

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER
Magna Carta, issued in 1215
(United Kingdom)

Ref N° 2008-29

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 *SUMMARY*

Magna Carta is one of the most celebrated documents in English history. It is often claimed to be the cornerstone of English liberty, law and democracy, and its legacy has been its enduring worldwide influence.

In origin, Magna Carta was a practical solution to the deep political crisis in the reign of King John; it contained few statements of legal principle and only three of the original sixty-three clauses are still valid today.

The critical importance of the charter is that it imposed for the first time detailed written constraints on royal authority in the fields of taxation, feudal rights and justice, and it reasserted the power of customary practice to limit unjust and arbitrary behaviour by the king. In essence, it was Magna Carta that established the principle that the king was not above the law, but had to rule within in.

Magna Carta was not a single original document sealed when King John met his barons at Runnymede in 1215. The agreement was made orally, confirmed by oath and written up afterwards as a royal charter by the king's scribes. Many copies of the charter were sent out across the country in June 1215, but only four of these original exemplars now survive: two in The British Library and one each in the archives of the cathedrals at Lincoln and Salisbury.

The issuing of Magna Carta was one of the most famous acts in English history. The four surviving exemplars are symbols of the British way of life and icons for freedom and democracy, with a lasting global impact.

2 *DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR*

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

(1) The British Library Board, 96 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DB.

(2) The Corporate Body of Lincoln Cathedral, Minster Yard, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN2 1PX, United Kingdom.

(3) The Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral, Chapter Office, 6 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EF, United Kingdom.

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

The British Library Board owns two of the surviving 1215 exemplars of Magna Carta; the Corporate Body of Lincoln Cathedral and the Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral each own one 1215 exemplar of Magna Carta.

2.3 Contact person (s)

(1) Dr Claire Breay, Head of Medieval and Earlier Manuscripts, The British Library

(2) The Revd Canon Professor Mike West, Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral

(3) The Revd Canon Edward Probert, Chancellor of Salisbury Cathedral

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

(1) The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DB

Tel. +44 (0)20 7412 7852

Fax +44 (0)20 7412 7787

Email claire.breay@bl.uk

(2) The Chancery, 11 Minster Yard, Lincoln LN2 1PJ, United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0)1522 561633

Email chancellor@lincolncathedral.com

(3) 24 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EH

Tel. +44 (0)1722 555189

Email chancellor@salcath.co.uk

3 *IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE*

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The four surviving original exemplifications of Magna Carta, issued in 1215:

The British Library, Cotton MS. Augustus II. 106

The British Library, Cotton Charter XIII. 31a

Lincoln Dean and Chapter Archives, A1/1/45

Salisbury Cathedral Archives, Press IV. C2: Royal Charters/39

3.2 Description

All four exemplars are written in iron gall ink. The text is closely written in Latin, using the standard abbreviations of the period.

The British Library, Cotton MS. Augustus II. 106

Single parchment membrane, 514 x 343mm. 52 lines of text in a neat chancery-style hand.

The British Library, Cotton Charter XIII. 31a

Single parchment membrane, 305 x 505mm. 86 lines of text in a neat chancery-style hand.

Badly damaged by the Cotton Library fire of 1731.

This is the only exemplar to retain any trace of its original seal, now melted into a shapeless lump of wax.

Lincoln Dean and Chapter Archives, A1/1/45

Single parchment membrane, 451 x 454mm. 54 lines of text in a neat chancery-style hand.

Salisbury Cathedral Archives, Press IV. C2: Royal Charters/39

Single parchment membrane, c. 354 x 405mm. 76 lines of text in a neat business hand, closer to a book hand than the chancery-style hands of the other three exemplars.

4 *JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA*

4.1 Is authenticity established

All four 1215 exemplars of Magna Carta are authentic.

The original destination of British Library, Cotton MS Augustus II. 106 is unknown. It was given to Sir Robert Cotton by Humphrey Wyems on 1 January 1629.

