

Magna Carta:

Public Commemoration, Celebration, and Meaning,

1915- 2015

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I Steven Hugh John Franklin hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.

Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Steven Franklin

Date: 21 October 2020

In Memoriam

Nanny B and Nan P

&

Professor Justin Champion

The Skyward bound 'floppy hat' will be tossed in memory of you all

xxx

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Abstract

This thesis explores the public commemoration and celebration of Magna Carta within Britain during the period of 1915-2015. Sealed in 1215 by King John at Runnymede, Magna Carta was a contemporary failure, annulled almost as soon as the wax of the seal had set. Against the odds, the charter survived, transitioning from a document of revolution to one of good governance and kingship. Over the centuries, the charter has become synonymous with notions of individual liberty and trial by jury, acting as an icon and defender of these values in Britain, across the commonwealth, and in former colonies like America. During this legacy, Magna Carta has displayed a protean quality, equally adept at supporting the arguments of the establishment as it is radicals and reformers. From the position of the twenty-first century, Magna Carta holds a prominent position in preconceived formulations and understandings of British liberty and national identity, simultaneously providing many western democracies with a foundation on which to legitimise principles such as the 'rule of law'.

This thesis provides an analysis of the legacy of Magna Carta in Britain throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, bookended by the 700th and 800th anniversary of the charter. Unlike previous work, this thesis' methodology is informed by theories of public history, particularly those tied to commemoration, memory, and heritage. It shifts the focus of the historical analysis towards both the reception of the charter and how it has been publicly celebrated. This thesis argues that the memory of Magna Carta is best described and understood as a palimpsest: the layering of successive interpretations, arguing Magna Carta has been framed to suit contemporary needs and function. Alongside these developments in interpretation, society's relationship to and use of the past has not been static. In this context, ideas associated with commemorative practice and the planning of historical anniversaries has also changed. As a result, Magna Carta commemorations provide a suitable case study in which changing attitudes towards the past, heritage, and public history can be traced.

Abbreviations

ABA	American Bar Association
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CRES	Records of The Crown Estate and predecessors
CSC	Community Services Committee
FO	Foreign Office
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MCCC	Magna Carta Commemoration Committee
MCS	Magna Carta Society
MCT	Magna Carta Trust
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary National Biography
PREM	Prime Minister's Office
RBC	Runnymede Borough Council
RMCL	Runnymede Magna Carta Legacy
SCC	Surrey County Council
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

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Introduction

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the British Library is convened every March. Following the conclusion of the meeting's formalities, members enjoy an organised public lecture, courtesy of the Friends of the British Library. In this regard, the evening of the 9th March 2015 was no different. Those present looked forward to hearing Lord Sumption deliver his lecture, *Magna Carta Then and Now*. The timing and topic of the talk was unsurprising. 2015 marked the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and the opening of the British Library's eagerly anticipated exhibition, *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy*, was just days away.

There could hardly have been a more suitable speaker for the evening. Recognised as one of the leading lawyers in Britain, Lord Sumption was appointed a Justice of the UK Supreme Court in January 2012, a position to which he was somewhat unusually appointed directly from the Bar, not having ever served as a full-time judge. Importantly, moreover, Lord Sumption is also a distinguished medieval historian, who has continued to publish historiographical commentary while also serving as a lawyer and judge. Within the academy, his magisterial five-volume study of the Hundred Years War, the first instalment of which was published in 1990, has been widely praised for its academic detail and is viewed as the definitive text on the conflict. Given both his legal and academic expertise, one would be hard pressed to think of someone better placed to deliver a talk on Magna Carta in its anniversary year. The stage was thus set for an informed and informative talk.

In line with commemorative expectation, this was not a moment for serious critical reflection, but rather one for triumphant celebration of an event and a legacy that retains considerable cultural and political resonance. Those in attendance undoubtedly expected a highly romanticised account of the history and legacy of Magna Carta. The speaker might, for example, reaffirm the presence of Gordon Brown's 'golden thread' that runs throughout British history connecting the events of 1215 to the Bill of Rights of 1689, numerous Parliamentary Reform Acts of the nineteenth century, and ending with the modern legal freedoms we enjoy

today.¹ This would be the widely-accepted 'island story' of progress and triumph, featuring individual acts of bravery and stories of common men and women, defying the odds in the face of tyranny in their collective quest for freedom and equality. All these achievements traced back to that central moment at Runnymede and the sealing of Magna Carta in 1215, and there was little to suggest Lord Sumption would deviate too far from this narrative.

'It is impossible to say anything new about Magna Carta, unless you say something mad' was his opening line, signalling the direction of his talk.² He continued by informing his audience that they were not to expect 'any startling new line from me, least of all in a centenary year in which something portentous is said about Magna Carta every day.'³ Finding his natural rhythm, and with the skill of a surgeon, he proceeded to clinically dissect the myth of Magna Carta. This was not the rip-roaring celebration of Magna Carta that those attending had anticipated. In conclusion, he suggested that the Great Charter was not 'a sacred text' and should not be revered as the 'foundation of all our laws and liberties'.⁴ Such claims, he recommended, were little more than 'high-minded tosh'.⁵

Before finishing and taking his seat, he directed one final question to his audience: 'do we really need the force of a myth to sustain our belief in democracy?'⁶ Unsure of how to process what they had just witnessed, an invitation to ask questions was greeted with motionless silence from audience members who were unsure of what they had just witnessed.⁷ Eventually, one man summoned the courage to raise his hand, asking Lord Sumption for his views on the Magna Carta exhibition and its framing of the Great Charter as a proto-democratic

¹ Gordon Brown, 'Full Text of Gordon Brown's Speech, *The Guardian*, 27 February 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/feb/27/immigrationpolicy.race>, accessed 11 June 2019.

² Lord Sumption, 'Magna Carta Then and Now: Address to the Friends of the British Library,' 9 March 2015, <https://www.supremecourt.uk/docs/speech-150309.pdf>, accessed 18 May 2019.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wendell Steavenson, 'Jonathan Sumption: The Brain of Britain,' *The Guardian*, 6 August 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/aug/06/jonathan-sumption-brain-of-britain>, accessed 18 May 2019.

document. Having spent the duration of his talk dismantling this view, Sumption politely demurred.⁸

Since its sealing in 1215, Magna Carta has been the central character in a series of discreet historical moments such as this. In this particular moment, Lord Sumption chose to deliver a critical account, sacrificing the meaning of Magna Carta on the altar of modern legal revisionism. However, this vignette illustrates three central themes, each of which will be addressed in this introduction. Firstly, a key feature of Sumption's talk was his explicit reference to the development and presence of multiple interpretations and readings of Magna Carta and its legacy, raising the question of the charter's historiography, which will be tackled in the first section. Attention will be given to Magna Carta's medieval origins, looking at how the moment of 15th June 1215 has been framed within academic and legal thinking and how this has developed over time. This section will also look to engage with the 'myth' of Magna Carta, locating its historic emergence and unpicking the basis on which it was founded. Secondly, and importantly, Lord Sumption's talk was organised to coincide with Magna Carta's 800th anniversary; it was one of many commemorative events that took place during 2015 and, as such, will be used as a point of entry into discussions about the cultural purpose of commemoration. In doing so, the second section will consider round-numbered anniversaries and commemoration in the broadest sense, linking these to wider issues of memory and its relationship to history. Thirdly, Lord Sumption was strident in his assertion that there was nothing new that could be said about Magna Carta, suggesting that those who tried were mad. Some would argue, that the implication of his claim suggests that the history of Magna Carta has all but ended. The final section of the introduction will be devoted to challenging this assertion, outlining a methodological approach before implementing this within the framework of this study. Above all, this section will provide this thesis' central arguments, outlining its contribution to both the history of Magna Carta and academic scholarship more broadly.

⁸ Ibid.

1215 to the Myth of Magna Carta: Evolving Interpretations of Magna Carta

Because it was intended to make peace and led only to war, Magna Carta as issued by King John in 1215 remains a shadowy thing, of greater significance in spirit than in its practical application. Many of its clauses were still-born from the moment of its issue.⁹

The Magna Carta of 1215 was an abject failure. The fact that that both this moment and document continue to exert such cultural influence is perhaps one of the greatest ironies of English history. Tired of King John's treacherous and cruel ways, his Barons revolted and forced him to accept and seal a document known as Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215. The legal force of the charter lasted for just eight weeks before Pope Innocent III annulled the document.¹⁰ The resulting Papal Bull declared Magna Carta to be 'shameful, demeaning, illegal, and unjust', declaring the charter to be 'null and void of all validity for ever.'¹¹ In Nicholas Vincent's words, Magna Carta was a 'failed peace treaty' and, following its annulment by both the King and Pope, it was 'consigned to oblivion . . . so much scrap parchment for rats to nibble at.'¹² The annulment of the charter saw the resumption of conflict between the King and his Barons.

The story of Magna Carta could have so easily ended at this point, but this was not to be case. The death of King John in October 1216 would provide a moment of fortune that ensured Magna Carta would become much more than a mere footnote in English history. John's death significantly changed the dynamics of the conflict because, as David Carpenter notes, the Barons were no longer fighting the much-hated John, but instead his innocent son, Henry.¹³ At the point of succession, there was little certainty over the direction of the Barons' allegiances: would they back the boy-king Henry or continue to provide their support to the French Prince

⁹ Nicholas Vincent, *Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72.

¹⁰ 'The Papal Bull Annuling Magna Carta,' British Library, accessed 10 September 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-papal-bull-annuling-magna-carta>.

¹¹ 'Shameful and Demeaning: The Annulment of Magna Carta,' British Library, 24 August 2015, accessed 10 September 2019. <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2015/08/shameful-and-demeaning-the-annulment-of-magna-carta.html>.

¹² Vincent, *Magna Carta*, 81.

¹³ David Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 407. See also Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, *1215: The Year of Magna Carta* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), 271.

Louis. Henry's cause received a further boost when the Earl of Pembroke, William Marshall, reluctantly agreed to assume the role of Regent. Henry was crowned in October 1216 and under the guidance of Marshall and the papal legate, Guala Bicchieri, the decision was taken to accept Magna Carta and re-issue it.

On the 12th November 1216, the 'Charter of Liberties' was thus re-issued under the new king's name, carrying the seals of both Marshall and Bicchieri. Described by Carpenter as a 'momentous moment, which changed the course of history', the acceptance of the charter and its terms paved the way for its long-term survival.¹⁴ Importantly, however, the context and function of the 1216 re-issue differed tremendously from the charter originally sealed at Runnymede. 'What had begun life as a manifesto of rebellion', Geoffrey Hindley observes, 'was being transmuted into a government policy document.'¹⁵ There is no way of knowing what the true motivations for the charter's re-issue were, but scholars such as Danny Danziger and John Gillingham have suggested that re-issued charter was a clever piece of propaganda.¹⁶ If the new King was willing to govern by the terms set out in Magna Carta, what was the point of the conflict continuing? The Baron's grievances were now out-dated and so too was the need for the fighting to continue. In this one move, Magna Carta had been transformed from a radical charter, seeking to limit the monarch's power, to a manifesto of good governance. The long-term future of Magna Carta had therefore been ensured. The charter would be re-issued now fewer than three times over the course of the century that followed, in 1217, 1225 and 1297, under similar circumstances. In these re-issues, the charter's size would diminish. Clauses that were pertinent to Runnymede in 1215 were either removed or updated and the 1217 issue of the 'Charter of the Forrest' captured all of the issues relating to land ownership and care of the natural world. Importantly, the 1297 issue of the Magna Carta was added to the statute books and became part of English law.

¹⁴ Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 408.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Hindley, *The Magna Carta: The Story of the Origins of Liberty* (London: Constable and Robinson Ltd, 2008), 252. For similar views, see Vincent, *Magna Carta*, 82.

¹⁶ Danziger and Gillingham, *1215*, 271.

Traditional accounts of the charter's history point to it diminishing in importance and function over the course of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹⁷ Yet Magna Carta made a bold return to the forefront of political and legal debate in the seventeenth century under the direction of the lawyer and jurist, Sir Edward Coke. As Justin Champion and others have commented, Coke viewed Magna Carta as an expression of the ancient constitution and a declaration of the fundamental laws of England.¹⁸ It was within the second part of the *Institutes* that Coke provided his commentary on Magna Carta.¹⁹ Scholars are unanimously agreed that Coke's interpretation of the charter fused 'seventeenth century ambitions into the medieval document', helping to create a powerful argument and symbol of defence of the freeborn Englishman.²⁰ His ideas would collide with the policies and methods of the Stuart government on more than one occasion.²¹ Indeed, while Coke was on his death bed, Charles I would send for his papers to be confiscated in an effort to minimise the impact of his work. In 1642, these papers would be published by order of Parliament and would play a central role in the ideological battles between King and Parliament during the English Civil Wars. The Cokean interpretation of the charter thus proved to be extremely powerful and pervasive, and Parliament's victory over Charles would only strengthen this interpretation of Magna Carta further.

In Britain, radical groups such as the Levellers would be the immediate inheritors of this tradition, followed later by the Whigs of the Glorious Revolution, reformers such as John Wilkes (1725-1797) and Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844), and the Chartists of the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ Anne Pallister, *Magna Carta: The Heritage of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2.

¹⁸ Justin Champion, "From *Liber Homo* to 'Free-born Englishman': How Magna Carta became a 'Liberty Document', 1508-1760s" in *Magna Carta: The Foundation of Freedom 1215-2015*, Ed. Nicholas Vincent, (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2015), 106; Anne Pallister, *Magna Carta: The Heritage of Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3; Geoffrey Hindley, *The Magna Carta: The Story of the Origins of Liberty*, (London: Constable and Robinson Ltd, 2008), 280.

¹⁹ Gerald P. Bodet, 'Sir Edward Coke's Third Institutes: A Primer for Treason Defendants,' *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 20, no. 4 (1970): 469-477.

²⁰ Justin Champion, 'From *Liber Homo* to "Free-born Englishman": How Magna Carta became a "Liberty Document", 1508-1760s,' in *Magna Carta: The Foundation of Freedom 1215-2015*, ed. Nicholas Vincent (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2015), 113.

²¹ For a detailed exposition of the Cokean interpretation of Magna Carta see George Garnett, 'Sir Edward Coke's Resurrection of Magna Carta' in *Magna Carta: History, Context, and Influence*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (London: School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2018), 51-60.

The Cokean interpretation of Magna Carta would also make its way across the Atlantic Ocean to the American colonies. In the period just before the American Revolution, colonists would argue that they too were protected by the rights and liberties associated with freeborn Englishmen, often citing the wording of their founding charters which closely mimicked that of Magna Carta.²² Viewed along this trajectory of inheritance, Magna Carta, as Anne Pallister has argued, has been 'a rallying cry and protective bulwark in every crisis which threatened to endanger the national liberties.'²³ Pallister eloquently summarises:

In origin a limited document relating to certain specific feudal rights, the Charter gradually came to be revered as the source of a vast conglomeration of ancient rights and liberties which were regarded as the 'birthright' of the English people. If, as Sir Herbert Butterfield has suggested, the theme of English political history is the story of our liberty, then the whole of English political history is also the story of the unfolding of the 'myth' of Magna Carta.²⁴

The Myth of Magna Carta

References to and the deployment of Magna Carta in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were commonplace, but as Miles Taylor argues, despite the frequency with which it was invoked, commentators were ignorant of the precise facts relating to its sealing.²⁵ 'The popular understanding of Magna Carta', Taylor writes, 'was bound up with a quaint view of the olden time, in which a despotic monarch (not unlike the Hanoverian George) and a noble aristocracy (not unlike the Whig party in the age of reform) vied to establish representative government.'²⁶ The dominant understandings of the charter during this period were founded on much earlier interpretations of lawyers such as Sir Edward Coke, William Blackstone, and Daines Barrington. The history of the charter and its development over the course of the thirteenth century was largely ignored. The main thrust of attention was directed towards some of the most famous

²² Harry T. Dickinson, 'Magna Carta in the American Revolution' in *Magna Carta: History, Context, and Influence*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (London: School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2018), 80.

²³ William S. McKechnie cited in Pallister, *Magna Carta*, 3.

²⁴ Pallister, *Magna Carta*, 3.

²⁵ Miles Taylor, 'Magna Carta in the Nineteenth Century,' in *Magna Carta: The Foundation of Freedom 1215-2015*, ed. Nicholas Vincent (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2015), 141.

²⁶ Ibid.

clauses, such as 39, which opens with the words ‘no free man ...’, in the belief these laid the foundations for concepts such as trial by jury and no taxation without representation.²⁷ These simplistic understandings of Magna Carta, which in part helped to perpetuate its myth, would remain unchallenged until the final decades of the nineteenth century when William Stubbs’ three volume study of the *Constitutional History of England* would begin to scrape away at this myth.²⁸ The 1905 publication of William Sharp McKechnie’s 600-page monograph entitled, *Magna Carta: A Commentary of the Great Charter of King John with an Historical Introduction*, would be the first major study that consciously sought to challenge the Magna Carta myth.²⁹

In 1904 - a year before the publication of McKechnie’s work - Edward Jenks, a jurist and theorist of English law, exploited his editorship of *The Independent Review* to print an article entitled “The Myth of Magna Carta.”³⁰ Jenks provided a strident re-appraisal of the charter’s history and sought to expose the ‘false glamour which invests Magna Carta.’³¹ Jenks was a distinguished legal scholar, holding positions at the University of Melbourne, Manchester, and Oxford. Alongside his academic work, he also sought to improve the public’s knowledge of the law, helping to establish the Society for Public Teachers of Law and serving as secretary from 1909 to 1919. As Tony Honoré suggests, Jenks should be remembered for his ‘sustained attempts to spread a knowledge of English law and its history.’³² In his article on Magna Carta, Jenks challenged the then-dominant interpretation of the charter provided by Stubbs. According to Richard H. Helmholz, Jenks was reacting against the ‘fulsome praise’ that Stubbs had bestowed on the Charter, claiming his revisionism was an urgent ‘public duty’.³³ His article offered three overarching conclusions drawn from his understandings of the historical reception of both the tradition and the text. Firstly, he asserted that Magna Carta was not the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England: In its Origin and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880).

²⁹ William Sharp McKechnie, *Magna Carta: A Commentary on the Charter of King John with an Historical Introduction* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1905).

³⁰ Edward Jenks, ‘The Myth of Magna Carta,’ *Independent Review* 4 (1904): 260.

³¹ Ibid, 268.

³² Tony Honoré, ‘Jenks, Edward (1861–1939), jurist and writer,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34179>, accessed 14 September 2019.

³³ Richard H. Helmholz, ‘The Myth of Magna Carta Revisited,’ *North Carolina Law Review* 94 (2016): 1476.

work of a 'nation' or 'people'; secondly, the Great Charter was not a landmark of constitutional progress; thirdly, the charter actually became an obstacle and stumbling block for generations that followed.³⁴

For Jenks, the events of 1215 were nothing more than a 'hollow truce ... when a conspiracy of self-seeking and reckless barons wrung from a worthless monarch the concession of feudal privileges, which he never for one moment intended to observe.'³⁵ Jenks argued the historical truth, as he saw it, had been eclipsed by the 'real author of the Myth of Magna Carta', Sir Edward Coke, the seventeenth century lawyer and jurist.³⁶ In summarising Coke's impact on the legacy of Magna Carta, Jenks concluded:

It is tribute to Coke's character and ability, that he imposed his ingenious but unsound historical doctrines, not only on an uncritical age, but on succeeding ages which deem themselves critical. It is not, perhaps, altogether a testimony to the industry and acumen of a generation which might well be impartial in such matters, the legend invented by Coke has been so long allowed to pass current as the gospel of history.³⁷

For Jenks, the vision of Magna Carta as a guarantor of the rights of 'ordinary' Englishmen was little more than a product of seventeenth century invention. Indeed, he argued that the charter of 1215 was not a statement of fundamental liberties, but instead a document designed to protect baronial interests, safeguarding their positions of privilege and power.³⁸ Many of the criticisms of Magna Carta put forward by Jenks were supported and confirmed by McKechnie's later publication. The most obvious response to Jenks' article came in 1947 with the publication of Max Radin's article, *The Myth of Magna Carta*.³⁹ Borrowing Jenks original title, Radin sought to argue against Jenks' suggestion that 1215 had little other effect than 'the hardening of the privileges of some hundred petty kings.'⁴⁰ Radin's article serves to act as the antidote to this incorrect interpretation of the charter and its history, looking to illuminate the fortunes of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jenks, 'The Myth of Magna Carta,' 272.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 273.

³⁸ Helmholz, 'The Myth of Magna Carta Revisited,' 1477.

³⁹ Max Radin, 'The Myth of Magna Carta,' *Harvard Law Review* 60, no.7 (1947): 1060-1901.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1062.

Magna Carta in the 'law and life of the Englishman since that fateful – at any rate, long-considered fateful – afternoon in June'.⁴¹

The 750th anniversary of Magna Carta in 1965 saw the publication of James Clark Holt's monograph, *Magna Carta*. In reviewing Holt's work, the medieval historian, Helen Cam, would offer her praise, describing the work as a 'masterly setting of the Great Charter and its place in English history'.⁴² Holt's monograph was the first major revision of Magna Carta scholarship since the publication of McKechnie's work in 1905, incorporating much of the scholarship that had emerged in the intervening sixty years. As Holt himself noted, 'the approach of the work is different from McKechnie's, for it is the work of a historian not a lawyer. Its object is to present the Charter in a context of the politics, administration and political thought of England and Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.'⁴³ In this way, Holt was less concerned with the legal context of the charter as demonstrated by the lack of a clause by clause commentary. Like Jenks, Holt would identify the importance of Magna Carta's connection to ideas of English law, suggesting these were the source of its symbolic status and acknowledging these ideas influenced both the English Civil War and American Revolution.⁴⁴ Holt, however, introduced the idea that the history of the charter could be characterised as the 'history of an argument':

The history of Magna Carta is the history not only of a document but also of an argument. The history of the document is a history of repeated re-interpretation. But the history of the argument is a history of a continuous element of political thinking. In this light there is no inherent reason why an assertion of law originally conceived in aristocratic interests should not be applied on a wider scale. If we can seek truth in Aristotle, we can seek it also in Magna Carta. The class and political interests involved in each stage of the Charter's history are one aspect of it; the principles it asserted, implied or assumed are another.⁴⁵

Holt's belief that Magna Carta could be viewed as the history of continual re-interpretation or a continuous element of political thinking provided a new way of thinking about the charter and

⁴¹ Ibid, 1062-63.

⁴² Helen Cam, 'Magna Carta,' review of *Magna Carta*, by J. C. Holt, *Political Science Quarterly* 81 (June 1966): 305.

⁴³ James Clark Holt, *Magna Carta*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xi.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 2-19.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 18.

its legacy. Holt's book then, amongst other things, was an evocative account that framed the story of Magna Carta as one of political thought in action.

Since the publication of Holt's work, there has been a steady stream of new works produced by historians who have engaged with the history and legacy of Magna Carta.⁴⁶ Each publication has, however, served as a synthesis of the current historiography rather than offering any startling new interpretations of the charter. Interpretations of the charter tend to fall somewhere between either the 'lawyers' view' or the 'historians view'.⁴⁷ The lawyers' view frames the charter as a foundational moment in legal history. A moment of seeding in which a legal tradition emerged and has continued to evolve. The lawyers' view of the charter is perhaps best captured in the words of Lord Judge. Speaking in front of lawyers of the Middle Temple on 19th February 2015, he declared: 'For me, it remains a living document. The banner, the symbol, of our liberties.'⁴⁸ Judge's co-authored book, *Magna Carta Uncovered*, provides a contemporary example of this view being very much alive.⁴⁹ At its most extreme, the historians' view reduces Magna Carta to the status of perdurable myth. David Starkey articulates this interpretation in his 2015 book *Magna Carta: The True Story Behind the Charter*.⁵⁰ Most historians, however, adopt a more cautious approach, noting that 1215 was the first moment in English history in which a monarch had been forced to submit to the will of his subjects, and acknowledging the subsequent effects of later interpretations.⁵¹

⁴⁶ For example see Ralph V. Turner, *Magna Carta* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003); Hindley, *The Magna Carta*; Danziger and Gillingham, *1215*; Claire Breay, *Magna Carta: Manuscripts and Myths* (London: The British Library, 2002).

⁴⁷ Sumption, 'Magna Carta Then and Now'.

⁴⁸ Lord Judge, 'Magna Carta: Luck or Judgement: Speech at Middle Temple,' 19 February 2015, <https://www.middletemple.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/about-us/i-judge-magna-carta.-luck-or-judgment.pdf>, accessed 20 May 2019.

⁴⁹ Anthony Arlidge and Igor Judge, *Magna Carta Uncovered* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015).

⁵⁰ David Starkey, *Magna Carta: The True Story Behind the Charter* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2015).

⁵¹ See: Breay, *Magna Carta*; Vincent, *Magna Carta*; Hindley, *The Magna Carta*.

Magna Carta: Event or Document?

The above summary of the historiographical and legal interpretations of the charter leads us to one particularly vexed question. Is Magna Carta an event or a document? Speaking to the Selden Society in 1965, the 750th anniversary year of Magna Carta, Helen Cam posed the same provocative question in her lecture, *Magna Carta – Event or Document?*⁵² In essence, she asked her audience to consider whether the anniversary celebrations were commemorating the moment of 15th June 1215 or the document it produced?⁵³ Her definitive conclusion was:

If I may return to my original query, is it an event or a document that we are celebrating? The answer must be, it is both. When we honour Magna Carta today we call to mind the circumstances in which it was first framed and the circumstances in which [it] kept the memory of Runnymede alive; we recall the age-long association of the document with resistance to undue authority, with the protection of individual liberty, and with the preservation of traditions of law and custom older than the document itself, and we recognise the decisive importance of the revivification of that association in the seventeenth century.⁵⁴

Magna Carta is thus both historical event and document. An extended consideration of its historiographical development serves to emphasise this point. Its symbolism and cultural status are derived from both the physical document and the way in which the moment it was sealed by King John has been imagined and reconstructed over the centuries. Writing in the 800th anniversary year of the charter, Justin Champion adopted a similar line of thought to Cam, arguing ‘the history of the reception of the Magna Carta has been driven by a series of intimately connected ‘moments’, where drawing on pre-existing traditions, new voices and communities have deployed the exemplar in the name of justice, freedom, equality and the rule of law’.⁵⁵ In 1215 a powerful ‘tradition was seeded’ in which the written text, event, and associated ideas would fuel ‘significant’ and ‘powerful’ interpretations ‘by and for later generations’.⁵⁶ The written text of the charter, the historical event of its composition and

⁵² Helen Cam, *Magna Carta – Event or Document* (London: B. Quartich, 1965).

⁵³ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁵ Justin Champion, ‘Magna Carta after 800 Years: From Liber Homo to Modern Freedom,’ Online Library of Liberty, last modified 22 December 2015, accessed 29 May 2019, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/libertymatters-mc>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

sealing, and, crucially, interpretations of its ideas have had divergent trajectories of practical, political, and public usage.

However, these ideas could be built upon further. Magna Carta is a written text, artefact, historical event, and a series of subsequent representations. The text and language of the charter evolved, undergoing a process of reissue, repurposing, and reinterpretation in 1216, 1217, 1225 and 1297.⁵⁷ Each copy of the charter has a unique archival history. The moment of 1215 and the context surrounding it has been the subject of historical, political, legal, and public revision and, following Cam's argument to its logical conclusion, all subsequent interpretations of the charter feed back into the term, Magna Carta, imbuing it with added meaning. In summary, Magna Carta is thus a compilation of material, textual and performative moments, the accumulation of which shape and preserve individual, social and cultural understandings of the charter.

Magna Carta is thus much more than a thirteenth-century charter, dealing with the minutiae of feudal society. The charter's sealing is a central moment of foundation in which narratives of English identity have been constructed and continue to be constructed. As we have seen, it can be synonymous with ideas of liberty, individual rights, and freedom under the rule of law. It has held and continues to hold a place within the individual and collective imagination, subject to repeated reimagining, reinterpretation, and invocation. The moment of 1215 is both central to the story and at the same time a hangover from of an archaic age. The text, though important, to most is now unreadable and alien. And yet nestled amongst issues relating to matters of feudal society remain clauses thirty-nine and forty:

39. No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any other way ruined, nor will we go against him or send against him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.

⁵⁷ See: Breay, *Magna Carta*, 44; Sir Ivor Jennings, *Magna Carta and its Influence in the World Today* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965), 10; Holt, *Magna Carta*, 378-405; Edward Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2009).

40. We will not sell, or deny, or delay right or justice to anyone.⁵⁸

Unlike many of the other clauses, these two assertions offer more abstract statements of principle and are not tied to thirteenth century society. As Claire Breay notes, in 1215 clauses thirty-nine and forty were not given any special emphasis and were just two grievances against the king, featuring in a list of sixty-three.⁵⁹ But these clauses were abstract enough in their composition to allow for a process of reinterpretation.

In response to Champion's lead essay, David Womersley, Professor of English Literature at Oxford, suggested that Magna Carta is a 'wrong map'. His statement was founded on an idea encapsulated in Miroslav Holub's poem, *Brief Reflection on Maps*, in which a group of soldiers get lost in the Alps and navigate their way back to their comrades. Upon arriving back at their camp, they notice that the map they were using was of the Pyrenees and not of the Alps. However, it was the solace provided by having the map that encouraged the soldiers to keep going and not give up. In this sense, Magna Carta is a 'wrong map' in so far as academic understandings of the charter seek to chip away at the charter's reputation, but in applying this critique they only serve to expose its inspirational power.⁶⁰ Womersley's approach serves to illustrate the enduring power of the charter by suggesting that one does not need to know its exact wording or the context of its sealing to invoke its authority and legitimacy. Importantly, moreover, attempts to scrape away at the mythic tradition it seeded invariably serve to reinforce its position as a cultural icon and source of inspiration.

As we have seen, Magna Carta and its legacy have been the subject of considerable historiographical, legal, and political interpretation. The above survey of this historiography is not exhaustive and, on account of this thesis' disciplinary approach, has attempted to highlight the development of historical thought over that of law and politics. That said, one cannot write

⁵⁸ 'The 1215 Magna Carta: Clause 39,' The Magna Carta Project, trans. H. Summerson et al., http://magnacartaresearch.org/read/magna_carta_1215/Clause_39, accessed 30 September 2019; 'The 1215 Magna Carta: Clause 40,' The Magna Carta Project, trans. H. Summerson et al., http://magnacartaresearch.org/read/magna_carta_1215/Clause_40, accessed 30 September 2019.

⁵⁹ Breay, *Magna Carta*, 29.

