

Learning Pack
Key Stage 2 (Years 5-6, ages 9-11)
The Magna Carta Project

Why did King John issue Magna Carta?

'Foul as it is, Hell itself is defiled by the fouler presence of King John.' (Matthew Paris, died 1259)



Image: A drawing of King John [British Library MS Royal 14 CVII, f. 9, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=48013>]

Information for Teachers

This learning pack has been devised with reference to the aims of '[History programmes of study](#)' for Key Stage 2, which form part of the National Curriculum in England. This resource could also be differentiated for pupils in Key Stage 1 who are looking at events beyond living memory. It is framed as an enquiry into the causation of Magna Carta – what Magna Carta is and why it was drawn up in the reign of King John. The pack begins by looking at how England was governed in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and what English society was like at this time. It then moves on to focus on King John and the problems that emerged in his reign, before considering the making and meaning of Magna Carta. Within the pack, pupils are asked to think about how evidence can be interrogated to learn about the past by devising questions about sources and constructing answers drawing on relevant information. They are also encouraged to make connections between specific episodes in King John's reign and the creation of Magna Carta, as well as formulating their own analyses of the significance of particular events.

Please note that Key Stage 3 resources, including worksheets, are also available on [The Magna Carta Project's website](#). Teachers are also welcome to adapt these to examine the longer-term influence of Magna Carta on the English monarchy and the emergence of parliament for Key Stage 2 pupils.

Acknowledgments

These resources have been compiled by Professor Louise Wilkinson of Canterbury Christ Church University. Professor Wilkinson is grateful to Melanie Jones, education officer of the Historical Association, for her helpful comments on an initial draft of these resources, and to the School of Humanities at Canterbury Christ Church University for their financial support. She is particularly indebted to Cressida Williams and Zoe Willis of Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library, Martin Crowther of the Canterbury Museums, Diane Heath, Nicky Marshall and Dr Henry Summerson for their friendly advice and support. Similarly, the Magna Carta Project extends its thanks to our partner, Dr Claire Breay of the British Library, for directing the Project to the use of images ('made available under a Public Domain Mark* which indicates that there are no copyright restrictions on reproduction, adaptation, republication or sharing of the content available from the site') from the [British Library's Online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts](#). As far as possible, all other images used in this pack are also in the public domain.

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1. THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN THIS LEARNING PACK

If you see a word in this book that is in *italics* and you would like to know what it means, then you can look it up in the glossary (or word bank) at the end of this pack.

Most of the events that are described here took place around 800 years ago, when King John ruled England between 1199 and 1216.

The period between AD 1100 and AD 1200 is usually referred to by historians as the twelfth *century*, the period between AD 1200 and AD 1300 as the thirteenth *century*, and so on. King John *sealed* Magna Carta in AD 1215.

Timeline

Magna
Carta
(1215)

Today

AD 1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	AD 2000
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2. HOW WAS MEDIEVAL ENGLAND GOVERNED?

In the *Middle Ages*, the king was the most important man in England and made all the laws. He ruled over all the people in his kingdom with the support of his *barons* and the Church. The king owned all the land and gave *estates* to his followers. In return for their *estates*, the king's followers promised to be loyal to him. They also provided him with *knights* to serve in his army and gave him money and advice. The king did not have to accept their views.



Image: A drawing of a medieval king [British Library MS Royal 2 A XXII, f. 219v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I1ID=48013>]

A good king was someone who:

- ❖ ruled his kingdom fairly
- ❖ upheld law and order
- ❖ asked his *barons* and churchmen for advice
- ❖ protected his people
- ❖ protected and supported the Church
- ❖ waged successful wars against other rulers either to defend his lands or gain new land.

Like the king, *barons* also granted lands to their followers in return for military service. When a *baron* died, his *estates* usually passed to his

son or daughters, who then performed *homage* to the king and took over the *estates*.



Image: A knight performing homage [British Library MS Royal 2 A XXII, f. 220, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=38924>]

In the thirteenth *century*, most people over whom the king ruled were *peasants* who lived in villages in the countryside. They lived in simple houses built from wood, reeds and clay, with few items of furniture. They also shared their houses with farm animals, and disease was common. Their days were spent working in the fields to grow crops and raise cattle to feed their families. In years when harvests were poor, many *peasants* starved to death.



