



Magna Carta Barons Reception

Mansion House
Tuesday 12th May 2015
The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of London
Alderman Alan Yarrow

**Chairman, My Lord, Fellow Aldermen, Sheriffs, Chief
Commoner, Your Worships, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

My Baronial Brethren!

Welcome to the Mansion House!

Welcome from all over England – and from two towns in France¹ – to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. The most important legal document in history. Foundation for global constitutions, commerce and communities. Anchor for the Rule of Law.

Eight centuries later, it's fantastic to celebrate one very special moment in history.....from which Magna Carta's incredible role, and reach, snowballed.

I am talking, of course, of the arrival of 24 Barons at the gates of the City of London – on 17th May, 1215. Meeting the 25th Baron – London Mayor, William Hardel.

¹Two of the Magna Carta barons' families came over with William the Conqueror from two towns in France. They are linked to the MC Barons' villages: Le Havre in Normandy and Curry Mallet in Somerset (William Malet), and Lanvallay in Brittany and Walkern in Hertfordshire (William de Lanvalei).

**We are, admittedly, a little early in marking the occasion!
But I will be on a business visit to Sri Lanka on Sunday –
and I didn't want to miss out!**

**And it's great to welcome representatives of towns and
villages from where the Barons hailed.....to the heart of
the City of London. Even if it is to this rather 'nouveau'
Georgian town palace – I'm sure you are all disappointed
not to be huddling in a tent outside!**

**However, even this 250 year old building bears traces of
the Barons' momentous intervention, 800 years ago.**

**If you look to your right, you will see a stained-glass
window – which dates to 1868.**

It depicts the sealing of Magna Carta – in which, of course, King John granted Londoners permission to elect their own Lord Mayor.

Later on, Mansion House contained a court – the last private house in the UK to do so.....only closing in 1992. The case of Jonathan Strong² was one of the most famous it tried. Jonathan was a slave who escaped to England from America in the mid-1700s. He was tried by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen – and found ‘Not Guilty’. In fact, the outcome of that one case established the legal principle that “ALL men and women are free, once they set foot on English soil.”

² Jonathan Strong appeared at the mansion house justice room on 18 September 1767 before the Lord Mayor, Sir Robert Kite. He discharged Strong because “the lad had not stolen anything, and was not guilty of any offence, and was therefore at liberty to go away”.

That principle of freedom.....and the many others enshrined and upheld in the Rule of Law over the years.....was only made possible by that first decisive act. The requesting, and sealing, of Magna Carta. Redefining, forever, the rights of man.

We often interpret the ‘law of unintended consequences’ as causing a negative outcome. But Magna Carta is, perhaps, the BEST example of the law of unintended consequences, in the world.

Here in the City of London, we are honoured to have one of the finest extant 13th century originals of Magna Carta.....and in time for this special year, we have created a brand new ‘Heritage Gallery’ within the Guildhall Art Gallery.

Where Magna Carta and other precious parchments can be displayed.

There some surprising statements on that small square of vellum.....such as Clause 7:

“At her husband's death.....a widow may remain in her husband's house for forty days.”

How sympathetic the Barons were!

But bygone quirks aside – the powerful principles of this document cannot be overlooked.

It is the basis of functioning legal systems, across the world. The foundation for ALL efficient and ethical markets.....that are open for business.

And it all began with those 25 Barons.

Later on, students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama will read excerpts from the play 'Left Handed Liberty' – intended to capture the Barons' actions in 1215. It was written by John Arden in 1965 – for the 750th anniversary.

I think some artistic license may have been used! In Act 2, Scene 2, the Barons are said to be 'taking their pleasure' of some aspects of London....

However, they are interrupted when – according to the script:

“The Lord Mayor bursts in, despite the efforts of some servants to restrain him.”

He then launches into a long diatribe – lecturing the Barons on the ‘corruptions of the flesh’....and lecturing their lady companions on their ‘unchaste behaviour’.

Well – I’m glad to have such a noble and saintly part in the play.....although I fear the fact that the City of London did the commissioning may have something to do with it!

But however the story played out, one thing is not in dispute. The document which was signed at Runnymede.

It now gives me great pleasure to hand over to a Civic Leader from one of the major places from whence the Barons came.....

The Mayor of Leicester, Sir Peter Soulsby.

Thank you.

(700 words)

TO END

**Thank you to all our speakers and readers today –
fascinating stuff!**

**Thank you to the Mayor of Leicester, Sir Peter Soulsby.....
Professor Nicholas Vincent of East Anglia University.....
.....and the Guildhall performers.**

**And I am delighted that Peter Sinclair, Chairman of the
Magna Carta Barons Association, has prepared a very
special finale to these formal presentations....**

All the representatives of the Barons' towns and villages will sign a new document – including myself, and the Garter Principal King of Arms.....who validated the Barons' Arms and is present today. Could the signatories please make their way to the table at the side of the stage.

You will be relieved to hear that this does not invalidate Magna Carta! But it is a wonderful symbol of unity – marking the second time in 800 years, that the Baronial representatives have been brought together in the City of London.

I hope it won't be another 800 years before our descendants gather again! Thank you all so much for coming, and I hope you all enjoy a wonderful lunch.