

Why talk about the Magna Carta

After all,

it was made in 1215 at Runnymede in England, a long time ago and far away across the ocean.

It was written in Latin, a language that hardly anybody understands today.

Most of what it says makes no sense to people today.

It means Great Charter

Why call something Great?

Because it was very long?

Because it was heavy?

Because it was very important?

What is a Charter?

A special kind of law or agreement.

It gives or tells about rights and privileges that people have

Why did it get made?

John was King of England. They called him Lackland since he could not inherit any land from his parents (he was the fourth son). So he was already trying to get land in other ways.

Many people were unhappy with King John, even before he got to be King. Robin Hood was one of those people.

Once he became King he made people even more angry.

They thought he was unfair and not a very good king, he lost a lot of battles and a lot of English land. People said he was too greedy and wanted to run everything himself.

King John believed that God had given him absolute power over England and its people.

King John was not happy about agreeing to the Magna Carta. Only three months later he was fighting with the barons again. The next year he died and Magna Carta was brought back.

Why did the King agree?

King John, when he saw that he was deserted by almost all, so that out of his regal superabundance of followers he scarcely retained seven knights, was much alarmed lest the barons would attack his castles and reduce them without difficulty, as they would find no obstacle to their so doing; and he deceitfully pretended to make peace for a time with the aforesaid barons...

...At length, after various points on both sides had been discussed, king John, seeing that he was inferior in strength to the barons, without raising any difficulty, granted the underwritten laws and liberties, and confirmed them by his charter...

The Barons

The barons were noblemen, rich landowners. Each had his own land granted by the King. Each had promised to serve the King in return for having his land.

The barons were angry with the King. They started to fight against him. The King felt weak and thought he had to make a deal with the barons.

Each baron had a coat of arms. Which one is the best?

Some questions about 1215

Could people watch the signing on television or did they have to wait to see a movie about it?

How many photographs were taken of the signing of the Magna Carta?

Who wrote out the Magna Carta?

Could most people in England read what the Magna Carta said?

Copies of the Magna Carta were sent all around England. How did they make the copies?

Did King John sign the Magna Carta or did he show he agreed to it by using his seal?

How does Magna Carta start?

Johannes del gracia rex Anglie, dominus Hibernie, dux Normannie, Aquitannie et comes Andegavie, archiepiscopis, episcopis, abbatibus, comitibus, baronibus, justiciariis, forestariis, vicecomitibus, prepositis, ministris et omnibus ballivis et fidelibus suis salutem.

John, by the grace of God, king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and count of Anjou, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, barons, justiciars, foresters, sheriffs, stewards, servants, and to all his bailiffs and faithful subjects, greeting.

What does Magna Carta Say About the Church?

The King will not interfere with the church. The church will choose its own bishops and priests.

FIRST, THAT WE HAVE GRANTED TO GOD, and by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired. That we wish this so to be observed, appears from the fact that of our own free will, before the outbreak of the present dispute between us and our barons, we granted and confirmed by charter the freedom of the Church's elections - a right reckoned to be of the greatest necessity and importance to it - and caused this to be confirmed by Pope Innocent III. This freedom we shall observe ourselves, and desire to be observed in good faith by our heirs in perpetuity.

What about the Barons?

The King promised to stop interfering with the Barons' rights.

He promised that their widows would not be forced to remarry.

He promised that their sons could inherit their lands.

He promised not to interfere with their courts.

Only Nobles could judge Nobles.

He promised not to tax them so much.

What about ordinary people?

Ordinary people were not around for the signing of the Magna Carta. The deal was made between the King and the Barons. But Magna Carta still gave some of them rights:

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.

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

Is Magna Carta still around ?

Yes, there are four copies of Magna Carta.

Yes, part of it is still the law in Ontario...

An Act respecting Certain Rights and Liberties of the People

2. No man shall be taken or imprisoned nor prejudged of life or limb, nor be disseized or put out of his freehold, franchises, or liberties, or free customs, nor be outlawed, or exiled, or any otherwise destroyed, unless he be brought in to answer and prejudged of the same by due course of law; nor shall the King pass upon him, nor condemn him, but by lawful judgement of his peers, or by the law of the land; and the King shall sell to no man, nor deny or defer to any man, either justice or right. 25 Edw. I, (Magna Carta), c. 29; 5 Edw. III, c. 9; 25 Edw. III, st. 5, c. 4; and 28 Edw. III, c. 3.

Are there any other important Charters?

In Canada, the most important one is the
Canadian Charter of Rights and
Freedoms.

It was signed by Queen Elizabeth II in 1982.