Image: Peasants [British Library MS Additional 42130, f. 170, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=41763>]

A local lord, who was a *knight*, a *baron* or a wealthy churchman, usually governed each village. The lord allowed the *peasants* to farm his *estates* in return for paying him money rents or working for him. The king and most lords lived in stone castles, which were much more comfortable and finely furnished than *peasant* houses. Castles were built to protect the lord against his enemies, and so were built for defence. It

was usual for the wife of a *knight* or a *baron* to help and advise her husband on how to manage the family's castles, their household and their *estates*, especially when the lord was away. Some ladies like Lady Nichola de la Haye, who lived in Lincoln Castle, defended their family homes with the help of soldiers during times of war.



Image: A knight riding away from a castle [British Library MS Royal 14 E III, f. 21, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I1ID=43457>]

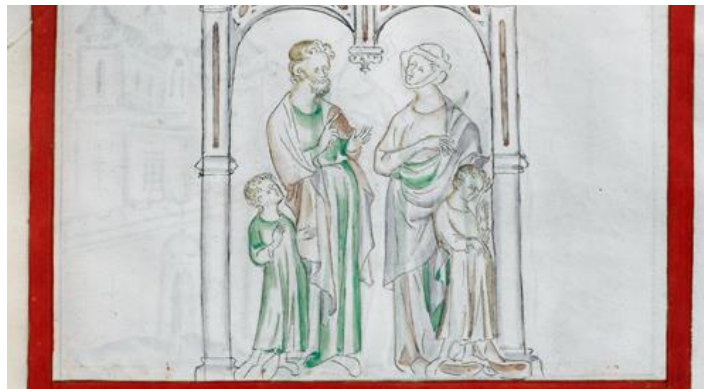


Image: A noble woman and her family [British Library MS Royal 2 BVII, f. 47v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I1ID=53792>]

ACTIVITY

1. Compare the clothing of the king, the knight, the lady and the peasants in the four images. How different are they? What can their clothing tell us about their different jobs? Which person would you rather be – a king, a knight, a lady or a peasant – and why?
2. Look at the castle. How many defensive features can you find? What other defensive features of castles do you know about? Why do you think the king and his barons lived in castles?
3. Now draw a self-portrait of yourself as a medieval king, a knight, a lady or a peasant and the type of castle or house you would have lived in if you had lived in medieval England.

3. WHO WAS KING JOHN?

King John was one of the worst men ever to be king of England. He was cruel, mean and treacherous. This was how Matthew Paris, a thirteenth-century monk, regarded King John who died in 1216:

‘Foul as it is, Hell itself is defiled by the fouler presence of King John.’

John became so unpopular that many of his *barons* rebelled against him, and forced him to grant them a large number of privileges. These privileges were written down in a document known as *Magna Carta* (the Great *Charter*) in June 1215.

Magna Carta was important because it limited the king’s power and he could no longer do as he wished. It promised to treat people fairly and justly. This was the first time that an English king had been challenged by his own people for being a harsh ruler, and the first time that the king was forced to agree to a list of rules that were written down.

John’s Early Life

Between AD 1154 and AD 1216, England was ruled by King Henry II (died 1189) and his sons, King Richard I (died 1199) and King John (died 1216). John was the youngest son of King Henry II by his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine. As the youngest son of his family, he was not likely to be king, and he was also not likely to inherit much land from his parents – in fact, he had the nickname John “Lackland.” He displayed little loyalty towards his family. During the final year of his father Henry II’s reign, John supported a *rebellion* against him that was led by his older brother Richard.

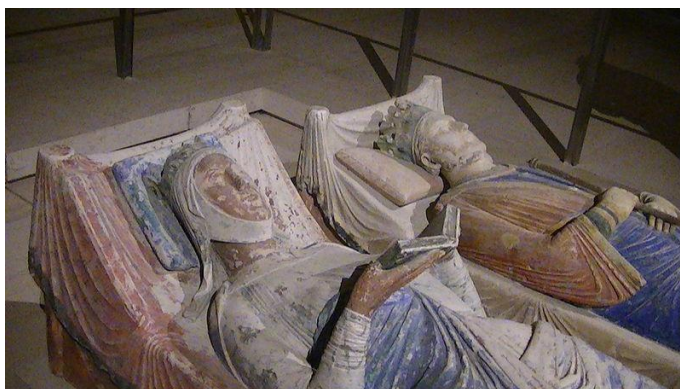


Image: King Henry II and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine [image and attribution details available at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Church_of_Fontevraud_Abbey_Eleanor_of_Aquitaine_and_Henry_II_effigies.jpg]

When Richard I became king and left England to fight in the **Crusades**, John stirred up trouble against him. Richard was captured on his way home by Duke Leopold of Austria, and then placed in prison by the German Emperor. Richard was only set free in return for a **ransom** of £100,000, which was raised by taxing the English people. Although John continued to plot against Richard during the time he was imprisoned, Richard soon forgave him. When Richard died in 1189, John was crowned as king of England.