British Library, Cotton Charter XIII. 31a was acquired by Sir Edward Dering from the records of Dover Castle and sent by him to Sir Robert Cotton in 1630. It may originally have been the exemplar directed to the county of Kent, but is more likely to have been sent to the Barons of the Cinque Ports.

The Lincoln Magna Carta has been in the cathedral archives since shortly after it was issued and has two 13th-century endorsements, 'Lincolnia', on the dorse.

The Salisbury Magna Carta is assumed to be the exemplar delivered to Wiltshire, thereafter stored in the cathedral archives.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

There are four existing exemplars of the 1215 Magna Carta, all of which are irreplaceable as historical documents and as documents of current social and political value. The agreement which led to the drawing up of Magna Carta was reached at Runnymede in Southern England in June 1215 to resolve a prolonged and bitter dispute between King John and the barons. Following reissues in 1216, 1217, 1225 and 1265, it was reissued again in 1297 under Edward I: it was this version that was subsequently copied on to the statute roll.

Magna Carta has been preserved as part of the common law of England and as such its content has been defended, maintained or repealed as the needs and functions of the law have required. However, Magna Carta has also rightly been described as *jus cogens*, part of a body of higher or compelling law of overriding significance to the international community. In that sense, a line that runs from Magna Carta can be traced through the instruments of the French Revolution and the United States Constitution to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It stands today as an icon for freedom and democracy throughout the world.

Each exemplar of Magna Carta is unique, but none has more authority than any other. Each shows evidence of being written in some haste by different Chancery clerks. Each is written on a single sheet of parchment but the sizes differ significantly and the texts differ slightly in spelling and word order.

4.3 Is one *or more* of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style satisfied?

Time: Magna Carta was born out of the conflict between King John and his Barons and brought to a head a long running dispute about the operation of kingship. The charter sought to limit the King's money-making operations, make his justice more equitable, reform the abuse of his local agents and prevent him acting in an arbitrary fashion against individuals. Initially failing to end the conflict, Magna Carta's subsequent reissues throughout the thirteenth century have assured that its long term effect on English legal and social history have been unprecedented and profound. 1215 is now recognised as one of the great moments in British history.

People: The effects of Magna Carta through the centuries can be attributed to a large extent to the way it has touched the hearts and minds of individuals and groups of people who have been seeking freedom from perceived oppression.

Under the influence of Sir Edward Coke and his compatriots, Magna Carta became a key way for Parliamentarians to confront the authority of Charles 1 in the fight for the development of parliamentary democracy in England in the seventeenth century. Magna Carta subsequently travelled to the New World in the hearts and minds of the first British settlers and became a rallying cry for the American colonists in their fight for independence from the British crown. It was later incorporated into many of the early colonial charters and was woven into the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Magna Carta has been used by abolitionists to combat slavery in both Britain and America and continues to be an icon of hope for groups that are oppressed in our world today. Today it challenges societies all over the world to identify and address issues of slavery wherever they are found.

Together with the Charter of the Forest (1217), Magna Carta preserved the rights of commoners to use the forests and therefore the common lands of England for subsistence. This often neglected aspect of Magna Carta speaks to indigenous peoples today who have lost their ancestral land or are in the process of doing so.

Subject and Theme:

The Rule of Law

Chapter 39 of Magna Carta has grown to embody fundamental principles of law that include Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, the primacy of the rule of law and the prohibition of torture. Today it can still be used to challenge governments when they move to curtail human rights by detaining citizens without trial, condoning torture or curtailing the individual's rights or freedoms.

Democracy

The Great Charter has been used in Britain and America to promote and support democratic systems of Government and is still heralded as a foundational document for freedom and democracy. Today it can be used to challenge governments to look critically at their own democratic processes and at the ways in which they encourage democratic development in others.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

Rarity: Only four exemplars of the original 1215 issue of Magna Carta survive. Each is a unique manuscript, but all four have equal evidential value.

Integrity:

British Library, Cotton MS. Augustus II. 106

Good condition. Original seal impression and parchment seal tag now missing.