⁶⁰ David Womersley, 'Magna Carta in 2015,' Online Library of Liberty, last modified 22 December 2015, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/libertymatters-mc>, accessed 27 September 2019.

a purely historical overview without incorporating or acknowledging the influence of legal and political interpretations. Magna Carta as sealed in 1215 was a failure and many scholars would support this interpretation. As a moment in time and event, however, it captured, and continues to capture, the public imagination. The King had never been forced to concede power and submit to the will of his subjects. It would be the powerful image of John, sealing the charter at the behest of his revolting barons, that would resonate across the centuries and serve as the inspiration for reinterpretation at particular 'Magna Carta moments.' However, Magna Carta is more than just document and event, it is the product of the merging of event, document, reinterpretation, and commemoration.

Commemorative practice and Round-Numbered Anniversaries

The second idea to be captured in Lord Sumption's address is implied, rather than explicitly stated, and relates to the cultural importance and historical significance of anniversary moments and commemorative events. Magna Carta is a prime example of a moment from the past that is regularly commemorated. Its milestone anniversary in 2015 generated and fuelled an array of commemorative activity throughout the year at the local, national, and international levels. Unlike many moments from history, the charter is also commemorated annually but, when compared to the activity and attention generated during milestone anniversary years, the scale and level of impact is far reduced. In this regard, Magna Carta is arguably unique. It is incredibly rare for a singular historic moment to warrant a whole year of commemorative activity and rarer still for this moment to date from such a distant past. All of this serves to provide a very practical illustration of the charter's cultural importance and historic significance. Unlike Magna Carta, not all events or individuals are commemorated or remembered. Often the individuals and events of the past are lost to the records of history once they recede from living memory. Our propensity to remember specific moments or individuals is never the result of happenstance. It is always the result of a combination of their perceived importance and cultural impact and, as Geoffrey Cubitt suggests, the way they can be 'incorporated into

narratives or organized accounts of the society's or the nation's past'.⁶¹ The above observations introduce a series of ideas that make numerous assumptions, which, in turn, raise multiple questions. Why do individuals or communities remember certain people and events of the past? What is the purpose or function of remembering the past? How do individuals and societies remember? These questions will be used as the framework and primary line of enquiry in the sections that follow. In considering these questions, broader engagement with issues of collective and social memory and their wider relationship to history will also be addressed.

Why do we remember events and individuals from the past?

'The past is never dead: it's not even the past.' This famous line from William Faulkner's novel, *Requiem for a Nun*, has often been quoted or paraphrased, featuring in the speeches of political leaders and the scripts of Hollywood films.⁶² In each case, it has been quoted out of its original context and used to convey a sense of the ever present past. Read on its own, the line proposes that the past is never too far from the present and, in fact, a prominent feature of it. We cannot escape the past, encountering it in some form or another almost daily through the rhetoric of politicians, the media, and the monuments and statues that populate our streets and parks. Historians, such as Paul Connerton, generally agree that the present provides meaning to the past.⁶³ However, this alone does not account for the way in which certain moments, people, and episodes from history manage to extend beyond the limits of living memory to become engrained within both the social and cultural fabric of groups and nations.

In accounting for the process of the transmission of events from living memory to public memory, we first need to revisit the late nineteenth century and the earliest articulations of the

⁶¹ Geoff Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 199.

⁶² William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 73.

⁶³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2. See also Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 201; Jeffrey Olick, 'Genre Memories and Memory Genres: A Dialogical Analysis of May 8, 1945 Commemorations in the Federal Republic of Germany,' *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 3 (June 1999): 381; Bill Schwarz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory,' *Social Forces* 66, no. 2 (December 1982): 376.

concept of collective memory. Sociologists and psychologists, such as Ernest Renan, Emile Durkheim, and Henri-Louis Bergson explored the social functions of memory on both an individual and social level. Historians, however, were largely absent from the development of this area of study, preferring to focus on a writing of history driven by the archival record and a methodology that sought to mimic the perceived strengths of objective scientific rationale. The work of sociologists and psychologists would provide the theoretical foundations for others to continue their theoretical work in what would later become the burgeoning field of memory studies. The French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), would be the chief inheritor of this tradition and be the central figure responsible for advancing this embryonic area of study. As Kerwin Lee Klein argues, Halbwachs provided the discourse on collective memory a theoretical weight that had been missing.⁶⁴ Over the course of his career he would formulate the main ideas that would ultimately underpin the concept of collective memory, demonstrating the social construction of the past in the present.

Across his two major publications, *The Social Frameworks of Collective Memory* and *The Collective Memory*, the second of which was published posthumously, Halbwachs developed several key points with which this study engages. The first idea reflects that expressed by Connerton, the notion that the past serves the need of the present. Serving the need of the present in this case implies that the past can be used – it has a usability. According to Halbwachs, ‘Time is real only insofar as it has content, insofar as it offers events as material for thought.’⁶⁵ For Halbwachs, the materiality of the past was a resource, waiting to be mined and extracted to serve the need of the present. However, this proposition does not entirely account for the way in which certain events and personalities become almost lodged in our cultural DNA. In order to investigate this properly, we need to consider what is meant by the word ‘use’ in this instance. Within this context, ‘use’ can be considered to refer almost explicitly to meaning. For Halbwachs, remembrance is an action of the present and societies or groups

⁶⁴ Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

⁶⁵ Lewis A. Coser, ‘Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945,’ in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

ascribe subsequent meaning(s) to the past from the position of the present.⁶⁶ In his 2007 publication, *History and Memory*, Geoffrey Cubitt echoed Halbwachs' views, arguing:

The significance that is attached to them becomes increasingly symbolic in character, a function less of their precise location in the unfolding sequence of events than of the place that can be given to them in schematic narratives of a society's or nation's history, or of their capacity to embody moral or existential messages that are found meaningful at later moments.⁶⁷

Thinking of the past as a resource of almost limitless potential, waiting for the present to extract the elements required, is a useful metaphor to think about the relationship between the past and the present. Indeed, Halbwachs' assertion that the remembered past serves contemporary needs are quite persuasive, and his suggestion that we ascribe meanings to the past from the position of the present have also largely remained unchallenged and unchanged. The transmission of historic events and personalities from living memory to public memory is thus always the result of contemporary need. However, as Cubitt suggests, their meaning derives from their capacity to embody moral or existential messages that will be found useful at later moments in time.

Halbwachs also contends that memory is socially constructed. At first, this suggestion appears counterintuitive: after all, remembrance is an individual act. Halbwachs did not contest this, but he went on to assert that individual's memory and reconstruction of the past is context specific.⁶⁸ We remember events and episodes that are common to the people of our community, be it national or local or of some other grouping. Memory, when conceived along these lines, shifts from the domain of the individual and moves to a more collective footing. It is these shared memories, drawn from a range of common experiences or moments of a shared past, that Halbwachs defines as 'collective memory.' Although this definition works in theory, however, it is far from unproblematic. Individuals are rarely members of a singular group and instead are associated with multiple social networks. In line with Halbwachs' theory, it stood to

⁶⁶ Schwarz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration,' 374.

⁶⁷ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 213.

⁶⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 53.

reason that the remembered past would differ as the social context changed. This is not to say that individuals forget moments of the past as they move between different groups or networks, but the significance and importance of certain events and personalities of the past will fluctuate in line with the company they are in. Moreover, Halbwachs argued that the same event could be remembered and reconstructed by two different groups in entirely different ways:

The reason psychologists have imagined other theories to explain the localization of memories is that, just as people are members of many different groups at the same time, so the memory of the same fact can be placed within many different frameworks, which result from distinct collective memories.⁶⁹

Given the above, any argument that attempts to assert the presence of one singular collective memory is, in fact, heavily flawed. It is possible for multiple collective memories to exist rather than one singular collective memory, resulting not in one unified collective memory but multiple collective memories.

As Cubitt asserts 'the remembered past is in practice, always multiple and contestable, mutable and elusive.'⁷⁰ The past can be reconstructed and reinterpreted in a multitude of ways. These interpretations of the past can compete, drawing different meanings from the same historical moment. However, if we acknowledge that the past is flexible and open to interpretation, we must also accept that a consequence of this is that it can be abused and used as tool of legitimization. Peter Burke has underlined the importance of adopting a who, what, and why approach when considering the purpose of social memory within society.⁷¹ Alon Confino, meanwhile, has argued that when dealing with 'agents' of memory – the people doing the remembering – it is essential to identify their cultural, social, and political backgrounds.⁷² Critical analysis along these lines helps to prevent the pre-dominance and potential weaponizing of a particular vision of the past.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 52.

⁷⁰ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 242.

⁷¹ Peter Burke, 'History as Social Memory,' in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 107.

⁷² Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,' *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December 1997), 1397.

Halbwachs' thinking, however, stopped short of proposing that the past could be significantly reconstructed or even actively shape the present. As Lewis Coser, Halbwachs' translator and editor, noted 'A society's current perceived needs may impel it to refashion the past, but successive epochs are being kept alive through a common code and a common symbolic canon even amidst contemporary revisions.'⁷³ The past, according to Halbwachs, is preserved in the symbols that embodied it that prevented it from serious alteration. Scholars, such as Bruce Lincoln, have argued against this, contending that the past can be reconstructed and used as a basis to establish social identities: '[T]hrough the repeated evocation of such sentiments via the invocation of select moments from the past that social identities are continually (re)-established and social formations (re)constructed.'⁷⁴ Viewed in this light, it can be said that the past can be actively reconstructed or altered. It is also possible to argue that it not only provides the present with meaning but offers resources with which new identities and social bonds can be constructed. Similarly, writing in 2010, Bill Schwarz and Susannah Radstone concluded that, 'Identities, individual and collective, are formed and re-formed through narrative, in history, and through adversity.'⁷⁵ Additionally, Jan Assmann pointed to the 'formative' and 'normative' aspects of collective memory, providing societies with a mixture of educative and civilizing functions and a code of conduct by which to abide.⁷⁶

Yet whether we use the terms 'collective memory', 'social memory', 'cultural memory' or 'public memory', we arguably arrive at a similar conclusion. The presence of the past in the present provides both meaning and the opportunity to construct identities and social bonds. Going back to our earlier proposition, the past is indeed far from being dead: it is a fundamental aspect of the present. Societies and nations rely on conceptions of the past to provide instruction, order, education, and legitimation. We cannot study or analyse the social

⁷³ Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945,' in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 26-27.

⁷⁴ Bruce Lincoln, *The Discourse and Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23. For similar views see: Schwarz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration,' 374-402.

⁷⁵ Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 'Introduction: Mapping Memory,' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 3.

⁷⁶ Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,' trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 132.

manifestation of memory without taking these ideas into account. Indeed, Confino concludes that the study of collective memory is an exploration of a 'shared identity that unites a social group.'⁷⁷

How is the past remembered?

It is one thing to acknowledge that the past is a constant and all-pervading feature of the present, but it is an entirely different proposition to consider how the past is physically remembered within societies and communities. In fact, the past – or more precisely, our construction of it – is remembered in multiple ways within the present. The past, as Eviatar Zerubavel proposes, can be embodied in history textbooks, television footage, archives, museums, memorials, and other 'sites' of memory.⁷⁸ However, one of the most obvious examples of how the past is remembered is through ritual displays of collective sentiment. As Zerubavel argues, the term collective memory 'implies a past that is not only commonly shared but also jointly remembered (that is, "co-memorated").'⁷⁹ Acts of commemoration offer individuals, groups, and societies a point of engagement with memory, and by extension a reconstruction of the past, in which they can actively or passively engage. However, the moments that communities chose to commemorate are carefully selected and composed. In all cases, the events selected reflect the historical moments that specific communities feel are significant and eventful. Barry Schwarz eloquently summarises, 'commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values. Commemoration ... is in this sense a register of sacred history.'⁸⁰ Commemorative practice is thus a point of confluence in which history and memory meet and,

⁷⁷ Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History,' 1390. For a more elaborate summary see Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 199-200.

⁷⁸ Eviatar Zerubavel, "Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organisation of National Memory" in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection*, Ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 316. For discussion of sites of memory see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,' *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-24.

⁷⁹ Eviatar Zerubavel, 'Social Memory: Steps to a Sociology of the Past,' *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996), 294.

⁸⁰ Schwarz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration,' 377.

as Schwarz observes, 'commemoration, history, and collective memory perform interrelated functions.'⁸¹

However, historians have traditionally been cautious in their willingness to seriously engage with commemoration as an area of study. Within the context of a European historiographical tradition, the publication of Pierre Nora's edited collection of essays, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* in 1989, is viewed as the start of the 'memory boom', which provided both a framework and methodology for the study of historical culture.⁸² Nora, a product of the *Annales* school himself, embarked upon an ambitious project that sought to trace the development of French national heritage and culture. Starting from the present, he looked to trace this development across three thematic strands, or realms of memory. Nora, like Halbwachs, suggested that history and memory were fundamentally distinct. The true mission of history, he posited, is to suppress and destroy memory.⁸³ Arguably Nora's greatest contribution was his exploration of the idea of *Lieux de Mémoire*. At its simplest, *Lieux de Mémoire* refers to 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the material heritage of any community.'⁸⁴ Commenting much later, Cubitt would explain that the historians' interest in *Lieux de Mémoire* is that they are residual, bringing into focus not the presence of living memory, but instead an awareness of lingering memory.⁸⁵

Issues of epistemology, however, stunted the field's expansion. Historians such as Patrick Hutton and Michael Kammen, urged scholars to put their epistemological concerns to one side, advocating that these should not stymie the study of commemoration. In his 1993 book, *History as an Art of Memory*, Patrick Hutton urged his peers to 'juxtapose their interest in commemorative practice with the taint of being identified with commemorative historical

⁸¹ Bill Schwarz, 'Commemoration,' in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed, ed. James D. Wright (Elsevier, 2015), 235, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.10404-0>.

⁸² Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux des Mémoire*, vols 1-4 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999-2010).

⁸³ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 9.

⁸⁴ Pierre Nora in Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 47.

⁸⁵ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 47.

writing.⁸⁶ The central issue was whether the study of commemoration was affected by issues of epistemology. Increasingly, scholars set these issues to one side and were persuaded by scholars like Hutton who argued that commemorative moments are, in themselves, events from the past and thus worthy of study and historical analysis.⁸⁷

As the title of his publication suggests, Hutton believes that history and memory are not fundamentally distinct. For Hutton, history is 'an art of memory because it mediates the encounter between two moments of memory: repetition and recollection.'⁸⁸ He would define 'repetition' and 'recollection' as follows:

Repetition concerns the presence of the past. It is the moment of memory through which we bear forward images of the past that continue to shape our present understanding in unreflective ways ... Recollection concerns our present efforts to evoke the past. It is the moment of memory with which we consciously reconstruct images of the past in the selective way that suits the needs of our present situation.⁸⁹

When viewed in this light, historical thinking and analysis is made possible by the 'opening' between these two moments of memory.⁹⁰ It is the discrepancy that exists between 'what happened' and 'our interpretation of what happened' that enables scholarly research and analysis to be conducted. Memory scholars, such as Jan Assmann, Alon Confino, and Wulf Kansteiner, would provide greater methodological input over the course of the 1990s and into the early 2000s, highlighting the strengths of scholarly engagement with memory. Jan Assmann's creation of 'mnemohistory' in 1997, placed greater emphasis on the study of the past as it is remembered, directing people to study 'the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past.'⁹¹ Confino and Kansteiner

⁸⁶ Patrick H Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (London: University Press of New England, 1993), 22.

⁸⁷ Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 'Introduction.', 44.

⁸⁸ Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, xx.

⁸⁹ Ibid, xx-xxi.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9. Similar views also expressed in Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,' 132; Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations Between History and Memory,' *Social Research* 75 (2008): 62.

placed equal emphasis on adopting a methodological approach that captures the 'commingling of reception, representation, and contestation.'⁹²

Acts of commemoration create a point of dialogic interaction between the past and the present. The past helping to shape the present, whilst the present re-constructs an interpretation of the past. It is important to acknowledge that this interaction is more than simply one-way. Indeed, Jeffrey Olick warns that we should avoid over emphasising the argument that commemoration is the product of the present. He goes on to suggest 'that mnemonic practices neither express the past or the present, but the changing interactions *between* past and present: Past meanings are malleable to varying degrees, and present circumstances exploit these more or less.'⁹³ From this view, commemorative practice is neither solely motivated by the past or a product of contemporary need, but a moment of blurring and interaction between the two.

Commemorative moments, however, cannot be treated as discreet historical events. When critically analysing commemorative moments, it is essential to acknowledge the two-way interaction between the past and present. Many commemorative events are cyclical and repetitious, conforming to specific patterns of remembrance. In this sense, repeated commemorations could be described as the accumulation of one present-to-past relationship after another.⁹⁴ Olick cautions us against adopting this view, claiming that 'images of the past depend not only on the relationship between past and present but also on the accumulation of previous such relationships and their ongoing constitution and reconstruction'.⁹⁵ Borrowing from the theoretical contributions of the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of 'dialogue', Olick applies this framework to the study of commemoration. Writing with specific reference to the history of German commemorative activity connected to May 8th, 1945, he argues:

⁹² Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History,' 1397; Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,' *History and Theory* 41 (May 2002), 180.

⁹³ Olick, 'Genre Memories and Memory Genres,' 381.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 382.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 381.

Bakhtin's approach – with its axiomatic emphasis on dialogue and on genre as its central mechanism – thus provides a way of studying commemoration (and other processes) that simultaneously takes into account its conjunctural (politics of commemoration), developmental (history of commemoration), and dialogic (memory of commemoration) dimensions, all of which are essential to understanding discourses like May 8, 1945 commemoration.⁹⁶

In this regard, commemorative moments take place within their unique historical situations and at the same time are informed by previous commemorations. As Olick concludes, 'the past includes not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations, as well as what has occurred between those powerful moments.'⁹⁷ It can be said, therefore, that, when viewed along these lines, commemorative moments become powerful junctures in which the complex relationship between the past and memory can be observed and analysed. These events serve to illustrate the duologue that takes place between the distant past and the present, whilst the accumulation of memory traces from the previous commemorative episodes also effect the form of future commemorations.

One cannot study commemoration successfully without acknowledging that commemorative practice incorporates elements of anthropological ritual, civic and religious ceremony, and invented tradition. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's edited collection of essays, *The Invention of Tradition*, argued that the formulation of European nation states in the middle of the nineteenth century relied on the creation of cultural tradition as a mechanism of legitimation.⁹⁸ In lieu of long-established ritual and custom, states were required to blur the boundaries of time and invent an array of ceremonies for the state's use. The exploration of invented commemorative rituals is a defining feature of their publication, demonstrating the centrality of commemoration and ceremony in creating communal bonds, projecting legitimacy, and connecting the past to the present. Similarly, Paul Connerton's 1989 publication, *How Societies Remember*, chose to emphasise the importance of performativity in sustaining social memory. Connerton's central thesis was:

⁹⁶ Ibid, 384.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 383.

⁹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

If there is such a thing as social memory, I shall argue, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies; but commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms.⁹⁹

Despite being very different in their approach and motivations, both works serve as a good methodological basis to think about the ways that cultural symbols and performative rituals are employed within commemorative practice.

The construction of monuments and memorials also constitute a form of commemorative activity, helping to preserve an image of the past within the present. The classic distinction between the two being ‘memorials recall only past deaths or tragic events and provide places to mourn, while monuments remain essentially celebratory markers of triumphs and heroic individuals.’¹⁰⁰ However, James Young encourages us to approach this distinction with greater sensitivity and nuance, suggesting that this is a simplistic distinction and that in practice monuments can act as sites of mourning and memorials can mark past victories.¹⁰¹ As Young notes: ‘By themselves, monuments are of little value, mere stones in the landscape. But as part of a nation’s rites or the objects of a people’s national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul and memory.’¹⁰² In this sense, monuments and memorials act as sites of memory, echoing the ideas of Pierre Nora and his articulation of *Lieux de Mémoire*. However, as Cubitt argues the practice of memorialisation seeks to ensure the persistence ‘of a conscious engagement with the data culture helps memory to retain.’¹⁰³ But as Young suggests, the individuals, episodes, and time periods we choose to remember through the construction of monuments and memorials reflect those that are invested with national interest.¹⁰⁴ Of course, exceptions at the local level can be found, but on the whole monumental landscapes reflects the structure and interests of social memory.

⁹⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*, (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰³ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 145.

¹⁰⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 2.

The Structure of Social Memory

The pattern of commemoration provides public memory with both an order and framework. From their moment of inception, commemorative episodes are rarely designed to happen just once and the frequency with which they take place, Olick suggests, is an important feature of their temporality.¹⁰⁵ Commemorative calendars are carefully constructed, and the product of decisions designed to commit communities to remembering certain events or individuals from the past. By this logic, they also dictate the moments from history that are not publicly commemorated. Commemorative calendars can also function on the local, regional, national or international scales, marking specific moments from history that are deemed significant that specific groups or communities have identified for remembrance. Given this, it is perfectly common for multiple commemorative calendars to function in conjunction throughout the year. Using the local community of Egham as an example, in 2015 Magna Carta was commemorated across the country because of its 800th anniversary. The following year, these national commemorations were dropped, but local commemorative activity in Egham continued with their annual Magna Carta Day celebration. Local and national commemorative calendars can differ vastly, reflecting the interests and identities of local communities compared to those on the national scale.

Zerubavel's work on the social organisation of national memory seeks to highlight the commemorative function of the calendar, drawing attention to its 'critical role in the social organisation of memory.'¹⁰⁶ His analysis frames the calendar as a social artefact that both reflects and shapes contemporary constructions of the past. In his view, commemorative calendars reflect the identity of the groups which use them, and 'by examining what they consider memorable, we can thus gain better access to who they believe they are.'¹⁰⁷ Many of the events that feature on a commemorative calendar are either watershed or founding moments. Often these historic moments provide a basis on which narratives of identity can be

¹⁰⁵ Olick, 'Genre Memories and Memory Genres,' 383.

¹⁰⁶ Zerubavel, 'Calendars and History,' 319.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

constructed and bear existential meanings that are representative of the group using the calendar.

Exploring these ideas further, Yael Zerubavel in her 1995 publication, *Recovered Roots*, coined the term 'commemorative density', which provides a useful lens in which we can observe the variability of memory.¹⁰⁸ Some moments from history receive greater attention and prominence than others and are almost inescapable. 'Commemorative density' thus refers to the episodes or personalities of the past that feature more prominently within communities, appearing in textbooks, being the subject of popular and academic publishing, and having a greater level of attention and cultural investment. Zerubavel argues that the events from history that have greater commemorative density are either foundational or watershed moments.¹⁰⁹ In providing a summary of the role of commemorative calendars, Cubitt concludes that they allow groups or communities to 'do the rounds of their symbolic references, recharging them in regular order.'¹¹⁰ Adherence to a commemorative calendar thus provides a collective sense of the past with an order and structure. At the same time the moments and events which feature within the calendar are reflective of group or communal identity.

Commemorative calendars are not fixed entities and are subject to yearly change. Within the context of national commemorative calendars, many of the events that feature within them are 'round-number anniversaries'. Institutions and organisations decide each year which events they will choose to devote their individual and collective commemorative attentions.¹¹¹ Events that feature within lists of this nature all have a common feature: they are milestone or round-numbered anniversaries. Roland Quinault in his article, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784-1914', traced the emergence of centenary celebrations across Europe. He concluded that their emergence can be linked to a maturing historical consciousness that was a

¹⁰⁸ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 220.

¹¹¹ See for example: '10 Anniversaries for 2019,' English Heritage, 3 January 2019, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/search-news/top-10-anniversaries-for-2019/>, accessed 29 September 2019.

feature of European society during the late nineteenth century.¹¹² In a similar fashion, Joep Leersen & Ann Rigney's work on the commemoration of the writers in the nineteenth century and their links to a 'centenary fever' and its process of nation building offers a complementary study, which deals with many similar ideas and issues, extending the object of its research to encompass literary figures.¹¹³ Both studies, however, firmly situate their respective studies within a tradition that began with the works of Hobsbawm and Ranger and Pierre Nora.

Round-numbered anniversaries are much larger affairs, receiving both greater levels of planning, financial support, and publicity as a result.¹¹⁴ All of these have implications for the desired quality and scale of commemorative activity that is subsequently delivered. It is generally accepted that commemorative moments offer communities a moment of reflection, contemplation, and debate.¹¹⁵ Over the course of the last thirty years, there has been a growing body of scholarly work from around the world that has sought to record, explain, and analyse the cultural effects of these round-numbered commemorations.¹¹⁶ Within Britain, the 2007 bicentenary of Slave Trade Abolition Act and, more recently, the four years of activity marking the centenary of World War One have been commemorated on a national scale. Indeed, both the preparations for Magna Carta's eight hundredth anniversary and the events in 2015 ran in parallel to the World War One commemorative programme.

¹¹² Roland Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784-1914,' *Historical Research* 71, no. 176 (2002): 303-323.

¹¹³ Joep Leersen and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of why societies tend to remember events in intervals of 5, 10, 50, and 100 please see Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, *Commemorative Events: Memory, Identities, Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 1-3.

¹¹⁵ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 221.

¹¹⁶ For example, see Lois G. Schworer, 'Celebrating the Glorious Revolution, 1689-1989,' *Albion* 22, no. 1 (1990): 1-20; Holger Hock (ed.), *History, Commemoration and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); R. J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial. 1961-1965*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Rogers Brubaker & Margit Feischmidt, '1848 in 1998: the politics of commemoration in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. (2002), 700-44; Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Museums and slavery in Britain: the bicentenary of 1807', in Ana Lucia Araujo (ed.), *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space* (London: Routledge, 2012); James Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Abolition and public memory', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009), 139-49; Tammy S. Gordon, *The Spirit of 1976: Commerce, Community, and the Politics of Commemoration*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Stephen J Summerhill & John A Williams, *Sinking Columbus: Contested History, Cultural Politics and Mythmaking during the Quincentenary*, (Gainesville University Press of Florida, 2000); Pierre Nora, 'The era of commemoration', in Pierre Nora (ed), *Realms of Memory: the Construction of the French Past, Vol. III: 'Symbols'* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1998), 609-37.

The link between round number commemorations and conceptions of the nation cannot be denied. One only needs to look at the titles of literature dealing with commemoration and round number anniversaries to see there is a preoccupation in drawing out connections to the nation. This should not come as a surprise. In the exploration of the literature of collective and social memory, the idea that it provided the potential for identities to be formed, acting as tool of social cohesion, was unavoidable. The works of Hobsbawm and Ranger, Leersen and Rigney, and Quinault demonstrated the ways in which the past was invented and twisted for during the late 1800s for the benefit of nation building. In commenting on the relationship between the nation and commemoration, Charles Turner writes:

Yet even here there is often a reluctance to acknowledge the fact that whether it generates common sentiment or social discord, explicit commemoration is something which does not happen without an accompanying agent or agents.¹¹⁷

Much like Burke and Confino, the need to recognise agency comes to the fore. 'Within the context of nationally framed studies,' Cubitt asserts, 'is the presumed relationship of memory to social and political unity and thus to power.'¹¹⁸ In keeping with this idea, Lyn Spillman's pioneering work comparing the centennial and bicentennial celebrations in America and Australia clearly articulated the link between national identity and commemorative observance.¹¹⁹ Commemorative ceremonies are social looking glasses as Spillman conceives them, whereby a sense of community is created, fostered, and affirmed. At each commemorative juncture she poses a series of useful questions, which are useful for the purposes of this study: 'Where do we stand in the world?' and 'What do we share?'¹²⁰ For Spillman, the use of the word 'we' reflected the commemorative need for recalibration: each moment of celebration was a response to a discreet set of historical circumstances. But beyond this, it is Spillman's interest in foundational moments and other 'symbolic repertoires' of

¹¹⁷ Charles Turner, 'Nation and commemoration', in *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, (Eds.) G. Delanty and K. Kumar, (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 211.

¹¹⁸ Geoff Cubitt, 'History of Memory' in *Debating New Approaches to History*, (Eds.) Marek Tamm and Peter Burke, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 135.

¹¹⁹ Lynn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 144.

commemoration used by nations to evoke feelings of belonging that is most interesting within the context of this study.¹²¹

The symbolic significance of a past event does not remain constant and they require regular revivifications to ensure they hold the same status within society. In this regard, commemorative calendars and annual commemorations go some way to ensuring this happens. An important feature to the symbolic status of an event is somewhat sustained by the narrative connections that can be made. Cubitt suggests: 'Events and individuals do not establish themselves in social memory as isolated containers of symbolic meaning: much of their significance comes from the ways in which they get connected to other events and to larger narrative structures.'¹²² Often, commemorative calendars provide a framework in which these connections can be made. The events featuring within them embody similar messages and guiding moral principles for contemporary audience.

Groups and communities look to remember events that share these fundamental values, enabling links to be constructed which both unite and strengthen their message. But historians have not been united in the belief that commemorative events are the instrument of the state, providing opportunities to bond the social collective. Whilst acknowledging the role of ceremony and invented traditions in the process of nation building, Frank Ankersmit questioned whether the vehicle of commemoration remains a tool of the nation. In adopting a post-modernist approach, he suggests that commemoration has become a vehicle through which the past has been 'privatised' rather than 'democratised.'¹²³ Ankersmit asserts:

Commemoration then no longer places the life of the individual against the background of national history; it no longer democratizes the past, but places, instead, national history against the background of the banalities of the individual's life.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Lyn Spillman, 'When Do Collective Memories Last?: Founding Moments in the United States and Australia.' *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998): 445–77.

¹²² Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 214.

¹²³ Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representations*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 169.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

This conclusion is rooted in the fact that commemoration no longer serves the process of nation-building that it once did. In this absence, the state no longer needs to be the central agent, replaced by the vested interests of local and regional groups, or extol the virtues of one group over another.

Commemorative practice sits at the confluence of history and memory and provides a practical way in which public memory can be both retained and transmitted. However, as seen above, commemoration forms an active dialogue between the past and the present. Moments of commemoration also leave their impression on future historical interpretation. Broadly speaking, we remember moments of the past to help forge communal identities and for the moral messages they bestow to the present. In this regard, the organisation and construction of social memory helps to reinforce these messages and values, whilst also providing a structured pattern of remembrance to follow. As Bill Schwarz concludes:

Memory is a necessary property of the mind, a fundamental component of culture, and an essential aspect of tradition. Although individuals alone possess the capacity to remember the past, they never do so singly; they do so with and against others situated in different groups and through the knowledge and symbols that predecessors and contemporaries transmit to them.¹²⁵

In this regard, commemoration, history, and social memory perform interrelated functions.

Magna Carta, Commemoration, and Public Memory: A Methodology

Considering the above discussions of memory, round numbered anniversaries, and, more broadly, commemoration and commemorative practice, this study is shaped by three main questions and observations. These ideas form the analytical framework and toolkit I will employ to investigate and evaluate the commemoration of Magna Carta within Britain throughout the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Schwarz, 'Commemoration,' 235.