How do we know about King John?

King John lived 800 years ago. We know about many of the things that happened so long ago because some people wrote them down. A lot of the information that we have about King John's reign comes from **chronicles** written by **monks**. **Chroniclers** wrote down events and the important news of their day. Some writers also included gossip, rumours and entertaining stories in their writing. They also gave their view of the events they described.

Monks wrote many of the **chronicles** because they were churchmen. The Church played an important role in teaching people to read and write. Not many ordinary people were able to read and write in the **Middle Ages** because there were not many schools and it was expensive to go to school.

Matthew Paris (died 1259) was a **monk** who lived at St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire. He wrote books on English history twenty years after John's death. St Albans Abbey was often visited by King John's son, King Henry III, and by the leading men and women of the kingdom.

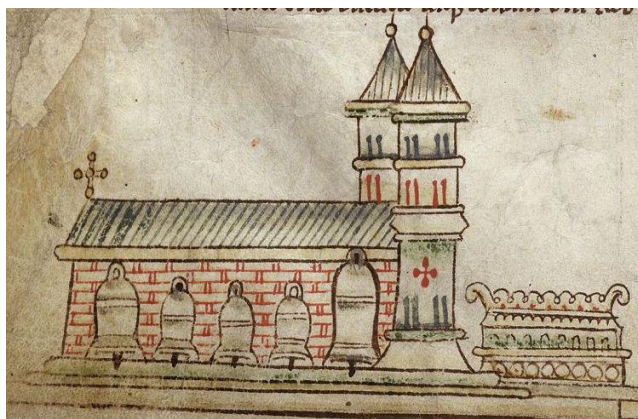


Image: An abbey [British Library MS Royal 14 CVII, f. 138v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=43420>]



Image: Matthew Paris [British Library MS Royal 14 C VII, f. 6, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=43395>]

ACTIVITY

1. Split into small groups, and discuss the following:

- i. How you think Matthew Paris' opinion of King John compares with the drawing of this king (also from Matthew Paris' chronicle) on the front cover of this pack.
- ii. If Matthew Paris wrote twenty years after King John's death, how do you think he knew about him? How accurate and trustworthy do you think his opinion of King John is likely to be? Why?

2. Now, imagine that you are chroniclers. Which five people or current events would you choose to write about today and why? How do your readers know that what you write is true?

4. WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS THAT JOHN FACED AS KING?

As well as the English throne, King John inherited many lands in France from his brother in 1199, including the *duchy* of Normandy, an area that is now in northern France. Some men in France did not want John to be their ruler. They believed, instead, that John's nephew, Arthur, should rule in his place. Arthur was the twelve-year-old son of Geoffrey of Brittany. Geoffrey was another older brother of John, who had died in 1186.



Image: John's lands in France before 1204. [image and attribution available at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angevin_empire.svg]

Note: The 'royal domain and vassals of the French king' on the map are simply the lands ruled by the king of France.

King John fought a war against Arthur in France. Arthur was helped by the French king Philip and John was helped by Eleanor of Aquitaine. In 1202, John captured Arthur and large numbers of *knights* at a castle in France called Mirabeau, which was being defended by Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Soon after John took Arthur prisoner, Arthur disappeared and was never seen again. Many people believed that John killed Arthur himself or arranged for Arthur to be killed. As a result of his treatment of Arthur, many of John's French followers no longer wanted him to be their ruler.

To think about

- Look at the picture of King John's family tree. John's older brothers all died before him. Can you find Geoffrey, Arthur and John?
- Why do people make family trees? Why do you think it was important for the royal family to have their family tree drawn out like this?



