

# Western democracies felt influence of Magna Carta

by Hope E. Paasch

Aside from its influence on England in 1215, Magna Carta deals with topics relevant to Western democracies today, the priest who travels with the document said Monday.

The Very Rev. Oliver Fiennes, dean of Lincoln Cathedral in England, is at Texas A&M University along with one of the copies of Magna Carta. Only four of the original copies remain, and the one currently in 226 MSC belongs to the Lincoln Cathedral.

Fiennes speech in 201 MSC

was sponsored by MSC Great Issues.

The fact that Magna Carta has survived for over 750 years proves its lasting worth, Fiennes said. Many of the principles in the charter have been incorporated into the constitutions of several nations, including the United States.

One can look at the Magna Carta two different ways, Fiennes said. The first is to study the document from a historical point of view; what it meant in 1215 and what it has meant to England. Fiennes said he is neither a Magna Carta scholar,

nor is he knowledgeable of the detailed content of the charter.

The second way of looking at the charter, Fiennes said, is to examine sections that were the foundation for some of today's democratic ideas. Magna Carta dealt with women's rights, trial by a jury of peers and the concept that government is not above the law, Fiennes said.

The charter specifically states that a widow could not be forced to marry against her will, establishing her right to choose her partner, Fiennes said. In contrast, Magna Carta disallowed court evidence from a woman

unless the trial concerned her husband's murder.

One, and perhaps the most famous, section of Magna Carta concerns what Americans refer to as due process of law, Fiennes said. This clause guarantees every free man the right to trial by a jury of his peers. The clause also states that a man cannot be arrested unless witnesses of the crime are available.

Magna Carta put government, including the king, under written law. This, Fiennes said, was a new concept in government.



staff photo by Colin Valentine

The Very Rev. Oliver Fiennes, dean of the Lincoln Cathedral in England, spoke Monday to a group on the influence of Magna Carta on Western democracies.

## False alarms frequent with campus system

by Greg Trest

About 90 percent of campus fire calls are false alarms, 99 percent of which are caused by vandalism or by accident, says Robert H. Stiteler, Texas A&M safety director. In 1981, University Police responded to 566 fire alarms, six of which were actual fires. The College Station Fire Department has responded to 26 fire calls on campus since Jan. 1, only six were fires.

Most campus buildings are connected to the Hawkeye reporting system, a detector that senses smokes or heavy vapors and provides an early warning for occupants to clear the building.

"It's not that the system is malfunctioning, it just is extremely sensitive," Stiteler said, explaining the high incidence of false alarms.

Hair spray, cigarette smoke or even paint vapors can trigger the alarm, he said.

The Hawkeye reporting system has a transmitter in each building and operates on a radio frequency that sends a signal to both the University Police Station and the Physical Plant, Stiteler said. Each location has two receivers that are monitored constantly. The signal that comes in tells where the fire is, he said.

University Police officers then respond to the call and call

city firemen if there is a fire. This practice, however, carries the potential of greater fire loss due to firemen arriving late, Stiteler said.

Thirteen campus buildings are designated as immediate notification areas because of their contents or value. When the alarm sounds in these buildings, the College Station Fire Department is notified immediately.

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