



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY ARCHIVES

MAGNA CARTA & PARLIAMENT



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FOREWORD



The Speaker



The Lord Speaker

From The Speaker of the House of Commons and The Lord Speaker

The granting of Magna Carta by King John at Runnymede on 15 June 1215 is one of the best known events in our history and one which has echoed across eight centuries. It has shaped the way we live our lives today.

In a year which also sees the 750th anniversary of the parliament assembled by Simon de Montfort at Westminster, it is entirely appropriate that this exhibition should seek to trace the impact of Magna Carta on the evolution of Parliament and thereby provide the opportunity to display some of Parliament's most iconic documents, such as the Petition of Right of 1628 and the Bill of Rights of 1689.

It is due to the great generosity of the British Library, Lincoln Cathedral and Salisbury Cathedral that on the 5th February 2015 the four original engrossments of Magna Carta will be on display as part of the exhibition in the Queen's Robing Room in the House of Lords. This is an unprecedented event in Parliament's history and one of which we are extremely proud.

INTRODUCTION

This guide serves as an accompaniment to the exhibition Magna Carta & Parliament which will be on display in the Royal Gallery and Queen's Robing Room in the House of Lords during February 2015. Elements of the exhibition will then travel to various venues during 2015 as part of the De Montfort project which is being run by the Parliamentary Archives.

The exhibition marks the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215. It also coincides with the 750th anniversary of the meeting of Simon de Montfort's parliament at Westminster in 1265.

The display on 5th February 2015 in the exhibition of the four surviving original

engrossments of Magna Carta greatly enhances the opportunity to consider Magna Carta in a parliamentary context and to examine its impact on the history of Parliament. The House of Lords is grateful to the British Library, Lincoln Cathedral and Salisbury Cathedral for their generosity in agreeing to the loan of these documents.

This exhibition has been made possible by the provision of insurance through the Government Indemnity Scheme. The House of Lords would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

MAGNA CARTA 1215

At Runnymede on 15 June 1215 King John agreed to the terms of Magna Carta – the Great Charter. This was the climax of a dispute between the King and a group of rebel barons which had grown out of ever increasing Royal demands for money to fund expensive military campaigns. In attempting to raise revenue the King went beyond the limits of accepted custom and abused and exploited long standing rights.

Magna Carta contained 63 clauses and established that the king was subject to the law, like everyone else. The first clause confirmed ‘that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired’. Many of the remaining clauses addressed the barons’ grievances concerning King John’s unscrupulous behaviour; for instance clause 9 stated that ‘Neither we nor our officials will seize any land or rent in payment of a debt, so long as the debtor has movable goods sufficient to discharge the debt’. Of particular significance was clause 12, which established that taxation could



**King John assents to the Magna Carta 1215
by Charles H. Sims**

© Palace of Westminster Collection,
WOA 2602 www.parliament.uk/art

only be levied with the ‘general consent’ of the kingdom; clause 14 set out the means for obtaining this consent: ‘we will cause the archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, and greater barons to be summoned individually by letter’. At the heart of Magna Carta lay two clauses, 39 and 40, which are the most well known and which relate to rights and liberties.

In order to ensure that the King complied with the terms of Magna Carta the barons were to elect 25 of their number to ‘keep, and cause to be observed with all their might, the peace and liberties granted and confirmed to them by this charter.’ News of the sealing of the charter was communicated to officials in the counties who were required to see that its terms were adhered to. Of the 63 clauses only 4 are still in force today: 1 (part), 13, 39 and 40.

After the events of 15 June it is thought that officials drafted copies of Magna Carta using the terms that had been agreed at Runnymede. By 24 June

‘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.’

Clause 39

‘To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.’

