

## **How did a peace treaty from 1215 forge the freedoms of 2015?**

### **A broken peace**

The agreement between King John and his barons in 1215 averted full scale civil war in England but not for long.

Just six weeks after setting his seal to Magna Carta, John effectively ripped it up. This time there really was war as the desperate barons turned to John's enemy, Prince Louis of France, to aid their cause and invade.

After several months of war John was killed – not by his enemies but by dysentery.

His nine-year-old son Henry ascended to the throne and the country had a chance to start again. And what did the boy King and his advisors turn to? Magna Carta.

The contents of the charter formed the basis for a new agreement but now it wasn't a compromise forced on an unwilling King, instead it was a political manifesto offered voluntarily by a new, apparently more well-meaning, crown.

When peace was finally secured in 1217, the charter was issued again.

The powerful barons, whose support the young Henry needed, were guaranteed their rights under law in return for their loyalty to the crown.

In 1225, when the King turned 18, he reissued Magna Carta again and he continued to do so, time and again throughout his reign whenever there was a moment of political crisis. Each time he did so – the charter became more famous.

Over the years, the detail in the clauses changed but the fundamental principles of the document grew in importance. The charter epitomized the English people's right to be treated equally under the law.

Of course – this was still the Middle Ages. Even the final version of Magna Carta – confirmed in 1300 - gave freedoms and rights to a limited number of the leading men in the land. But its ideas would snowball and be reinterpreted time and again during the centuries that followed.

Eventually, it wasn't just warlord barons and the super-wealthy whose interests were protected by Magna Carta, it was everyone. So 800 years on, that's why it still matters.

Magna Carta – a broken peace treaty from the thirteenth century –was the first big step along the path to establishing the rights that every free person in the world today should cherish and protect.

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