**Worcestershire, Home of Liberty & Democracy – King John reunited with Magna Carta**

4 March 2015

**King John has been reunited with Magna Carta at a special event to commemorate Worcestershire as the Home of Liberty and Democracy.**

**Thirteenth Century barons have stormed their way into the historic Worcester Cathedral, resting place of King John and home of his great tomb, surmounted by the oldest royal effigy in England.**

**There they confronted him with a copy of Magna Carta, recreating the moment 800 years ago that put in place one of the most important building blocks on the road to democracy in Britain and the world.**

The re-enactment highlights the role Worcestershire has played time and again in the struggle for Liberty and Democracy. From Magna Carta to the English Civil War and beyond, the beautiful hills, lands and rivers of Worcestershire have borne witness to the struggles and battles that have created the freedoms we enjoy today.

To celebrate this legacy, an unparalleled programme of historic, immersive and fun events will take place here in the heart of England over the next 18 months. Details of all events are at [www.visitworcestershire.org/magnacarta](http://www.visitworcestershire.org/magnacarta). The main events are listed later in this press pack.

Worcestershire, Home of Liberty and Democracy is a programme supported by Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Worcester Cathedral, Museums Worcestershire, the Simon de Montfort Society, Battle of Evesham 2015, Worcestershire County Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council, Worcestershire Historical Society, Visit Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and the University of Worcester.

**King John and Magna Carta**

2015 marks the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta by King John. For the first time, the rule of law was given precedence over the rule of the monarch.

By the time of this momentous event on 19 June 1215, King John had already formed a special relationship with Worcester and the surrounding county. He often visited Worcester Cathedral to worship at the shrine of Saint Wulfstan. His favourite hunting grounds were nearby in forests at Wyre, Feckenham and The Chase.

But his relationship with the county was destined to be bittersweet. As civil war brewed and the King was forced to concede many of his powers under Magna Carta, Worcester declared for the rebellious barons.

In July 1216, the King’s forces recaptured the city, but the monarch’s days were numbered. He died in October that year, specifying in his will that he be buried in Worcester Cathedral. His will and artefacts will be on display in the Cathedral library from September 2015.

John’s great tomb is a masterpiece of early thirteenth-century sculpture. It gives Worcestershire a direct link to the story of Magna Carta, and to the story of Liberty and Democracy, that is genuinely unique.

**The Very Reverend Peter Atkinson, Dean of Worcester**, said: “Worcester Cathedral boasts a unique role in the story of Magna Carta that no other place can claim. We have King John’s tomb and his will, giving visitors a direct connection with the monarch who, whether he liked it or not, sealed the document that established the principle of the rule of law.”

**Recalling Magna Carta**

Marking the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, Worcester Cathedral is staging a major exhibition from March 2015 to December 2016, accompanied by a programme of inciteful lectures and talks, including a presentation by Sir Robert Worcester, Chairman of the national Magna Carta 800th Committee.

Bringing the story of Magna Carta alive for children, the Cathedral will host performances of a specially commissioned play for youngsters, which will also tour around schools in Worcestershire and the metropolitan borough of Dudley. *A Tale of Bolshie Barons, a Crafty King and a Timeworn tomb in Wooded Worcestershire* will be performed by Worcester Repertory Company.

A special service with a peal of bells on June 14 will mark the actual 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and a series of anniversary concerts will be held in the same week.

Uniquely, the Cathedral will offer the opportunity to view King John’s Will and other artefacts related to the monarch, from September.

Worcester Cathedral will also host a conference on King John and his connections to Worcestershire in April 2016.

**Simon de Montfort and the first representative Parliament**

50 years on from Magna Carta, another of the founding fathers of British democracy arrived in Worcestershire: Simon de Montfort.

The extravagant spending of the weak but vicious King Henry the Third and his son Edward had frustrated the barons. Led by De Montfort, the Sixth Earl of Leicester, they launched a civil war against the monarch in 1263.

De Montfort captured the King and his son at the Battle of Lewes. He established Parliament, until then simply the king’s council, as a representative body for the first time. This is still recognised today as the template for democratic nations across the globe. With this power base, de Montfort ruled the country for a year until 4 August 1265.

Stopping to allow King Henry to hear mass at Evesham Abbey, in the south of Worcestershire, de Montfort suddenly found himself confronted by a Royal army four times the size of his own. Prince Edward had escaped capture and he had one objective – the rescue of his father, the King.

The brutal battle raged throughout the town of Evesham and ended with the bloody death of de Montfort.

De Montfort was seen as the people’s champion and quickly became widely respected as a hero in the tale of liberty and democracy. Among some people he was even venerated as an unofficial saint. He was laid to rest in Evesham Abbey, a place of pilgrimage ever since.

