

## Item 4

### The History of Magna Carta

A yew tree (over 2,500 years old) and the ruins of a Priory are to be found at Ankerwycke in the Parish of Wraysbury. They were witnesses to the great events when Magna Carta was sealed by King John on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1215. It is likely that the monks drafting the charter might have been based in the Priory.

The meadow of Runnymede would have been full of armed men – knights and barons who were confronting their king and requiring that he agree to their demands which had been set out in their Articles. Also present was Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, acting as an intermediary.

King John had previously quarrelled with the church over the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Pope Innocent III chose a compromise candidate, an Englishman who was a noted European scholar. The Pope declared an Interdict closing all the churches until King John decided to reach agreement and accept Stephen Langton.

In those days the Thames flowed in three channels, with an island at Ankerwycke, which would have given King John some protection.

King John had been pursued by the barons who had first convened in St Albans and then they had moved onto Bury St Edmunds where they had sworn not to disperse until their grievances had been addressed. What drove the King to meet them was the loss of his capital, London to the barons.

John was an unpopular King, hated because of his heavy taxation, his cruelty which included the murder of his nephew and the loss of his French Empire. Barons resented the fact that widows and minors would be married off to the highest bidder.

The Charter that emerged from this meeting is now taken as the foundation of our Liberty and marking the rule of Law. However the barons and the twenty five selected as guarantors would have been surprised by this as the Charter refers to free men who were a minority in a population of villeins bound to work for their lords. This charter was unusual in that it was sent to the bishops rather than the sheriffs of the counties, who would have been reluctant to publicise its clauses because of the implied criticism of themselves.

There are two clauses which still survive on our statute books from 1215 and these are clauses 39 and 40 which say state:

‘No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way destroyed, nor will we go against him, nor will we send against him, save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.

To no one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay, right or justice.’<sup>1</sup>

King John died the following year and his young nine year old son, Henry III, succeeded with William the Marshal as his regent and he shrewdly re-issued Magna Carta to secure the support of the majority of the barons against a French invasion.

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<sup>1</sup> Magna Carta By David Carpenter published by Penguin Books 2015

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The Americans and the countries of the Commonwealth have an equal interest in commemorating and celebrating Magna Carta as providing the founding principles of their Constitutions.

Margaret Lenton