Image: King John and his family [British Library MS Royal 14 BVI, m. 6, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=49987>]

John also lost supporters in France because he offended the Lusignans, who were a rich and powerful family. In 1200, John married a rich young heiress called Isabella. Isabella had already promised to marry Hugh de Lusignan, and Hugh was angered by John's behaviour. Hugh appealed to King Philip of France, who announced his intention of seizing John's French lands. By 1204, King Philip had conquered most of the lands in France that John had inherited from his brother. This meant that King John spent the rest of his reign trying to raise money in England to try and recover Normandy.

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are a historical detective. Your task is to investigate what happened to Arthur of Brittany and why it happened.

1. Read this description of what happened to King John's nephew, Arthur of Brittany (died 1203), that was written by Roger of Wendover (died 1236), another *monk* at St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire who wrote his *chronicle* in the years between 1220 and 1236.

'King John came to the castle of Falaise, and ordered his nephew Arthur to be brought into his presence. When he appeared, King John addressed him kindly, and promised him many rewards, asking him to separate himself from the French king, and to support the side of himself, as his lord and uncle. But Arthur unwisely replied to him with anger and threats, and demanded of King John that he should give up to him all the territories which King Richard possessed at the time of his death; and since all these possessions belonged to him by right of inheritance, Arthur promised that unless King John quickly restored these territories to him, he would never enjoy peace for any length of time. King John was much troubled at hearing his words, and gave orders that Arthur should be sent to Rouen, to be imprisoned in the new tower there, and kept closely guarded; but shortly afterwards Arthur suddenly disappeared.'

Later Roger of Wendover says that 'an opinion about the death of Arthur gained ground throughout the French kingdom and the continent in general, by which it seemed that John was suspected by all of having killed him by his own hand; for which reason many turned their affections from King John from that time forward wherever they dared and held the greatest hatred for him.'

2. Work in pairs to make a list of questions to ask about this source. Try to find out as much as possible about what happened to Arthur of Brittany and why it happened. Then see if you can answer each other's questions.

3. Next, discuss how far you think we can trust Roger of Wendover's account of what happened? (For example, do you think it is likely that Roger had met Arthur of Brittany or King John? Where did Roger get his information?)

4. Finally, write out your own crime report on Arthur of Brittany's disappearance as if you were a modern-day detective. Think about how Roger of Wendover describes the king's character.

5. WHAT WAS ENGLAND LIKE UNDER KING JOHN?

In addition to his troubles in France, King John also met with opposition from members of the Church and from his *barons* in England.

A. King John and the Church

In the *Middle Ages*, most English people were Christians and attended Church regularly. The English Church was part of the Catholic Church. The pope, who lived far away in the Italian city of Rome, was the head of the Catholic Church. The archbishop of Canterbury was the most important churchman who lived in England.



Image: A pope [British Library MS Royal 1 D I, f. 528v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=30075>]

After Archbishop Hubert Walter died in 1205, King John quarrelled with the *monks* of Canterbury over who should be the next archbishop of Canterbury. Both John and the *monks* asked Pope Innocent III to settle the dispute. Pope Innocent wanted his own man, a churchman called Stephen Langton, to be appointed as the next archbishop of Canterbury. Langton was an extremely clever *scholar* and *priest*.

This angered King John. He believed that the English king should choose the new archbishop of Canterbury. King John refused to allow Langton to come to England and the *monks* of Canterbury were expelled from the kingdom. Pope Innocent III imposed an *interdict* on England in 1208 to try and force John to toe the line. This *interdict* meant that no

religious services were held in England anymore and the churches were closed. This was a very religious time and most people went to church. The *interdict* caused chaos because it meant that church services, including baptisms, weddings and funerals could not take place. John took lots of church property into his own hands. Nearly all the English *bishops* fled overseas.



Image: Bishops discuss religion [British Library MS Royal 14 C VII, f. 126, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=43415>]

The *interdict* only ended in 1214, after a year of talks between King John and Pope Innocent. King John was persuaded to accept Stephen Langton as the archbishop of Canterbury because he needed the pope's support:

- ❖ King Philip of France had threatened to invade England
- ❖ King John faced growing opposition to his rule from his English *barons*. In 1212, a group of northern *barons* plotted to murder him. When King John discovered this, the plotters fled abroad.

B. King John, the *Barons* and the *Peasants*

During the *interdict*, King John became worried about keeping the loyalty of the English people. After the loss of Normandy in 1204, John taxed his *barons* and many ordinary people very heavily. He wanted to collect as much money as possible in order to launch an invasion to recover his lost lands in France and pay for *mercenary soldiers* to serve in his army. John used his *sheriffs* to collect the money that he raised through taxation. Many of his *sheriffs* were deeply unpleasant men, like Philip Mark, the *sheriff* of Nottingham, who was later accused of robbery.