British Library, Cotton Charter XIII. 31a

Very poor condition. Burned in the Cotton Library fire of 1731 and now mostly illegible. The only exemplar to retain any trace of its original seal, but this is now a shapeless lump of wax.

Lincoln Dean and Chapter Archives, A1/1/45

Poor condition, but with some fading of the text. Cords and seal impression now missing.

Salisbury Cathedral Archives, Press IV. C2: Royal Charters/39

Very good condition. Cords and seal impression now missing.

Threat:

British Library, Cotton MS. Augustus II. 106

Good condition. Some fading and loss of ink. Some parchment and paper repairs at the edges and some parchment repairs on the dorse.

British Library, Cotton Charter XIII. 31a

Very poor condition, owing to exposure to the Cotton Library fire of 1731 and attempts to conserve the charter by remounting it in the early nineteenth century. Very significant damage and loss of text. Remains of wax seal still attached, but impression completely destroyed by fire.

Lincoln Dean and Chapter Archives, A1/1/45

Poor condition. The face of the parchment has become dirty and is mottled, probably through historic mould and bacteria growth. The face has become abraded and weakened in some areas. Some damaged areas have become misaligned through early repairs and as a result are extremely vulnerable. As a result of past environmental fluctuations and small repair patches, the parchment surface has become distorted in places. The condition of the ink varies; there are extensive areas of abrasion and loss, possibly caused by earlier repair procedures.

Salisbury Cathedral Archives, Press IV. C2: Royal Charters/39

Very good condition. Apparently stable with very little ink loss. Repaired at the foot where the seal impression was formerly attached.

Management Plan:

See information in item 6 below.

5 *LEGAL INFORMATION*

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

(1) Owner: The British Library Board

Contact details: Mr Andy Stephens, Secretary to the British Library Board, The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DB

Tel. +44 (0)20 7412 7269

Email: andy.stephens@bl.uk

(2) Owner: The Corporate Body of Lincoln Cathedral

Contact details: Mr Roy Bentham, Chapter Clerk & Chief Executive, Chapter Office, 4 Priorygate, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN2 1PL

Tel. + 44 (0)1522 561601

Email: chiefexecutive@lincolncathedral.com

(3) Owner: The Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral

Contact details: The Chapter Clerk, 6, The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EF

Tel. +44 (0)1722 555105

Email: chapterclerk@salcath.co.uk

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

The custodian is the same as the owner in the case of The British Library Board and the Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral.

The custodian of the Magna Carta owned by the Corporate Body of Lincoln Cathedral is:

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincoln Castle, Castle Hill, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, UK. LN1 3AA

Tel: +44 (0)1522 511068

Fax: +44 (0)1522 512150

Email: Lincoln_Castle@lincolnshire.gov.uk

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

- (1) The British Library – public institutional ownership**
- (2) Lincoln Cathedral – private ownership**
- (3) Salisbury Cathedral – private ownership**

(b) Accessibility

- (1) Both 1215 copies of Magna Carta are normally on display to the public at The British Library, free of charge. One copy is rotated off display for six months every two years as part of the Library's Treasures Rotation Policy.**
- (2) The 1215 copy of Magna Carta owned by Lincoln Cathedral is normally on display to the public at Lincoln Castle, except when on loan to external exhibitions.**
- (3) The 1215 copy of Magna Carta owned by Salisbury Cathedral is normally on display to the public, free of charge, in the Cathedral's Chapter House.**

(c) Copyright status

Reproductions of images of any of the four copies of Magna Carta require prior consultation with the relevant owner.

(d) Responsible administration

- (1) The British Library Board**
- (2) The Corporate Body of Lincoln Cathedral**
- (3) The Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral**

(e) Other factors

6 *MANAGEMENT PLAN*

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?