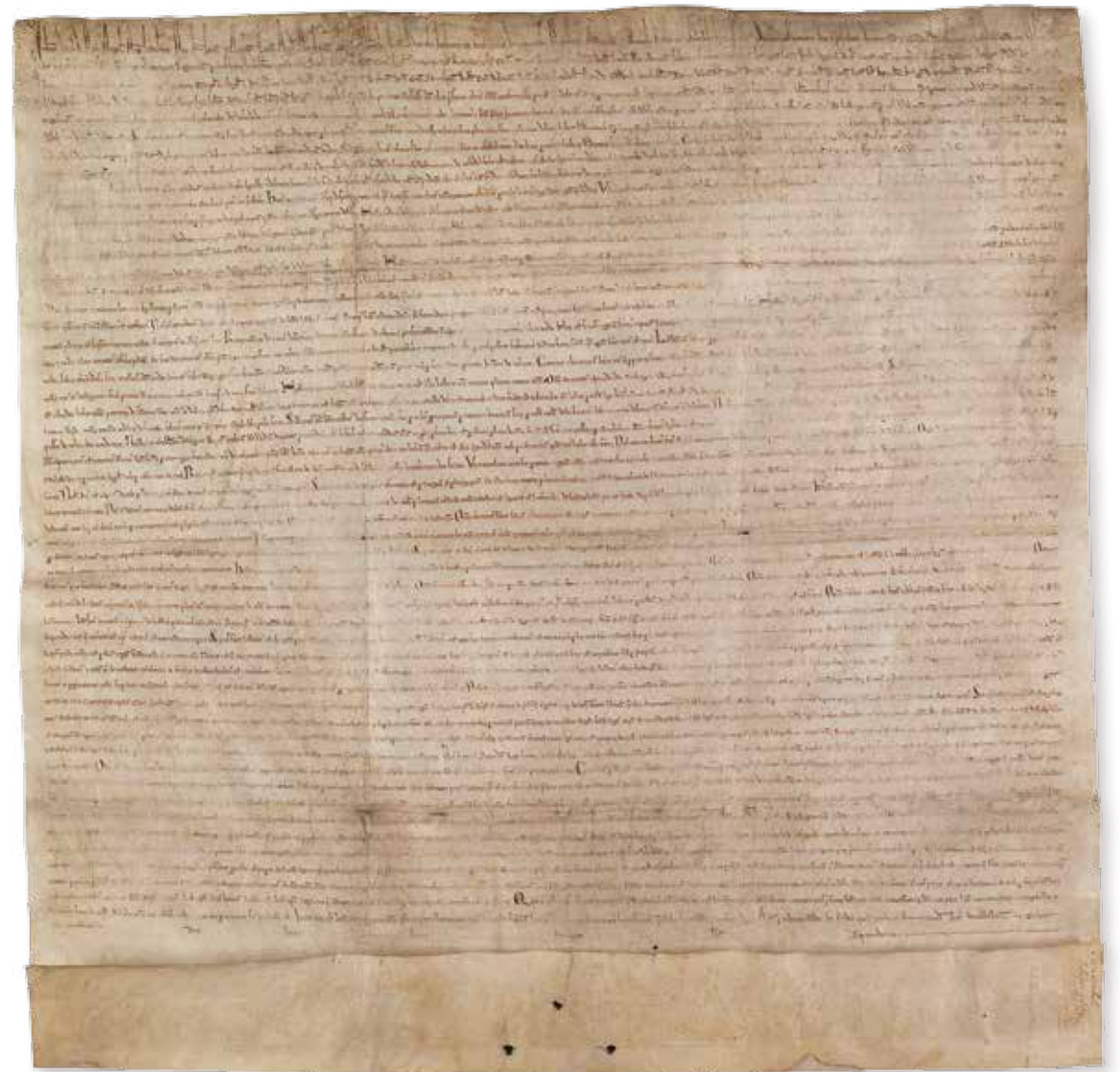
Clause 40

seven copies had been produced and it is known that at least thirteen were issued altogether. Four original copies of Magna Carta survive today. Two are held by the British Library, one by Lincoln Cathedral and one by Salisbury Cathedral. All are written on parchment, but vary in size and shape. The copies held by the British

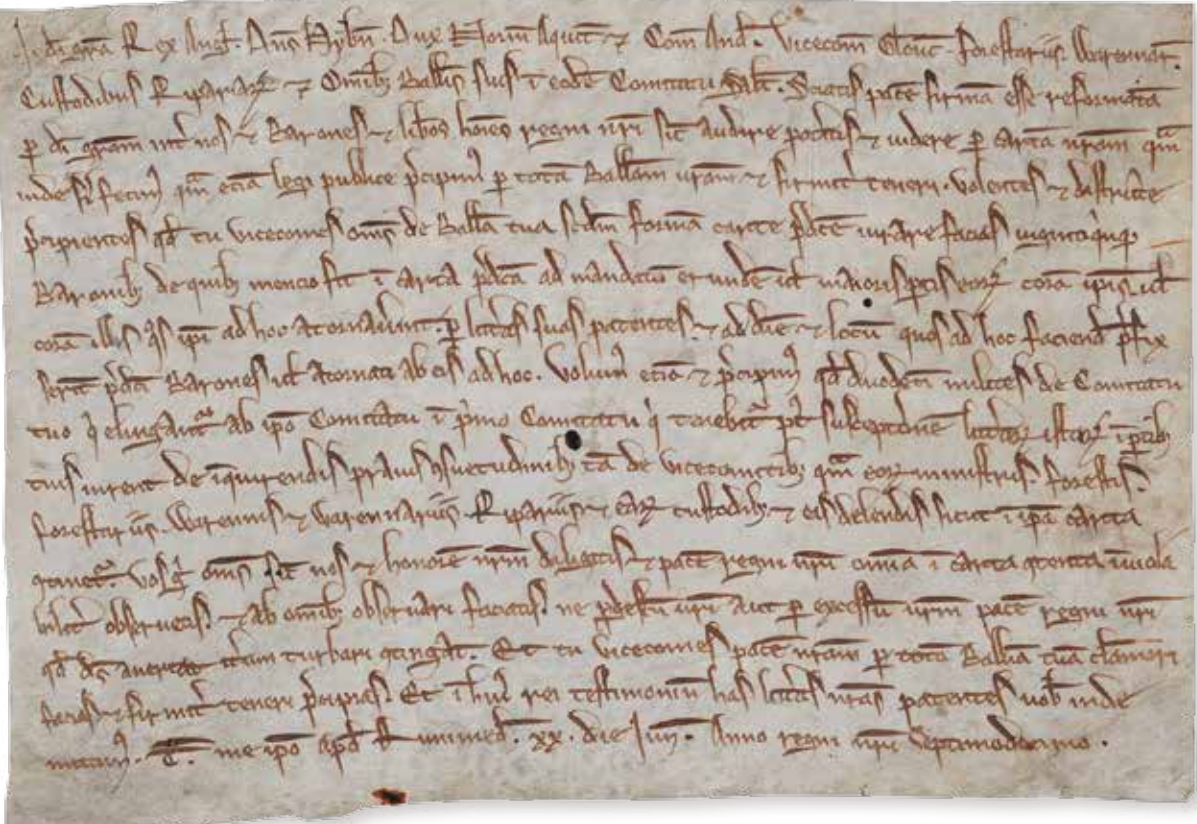
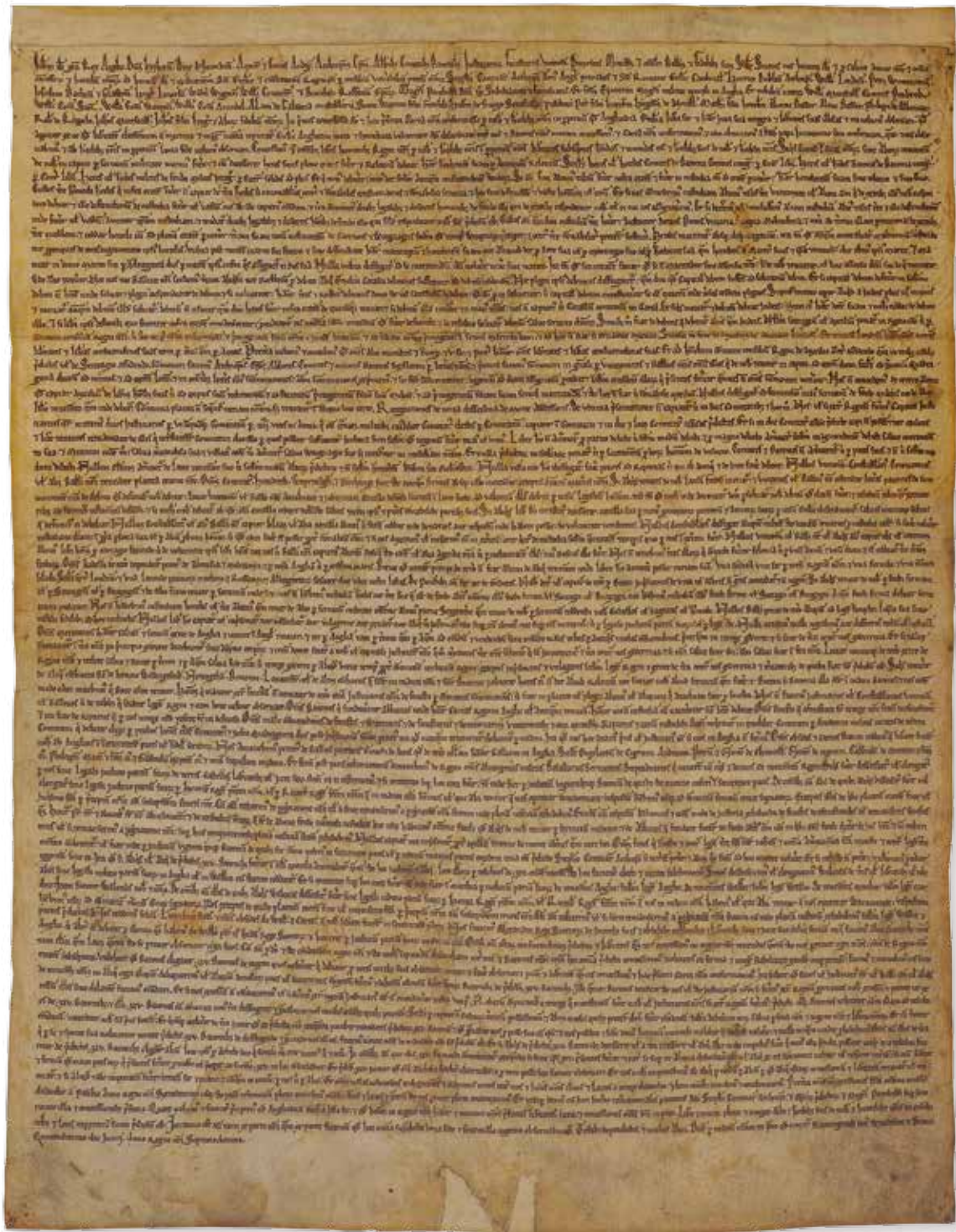
Library came from the collection of the antiquary Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631). One, now BL Cotton MS Augustus II 106, was passed to Cotton by Humphrey Wyems; where it came from is not clear but one story has it that it was found in a tailor’s shop in London. The other copy, BL Cotton Charter XIII 31A, was sent to Cotton in 1630 by Sir Edward Dering. Recent research shows that this copy was in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral in the late thirteenth century and was probably sent there in 1215. It was badly damaged in a fire in 1731 and is now very difficult to read, but it is the only one of the four originals to still have King John’s Great Seal attached. The copy held by Lincoln Cathedral is believed to have been held by the Cathedral since 1215; the same is true of the copy held by Salisbury Cathedral which was originally kept at Old Sarum Cathedral.