In order to understand why King John was so unpopular, it is also important to remember that everyday life in the *Middle Ages* was already uncertain and harsh. The king's attempts to tax people placed an extra burden on the *barons* and on John's poorer subjects. Some of the methods that King John used to raise money angered the English people. When a *baron* died, his son or daughters were expected to pay King John large sums of money to take over their dead father's *estates*. The *baron's widow* was also usually expected to pay King John money to remain unmarried. If a *widow* did not pay John money, she risked being married off against her wishes to a new husband chosen for her by the king.



Image: A man hoards a bag of money [British Library MS Yates Thompson 44, f. 108, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=5786>]

This situation was not entirely John's fault. Before John became king, his father King Henry II and his brother King Richard I had also upset the English *barons* by demanding large sums of money to pay for foreign wars. Henry II had kept control of his *barons* by building new royal castles and sending royal judges around England, while Richard I was a highly skilled military commander. Yet King John was so keen to collect money to recover his French lands that he made the English people pay much greater sums of money to him than they had paid earlier English kings.

To make matters worse King John was also a deeply unpleasant man. He tried to ensure the loyalty of his *barons* by taking their wives and children as *hostages*. If a *baron* went against the king's wishes or was suspected of disloyalty, John was quick to turn against him. When a *baron* called William de Briouze angered John, William was forced to flee England. Although William escaped with his life, other members of his family were not so lucky. William's wife Matilda and his son were captured, imprisoned and starved to death in Windsor Castle.

The Briouze family were not the only people who suffered at John's hands. John also ordered the sons of 28 Welsh lords to be killed

because he suspected their families of disloyalty. Many of John's people, both rich and poor, had good reason to fear and hate the king.



Image: A medieval battle [British Library MS Lansdowne 782, f. 26v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=13360>]

When John decided to go to war against the French king in 1214, in the hope of recovering Normandy, very few northern *barons* supported his requests for *knights* to serve in the royal army. The campaign ended in failure. John's *allies* were defeated in a great battle fought at Bouvines, and John's reputation as a military leader was very badly damaged. This encouraged John's subjects in England to launch an armed *rebellion* against the king.

ACTIVITY

1. Imagine that you are an English bishop. Explain to a visiting foreign churchman why King John quarrelled with Pope Innocent III.
2. Imagine that you are an English baron. Explain to a visiting foreign lord why you believe King John to be a bad king.

Helpful Hint: Can you list the things that King John has done to make you angry with him? What has angered you the most and why?

3. Imagine that you are King John. Explain to a visiting foreign king the reasons for your behaviour towards the English people.

6. WHY WAS MAGNA CARTA ISSUED IN 1215?

By 1215, the situation in England was so bad that groups of *barons* began to meet together to discuss how they could stop the most harmful aspects of John's rule. They decided to draw up a list of demands to give to John. When John refused to listen to the *barons*, they rose in *rebellion* against him and captured London. John realised that it would be difficult to defeat the rebels, and agreed to meet them to discuss peace in June 1215.



Image: A baron attacking a king [British Library MS Royal 10 EIV, f. 85v, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=29506>]

John and the rebels met at Runnymede, a meadow next to the River Thames, in June 1215. It was here that a great *charter* was drawn up. This *charter* later became known as *Magna Carta*, which means 'Great *Charter*' in Latin. It contained a long list of rights that King John granted to all *free men and women*. John promised to:

- ❖ protect the rights of the English Church
- ❖ protect the *widows* and children of dead *barons*
- ❖ rule more fairly
- ❖ take less money from his subjects
- ❖ remove his most unpopular officials
- ❖ return all *hostages*
- ❖ expel all foreign *mercenary soldiers* in his army from the kingdom

One of the most important promises that King John made in *Magna Carta* was that no *free man* was to be arrested or imprisoned without a fair trial.

Unfortunately for the *barons*, King John failed to keep to the terms of *Magna Carta*. He wrote to Pope Innocent III, and the pope said that

John did not have to observe *Magna Carta*. By the time that the *barons* heard this, war had broken out again in England. When King John died in October 1216, more than half of his kingdom was in the hands of the rebel *barons*.