¹²⁶ The methodological considerations outlined within Rogers Brubaker Margit Feischmidt, '1848 in 1998: the politics of commemoration in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no,

The first question is: *Who, why, what, when?* Given the degree to which interpretations of the past can differ between both individuals and groups, it is essential to understand, recognise, and acknowledge the extent to which peoples' socio-economic and political backgrounds shape both the coordination and delivery of commemorative events. The *who, why, what, when* approach outlined by Peter Burke in his chapter, 'History as Social Memory,' provides a simple but effective way in which to take these issues into consideration.¹²⁷ In accepting that the past can be used and abused as tool of legitimation, it stands to reason that commemorative moments – particularly round-numbered anniversaries – offer opportune moments for the furthering of certain interpretations of the past, and, more often than not, these are at the expense of other, competing interpretations. To adopt Alon Confino's lexicon momentarily, it goes without saying that agents of memory, or organisers of commemorative events, have their own motivations to keep alive the memory of a certain historic moment.¹²⁸ Without knowing the cultural, social, and political backgrounds of these actors, it becomes much harder to assess their motivations and assess how their backgrounds shape both their understanding and interpretations of the past.

In a similar vein, point seven of Frost and Laing's research agenda for commemorative events, which questions whether commemorative events are just a medium to reinforce elites, provides an added layer of analysis with regards to the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of commemorative organisers.¹²⁹ This study places the history of Magna Carta commemoration into a much longer chronology. In identifying the cultural, social, and political backgrounds of the agents of memory in the context of each commemorative moment, it is possible to both observe and reflect upon any trends that emerge. In relation to Frost and Laing, it is possible to observe and comment on whether the commemoration of the great charter has traditionally

(2002), 700-10 and Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, *Commemorative Events: Memory, Identities, Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 169-170.

¹²⁷ Burke, 'History as Social Memory,' 107.

¹²⁸ Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,' 1397. For similar discussions on the motivations of commemorative organisers, see:

¹²⁹ Frost and Laing, *Commemorative Events*, 170.

been the preserve of elites and political right, or whether the history of these Magna Carta moments are more politically diverse.

The second point this thesis will consider is how Magna Carta commemorations have been shaped by the contemporary contexts in which they have taken place. As previously discussed, historians and social scientists have all acknowledged that a key aspect of remembering the past is the way it is used to give meaning to the present. In remembering an event or individual from the past, a dialogic interaction is created between both the past and present. Commemorative events are no different, with contemporary circumstances shaping the ways in which these moments have been framed along with the rhetoric that has surrounded them. Linking back to Burke's *who, what, why, when* approach, this specific methodological focus relates explicitly to the *when*. In this vein, this study explores the impact of specific historical contexts on both the direction of Magna Carta commemorations, highlighting how the charter and its legacy has been drawn into contemporary debates.

It would be easy, however, for this specific methodical focus to offer little more than some superficial historical connections, linking commemorative moments with the wider historical context. Drawing connections between two points in time provides little analytical benefit to this study. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, the most useful and insightful connections are those that focus on narrative structures. Returning to the theoretical intervention of Cubitt, events and narratives do not establish themselves as isolated containers of symbolic meaning: much of their significance comes from the ways in which they become connected to other events and to larger narrative structures.¹³⁰ It is these type of connections that provide the most interesting framework in which to analyse how the past interacts with the present, and, by extension, how the present helps frame the past. Taking the seven hundredth anniversary of the charter in 1915 as an example, a superficial connection would make the point that this anniversary occurred during the conflict of the First World War. However, a more analytical approach to this would be to see how the terms of reference for each event – the sealing of Magna Carta and the Great War – were given an inherent

¹³⁰ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 214.

commonality. In this vein, the sealing of Magna Carta is no longer about the minutiae of thirteenth century feudal politics but is elevated to a frame of reference that pits tyranny against freedom. Likewise, it stands to reason that the First World War would also be couched and framed along similar terms of reference. In each case, both events are removed from the context of their contemporary circumstance and elevated to a much larger metanarrative: tyranny versus freedom. It is through the investigation and analysis of these narrative connections and interactions that some of the most compelling observations about the dialogic interactions between past and present can be made.

The third issue this thesis will address is whether we can talk of ‘commemorative traditions’ or ‘commemorative continuities’ in relation to Magna Carta moments. In his analysis of German commemorative events to mark VE Day on the 8th May 1945, Olick reminds us of the importance of adopting a conjunctural, developmental, and dialogic approach to the study of commemoration. As part of his methodological framework, he underlines a need to observe the accumulation of memory traces from previous commemorative episodes: ‘the past includes not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations, as well as what has occurred between those powerful moments.’¹³¹ Given the nature of this study’s approach to the commemoration of Magna Carta, observing the traces of memory from previous commemorations becomes possible. By placing Magna Carta commemorations into a much longer chronology, thematic continuities become more apparent, but so too do moments of discontinuity. However, these memory traces of previous commemorations are rarely observed through either the rhetoric of the organisers or in meeting minutes: people rarely say we are doing this because this is what we have always done. Instead, these memory traces take the form of ritualistic commemorative tradition and narrative continuities. And, occasionally, these traditions are acknowledged more publicly within the speeches of both commemorative organisers and dignitaries.

¹³¹ Olick, ‘Genre Memories and Memory Genres,’ 384.

'There is nothing new that can be said about Magna Carta'

The final idea to be excavated from Lord Sumption's talk both addresses and directly responds to the assertion: 'It is impossible to say anything new about Magna Carta, unless you say something mad.'¹³² It is uncommon for any thesis to begin with such a forceful claim that, at least on the surface, undermines the essence of its own endeavour. And indeed, in some respects, his words hold true. As the footnotes of the preceding pages have demonstrated, there is no shortage of scholarship concerned with some aspect of the history or legacy of Magna Carta. Viewed as a *corpus*, this body of work has explored the Charter in most contexts: the events leading up to its sealing; analysed its text; assessed its immediate legacy; evaluated its long-term legacy; considered it within an international context; approached it from perspectives of politics or law.

Equally, publications have considered Magna Carta within the context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹³³ However, these have either been viewed through the lens of high politics or international relations, choosing to focus on how Magna Carta has helped underpin notions of nationhood across the Anglo-speaking world. Although few have framed their work along these lines, there is an argument to be made that anyone who has produced scholarship that considers the reception and reinterpretation of Magna Carta could in fact constitute a form of public history. Except for some isolated works, few have considered the charter explicitly through the lens of public history.¹³⁴ It is within this lacuna that this thesis seeks to make its biggest intervention, adding to the pre-existing historiography of Magna Carta and its legacy.

The emergence of public history within Britain as a separate discipline of study can be traced back to the turn of the twenty-first century. The American Journal, *The Public Historian*,

¹³² Sumption, 'Magna Carta Then and Now'.

¹³³ Nicholas Vincent, ed., *Magna Carta: The Foundations of Freedom 1215-2015* (London: Third Millennium Publishing); Claire Breay and Julian Harrison, ed., *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy* (London: The British Library, 2015); Andrew Blick, *Beyond Magna Carta: A Constitution for the United Kingdom* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015); Turner, *Magna Carta*.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Graham Smith and Anna Green, 'The Magna Carta: 800 Years of Public History,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, eds. Paula Hamilton and James B. Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 387-402; Champion, 'Magna Carta after 800 Years'.

ran a special issue devoted to public history within Britain and the six leading articles provide a detailed overview of the field at that moment in time. This special issue resulted from the international conference on public history held in 2008 that was organised by the University of Liverpool, the Institute of Historical Research, and National Museums Liverpool. Within his article of introduction, Holger Hock explains that the conference saw fifty speakers from across the globe reflect on the practices of public history, exploring the 'theoretical and conceptual frameworks within which public history is being practiced, and the various roles that public historian and their public(s) play in those shared practices.'¹³⁵ In his recollections of the conference, Hock notes that many of the North American delegates were 'struck by the fact that, although public history had been practiced in manifold ways within the UK for several generations, few British practitioners identified themselves primarily, if at all, as public historians. Rather they described themselves as humanities or social science scholars with "outreach" or "knowledge transfer" agendas, as "heritage specialists" or "museum practitioners", and as historians working with the media.'¹³⁶ In many respects, this episode serves to underline the difficulties in defining both public history as a conceptual term and practice.

Commenting in 2002, Jill Liddington would term describe public history as a 'slippery concept' on account of its varied usage and the infinite ways that it could be deployed.¹³⁷ To this day, public history is still perhaps best conceived of an umbrella term, looking to capture historical activity that falls under the categories of 'popular history', 'applied history', 'people's history', and 'heritage studies'. Beyond issues of approach and methodology, the use of the catchall word 'public' presents further difficulties. But as Ludmilla Jordanova argues, 'public history is a useful phrase, in that it draws attention to phenomena relevant to the discipline of history.'¹³⁸ Public history thus considers an increasing array of historical activity that reflects the variety of producers of historical knowledge; the different locations in which history can be

¹³⁵ Holger Hock, 'Introduction,' *The Public Historian* 32, no. 3 (2010): 8.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Jill Liddington, 'What is Public History? Publics and their Past, Meanings and Practices,' *Oral History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 84.

¹³⁸ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 126.

consumed and engaged with; the different media in which the past is communicated; it provides a forum for the discussion of audience reception; it looks to engage with policy makers and engage with over simplistic narratives that looking to hijack history for the legitimization of their causes.

In terms of its methodology, this thesis looks to adopt a public history orientated approach, applying it to the sealing of Magna Carta and its eight-hundred-year legacy. On account of the varied forms that public history can manifest itself, this thesis will explore, examine, and analyse the ways in which Magna Carta has been remembered through commemorative practice over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As has been explored above, commemorative events provide communities and groups with a moment to engage with the past and are a point at which history and collective memory merge. Commemorative events are as much the product of the present, as they are the product of gradual cultural accretion in which layers of memory combine. However, to fully explore the history of the charter using a public history inspired methodology, one cannot simply study commemorative practice in isolation. In order to provide a more rounded public history perspective, commemoration needs to be considered as part of an inter-connected web of public history activity. Each commemorative moment is informed by its relation to narratives of identity, issued of nostalgia, its relationship to the heritage industry, the economics of production, and their method of broadcast and dissemination. Above all else, you cannot study commemoration without focussing on the agencies behind these reiterations of memory. It goes without saying, that these interrelated issues have their own unique historiographical genesis and development, occurring over the period of this study. In the same vein, limiting Magna Carta to just written text and event provides a limited window in which to explore its public history. As such, this thesis looks to build on the frameworks of Cam and Champion, framing Magna Carta as the merging of text, document, event, successive interpretive moments, and performative ritual.

In many ways, this thesis has two clear sections. Chapters one to three make up part one of this study, providing a historicised account of past Magna Carta commemorative

moments. In contrast, chapters four to seven offer a contemporary reflection on some of the events and activities that were both planned and staged in celebration of the charter's eight-hundredth anniversary in 2015. For the most part, the field of Runnymede acts as a geographical anchor, allowing the histories of these commemorative moments to be explored in greater detail. In chapter three, the attention of the thesis shifts away from Runnymede, and to the City of London – where much of the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary celebrations of 1965 took place. In choosing to centre much of this study on Runnymede, some of the methodological approaches to the study of memory and commemoration become more pronounced and easier to discern. It is within this regard that the dialogic dimensions of commemoration come to the fore, leading to its accumulative effects being observed more easily by virtue of the fact these events occur in the same geographical space. The consistency of location makes potential points of continuity and discontinuity more distinct, allowing lines of commemorative tradition to be drawn and areas of commemorative evolution to be observed across the period covered by this thesis.

One of the strengths of this study's *longue durée* approach to the history of Magna Carta commemorations at Runnymede, is that it offers a framework in which continuity and discontinuity can be observed. It focusses on the logistical and contextual minutiae of each commemorative episode, and places these into a much longer chronology of Magna Carta moments. Unlike most historical studies, however, a large proportion of this thesis focuses on contemporary historical events. As such, questions of the historical methods employed by the historian, and the changing nature of the researchers position in relation to their subject matter, increase in importance over the course of this study. In this vein, chapters one to three are more traditional in their approach to historical study, using more conventional sources and methods. The primary source base of these chapters is drawn from a combination of newspaper reports, committee minutes, speeches, and, where possible, augmented with surviving commemorative ephemera. These primary sources are subsequently supported by the relevant secondary literature and historiographies. The distance in time between the subject and historian provides two clear advantages. Firstly, the episodic details of each commemorative moment can be set within a much wider contextual framework, allowing

broader historiographical points to be made and preventing each chapter from being treated as an isolated set of events. Secondly, the distance of time allows the historian to be more critical in their analysis and handling of the events, scrutinising the motivations of central actors and planning of each moment more sharply. With time, events become less emotionally or politically charged as they recede from living memory, allowing historians to be more analytical.

In contrast, chapters four through to seven are in many ways a direct response to the call to action outlined by Justin Champion in his 2007 article, 'What Are Historians For?' Champion begins with the bold assertion that 'the profession in the U.K. has become distracted from the proper function of engaging with the public.'¹³⁹ 'Historians' he continues, 'have an intellectual responsibility to make every effort to connect the past to the public: history is ultimately a form of public property.' For Champion, historians have an important contemporary cultural role, providing historical insight as they draw connections with the past and the present. Writing within the context of commemoration, anniversaries, and the phenomenon of marking time, Ludmilla Jordanova concludes:

I have revisited the idea that a passionate commitment to public history involves uncritical participation in anniversary phenomena. On the contrary, that commitment enjoins us to set our own terms and standards, to be fearless both in looking the past in the face and re-presenting it to wide audiences – frank appraisal is arguably the most profound and enduring form of tribute yet developed.¹⁴⁰

Operating under these same fundamental beliefs, chapters four through to seven both record and engage with the eight-hundredth anniversary celebrations of Magna Carta, reflecting on these events as they unfolded.

However, writing history in the moment places the historian in an unfamiliar position. Firstly, the commemorative actors that are central to each chapter are still alive. Given this, greater sensitivity is needed in the handling of the subject matter. The historian is less able to pass critical judgement on motivations and actions, wary of straying into libellous grounds.

¹³⁹ Justin Champion, 'What are historians for?' *Historical Research* 81, no. 211 (February 2008): 167-188.

¹⁴⁰ Ludmilla Jordanova, "Marking Time" in Holger Hock (ed.), *History, Commemoration and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005*, ed. Holger Hock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.

Secondly, writing history as it happens allows the historian to capture granular-like details as the events unfold. In most cases, these intricacies are lost with time and the records relating to them become fragmented or misplaced. A historic record is created in parallel to the events taking place, creating a source base for the benefit of future historians. For example, chapters five and six of this thesis place the events and circumstances in the build-up to the unveiling of the Queen Elizabeth II statue and The Jurors installation into a coherent historical narrative. It is hoped that this narrative will be of benefit to future historians, who, with the benefit of distance from the subject and hindsight, might begin to place these events into a much wider historical context. Whilst there are undeniably benefits from writing history in the moment, there is an obvious drawback. Most historical accounts are written at a certain temporal distance from their subject, meaning they can draw on a pre-existing body of historiography and make broader thematic points as a result. Writing history as it unfolds prevents the historian from implementing this method of working. These factors lead to a very focussed examination and narrative of the events, but an account that is limited in the broader contextual points and analysis that it can offer. Lastly, the traditional sources that form the basis of the historians' craft are not as easily accessible. Some sources, such as committee papers, private correspondence, and personal memoirs, might not make-up the public record until a certain period has elapsed and the contemporary ramifications of their release has abated. Historians operating within and writing about contemporary events are forced to use less traditional sources, recording interviews with key actors and placing much more importance on contemporary news reports.

Chapter one focuses on the annual Magna Carta commemorations that took place from 1923 until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. In 1923 Runnymede (**fig. 1**) was crown land and, faced with crippling war debt, the government planned to sell the field. These plans were met with public outrage and quickly a campaign was started to ensure that Runnymede would not be sold. A Magna Carta Commemoration Committee was established, featuring well-connected and politically influential individuals such as Helena Normanton (**fig. 2**) the first female barrister, to ensure that regular commemorative activity took place each year at Runnymede. Central to this chapter, is the exploration and analysis of the committee's

membership and their personal social networks drawn from a mixture of politics and law. Collectively these committee members were able to attract speakers of substance and notability each year. Over the period covered in this chapter, however, commemorations did not remain constant and we can trace subtle variations in how the charter was framed within the rhetoric of each commemorative moment.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, annual commemorative observances at Runnymede had become less frequent and this is the point at which chapter 2 begins. During the war commemorative practices at Runnymede were suspended. Outside of commemoration, Magna Carta continued to be present within politics, international relations, and the law during the conflict. At the outbreak of war, the Lincoln Magna Carta was on display in the British Pavilion at the 1939 New York's World Fair. The Lincoln copy of the charter stayed in the USA during World War Two, as it was felt that the charter would be safer there than being transported home. This was the first overseas loan of Magna Carta and was made on the advice of the Department of Overseas Trade, hoping that the display of the document would strengthen Anglo-American relations. In his third inaugural address of January 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt made explicit reference to Magna Carta. In March of the same year, Churchill and his government considered gifting the Lincoln copy of the 1215 Charter to the American people. As one British government official wrote: 'The gift of Magna Carta would be at once the most precious of gifts and the most gracious of acts in American eyes; it would represent the only really adequate gesture which it is in our power in return for the means to preserve our country'. Within Britain, the November 1941 Liversidge vs Anderson legal case would use the second part of clause 39 to justify its policy of internment. In combination, these moments provide important background context and insight into Magna Carta's evolving role and meaning at both national and international levels.

The central case study of this chapter will be the unveiling of the American Bar Association (ABA) memorial to Magna Carta in 1957 (**fig. 3**). Following the establishment of the Magna Carta Trust in 1956 – the successor to the by this point inactive Magna Carta Society – plans quickly developed in relation to establishing an American monument to Magna Carta at Runnymede. Designed by the British architect, Sir Edward Maufe, who had also designed the

recently unveiled Air Forces Memorial on top of Cooper's Hill. The A.B.A memorial was unveiled in 1957 in front of 5,000 guests. Speaking at the unveiling, Sir Hartley Shawcross MP, would use the stage to make explicit reference to the 1956 Hungarian uprising, concluding: 'in the end the individual will transcend the state'. In this specific context, Magna Carta was framed within the politics of the Cold War and the charter acted as cultural totem for the benefits of western liberal democracy.

The focus of chapter three is the year 1965 and the 750th anniversary of Magna Carta. Our attention shifts away from Runnymede and instead to the city of London, which played host to a wealth of commemorative activity. As part of the celebrations, the 1960s Marxist playwright, John Arden, was approached and commissioned by the City of London Corporation to produce a commemorative play, *Left Handed Liberty*. Using the extensive records of the London Metropolitan Archive, it is possible to trace this project's development from its initial inception to delivery and legacy. This case-study provides a contemporary window onto more practical and functional issues of commemoration. It considers how this project was funded, managed, and publicised, before thinking about more theoretically as a piece of public history.

Chapter four marks a shift in focus away from historic commemorative moments and instead sets the scene for the events of 2015. In chronological terms, this chapter bridges the gap between 1965 and the turn of the twenty-first century. This period saw the emergence of a heritage industry in the 1980s, the creation of the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1993, and early articulations of public history within the academy. The collective impact of these had radical implications on historical activity, fundamentally changing the ways we think about heritage, communicate the past, fund the production of history, and critique public articulations of history. These issues will be connected to the commemoration of Magna Carta in the lead up to the 800th anniversary celebrations. The official commemorations began in earnest in 2010, coordinated by Sir Robert Worcester, the chairman of the Magna Carta 800th Committee. From 2010 onwards, the committee brought together a range of national and international stakeholders. This chapter will provide the contextual background, enabling this thesis to use the following chapters to discuss three specific commemorative case-studies.

Chapter five looks at Runnymede Borough Council's contribution to the Magna Carta anniversary year. Starting in 2013, this chapter begins with the council's unsuccessful attempts to secure Heritage Lottery Funding for a Magna Carta interpretation centre and continues by examining the various cultural activity that was supported. One such activity, was the financial support that was provided to Egham Museum, an independent museum who had been successful in receiving £100,000 of Heritage Lottery support, to augment and facilitate the programmed activity. This chapter will also explore the rationale behind the decision to erect a statue of Queen Elizabeth II to commemorate the anniversary of the charter. For many, the institution of the monarchy and Magna Carta are an unnatural pairing, as the charter curtailed royal power. But as was argued, this memorial symbolises and celebrates constitutional monarchy, a journey, it was said, that had started in 1215.

By contrast, chapter six focusses on the commemorative activity that was pursued by the National Trust in 2015. The direction of their activity was directed by the partnership which was formed with Surrey County Council. Like Runnymede Borough Council, potential commemorative activity was varied and wide ranging and one of the major projects that was pursued was the installation of a piece of contemporary art by the artist, Hew Locke. The main intellectual focus of this chapter will centre on Hew Locke and his creative process, presenting a unique insight into the more creative aspects and elements of public history. The final chapter of this thesis will examine and analyse the international commemorative ceremony that took place at Runnymede on Monday 15th June 2015. It will focus on the way in which Magna Carta was framed and, in a similar fashion to earlier chapters, the central question will be to see how the memory and legacy of the charter was deployed serve present needs.

From Latent to Active Memory: Runnymede as ‘Lieu de Mémoire’ and the Activities of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1923-1939

In 1829, the fields at Runnymede (**fig. 1**), the site at which Magna Carta had famously been sealed, were threatened with enclosure for use as farmland. One anonymous writer, in an impassioned and patriotic letter to *The Times*, asked: ‘What term, then, is strong enough to mark our contempt of those who, for a little base pelf, would desecrate such hallowed ground?’¹ Writing under the pseudonym ‘An Englishman’, this letter presents a powerful, if unsubtle, argument that frames Runnymede and the sealing of Magna Carta as central components of Englishness:

If there be one spot in the world sacred to liberty, it is that on which Magna Charta was sealed; and the Englishman who may have visited without feeling his patriotism strengthened, is even less respectable than he who on the plains of Marathon could be indifferent to its associations.²

This letter was written with an obvious agenda, but at the same time provides a vivid and quite representative articulation of the way certain commentators framed Runnymede and sought to incorporate the charter into notions of English identity and liberty. The author goes on to implore the government to protect Runnymede’s long-term future and render it national property by way of purchase.³

However, amidst the zealous declarations of patriotism, the anonymous patriot who penned the letter closes by remarking that, ‘the 15th June, the day on which Magna Charta was sealed, is not ... in anyway, commemorated.’⁴ Remarkably, for a document of such perceived cultural importance, there was no established national commemoration. This is not to suggest that the anniversary went by without comment or reflection. A cursory survey of national and regional newspapers printed across the nineteenth century depicts a commemorative trend lacking in geographical focus, with seemingly random events held each year across the country.

¹ *The Times*, 7 October 1829, 3. Pelf, meaning money that is gained in either a dishonest or dishonourable way.

² *Ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

At Runnymede, however, there was no commemorative and this would remain the until 1923 when the future of Runnymede was once again under threat. On this occasion it was not the threat of enclosure, but instead the subject of future sale. The proposed public auction of Runnymede prompted the establishment of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, which organised regular commemorative observances until war intervened in 1939.

This chapter will explore the activity of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee (MCCC) between 1923 and 1939. The central argument that runs throughout the sections that follow is that it was during the interwar period that Runnymede became a site of memory, or, to use a term associated with Pierre Nora, *a lieu de mémoire*. The actions of the MCCC did much to ensure Runnymede became a site of active memory, and regular commemorative observances constituted a practical form of memory work. Prior to their collective intervention, Runnymede was caricatured by some individuals and groups as a quasi-sacred site of foundation that was strongly associated with over-zealous notions of Englishness.⁵ Before the 1920s, Runnymede could not really be regarded as a site of memory in any other sense. It was only following the intervention of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee that memory activity, expressed through annual commemorative services, became intimately linked to the site. Regular commemorations served to strengthen the significance of the site and, as we will see in later chapters, provided the foundations for the erection of monuments and memorials in celebration of the charter, its wider values and broader legacy.

In exploring activity during this period, this chapter will also explore the committee's membership, their professional networks, and the way in which they sought to frame the charter during these commemorative events. By focussing on some of the key ceremonies during this period, we will also be able to demonstrate the protean nature of the charter, highlighting how both its deployment and surrounding rhetoric changed to reflect the context of its usage. Structurally, this chapter will be divided into four parts. The first section covers the commemorative activity that took place in 1915, the seven hundredth anniversary of the

⁵ One might conceivably think of Rudyard Kipling's 1911 poem, *The Reeds of Runnymede*, as being representative of this idea. See C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

charter. Traditionally, the seven hundredth anniversary has been viewed as a non-event, with scholars citing the First World War as the central reason for the lack of activity. Whilst it is correct to say that the war prevented any national celebrations from taking place, local communities and some political groups did celebrate the anniversary. Secondly, these events will be situated within the context of post-war Britain. This section will briefly reflect on the role of the past within post-war British society, engaging with the traditional view that the First World War caused a cultural break in which the relationship to the past was characterised by discontinuity. The focus will then shift towards the Government's proposal to sell Runnymede in 1923, the formation of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, and its role in ensuring the site remained publicly accessible. The third section will focus on the committee's activity from 1923 to 1929, including their links to with the International Magna Charta Day Association and ending with Runnymede's purchase and subsequent addition to the growing portfolio of properties managed by the National Trust. The final section will focus on commemorative activity from 1930 to the outbreak of the Second World War, including the Runnymede Pageant of 1934.

The 700th Anniversary of Magna Carta, 1915

This commemorative pattern continued into the twentieth century. The charter's 700th anniversary in 1915 was overshadowed by the First World War, but prior to the outbreak of fighting, plans for a national celebration had been mooted. At the heart of this was the Royal Historical Society. As stated by Henry Eliot Malden, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Historical Society and editor of *Magna Carta Commemoration Essays*, 'some kind of celebration of the event was so likely to be undertaken that the Royal Historical Society determined that if such took place at all it should be directed by competent persons.'⁶ His inclusion of the phrase 'competent persons' is a telling, but subtle, insight into how the Society viewed themselves and their role within these commemorations. The historical discipline clearly felt it was the

⁶ Henry Elliot Malden 'Introduction,' in *Magna Carta Commemoration Essays* (London: Royal Historical Society), xix.

gatekeeper of historical knowledge and thus had a vested interest in informing the public's historical consciousness. The Royal Historical Society established a Magna Carta Commemoration in early 1914 with the Right Hon. Viscount Bryce, a well-regarded academic of civil law and medieval history, taking on the role of the committee's chairman. The committee was made up of representatives from Universities, learned societies, and leading historical and legal scholars from a mixture of the United Kingdom, America, and other countries.⁷ In total, the General Committee numbered in excess of a hundred members and an executive committee was appointed to arrange the specific details. One of the proposed events was a visit to Runnymede where an address on the spot of Magna Carta's sealing was proposed.

War prevented these plans from developing further and as Malden writes, 'the principle of government by law was overclouded [sic] by the cares of the immense struggle to maintain that principle through force of arms.'⁸ Malden's introduction deliberately situates the charter within the context of the conflict of the First World War, characterising both the moment of June 1215 and the Great War as a 'struggle for the rule of law.'⁹ Many scholars had already provided essays before the outbreak of war and the decision was taken to publish these. They were presented to Fellows of the Royal Historical Society and it was felt that they would be useful for future history students. By Malden's own admission, 'these papers ... were not written with any idea of sequence, nor as aiming at any complete comment upon all points of the charter.'¹⁰ Published in 1917 a total of nine essays were brought together to form the body of the work. Viewed as a *corpus*, the essays range considerably in theme and approach, but overall can be grouped into either historical or legal contributions, featuring essays by historians such as Professor William McKechnie and Professor Frederick Maurice Powicke. Despite the varied nature of their approach and thematic responses, viewed as a collective the essays are united in their critical handling of the charter. As Malden summarises:

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, xx.

¹⁰ Ibid, xxi.

the old uncritical admiration which found in the Great Charter something more than the germ of all the more important parts of the Constitution and law of recent centuries has vanished from every place, except occasionally from Parliament and the public platform.¹¹

His words echoed the contemporary scholarly contributions of Edward Jenks and William McKechnie. There is little doubt that war prevented the Royal Historical Society from delivering a more expansive commemorative programme and, as noted in the introductory remarks of the commemorative essays, plans to hold an event at Runnymede were cancelled.¹² The commemoration essays are representative of the academic response to the seven hundredth anniversary celebrations. Without their collective efforts the anniversary would have passed with little meaningful academic input.

Outside of academic contributions to the 700th anniversary, celebratory events and commemorative activity were reported in many regional newspapers.¹³ At Canterbury Cathedral a small commemorative event was held and the coffin of Archbishop Langton was covered with the cathedral pall, upon which a wreath of roses was placed, flanked by bouquets of flowers. The local community in Barnstable celebrated the sealing of the charter by a 'divine service in the Parish Church, followed by a public meeting in the Parish Rooms.'¹⁴ Mr R. E. C. Balsdon, a local solicitor, described as a 'very able speaker', provided the main address. He began his talk with a reflection on the conflict in which the country was engaged, suggesting this was the greatest struggle that the world had ever known against military oppression and potential domination of a singular nation. The sealing of Magna Carta, he argued, represented the first notable moment in which a body of people stood against oppression and hardship. Similarly, the *Liverpool Echo* framed the present conflict as an international fight for liberty: a fight that started with the Barons at Runnymede in 1215.¹⁵ In further cementing this point, the

¹¹ Ibid, xx.

¹² Ibid, xix.

¹³ "Magna Charta," *North Eastern Daily Gazette*, June 16, 1915, 3; "Magna Charta," *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, June 16, 1915, 4; "Magna Charta and Midlands," *Birmingham Gazette*, February 20, 1915, 4; *The Yorkshire Post*, May 12, 1915, 5.

¹⁴ "Magna Carta Celebration Barnstable," *The North Devon Journal*, June 17, 1915, 2.

¹⁵ "The New Magna Charta," *Liverpool Echo*, June 15, 1915, 6.

article asserts 'the spirit of King John, the spirit of insolent arrogance and ruthlessness, is reincarnated in the person of the German Kaiser.'¹⁶ The fact that Magna Carta was framed along these lines is not surprising, serving to further legitimise the claim that the charter is protean in character.

Suffrage organisations, however, played a leading role in organising commemorations. Publications such as *Votes for Women*, *Vote*, and *Church League for Women's Suffrage* publicised commemorative meetings and, more broadly, made note of the anniversary.¹⁷ Additionally, some local suffrage societies placed adverts in regional newspapers to advertise their respective anniversary events.¹⁸ The most high-profile event was a charity evening arranged by the Women's Freedom League (W.F.L) at Caxton Hall on 18th June 1915. The event was marketed as both a Magna Carta Celebration and Anglo-Belgian meeting and, as such, the proceeds from the evening were split between funds that helped Belgian soldiers and the league's own work. Charlotte Despard, President of the W.F.L, provided the official welcome and remarked that those in attendance 'had showed their determination to hold aloft the banner of liberty at a time when the liberties of Europe were menaced.'¹⁹ Despard's welcome was followed by two talks from M. Vandervelde and the lawyer Miss Helena Normanton (**fig. 2**). Normanton provided a talk that sought to challenge arguments that styled the charter as a mere list of provisions to suit a group of selfish and disgruntled barons. In response to this, Normanton looked to provide a corrective argument drawn from her own legal interpretation of the charter. If this was the case, Normanton asked, why was it ordained that Magna Carta was to be read aloud twice a year?²⁰

The anniversary of the charter was not only framed within the context of World War One. The anniversary moment was also used to further strengthen calls for the extension of the franchise to women. 'The charter', Normanton insisted, 'is *everything to us*; it is the legal basis

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For example, see "The Basis of English Freedom" *Votes for Women*, June 11, 1915, 299; "In Defence of Our Liberties," *Vote*, June 4, 1915, 1; "700th Anniversary of Magna Carta: A Public Meeting," *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, June, 1915, 104.