(1) The British Library

The British Library's Collection Care Department works with all the curatorial departments in the Library to ensure that the Library's collections, which contain many heritage items, are secure, preserved and made accessible through the Library's exhibitions, reading rooms and website. The British Library's two exemplars of the 1215 issue of Magna Carta are stored in optimal conditions that meet BS5454-2000, with full environmental control and monitoring. This aspect of the Library's work is managed by the Collection Care department which includes staff with long experience of conserving valuable medieval manuscripts, including world class heritage items. The Library has a full disaster preparedness plan which is actively managed by the Preservation section of Collection Care.

The Library's two exemplars of the 1215 Magna Carta are normally both on public display in the Sir John Ritblat Gallery: Treasures of the British Library, which is open free of charge, seven days a week. The Library's Magna Carta display was renewed in 2006 and the Library now has a dedicated room explaining the history, content and legacy of Magna Carta. To enrich the interpretation provided, the room includes a 'virtual curator' and a computer interactive with a 'magic magnifier' for examining the text in detail and translating it into English on-screen. The resources in this room have recently been made available on the British Library's website at <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/index.html> .

The British Library displays its two exemplars of the 1215 issue of Magna Carta along with other exceptionally important related manuscripts: the Articles of the Barons, listing the barons' demands prior to the meeting at Runnymede; the bull of Pope Innocent III, declaring Magna Carta null and void, issued on 24 August 1215; and one of the four surviving copies of the 1225 reissue of Magna Carta, bearing the great seal of Henry III.

In 2006, the British Library's Collection Care department implemented a rotation policy for the principal treasures displayed in the Sir John Ritblat Gallery. Under this policy, these treasures are rested from exhibition in secure storage for six months in every twenty-four. One of the Library's two exemplars, Cotton Augustus ii. 106, is off display from January to June 2008 inclusive, as part of this policy. This exemplar return to the Magna Carta room in the Sir John Ritblat Gallery from July 2008.

The British Library is currently preparing a major exhibition in its temporary exhibitions space, the Pearson Gallery, on the subject of British political rights. This exhibition will display cornerstones of British citizenship together for the first time, including one of the Library's exemplars of Magna Carta (Cotton Augustus ii. 106). Entitled, 'Taking Liberties: The Struggle for British Freedoms and Rights', this exhibition will open on 31 October 2008 and run until 1 March 2009.

(2) Lincoln

Yes. Security of the charter is maintained to the levels required by the Government Indemnity Scheme. Storage and exhibition conditions are maintained to BS 5454. A Management Plan has been adopted which has been based on a detailed Inspection and Condition Report (February 2007). Recommendations from the Inspection and Condition Report have been implemented for its display in Lincoln and in the USA.

The Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral has a commitment to make Magna Carta available to the widest possible audience both as home and abroad. This is evident in its recent history when it has been on permanent public display both in Lincoln and as part of touring programmes in the USA and Australia and in our current a future plans for the document.

Display of Magna Carta in Lincoln

Since 1992 the Lincoln Magna Carta has been on display as the centre piece of a purpose built exhibition in Lincoln Castle. This has been possible through a close partnership between Lincoln Cathedral as owners of the Magna Carta and Lincolnshire County Council as owners of the castle.

In 1994 a new group – the Historic Lincoln Partnership - was established. This has brought together key organisations namely Lincoln Cathedral, Lincoln City Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Enterprise, English Heritage and Lincolnshire Tourism dedicated to delivering a new vision for uphill Lincoln. This partnership is working towards 2015 – the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the first Magna Carta – with an ambitious programme of redevelopment centred on a new exhibition and display of Magna Carta in the Crown Court building in the Castle. This would interpret Magna Carta in the context of the development of democracy and the fight for individual freedom in the western world in a venue appropriate to its iconic importance. We are currently seeking funding for this work

Educational Work

In parallel with the work of the Historic Lincoln partnership, Lincoln Cathedral has begun to expand its educational work around the Magna Carta. For the last two years we have held a series of events in the week of June 15th including a Magna Carta lecture, talks and special tours. In addition we are working in partnership with the University of Lincoln on the first of four conferences for young adults from the UK and America entitled 'Magna Carta 2008'. We are also working with the National Union of Teachers in the UK and the National Educational

Association in the USA to provide material for schools in the USA and the UK on issues raised by Magna Carta. Funding is currently being sought to develop this work

Display of Magna Carta in the USA and Europe

Between 1976 and 1990 the Lincoln Magna Carta went on a series of highly successful tours of the USA and Canada. In addition it visited Australia as part of EXPO 88.

