

An aerial photograph of the Vancouver waterfront at sunset. The city skyline is visible in the background, with the Vancouver Convention Centre and the Science World building in the foreground. The water is calm, reflecting the city lights and the sky. The sky is a deep blue with a hint of orange from the setting sun.

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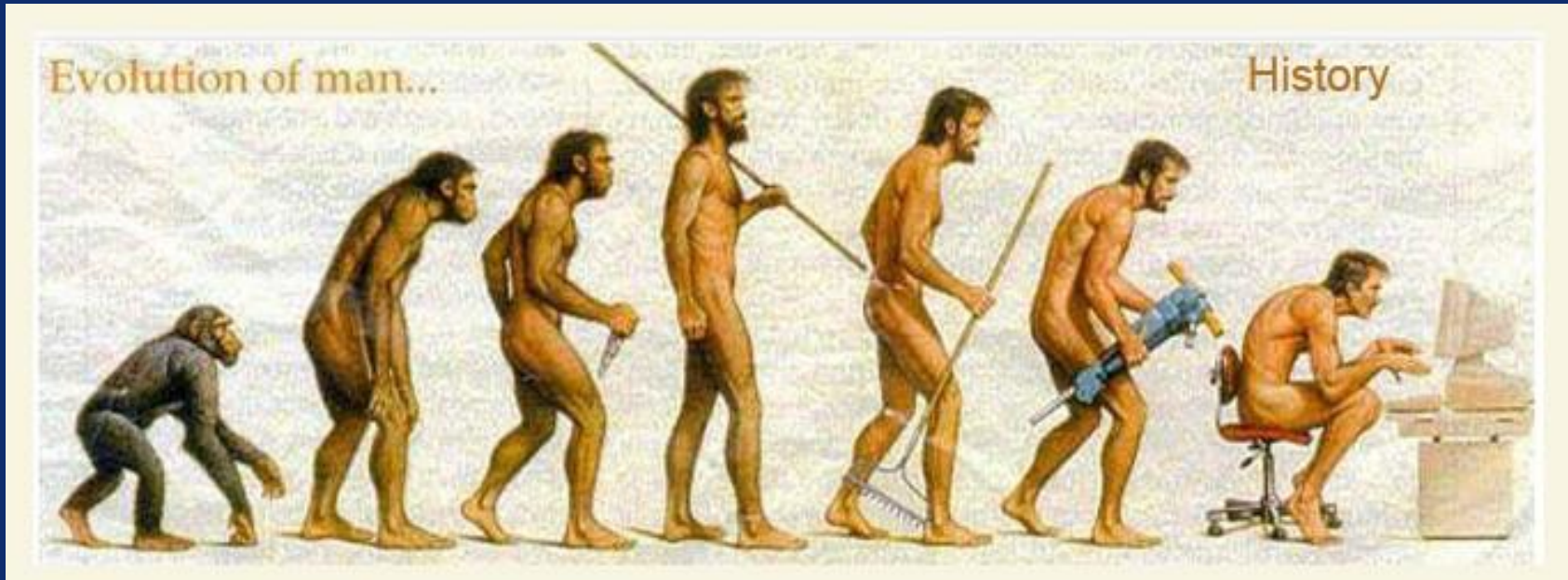
THE COMMON LAW & THE CANADIAN LEGAL SYSTEM

Craig A. Wallace, P.Eng.