¹⁸ For example, see "Uxbridge Suffrage Society Meeting," *West Middlesex Gazette*, December 10, 1915, 6.

¹⁹ "The Magna Carta Celebration and Anglo-Belgian Meeting," *Vote*, June 25, 1915, 657.

²⁰ Ibid.

for the enfranchisement of Englishwomen.’²¹ This was not the first time that Normanton had invoked the tradition of the charter as a legitimising tool for the women’s suffrage movement, having already published a lengthy article within *The Englishwoman*.²² However, away from Normanton’s contributions, suffrage organisations had occasionally drawn on Magna Carta’s legacy to justify their arguments for both militant and non-militant action.²³ These arguments had little impact upon the eventual success of the campaign, instead underlining the way in which political projects have been anchored to the Magna Carta tradition and ideas of liberty, freedom, and equality. Viewed as a whole, the 700th anniversary of the charter clearly reinforces the idea that Magna Carta can be deployed to support multiple interpretations and arguments concurrently. In 1915, the charter was framed within both the context of the First World War and the extension of the franchise to women. In contrast, however, there was no notable activity that took place at Runnymede. The anniversary is mentioned only in passing within the pages of *The Surrey Herald* and is noteworthy only for its humorous levels of historical inaccuracy, stating it was ‘seven hundred years ago one of the fickle Stewarts was met by that bold band of Barons.’²⁴

Britain Between the Wars

At least 780,000 men from across the United Kingdom died as a result of service during the First World War. For a conflict that was many initially believed would be relatively short and decisive, the bitter effects of four years of prolonged and bloody fighting had an immeasurable impact, shaping the future direction of British society, economic policy, domestic and international politics. As such, the ‘war to end all wars’ is often characterised as a watershed moment in not only British history, but global history more widely. The First World War was a cultural break: a moment in which continuity with pre-war society was ruptured. Narratives of the war have traditionally been characterised along these lines, flooding the work of history,

²¹ “The Magna Carta Celebration and Anglo-Belgian Meeting,” *Vote*, June 25, 1915, 657.

²² H. Normanton, “Magna Carta and Women,” *The Englishwoman*, 77 (1915), 129–42.

²³ *Votes for Women*, January 27, 1911.

²⁴ “The Runnymede Anniversary,” *The Surrey Herald*, June 18, 1915, 3.

literature, drama, and film. As Samuel Hynes observes, the construction of the myth of the war emerged during the war itself but really began in earnest at the end of the 1920s, marking the point at which the validity of the war was no longer questioned and this narrative uncritically regurgitated.²⁵

It is undeniable that the war had considerable negative impacts. Returning soldiers struggled to reintegrate into a society that was filled with people from which many of them now felt quite alienated. Veterans also often had difficulty finding work and many still waited for overdue payments for their active service. After a short-lived post-war boom, the economy slumped and levels of unemployment reached two million by 1921, a trend that was exacerbated by the influx of returning soldiers and the fact that women were forced to leave factory work in preference for veterans.²⁶ The extraordinary death tolls suffered during the war years also led to the emergence of a myth of a 'lost generation'. Jay Winter has critiqued this idea and demonstrated that the war did not, in fact, wipe out an entire generation, but also noted that it had a disproportionate impact on the traditional aristocracy and upper classes.²⁷ The war also acted as a catalyst for longer-term economic decline. Britain entered the war as the leading global economy and emerged in 1918 some way behind the United States. New York, instead of London, was now the leading global stock exchange and Britain's decline in the share of world trade, especially in textiles, continued.²⁸ However, it was not all doom and gloom. In terms of the physical extent of the empire, 1918 marked its zenith. Additionally, as Winter argues, the Great War presents a curious paradox: for all the bloodshed and suffering, political and social advances were made. Wages increased with the poorest in society receiving

²⁵ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), x. He explained the 'Myth of the War' as: 'a generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived ... rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.'

²⁶ Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars*, (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), 278; Chris Wrigley, 'The Impact of the First World War,' in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 509.

²⁷ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 65-99.

²⁸ Wrigley, 'The Impact of the First World War,' 505-507.

the greatest increase; people's diet improved; and the franchise was extended to women of property over 30 and men over 21 or 18 if they had served.²⁹

Paul Fussell described the war as 'perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful "history" involving a coherent stream of time running from past through to present.'³⁰ In this framing, the war was a transitory time in which there was a moment of rupture in an otherwise continuous chronology. The war thus hurriedly ushered in modernity. Fussell's work has been criticised by numerous commentators, but the framing of the war as a futile and tragic conflict, marking a moment of discontinuity with the past has gained support.³¹ In this vein, Hynes states:

Even as it was being fought the war was perceived as a force of radical change in society and in consciousness. It brought to an end the life and values of Victorian and Edwardian England; but it did something more fundamental than that: it added a new scale of violence and destruction to what was possible – it changed reality. That change was so vast and so abrupt as to make the years after the war seem discontinuous from the years before, and that discontinuity became a part of English imaginations. Men and women after the war looked back at their own pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side.³²

And yet the war was a great agent of change and viewing it in isolation provides us with quite a distorted view. As Hynes suggests, this story of change does not begin in 1914 and end in 1918 but starts in the late nineteenth-century and continues into the 1930s.³³ Adopting this longer assessment of people's perceptions of the past reveals a rich vein of historiographical debate, suggesting this issue was not simply a result of the war.³⁴ Equally, historians such as Janet Watson and Jay Winter have attempted to nuance the traditional argument, framing the war as

²⁹ Winter, *The Great War*, 101-153.

³⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

³¹ See, for example, Belinda Davis, 'Experience, Identity, and Memory: The Legacy of World War I', *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003), 111-131.

³² Hynes, *A War Imagined*, ix.

³³ *Ibid*, xi.

³⁴ The most succinct summary of this historiographical debate is detailed in Paul Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture,' *Past and Present* (February 2005): 147-199. One should not overlook the rise of heritage and preservation societies during this period, see: Astrid Svenson, *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England, 1789-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

either a generational break or through stressing the continuation and reliance on tradition as a way of dealing with mourning and loss.³⁵

The war necessitated the need to recalibrate ideas of 'Britishness' as Britain came to terms with its place in the world. In terms of its Empire, the end of the war marked its zenith and the rest of the century could be characterised as a narrative of decline. Nationalist uprisings across the Empire became a common feature of the immediate post-war experience and between 1919-1921 uprisings or serious civil disturbances occurred in Ireland, India, Egypt, and Iraq.³⁶ December 1921 saw the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland reduced in size, following the Irish War of Independence, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the establishment of the Irish Free State. This was set against a backdrop of a return to 'Englishness' and romantic ideas of 'Merrie England', which looked to reject modernism in favour of social and political conservatism. The appeal and political success of Stanley Baldwin's 'One Nation Conservatism' across the 1920s and 1930s, echoing similar ideas and tropes, suggests that these ideas were deeply powerful and persuasive. However, in recent decades this generally accepted historiographical view has been drawn into question.³⁷

For Sale: Runnymede

At the turn of the twentieth-century, Runnymede formed part of the Crown Estate. In 1215, Runnymede was not owned by the crown, but by Chertsey Abbey. Along with the adjacent meadows of Longmead and Yardmead, this cluster of fields was known as the Manor of Egham. In 1537, Chertsey Abbey was dissolved under Henry VIII's policy of dissolution. The former monastery's lands thus became property of the Crown and remained so well into the twentieth century. But this is not to say that Runnymede was excluded from public usage. From 1770

³⁵ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 307-308; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

³⁶ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995* (London: Longman, 1996), 257-258.

³⁷ Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1997): 155-175.

onwards, for example, Runnymede was the site of the Egham Races. The races were a hugely popular and well attended annual event, taking place in September. The significance of the location was not lost, however, with both the King John Plate and Magna Charta Plate featuring on the race cards each year. In 1886, the races were cancelled, following the Metropolitan police's refusal to supply the necessary men to control the rowdy crowds and the thriving community of pickpockets who saw the races as their metaphorical home.

Following the cancellation of the races and up to the end of the First World War, Runnymede was used for little else other than farming. In 1920, however, acting under the approval of the Treasury, the Commissioners of Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues elected to offer for sale by public auction 633 acres of the outlying portion of the Crown's Windsor estate in the parish of Egham.³⁸ Out of the total acreage that went up for auction, ninety-nine acres covered the Runnymede site. Under the direction of Messrs. Daniel Smith, Oakley, and Garrard, the auction took place at Winchester House on 6 July 1921. Runnymede, referred to as 'Lot 8', received no bids and remained unsold. In accounting for this, the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that the site's description as a 'valuable grazing meadow' meant that potential purchasers remained unaware of the site's extraordinary historic significance.³⁹

The proposed sale did not stay out of the public eye for long, however, and by the beginning of August, a campaign to save Runnymede and stop its public auction was well underway. Central to the coordination of this campaign was Helena Normanton, a lawyer, suffrage campaigner, and a key actor during the 700th anniversary celebrations of the charter. Following the introduction of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill (1919), the success of which was largely attributed to her own campaigning efforts, women could enter the legal profession.⁴⁰ She first learnt of the proposed sale whilst going through a selection of parliamentary papers relating to forthcoming events, which had been made available for the reference of Middle Temple members.

³⁸ 'Runnymede Retained,' *The Times*, 11 August 1921, 5.

³⁹ 'Runnymede: Landmark of History,' *The Daily Telegraph*, August 9, 1921, newspaper clipping in Runnymede and Longmede: General Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter cited as TNA): CRES 35/1213.

⁴⁰ Joanne Workman, 'Normanton, Helena Florence (1882–1957), Barrister and Feminist Campaigner,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39091>, accessed 3 December 2019.

Normanton acted decisively, adopting four approaches to ensure the word was spread efficiently and effectively. Firstly, she ensured the major newspapers were made aware of the proposal, writing letters to the respective editors or through meeting them in person. Secondly, she engaged with politicians and the government, making use of the political connections of her father-in-law, Dr Gavin Brown Clark, a former Scottish MP. It was through this link that she was introduced to Charles Wynn-Carrington, 1st Marquess of Lincolnshire (**fig. 4**), a liberal politician and major landowner, who owned property near Runnymede. Her third move was to engage the community of Egham, writing to the local Rector. Lastly, she also applied parliamentary pressure by ensuring that questions were asked in the House of Commons.

Her actions were very clearly effective. During the House of Lords debate over the repeal of the Corn Productions Act on 3 August, the Marquess of Lincolnshire delivered an impassioned speech in which he exposed the government's attempts to sell Runnymede:

It is thus described— "On the Manor Farm is Runnymede. The Armies of King John and the Confederate Barons encamped here for the signing of Magna Charta, on June 15. 1215". Your ancestors, my Lords, on that historical field, saved the Crown and the liberties of England. And now we are face to face with the fact that this field, which is so famous in history, is to be put up for sale ...'⁴¹

His intervention and line of questioning, however, were framed against the backdrop of domestic economic uncertainty, following the end of the war. In commenting on the economic situation, the Marquess heavily criticised the government's fiscal policy, accusing them of 'destroying the credit of the nation' having 'flooded the country with paper money; debased the coinage of the Realm; and now ... selling the Crown lands'.⁴² The economic issues that plagued Britain following the war have been well documented. As Noreen Branson has observed, the immediate post-war years saw an 'uncontrolled inflationary boom during which output never reached pre-war standards but prices soared and fortunes were made

⁴¹ Marquis of Lincolnshire, 'Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill,' HL Deb 3 August 1921, vol 43 cc178-179. For a short summary of the repeal of the Corn Productions Act and surrounding debates see Edith H. Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol 8: 1914-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 139-141.

⁴² Marquis of Lincolnshire, 'Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill,' HL Deb 3 August 1921, vol 43 c177.

overnight'.⁴³ This was in stark contrast to the slump and depression experienced by Britain during 1921 and 1922 when levels of unemployment reached highs that had not been seen for a hundred years.⁴⁴ Weighed down by the pressure of war debts, the government looked to reduce public expenditure and increase income to alleviate this economic burden. The selling of Crown Lands thus became one way in which the government sought to achieve an income surplus.

Following the Marquess' intervention and criticism in the House of Lords, a flurry of articles on the matter appeared in the press. In one such piece, published in the *Daily Mail*, the author pointedly claimed that the Crown had decided to 'dispose' of Runnymede.⁴⁵ On Saturday 6 August, the Vicar of Egham, the Rev. A. C. Tranter (**fig. 5**), was present at a meeting of the Staines branch of the League of Nations Union at Runnymede. It is difficult to determine whether this meeting had been planned prior to the public learning of the proposed sale of Runnymede. The issue, however, was unavoidable, and Tranter was joined by other residents, voicing their disdain. Speaking to a reporter from the *Daily Mail*, Tranter insisted that 'rather than submit to such vandalism, I should be prepared to go to gaol if necessary'.⁴⁶ After declaring he was prepared to 'pitch the auctioneer into the river', Tranter continued: 'It would be a shame and a scandal if Runnymede became the property of a private individual; it ought to be the national property for all time, because it was at Runnymede that England's real liberties began.'⁴⁷ Similarly, in commenting on the number of visitors, the ice-cream vendors, and coconut-shy proprietors that often set up to take advantage of the visitors to Runnymede, a local resident stated, 'heaven forbid that Runnymede should ever become like Hampstead Heath or a show-place like Hampton Court'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Noreen Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 13. For a more general account of land transfer in the aftermath of the First World War see Michael Thompson, 'The Land Market, 1880-1925: A Reappraisal Reappraised,' *The Agricultural History Review* 55, no. 2 (2007): 289-300.

⁴⁴ Arthur Marwick, *After the Deluge* (London: The Bodley Head, 1965), 291.

⁴⁵ 'Runnymede for Sale,' *The Daily Mail*, 5 August 1921, 5.

⁴⁶ 'Runnymede,' *The Daily Mail*, 8 August 1921, 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The press coverage of the proposed sale was largely negative, urging the government to reassess their decision and change their plans. Many of the published reports were deliberate in the way they framed Runnymede as the site on which British liberty was born.⁴⁹ For many, the sale of Runnymede was apparently akin to selling the foundations of British liberty. It was these very values and principles that British troops had sought to defend during the war, and it was along these lines that Magna Carta had been celebrated in 1915. But, as was noted in the *Daily Telegraph*, the sale of Runnymede would be of little loss in terms of its public usage:

A sale of Runnymede would probably bring little material loss of public usage. It may be that sentiment alone is offended. But the Government department needs to remain strong that would eliminate the impulse of sentiment from the British race. Runnymede makes a thousand claims to become a national possession.⁵⁰

The moment of 1215 saw the germination of these ideas and principles. For centuries these had been untouched, nurtured only by the passing of centuries. In 1921 the question was: could the tree survive if it was severed from the ground on which it grew? However, the reality was that whilst Runnymede remained a relatively underused open space, its future was precarious. The long-term preservation of the site seemed to many to be crucial, and the only guaranteed way of ensuring this was for it to become a national possession.

Speaking in the House of Commons on 10 August, the Conservative politician and British peer, Sir William Davison, 1st Baron Broughshane, challenged the Government over its decision to sell Runnymede, highlighting the fact that matter had not yet been debated in Parliament. In his question to the Prime Minister, he asked:

. . . whether he is aware that this historic property, one of the beauty spots of England and part of the ancient domain of the Crown, is one looked upon with feelings of the utmost veneration, not only by the inhabitants of Great Britain, but by all the English speaking democracies throughout the world . . . whether he will see that no further action is taken with regard to the sale of Runnymede and the

⁴⁹ For example, see 'Runnymede for Sale,' *The Coventry Herald*, 5 August 1921, 12; 'Lot 8 – Runnymede: The Question of Sale of an Historic Site,' *The Sphere*, 13 August 1921, 156; 'Runnymede,' *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 11 August 1921, 6; 'Historic Runnymede,' *The Herald*, 12 August 1921, 5.

⁵⁰ 'Runnymede: Landmark of History,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 1921, newspaper clipping in Runnymede and Longmede: General Correspondence, TNA: CRES 35/1213.

adjoining property until Parliament has had an opportunity of expressing its opinion on the matter?⁵¹

Davison's intervention reflected the concerns shared with many members of the public. In response, Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, the Minister of Agriculture and Co-Commissioner of Woods, Forests, and Land Revenue, informed the House that, in his view, the property should not have been included as part of the proposed sale and he hoped it would be 'withdrawn from the sale and retained as Crown property'.⁵² Following this statement, the question of the sale of Runnymede disappeared from public debate. Newspapers triumphantly published articles celebrating the decision over the following days under headlines such as "Runnymede Retained". However, despite the overwhelming sense of positivity that came with this decision, some reports emphasised that this did not guarantee the site any long-term security.⁵³

The Magna Carta Commemoration Committee

Helena Normanton was a key figure in ensuring that Runnymede was removed from the public auction and her efforts to publicise the sale and place pressure on the government were effective. Her actions provided her with a small network of influential figures that each valued the historic significance of both Runnymede and the charter. Of the people she had contacted, the interventions of the Marquess of Lincolnshire and Rev. Albert Tranter had done much to raise the public profile of the proposed sale. Both the Marquess of Lincolnshire and Rev. Tranter had publicly stated their desire to see Runnymede retained as national property, but the future of the site remained uncertain and this provided a common cause for the continuation of work for this network of allies.

In a letter to Normanton, Tranter expressed his relief at seeing the sale stopped. Tranter was keen, however, to ensure that Runnymede remained permanently safe and free from future threat. Before signing-off, he expressed four main issues that he felt still required

⁵¹ Sir William Davison, 'Runnymede (Crown Property),' 146 HC Deb. 5. s. 10 August 1921, 434.

⁵² Sir Arthur Boscawen, 'Runnymede (Crown Property),' in *ibid*.

⁵³ For example, see 'Runnymede Retained,' *The Times*, 11 August 1921, 5.

attention, welcoming Normanton's input. His queries ranged considerably, but, viewed as a collective, reflect many of the issues that had already been expressed with regard to the meadow's future, particularly the desire to see it become nationally owned. Tranter's last point is of particular note as he takes the opportunity to suggest that some form of annual event – be it pilgrimage, pageant, or commemoration – should take place at Runnymede.⁵⁴ The future of the site remained a central concern and the three individuals continued to lobby and agitate for national acquisition. The Marquess was a strong advocate for this approach and, as Normanton later wrote, spent much time pressing the government on this issue.⁵⁵ His calls were dismissed, however, and the dark cloud that was Runnymede's future loomed ominously overhead. There was little the three could do to immediately change the situation, but they remained undeterred. As a collective, their energies shifted away from the issue of purchase, towards that of activity. In the short term, the priority was to ensure that activity at the meadow continued. Collectively they felt that the more that took place on the meadow, the greater the chances of keeping 'the interest of the world'.⁵⁶ This was something that the three could directly influence. True to his word, Tranter set about establishing a local committee in Egham.⁵⁷ The exact date at which 'The Magna Carta Commemoration Committee' was established remains unclear as the first commemorative service did not take place for a further two years.

On 15 June 1923, *The Times* noted that a 'Magna Carta Day had been inaugurated on historic Runnymede' the previous evening.⁵⁸ The report provides a brief but extremely insightful window through which to view the events that took place and the people that were involved. A procession made up of the 'massed choirs of the established and Free Churches of the district', marched from St John's, Egham, the church at which Rev. Tranter was vicar. The procession's route to Runnymede is not stated, but one imagines that at least some of the mile

⁵⁴ Copy of letter from A. C. Tranter to Helena Normanton, 13 August 1921 in scrapbook compiled by Helena Normanton, Egham Museum, MN 347.

⁵⁵ Helena Normanton, "Runnymede for England," *The Landmark*, n.d., 127, in *ibid*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ The committee's initial membership included Mr H. Weller, Esq, JP of Egham U.D.C, F.E. Larkin, Esq, O.E. Mandeville Esq. (Invitations Secretary), Rev. A. C. Tranter, and Mrs A. de Worms.

⁵⁸ 'Magna Carta Day,' *The Times*, 15 June 1923, 12.

walk incorporated Egham's High Street. Estimating the numbers that were present that evening is also difficult, and, apart from a few short newspaper reports and some photos, there remains very little surviving evidence. The report from *The Times* indicates that the crowd was significant, using the phrase 'a large number' to describe it.⁵⁹ Likewise, a photograph of the 1923 service (**fig. 6**) depicts a crowd gathered around a makeshift stage that is, in places, ten people deep, which seems to confirm that there was at least several hundred people present that evening.⁶⁰ Writing some seven years later, Normanton noted that the 1923 meeting had a 'rather small crowd', which appears to contradict the surviving evidence. One suspects this aside was the product of comparison to the success and popularity of subsequent commemorative services, rather than an accurate assessment of the 1923 meeting. Regardless of attendance, the inaugural meeting was inclusive, encouraging local groups and individuals to either play a participatory role or show their support through attendance.

The long-term future of the Runnymede site remained uncertain. The 1923 service, therefore, was an act of local defiance and protest as much as a commemoration of the great charter. Once the procession had reached Runnymede, the commemorative service incorporated two keynote addresses, interspersed by religious liturgy. The first address was delivered by the Very Rev., Sir Albert Victor Baillie, Dean of Windsor. Born in 1864 and known for his 'energy, his impatience of opposition, and stentorian vocal powers', one of his first acts as Dean was to co-ordinate the renovation of St George's Chapel, Windsor.⁶¹ Under Baillie's guidance, the repair project commenced in 1920 and he was a leading figure in ensuring interest did not wane and that the money was raised to ensure it was completed.⁶² The exact wording of his address is unclear, but *The Times* reported that Baillie stressed that whilst the Great Charter belonged to the age of feudalism, 'we were right in looking to it as having been in a remarkable degree the foundation-stone in the development of our national liberties.'⁶³ For Baillie, it was clear, Magna Carta represented the foundation of British liberties. Runnymede

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Magna Carta Commemoration. Runnymede, Egham. Sunday, June 22nd, 1924*, Egham Museum. Doc 172.

⁶¹ 'The Rev. A.V. Baillie,' *The Times*, 4 November 1955, 11.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 'Magna Carta Day,' *The Times*, 15 June 1923, 12.

was the site upon which this moment of foundation had happened. It was, therefore, as central to this narrative as the document itself.

Lord Lincolnshire delivered the second address in his capacity as President of the Magna Carta Commemoration Society. Having been such a vocal advocate for the removal of Runnymede from the public sale in 1921, the direction and framing of his speech was unsurprising given the conversations that had preceded this meeting. He impressed upon the gathered crowd the importance of ensuring ‘that sacred spot’ remained the property of the nation and, with a tone of defiance, reminded those present that the principles established in 1215 were now the ‘keynote of our great Empire’.⁶⁴ This was not just a domestic concern, but one that was inextricably linked to Britain’s imperial project, interests, and empire. As Zoe Laidlaw argues, during Britain’s imperial expansion, Magna Carta was often deployed as a ‘portable blueprint for British rule’, and ‘the idea of an empire enjoying the benefits of British justice and good government was important to those trying to justify empire’.⁶⁵ War, however, had dramatically changed the world’s geo-political landscape. Britain had entered the war as the world’s dominant economic force, but its economy had emerged from war beleaguered, weighed down by the sheer expense of total war. Ideas of liberty and justice, in their British guises, remained an important pillar on which the empire was supported. Selling Runnymede, the site on which these values and ideas were established, only served to strengthen the colonies’ arguments against the empire’s existence. The public articulation of these tensions reflects the degree to which the inaugural Magna Carta Day can be characterised as the product of activism over commemoration. There is little doubt that those present were there to reconfirm their allegiance to the principles contained within the great charter, but of equal motivation was the desire to ensure Runnymede remained publicly accessible.

In terms of form, the 1924 Magna Carta Day was very similar to that of the previous year. Described by *The Times* as ‘the most successful demonstration yet held in connexion with Magna Charta Day celebrations in this country’, the commemorative service began once again

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Zoe Laidlaw, ‘Empire and After,’ in *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy*, eds. Claire Breay and Julian Harrison (London: The British Library, 2015), 192-193.

with a procession from St John's Church that culminated at Runnymede.⁶⁶ Moreover, the activist spirit that had provided the original impetus for the establishment of the annual commemorative services was still very much alive. As the *Portsmouth Evening News* reported, Helena Normanton had 'addressed many residents of Egham ... on Magna Carta as a preliminary stage of the demonstration'.⁶⁷ However, in comparison to the previous year, the 1924 commemorative service was much larger, receiving both a greater level of attention within the popular press and attracting a more prestigious selection of speakers and international guests.⁶⁸ Among the guests were Mr J. H. Whitley MP, Speaker of the House of Commons (**fig. 7**); Lord Lincolnshire; Sir Joseph Cook, High Commissioner for Australia; and Mr Harcourt Malcolm, Speaker of House of Assembly of the Bahamas.

Unlike the 1923 service, commemorative ephemera survives from 1924, including an order of service, providing us with a greater insight and understanding of the event's basic form and structure (**fig. 8**). The service book includes a brief historical overview of Magna Carta and its wider legacy written by a Mr W. J. Hutchins, assisted by Professor Hilda Johnstone, a medieval historian on the faculty at Royal Holloway and one of the first female Professors within the University of London. The final section of Hutchins' introduction turns to the memorialisation of the charter. In emphasising the lack of a memorial to Magna Carta, Hutchins draws a direct contrast with 'our American cousins' who he states 'have erected a Statue of Liberty . . . to symbolise the Freedom to which those who enter their country enjoy'.⁶⁹ He goes on to lament the absence of an equivalent on the 'hallowed' Runnymede:

⁶⁶ 'Magna Charta Day,' *The Times*, 23 June 1924, 14.

⁶⁷ 'Magna Charta Day,' *Portsmouth Evening News*, 20 June 1924, 7.

⁶⁸ For an indication of local press attention, see: 'Commemorating Magna Carta,' *Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette*, 27 June 1924, 9; 'The Speaker Speaks Out,' *Dundee Courier*, 23 June 1924, 5; 'Speaker Speaks Out,' *Western Gazette*, 27 June 1924, 12.

⁶⁹ *Magna Carta Commemoration. Runnymede, Egham. Sunday, June 22nd, 1924*, Egham Museum.

No monument with sculptured phrase is raised to perpetuate those liberties which were thereon secured to us. Simple of itself the historic meadow blends with a landscape of utter restfulness and peaceful dignity and of Runnymede [sic], with its memory of Magna Carta, it may be truly said;-

‘We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone,

But we left it alone with its glory.’⁷⁰

His words are telling and provide an interesting perspective on the relationship between commemoration and memorialisation. For Hutchins and the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee more broadly, the charter was memorialised in perpetuity at the site on which it had been sealed. The physical space served as a living memorial to that famous event of 1215. Runnymede was glorious, precisely because it had been left untouched, a historic meadow blended with a landscape of restfulness and peaceful dignity. Unlike the American case, there was no need to erect a statue because the site already represented and embodied these values. It was the landscape that contained the historic DNA and it was exactly this that they were looking to actively protect.

In terms of its structure, the 1924 Magna Carta Day followed a similar pattern to that of the previous year, combining liturgy with secular speeches. The service was led by the Rev. F. T. Kirby of Egham Hill Congregational Church and H. F. Poole of St Jude’s, Englefield Green, incorporating hymns and prayers. J. H. Whitley provided the event’s main address. Whitley’s participation was undoubtedly quite a coup for the Commemoration Committee, providing their activity at Runnymede with a greater level of public exposure. Indeed, many local newspapers adopted a headline centred on the Speaker’s presence on the meadows, instead of the Magna Carta Day celebrations. If the speeches of the previous year made direct reference to the proposed land sale and extolled the virtues of British liberty, Whitley’s address considered the charter in the context of Bolshevism and the perceived threat of socialism within Britain, following the establishment of a Labour Minority government led by Ramsay MacDonald in January 1924.⁷¹ MacDonald’s recognition of the Soviet state and his willingness

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ For example, see Philip Williamson, ‘The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin,’ in *Public and Private Doctrine: Essays in British History dedicated to Maurice Cowling*, ed. Michael Bentley (Cambridge: Cambridge University

to enter into negotiations over an Anglo-Soviet trade treaty did little to alleviate these fears, and were a matter of grave concern for Conservatives and Liberals. As the sub headline of the *Western Gazette* unsobtly suggested there was a 'Red menace' that threatened the liberties enshrined within Magna Carta, and Whitley's words were framed along these lines.⁷² Directly referencing Bolshevism, Whitley stated: 'Dictatorships with queer names, triumvirates with unlimited powers, but not limited responsibilities – these are offered as substitutes for our liberties.'⁷³ Bringing his speech back toward the domestic scene, Whitley referenced the figure of Charles I, claiming he was not dead and using the reincarnation of his spirit as a metaphor for the perceived threat that socialism posed: 'He is just the same; he still dislikes hearing any voice but his own. He goes on trying to prevent free speech, and he would suppress any opinions other than his own.'⁷⁴ Whitley observed that the type of person characterised here was not, however, confined to the streets of Britain and occasionally glimpses were seen on 'the green benches of the House of Commons'.⁷⁵ In this interpretation of Magna Carta, the charter acted as the bulwark and stoic defender of democratic principles and western conceptions of freedom of speech and the rule of law. The charter served as a suitable reminder that underpinned a conservative approach to the world and domestic politics at a time when the tectonic plates of the traditional political landscape were shifting dramatically.

More broadly, the 1924 service acts as a case study in which to think about ideas of continuity and change. Many of the performative elements of the event, such as the procession through Egham, remained the same as the previous year's service. The activist spirit that underpinned the establishment of the annual Magna Carta Day service was also prominent, with Normanton and Lord Lincolnshire again taking the opportunity to make the case for the public acquisition of the site. There were also notable differences, reflecting both the increased

Press, 2002), 195. In the lead up to the 1924 election, the Conservative Party campaigned on an anti-socialist platform and propaganda of the period reflects this. In his political speeches Baldwin warned of the dangers of communism, during the election campaign of October 1924 he made explicit reference to the Zinoviev letter, telling Russia to keep its 'Hands off England.' Full details available in Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), 275.

⁷² 'Speaker Speaks Out,' *Western Gazette*, 27 June 1924, 12.

