

Magna Carta

Magna Carta Regis Johannis, xv. Die Junii Anno Regni XVII. A.D. MCCXV.

London, John Whittaker, 1816

FOLIO (428 × 335 mm), (12)ff. letterpress, printed in gold on thick card (rectos only), unsigned and unpaginated, comprising: title (transcribed above) decorated by regalia painted in colours, and eleven leaves of text, of which the first is illuminated by an initial J.

Occasional spotting; edges of the binding lightly rubbed.

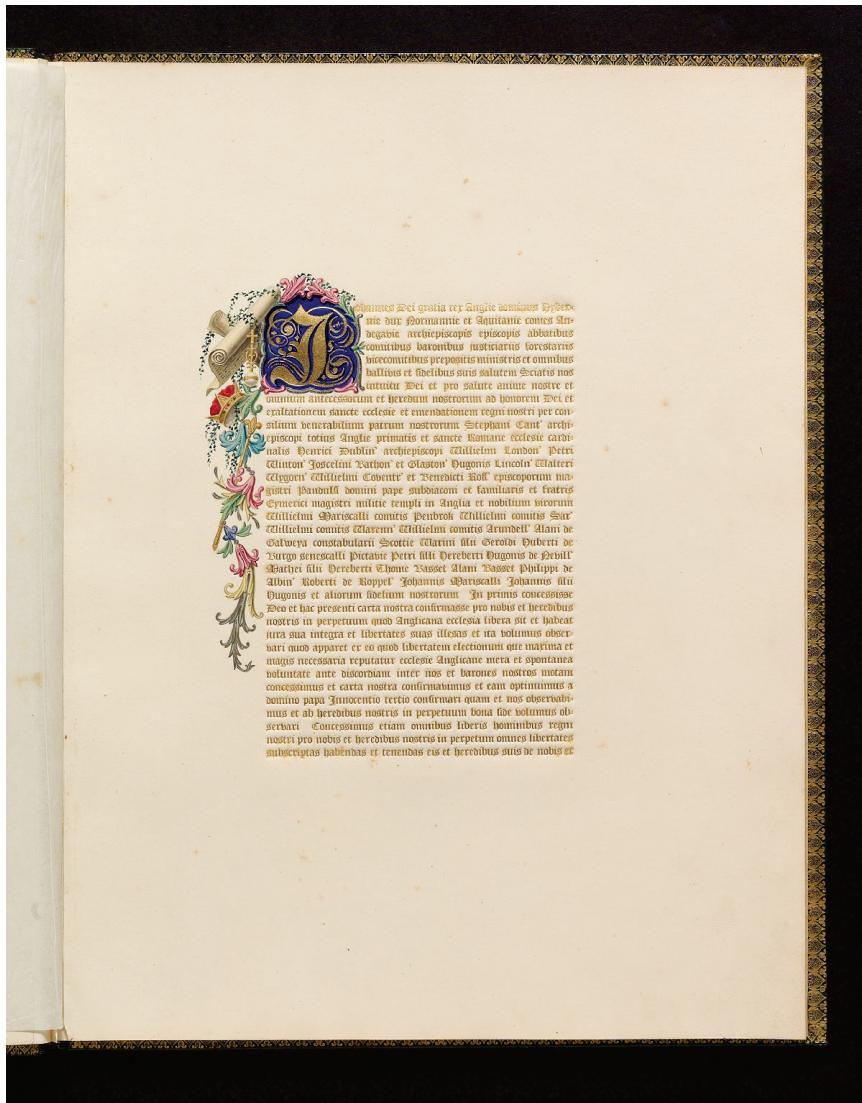
BOUND in contemporary green morocco, covers decorated in gilt; by Philipp Selenka (engraved ticket, printed on white paper, *Gebunden bei Ph. Selenka in Wiesbaden*)

THE HANDSOME MAGNA CARTA PRINTED IN GOLD BY WHITTAKER. In 1812, the Westminster bookbinder, John Whittaker (c. 1780–1831), ingeniously adapted the process of stereotyping to print in burnished gold.¹ He circulated a prospectus and specimens,² and in 1816 published the present work in celebration of the sixth-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta. Whittaker thereafter practically abandoned his invention: just one other was book printed by him using the same technique.³

¹ C.H. Timperley, *Dictionary of Printers and Printing* (London 1839), p.844.

² T.H. Horne, *Introduction to the Study of Bibliography* (London 1814), I, p.225: 'Mr. W. has issued proposals for an edition of Magna Charta, (from the original MS. deposited in the British Museum), to be executed after his improved method, on royal purple satin, and on superfine vellum paper: the specimens we have seen are truly superb, and reflect the highest honour on the artist'.