Magna Carta, 1215
© The British Library Board,
BL Cotton Charter XIII 31A



Magna Carta, 1215
Lincoln Cathedral Library,
A1/1B/45



Magna Carta, 1215
Salisbury Cathedral Archives,
Press IV, C2: Royal Charters/39

Writ of King John with news
of Magna Carta, 20 June 1215
Dean and Chapter
of Hereford Cathedral

MAGNA CARTA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARLIAMENT

By Professor David Carpenter

In England in the thirteenth century there were two great constitutional developments; the establishment of Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament. It was on 15 June 1215 that King John (1199-1216) authorized the sealing of Magna Carta. The Charter met very real grievances against his rule and also asserted a fundamental principle, namely that the king was subject to the law. Nonetheless in the short term it was a failure. Within little more than a month of its issue, King John had asked the pope to quash the document. The barons themselves turned to other remedies. They deposed John and offered the throne instead to Prince Louis, the eldest son of the king of France, Philip Augustus. The Charter only survived thanks to John's death in October 1216 and the parlous position of the minority government of his nine year old son, King Henry

III (1216-1272). In order to tempt Prince Louis' partisans back into the young king's camp, in November 1216, the minority government issued a new version of the Charter. Having won the war against Louis, it did so again in November 1217 in order to consolidate the peace. Finally in 1225, in return for a great tax, Henry III issued the final and definitive version of Magna Carta. It is chapters of Henry's 1225 Charter (in Edward I's confirmation of 1297) which are still on the Statute Book of the United Kingdom today.

Kings had always convened assemblies of the great and good to discuss the affairs of the realm, but it was only in the thirteenth century that they began to be called 'parliaments'. A new term seemed appropriate because the assemblies of the thirteenth century were themselves new in two ways. First they had a new power derived from

their control over taxation. Second they had a new constitution since knights representing the counties and burgesses the towns were summoned to them with increasing frequency - the beginnings of the House of Commons. These twin developments, the establishment of Magna Carta and the development of Parliament, were very closely linked.