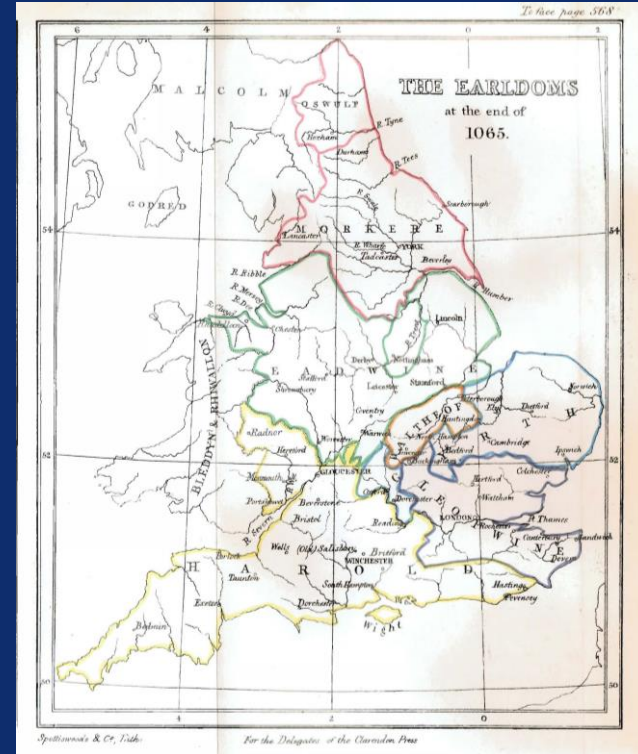
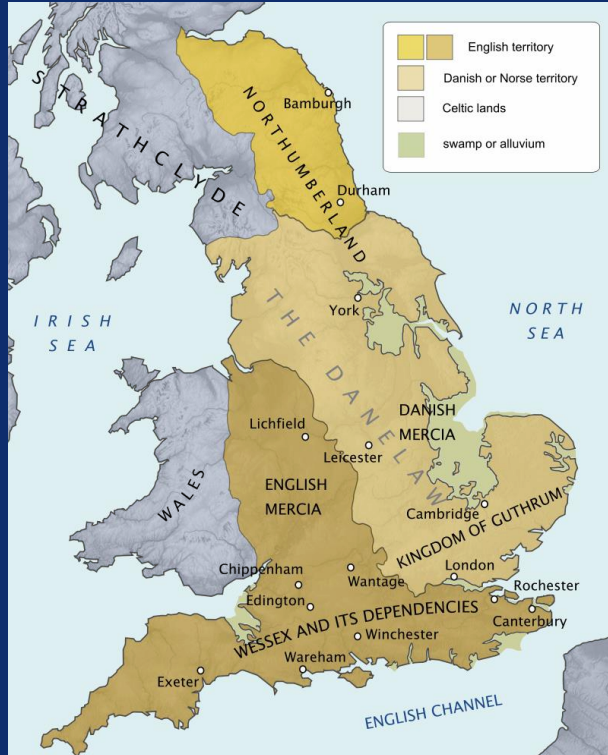
CIVL 402



HISTORY



England was fractured in the years before 1066, both in terms of its administrative system and its legal system.



Harold was Crowned King in January of 1066, but his hold on power was weak.





Harold was killed at the Battle of Hastings.

William of Normandy became King and appropriated all the land in England, which he then parceled out as “fiefs” to about 180 nobles, who “held” the land in return for “knight service”.

This revolutionized patterns of landholding and military infrastructure.



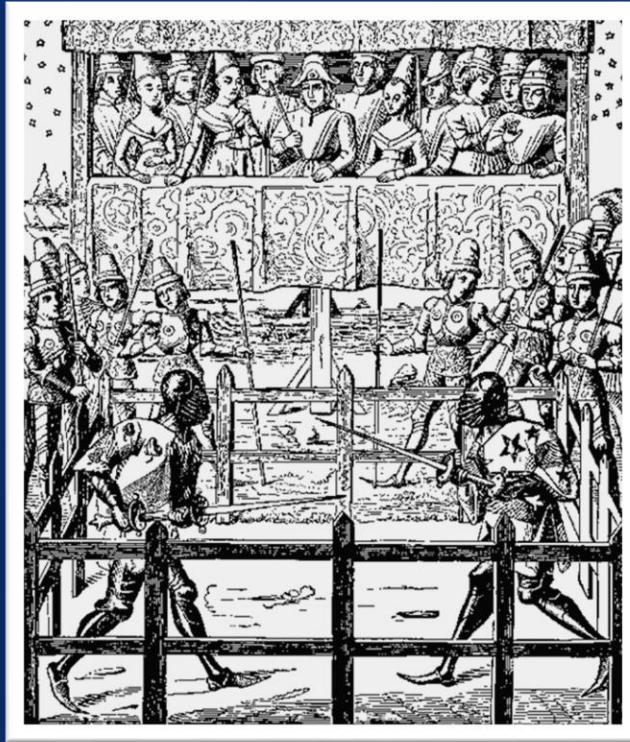
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- The system of local government was largely unchanged, and much of the Anglo-Saxon legal system remained, such as trials and stare decisis.
 - Stare decisis began as an informal system where judges would follow past decisions on the same questions of law and fact.
 - This gradually became formalized and forms the basis of the common law; common law is precedent law.

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- Judge-made common law was the primary source of law for several hundred years, before Parliament acquired legislative powers to create statutory law.
 - Since the 12th century, courts and parliament have both “made law”, although parliament was ultimately recognized in as being “supreme” (1689).




ADVERSARIAL SYSTEM

While the nations of continental Europe continued to follow the inquisitorial method of justice – a judge or other official would ask questions of witnesses and come to a ruling -- English law gradually developed an adversarial system.