⁷³ 'Magna Charta Day,' *The Times*, 23 June 1924, 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

exposure the service received and public support for the campaign that was being generated. Beyond matters of scale and turnout, the international profile of representatives and guests, which were drawn from the dominions, points to a more outward looking and internationalist event. In terms of profile, the coup of attracting a high-profile speaker such as J. H. Whitley MP undoubtedly provided the service with greater gravitas and ceremonial significance. Whitley's framing of the charter, along with the particular themes he chose to stress, reflect this internationalist approach. It is important to stress that this was an internationalist perspective that was anchored in conceptions of Western democracy that were representative of both the various guises and evolutionary stages of 'British liberty'. In this sense, Magna Carta's protean character was, once again, on display for all to see. Although not explicitly stated, 1924 witnessed Magna Carta being drawn into debates that pitted democratic ideals against the tyranny of dictators. In the case of 1924, socialism, both at home and abroad, was perceived by many to pose the biggest threat to these values and ideals.

The International Magna Charta Day Association

The activities of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee at Runnymede in 1923 and 1924 did much to raise their public profile in Britain, America, and across the Empire. Much of what was seen at Runnymede, however, was in keeping with a general spirit of international collaboration following the end of the First World War in which universal ideals of democracy, freedom, and individual liberty became a common international currency. This was a continuation of the amity that was demonstrated between many of the Anglophone soldiers who had served in the trenches of the Western Front and Gallipoli and in the other theatres of war. There was a desire to see this spirit of international cooperation continue to avoid further war and safeguard against states following the path Russia had taken.⁷⁶ The First World War, combined with the resulting desire to avoid another conflict of such extraordinary destructive force, provided the impetus for international cooperation, but, prior to the outbreak of conflict,

⁷⁶ Donald M. MacRaild, Sylvia Ellis and Stephen Bowman, 'Interdependence Day and Magna Charta: James Hamilton's Public Diplomacy in the Anglo-world, 1907-1940s,' *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (2014): 146.

transatlantic cultural ties were bolstered through the pervasive power of a shared Anglo-Saxon heritage. Publications such as John R. Dos Passos', *The Anglo-Saxon Century and the Unification of the English-Speaking People* (1903), reflected a desire to mobilise the commonality of language as the basis for greater transatlantic collaboration.⁷⁷ Passos' work sets out a number of highly persuasive arguments and uses a combination of shared history, including the sealing of Magna Carta and its links to the American Constitution, literature, language, and law to underpin his political project. The early twentieth century thus saw something of a re-emergence of the charter as a cultural totem, representative of shared democratic heritage.⁷⁸ The establishment of the Minnesota-based International Magna Charta Day Association (IMCDA) in 1907 by James Woodburn Hamilton, was in keeping with this trend, stating its desire to help promote world peace through the spread of Western democratic values. Hamilton was a keen observer of the annual commemorative services at Runnymede and contacted the MCCC to see if his association could lend their support. The Committee were not particularly receptive to his enquiries.

Hamilton was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1866 to a Scottish Presbyterian father and an English mother. Having had a comfortable lower-middle class upbringing, he received a good education and worked as a sales-manager in St Paul, Minnesota after he left school. At heart, however, Hamilton was a campaigner and his sales job merely provided the basis for which he could further his campaign work. His lofty ideals included the conviction that there should be a common, global English language. He also believed in pacifist education and global peace, and felt that there should be a formal Magna Charta Day.⁷⁹ The IMCDA thus served as a vehicle through which Hamilton could fulfil his commitment to these causes. The Association had two stated principles. The first stated objective was 'to develop English-speaking patriotism and co-

⁷⁷ John R. Dos Passos, *The Anglo-Saxon Century and the Unification of the English-Speaking People* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1903).

⁷⁸ MacRaid, Ellis and Bowman, 'Interdependence Day and Magna Charta,' 142.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 144.

operation by linking the English-speaking nations more closely together', whilst the second looked to 'build up respect for law'.⁸⁰ As Hamilton wrote:

It seems fitting that this association, formed to commemorate Magna Charta and all it stands for, should interest itself with plans to preserve our liberties through greater respect for the law and for those in authority, a proper understanding of the sacredness of citizenship, and unfailing loyalty to the flag in peace as well as in war.⁸¹

For Hamilton, the charter provided a cultural bridge that spanned much of the world. Magna Carta represented a commitment to upholding ideas of freedom under law and individual liberty, but also a mechanism through which to explore ideas of citizenship and peace.

Hamilton first contacted the MCCC in 1923 after he first learnt of the committee's work and commemorative plans. Writing in 1953, Normanton expressed her disdain for Hamilton and his incursions into their activities, going so far as describe this as the 'one unfortunate effect' of the committee's work.⁸² Hamilton learnt of the committee's plans to establish an annual commemorative service, viewing their activities as an ideal conduit through which to achieve his own objectives. According to Normanton, Hamilton wanted to fundamentally change the character of the service, making their activity more in line with his own views of how the anniversary should be celebrated. He also wanted to assimilate the work of MCCC with his own organisation, bringing the financing and organisation of their activity underneath the banner of the IMCDA.⁸³ These intentions were not obvious at first, however, and he exchanged regular correspondence with the Rev. Tranter. In a display of support, Hamilton and his organisation donated the sum of £5 to cover a portion of the expenses associated with the inaugural commemoration service in 1923, which, one imagines, was gratefully received.⁸⁴

Many of the members of the MCCC were sceptical of Hamilton and his organisation. Between the later part of 1924 and first-half of 1925, Normanton was in the USA and Canada

⁸⁰ James Hamilton, 'International Magna Charta Day,' *The Journal of Education* 103, no. 19 (1926): 521.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² 'Confidential Memorandum: Mr J. W. Hamilton of St. Paul's, Minnesota, U.S.A.,' in scrapbook compiled by Helena Normanton, Egham Museum, MN 347.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

during which time she became the first woman to conduct a legal case in the United States. In this test case, Normanton established the legal precedent that secured women's rights to maintain their maiden names following marriage.⁸⁵ She also took the opportunity to tour both countries as part of her political and social activism. Whilst in Chicago she met with James Hamilton to learn more about the man and the work of the IMCDA. Prior to their meeting, Normanton's scepticism had seen her make several enquiries with The English-Speaking Union and other personal contacts over the status, work, and reputation of Hamilton's organisation. In her words, all were 'most unfavourable.'⁸⁶ As far as Normanton could determine, the IMCDA was little more than a front for Hamilton's activities, providing him with a shell-corporation from which he could leverage greater legitimacy and importance for the furthering of his own ambitions. In terms of personnel, Hamilton could only direct Normanton was his local Minister, the Rev. William Johnson, who he had appointed President of the IMCDA. Normanton also noted that, as far as she could establish, 'there appeared to be no signs of accountancy as to its funds'.⁸⁷

The MCCC's distrust of Hamilton and the IMCDA was well-placed. During Normanton's discussions with Hamilton, it emerged that he claimed to be the architect of the annual commemorative service at Runnymede and a central actor in both its establishment and ongoing observances. He even claimed that his financial support had secured J. H. Whitley, and further annoyed Normanton by adding the MCCC's work to the portfolio of activity directed by the IMCDA.⁸⁸ Upon her return to England, Normanton informed the committee of her dealings with Hamilton and the claims he was making. On 30 June 1925, the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee agreed to the following resolution:

⁸⁵ Workman, 'Normanton, Helena Florence (1882–1957).'

⁸⁶ 'Confidential Memorandum: Mr J. W. Hamilton of St. Paul's, Minnesota, U.S.A.'

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

That the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee emphatically repudiates the claim of the International Magna Charta Day Association that 'the celebrations at Runnymede are and always have been a part of the latter organisations work.' This movement was originated spontaneously in England in 1923 and the notification sent to the International Magna Charta Association was only paralleled to that sent to other bodies.⁸⁹

In her own reflections of the meeting, Normanton added that Mr Hamilton was sent letters from both Mr Ashby and the Rev. Tranter, which sought to deny his claims and end their association. The £5 donation was also returned on account of the 'misunderstanding' that surrounded its acceptance.⁹⁰ Following the unanimous acceptance of the resolution, it was agreed that a Vigilance Committee, made-up of the Rev. Tranter, Rev. Kirby, Mr Weller, and Ms Normanton, be established to ensure that the MCCC remained free of associations with potentially harmful groups or individuals.⁹¹ Mr Hamilton's interactions with the committee did not cease here however, and only a year later they were again discussing ways in which they could prevent him from playing a prominent role within the 1926 commemoration service.⁹²

Purchasing Runnymede: A gift for the benefit of the Nation

The establishment of annual commemorative activity at Runnymede along with the subsequent formation of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee ensured that the meadow shifted from a site of latent memory to one of active memory by 1925. The annual commemorative observances constituted a form of memory work, strengthening the relational tie between the space and the moment of 1215 whilst also increasing the public prominence and cultural significance of the site. As we have seen above, the catalyst that prompted this upsurge in commemorative activity was the government's proposal to sell the land and the cloud of uncertainty that remained following its withdrawal from auction. The Magna Carta Commemoration Committee was defined by the activist spirit of its membership, many of

⁸⁹ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 30 June 1925 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' Surrey Heritage Centre, Woking (hereafter cited as SHC): Ac1498/10.

⁹⁰ 'Confidential Memorandum: Mr J. W. Hamilton of St. Paul's, Minnesota, U.S.A.'

⁹¹ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 30 June 1925 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/10.

⁹² Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for May 11, 1926 in *ibid*.

whom had been central in ensuring the site was not sold. A central aim of the Committee was to ensure that the site's long-term future was secured for the benefit of the nation, and the annual commemorative service provided an opportune moment to guarantee that this question and aim was not forgotten. On June 30th, 1925, the MCCC agreed that part of its objective was to ensure 'the perpetual conservation for the public of land associated with Magna Carta.'⁹³ For all their desire to ensure that the future of Runnymede remained safe, the reality was that the Committee lacked a viable solution or mechanism in which they could achieve this. However, from March 1926 the MCCC embarked upon an ambitious project that aimed to purchase the site.⁹⁴

A special sub-committee of the MCCC was established to further these proposals. Unlike more of the mundane activities of the Committee, Lord Lincolnshire took an active interest in developing these plans, playing a vital role in the early development of the project. On the morning of 10 June, under Lincolnshire's chairmanship, the sub-committee met at his London residence in Knightsbridge. He opened the meeting by informing those present that they had gathered to review 'the various possibilities of the position [and] to retain Runnymede for the nation as a whole to whom it already belonged.'⁹⁵ Lincolnshire had also invited the land agents, Carter Jonas, to the meeting and their representative, Mr Jonas, was interviewed by this rump of the MCCC about the legal complexities of manorial right and copyhold, which all needed to be overcome before any purchase was possible. In terms of funding this venture, the sub-committee agreed to draw up an appeal to the public for funds, using the names of the prominent supporters, drawn from both politics and religion, such as the Speaker of the House, The Lord Chancellor, and The Archbishop of Canterbury to help generate donations and provide their appeal with greater legitimacy.⁹⁶ The meeting concluded with the passing of a unanimous resolution and that this was to be sent to Arthur S. Gaye, the first permanent Commissioner of

⁹³ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 30 June 1925 in *ibid*.

⁹⁴ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 5 March 1925 in *ibid*.

⁹⁵ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 10 June 1926 in *ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*. The full list of individuals included: Lord Chancellor, Lord Chief Justice, Speaker of the House, the Lord Great Chamberlain, The Father of the House of Lords, The Father of the House of Commons, The Archbishop of Canterbury, and The Head of the Free Church Council.

Crown Lands, along with Walter Guinness, the Minister for Agriculture.⁹⁷ The next day, the Honorary Secretary to the Egham Branch of the MCCC, L. Ashby, sent a copy of the resolution to Gaye, which stated: 'That immediate steps should be taken, either by Act of Parliament or by the purchase of Commoners', or any other existing rights, to preserve the land at Runnymede for the Nation, as an open space for ever.'⁹⁸

The sub-committee's actions, however, did not please the rest of the MCCC. Members who had not been invited to Lord Lincolnshire's private meeting expressed their dissatisfaction at the resolution having been sent. They believed it was a breach of the sub-committee's authority to have sent out a resolution under the banner of the MCCC.⁹⁹ It is difficult to discern whether this heated exchange was the result of the sub-committee's eagerness to press-on, or actually if the invitation only nature of the private meeting was, in fact, the root of their dissatisfaction. Despite their strong statement of intent, very little progress was made regarding the delivery of this objective and it was over a year before any similar correspondence between the MCCC and government officials took place. The meeting minutes of the MCCC also go silent, with the Committee more preoccupied with arranging the logistics of the annual service over talk of purchasing the Runnymede site.

The desire to purchase Runnymede was a clear priority of the MCCC. On the evening of 15 July 1927, in the School House, Egham, the MCCC unanimously agreed to set about actioning these plans. It was decided that they would consult J. H. Whitley for his 'opinion & comments as to their wisdom.'¹⁰⁰ It seems likely that this decision was informed by the committee's lack of collective experience with regard to matters of this nature. Whitley had demonstrated his support for the committee's activities when he agreed to be their guest speaker in 1924, and the reassuring words and advice of the Speaker at this moment were vital in getting this initiative moving forward. Undoubtedly, Whitley was not able to broker the deal on their

⁹⁷ The Commissioners of the Crown Lands were the direct successors to the Commissioners of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues, having been created in 1924 and discharged the same administrative duties in its management of the Crown Lands.

⁹⁸ L. Ashby to A. Gaye, 11 June 1923, TNA: CRES 35/213.

⁹⁹ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 14 June 1926 in "Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933," SHC: Ac1498/10.

¹⁰⁰ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 15 July 1927 in *ibid*.

behalf, but he was an extremely well-connected and respected parliamentarian who was able to point them in the right direction.

Twelve days later, Whitley sent an internal memorandum to Peel, stating that the Rev. Albert Tranter had recently approached him on behalf of the MCCC with a proposal to purchase Runnymede. According to Whitley, Tranter was unwavering in his belief in the proposal and was even undeterred by the £15,000 sum that was provided to him as an initial estimate for the site.¹⁰¹ The personal connection between the committee and the Speaker of the House provided them with a conduit through which their proposals could be redirected to the necessary government department or civil servants. The central question, however, related to the exact legal position of the Runnymede site. Various sections of the historic site were sublet to individual tenants, and any sale of the site was dependent on these tenancies being bought-out. Following his encounter with Tranter, Whitley forwarded a favourable note, recounting his conversation with the Vicar before requesting a summary of the current legal position of Runnymede.

On 13 August, a reply was received from Walter Guinness, the Minister for Agriculture. He was acutely aware of the historical significance of the Charter. As the parliamentary representative for Bury St. Edmunds, he was also familiar with his constituency's own connection to the Magna Carta story and how it continued to resonate locally. It is therefore unsurprising that he was largely supportive and encouraging of the MCCC's proposal, promising their offer would be looked on 'most sympathetically' if the intended area was the current property of the Crown.¹⁰² His response provided a clear outline of what the current legal position of the site was, but his findings suggested that any future purchase would not be free of potential complication. He confirmed that the Commissioners of Crown Lands were the Lords of the manor, owning the freehold on much of the estate. The individual tenancies, however, fell outside of the Crown's possession and thus any enquiry relating to these areas could not be

¹⁰¹ J. H. Whitley to Peel, 27 July 1927, TNA: CRES 35/213. This is likely to be William Robert Wellesley Peel, 1st Earl Peel, who, at this point, was the First Commissioner of Works. In 1851 this position took over some of the administrative duties of the First Commissioner of Woods and Forests, following the division of Crown holdings between public and commercial property.

¹⁰² Walter Guinness to J. H. Whitley, 13 August 1927, TNA: CRES 35/213.

sold by the Crown. To acquire any land that fell within the boundaries of these individual tenancies the MCCC needed to negotiate directly with the tenants. Whilst the tone of his response was encouraging everything hinged upon the exact area that Tranter and the committee intended to purchase and how this interacted with the various freeholdings that existed. Without a firm understanding of this, it was impossible for anyone to provide a more robust and clear response to the enquiry and proposal. Before any further conversations could be had, it was of central importance to ascertain the scope of the committee's proposal.

The Rev. Tranter received a reply from Gaye in mid-July. Gaye's response was encouraging of the proposal and clearly laid out the central issues that needed to be resolved. His follow-up letter, dated 21st October, requested that a meeting between the two be arranged to discuss the matter further and on 27th October, the two met at Whitehall and the proposal was discussed in greater detail.¹⁰³ Following the conclusion of their meeting, Gaye wrote a detailed synopsis of what was discussed, sending this to Whitley for his information. His synopsis provides the first detailed description of the scale of the site, which the MCCC wished to purchase. As Gaye explained, their proposal was ambitious:

Mr. Tranter came today and explained to me that his committee desired to acquire the freehold, with all the rights over it, of the grassland between the Boathouse adjoining Runnymede House and the main road between Egham and Staines, excluding the land between the road and the River, which has already been developed. The strip proposed is almost a mile and half long and is vested in several owners, including the Crown.¹⁰⁴

This revelation complicated the purchase considerably and Gaye outlined several actions that were necessary to complete the process. These ranged considerably in their relative ease and included marking on a 6" Ordnance Survey map the exact area intended for purchase and establishing who the individual tenants were to obtaining an approximate value for the land

¹⁰³ Rev. Tranter to H. Garside, Secretary, Office of Commissioners of Crown Lands, 22 October 1927, TNA: CRES 35/213.

¹⁰⁴ Notes of meeting between A. Gaye & Rev. Tranter sent to J. H. Whitley, 27 October 1927, TNA: CRES 35/213.

and arranging for a Bill to be passed within Parliament that would grant the MCCC the powers to purchase the land and suspend the historic Lammas Rights associated with it.¹⁰⁵

Having received these instructions, the vicar asked whether the Commissioners of Crown Lands could continue to administer the land as a public park, following the purchase.¹⁰⁶ His request was in keeping with the general sentiment of 1921, which had seen the government's plans for Runnymede sale abandoned. However, Tranter did not receive the response he had expected. Gaye informed him that the Commissioners of Crown Lands did not exist to fulfil such functions. Instead, he encouraged the Committee to consider trustee groups such as the National Trust, advising them that they existed for this exact purpose and suggesting they contact them over the possible management before any further conversations were had.¹⁰⁷ This suggestion was greeted with surprise. Tranter acknowledged that the National Trust sounded like a suitable fit but admitted that both he and the committee were ignorant of the organisation's existence.¹⁰⁸

In closing his letter, Gaye provided an amusing aside, describing the MCCC as 'nebulous and unorganised'. His words provide a rare glimpse into the way in which the MCCC was perceived by the government ministers. It was, in his opinion, too big a transaction for the MCCC to undertake, believing they lacked the necessary collective experience to achieve such a task.¹⁰⁹ Gaye's candour is surprising; the underlying tone of his observations less so. It would not be unfair to characterise the MCCC as the product of quaint English provincialism and, in keeping with this theme, much of their discussions reflected their rural origins and environment. The committee was an assortment of mostly local people that was augmented by some people of considerable repute, united by the belief that the charter should be annually commemorated, and that Runnymede remain publicly accessible. They were most comfortable in dealing with the logistics and practicalities of arranging the annual commemorative service, not negotiating the purchase of large areas of land and the legal complexities that were

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

associated with such an endeavour. The Committee's meeting minutes encapsulate this juxtaposition with references to the Speaker of the House of Commons surrounded by more mundane matters such as organising seating.

Activity in relation to these negotiations slowed over the second half of 1927, but activity had not stopped and, following his meeting with Gaye, Tranter and the MCCC had been productive in actioning his assigned tasks. As was reported to the Committee in its December meeting, Lord Lincolnshire and a select group of other members had reached out to Sam Hield Hamer, who had been Secretary of the National Trust since 1911. Hamer was receptive to the proposals, expressing the opinion that he felt the Trust 'would be willing to undertake the arrangements of the acquisitions for the public benefit of these portions of Runnymede held by private persons.'¹¹⁰ Having been encouraged by Hamer's willingness to add the site to the Trust's growing property portfolio, Lord Lincolnshire proposed to introduce a bill to the House of Lords to allow the site to be purchased and rescheduled as a Royal Park.¹¹¹ Following his meeting with the MCCC, Hamer met with Gaye and confirmed that he had been approached by Lord Lincolnshire who had 'placed the whole question of the purchase of Runnymede in the hands of the National Trust.'¹¹²

The momentum that had been built up was destroyed, however, as Lord Lincolnshire's involvement with the Committee dwindled, following the loss of his daughter and the deterioration of his own health. He died on the 13 June 1928 and his passing was a great loss to the MCCC. His commitment to securing the long-term future of Runnymede had been central in advancing their proposals and without him their activities were considerably weakened. As a mark of respect, the 1928 commemoration service included a minute's silence and the Rev. Tranter delivered a few reflective remarks.¹¹³ With a sense of resignation, in July it was agreed that the 'question of the "land purchase" should be kept entirely distinct for the present and

¹¹⁰ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 16 December 1927 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/10.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Minutes of A. Gaye meeting with S. Hamer, 24 November 1927, TNA: CRES 35/213.

¹¹³ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 18 June 1928 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/10.

until further developments had taken place & a stronger committee could be appointed to deal with the matter.’¹¹⁴

Unbeknownst to the MCCC, the government received a separate enquiry from Sir Hamar Greenwood, the Conservative MP for Walthamstow East and a very influential figure in the Tory Party, about the availability of the Runnymede site. Greenwood was making this enquiry on behalf of a friend who, for the time being wished to remain anonymous, but was described as ‘an English gentleman of substance and first-class social standing’ who was looking to ‘make certain that the historic site would always remain national property.’¹¹⁵ In response, Gaye told Greenwood that he was already in discussions with the MCCC and National Trust over this very matter. Undeterred by what he had been told, Greenwood replied that he too would approach the National Trust, expressing his own interest in the site and taking the opportunity to outline his offer. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the records that obscures the development of Greenwood’s enquiries and there is no mention of his interest within the meeting minutes of the MCCC.

Discussions relating to the purchase of Runnymede recommenced approximately a year later. On 27 May 1929, Rev. Tranter met with the Secretary of the Commissioners of Crown Lands, expressing a desire to commence the process of purchase. In a similar fashion to Greenwood, Tranter referred to the presence of an anonymous benefactor that wished to purchase the site. Again, the records are silent on whether the individual was indeed the same person and we can only presume that, on account of the length of time which had elapsed between Greenwood’s and Tranter’s correspondence, this was not the case. Unlike previous exchanges, Tranter displayed a greater sense of urgency and the meeting progressed with a much sharper focus, which was characterised by his direct questioning on matters relating to the purchase process. This was the first occasion in which a representative of the MCCC had been this explicit, displaying a confidence that suggested the required funds had been secured. Tranter was advised that he needed to submit a formal written application that was to be

¹¹⁴ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 9 July 1928 in ‘Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,’ SHC: Ac1498/10.

¹¹⁵ Sir Hamar Greenwood to A. Gaye, 30 April 1928, TNA: CRES 35/213.

accompanied by a marked-up map of the area intended for purchase. The next day, Gale, Power, & Co., an Egham-based agency specialising in land estate sales, contacted the government department, informing them they had been appointed as agents for the purchase of Runnymede.¹¹⁶ After many years of tireless campaigning, meetings, and exchanges in correspondence, one of the MCCC's main ambitions – the purchase of Runnymede for the benefit of the public – was close to realisation.

The plans developed apace, with solicitors regularly exchanging correspondence whilst the terms of the contract were established. It was during these exchanges that the identity of the anonymous benefactor was established. In a letter sent to the London-based solicitors, Lewis & Lewis, it stated that the 115-acre site was to be transferred to Sir Reginald Ward Edward Lane Poole and the Rev. A. C. Tranter for a total sum of £4,800.¹¹⁷ Born in 1864, Poole was a prominent British solicitor, becoming the sole partner of Lewis and Lewis, one of the best-known legal firms in the country, in 1927. There is little in the way of evidence that links Poole with either Tranter or the activities of the MCCC. Given his reputation within the legal profession one suspects he valued the charter and the site of its sealing. Equally, it would not be beyond the realm of possibility that he would have known Helena Normanton. Tranter's involvement is more surprising, and the question of where he was sourcing the funds from looms large. Unfortunately, this question remains unanswered and the records provide little evidence to account for this. If Tranter had always been in possession of the funds himself, one imagines the MCCC would have been able to purchase Runnymede at a much earlier date, leading us to speculate that he was merely a conduit for another. The public backlash received in 1921 lived long in the government's memory and, in an effort to avoid a repeat situation, they ensured a security clause was inserted into the contract, which stated that they could repurchase the site for the same sum if it was not transferred to the National Trust within two years.¹¹⁸

The site's salvation was duly reported in *The Times*, on 18th December 1929:

¹¹⁶ Gale, Power & Co. to Commissioners of Crown Lands, 1 June 1929, TNA: CRES 35/213.

¹¹⁷ E. Talbot to Messrs. Lewis and Lewis, 27 July 1929, TNA: CRES 35/213.

¹¹⁸ 'Minute Sheet: Land in Longmead, Runnymede,' 12 August 1929, TNA: CRES 35/213.

There are green lines across Runnymede and Cooper's Hill that looks over the meadows to the river – across the very district of which the greater part is now by private munificence safe for ever from the hand of the spoiler and open for ever for the public benefit.¹¹⁹

There was, however, a final twist in the tale and newspaper reportage attributed the purchase of 182 and a half acres of Runnymede to Lady Fairhaven (**fig. 9-10**), widow of the late Urban Hanlon Broughton, and her two sons, Lord Fairhaven and Captain Henry Broughton.¹²⁰ In the absence of records, we are forced to presume that both Poole and Tranter were acting on behalf of Lady Fairhaven, using her finances to underwrite their work of legal fiction. The discrepancy between the size of the site purchased by Poole and Tranter and that announced in *The Times* is also puzzling and, we must assume, that these were purchased through other legal instruments. Lady Fairhaven owned a country mansion close to Egham, providing a possible connection to the work of the MCCC. Her actions were also fitting for her husband's legacy. In 1928, shortly before his death, he had purchased the Ashridge House in Hertfordshire, presenting this to the Conservative Party as a memorial to his former party leader, Andrew Bonar Law.¹²¹ Reflecting upon this purchase, *The Times* noted his desire to preserve the historic site for the benefit of the nation. Runnymede was purchased with two central objects. Firstly, there was a desire to preserve the site upon which the charter of 1215 was sealed for public good. Secondly, the site was purchased in honour of her late husband's memory.

The 1928 purchase of the site and immediate transferal to the National Trust brought a close to an almost decade-long project. What started as Helena Normanton's desire to prevent the sale of the property in 1921 ended with an act of benevolence, ensuring the site would permanently remain the possession of the nation. The efforts of the MCCC, especially the collective energies of Helena Normanton, the Rev. Tranter, and Lord Lincolnshire, were central

¹¹⁹ 'Runnymede: Purchase for the Nation,' *The Times*, 18 December 1929, newspaper clipping following Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 18 June 1928 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/10.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Urban Hanlon Broughton died in January 1929, just before he was awarded a peerage. It was decided that his title would be transferred to his eldest son, Urban Huttleston Rogers Broughton, 1st Baron Fairhaven, with his widow taking the title of Lady Fairhaven.

¹²¹ The wider Ashridge estate was presented to the National Trust in 1921 and was separate from the house. Here is one potential link to the National Trust, which might account for Lady Fairhaven's actions.

to the project's success. Throughout the 1920's, their commemorative efforts, combined with the belief that the site should be permanently saved, provided them with an unwavering commitment even during times of adversity. It would be difficult to ignore the degree to which the site was being drawn into debates about 'Englishness' and wider debates relating to Britain's place in the world. In this vein, Runnymede was as central as the charter itself in legitimising notions of British liberty, providing a point of conservative continuity during a moment in which these ideals were severely tested and challenged. Runnymede was the point upon which notions of 'British Liberty' were rooted. This view is best encapsulated in the final words of *The Times*:

History is a difficult and crepuscular science. But there are events in history which the hearty voice of the popular tradition sings as simply as a folk-song. And no song does the English tradition sing with more constancy and a simpler faith than the story of what was done on those days on the riverside lands which the family of an ardent Englishman have now made, in his honour, inalienably England's.¹²²

The Magna Carta Commemoration Committee and its Activities, 1930-1939

The 1929 purchase of Runnymede represented the height of the MCCC's activities, and they struggled to keep up the momentum of the previous decade. Enthusiasm for the commemorative service dwindled as the committee's membership changed and attendance at their meetings dramatically fell. Several MCCC members, including the Rev. Tranter and Mr. Ashby, were co-opted onto the National Trust's local management committee for Runnymede, dividing the attentions of these two central characters.¹²³ This was compounded further following Helena Normanton's decision to establish the Magna Carta Society in 1929, reducing the Egham Committee's importance and making it part of a much larger project. But in achieving their stated ambition of securing the long-term future of Runnymede, they now lacked the objective that had for so long legitimised their collective activities. With the future of

¹²² 'Runnymede: Purchase for the Nation,' *The Times*, 18 December 1929, newspaper clipping following Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 18 June 1928 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/10.

¹²³ 'Runnymede and the National Trust: Formation of a Local Committee,' *Windsor, Slough and Eton Express*, 16 May 1929, newspaper clipping opposite Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 13 May 1930 in *ibid*.

the site secure, commemorative moments were little more than instances of historical reflection and reconfirmation of the principles embodied within Magna Carta. Before they had acted as a vehicle of activism and a highly public way to push forward calls to make the site the property of the nation.

The 1930 service saw Captain Edward Algernon Fitzroy M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons, invited and deliver the main commemorative address. His words reflected the international peace of the time, reminding the British people that they were right to take advantage of their 'privileges, advantages, and liberties as matter of course.' He continued by commenting 'there might be struggles in the future, against what form of usurper we knew [sic] not.'¹²⁴ In keeping with tradition, invited guests reflected local concerns and the interests of the dominions. A notable absence, however, was the corporation of Bury St Edmunds who declined their invitation, claiming the date clashed with their own local commemorative event.¹²⁵ The commemorative service of 1931 temporarily raised the committee's levels of excitement and expectation with the news that they had secured Sir John Simon, past and future Home Secretary. These plans were dashed following Simon's defection from Lloyd-George's Liberal Party and, instead, the less well-known Conservative M.P. for Eastbourne, Edward Majoribanks, was sent as a last-minute replacement (**fig. 11**).¹²⁶

The committee's desire to attract a high-profile speaker was often precluded by its inability to invite them in a timely manner, and it was not uncommon that approaches were made as late as April or May. It should not come as a surprise to learn that the 1932 service was cancelled because the MCCC failed to attract a speaker. This was the first time that a commemorative service had not taken place at Runnymede since 1923, marking the beginning of the end of the commemorative activity at Runnymede. Additionally, the landscape of Runnymede was also slowly changing, and a culture of memorialisation slowly emerged. Lady Fairhaven had commissioned the British architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, to design and construct

¹²⁴ 'Magna Carta Day at Runnymede,' *The Times*, 30 June 1930, 11.

