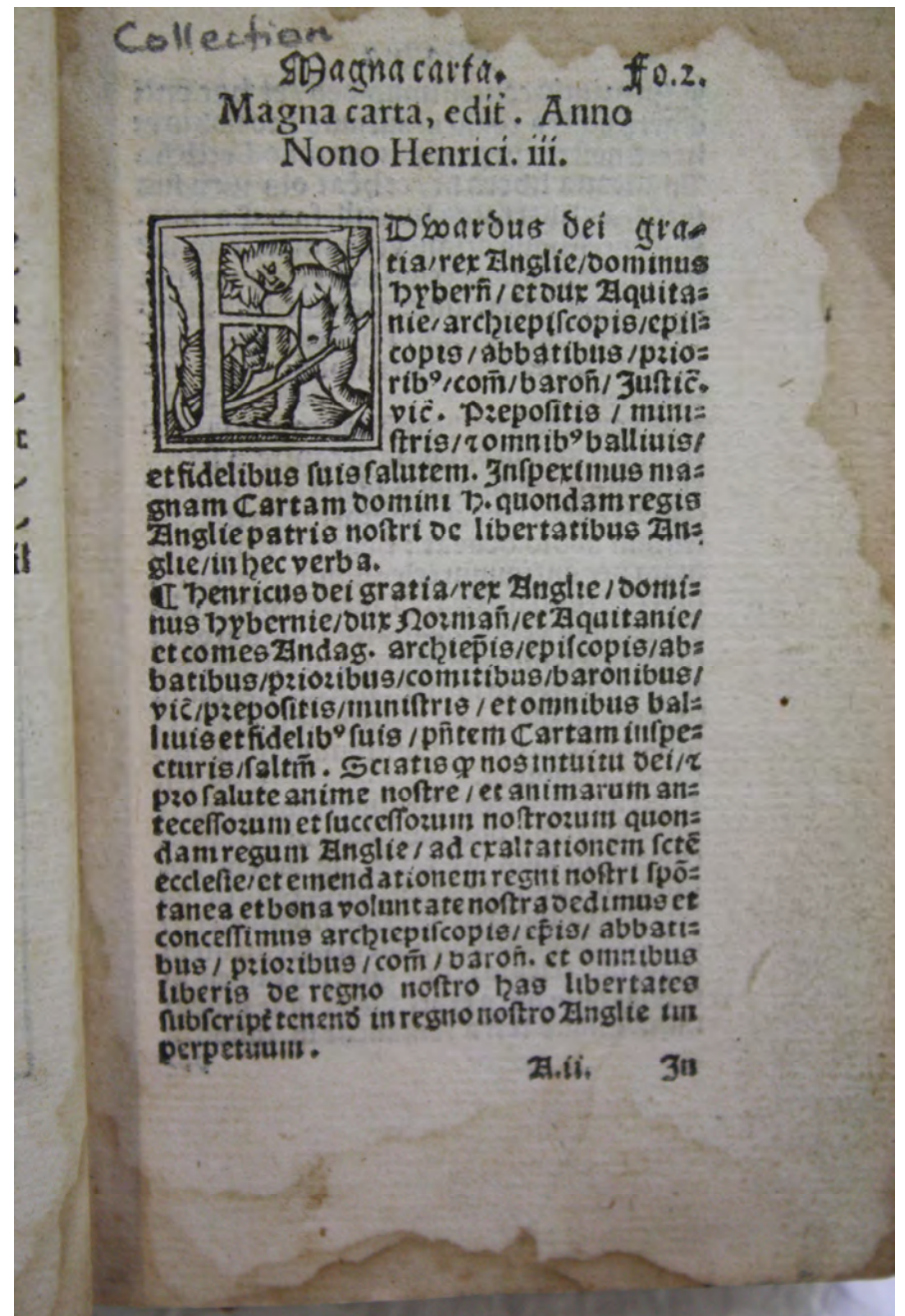
The Canterbury Magna Carta

The University of Canterbury owns the oldest known copy of Magna Carta in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dating to 1531-32, it is an edition printed by Thomas Berthelet. Appointed by Henry VIII to the office of King's Printer, Berthelet was known for the exceptional quality of his work. An important part of his role was publishing official texts. This edition, while not the first printing of the Charter, is significant: it was intended to reinforce the independent foundations of the English legal tradition on the eve of the Reformation.

A remarkable feature of the Canterbury Magna Carta is that the identity of its original owner is known. A note on the title page indicates that the book was the possession of the noted Tudor legal scholar, Bishop Richard Sampson (d. 1554). Today, Sampson is best known as the King's proctor responsible for prosecuting Henry's case for divorce against Anne Boleyn in 1536. He was also an advisor and diplomat, and worked tirelessly to defend Henry's claims to supremacy over the English Church in the 1530s.

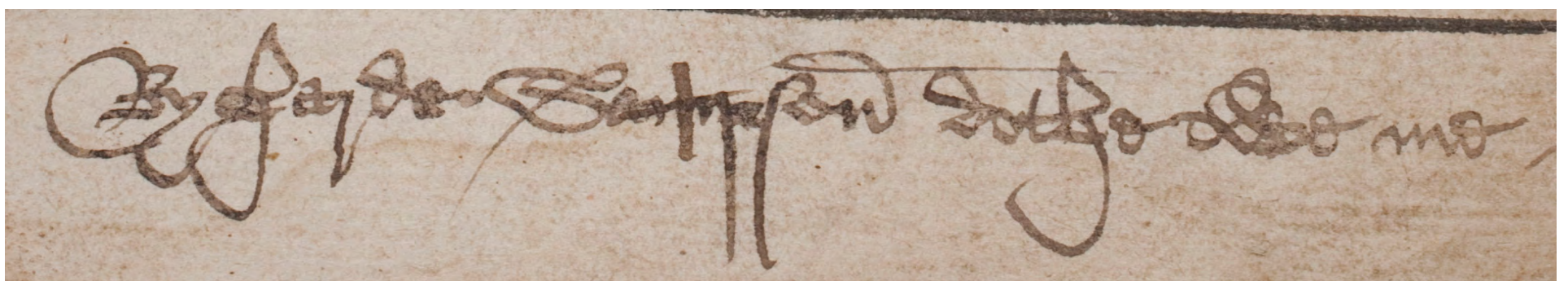
Sampson's copy of the Charter was sent to New Zealand in the 1850s by the Canterbury Association.

The preamble of Magna Carta as it appears in the University of Canterbury edition. This is the most famous version of the Charter, King Edward I's confirmation of his father's 1225 re-issue. Essentially the same text as the 1297 statute, this confirmation dates to 1300.



Magna Carta, cu[m] aliis antiquis statutis (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531-32), fol. 2^r. University of Canterbury Special Collections

A note indicating Richard Sampson's original ownership of the Canterbury Magna Carta. The cross superimposed over the 'm' in 'Sampson' is connected with the owner's elevation to the bishopric of Chichester in 1536.



From the title page of Magna Carta, cu[m] aliis antiquis statutis (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531-32). University of Canterbury Special Collections