The 750th anniversary of de Montfort’s downfall, a central moment in the English struggle for democracy, will be marked with two weeks of events in this beautiful English town, including a lecture by Professor David Carpenter, Professor of Medieval History at King’s College, London.

The highlight of the fortnight will be a two-day Medieval Festival, including a thrilling battle re-enactment, living history displays, medieval fair and much more.

More details of the commemorations will be available shortly at [www.battleofevesham.co.uk](http://www.battleofevesham.co.uk)

**Antonia Coles,** **Battle of Evesham Festival Co-ordinator**, said: “The road to Parliamentary democracy was a long and bloody one and the Battle of Evesham is one of the most important waymarkers on that road. It will be a thrilling experience for people of all ages to see the events and atmosphere of that clash of 750 years ago brought back to vivid life.”

**The English Civil Wars**

Worcester played a unique role in the English Civil Wars, with both the first and final battles fought at the city.

In 1642, the Battle of Powick Bridge was the first major cavalry engagement of the conflict, bringing a victory for the Royalists. Worcester’s support for the monarchy secured it a nickname that endures to this day: the Faithful City.

Nine years later, the Battle of Worcester brought the Civil War to an end. King Charles I was already dead when, in 1651, Charles II mounted a final offensive with an army that was mainly Scottish.

He established his headquarters in the historic Commandery, which still stands a short distance from Worcester Cathedral and is now a historic visitor attraction.

By September 3, Oliver Cromwell’s New Model Army and county militia had closed in on Worcester and Charles II’s forces were badly outnumbered.

The battle raged across the city and came to a head at Fort Royal Hill, the military stronghold that rose high over the city. There, the Parliamentarians took control of the Royalists’ guns and turned them on the city. Charles II’s men could only retaliate by mounting a final desperate charge as cover for the King’s escape.

**Worcestershire’s civil war legacy**

Fort Royal is now a beautiful public park offering spectacular views of this quintessentially English city. Its role in the Battle of Worcester is marked at the hill’s summit by a remarkable bronze plaque by artist Kenneth Potts.

Re-enactments of the events preceding the Battle of Worcester will be hosted by The Commandery over the 2015 August Bank Holiday weekend, while on September 3 a haunting commemorative Drumhead Ceremony beginning with an atmospheric march from The Commandery to the top of Fort Royal Hill, will remember those who fell at the Battle 363 years ago.

The Commandery will also host a LiberTea event on June 14, featuring re-enactments and lively debate about Worcestershire’s status as the home of liberty and democracy. The building will provide an atmospheric location for a range of talks over the next year, including a lecture on Parliament in the Civil War by Chris Bryant MP, author of Parliament – A Biography.

**David Nash**, Manager of The Commandery, said: "The fight for democracy very literally came to The Commandery with the Battle of Worcester in 1651. This last battle of the English Civil War changed the nature of Parliamentary government. The Commandery's Year of Liberty and Democracy includes historic re-enactments, national debates and local celebrations, marking Worcester's unique role in the story of England's democracy."

**Recognition from US presidents**

Such is the importance of the Battle of Worcester to the evolution of liberty and democracy that Fort Royal Hill was visited in 1786 by the second and third Presidents of the United States of America, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Adams’ words on that momentous day perfectly capture Worcestershire’s importance in the struggle for democratic freedom.

“Tell your Neighbours and your Children that this is holy Ground, much holier than that on which your Churches stand. All England should come in Pilgrimage to this Hill, once a Year.”

**Contacts for further information**

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**Notes to Editors**

**Pictures & video**

* Free-to-use pictures of Worcester Cathedral, The Commandery, Fort Royal Park, Evesham Abbey and more can be downloaded at <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B2HX4BQzAjElTVNfSXVjejlRb0E>
* Watch the Worcestershire, Home of Liberty and Democracy video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vahNUbQ470>

**Worcester Cathedral** has been described as possibly the most interesting of all England’s cathedrals, especially architecturally. It was founded it in 680 AD. Saint Oswald then built another cathedral in 983, and established a monastery attached to it. Saint Wulfstan, who rebuilt the cathedral in 1084, began the present building. During Anglo-Saxon times, Worcester was one of the most important monastic cathedrals in the country. It was a centre of great learning, which continued into the later middle ages, when Worcester’s Benedictine monks went to university to study a variety of subjects, such as theology, medicine, law, history, mathematics, physics, and astronomy. Some of these medieval university textbooks still survive in the cathedral library today. The monastery continued until 1540 when Henry VIII dissolved it, and some of the last monks became the first Dean and Chapter. The cathedral was badly damaged in the civil wars, and as a consequence a major programme of rebuilding was required after the Restoration of Charles II. From the late seventeenth until the nineteenth centuries there were several campaigns to restore parts of the cathedral, but the Victorians from 1864-75 carried out the largest of these.