¹²⁵ Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 2 June 1930 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/1.

¹²⁶ See Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 21 April 1931; 19 May 1931 and 15 June 1931 in *ibid*.

two commemorative pillars at the entrance of the meadow to commemorate the sealing of the charter. The Prince of Wales was due to unveil these and, a few hours prior to his arrival, it was discovered they were the subject of vandalism, having been sprayed with creosote.¹²⁷

The last commemorative service at Runnymede took place in 1933, when the former Conservative M.P., Leo Amery, was persuaded to speak. Amery was a man of repute, having served as an Intelligence Officer in the First World War before serving in Lloyd George's national government, helping draft the Balfour Declaration. Amery had considerable experience in international politics and diplomacy, serving as the First Lord of the Admiralty from 1922-1924 and as Colonial Secretary from 1924 to 1929. He joined Churchill in opposition to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement in the 1930s and throughout his life remained an ardent anti-communist. Amery delivered a passionate address in which he merged ideas and principles embodied within the charter seamlessly with the case for Indian constitutional reform, which began in 1933 and was partially resolved in 1935 with the passing of the Government of India Act, concern over the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany, and the direction of the Russian state under Stalin. Amery's speech was as much a commentary on the benefits of western liberalism and an impassioned call to the defence of liberty, as it was a reflection on Magna Carta. The charter, however, provided a historical legitimacy in which he could ground his claims. In relation to India, Mr. Amery said:

No harder or nobler task had ever confronted us than that upon which we were engaged with India to-day [sic]. There was a time when the none could doubt that the greatest possible measure for freedom for India lay in British law, British justice, British order, administered by Englishmen in unfettered authority. That time had passed, and educated India, at least, was chafing under what it conceived to be a denial of liberties for which it thought itself fitted.¹²⁸

Amery's words fell against the backdrop of Indian constitutional reform that had started in the nineteenth century. The contributions of many Indians during the First World War had persuaded many within Westminster that some form of constitutional change was required, resulting in the Government of India Act 1919. This did not alleviate calls for constitutional

¹²⁷ 'Vandals at Runnymede,' *The Times*, 15 July 1932, 9.

¹²⁸ 'Magna Carta and True Liberty,' *The Times*, 3 July 1933, 11.

reform for long, and following attempts in the early 1930s, the Conservative-dominated National Government changed its approach, introducing its own proposals in March 1933 and a joint parliamentary select-committee was established under the chairmanship of Lord Linlithgow. As Amery argued:

Our immediate task was so to direct the transition from one control to the other that at no stage should the true liberties of India be seriously impaired. It would need all of the spirit of Magna Carta, its practical sense as well as its generosity, to make that task possible of achievement.¹²⁹

Events in Germany were also of concern. The 1933 election saw Hitler's National Socialist Party achieve unprecedented levels of success, securing over 17,000,000 votes and, whilst he remained short of a Reichstag majority, he was in the political ascendancy as Chancellor of Germany. Hitler, unquestionably, posed a serious threat to European peace and the policy of appeasement was not universally popular within Parliament. Amery was one such critic, using the commemoration service as an opportunity to warn of the dangers of Nazi Germany:

Not only in Russia and Germany but also in other countries to-day [sic] the boundaries of freedom were being contracted. What was more, the abandonment of liberty was being justified on every hand, not as a disagreeable necessity, but as the true ideal. There was a fanaticism of collective tyranny which was spreading widely and found its advocates even in its own midst.¹³⁰

Amery concluded with a progressive call to action. 'Our answer', he declared, 'must be to bring freedom up to date, to overhaul our political machinery so as to increase its efficiency as well as its stability, to reform our economic life so that it might afford better opportunity, greater security, and better social justice to all.'¹³¹ For Amery, the solution to the political issues they were dealing with lay in an evolving concept of liberty. To prevent the spread of tyranny was to embrace change, creating a political environment in which only a minority of people were disenfranchised, marginalised, and underrepresented. This was the spirit and enduring legacy of the charter. Amery's address illustrates the protean character of the charter and its malleability in supporting contemporary political arguments.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

The minutes of the MCCC abruptly end, concluding in May 1934. The 1934 service was different in character, taking the form of a service of thanksgiving for the Runnymede pageant, taking place the day after the final performance.¹³² The Rt. Hon. Lord Hanworth, Master of the Rolls, was the speaker that year and, by comparison to previous addresses delivered at Runnymede, the tone and subject of his speech was far less impassioned or politically charged. The Pageant Committee was chaired by Lady Enid de Chair and consisted of several highly respected residents, predominantly drawn from the aristocracy, and its central purpose was to raise money for various local hospitals and charities. As Lady Enid stated, 'we are all actuated by ... the knowledge that we are helping to heal hopelessly wrong conditions in a sick world, and giving happiness and interest to the united community of our very democratic nation.'¹³³

Interwar Britain, however, was consumed by a 'pageant fever', and many towns and communities staged historical re-enactments for entertainment, a greater sense of community involvement, and informal education.¹³⁴ Indeed, it has been argued that the period witnessed an increased interest in England's medieval past, believing that it was within this period that England was united, going as far to say this was the moment in which it was created.¹³⁵ This construction of the English past was in line with the rhetoric of Stanley Baldwin's 'One Nation Conservatism.' Historical pageantry thus provided a space in which this view of history could be engaged with. The Runnymede Pageant of 1934 (**fig. 12**) was in keeping with this tradition and locating it on the meadow upon which the charter was sealed served only to heighten expectations and bolster its educational potential.

¹³² Magna Carta Commemoration Committee Minutes for 23 March 1934 in 'Minute Book of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee, 1925-1933,' SHC: Ac1498/1

¹³³ Lady Enid de Chair quoted in Angela Bartie et. al, 'Pageant of Runnymede,' *The Redress of the Past*, <http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1179/>, accessed 4 December 2019.

¹³⁴ Angela Bartie et. al, "'History Taught in the Pageant Way': Education and Historical Performance in Twentieth-Century Britain,' *History of Education*, 48, no. 2 (2019): 156-179; Mark Freeman, "'Splendid Display; Pompous Spectacle": Historical Pageants in Twentieth-Century Britain,' *Social History* 38, no. 4 (2013): 423-455; Tom Hulme, "'A Nation of Town Criers": Civic Publicity and Historical Pageantry in Inter-War Britain,' *Urban History* 44, no. 2 (May 2017): 270-292.

¹³⁵ Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alexander Hutton, Paul Readman, 'Historical Pageants and the Medieval Past in Twentieth-Century England,' *The English Historical Review*, 133, no. 563 (2018): 870.

Gwen Lally, the noted theatre producer, was the pageant master, providing a whistle-stop tour of English history in eight scenes and casting 5000 residents to play the various roles. Advertised as a celebration of English democracy, the sealing of Magna Carta acted as its centrepiece (**figs. 13-14**). In the space of eight days, a total of fourteen performances took place, but it failed to deliver the resounding 'endorsement of democracy against totalitarianism that some had hoped.'¹³⁶ Instead, it was a 'display of the phlegmatic nature of the English, whose strength lay in accommodation between the people, the monarchy and the aristocracy.'¹³⁷ This is not to say that the pageant was not a success and, over fourteen performances, 90,000 people attended.¹³⁸ This figure was all the more remarkable given the relative distance the site was from its closest towns. In truth, whilst the pageant of 1934 represented a zenith of publicity for activity at Runnymede in the 1930s, it was merely part of a wider trend within interwar Britain. Beyond the romanticism of its location, it was not the grandiose statement of democratic heritage that some might have yearned.

Conclusion

The interwar period in Britain represents a peak of commemorative activity at Runnymede in which a concerted effort was made to develop an annual tradition of celebratory services. Prior to the government's attempt to sell the land in 1921, Runnymede was a site of latent memory. People were aware of its historical significance and its importance within a predominantly English national narrative, but this fact alone did not spur people to observe the anniversary of the Charter on a national scale either in general or at the site of Runnymede. The government's attempts to sell the site proved to be the catalyst for the commencement of annual commemorative services. The site then moved from a position of latent memory to one of active memory and became a place at which people carried out memory work.

¹³⁶ Bartie et. al, 'Pageant of Runnymede'.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

The MCCC were central in ensuring this change took place. Without both the initial efforts and the sustained energies of Helena Normanton, Lord Lincolnshire, and the Rev. Albert Tranter arguably the committee might not have been as effective. It was on account of their individual and collective networks that they were able to save the Runnymede site and guarantee it would remain the property of the nation. There is little doubt that the MCCC were aware of the charter's historical significance and the establishment of regular commemorative observances was an effective strategy in ensuring their campaign gained national and international traction. One suspects, however, that this was the central motivating factor, and reaffirming their commitment to the principles embodied within Magna Carta was a secondary motivating factor. The decline in activity following the land's successful purchase serves only to bolster this argument.

They believed passionately that Runnymede belonged to the nation and their rhetoric reflects this. The site was also central to ideas of Englishness. The charter had played a small part in mobilising people during the First World War, when it was drawn upon by commentators who cast the conflict as a struggle between democracy and tyranny. Having fought so hard in defence of these ideals, selling the site upon which the charter was sealed, in many respects, felt like a betrayal of these values. The First World War had an immeasurable impact upon British society. Arguably, both Magna Carta and Runnymede provided a point of continuity, linking post-war Britain with the certainties and traditions of the pre-war world. Indeed, activities at Runnymede appear to be in keeping with the general return of ideas of 'Englishness' that defined the interwar years. However, scholars, such as Peter Mandler, have cautioned against this interpretation, suggesting that the entirety of Europe 'entered a phase of slow growth, environmental consciousness and concern for national heritage.'¹³⁹ It might be stretching things to place the events at Runnymede within this context, but clearly from the dominant rhetoric the site and document became central in understandings of national identity, which were undoubtedly Anglo-centric in their construction.

¹³⁹ Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', 155-175.

Commemorations at Runnymede also serve to illustrate the charter's malleability and protean nature, cementing the idea that the past is used for the benefit of the present. Whilst there have only been a small number of examples provided, both the 1924 and 1933 commemorative services clearly show the charter being drawn into contemporary debates. In 1924, J. H. Whitely, used the opportunity to vehemently warn against the international threat of communism and the domestic threat posed by Ramsay Macdonald's Labour Government. In contrast, Leo Amery used the charter and its legacy to legitimise his call for an ever-evolving definition of liberty. His words spoke directly to contemporary issues of Indian reform, but also made explicit reference to events taking place within mainland Europe. As later chapters will highlight, this tradition of drawing on the principles of the charter in support of contemporary arguments continued throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

As had been the case during the First World War, commemorative activity at Runnymede was halted during the Second World War. Despite this, the prominence of the charter as a trans-Atlantic icon of liberal democracy meant that it played a significant role during the conflict and after, increasing ties between Britain and America and helping to crystallise the 'special relationship.' These themes will form the basis of the next chapter, as we look to activity at Runnymede from 1945 to 1965.

Magna Carta, Freedom Under the Rule of Law, and the Roots of the Special Relationship at Runnymede, 1939-1965

In June 1939, one of the four surviving copies of the 1215 charter was displayed abroad, exhibited at the Worlds' Fair in New York. It was a historic moment, which marked the first occasion that any copy of the 1215 charter had been exhibited outside of the United Kingdom. The safe transportation of the charter required a considerable level of planning, secrecy, and cost. *The Times* reported: 'With the comfortable support of an insurance policy of £100,000 and the kind of secrecy which has only been achieved on Atlantic crossings by eminent film stars or distinguished aeronauts, the Charter, as described on another page this morning, will make its first international journey.'¹ The copy, which belonged to Lincoln Cathedral, made the journey across the Atlantic in a bespoke frame and its designer, Robert S. Godfrey, claimed it could withstand 'bullets, thieves, fire, and water.'² Upon its arrival, Magna Carta assumed pride-of-place in the British Pavillion, displayed in its 'Hall of Democracy'. The World's Fair, which opened on 30 April, was, in the words of Susan Reyburn, 'a gleaming Art Deco extravaganza that heralded an optimistic "World of Tomorrow" and rose up on 1,200 acres of a former ash dump in Queens'.³ It was also a massive logistical and financial undertaking, featuring contributions from sixty countries and costing an estimated £30,000,000.⁴

For a document sealed in thirteenth-century England, Magna Carta's cultural resonance in the United States was profound indeed. The charter had served as a legitimising force throughout the American War of Independence and American colonists believed the rights of freeborn Englishman extended to their shores.⁵ Many of the founding charters of the colonies

¹ 'Magna Carta on the Move,' *The Times*, 10 April 1939, 11.

² 'Moving Magna Carta to New York: A Bullet Proof Case,' *The Times*, 10 April 1939, 13.

³ Susan Reyburn, 'Magna Carta in America: From World's Fair to World War,' in *Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor*, ed. Randy J. Holland (Washington DC: Thomas Reuters in association with Library of Congress, 2014), 9.

⁴ See 'New York's £30 Million Fair: Opening Next Month the British Pavilion,' *The Observer*, 19 March 1939, 12; 'Britain at the Fair,' *The Times*, 2 May 1939, 13.

⁵ Henry T. Dickson, "Magna Carta in the American Revolution," in *Magna Carta: History, Context, and Influence*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2018), 81-82; A. E. Dick Howard, 'Magna Carta's American Journey,' in *Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor*, ed. Randy J. Holland (Washington: Thomas Reuters in association with Library of Congress, 2014), 103; John Phillip Reid, *Constitutional History of the American Revolution: The Right to Tax* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 100.

borrowed heavily from the language of Magna Carta and, unsurprisingly, their legal systems were influenced by the English traditions to which they were accustomed.⁶ The colonists believed they were the equal inheritors of the Magna Carta tradition and legacy, and the moment of 1215 arguably carried as much cultural symbolism across the Atlantic as it did for those living in Britain. This sense of shared democratic heritage provided a frame of reference for visitors to the World's Fair. A dedicatory panel, welcoming visitors to the hall, reinforced this message stating 'this panel is dedicated to the lasting friendship between the peoples of Great Britain and the United States'.⁷ In addition to this, there was a central message that was impossible to miss. Following a semi-circular curve of one wall, the word 'Democracy' was emblazoned in large lettering.⁸ Magna Carta's presence at the Worlds' Fair thus projected two obvious messages. Firstly, this was a joint celebration of the shared democratic heritage and relationship between Britain and America, which was reminiscent of arguments that were made in the late nineteenth century in support of a closer connection. Secondly, the overt commitment and public pledge to democratic principles were undeniably shaped by a perceived future threat to world peace. The optimism of the inter-war period and the spirit of international collaboration to protect world peace seemed to have evaporated. Britain's policy of appeasement toward Germany had failed. Nazism, alongside other fascist ideologies in Italy and Spain, posed the greatest threat to world peace, liberal democracy, and, indeed, the world of tomorrow.

The advent of the Second World War ended commemorative activity at Runnymede. Despite this, the charter continued to exert degree of influence on international politics and diplomacy. The values it embodied and morals it represented were believed by many commentators to form the basis of the shared cultural bond between the United States and Britain. The central focus of this chapter is commemorative activity at Runnymede from 1953 to

⁶ For example, see H. D. Hazeltine, 'The Influence of Magna Carta on American Constitutional Development,' *Columbia Law Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1917): 3-8. In relation to the first printing of the Magna Carta in America, see Edwin B. Bronner, 'First Printing of Magna Charta in America, 1687,' *The American Journal of Legal History* 7, no. 3 (July 1963): 189-197.

⁷ 'New York's World's Fair,' *The Times*, 11 April 1939, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

1965, a period which witnessed the erection of three major memorials and monuments: The Air Forces Memorial of 1953 (**fig. 15**); the American Bar Association's (ABA) Monument to Magna Carta of 1957 (**fig. 16**); and the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Memorial in 1965 (**fig. 17**). Over this period, Runnymede was slowly transformed into a monumental landscape, highlighting two clear themes: the victory of liberal democracy over totalitarianism and, as Cold War tensions increased, a strengthening of the shared democratic endeavours that united America and Britain. As Nuala Johnson reminds us, monumental landscapes reflect local and national interests, articulating political positions and projecting cultural associations.⁹ In this regard, the landscape of Runnymede provided the perfect canvas upon which to illustrate ideas of liberty and democracy through the erection of monuments and memorials.

However, as Dell Upton has noted, 'all monuments have a message' and, arguably, this sentiment should be extended to encompass memorials. Monuments and memorials 'direct us not simply to remember, but *to remember in a certain light*.'¹⁰ He continues by explaining: 'Monuments always say more about the people, times and places of their creation than they do about the people, times, and places they honor (sic).'¹¹ Of the three memorials erected during this period, only one, the ABA's Monument to Magna Carta, was a direct celebration and permanent affirmation of Magna Carta's wider values and legacy. The decision to erect both the Air Forces Memorial and Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede, however, was not an accident. In both cases, Runnymede was deliberately chosen because of its historic significance, and their siting represents a quite conscious attempt to connect these memorials with the legacy of and wider values embodied within the charter. Yet, as Upton suggests, memorials and monuments should always be considered within the context of their construction and through the personalities that provided the impetus to ensure they were built. Much like the

⁹ Nuala Johnson, 'Cast in Stone: Monuments, Geography, and Nationalism,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 1 (1995): 51.

¹⁰ Dell Upton, 'Why Do Contemporary Monuments Talk So Much?' in *Commemoration in America: Essays on Monuments, Memorialization, and Memory*, eds. David Gobel and Daves Russell (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 20.

¹¹ Ibid.

commemorative speeches delivered at Runnymede across the 1920s, Magna Carta was always framed in line with contemporary concerns.

In accounting for the circumstances surrounding the various monuments and memorials, Magna Carta and, indeed, Runnymede should be placed in a much longer chronology, going back to the Second World War and the framed in the context of Anglo-American diplomacy. This chapter begins by considering the charter in the context of the Second World War, concentrating on the way in which Magna Carta was deployed to help strengthen Anglo-American relations and used as an icon of liberty against Nazism and other fascist ideologies. Commemorative activity at Runnymede might have been suspended, but the activities of Helena Normanton and the Magna Carta Society also played an integral part in ensuring the charter continued to have cultural purchase during the war. The second half of the chapter focusses on Britain after the war, concentrating on activity at Runnymede. This section includes an analysis of the circumstances that led to the building and unveiling of each monument and memorial. Each memorial is considered in the context of the time in which it was created, driven by a consideration of the messages they project. Beyond this, the direction of enquiry and analysis will be led by the way these monuments and memorials have been framed and linked to the legacy and narrative of Magna Carta. In conclusion, this chapter will explain how Runnymede made the transition from open field to monumental landscape. Above all else, this chapter will argue that by 1965 Runnymede had become a site that projected the ideals of western democracy to the world, which was increasingly expressed through the idiom of the Anglo-American shared democratic heritage and the perceived special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States.

Magna Carta, Anglo-American Relations, and the Second World War

In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and, as promised, Britain declared war. The Second World War had begun. Fighting in Europe had started before the World's Fair had ended and, as such, many of the allied nations decided against transporting their national treasures home. Although eight months would pass until the conflict really ignited – a period

known as the 'Phoney War' – the perceived risk of transporting these objects and artefacts home was deemed too great. The Lincoln copy of Magna Carta was no different. According to *the New York Times*, the British Government were reluctant to 'incur the risk of sending across the ocean the historic document.'¹² Increasingly, German U-boats infested the waters of the Atlantic, turning the ocean into both their habitat and hunting ground. Upon the instruction of the British Government, the Marquess of Lothian, British Ambassador to the US, deposited the charter in the Library of Congress for safekeeping. Phillip Kerr, 11th Marquess of Lothian, was a writer and politician of considerable experience and reputation. He had served as Lloyd-George's Private Secretary until March 1921 and was an ardent federalist.¹³ He was appointed as the Ambassador in Washington in April 1939, succeeding Sir Ronald Lindsay. Many Americans identified him with the policy of appeasement and criticised his appointment, and some believed he would attempt to persuade the American people into entering the war.¹⁴ These concerns appear to have been well-founded. In describing Lothian, Alex May suggests he possessed 'aristocratic charm, but democratic ideals' believing 'that an Anglo-American bloc would prove to be the cornerstone of an eventual world commonwealth.'¹⁵ On account of these beliefs, there were few men who were as well-placed or suited to fulfil this diplomatic position and deposit Magna Carta at the Library of Congress.

Shortly after 4pm, on November 28, 1939, Lord Lothian, described in the *Chicago Tribune* as red-faced from having walked up the mountain of marble steps, deposited Magna Carta at the Library.¹⁶ In his address, he proclaimed, 'the principles which underlay Magna Carta are the ultimate foundations of your liberties no less than ours'.¹⁷ The case in which the charter

¹² 'Congress Library Gets Magna Carta: Lord Lothian Puts Document in Congress Library,' *The New York Times*, 29 November 1939, 20.

¹³ His lecture, *Pacifism is Not Enough, nor is Patriotism*, delivered for the Burge Memorial Lecture of 1935 is cited as the best articulation of his views on federalism. See, Alex May, 'Kerr, Phillip Henry, 11th Marquess of Lothian (1882-1940),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6 January 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34303> accessed 26 January 2019.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'Magna Carta's First Headline in 700 Years,' *Chicago Tribune*, 29 November 1939, cited in Reyburn, 'Magna Carta in America,' 13.

¹⁷ Ibid. A similar article also featured in the *New York Times*: 'Yesterday this precious relic of the Anglo-Saxon race, the parent cell through which our liberties have been transmitted into the living body of democratic law, was

was displayed stood directly opposite the two great founding documents of the United States: The Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution. As the *New York Times* observed, 'its case stands near those of our two charters of liberty, its spiritual "offspring."¹⁸ For many, the visual symbolism of this democratic triptych was a physical manifestation of the Anglo-American connection. The *New York Times'* use of the word 'offspring' neatly captured both the perceived lineage and affinity that existed between the documents. For the first time, the father of democracy was being united with two of his sons. The charter was the point from which the two countries drew their common beliefs, providing both an unbreakable cultural bond and common purpose. Back in Britain, some members of the public greeted this news by suggesting the charter should be permanently gifted to the American people. Writing to *The Times*, Mr. J. W. Robertson Scott, editor and founder of *The Countryman*, a magazine devoted to depicting and recording English rural life, argued 'no gift would be more appreciated'. He continued by suggesting 'the largest section of the English-speaking world may be considered to have some right in a document of our race, of which England has three other copies'.¹⁹

Magna Carta was increasingly styled as a beacon of shared heritage and a guardian of democratic ideals, deployed as a cultural shibboleth to help leverage the United States into the conflict. However, American foreign policy during the 1930s had been increasingly defined by isolationism. Writing in the 1950s, Selig Adler argued that there were two main factors that led to the adoption of this policy. Firstly, the Great Depression of 1929 put an end to the constant flow of American money abroad that had defined much of the 1920s. Secondly, the wave of aggression that first sought to undermine and then destroy the Treaty of Versailles. As he concludes:

placed appropriately among the archives which hold our own precious relics...It has taken many centuries to establish the representative government of free men now challenged once again. Wherever Magna Carta rests, wherever it is accepted as the foundation stone of the slowly built wall against anarchy and despotism alike, is a strong citadel.' 'Shelter for Magna Carta,' *The New York Times*, 29 November 1939, 22.

¹⁸ 'Congress Library Gets Magna Carta: Lord Lothian Puts Document in Congress Library,' *The New York Times*, 29 November 1939, 20.

¹⁹ J. W. Robertson Scott, 'Copies of Magna Carta,' *The Times*, 23 August 1939, 8.

The ephemeral prosperity of the later twenties had obscured the danger of the growth of anti-democratic and anti-liberal movements. When conventional governments could not solve problems arising from the depression by conventional means, they were overthrown by unscrupulous demagogues ready to revert to barbarism to achieve their goals.²⁰

Added to this, domestically the United States was plagued by a host of economic issues, ranging from unemployment and bankruptcies to plummeting farm prices and the foreclosing of mortgages, which left many Americans asking, 'why ... should we concern ourselves with foreign matters when so much needed to be done at home?'²¹ : 'Debts, taxations, the foreclosing of mortgages, wholesale bankruptcies bank failures, plummeting farm prices, and the fruitless hunt for jobs.' The neutrality act passed by Congress in 1935 prohibited the export of arms, ammunition, and implements of war to nations at war and was seen by the American people as a 'necessary step to protect the nation from involvement in war.'²²

President Roosevelt, as Robert Devine has suggested, was a realist and not an isolationist, believing America could not withdraw from the world, but could control the direction of future policy.²³ By 1939, however, the diplomatic agenda was defined by a need to prepare for war. On 4 January 1939, Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union Address to members of the Senate and Congress. His tone and words were foreboding and ominous. 'World peace', he declared, 'is not assured' and he noted the danger to democracy that was posed by indifference to international lawlessness anywhere.²⁴ American isolation continued, but during his Third Inaugural Address of the 20 January 1941 he made explicit reference to Magna Carta, situating it within the context of war and the dangers it posed to democracy: 'The democratic aspiration is no mere recent phase of human history... It blazed anew in the Middle

²⁰ Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), 241-243.

²¹ Ibid, 250.

²² Robert A. Devine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 119.

²³ Ibid, 120.

²⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Annual Message to Congress, 4 January 1939,' The American Presidency Project, eds. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209128>, accessed 27 November 2019.

Ages. It was written in Magna Carta.²⁵ Roosevelt's assessment of the charter was a clear attempt to interpret the contemporary need to defend democracy as part of a much longer tradition, which began at Runnymede in 1215. One imagines that this was a deliberate attempt to evoke similar public sentiment to that which surrounded Magna Carta being displayed at the Library of Congress. The Second World War was a direct attack on the principles enshrined within the charter, which linked Britain and America.

As the war raged on in Europe, Britain looked increasingly across the Atlantic and towards America for assistance. Congress's approval of the Lend Lease Act, which granted material aid to Britain and other allied nations, in March 1941 effectively ended the pretence of American neutrality. In response, some within the British Government suggested that the Lincoln copy of the 1215 charter be permanently gifted to the American people.²⁶ Magna Carta's status and reputation was viewed as a tool of leverage and one, it was hoped, that would help mobilise the American public in support of the war. These plans were thwarted, following the realisation that the charter was, in fact, the property of Lincoln Cathedral and thus not in the government's gift to give away. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 hastened America's entry into the war. It can be said, Magna Carta characterised an unwavering commitment to the principles of liberal democracy and belief in the freedom of the subject. In many cases this belief was expressed by a rhetoric that stressed the importance of a shared Anglo-American heritage and a belief in communal international values.

The War Time Activities of The Magna Carta Society

Commemorative activity at Runnymede ceased following the 1934 commemorative ceremony. Despite this, both the MCCC and the nationally focussed MCS were not disbanded, and, at least in principle remained active during the war. Writing in the 1950s, Normanton confessed that

²⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Third Inaugural Address, 20 January 1941,' The American Presidency Project, eds. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210116>, accessed 27 November 2019.

²⁶ 'Lincoln Copy of Magna Carta,' in Proposed Gift of Magna Carta to United States, 1941, TNA: FO 371/26169.

the rationale for not disbanding either organisation was to prevent Mr Hamilton from laying any potential claim to Magna Carta Day and the commemorative observances at Runnymede.²⁷ Although the MCS was not active, Normanton continued to make use of her London base in the Temple law district. Following the death of Lord Hanworth in 1936, the well-respected London solicitor Mr R. S. Fraser became President of the Society. In many respects, Fraser was the perfect appointment. He was friends with both Lord Lincolnshire and Lord Hanworth, providing the continuity of leadership the society needed. Above all else, 'he was a convinced democrat, devoted to the study of the Charter, upon which he was no mean authority.'²⁸ Sadly, however, Fraser died during the war. He was replaced by Lord Alness, the lawyer and Liberal Politician.²⁹

Normanton remained in regular contact with the Rev. Tranter and the two often met in her London offices. The activities of the MCS drastically changed during the war, however, and any thoughts of commemorative services were gone. Instead, the MCS 's offices became a hub for those wishing to learn about the charter and its legacy, effectively becoming a make-shift library that contained texts and documents relating to the charter. Increasingly, Normanton received visitors, ranging from foreign M.P.s to various journalists, who all wished to consult the available material and. All came with an interest in the Great Charter and 'its role in building the foundation of the ancient liberties of England.'³⁰ This flow of visitors increased throughout the war and the Charter was a source of inspiration to many in the fight against tyranny and authoritarianism.

An Anglo-American Celebration at Runnymede

Although commemorative activity had ceased, Runnymede did not remain entirely dormant during the Second World War. On the 23rd April 1944, the site was once again used for the

²⁷ 'History of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee,' in scrapbook compiled by Helena Normanton, Egham Museum, MN 347.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gordon F. Millar, 'Munro, Robert, Baron Alness (1868–1955),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40352>, accessed 5 November 2019.

³⁰ 'History of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee,' in scrapbook compiled by Helena Normanton, Egham Museum, MN 347.

purposes of public ceremony. Unlike the interwar years, however, this was not a celebration of the sealing of Magna Carta, but an Anglo-American service celebrating St George's Day (figs. 18-19). During the war, members of the U.S. Air Force were stationed in Englefield Green and the surrounding localities. This joint celebration was noteworthy for its inherent symbolism. The following day, an iconic image of the American flag, standing proudly next to the Union Jack and fluttering in the spring breeze featured in *The Times*.³¹ This image was a physical embodiment of the shared democratic heritage, which had been the dominant narrative of Anglo-American relations since the late nineteenth-century and been a central feature of Britain's involvement at the World's Fair in 1939. The celebration was the first moment in which these shared values had manifested themselves at Runnymede, however, thereby creating a tangible connection between the site upon which Magna Carta was sealed and the democratic heritage that connected Britain with America. Until this point, it was the velum on which the Latin words had been written and the principles that these words embodied that provided the basis for this connection, serving as inspiration for the American Constitution and later Bill of Rights. For obvious reasons, the site of Runnymede had remained an absent partner in the development of this trans-Atlantic relationships. The St George's Day celebration demonstrated that Runnymede was a site upon which the expression of a shared Anglo-American heritage could be demonstrated and reaffirmed. As we will see later in this chapter, this joint celebration would be the first of a series at Runnymede that would punctuate the next twenty years.