To think about

1. What do you think the rebel barons hoped Magna Carta would achieve?
2. Why do you think King John did not want to observe the terms of Magna Carta?

Did you know that...?

1. ***Four original copies of the 1215 Magna Carta survive today – two are in the British Library, one belongs to Lincoln Cathedral and another one to Salisbury Cathedral.***
2. ***Magna Carta was not signed by King John. Instead, the king attached his great seal to the document to show it had been written in his name.***



Image: A drawing of King Henry III [British Library MS Royal 14 CVII, f. 9, available at <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=48013>]

On John's death, his nine-year-old son Henry came to the throne as King Henry III. The English *bishops* and some loyal *barons* supported

the young boy king. Together they gradually defeated the rebels, so that peace finally returned to England, but *Magna Carta* was not forgotten. New copies of *Magna Carta* were drawn up in the reigns of King Henry III (died 1272) and King Edward I (died 1307). Each time this happened, *Magna Carta* was read out in the local courts and churches. It was translated from Latin (the language used for royal *charters*) into French (the language spoken by *barons* in England after 1066) and into English (the language spoken by the *peasants* and other ordinary people). This meant that many people heard and learned about the important rights that it contained. *Magna Carta* soon became a very famous document. It became so well known that it people continued to refer back to it to protect their own rights against later rulers and governments.

What was a *Charter*?

A *charter* was a type of document that was used to grant people lands, rights, government positions, and privileges. King John and earlier English kings had granted men and women *charters*, saying that they had given them certain rights. They had also granted similar *charters* to towns that gave townsmen rights over local trade and over local matters. *Magna Carta* was an important *charter* of *liberties* because King John granted it to all *free people* in England.

Hundreds of royal *charters* that were granted by King John survive to this day. They were written on parchment. Parchment was a special material for writing on that was made from sheep's skin. Like *Magna Carta*, royal *charters* had the king's great *seal* attached to them. His great *seal* was a round disc made from coloured beeswax. On the front of the great *seal* was a picture of King John, wearing his crown and sitting on his throne. On the back of the *seal* was a picture of the king dressed as a *knight* and riding a horse.

ACTIVITY

- Split into small groups and draw up your own Magna Carta for 2015. What do you want to include and why?

OR

- Draw your own timeline of the events that led to Magna Carta.

OR

- Either draw a comic strip or design a board game based on the information in this learning pack around the events that led to Magna Carta.

7. GLOSSARY (WORD BANK)

Use this glossary to find out the meanings of words in this pack.

Allies

People who cooperate with one another or who help one another by working together

Baron

An important nobleman. A baron was a person of high rank in society.

Bishop

A senior clergyman within the Catholic Church.

Century

A period of time lasting one hundred years.

Charter

A type of document that was used to grant people lands, rights, government positions, and privileges.

Chronicle

A written record of events.

Crusades

Religious wars, usually fought by Christians against non-Christians in the Holy Land (modern Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan).

Duchy

A territory ruled by a person who has the title of duke.

Estates

The lands held by people of high rank in society, such as knights and barons.

Free men and women / Free people

Men and women who were not serfs. Serfs were peasants who were expected to labour in their lords' fields. Serfs were usually tied to working on a particular manor or estate for their lives. Roughly half of England's peasants were serfs.

Homage

A promise of loyalty to a king or lord by a person who held land from him as a tenant.

Hostage

A person taken prisoner.

Interdict

A sentence imposed by the Catholic Church on a person or place, forbidding the performance of religious and other services by churchmen.

Knight

An armed warrior who fought on horseback.

Liberties

Rights or privileges.

Magna Carta

A charter of liberties granted by King John to the English people. *Magna Carta* is Latin for Great Charter.

Mercenary soldiers

A professional soldier hired to serve in the royal army.

Middle Ages

The name given to the period in European history from AD 400 to AD 1500.

Monk

A man who lived in a Christian religious community (a monastery) and dedicated his life to serving God.

Peasant

A person of low status who lived in the countryside. Peasants usually worked as agricultural labourers. Peasants were usually under the control of a baron or knight who acted as their lord.

Priest

A man of the Catholic Church who performed religious services.

Rebellion

The act of resisting a king by going to war against him.

Scholar at a cathedral school

A highly educated person.

Seal

A piece of beeswax, or other material, with a design stamped onto it that was attached to a document to show the document was genuine.

Sheriff

The chief officer of the king in a county.

Widow

A married woman whose husband had died.