The Normans Brought Trial by Battle

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- Juries were introduced by the Danes to investigate and punish crimes.
 - They were also used in Anglo Saxon England for taxation.
 - Eventually the jury also became the body responsible for finding facts and issuing verdicts in disputes.
 - Henry II (1133 to 1189) deserves a lot of credit for centralizing law and using juries to decide facts.

MAGNA CARTA 1215

A big deal?

Looked at in American jurisprudence as a cornerstone of the rights of citizens. English authorities consider it to be more about quelling a revolt of the nobles.

Most of the 63 clauses deal with the administration of justice, and the detail of feudal rights and customs.



MAGNA CARTA 1215 (cont'd)

- It placed limits on royal authority and made clear that the monarch was not above the law.
- Many copies were made and sent out to bishops and sheriffs across the country; four survive.
- Originally in Latin, it was translated into French which was the language of the ruling classes; not used in English for over 300 years.

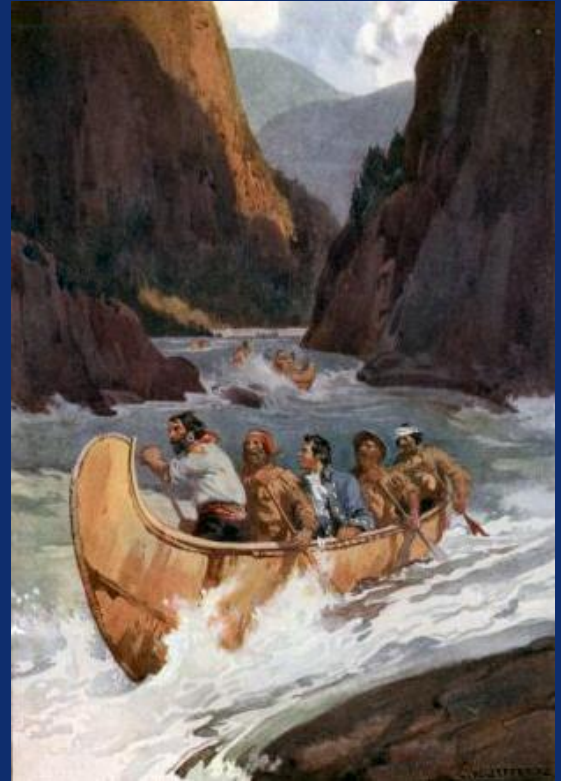
MAGNA CARTA 1215 (cont'd)


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“No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.”

What does this have to do with the law of Canada?

Answer: The entire body of English law was "received" by most of Canada as a British colony. The exception was Quebec, which was a French colony and maintains a form of law related to French law -- the "Civil Code".

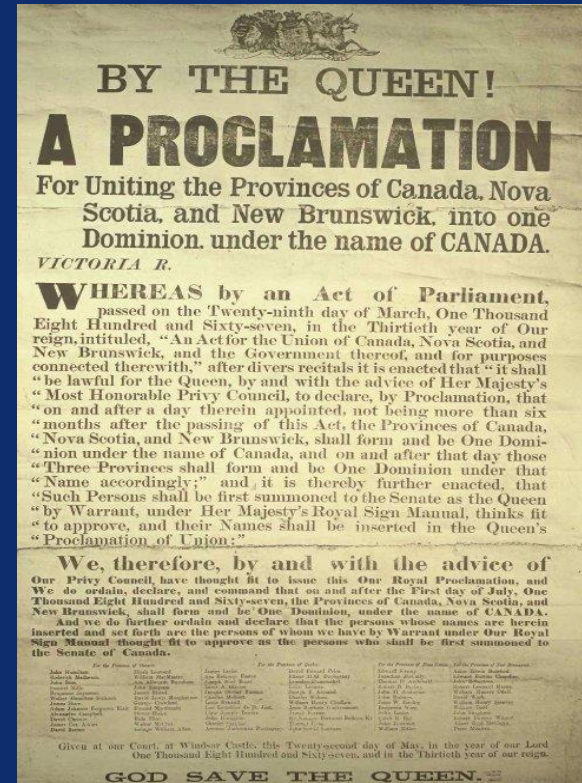


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- The governing principles that date from before the Norman conquest of England, Magna Carta and everything since, are applicable to courts in British Columbia.
 - The same process occurred in other English colonies, including the United States.
 - (After the American Revolution in 1776, the newly independent states adopted "reception statutes" that adopted the existing body of English common law.)

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- But Canada is a huge country, and presented some administrative problems not faced by England.
 - The result was a federal system, where the power – and the responsibility – to create, and enforce laws are shared between the federal government and the provincial governments.