In 1215 Magna Carta laid down the first constitution for Parliament. Chapter 12 stipulated that the king could only levy taxation with the common consent of the kingdom. Chapter 14 defined the assembly from which the consent must come. The earls, greater barons, bishops and abbots were to be summoned individually. The rest of the king's 'tenants-in-chief' were to be summoned generally through the sheriffs. Magna Carta did not give the assembly thus convoked a name.

Contemporaries would usually have called it a 'council' or 'great council', but already the name 'parliament', derived from the French word for meeting or discussion, was coming into use. Indeed, a contemporary account of the events of 1215 spoke of the barons meeting in a 'parliament'. The first assembly to be called a parliament in an official document met in 1237, and thereafter the term quickly became established.

In 1215 Magna Carta's assembly was largely baronial. It was the House of Lords, not the House of Commons. Only the great lay and ecclesiastical magnates were summoned in person. The other 'tenants-in-chief', summoned generally through the sheriffs, were also an exclusive body, being men who were direct tenants of the crown. There was no place for representatives from London and other towns. There was no place for elected knights representing

the counties. Evidently, the great magnates and the other tenants-in-chief felt that they alone could speak for the realm.

The first parliament to which knights and burgesses together were summoned was the parliament held under the auspices of Simon de Montfort in 1265. Montfort revered Magna Carta. During the parliament, he organized a great ceremony, held on 14 February 1265 in the chapter house of Westminster Abbey, where the king's adherence to the Charter was proclaimed. Why then had Montfort transformed the structure of the Charter's assembly by summoning representatives? One reason was the immediate political situation. Montfort had captured King Henry III at the battle of Lewes in May 1264 and thereafter ruled the country in the king's name. His regime, however, remained unstable, and enjoyed limited baronial support. It was vital to reach out to other sections of society.

The political significance of the burgesses and knights, implied in Montfort's summons, had already been clear in Magna Carta. While the Charter excluded knights representing the counties and burgesses the towns from its tax granting assembly, it still recognized their importance. The Charter had chapters protecting the liberties of London and 'all other cities, boroughs, vills and ports'. It also said that no tax should be levied on London without the common consent of the kingdom. Although they failed to get this into Magna Carta, the Londoners were already demanding a say in the giving of such consent. As for the knights, there would have been some, if on an individual basis, even in Magna Carta's assembly, for many of the lesser tenants-in-chief were of knightly status. The Charter also gave an important role in the localities to elected knights. Four knights, elected in the county court, were to sit with the king's judges when they came four times a year to

hear the common law assizes, a striking indication of the legal knowledge and self confidence of the knights. Likewise, twelve knights, again elected in the county court (and so not nominated by the barons) were to investigate the malpractices of the king's local officials. These knights had great power because they were not merely to investigate. They were also to abolish the abuses they discovered. They thus had the ability to reshape the whole structure of local government. At the local level they were, in effect, elected legislators in each county. The foundations were being laid for the appearance of knights elected by the counties in national assemblies.

In the event, the chapter setting up knights to investigate and abolish local abuses did not survive into the post 1215 versions of Magna Carta. It was replaced, however, by a new chapter which regulated the whole running of the local courts. This was a chapter much valued by the knights and in the

decades after 1215 they struggled to exploit it. In Lincolnshire, they had the chapter publicly proclaimed and defied the sheriff when he seemed to break it. From 1217 onwards there was also, alongside Magna Carta, a separate charter dealing with the administration of the royal forest. The name 'Magna Carta' itself came into being from 1218 in order to distinguish the 'Great Charter' from its smaller Forest companion. The Charter of the Forest gave an important role to the knights for in each county they were to determine the areas which were to be freed from the burden of forest law. There was a great deal of argument over just how extensive the freed areas were to be. The king advanced one interpretation of the Forest Charter and the county knights another. These struggles over the Charters were educative and empowering. The knights were cutting their political teeth. Here was another foundation for the summoning of knightly representatives to parliament.

The summoning of knights and burgesses to Simon de Montfort's parliament in 1265 set the pattern for the future. Henry III's son, Edward I (1272-1307), a king influenced, in many ways, by Montfort's example, summoned them with increasing frequency and by the end of his reign their place was virtually fixed. None of this, however, meant that parliament necessarily had power against the king. Knights and burgesses might attend, just like lords, simply to applaud and implement his wishes. That indeed was how the kings would have liked it. They did not, however, get their way. The second great parliamentary development of the thirteenth century, alongside the summoning of representatives, was a huge increase in parliament's power. The great lever, the source of parliament's authority down the ages, had appeared, namely the control over taxation.

Here again much was owed to Magna Carta. As we have seen, it stipulated that taxation could only be levied with the common consent of the kingdom. It is true that this chapter was omitted from the post 1215 versions of the Charter of 1215, as was the chapter setting up the assembly from which consent was to come. The reason was baronial selfishness. By excising the chapter, the barons were able to excise along with it the parallel chapter which limited their ability to tax their own tenants. The omission of the chapter was, however, less significant than it seemed. The Magna Carta of 1215 was widely copied in the thirteenth century and became very well known. There was no understanding that it was invalid. The papal bull quashing the Charter was rarely copied and was generally ignored. In 1255 the magnates in parliament gave the failure to summon them according to the terms of the 1215 Magna Carta as a reason for refusing to grant taxation. In practice,

it was impossible after 1215 to levy a tax without the consent of parliament. The only time Edward I tried to do so (in 1297) the protests soon forced him to draw back.

The need to secure consent to taxation would not have mattered had kings been able to do without the money. If, as many thought they should, they 'lived off their own', lived, that is, off their own lands and other customary revenues, they would have no need for taxation. The twelfth-century kings had largely been in that position. The thirteenth-century kings were not. If they were to live grandly in peace and act mightily in war, taxation was an absolute necessity. One reason for the change was the diminution in the revenue from royal land. The great landed estate obtained by the Norman Conquest in 1066 had been alienated by the kings of the twelfth century, alienated in gifts both to religious houses and to royal servants.