Britain After the War

On 8 May 1945, people in Britain celebrated Victory in Europe Day. After almost six years of continuous fighting, there was much reason to celebrate. Although the war in the Pacific theatre dragged on, in Europe hostilities had ended and attention turned to post-war reconstruction. The Japanese war effort then ended when Emperor Hirohito formally announced on 15 August. The world had been ravaged by war, and the warring states and their

³¹ 'St George's Day at Runnymede,' *The Times*, 24 April 1944, 8.

economies need to be rebuilt. In the immediate post-war years, Europe witnessed millions of displaced persons – soldiers, prisoners of war, and refugees – attempt to make their way home. War had left the British economy in a state of ruin and on the verge of bankruptcy. As an industrial society, Britain had been in need of fundamental reform and reconstruction prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, which was obscured by the belief that the British Empire provided the United Kingdom with economic strength and ensured it remained a world power. The war only served to exacerbate these issues, highlighting the need for capital investment in plant and infrastructure, combined with a need to expand vocational and technical education at all levels.³² In the words of the economist and Treasury adviser, John Maynard Keynes, Britain was faced with a ‘financial Dunkirk.’ Bankruptcy, he suggested, would mean an immediate withdrawal from responsibilities abroad, leading to the loss of international prestige, and a higher level of austerity measures at home, greater than those experienced during war.³³ Britain was completely reliant on financial assistance from the United States to ensure its economy remained buoyant. Keynes negotiated the terms of the Anglo-American loan agreement of 1945, totalling \$3.75 billion and, in addition, secured a further loan from Canada. This loan was supplemented later in the decade by Marshall Plan Aid from 1948 from which Britain majorly benefitted.

Labour withdrew its support for Churchill’s wartime coalition, prompting a general election. Clement Atlee’s Labour Party produced a socially progressive, forward-looking manifesto embodied in the slogan ‘Let Us Face the Future’, including promises of nationalisation, full employment, and a National Health Service. The Conservative (or National Party) campaign was overshadowed by Churchill’s famous Gestapo speech of 4 June 1945, in which he suggested that the implementation of Labour politics would require the introduction of a British secret police. Historians have criticised Churchill for this, describing it as an act that ‘made him sound ludicrous rather than eloquent, a crude partisan rather than a wise statesman

³² Corelli Barnett, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 41.

³³ John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes. Vol. 24, Activities 1944-1946, The Transition to Peace*, ed. Donald Moggridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 410.

above the fray'.³⁴ This has long been cited as one of the reasons Labour went on to win such a large majority. Labour won over 48% of the vote, capturing 393 seats. In accounting for their electoral success, historians have been split between those that suggest British society had shifted politically to the Left and those that suggest the public were disillusioned with the Conservatives.³⁵ Once in power, Labour embarked upon implementing its electoral promises. The National Health Service was established; key industries were nationalised; National Insurance was introduced; and new houses were built. Britain was transformed into a welfare state, providing its citizens with care from the cradle to the grave. Despite the progressive strides forward, austerity measures and rationing continued, and products such as sugar and bacon remained in limited supply until 1954. Queuing for consumer products became an almost permanent feature of the immediate post-war years. Whilst the public were generally accepting of this at first, as rationing continued people began to voice their disdain.

The Empire and Commonwealth might have been perceived as a source of strength, but it weakened, rather than strengthened, the British economy: As Correlli Barnett suggests, the Government was faced with a public that was disconnected from reality: 'It was not to be expected that now in the afterglow of victory they would suddenly perceive the United Kingdom was in reality a second-rank power, and that her world and imperial commitments represented not assets but expensive liabilities.'³⁶ Britain was no longer a leading world power. The years following the Second World War therefore mark a moment of recalibration in which Britain needed to rethink both its position and future role within international politics. The partitioning of India into modern day Pakistan and India in June 1947 and their subsequent independence from British colonial rule in the same year, marked the beginning of decolonisation. Britain's changing relationship with its colonies defined much of the remaining century. The British people emerged from war scathed and beleaguered. They might have been

³⁴ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (London: Penguin, 2006), 82. This traditional understanding has recently been challenged, see Richard Toye, 'Winston Churchill's "Crazy Broadcast": Party, Nation, and the 1945 Gestapo Speech,' *Journal of British Studies*, 49, no. 3 (July 2010): 655-680.

³⁵ Steven Fielding, 'What Did "the People" Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election,' *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992): 623-639.

³⁶ Barnett, *Lost Victory*, 44.

the victors in war, but it had come at a monumental cost. It was against this domestic and international backdrop that the memorials and monuments at Runnymede were constructed.

The Air Force Memorial, Cooper's Hill

As detailed in the previous chapter, the First World War had a major demographic, political, and economic impact on British society. The conflict also helped to create a highly distinctive culture of commemoration and remembrance. As Michael Heffernan explains, very little attention was paid to the future public commemoration of the dead during the early months of the Great War, but this changed significantly after the unprecedented levels of casualties suffered at the first battle of Ypres in the autumn of 1914 and during the extremely costly engagements of 1915, including the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge and Loos.³⁷ Following the end of the First World War, mourning and the private and public expression of grief was commonplace across Europe. Jay Winter's iconic monograph, *Sites of Memory, Site of Mourning*, serves as one of the most sustained cultural studies on the collective remembrance of the Great War and its impact on British society.³⁸

The end of the Second World War was greeted with a similar desire to honour the dead, and the remembrance culture that epitomised responses to the Great War were once again employed. Talks of a memorial to honour members of the Royal Air Force (RAF) who had fallen during the war were first mooted by the Air Council Committee on War Memorials. In February 1948, the Air Council, which was then the governing body of the Royal Air Force, approved their recommendations. These were subsequently forwarded to the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) so that they 'might plan and build in accordance with them'.³⁹ This was not the only proposal that the Commission was asked to consider, following proposals from 'participating Governments for the commemoration of other units of their respective Air

³⁷ Michael Heffernan, 'For Ever England: The Western Front and the Politics of Remembrance in Britain,' *Ecumene*, 2, no. 3 (July 1995): 295.

³⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁹ *1939-1945 The Runnymede Memorial* (London: The Imperial War Graves Commission, 1953), 17, Egham Museum, Doc 2493. For further details relating to the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission, see Heffernan, 'For Ever England,' 297-301.

Forces.⁴⁰ It was agreed that one memorial, commemorating those airmen from across the British Commonwealth and Empire who had died on active service whose remains had never been recovered, would be built.

On the 24 October 1949 it was announced that the IWGC had secured a site for the erection of a memorial to 'those members of the air forces of the Commonwealth who fell in the United Kingdom and in North-West Europe in the 1939-45 war and have no known grave'.⁴¹ A six-acre site, standing on the edge of Cooper's Hill overlooking Runnymede, was offered as a gift to the Commission by Sir Eugen and Lady Effie Millington-Drake. Sir Eugen was a distinguished member of the Diplomatic Service, serving as Minister at Montevideo from 1934 to 1941.⁴² Eugen had acquired the land early in his career with the intention of developing the hilltop site, planning to build himself a home once he had retired from his ambassadorial duties.⁴³ Upon receiving the gift, the Commission stated, 'it would be hard to find a site which so well combines beauty of position, interest of surroundings, and ease of access'.⁴⁴ It was announced that the memorial was to incorporate the names of over 20,000 people, and Edward Maufe, the Commission's chief architect and artistic adviser, was its designer. Maufe had been appointed as the Imperial War Graves Commission's chief architect in 1943, a position he kept until 1969. His domestic work brought him great praise and much of his memorial architecture demonstrated a stylish modernity. As Margaret Richardson suggests, his work reflected the tastes of inter-war Britain, describing it in architectural terms as 'modernity with manners'.⁴⁵ The memorial's construction commenced in December 1951. The estimated build time was one year and reports suggested the total cost was in the region of £140,000.⁴⁶ As the title of *The Times* report indicated, this was a memorial to Empire, and the memorial was indeed outward-looking and inclusive in both its initial conception and execution, situating

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ 'Airmen's Memorial,' *The Times*, 24 October 1949, 4.

⁴² 'Sir Eugen Millington-Drake,' *The Times*, 14 December 1972, 19.

⁴³ 'Sir E. Millington-Drake,' *The Times*, 22 December 1972, 15.

⁴⁴ 'Airmen's Memorial,' *The Times*, 24 October, 1949, 4.

⁴⁵ Margaret Richardson, 'Maufe [formerly Muff], Sir Edward Brantwood (1882–1974),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31429>, accessed 24 November 2019.

⁴⁶ 'Empire Air Memorial,' *The Times*, 17 December 1951, 3.

Britain within the context of its Empire and acknowledging the important contribution of its dominions in helping to win the war.

In terms of its design, the memorial was built using Portland stone and roofed with Westmorland green slates. Commenting on the memorial's design, Maufe said: 'The design of the memorial consists of a shrine with a cloister embracing it (**fig. 20**); the shrine as a place of contemplation and the cloister as a place worthily to record the 20,455 names.'⁴⁷ The arcades with their 'open stone books of names' line the perimeter of the memorial (**fig. 21**) and are paired with long and narrow slit windows, which provide a natural and delicate form of illumination.⁴⁸ In the middle of the cloisters lies the Stone of Remembrance (**fig. 22**). Over the entrance to the central shrine, the stone figures of Justice, Victory, and Courage hang (**fig. 23**), acting as an embodiment of the memorial's central themes. The central shrine consists of areas of quiet contemplation and reflection, offering views across seven counties. Two circular stone staircases allow visitors to climb the central shrine and enter the memorial's tower. Across two-levels the central tower provides further space for quiet contemplation and stunning vistas across the English countryside. As visitors climb the staircases their view changes, and upon arrival at the top they are above the treeline and are just about able to see the Runnymede meadow and meandering Thames below (**fig. 24**).

The memorial was unveiled on 17 October 1953 by Her Majesty, the Queen. As reported in *The Times*, 'around her on Cooper's Hill were probably as many near relations and friends, 2,000 from overseas, as the number of those commemorated (**figs. 25-26**).'⁴⁹ The siting of the memorial, overlooking Runnymede from its vantage point on top of Cooper's Hill, could not have been more appropriate and the symbolism of its location did not go unnoticed. Sir Edward Maufe wrote:

⁴⁷ Sir Edward Maufe, *Runnymede: Including the Memorials to the Commonwealth Air Forces, Magna Carta, and John F. Kennedy Memorials* (London: Pitkin Pictorials Ltd, 1970), 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ 'Commonwealth Remembrance of Missing Airmen,' *The Times*, 19 October 1953, 3.

The imagination of the British peoples, perhaps particularly those of the Commonwealth, has been stirred by the association of this memorial commemorating men who so lately saved for us our freedom, with Runnymede, where much earlier our civil liberty had its birth in the signing of Magna Carta.⁵⁰

In her public address, the Queen echoed Maufe's words, situating the memorial into a narrative of freedom and liberty. This narrative, she stated, had started with the actions of the barons at Runnymede in 1215:

It is very fitting that those who rest in nameless graves should be remembered in this place, for it was in these fields of Runnymede, seven centuries ago, that our forefathers first planted a seed of liberty which helped to spread across the earth the conviction that man should be free and not enslaved. And when the life of this belief was threatened by the iron hand of tyranny, their successors came forward without hesitation to fight and, if demanded of them, to die, for its salvation.⁵¹

The extraordinary sacrifices made by those who served during the Second World War were thus framed as the evolution of the principles and ideals that had spurred the barons into action in 1215. The seed that had been planted in the early thirteenth century had grown and, along the way, evolved. Nevertheless, struggles against oppression and tyranny were all part of this evolving story. Whether it was King John in 1215, the Kaiser in 1914, or Hitler in 1939, these all constituted battles in which the liberty of the subject was threatened. Runnymede was the moment in which this stand had begun. In this sense, the Queen's words were not dissimilar to the way in which the charter was framed during the First World War. Magna Carta was representative of liberal democracy and the idea that every individual had a right to enjoy their own personal freedom. The first half of the twentieth century had seen these ideals, values, and beliefs challenged on an unprecedented scale.

For many the Air Forces Memorial on Cooper's Hill is a fitting tribute to the sacrifice made by the airmen and women during the Second World War. Its proximity to Runnymede provides it with an added layer of symbolism and meaning that might otherwise be absent. In this sense, there are two layers of memory being evoked. Layer one should be conceived of as the memory of the sacrifices made by air force personnel. Above all else, the memorial is built

⁵⁰ Maufe, *Runnymede*, 6.

⁵¹ Ibid.

to honour their memory and, as the Queen declared, 'the heroism of each will be remembered for as long as this memorial shall stand.'⁵² The secondary layer of memory is the struggle for freedom in the face of tyranny and oppression. It is possible to argue that the sacrifices of the servicemen and women remembered at the memorial embodies this layer of memory. The connection to Runnymede, I would argue, only serves to strengthen this message, and reinforce this idea. By linking the events of 1939-1945 to that of 1215, the struggle against tyranny and oppression is placed into a much longer narrative. As Geoff Cubitt reminds us: 'Events and personalities do not establish themselves in social memory as isolated containers of symbolic meaning: much of their significance comes from the ways in which they get connected to other events and to larger narrative structures.'⁵³ It goes without saying that the Second World War was an event that was unlikely to be forgotten from modern memory. However, the siting of the memorial at Cooper's Hill clearly established a connection between the sacrifice of the airmen and the sealing of Magna Carta. No longer was this purely a memorial raised in dedication to those who gave their lives, but a memorial that represented principles of liberty and freedom under the rule of law. This point is perhaps best illustrated by Paul. H. Scott's poem, engraved on a north facing window in the first-floor gallery overlooking Runnymede (fig. 27):

Here, where the treetops drop down to Runnymede.

Meadow of Magna Carta, field of freedom,

Never saw you so fitting a memorial,

Proof that the principles established here

Are still dear to the hearts of men.

Here now they stand, contrasted and alike,

The field of freedom's birth, and the memorial

To freedom's winning.

⁵² Quoted in *ibid*, 8.

⁵³ Geoff Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 214.

Post-War Resumption of the Magna Carta Society

There was a considerable delay between the end of the war and the resumption of the MCS's work partly because, in the intervening years, the Rev. Tranter had passed away. Acknowledging his extraordinary contribution to the activities of the MCCC, Normanton wrote:

No words will ever be adequate to praise all that was done by the Rev. A. C. Tranter. From first to last, he was a tower of strength. To know him and his dear wife, was to love both. He was an absolute devotee to the fundamental ideals of the Great Charter.⁵⁴

The vicar's commitment and contribution to the endeavours and activities of the MCCC during the interwar years was unquestionable. Without his energy and persistence, the eventual purchase of Runnymede might never have materialised. He was central to the activities that were held at Runnymede each year and, undoubtedly, his passing represented the end of an era.

On the 15 October 1953, Helena Normanton, in her capacity as Honorary Secretary of the MCS, convened a meeting at the Goring Hotel, London. Lord Alness, the Society's President, chaired the meeting. He stressed that the meeting's purpose was to provide absolute continuity with all that had been done and accomplished in previous years, following a long war and post-war lapse in activity.⁵⁵ In addition to this stated objective, the meeting had clearly been called to provide a point of departure for some of committee members and a moment for them to handover responsibilities and duties to new members. Lord Alness indicated that he would be stepping down from his position on account of his failing health. After thirty-two years of service to the MCCC and MCS, Normanton also announced that she would be resigning from her roles, ending her active involvement with the society and its work. As a gesture of thanks for her services, Normanton was made Honorary Vice-President of the Society.⁵⁶ In truth, the public activities of the MCS by this point had been non-existent for almost twenty years. There was an obvious desire for the Society to continue its work that was combined with a need to

⁵⁴ 'History of the Magna Carta Commemoration Committee,' Egham Museum, MN 347.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

prevent the energies of the interwar years from being lost. Although there was an obvious desire to see the work of the Society continue, this meeting appears to have prompted little in the way of immediate renewed activity.

Runnymede and the American Bar Association Monument to Magna Carta

Increasing Cold War tensions characterised the remaining years of the decade, and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 served as a physical illustration and reminder of the ideological divide between Western democracy and Eastern totalitarianism. Runnymede had already witnessed the charter be drawn into debates about the dangers of socialism and communism in 1924, during Speaker Whitley's address at the Magna Carta Day service of the same year. Anglo-American relations continued to strengthen across the 1940s and into the middle of the 1950s. The erection and unveiling of the American Bar Association (ABA) Memorial to Magna Carta in 1957 provided another moment in which Anglo-American unity could be expressed at Runnymede and for Magna Carta to be invoked in defence of Western democracy against the threat of communism. Although the memorial was erected to celebrate the international legacy of the charter, one cannot write about its construction without acknowledging the influence of the Cold War.

There remain very few records relating to the erection of the ABA Memorial at Runnymede. On account of this, providing a detailed analysis of the exact sequence of events is challenging. On the 23 and 24 August 1956, in the Statler Hilton Hotel, Dallas, Texas, the Administration Committee of the ABA met. Present were John D. Randall, Chairman of the Committee, E. Smythe Gambrell, Joseph D. Stecher, Harold H. Bredell, David F. Maxwell, and Charles S. Rhyne. The committee's main discussion point was the Annual Meeting, which was set to take place the following year. The 1957 Annual Meeting was the ABA's eightieth anniversary meeting and, as such, was split across two locations: New York and London. The ABA had not held a meeting in London since 1924 and there was a heightened sense of excitement and anticipation accompanying this event. Representatives of the ABA were sent to London to make the necessary preparations.

Point five of the Committee's agenda referenced plans to commemorate Magna Carta and the Administrative Committee were asked to consider proposals put forward by a sub-committee, the Committee to Commemorate Magna Carta (CCMC). Prior to this meeting, a report, which was known as Exhibit C, had been submitted for the board's consideration. Detailed within its pages were a series of recommendations relating to the ways the charter could be suitably commemorated during the ABA's London meeting. Based on the recommendations of the CCMC, the board agreed that the sub-committee: 'be authorised to do everything necessary to secure and to place a suitable monument at Runnymede commemorating the interest of the American Bar in Magna Carta, including the solicitation of funds from lawyers for this purpose.'⁵⁷ Given both the speed and the detailed nature of the recommendations that had been submitted for consideration, it is evident that the desire to erect a monument at Runnymede had been a long-term aspiration. The 'Report of the Committee to Commemorate Magna Carta,' otherwise known as 'Exhibit C', had been submitted by the committee's chairman, Charles S. Rhyne. Whilst the year in which the CCMC was established is not stated, it states there had been two visits to Runnymede by the President of the ABA, E. Smythe Gambrell, and Charles S. Rhyne in November 1955 and July 1956.⁵⁸ Their two visits were timely, linking to recent discussions and developments that were taking place in Egham.

1956 saw a move to establish a Magna Carta Trust (MCT) and these discussions and political manoeuvrings provided the backdrop to the 741st anniversary celebrations. Although it is not stated, one can only presume that the MCT was the successor to the MCS. There was a mild spike in commemorative activity associated with Magna Carta on 24 June, including a service of commemoration at Egham's parish church, St John's, and an anniversary lunch at Great Foster's, which was hosted by Councillor R. H. Try, Chairman of the Urban District Council of Egham. Both celebrated the 741st anniversary of the charter. The service at St John's was led by the Rev. John Northridge, who had succeeded the Rev. Tranter as vicar. Northridge was also

⁵⁷ American Bar Association, 'Minutes of the Administrative Committee,' August 1956, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

⁵⁸ American Bar Association, 'Report of the Committee to Commemorate Magna Carta,' August 1956, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

Chaplain to the Baronial Order of Magna Carta in the USA, an institution established in 1898 to promulgate and support the principles established in Magna Carta, providing yet another link between Egham, Runnymede, and America.⁵⁹ The main address was given by John Augustine Collins, the High Commissioner for New Zealand, and he was supported by the Rt Hon. Lord Evershed, Master of the Rolls, who also gave a short reading that was taken from an extract of the charter.⁶⁰ Lord Evershed was a lawyer and judge of considerable repute. Aged just forty-four, he was one of the youngest persons ever appointed to the High Court bench, succeeding Lord Greene as Master of the Rolls in 1949, a position he held for thirteen years.⁶¹ Following the completion of the service, guests had been invited to Great Fosters for a commemorative lunch. There were over a hundred guests present, drawn from the legal profession, councillors, representatives of the Magna Carta towns, and former and current members of the MCS.⁶² The lunch provided the perfect setting in which to reveal the plans to establish the MCT and these were duly discussed following the completion of the meal.⁶³

Although the MCT had not yet been established, Gambrell and Rhyne had determined that one of the central objectives of the Trust was to erect a monument to Magna Carta at Runnymede. This enthusiasm dovetailed with the ABA's own ambitions. The ABA were willing to provide the monument as a gift to the British people, something which was 'enthusiastically' welcomed by representatives of the Urban District Council of Egham.⁶⁴ Runnymede had remained without a monument to Magna Carta for almost seven-hundred and fifty years. As was discussed in the previous chapter, some believed that the untouched landscape was the perfect memorial, containing the historic DNA of liberty. The acceptance of a gift from American lawyers represented a 'unique departure from past policy and a most unusual

⁵⁹ 'Baronial Order of Magna Charta,' Baronial Order of Magna Charta & Military Order of the Crusades, <https://www.magnacharta.com/bomc/>, accessed 26 January 2020.

⁶⁰ Magna Carta Commemoration Service Booklet, 1956, Egham Museum, Doc 1749a.

⁶¹ Nicholls of Birkenhead, 'Evershed, (Francis) Raymond, Baron Evershed (1899–1966).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33051>, accessed 5 January 2019.

⁶² '741st Anniversary of the Granting of Magna Carta,' 24 July 1956, Egham Museum, Doc 1106.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ American Bar Association, 'Report of the Committee to Commemorate Magna Carta,' August 1956, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

action.⁶⁵ However, the ABA were interested in more than simply commemorating the charter and the wider values and legal principles it represented. It was felt that a monument at Runnymede would generate an immense level of publicity and international attention. The erection of this monument served as a political statement as much as anything else. Against the backdrop of increasing Cold War tensions and the clash of political and legal traditions, the Magna Carta monument was a beacon of hope, representing the pinnacle of western liberal values. As the ABA themselves acknowledged:

The erection of the monument would serve to dramatize [sic] the fundamental difference between our system of government and its recognition of individual rights, and the system of our chief competitors in the International field whose system denies such rights in favor [sic] of an all-powerful state.⁶⁶

Magna Carta had thus been drawn into the Cold War, and Runnymede was to be the site at which the ideas of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law would be internationally projected. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the charter and Runnymede acted as both a guardian against the tyranny and oppression of the East, and an inspiration for those forced to live under these regimes.

The ABA were encouraged to approach Sir Edward Maufe to produce a design for the monument. In their opinion, Maufe was well-placed to make suitable suggestions ‘as to the proper type of monument’, following the successful completion and general praise he received for the RAF Memorial.⁶⁷ The location of the monument was at this stage undecided. For obvious reasons, the ABA were keen for the monument to be built on Runnymede, but the National Trust were reluctant to endorse this proposal. Negotiations between the two continued, and the ABA exerted considerable pressure on both the National Trust and local Council to ensure Runnymede was where it was built. In terms of its unveiling, the ABA publicly stated that it wished to see the monument dedicated on 15 June 1957. These discussions were being had in August 1956 and, apart from an agreement in principle, there was much that still needed to be organised and agreed.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 3.

The ABA quickly entered into discussions with Maufe, relating to the design, cost, and construction of the monument. In a letter dated 15 October 1956, Maufe informed Charles S. Rhyne that, after working at 'great speed', he had managed to produce a design of the monument. At the time of his writing, he had already received positive feedback from the Heads of the General Council of the Bar and Law Society in addition to the surveyor of Egham Council.⁶⁸ Accompanying his letter were some sketches and plans, which fully detailed his proposal. In his opinion, he had 'produced a truly worthy design' that reflected the 'great enthusiasm' of the ABA.⁶⁹ Despite his general tone of positivity, he was acutely aware that he was working to an extremely tight deadline and he was at pains to stress the need to move these proposals forward. Maufe's design was simple: a neoclassical rotunda supported by eight pillars, housing a central pedestal made of Portland Stone (**fig. 28**). The monument was to be raised and the associated landscaping improvements would ensure that visitors would have to climb steps on their approach. He estimated that the cost of the monument would be no more than £11,000, which was divided into three sums: £6,000 for the monument, £4,000 for the landscaping, and £1,000 in architectural fees.⁷⁰ Maufe proposed that the ABA appoint the same builders who had worked on the RAF Memorial, Holloway Brothers. Not only were they reliable, he felt they would be able to quickly source the Portland stone required for the project. He ended confidently, promising to achieve a 'satisfactory result' on the proviso that his plans were quickly approved.⁷¹ Days later, Maufe's proposals were agreed and confirmed in a letter dated 25 October. The only slight reservation concerned whether the proposed design and intended materials would be capable of standing for 1000 years.⁷²

The next meeting of the Administrative Committee was convened on 16 December 1956 at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington D.C., where discussion predominantly centred on the arrangements for their London meeting. Preceding this, however, the meeting began with an

⁶⁸ Sir Edward Maufe to Charles S. Rhyne, 15 October 1956, American Bar Association, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Charles S. Rhyne to Sir Edward Maufe, 25 October 1956, American Bar Association, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

update on the progress of the monument. Committee members expressed their concern and acknowledged the presence of an anti-American sentiment within both Britain. Mr. John C. Cooper, Administrator of the American Bar Fund, informed those present that a recent edition of the satirical magazine, *Punch*, had been full of anti-American propaganda. The Suez Crisis of October and November loomed large in Britain's public consciousness. Politically, the crisis had been a disaster, resulting in Anthony Eden's resignation. George Peden argues that Eden significantly misread the American reaction to events in Egypt, believing that the 'UK could take independent military action of which the Americans disapproved.'⁷³ He was proven wrong. Chris Bartlett refers to the Suez Crisis as being 'essentially a passing thunderstorm' in Anglo-American relations.⁷⁴ More seriously, however, British ministers were reminded that they should not take for granted American support.⁷⁵ Mr Storey, Chairman of the Speaker's Committee, was asked to remind speakers to be 'most diplomatic' and avoid making any comments 'off the record' that might compound any anti-American feeling in Britain.⁷⁶

In terms of the monument's progress, the inscriptions for the central pedestal were agreed and attention quickly turned toward the unveiling ceremony. Sir Edwin Herbert, President of the Law Society of England and Wales, had recently written to Mr Ryne, advising that the dedication of the monument needed to take place before noon in order to allow the Bishop of London to deliver the invocation. The Bishop of London's involvement proved contentious. The ABA's President, President Maxwell, questioned 'why there should be so much emphasis placed on the clergy', adding that 'there existed a basic misunderstanding between the English and the ABA on this'.⁷⁷ The ABA were adamant that the unveiling was not to be a religious service. Commemorative services at Runnymede during the 1920s and 1930s had been characterised by their religious tone and clause one of the 1215 charter had ensured the

⁷³ George C. Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline as a World Power,' *The Historical Journal*, 55, no. 4 (December 2012): 1080.

⁷⁴ C. J. Bartlett, *'The Special Relationship': A Political History of Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992), 77.

⁷⁵ Peden, 'Suez and Britain's Decline,' 1080.

⁷⁶ American Bar Association, 'Minutes of the Administrative Committee,' 16 December 1956, Richard Collins, Librarian/Records Supervisor, email message to author, 30 November 2015.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

liberties of the church. For many, Magna Carta's religious connections were unavoidable. This connection was not something that was endorsed by the American legal community. It was agreed by a unanimous decision that the monument's dedication was to happen in the afternoon and the Bishop was issued with an ultimatum: if he could not rearrange his plans then someone else would be asked. In terms of the ceremonies format, a short invocation, lasting no more than two minutes, was to be followed by speeches from ABA representatives and Sir Hartley Shawcross as a representative of the British legal profession.⁷⁸

Under the cover of a thick blanket of lingeringly ominous thunder clouds, an optimistic spirit of hope and liberty was undeterred at Runnymede on the afternoon of Sunday 28 July 1957. In front of an audience of approximately 5,000 people, the American Bar Association's monument to Magna Carta was unveiled (**fig. 3**). The seating faced the brilliant white monument, covered by the American flag and Union Jack and rising magnificently from this landscape of liberty. Standing at the foot of Cooper's Hill the memorial was a permanent beacon and physical reminder of the principle of 'freedom under the rule of the law.' In terms of symbolism, covering the memorial in the flag of America and Britain represented the unique cultural bond that existed between Britain and America, but also represented the degree to which this relationship had strengthened after the Second World War. The invocation was delivered by the Rev. Canon J. D'E. Frith, Master of the Temple, and was followed by four short speeches, delivered by E. Smythe Gambrell, immediate past-President of the American Bar Association; the Right Honourable Lord Evershed, Master of the Rolls; Charles S. Rhyne, President-elect of the American Bar Association; and the Right Honourable Sir Hartley Shawcross, Chairman of the General Council of the Bar of England and Wales. As a collective the four speeches addressed similar ideas and looked to reinforce their cultural associations. Copies of the four speeches were subsequently printed in the journal of the American Bar Association. Unless otherwise stated, the following analysis is drawn from this publication.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Mr. Gambrell opened the proceedings by proclaiming they were ‘gathered on hallowed ground.’⁷⁹ ‘We sense again the bond that unites the dead, the living and those unborn,’ he continued, ‘in the eternal quest for freedom.’ The principles enshrined within the charter were framed as transcending time, ‘its truths are universal and eternal, good for all men, for all time.’ Beyond this, however, the charter was styled as an important tenet of the cultural heritage that linked America and Britain:

There flows within our veins a common blood line, commingling Celt and Saxon, Dane and Norman, Pict and Scot. We share a tongue, and are enriched by a common culture. But the genius of our concord is something more. What was brought into being on this meadow holds us still together. From that we trace our brotherhood.

The sealing of Magna Carta in 1215 marked a moment of foundation. It was the beginning of a shared cultural heritage and Runnymede was the site upon which the special relationship was firmly rooted. Over the centuries, this relationship had evolved and matured, but the charter had remained a defining feature, characterising this bond. Lord Evershed echoed this sentiment, declaring, ‘Now here at Runnymede had been raised a monument to our common heritage of the rule of law.’

If Gambrell and Evershed framed the charter in terms of constitutional history and its importance to Anglo-American relations, Charles S. Rhyne and Sir Hartley Shawcross situated the monument’s unveiling within the context of the Cold War. Rhyne proudly declared that the ‘mere mention of the Magna Carta stirs the Anglo-American pulse like a battle cry against oppression and tyranny.’ Communism was the charter’s latest opponent, attempting to undermine the principles it stood for and embodied. Rhyne cast the fight between communism and western liberalism as a struggle, employing the visual trope of light and dark for dramatic emphasis:

The world today is at a crucial point in the struggle between freedom and tyranny. On the one side are those who stand in the tradition of Magna Carta and defend the right of men to be free. On the other side stand the forces of darkness, who would

⁷⁹ E. Smythe Gambrell, Lord Evershed, Charles S. Rhyne and Hartley Shawcross, ‘The Magna Carta Memorial Ceremonies: Runnymede, Sunday Afternoon, July 28,’ *American Bar Association Journal*, 43, no. 10 (October 1957): 900-907.

deny freedom and exalt the state. This monument dramatizes the fundamental difference between our system of government, with its recognition of individual rights, and the Communist system, which denies such rights. This is the basic difference between Communism and the free world: we hold to the principle of individual human freedom under the rule of law and the inherent right of every man, while communism rejects that concept and would destroy it.