THE BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT (1867)

The Act created a federal system and the operation of the Government of Canada, including its federal structure, the House of Commons, the Senate, the justice system and the taxation system. It also divided the power to make laws between the governments.



Federal Powers

- trade & commerce
- direct & indirect taxation
- currency
- the postal service
- census taking & statistics
- national defence
- the federal civil service
- navigation
- fisheries
- banking
- copyright
- Aboriginals and Indian reserves
- naturalization
- marriage and divorce
- criminal law
- penitentiaries
- interprovincial works and undertakings

Provincial Powers

- direct taxation for provincial purposes
- municipalities
- school boards
- hospitals
- **property and civil rights**
- administration of civil & criminal justice
- penalties for infraction of provincial statutes
- Prisons
- celebration of marriage
- provincial civil service
- local works
- corporations with provincial objectives

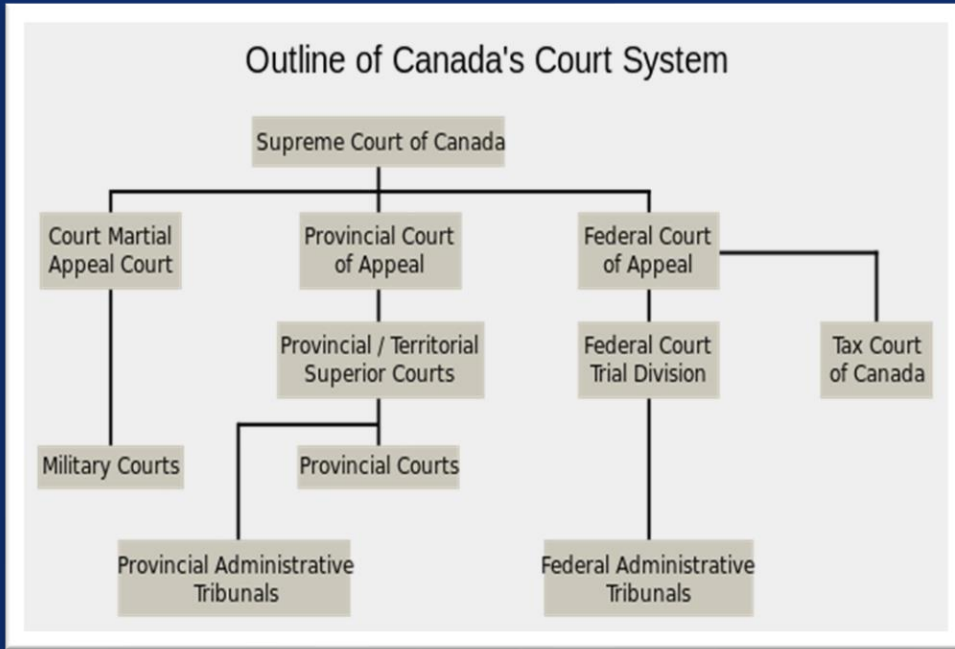
Most of the law relevant to Engineers is property & civil rights:

- Contracts
- Torts (negligence law)
- Lien legislation

As a result, the law relating to Engineers differs from province to province, particularly in Quebec. e.g., Lien laws are different, and limitation periods are different.

Some exceptions:

- Airports
- Post offices
- Railroads
- Competition law



- Each province has at least one trial-level court, which has "inherent jurisdiction", and a court of appeal.
- BC's principal trial court is the "Supreme Court of British Columbia". It is "supreme" in terms of its jurisdiction within the province.
- In Alberta, the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench is the principal trial court.



Court of Appeal for B.C.

- Reviews decision of the lower courts when requested to do so
- Normally three judges hear an appeal
- Not a trial court



Supreme Court of B.C.

- Civil cases involving money over \$25,000
- Divorce and custody matters
- Serious criminal cases

Provincial Court of B.C.

Family Division



- Family matters

Youth Court

- Criminal cases for youth aged 12-17



Traffic Division



- Traffic violations

Small Claims Division



- Civil cases involving money under \$25,000

Criminal Division



- 90% of all criminal cases

The British Columbia Court of Appeal hears appeals from the courts below. An appeal does not usually involve evidence; rather, evidence is heard in the trial court and, if one of the parties believes the judge misinterpreted the law as it applies to the facts found in the trial court, the Court of Appeal is asked to reverse the judgment.





All litigants have a right to apply for leave to appeal from a Provincial Court of Appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. Leave is not always granted and few cases involving engineers are appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

440

Partners

1,800

Lawyers

4,000

Total staff

2,500

Legal professionals

50+

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QUESTIONS?