Another reason was Magna Carta. It had a major impact on the king's ability to extract money from his subjects in an arbitrary fashion. The Charter was largely obeyed after 1215 when it fixed the 'relief', the inheritance payment due from a baron, at £100. King John, by contrast, had frequently charged hundreds of pounds and sometimes thousands. Magna Carta was also obeyed when it forbade the sale of justice. Likewise, the offers of money common under John to assuage the king's anger and recover property seized by acts of will virtually disappeared under Henry III. Whereas under John the annual value of fines (offers of money to the king for concessions and favours) was over £20,000, under Henry III it rarely exceeded £5000. Such income did not recover either under Edward I.

The conclusion was obvious, the king had to find a new source of revenue. That by far the best source was the one

provided by a general tax levied on the whole kingdom was clear. Such taxes had first been levied in 1187 in order to raise money for the papally proclaimed crusade to recover Jerusalem after its seizure by Saladin. Another tax was raised in 1193-4 to help pay the ransom of Richard the Lionheart after his capture on his way back from the crusade. These taxes were levied as a percentage of the value of everyone's movable property, essentially their corn and farm animals. Later evidence shows the detail in which the assessments were made. 'William at Netherhead: 1 heifer, 4 shillings; 1 bullock, 5 shillings; 1 cow, 5 shillings; 20 sheep, 20 shillings; 1 pig, 2 shillings; 1 quarter and 2 pounds of wheat, 4s and 2 pence; 1 quarter of drage, 3s 9d; Total 43 shillings and 11 pence. Ninth, 4 shillings and eleven pence' ran the assessment of William at Netherhead for the ninth of 1297. He was one of the more prosperous villagers from Shillington in Bedfordshire where

thirty men and three women were assessed for the tax. The first of such taxes of which we know the yield was the seventh levied by King John in 1207. It brought in around £60,000. Since John's annual income at the start of his reign was little more than £20,000, such taxes had the power to triple the king's revenues.

In 1207, John had failed to get proper consent for his great tax. That was a major reason behind Magna Carta's insistence that such taxes must be levied with the consent of the kingdom. John's son, Henry III never tried to levy a tax without consent. Indeed, he went to parliament again and again asking for it. In 1225 he was successful in return for the issue of what became the definitive Magna Carta. In 1237 he was successful again, this time in return for his first confirmation of the Charter as a king of full age (as he had not been in 1225). Thereafter, Henry's numerous requests for taxation ran into trouble.

If it was to grant a tax, parliament demanded in return the right to choose the king's ministers, and control the expenditure of the money, demands as radical as any faced by Charles I. Since Henry found such terms unacceptable, no taxes were forthcoming. The great lever, the source of parliament's power, had thus appeared. Edward I was far more successful than his father. He usually secured consent to taxation by clever concessions and the reform of the realm. He thus gained the funds with which he conquered Wales and nearly conquered Scotland.

Magna Carta is, therefore, crucially important for the development of Parliament. It established the fundamental principle that taxation needed consent. It set out the first constitution for Parliament, and it accelerated the emergence of the House of Commons. Without Magna Carta there would have been no tax based parliamentary state.

Magna Carta and Parliament: the legacy

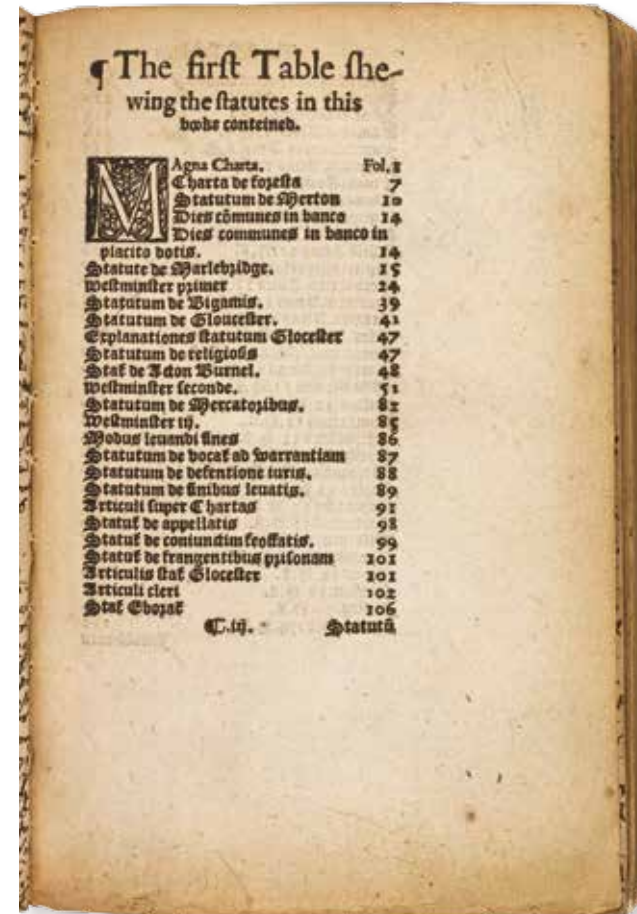
By David Prior



That both the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and the 750th anniversary of the parliament assembled by Simon de Montfort fall in the same year provides an opportunity to consider both events in the context of the history of Parliament and to reflect on the archival legacy that both have left us. This is not an unprecedented activity: fifty years ago, in 1965, our predecessors working in the House of Lords Record Office, as the Parliamentary Archives was then known, were in much the same position when they decided to mark the seventh centenary of de Montfort's Parliament. Their response was also an exhibition in the Queen's Robing Room in the House of Lords of documents

Writs of summons to Simon de Montfort's Parliament of 1265

The National Archives, C 54/82, m 11d



drawn from both Parliament's collections and those of the then Public Record Office. Some of those records are again on display in the present exhibition.

