

## The Magna Carta 1215



Only victory at Bouvines would have satisfied the barons. Taxation, the murder of Arthur (1203), the earlier loss of Normandy (1204), the interdict, (1208) and excommunication (1209), and the constant abuse of their rights were too much for the barons and Church to tolerate. The barons demanded a meeting with John. John refused. Diplomacy had failed, force was now the only option.

Late in 1214, civil war broke out and an army led by Robert Fitzwalter, William Marshall, Hubert de Burgh and Gilbert de Clare attacked and captured London. The army was called '**The Army of God and Holy Church.**' John was forced to make peace with the rebel barons led by Stephen Langton. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1215, at Runnymede, an island in the Thames, John agreed to the Magna Carta. The Magna Carta was made up of 63 clauses and aimed to address the complaints of the barons & Church. It took 6 days to negotiate.

The most **important clauses** were as follows:

1. **Taxes were to be fair.** If the King wished to raise taxes, then he had to consult with the Barons. No taxation without consent of Parliament.
2. No freeman could **be fined, outlawed, imprisoned or punished** without a fair trial
3. The **Church was to be free** of the King's control, and was to be allowed to elect its own officials
4. **Freemen** were to be able to **travel** wherever they wished.
5. **Feudal fees and scutage** were to be restricted.

### Other conditions agreed by the barons

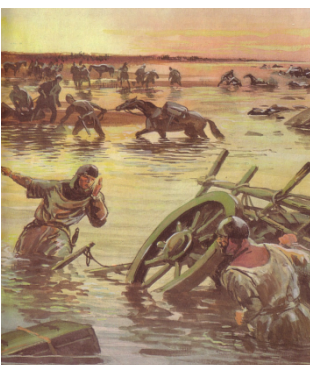
- Twenty-five barons were chosen to supervise King John and ensure he kept his promises. If he broke them they were to wage war against him.
- Magna Carta was an attempt by the barons and Church to protect their privileges. However, the largest part of the population, the peasants (villeins) received no benefits other than the fact that their animals could no longer be seized, instead of a paying a fine.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAGNA CARTA**

- It was the first time the barons and the Church had worked effectively together.
- Many historians regard the Magna Carta (Great Charter) as 'The Cornerstone of Liberty'.
- The USA constitution is based on much of the Magna Carta as is the United Nations 'Declaration on Human Rights.'
- The Magna Carta set out the rights & duties of all English people whether rich or poor.
- It made clear the supremacy of the law of the land over the will and power of the monarch. The King was not above the law.

However, it is clear that the main objective of the Magna Carta was to limit the king's' power which at the same time protected the rights of the barons and Church.

The majority of the population was not given any protection by Magna Carta. 95% of the people were not freemen! However as the feudal system broke down in the years after the Black Death, Magna Carta became more important in ordinary people's lives.



The Wash

Within a few weeks, John with the support of the Pope had begun to break his promises on the grounds that force had been used to make him agree to the Magna Carta. He hired a mercenary army and started to attack the barons' castles. He captured Rochester Castle. In response the barons asked for help from Louis, the son of Philip II, and offered him the crown. In 1216, Louis landed in England and marched to London, where he was warmly greeted. John marched to meet Louis and in the process of crossing the Wash lost his luggage and crown jewels. Shortly afterwards, John died of dysentery, (disease of the intestines) after eating too many peaches and drinking too much cider. (He might have been poisoned) He left a nine year old son, Henry, to face a civil war.

Roger of Wendover wrote at the time of the John's death, "foul as it is, hell itself is defiled by the presence of John"

**However John's reign would signal the start of England's journey down the long road to democratic government**

**Question 9**

a) Why did the barons finally rebel in 1214?

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b) What was the rebel barons' army called? .....

c) Where was John forced to meet the barons? .....

e) Give the full date of Magna Carta .....

f) How many clauses were agreed by John and the barons? .....

g) Write down two of the main clauses

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h) Fill in the spaces with the correct word

Magna Carta was the first time the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ had worked effectively together. Many \_\_\_\_\_ regard the Magna Carta as 'The \_\_\_\_\_ of Liberty'. The constitution of the \_\_\_\_\_ is based on much of the Magna Carta as is the United Nations 'Declaration on \_\_\_\_\_. The Magna Carta set out the \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ of all English people whether \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. It made clear the \_\_\_\_\_ of the law of the land over the will and power of the \_\_\_\_\_. The \_\_\_\_\_ was not above the \_\_\_\_\_.

i) Why did John break his promise to the barons?

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j) Who did the barons invite to be their new king? .....

k) What did John lose in the Wash? .....

l) Which rebel castle did John capture? .....

m) Why did John not sign the Magna Carta? .....

n) What percentage of the population were unaffected by the Magna Carta in 1215? .....

o) What does Magna Carta mean in English? .....

p) Do you think Roger of Wendover was a supporter of King John? Give reasons for your answer.

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## PRINCIPAL POINTS OF THE MAGNA CARTA – 1215

1. The power of English Kings was limited by a series of laws.
2. The barons kept watch over the King's activities.
3. Inheritance taxes were to be at a fixed rate.
4. Scutage was to be at a fixed rate.
5. Unpopular sheriffs were to be sacked.
6. Sheriffs were now accountable to the barons.
7. Every sheriff had a copy of the Magna Carta.
8. Foreign judges were to be removed.
9. Royal forests were limited.
10. All freemen had a right to a fair trial.
11. There were two knights per county to make sure that John kept the terms.
12. There were 63 clauses in all.
13. There are now 4 copies in existence. – 2 in the British Museum, 1 in Salisbury Cathedral and 1 in Lincoln cathedral.
14. The rough copy of the Barons demands was called **THE ARTICLES OF THE BARONS**.
15. It had been drawn up by Saire de Quincy, Eustace de Vesci, Robert FitzWalter and help from Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury.
16. The barons called themselves the **ARMY OF GOD AND HOLY CHURCH**.
17. John had been at Windsor and the barons at Staines before meeting at Runnymede.
18. John was later freed from keeping his promises by **POPE INNOCENT III**

