

Why Commemorate the 800th Anniversary?

MAGNA
800th
CARTA

Magna Carta matters today. It is the foundation supporting the freedoms enjoyed by nearly two billion people in over 100 countries.

Magna Carta enshrined the Rule of Law. It limited the power of authoritarian rule, the 'divine right of kings'. It paved the way for trial by jury, modified through the ages as the franchise was extended. It proclaimed certain religious liberties, "the English Church shall be free". It defined limits on taxation; every American remembers that "no taxation without representation" was the cry of the American colonists petitioning the King for their rights as free men.

Over centuries it has influenced constitutional thinking worldwide including in France, Germany, Japan, the United States and India as well as most Commonwealth countries, and throughout Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. Over the past 800 years, denials of Magna Carta's basic principles have led to a loss of liberties, loss of human rights and even genocide. It is an exceptional document on which democratic society has been constructed.

The original Great Charter was agreed by King John on 15th June 1215 when he acceded to barons' and bishops' demands to limit his powers and directed that it be sealed. This version of Magna Carta was revised several times in the 13th Century. The 1297 version became part of English law.

Nearly five hundred years later it was central to both the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. The newly-independent United States included many of its concepts in the 1791 Bill of Rights. In 1870 Bishop William Stubbs asserted "the whole of the constitutional history of England is a commentary on this Charter." In 1965 Lord Denning, the most celebrated English judge of the 20th Century, described Magna Carta as "the greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot."

Another lasting legacy is seen in the UN Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. Speaking at the UN General Assembly as she submitted the UN Declaration, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt argued that "we stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This declaration may well become the international Magna Carta for all men everywhere".

The 800th anniversary of Magna Carta is an occasion to deepen understanding of the crucial role it has played in our development. It is a time to commemorate the individual rights we enjoy today. It is an opportunity to strengthen human rights around the world.

The Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Commemoration Committee

The Magna Carta Trust's 800th Anniversary Commemoration Committee is charged by the Magna Carta Trust to co-ordinate activities, raise the profile of the anniversary and deliver a number of key national and international aspirations. These, and much else, can be found at: www.magnacarta800th.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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Address by Her Majesty from 1953

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Lest we fail to remember in the “picnic in the park” and “LiberTeas” celebrations of the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, let us also Commemorate the Address by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second at HM’s unveiling of the Runnymede Memorial, 17th October 1953, adjacent to the Runnymede meadow:

“This memorial has been built in proud memory of the men and women of the Air Forces of the British Commonwealth and Empire who lost their lives serving from bases in the United Kingdom and North-West Europe in the Second World War, and who have no known graves.

They were part of a glorious and far larger company who laid down their lives for freedom: and this memorial is one of many others, built, wherever the battle raged, so that they may not be forgotten. Twenty thousand four hundred and fifty-five names are recorded on these stones: and all races and countries of the British Commonwealth have here their representatives.

It is very fitting those who rest in nameless graves should be remembered in this place. For it was in those fields of Runnymede seven centuries ago that our forefathers first planted a seed of liberty which helped to spread across the earth the conviction that man should be free and not enslaved. And when the life of this belief was threatened by the iron hand

of tyranny, their successors came forward without hesitation to fight and, if it was demanded of them, to die for its salvation. As only free men can, they knew the value of that for which they fought, and that the price was worth paying.

They were not alone in this knowledge and in this sacrifice. At this very hour a memorial porch is being unveiled in Chelmsford Cathedral to commemorate some of those American airmen who fought together with us against the same aggression.

With prophetic insight, Pope wrote of this hill on which we stand:

***‘On Cooper’s Hill eternal wreaths shall grow
While lasts the mountain, or while Thames shall
flow’.***

Indeed the heroism of each will be remembered for as long as this memorial shall stand. But that which was done by all will, with God’s help, still be remembered when these stones have crumbled into dust. For wherever and for as long as freedom flourishes on the earth, the men and women who possess it will thank them and will say that they did not die in vain. This is their true and everlasting memorial.”

The Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Merchandise Shop



These, and much more, can be found at www.magnacarta800th.com/shop

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