³ *Ceremonial of the coronation of His Most Sacred Majesty King George the Fourth in the Abbey of St. Peter, Westminster: including the names of the archbishops, bishops, peers, knights, and principal officers who assisted in that magnificent ceremony* (West Minster: Printed by John Whittaker, 1822). On its production, see John Johnson, *Typographia, or The printers' instructor* (London 1824), II, p.547; Harold Miller, 'John Whittaker's Ceremonial of the coronation of His most sacred majesty King George the Fourth' in *American Book Collector* 7 (December 1986), pp.17–23; *Royal Treasures, A Golden Jubilee Celebration*, edited by Jane Roberts, published to accompany the exhibition at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, May 2002 to January 2003 (London 2002), pp.382–385 nos. 333–334.



The stereotypes were imposed on a range of materials (paper, vellum, and satin mounted on paper) of varying colours (white, red, and purple), and of varying dimensions (folio: c. 440 × 345 mm; and imperial folio: c. 600 × 435 mm). ‘Special’ copies were produced by adding illumination in gold and colours, with varying degrees of elaboration: borders, incorporating the heraldic insignia of the Barons; portraits; coats of arms of the recipients, etc.⁴ Plain copies were published at ten guineas, and the most highly decorated ‘reached a cost of two hundred and fifty guineas’.⁵

The number of leaves in the book varies: many copies, printed on paper, vellum, and also satin,⁶ contain a title and eleven leaves, comprising the text of the Magna Carta (*i.e.* 12 leaves in total); some apparently include ‘an additional page, containing the names of those Barons whose arms were painted in the large edition’ (*i.e.* 13 leaves),⁷ while others contain in addition a dedication to the Prince Regent, a sub-title and the text of the treaty (*Conventio inter Regem Iohannem et Barones*) in which the king surrendered the City of London (*i.e.* 17 leaves).⁸ Still larger copies with additional portraits (King John, King John with the Barons, the Prince Regent) and with dedication leaves bearing the arms of the original owner are recorded.

⁴ This decoration, once attributed to Thomas Willement, seems to have been added by John Harris, father (1767–1832) and son (1791–1873), the latter an employee of Whittaker from 1815 until about 1820; see Philip Weimerskirch, ‘John Harris, 1767–1832: Memoir by His Son, John Harris, 1791–1873’ in *The Book Collector* 42 (1993), pp.245–252; and Janet Ing Freeman, ‘John Harris 1791–1873’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, May 2006).

⁵ W.T. Lowndes, *The bibliographer's manual of English literature*, edited by H.G. Bohn (London 1861), VI, p.1450. ‘Special’ copies are noted by T.F. Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron* (London 1817), II, pp.416–417; Joseph Basile Bernard van Praet, *Catalogue de livres imprimés sur vélin* (Paris 1824), III, p.96 no. 163; and Van Praet, *Catalogue des livres imprimés sur vélin de la Bibliothèque du roi* (Paris 1828), VI, pp.172–177 no. 169 bis. The Spencer copy is given an extended discussion in Dibdin’s *Aedes Althorpiana* (London 1822), I, pp.207–223.

⁶ Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Typ 805.16.5490 (local OPAC: ‘printed in letters of gold, on royal purple satin’, ‘[12] leaves; 43 cm.’). Six other copies are elsewhere in Harvard Libraries.

⁷ Richard Thomson, *An Historical Essay on the Magna Charta of King John* (London 1829), pp.458–460.

⁸ See the discussion of the five copies of the book in the Wormsley Library: Bryan Maggs, ‘John Whittaker’s edition of the *Magna carta*, its printing, and his bindings on the Wormsley copies’ in *For the love of the binding: studies in bookbinding history presented to Mirjam Foot*, edited by David Pearson (London & New Castle, DE 2000), pp.271–275; also *The Wormsley Library: A Personal Selection by Sir Paul Getty, K.B.E.*, edited by H. George Fletcher (second edition, London 2007), p.180 no. 74.

Our copy contains the engraved ticket of the bookbinder Philipp Selenka (1803–1850) of Wiesbaden, brother of Johann Jacob Selenka (1801–1871), Hofbuchbinder in Braunschweig.⁹



⁹ Two bindings by Philipp Selenka in the Fürstlich Waldecksche Hofbibliothek, Arolsen, are described by Rudolf-Alexander Schütte and Konrad Wiedemann, *Einbandkunst vom frühmittelalter bis Jugendstil aus den Bibliotheken in Kassel und Arolsen*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel (Kassel 2002), p.54 no. 68 and Abb. 51 and no. 70. He was a specialist ‘Portefeuillearbeiter’; see Hektor Rössler, *Ausführlicher Bericht über die von dem Gewerbverein für das Großherzogthum Hessen im Jahre 1842 veranstaltete Allgemeine deutsche Industrie-Ausstellung zu Mainz* (Darmstadt 1843), p.240.