Magna Charta cum Statutis, 1587

House of Lords Library

The development of Parliament

Within a few years of Magna Carta, which established a principle of 'the general consent of the realm' for taxation there had emerged a body which by 1265 is recognisable by us today as Parliament with representatives from counties and towns in attendance. That these representatives had attended previous parliaments is documented, but the 1265 Parliament is the first instance of their attendance together at such an occasion when matters of common concern, as opposed to simply taxation, were discussed.

Magna Carta and Parliament

In addition to forming a baseline for the story of the development of democracy in the years after 1215 it is also true to say that Magna Carta embodied values that have been reflected in the history of Parliament during the following 800 years. These

included ideas of liberty and rights and access to justice. The incorporation of Magna Carta into Parliament’s institutional memory began in many ways in 1297, when the text of the 1225 reissue of the charter was copied onto the Statute Roll. Thereafter volumes of statutes often began with the text of Magna Carta. It was also read out at the opening of parliament and during the 14th century Parliament passed Acts

which clarified or extended some of the clauses in Magna Carta. Altogether there were six statutes between 1331 and 1369 that contributed to clarifying or extending aspects of the Charter. These changes, which were derived in part from Edward III’s need to accommodate the concerns of the House of Commons in return for grants of taxation, became as important to later lawyers as Magna Carta itself.



The Petition exhibited to His Majesty by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, concerning divers Rights and Liberties of the Subject with the King's Majesty's Royal Answer thereunto in Parliament (The Petition of Right), 3 Charles I, c. 1, 1628

Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/PU/1/1627/3C1n2

Magna Charta is such a fellow, that he will have no 'Sovereign'

Sir Edward Coke MP,
House of Commons, 17 May 1628

King and Parliament

During the seventeenth century Magna Carta took on a different significance when it became a reference point in the constitutional struggles which began in the reign of Charles I and culminated in the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. In many ways these struggles mirrored those between King John and the barons in 1215. During the reign of Charles I opponents of the King such as John Selden and Sir Edward Coke looked to Magna Carta to justify their belief in the dominance of parliamentary power over the monarchy. Coke (1552-1634), who was an eminent lawyer, and between 1592 and 1616 successively solicitor-general, attorney-general and chief justice of both Common Pleas and

King’s Bench, became an MP and active critic of the crown. In particular he wrote and pushed through Parliament the Petition of Right of 1628 which was triggered by the imposition by Charles I of a non-parliamentary tax. The Petition proclaimed the illegality of taxation without parliamentary consent.



Sir Edward Coke. Jacobus Houbraken after an original by Cornelius Johnson

© Palace of Westminster Collection, WOA 502
www.parliament.uk/art

His writings articulate the ideas of the ‘ancient constitution’, of the antiquity of the common law and of Magna Carta being the basis of the fundamental laws of England and in effect a contract between sovereign and people.



**Draft Declaration of Rights,
12 February 1689**
Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/403D

These struggles between Crown and Parliament reached a climax in 1688 when in the face of an invading army led by William, Prince of Orange the Catholic King James II fled London for France. The following February the draft Declaration of Rights was debated by Parliament.

This document catalogued the means by which James had allegedly sought to subvert the Protestant religion of the country. It sought to prohibit the king from certain actions, such as levying revenue without parliamentary consent, and went on to affirm the rights and liberties of the subject and that *‘the Freedom of Speech and Debates, or Proceedings in Parliament, ought not to be impeached or questioned in any Court or Place out of Parliament’*. This principle is known as Parliamentary Privilege. The draft ended with the resolution that William and his wife Mary be declared King and Queen of England, an offer which was accepted.



The engrossed Declaration served as the basis of the Act known as the Bill of Rights, passed in December

1689, which firmly established the principles of frequent parliaments, free elections, and freedom of speech within Parliament. The balance of power had finally shifted away from the monarch towards Parliament. The new king described some of the actions of James II as *‘contrary to law and to that express provision of Magna Charta’*.

Liberty

In 1679 Parliament passed the Habeas Corpus Act, which was designed to codify the ancient writ of Habeas Corpus.

The Act prevented the unlawful detention of people by the authorities, giving courts the power to determine the legality of such imprisonment. Such rights carried strong echoes of Magna Carta and it was erroneously believed that the principle of Habeas Corpus had originated in 1215. The suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1817 at a time of civil unrest provoked the caricaturist George Cruikshank to depict this as an

An Act declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject, and settling the Succession of the Crown (the Bill of Rights), 1 William & Mary Session 2, c. 2, 1689

Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/PU/1/1688/1W&Ms2n2

attack on Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus and the Bill of Rights. Two years later Cruikshank collaborated successfully with William Hone on his political satire *The Political House That Jack Built* which featured an image of a treasure chest containing the same three documents.



That the forces of revolution themselves were also sometimes seen as threats to Magna Carta and Parliament's heritage is clear from the cartoon by James



Gillray in 1798 entitled *Consequences of a Successful French Invasion* which carried the sub-title *We come to recover your long lost liberties*. In the cartoon the House of Commons was shown as overrun by the forces of revolution, with Magna Carta and the Declaration of Rights together with the journals of the House tipped onto the floor.

An Act for the better securing the Liberty of the Subject, and for Prevention of Imprisonments beyond the Seas (Habeas Corpus Act), 31 Charles II, c. 2, 1679

Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/PU/1/1679/31C2n3

Illustration from *The Political House that Jack Built* by William Hone

© The British Library Board 8135.e.1.(6)



Consequences of a Successful French Invasion, 1798 by James Gillray

House of Lords Library

I call it a greater Charter of the liberties of England

Thomas Babington Macaulay MP,
House of Commons, 5 July 1831, speaking in favour of a bill for parliamentary reform.