Based on the success of this original programme a new series of USA exhibitions has begun as described in the table below. This is work still in progress but has already proved a powerful educational resource, has attracted many visitors in the venues and has added value in giving us new insights into what Magna Carta means to audiences outside the UK.

Programme for loans of Lincoln Magna Carta, 2007-2011

Venue	Date	Contact	Notes
Contemporary Arts Center of Virginia, Virginia Beach	March – June 2007	Cameron Kitchin	Completed
National Constitution Center Philadelphia	July 2007	Steve Frank	Completed
Fraunces Tavern Museum New York	15 th October 2008 to 9 th January 2009	Richard Gregory	Agreed and funding in place
Reagan Presidential Museum	6 th February 2009 to 31 st May 2009	R Duke Blackwood	Agreed and funding in place
Gerald Ford Presidential Museum Michigan	4 th September 2009 to 4 th December 2009	Elaine Didier	Still in planning
George Bush Museum Texas	Sept 2010 to Jan 2011	Dr Roman Popadiuk	Still in planning
Schwyz Museum, Switzerland	Autumn 2011	Jim Scherrer Kaspar Michel	Bundesbrief exhibition/ still in planning

(3) (3) Management Plan for the Salisbury Magna Carta

As with all the cathedral’s historic documents and books, the Magna Carta is under the care of our Librarian and Keeper of the Archives. Since 1983 it has been displayed in the Chapter House in its own secure metal cabinet in which light levels are restricted and environmental conditions monitored. The document itself was encapsulated in 1992 by the British Library to specifications laid down in BS5454: 1989, RCHM 1990, and National Preservation Office Preservation Guidelines. In 1999 cabinet light levels were checked by the British Library Conservation Department and were found to be satisfactory. The cabinet is locked shut by cathedral constables when not on display; the case is permanently alarmed, and the Chapter House is alarmed when shut. Casual photography is not allowed. At least one volunteer is always on duty to assist with interpretation. No charge is made for access to the cathedral or Chapter House, though a donation is strongly encouraged on arrival at the cathedral entrance, and (except when access to the cathedral is restricted) access to the Chapter House follows a visit through the cathedral.

Though of long standing, the Chapter House remains a provisional location for the cathedral’s display of Magna Carta and a few other treasures. In 2007 we completed our Master Plan and Strategic Plan, which address the entire range of the cathedral’s aspirations. Under these the Magna Carta will be a focal point in new display arrangements in another location. This will allow readier access and more modern and effective display and interpretation; but also will

form a key element in our intention to use the cathedral to promote social justice. Our Education Department has within the last two years developed a very effective role-play for school groups which enhances their understanding of both the thirteenth century conditions which brought about the Magna Carta, and the more general issues raised by the document. The Department continues to develop imaginative ways in which to use it to foster education.

We envisage completion of the Strategic Plan by 1215, the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta. There are no plans to lend or display it elsewhere than at the cathedral.

7 *CONSULTATION*

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee

The British Library and the Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral fully support this application. The Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral has consulted the current custodian of the Lincoln exemplar, Lincolnshire County Council, who also fully support the bid. The Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral has liaised with David Dawson, the chair of the UK’s new Memory of the World Committee, regarding this application.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 *ASSESSMENT OF RISK*

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)

None of the four surviving exemplars of the 1215 issue of Magna Carta is threatened by any political circumstances. The physical threats to the exemplars are only those relating to their condition, as outlined in 4.4

9 *ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION*

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)

See section 4.4

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name)...Dr Claire Breay.....

(Signature)...M. Claire Breay.....