**The Commandery** is said to have been established by St Wulfstan as a monastic institution designed to act as a hospital. After serving its original function for nearly 500 years, the hospital was among the last monastic institutions to be dissolved by Henry VIII in 1540. From that date onwards The Commandery was to fulfil a number of vastly varied roles but is most notably and passionately recognised for being the headquarters of the Royalist army during the Battle of Worcester.

**The programme of events**

Details of all the events in the Worcestershire, Home of Liberty and Democracy programme can be found at [www.visitworcestershire.org/magnacarta](http://www.visitworcestershire.org/magnacarta)

The following table lists all events confirmed so far. Others are due to be added to the schedule.

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| **Date** | **Event Information** | **Location** |
| **MARCH** | |  |
|  | **Worcester Regimental Museum Neuve Chapelle display** | Worcester Regimental Museum, Worcester Art Gallery & Museum, Foregate Street, Worcester |
| March and April | **Virtual exhibition of parliamentary democracy documents from the Parliament Archives**  Running on Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service's Touch Table in The Hive, the fully integrated University and public library. | The Hive, The Butts, Worcester |
| March 2015 – December 2016 | **King John and Magna Carta Exhibition.** Interpretive boards and digital touch screens explore the legacy of Magna Carta, its influence today and its impact on the USA; alongside King John and Magna Carta, John’s death and burial, his will and his reputation and links with Worcester and St Wulfstan | Worcester Cathedral |
| **APRIL** | | |
| From April | **Talks by King John’s Tomb** for pre-booked groups.  King John’s tomb has the oldest Royal Effigy in England and makes a stunning setting to hear about his life and the time leading up to his sealing of Magna Carta.  Book on 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral – |
| Thursday 23 April | **Talk - Professor Diane Purkiss - People's History of the Civil War**  The social history of the English Civil War, from this bestselling author.  In partnership with the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Thursday 30April,  7pm | **Talk by Dr. Andrew Hopper – Turncoats and Renegadoes** [sic]  A fascinating evening with this successful author and leading Civil War academic.  In partnership with the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| April/May | **King John & Magna Carta Play for Schools. *A Tale of Bolshie Barons, a Crafty King and a Timeworn tomb in Wooded Worcestershire*** A high impact, high energy, educational, fun, specially written play. Performed by Worcester Repertory Company to 48 schools within the Diocese of Worcester, some beside King John’s tomb, others at the schools. | Worcester Cathedral and schools across Worcestershire and the metropolitan borough of Dudley |
| **MAY** | | |
| Tuesday 12May,  7pm | **Talk by Ben Humphrey FRSA – Worcester: City of Liberty**  President of the Battle of Worcester Society, Ben Humphrey debates Worcester's history.  In partnership with the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Thursday 28 May, 6pm | **Lecture on Magna Carta** by Sir Robert Worcester, Chairman of the national Magna Carta 800th Committee. Set in the stunning setting of the Cathedral Quire in the sight of King John’s Tomb, with a pre-lecture reception.  Book on 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| Saturday 30May,  10am-5pm | **Oak Apple Day**  Join The Commandery for traditional Oak Apple Day celebrations. Where better to celebrate Charles II birthday and his restoration to the throne that the Faithful City of Worcester? | The Commandery, Worcester |
| **JUNE** | | |
| Sunday 14June,  2-4pm | **Worcester LiberTea**  Be part of a national, simultaneous celebration of rights and freedoms by joining in the LiberTea at The Commandery and nearby Fort Royal Park. Part of the Magna Carta 800th Anniversary celebrations, come to The Worcester LiberTea and reflect, debate and celebrate the rights that we enjoy today and commemorate those who worked to gain those rights. Costumed re-enactors will bring to life the key characters of Worcester's democratic story including US presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, together with Royalists and Parliamentarians of the English Civil War. Picnic to the joyous sound of a peal of bells from Worcester Cathedral. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Sunday 14 June, 12 noon-4pm | **Peal of Bells** (part of national commemoration of Magna Carta anniversary) | Worcester Cathedral |
| Sunday 14 June, 4-4.45pm | **Special Evensong Service**  Commemorating the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta by King John | Worcester Cathedral |
| Monday 15 – Thursday 18 June,12.15pm | **Magna Carta anniversary lunchtime concert series**, on the theme of liberty. Performed by Worcester Cathedral’s top singers and the English Symphony Orchestra. Free to attend | Worcester Cathedral |