John Wilkes MP by John Dixon
© Palace of Westminster Collection,
WOA 1468 www.parliament.uk/art

Radicals, Parliamentary Reform and the Right to Vote

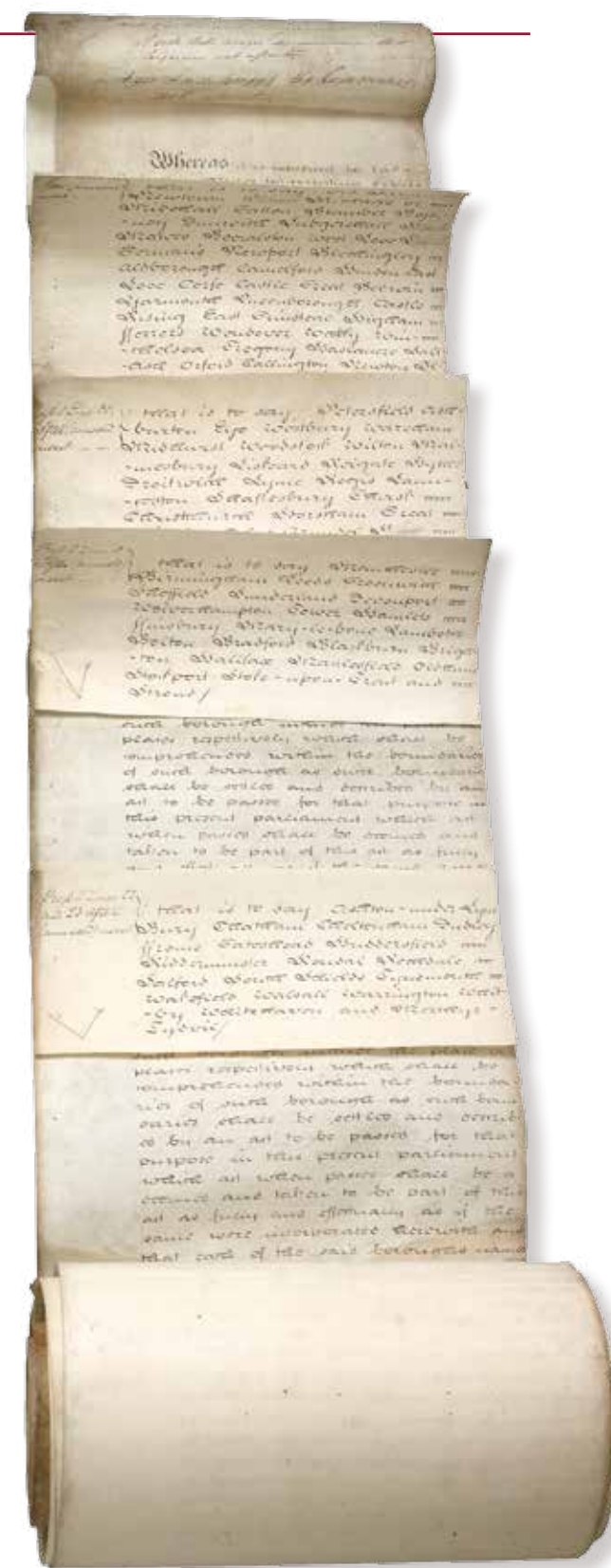
Amongst those in the eighteenth century who championed parliamentary reform was the radical MP John Wilkes (1725-1797), who in 1776 made the first motion in the House of Commons on the subject. Images of Wilkes often depict him with Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights.

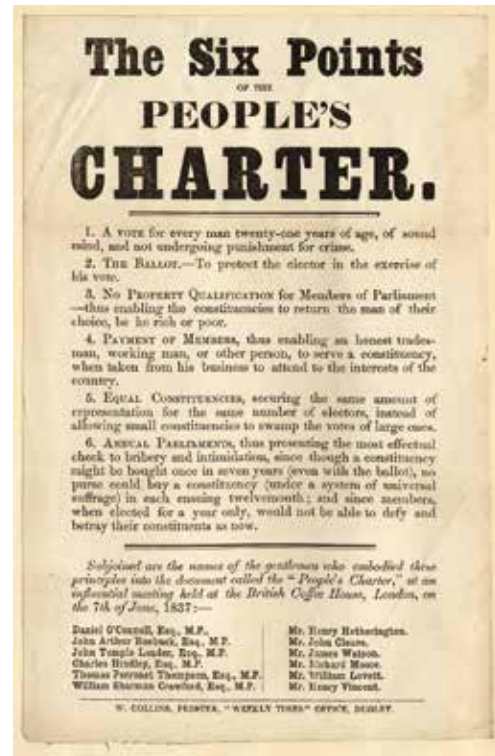
The passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 was a mixture of political circumstance and popular pressure. The pro-reform Whig Lord Grey became Prime Minister in 1830 and agitation from extra-parliamentary radicals finally convinced a sceptical King and hostile Tory peers that reform was necessary. The effect of this Act was to enable the middle classes of the big industrial towns to share in political power. A uniform borough franchise

was created, allowing adult males occupying property worth at least £10 a year to vote. In the counties the franchise was broadened to include the more substantial tenant farmers, small landowners and shopkeepers. Fifty-six towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants ('rotten boroughs') lost separate representation and 31 further towns were reduced to one MP. Sixty-seven new constituencies were created.

An Act to amend the Representation of the People in England and Wales (the Great Reform Act), 2&3 William IV, c. 45, 1832

Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/
PU/1/1832/2&3W4n147





From the late 1830s to the 1850s the Chartist movement demanded further reform. The Chartists campaigned for the male right to vote and listed their demands in *The People's Charter*, a manifesto with obvious echoes of Magna Carta, which was launched in 1838.

The People's Charter

Bishopsgate Library,
Bishopsgate Foundation and Institute

The Great Reform Act was followed by further Acts which widened the male franchise in 1867 and 1884. By the early 1900s some women had become frustrated that years of peaceful campaigning by groups such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies had not yet obtained them the vote. They formed new associations which used more forceful and direct

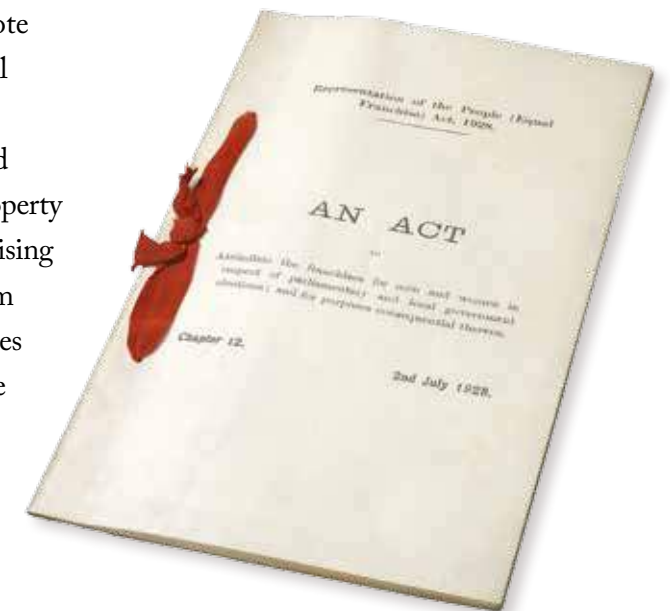


Cover of Votes for Women, 27 January 1911

Museum of London

methods, and such women became known as suffragettes. The cover of the 27 January 1911 edition of *Votes for Women*, a suffragette publication, featured a representation of the scene at Runnymede in 1215 with the sub-title *The Story of how Militant Methods Won the Great Charter is told by Mr Joseph Clayton on page 277*.

An Act to further reform the electoral system was deemed necessary during the First World War as millions of returning soldiers were not entitled to the vote because of property and residential qualifications. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 widened suffrage by abolishing almost all property qualifications for men and enfranchising women over 30 who met minimum property qualifications. These changes saw the size of the electorate triple from 7.7 million to 21.4 million. Women now accounted for about 43% of the electorate.



Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, c. 12, 1928

Parliamentary Archives,
HL/PO/PU/1/1928/18&19G5c12

Women, however, were still not equal to men in terms of the franchise, as men could vote from the age of 21. The requirement to be 30 years old or more was to ensure that women did not form the majority of the electorate; if women had been enfranchised on the same terms as men, they would have been in the majority because of the

loss of men in the war. Ten years later the Equal Franchise Act was passed *'for the purpose of providing that the parliamentary franchise shall be the same for men and women'*. It lowered the voting age for women to 21, giving the vote to five million women. Men and women now had the same qualifications based on residence, business premises, or being the spouse of a person with a business premises qualification.

The Modern Legacy

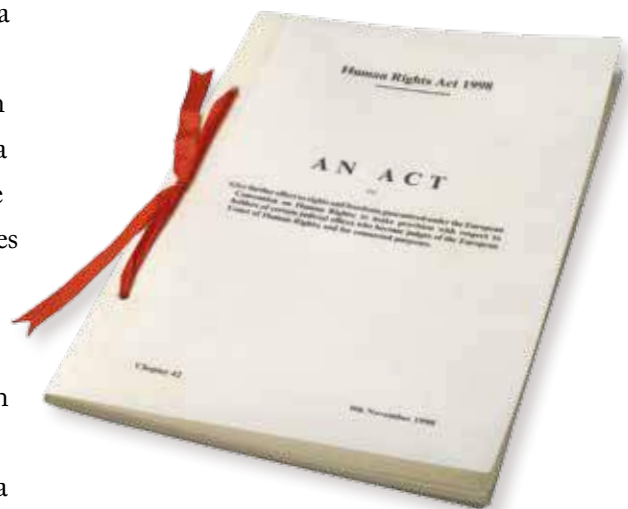
During the 19th century Parliament repealed many of the clauses in Magna Carta. In particular, the Statute Law Revision Act of 1863 repealed certain clauses in the 1225 re-issue of Magna Carta which had been entered onto the Statute Roll in 1297. Today only clauses 1 (part), 13, 39 and 40 remain in force.

In 1998 the Human Rights Act incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into British Law. The Convention echoed Magna Carta

in its insistence that governments follow the law and due procedure.

The Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the Bill of Rights are documents held in veneration by democrats throughout the world

Nelson Mandela,
Supreme Court of South Africa,
20 April 1964



Human Rights Act, c. 42, 1998
Parliamentary Archives, HU/PO/PU/1/1998/c42

Further reading

Ashley, M.

Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain's Freedoms and Rights
(The British Library, 2008)

Breay, C.

Magna Carta: Manuscripts and Myths
(The British Library, 2010)

Carpenter, D.

Magna Carta
(London, 2015)

**Shenton, C., Prior, D.,
and Takayanagi, M.**

*Victoria Tower Treasures from
the Parliamentary Archives*
(Parliamentary Archives, 2010)

Vincent, N.

*Magna Carta: The Foundation
of Freedom 1215–2015*
(London, 2014)

The Parliamentary Archives

The Parliamentary Archives holds the records of both Houses of Parliament dating from 1497. Information about our public services is available at

[**www.parliament.uk/archives**](http://www.parliament.uk/archives)

To make an appointment to consult records in our Search Room or to make an enquiry contact us at:

Parliamentary Archives

Houses of Parliament

London SW1A 0PW

020 7219 3074

[**archives@parliament.uk**](mailto:archives@parliament.uk)

During 2015 as part of its De Montfort project the Parliamentary Archives will be working with regional archive partners, community groups and schools to research members of both Houses of Parliament who have made a difference to communities and the lives of individuals.

More information is available at:

[**www.parliament.uk/demontfortproject**](http://www.parliament.uk/demontfortproject)

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Information about Parliament's commemoration of major anniversaries in 2015 can be found at:

[**www.parliament.uk/2015**](http://www.parliament.uk/2015)