| Tuesday 16 June, 7pm | **Talk – Anita Seymour – Royalist Rebel**  Anita is a member of the Historical Novel Society. Her novel “Royalist Rebel” is based on the real Elizabeth Murray, Countess Dysart, who was rumoured to have had affairs with both Oliver Cromwell and Charles II.  In partnership with Worcester Literature Festival and the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Wednesday 17June,  7pm | **Talk by Katherine Clements – The Crimson Ribbon**  Prize-winning fiction author, Katherine will set out the background to her book and her interest in the Civil War.  In partnership with Worcester Literature Festival and the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Thursday 18 June,  7pm | **Talk by Chris Bryant MP – Parliament in the Civil War**.  Chris Bryant MP is author of the best-selling two-volume 'Parliament – A biography'.  In partnership with the Battle of Worcester Society. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Friday 19 June, 7.30pm | **Magna Carta anniversary concert, reflecting the concept of 800 years of liberty -** *Beethoven the Revolutionary*, performed by Worcester Cathedral & the English Symphony Orchestra | Worcester Cathedral |
| **JULY** | | |
| Wednesday 15 July, 2.30pm | **LiberTea talk on Suffragettes** by Canon Georgina Byrne. Tickets £10.00 include tea or coffee and a slice of delicious homemade cake.  Book on 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| **AUGUST** | | |
| Saturday 1 August | **Commemoration & Democracy Day** presided over by Bishop of Dudley in Abbey Park / All Saints Church, Evesham | Abbey Park/ All Saints Church – Evesham |
| Sunday 2 August | **Battle of Evesham Memorial Day**  including a memorial service on the Battlewell Field | Churches across Evesham |
| Tuesday 4 August | **Lecture: Magna Carta and the Montfort Parliament 1264-5** by Professor David Carpenter, Professor of Medieval History at King’s College London | St Lawrence Church, Evesham |
| Wednesday 5 August, 2-4pm | **LiberTea talk on Simon de Montfort and the Battle of Evesham** by Tim Porter. Tickets £10.00 include tea or coffee and a slice of delicious homemade cake.  Book on 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| Wednesday 5 August | **Historical walk around Evesham** including the town, river and battlefield | Evesham |
| Saturday 8 – Sunday 9 August | **Battle of Evesham Medieval Festival.** A major event on Crown & Corporation Meadows, Evesham, featuring a re-enactment, living history displays, medieval fair, craft market etc. | Crown & Corporation Meadows - Evesham |
| Saturday 29- Monday 31August,  10am – 5pm.  Events throughout the weekend | **The Commandery - Battle Headquarters 1651**  Experience the most turbulent period in the history of one of Worcester's most historic buildings as The Commandery turns from family home to Civil War Battle HQ. As King Charles II's army arrives will you stay to fight or flee? | The Commandery, Worcester |
| **SEPTEMBER** | |  |
| Thursday 3September,  5.30-8.30pm | **The Battle of Worcester Commemorative Drumhead Ceremony**  Join the atmospheric anniversary march from The Commandery up Fort Royal Hill to honour the fallen soldiers of the final battle of the English Civil War, on the spot proclaimed by the American Presidents as "holy ground". | Commandery, Worcester |
| From September | **View King John’s Will and artefacts**  Pre-booked group visits to the medieval library to see King John's Will, the oldest Royal Will in England, his artefacts and relics. Tickets £5.00 – to book call 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| Wednesday 23 September | **LiberTea talk on Fair Trade: Slavery**, Abolition and the Ethical Trade in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries by Professor Suzanne Schwarz, . Tickets £10.00 include tea or coffee and a slice of delicious homemade cake.  Book on 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| **NOVEMBER** | |  |
| Tuesday 10 November | **Sixth Form Human Rights Conference**. A conference in the Cathedral Nave for young people. Organised by the Cathedral's education department. | Worcester Cathedral |
| Opening Thursday 19November | **Exhibition - Celebrating Worcester's Royal Connections**  Includes opening launch event to celebrate Charles I’s birthday. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| **2016** | |  |
| Saturday 13 - Sunday 14 February,  10am – 5pm | **Living History weekend at The Commandery**, demonstrating 2,000 years of history from ancient Greeks to WWII, with a special English Civil War focus for the Year of Liberty & Democracy.  Part of the Love Worcester Heritage Festival February 13-21. | The Commandery, Worcester |
| Friday 8 – Saturday 9 April 2016 | **King John: the Worcester Connection Conference**  Organised by Professor Stephen Church of the University of East Anglia in partnership with Worcester Cathedral. The subjects will include:- Who was King John? Henry III’s perceptions of his father, Worcester in the 13th Century, St Wulfstan of Worcester, The Bishops of Worcester in the early and late 13th Century, The rebuilding of the Quire in the 13th Century and The Architectural and Sculptural Setting of King John’s tomb. To register your interest in attending, call 01905 732900 or email visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk | Worcester Cathedral |
| 18 – 22 October | **Shakespeare’s King John** Presented and performed by Worcester Repertory Company at Worcester Cathedral. | Worcester Cathedral |