Communism, Rhyne argued, sought to destroy the principles enshrined within the charter. By extension, this also represented a direct attack on the ABA monument and everything it represented. The charter was framed as the protector of individual rights and guarantor of man's individual liberty and freedom. In a similar vein, Shawcross also referenced the Cold War and the ideological struggle that was playing out across much of the world.

Unlike Rhyne, however, Shawcross chose to evoke recent events. He asserted, 'what recently happened in Hungary is a demonstration of the fact that, however long suppressed, man's instinct for freedom will in the end be reasserted'. His words were set against the backdrop of the Hungarian Uprising of October and November 1956, which had originally started as a student protest in Budapest and had quickly spread across the country, culminating in the downfall of the national government. Events in Hungary were not isolated, however, and in July 1956 a rebellion of workers in Poznan, Poland, was brutally put down by the state. This revolutionary wave was, in part, prompted by the moderate liberalisation of Soviet foreign policy. The signing of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 formally bound all Eastern bloc countries together, but guaranteed their sovereignty and independence, promising that internal affairs would be free from Soviet interference. Under the leadership of Imre Nagy, the newly established national government called for Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and promised to hold free elections. On 4 November, Soviet forces were sent into Hungary to put down the resistance. The conflict ended on 10 November and had resulted in the death of 2,500 Hungarians, whilst a further 200,000 people had fled the country, seeking refuge.

Shawcross' words contained two central themes: Britain's decline as a leading world power and the continued need for British and American diplomatic cooperation in the long struggle against political oppression. His words looked to the future, and he challenged his audience to think about what might constitute the most appropriate form of help. Central to

this, he argued, was the need to collectively 'look forward rather than backward.' Diplomatic cooperation, he argued was essential: 'Together the United States of America and the British Commonwealth can lead and protect the peoples of the world by our influence and our example. But divided we shall imperil [sic] those things for which we stand – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' Shawcross' words directly referenced anti-American sentiment and the recent diplomatic tensions that had emerged between America and Britain, following the Suez Crisis of late 1956. He made light of this situation, explaining 'the wisdom of neither of our countries, still less of our politicians, is not infallible.' The need for collaboration was necessitated by Britain's decline as a world power. As decolonisation continued, Britain's reliance on the United States had only increased. Shawcross exclaimed, 'in Britain we no longer have the great wealth and material power we once possessed, but that does not mean that we have nothing.' Britain's diplomatic role had fundamentally shifted. With the support of America, it was their collective responsibility to spread the ideals and principles enshrined within the charter. His concluding remarks provided an excellent summary of the memorial's purpose and the wider context that surrounded its unveiling:

Let us then remember this great and significant occasion as one which marks our determination to strive mightily together in every field of physical and legal and social endeavour, to make the brave words of Magna Carta a reality, not for ourselves alone, but for all mankind, so that liberty and justice shall not perish from the earth.

The unveiling of the monument was a physical affirmation of shared democratic heritage, which linked the two nations. Beyond this, however, it was a powerful symbol of western democracy and a firm commitment to the rule of law. It was a beacon of hope and source of inspiration. As Shawcross' closing words suggest, this was a moment in which both Britain and America could renew their commitment to these ideals. Working collaboratively, it was their duty to spread this message across the world.

John F Kennedy Memorial, May 1965

The assassination of President John F Kennedy on 22 November 1963 shocked the international community.⁸⁰ November 1963 saw Kennedy embark on a tour of the western and southern US, speaking in nine different states. Although he was yet to declare his candidacy for re-election, it was clear that this series of appearances were in preparation for a presidential campaign the following year. As his motorcade made its way down the Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, the President was assassinated. At the time of his death, George Entwistle observes, 'JFK was regarded by millions as a lost Galahad, a knightly ambassador from a better realm.'⁸¹ Responding to the President's death, Sir Alec Douglas-Home stated: 'He had more power than had ever been given in history to a mortal man, and he used it always for high purposes and always to make the world a better and safe place for ordinary men and women to live.'⁸² On Monday 25 November 1963, former Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, paid tribute to the dead President. 'We mourn him not for ourselves,' he said, but 'for what we and the world have lost.'⁸³

Given the level of international respect and public mourning that accompanied Kennedy's death, there were almost immediate calls for a memorial to be raised in his honour. *The Times* reported that the Labour M.P. for Bradford East, Mr Frank McLeavy, had postponed his question, calling for the erection of a memorial to Kennedy, to provide Douglas-Home with more time for internal consultation.⁸⁴ The following day, the Prime Minister informed the House that he would consult with the Leader of the Opposition, Harold Wilson, about a national memorial, telling them that the Queen wished to be personally associated with the final proposal.⁸⁵ Even at this early stage, many members had more than a statue in mind. Many

⁸⁰ For example, see: 'Tributes to President Kennedy Pour in From World's Leaders,' *The Times*, 23 November 1963, 7.

⁸¹ George Entwistle, 'From Consensus to Dissensus – History and Meaning in Flux at Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe's Kennedy Memorial Landscape,' *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscape: An International Quarterly*, 39, no. 1 (January 2019): 53.

⁸² 'The Queen's Message of Sympathy to U.S.,' *The Times*, 23 November 1963, 8.

⁸³ 'Moving Speeches in Parliament,' *The Times*, 26 November 1963, 12.

⁸⁴ 'M.P. Wants a Kennedy Memorial,' *The Times*, 4 December 1963, 7.

⁸⁵ 'Memorial to President Kennedy,' *The Times*, 6 December 1963, 12.

thought that it would be fitting for part of the memorial to take the form of a university scholarship, supporting American students studying within Britain. This was, according to Frank McLeavy, 'a fitting memorial to the work and purpose of the late President.'⁸⁶

Parliament did not waste its time in establishing The Kennedy National Memorial Committee. Lord Franks, described by Alex Danchev as 'profoundly reasonable and publicly austere, a figure of immense moral authority,' was elected as the Committee's Chairman.⁸⁷ Franks was an astute appointment. He was British Ambassador to the United States between 1948 and 1952, forming a close relationship with the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. As Danchev remarks, 'the quality and scope of the relationship ... is unparalleled in American history, and likely to remain so.'⁸⁸ To Franks, the 'Special Relationship' was more than simply the belief of a shared inheritance, uniting English-speaking peoples, 'it arose out of common aims and mutual need of each other; it was rooted in strong habits of working together on which there was supervened the sentiments of mutual trust.'⁸⁹ Franks' committee was made-up of thirteen members, ranging from the Lord Mayors of London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast to Lord Evershed and Sir Roger Makins, who had succeeded Franks as the American Ambassador.⁹⁰ Over the course of the next three months, the committee consulted various stakeholders, presenting their recommendations to Douglas-Home at the end of March.

These recommendations were duly announced in the Commons on 25 March, following consultations with Harold Wilson and Jo Grimond, Leader of the Liberal Party. In his recommendations, Lord Franks advised that the Committee had attempted to: '... interpret the general feeling of the country, we have sought for President Kennedy, a living memorial in the service of men and women, including a physical permanent presence and infused with an

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Alex Danchev, 'Franks, Oliver Shewell, Baron Franks (1905-1992),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6 January 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/51039>, accessed 31 January 2020.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The full committee was: Lord Franks, Lord Mayor of London; Lord Mayor of Edinburgh; Lord Mayor of Cardiff; Lord Mayor of Belfast; Lord Chandos; Lord Evershed; Mr Victor Feather; Dame Margot Fonteyn; Mr John Freeman; Lord Harcourt; Dr T. Supton; Sir Roger Makins; Miss Barbara Ward; Sir Phillip de Zulueta. As reported in: 'Committee Named for Kennedy Memorial,' *The Times*, 22 January 1964, 8.

imaginative quality which would always evoke the memory of his outlook and achievements.⁹¹ They had sifted their way through over one hundred and fifty letters, each suggesting different forms the memorial might take. It was reported that the Queen had taken an active role in helping the Committee whittle down the suggestions, providing counsel to ideas as they were being formed.⁹² It was announced that Runnymede had been chosen as the most suitable location for the memorial. In explanation, Franks wrote: 'President Kennedy gave a voice to the heritage which is enshrined for us in Runnymede: we propose that an acre of Runnymede, laid out simply, with a simple plinth and steps, should be given in perpetuity to the United States in memory of him.'⁹³ Learning that the memorial was to be built at Runnymede, Mr A. E. Villars, clerk to the Egham Urban District Council, expressed his delight: 'We feel greatly honoured. Runnymede is a fitting place for a permanent tribute to President Kennedy, who was deeply concerned with the rights of man.'⁹⁴ The memorial was to take two forms. In addition to the memorial at Runnymede, a scholarship would be established, allowing British undergraduates and postgraduates to study at Harvard, Radcliffe College, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Both ventures were to be funded using the Lord Mayor of London's Appeal, and it was hoped that a total of £500,000 could be raised through public donation. Internal correspondence indicated that the Government was willing match fund the £500,000.⁹⁵ In total, it was hoped that the fund would raise in excess of £1,000,000.

Having successfully coordinated the Committee's work and submitted their recommendations to the Prime Minister, Lord Franks withdrew from the scene. Although a plan had been established and approved, there was considerable work still to do. The most pressing unanswered question, however, was who was going to design the 'acre of memorial.' The task of delivery fell to Sir Roger Makins who was already well versed on the proposals, having acted as Lord Franks' deputy. Makins, described by the *New York Times* as 'looking like an affable

⁹¹ 'Recommendations of the Kennedy National Memorial Committee,' quoted in P.R. Baldwin to Lord Franks, 17 April 1964, TNA: FO 924/1497.

⁹² 'Pres. Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede,' *The Times*, 26 March 1964, 14.

⁹³ "Recommendations of the Kennedy National Memorial Committee" quoted in letter from P.R. Baldwin to Lord Franks, 17 April 1964, TNA, Kew: FO 924/1497.

⁹⁴ 'Pres. Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede,' *The Times*, 26 March 1964, 14.

⁹⁵ D. F. Ingrey to Phillip Woodfield, 6 October 1964, TNA: PREM 11/5190.

hawk,' was a firm believer in the 'Special Relationship.'⁹⁶ But as Danchev asserts, 'if the public pinnacle of his career was as ambassador in Washington, in truth he was a prime mover in the inner circles of the Anglo-Saxons throughout the momentous middle decades of the twentieth century.'⁹⁷ His political and diplomatic success is perhaps best underlined by the absence of any mention of his involvement with the Kennedy Memorial project in his extensive Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry. This project was but a footnote in his distinguished career.⁹⁸ Needing to find a designer, Makins sent letters to Gordon Ricketts, the Secretary of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and to Miss Alison Dale, Secretary of the Landscape Institute, asking for suggestions of suitable candidates to undertake the project.⁹⁹

Makins received replies from both organisations. Unsurprisingly, both suggested different possible candidates, outlining ways in which the project might progress. The President of the Landscape Institute, L Milner White, suggested that 'in a matter of such public interest a competition for the design might be held.'¹⁰⁰ This idea was politely ignored. Makins no doubt aware of how time consuming such an undertaking might be. Both responses, however, named Geoffrey Jellicoe as a potentially suitable candidate. Jellicoe was a landscape architect of considerable notoriety, known for his 'strong sense of humour, integrity, and generosity.'¹⁰¹ In 1929 he founded the Institute of Landscape Architects, which later became the Landscape Institute. During the Second World War, he acted as the Institute's first President, editing its journal from 1941 to 1945. In 1948 he was elected the first President of the International Federation of Landscape Architects, a position he held until 1954. By 1964 some of his most recognisable works included: the gardens at Shute House in Dorset; Pusey House; Mottisfont Abbey; and his contribution to the Festival of Britain's Lansbury Estate. Jellicoe was interested

⁹⁶ Alex Danchev, "Makins, Roger Mellor, first Baron Sherfield (1904-1996)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/64006>, accessed 31 January 2020.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Entwistle, 'From Consensus to Dissensus,' 56.

⁹⁹ Cecil to Dale, 14 April 1964, TNA: CAB 21/5145.

¹⁰⁰ Dale to Cecil, 21 April 1964, TNA: CAB 21/5145.

¹⁰¹ Hal Moggridge, 'Jellicoe, Sir Geoffrey Alan (1900-1996),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 26 May 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40519>, accessed 4 February 2020.

in exploring the subconscious in landscape design.¹⁰² In later reflections, Jellicoe explained that the Kennedy Memorial was the first piece of work in which he could explore this: 'It gave me my first serious opportunity to put a subconscious idea into a work, so that it is more important and more lasting than the purely visual impression the eye receives.'¹⁰³ Satisfied that Jellicoe was suitable for the commission, Makins contacted him and the two met at Runnymede on Saturday 2 May 1964. The two traipsed around the sodden site for a couple of hours. Despite the wet, their meeting was productive. Makins enthusiastically wrote to his fellow civil servants, informing them that Jellicoe was 'not only willing but anxious to do the work.'¹⁰⁴ Helpfully, Makins also noted that Jellicoe's plans were in line with his own visions for the project. Jellicoe was equally enthusiastic, producing the proposals in six weeks and presenting them to the Cabinet Office on 15 June 1964.

Details of the Kennedy memorial were made public in November 1964. By this point the Memorial Appeal had reached £616,120 - £383,880 short of the target.¹⁰⁵ Although this was an impressive sum, the process of collection had been slow, and donations were not forthcoming. The £600,00 total was, in fact, a lie. As of October the Memorial Appeal had only received a 'meagre £300,000.' It was decided in late October that the figure be deliberately inflated to help 'stimulate the public's imagination and an interest in the Appeal and its objects.'¹⁰⁶ It was hoped that the fanfare surrounding the public announcement would help generate extra donations. A public commitment to getting the memorial completed by the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Magna Carta also formed part of the announcement.

This was the first occasion that details of the memorial were made public. The memorial was to be approached through the National Trust site of Runnymede. Members of the public would be required to climb stone steps and meander their way through the surrounding woodland, before emerging into a clearing dominated by Portland Stone. The white of the stone formed an unnatural juxtaposition with the surrounding woodland. The memorial, as Jellicoe described

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Makins to Sutherland-Harris, 4 May 1964, TNA: CAB 21/5145.

¹⁰⁵ 'Runnymede Memorial to President Kennedy,' *The Times*, 23 November 1964, 10.

¹⁰⁶ D. F. Ingrey to Phillip Woodfield, 6 October 1964, TNA: PREM 11/5190.

it, was in three elements: the memorial stone and inscription; the paved terrace; and the two seats of contemplation, overlooking Runnymede.¹⁰⁷ With reference to the two seats of contemplation, Jellicoe said: 'The intention has been to create a frame of mind in the visitor in which the significance of the superb view is brought home: the inscribed stone is only the beginning of a process of thought and intuition.'¹⁰⁸ Jellicoe had found a way in which the memory of Kennedy could be linked to that of Magna Carta. His proposal, however, did not crudely make this connection. The memorial was simultaneously reflective and provocative: it prompted visitors to remember the late President, whilst provoking them to reflect on the legacy of the charter. The memorial's construction started almost immediately. On the morning of the 22 February 1965, ten men, supported by a large crane, lowered the Memorial stone into location ahead of its unveiling on 14 May.¹⁰⁹

In the presence of members of the Kennedy family, Her Majesty the Queen, and various international politicians and civil servants, the Kennedy Memorial was inaugurated on 14th May 1965 (**figs. 29-31**). The opening words of *The Times* provide a particularly eloquent and literary depiction of that afternoon:

In the green and golden meadows here this afternoon ... the British memorial to John Kennedy was inaugurated. The meadows were knee-high with grass, fresh with buttercups and dandelions, with insect hum and bird chirrup. Crowds picnicked in deep pools of sage under the muscular arms of oaks.¹¹⁰

The significance of the location and the links between British and American people was an obvious and inescapable theme. Her Majesty spoke of the historic ties between Britain and America, reflecting that Magna Carta was the cornerstone of the liberties shared by America and Britain. In her opinion, the memorial's siting at Runnymede was fitting. Kennedy, she affirmed, 'championed liberty in an age when its very foundations were being threatened on a universal scale.'¹¹¹ In accepting the memorial on behalf of President Johnson, Mr Dean Rusk,

¹⁰⁷ 'Runnymede Memorial to President Kennedy,' *The Times*, 23 November 1964, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ 'Memorial to President Kennedy,' *Staines and Egham News*, 26 February 1965, 4. See also: 'Progress on Kennedy Memorial,' *The Times*, 23 February 1965, 24.

¹¹⁰ 'The Queen Inaugurates Kennedy Memorial,' *The Times*, 15 May 1965, 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

United States Secretary of State, expressed similar sentiments. He reflected on how much this gesture had moved the American people, 'not only because you decided to share with us this Runnymede, which is a common and precious symbol, but also because what you have done reflects so sensitive an understanding of John F. Kennedy himself.'¹¹² He continued by emphasising the common dedication to the principles of the charter, noting that whoever passed the memorial would be reminded of this common commitment. Later that evening, Mrs Kennedy expressed her thanks. In doing so, she perhaps best described the permanency of the connection that had been established between Kennedy and the sealing of Magna Carta through this memorial's construction:

I wish to thank the British people for their magnificent gift of a piece of British land in memory of my husband. For free men everywhere, Runnymede is indeed sacred soil. It is the birthplace of our ideals of human freedom and individual dignity in which my husband passionately believed.¹¹³

Conclusion

The unveiling of the Kennedy Memorial in 1965 was the last of three major moments of construction to take place at Runnymede. During this period, Runnymede had become a monumental landscape. The site had always been a landscape that was closely associated with notions of liberty and freedom under the rule of law, but it was not until this period, that these ideas were both expressed and projected through memorials and monuments. Only one was an overt celebration of the charter and its legacy, serving to highlight the malleability of memory. In the case of the RAF Memorial and Kennedy Memorial, their projects were linked to the larger narrative of liberty and freedom. A narrative to which the charter is intimately bound. By making this connection, the memorials gained greater cultural currency, meaning, and significance.

Over the course of these twenty years, Runnymede emerged as a site with significant international connotations, providing the space in which the 'special relationship' between the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

UK and the US could be physically expressed. To this day, there remain very few sites that engender the strength of this cultural bond. It would be wrong to comment upon this change at Runnymede from within an historical vacuum. In many ways, the expression of Anglo-American relations at Runnymede was the culmination of a rhetoric that had punctuated trans-Atlantic relations for almost a century. The Second World War undoubtedly pushed Britain toward America. Britain emerged from war economically beleaguered, and with much less power than it had once wielded, its empire now a burden rather than a source of strength. The need for further American loans to prop-up the economy served only to reinforce these diplomatic and cultural ties. The rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon unity and brotherhood played a very significant role in helping cement this relationship. As the process of decolonisation developed, moreover, Britain would need the support of America in order to continue to play a major role in global politics. These facts would prompt a recalibration of the national psyche, along with the uncomfortable acceptance that Britain was no longer a leading power. The combination of all of these factors ensured it was appropriate to think of Runnymede as the site upon which the roots of the 'Special Relationship' were anchored.

1965 marked the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Magna Carta. As in 1915, there was no national celebration of the charter at Runnymede, but this is not to say that commemorations were absent. The next chapter sees our attention diverted towards London, where many of the national celebrations were held. We will focus on the specific activities of the City of London Corporation. In diverting our attention away from Runnymede, we will look at how the moment of 1215 has been imaginatively conceived.

Commemorating Magna Carta in 1965: Left-Handed Liberty, John Arden, and the City of London Corporation

At Mansion House on the 9 July 1957, the draft deed of the Magna Carta Trust (MCT) was approved. As referenced in the previous chapter, this act marked the culmination of a process that had begun in 1956 with the anniversary celebrations in Egham. Although not stated, one must assume that the MCT was the successor to the Magna Carta Society (MCS), ensuring that the commemorative momentum of Magna Carta was not lost. The Trust was in an unusual position, having already delivered on one of its key objectives – the erection of a Magna Carta monument at Runnymede – before it had even been established. Sir Cullum Welch, Lord Mayor of London and Alderman of the City of London, and Lord Evershed jointly presided over the formalities, ensuring that the Trust's main purpose was agreed. The Trust resolved to:

... perpetuate the principles of Magna Carta, preserve the sites associated with its signing for reverend use by the public, and commemorate triennially and on occasions to be determined by the trustees the grant of Magna Carta as the source the constitutional liberties of all English-speaking peoples and as a common bond of peace between them.¹

Their objectives clearly framed Magna Carta as the source of the constitutional liberties of all English-speaking peoples and a common bond of peace. Additionally, there was a firm commitment to ensuring that the charter was commemorated triennially.

In terms of the Trust's structure, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor would be patrons with the Master of the Rolls acting as Chairman in perpetuity. Other trustees included: Sir Campbell Stuart, Chairman of the Pilgrims of Great Britain; Lord Baillieu, Chairman of the English-Speaking Union; Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Longmore, Chairman of the Joint Empire Societies Conference; the Mayors of St Albans, Canterbury, Bury St Edmunds; and the Chairman of the Egham Urban District Council.² The diversity of the Trust's membership

¹ 'Magna Carta Trust Deed Approved,' *The Times*, 10 July 1957, 6.

² Ibid. For a biography of Sir Campbell Stuart, see: William Haley, rev. Robert Brown, 'Stuart, Sir Campbell Arthur (1885–1972),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31732>, accessed 3 February 2020; for Lord Baillieu, see: Simon J. Potter,

reflected Magna Carta's Anglo-Saxon links and connections to Empire, whilst at the same time representing the English towns that were central to the Magna Carta story.³

The seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary represented the first milestone anniversary of the twentieth century that could be nationally celebrated. Although there had been local commemorative activity to mark the seven hundredth anniversary, the First World War had prevented any national reflection and celebration. There is little documentary evidence or reportage to suggest the MCT had been successful in its aim to hold triennial commemorations. However, the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the charter was an enticing opportunity to celebrate the charter on a national scale, and one that the MCT could not let pass. Under their direction, it was decided that the official commemorations would take place in London. Runnymede, the site upon which the drama of 1215 unfolded, was not to play a central role in these anniversary celebrations.

This chapter will explore the seven hundredth anniversary celebrations that took place in London in 1965. Unsurprisingly, there was considerable commemorative activity that took place across London over the course of several days. As such, this chapter uses John Arden's, *Left Handed Liberty*, which was commissioned by the City of London Corporation especially for the anniversary of the charter, as its central case-study. On account of the richness of the surviving source material, *Left Handed Liberty* provides a foundation upon which we can explore creative commemorative responses to Magna Carta's anniversary. Arden's play sits within its own imaginative tradition, which has seen the sealing of Magna Carta depicted within literature, art, and performance. Beyond this, the commissioning and production of *Left Handed Liberty* is interesting for the many questions it raises. The decision to appoint Arden as playwright is intriguing given the juxtaposition between his political beliefs and that of the largely conservative City of London Corporation. Professionally, Arden was relatively obscure, and there were more established playwrights that might have been considered more suitable

'Baillieu, Clive Latham, first Baron Baillieu (1889-1967),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/46581>, accessed 3 February 2020; for Sir Arthur Longmore, see: David Lee, rev. Christina J. M. Goulter, 'Longmore, Sir Arthur Murray (1885-1970),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 5 January 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34593>, accessed 3 February, 2020.

³ Ibid.

for such a commission. Equally puzzling, is the City of London's decision to commission a play for the seven hundredth anniversary celebrations, something that they had no experience of. The London Metropolitan Archives hold many of the records relating to this commission, allowing many of these questions to be answered.

In terms of structure, this chapter will be divided into three chronological sections. Firstly, the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the charter will be situated within the context of sixties Britain. Few decades have had such an enduring legacy and been the subject of nostalgic mythologization and symbolism.⁴ Arthur Marwick famously described the 1960s as a period that witnessed a cultural revolution. One cannot consider both the anniversary of the charter and, indeed, *Left Handed Liberty*, without acknowledging the impact of this decade. From here, the attention of the chapter will turn toward the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the charter. Before focussing on our central case-study, this chapter will place the commission into the broader context of events that were held in London, including local commemorative activity across the United Kingdom. This chapter will conclude by focussing on the events surrounding the Arden commission, charting these from the project's inception to its delivery.

Sixties Britain

After the austerity of the 1950s, the 1960s by contrast have been viewed as a decade of optimism and change. This was the decade in which the baby-boom of the post-1945 reached adolescence and adulthood. The traditions and world views of their parents were rejected, replaced with a youth culture that possessed a very different social outlook. Writing in the 1980s, Arthur Marwick argued that Britain during the 1960s experienced a 'cultural revolution.'⁵ For Marwick, it was the transformation of the popular music scene and emergence

⁴ Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 1; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States* (London: Bloomsbury Reader, 2012), 3.

⁵ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 135.

of pop-music that underpinned the cultural revolution.⁶ Whilst the emergence of popular music supported the 'cultural revolution', its effects were felt throughout society. In short, the cultural revolution transformed 'material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people.'⁷ Marwick presents a positive framing of the 'cultural revolution', arguing that its effects largely improved society.⁸ For others, however, the changes that took place during the 1960s were far from positive, framing the decade as 'the end of civilization.'⁹

In his magisterial comparative study of the 1960s, Marwick identifies sixteen areas in which the effects of the cultural revolution were felt. Mark Donnelly provides a helpful summary of these sixteen points in his own work, *Sixties Britain*:

Marwick argues the sixties saw the formation of new subcultures and movements, generally critical of, or in opposition to, established society; an outburst of entrepreneurialism, individualism, doing your own thing; the rise to positions of unprecedented influence of young people; important advances in technology; the advent of 'spectacle' as an integral part of the interface between life and leisure; unprecedented international cultural exchange; upheavals in class, race and family relationships; general sexual liberation; new modes of self-presentation; a vibrant popular culture; striking developments in elite thought; the expansion of a liberal, progressive presence within the institutions of authority; the continued existence of elements of extreme reaction – particularly in police forces; new concerns for civil and personal rights; and the first intimations of the challenges and opportunities presented by multiculturalism.¹⁰

Donnelly sounds a note of caution, arguing that the debate over the 'sixties has long been overheated.' Rather than viewing 'the decade as a definitive turning-point that produced clear lines of development which reached into the seventies and beyond, we should see the sixties as

⁶ Ibid. Also, see: Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain Since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 92; Arthur Marwick, 'The 1960s. Was there a "Cultural Revolution"?' *Contemporary Record* 2, no.3 (1988): 18-20; Arthur Marwick, 'The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation,' *The International History Review* 27, no.4, (2005): 780-806.

⁷ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 15.

⁸ For similar, if more focussed, positive readings of 1960s Britain, see: Brian Masters, *Swinging Sixties* (London: Constable, 1985); John Seed and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Cultural Revolution: The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (London: Routledge, 1992); Shawn Levy, *Ready Steady Go! Swinging London and the Invention of Cool* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002).

⁹ Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 5-8.

¹⁰ Ibid, 11.

a time when certainties were challenged, new ways of conceptualising individual identity became apparent, and social relations were in some respects transformed.¹¹ Marwick's use of the word 'revolution' paints pictures of violence and rapid change. There was no violence and, whilst it is difficult to argue the sixties does not represent a period of social change, it was less dramatic than his terminology suggests. The emergence of a distinct youth culture; the sexual revolution; the call for greater sexual equality; and protest movements against nuclear war have come to define the 1960s, and each has developed a unique historiography.¹²

The sixties also had a defining impact upon British theatre. As Steve Nicholson reflects, 'in terms of theatre, it was also a decade – perhaps the last one – when people believed it not only reflected the times but helped to shape them.'¹³ The emergence of the 'Angry Young Men' and the infiltration of working class people into the Royal Court had done much to disrupt the well-established theatre traditions. In playwrights such as Edward Bond, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter, English drama moved toward commenting on contemporary issues, using the stage and their work as the mechanism to do this. However, the censor on theatre performances was still in place and any works needed the approval of the Lord Chamberlain prior to its production. John Arden and *Left Handed Liberty* thus have to be considered within the context of this change in theatre as well as the cultural and social changes experienced across the 1960s.

¹¹ Ibid, xii.

¹² The following list provides a representative example of the different historiographies that have emerged: Adrian Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Stuart Hall, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 2006); David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain c.1920-c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement – A New History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Hera Cook, 'The English Sexual Revolution: Technology and Social Change,' *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005): 109-128; Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); Sue Bruley and Laurel Forster, 'Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement,' *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 697-700; Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹³ Steve Nicholson, 'Introduction to the 1960s.' in *Modern British Playwriting: The 1960s – Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, ed. Steve Nicholson (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 28.

The 750th Anniversary Celebrations

The City of London Corporation's contribution to the anniversary of Magna Carta was not the only event that took place in London that year. Writing to Lord Kilmaine, Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust, Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls and Chairman of the Magna Carta Trust, outlined the events that were taking place across the capital.¹⁴ Denning was famed for his 'brilliant intellect' and 'astonishing memory', and his judicial summaries were 'vivid, economical, and lucid in the extreme.'¹⁵ He was a judge of the highest distinction, delivering judgements on causes célèbres such as the Profumo affair of 1963. As Robert Goff asserts, 'he must have been the greatest master of relevance ever to sit on the English bench.'¹⁶ He was seen as a man of the people, a 'champion of the man in the street against those in authority, partly because he expressed himself in language which ordinary people could understand, but mainly because of his passion for justice, his unique personality, and his command of language.'¹⁷ He held the charter in very high regard, believing it was both the 'fount of English Liberty' and the 'greatest constitutional document of all times.'¹⁸ Despite his modernising zeal and energy, he was paradoxical. His views were conventional and traditional, and his views on topics such as capital punishment and homosexuality were reactionary.¹⁹

¹⁴ For Lord Kilmaine, see: D. M. Lennie, 'Browne, John Francis Archibald, Sixth Baron Kilmaine (1902-1978),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 25 May 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30865>, accessed 9 February 2020.

¹⁵ Robert Goff, 'Denning, Alfred Thompson [Tom], Baron Denning (1899-1999),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 9 January 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/72037>, accessed 9 February 2020.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lord Denning, 'Runnymede, Fount of English Liberty,' *The Times*, 9 June 1965, 13; Lord Denning quoted in Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, *1215: The Year of Magna Carta*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 278.

¹⁹ In 1982, Denning published, *What Next in the Law?* Some of its later passages, relating to the suitability of black jurors, caused great offence. He received a great deal of criticism in the press and the book was withdrawn, and the offending passages removed before it was later republished. As a result of this, he offered his resignation, stepping down from the position of Master of the Rolls in 1982. See: Goff, 'Denning, Alfred Thompson [Tom], Baron Denning (1899-1999)'. For reaction to his book, see: Frances Gibb, 'Denning Jury Reforms Anger Black Lawyers,' *The Times*, 22 May 1982, 5; 'A Judgement too Far,' *The Times*, 24 May 1982, 11; Frances Gibb, 'Denning's Book is Withdrawn,' *The Times*, 26 May 1982, 26; Alan Rusbridger, 'Lord Denning Sets Date for Retirement,' *The Guardian*, 29 May 1982, 1. Following the book's publication, Denning was threatened with libel and later issued a public apology. He suggested that his book was meant to be controversial, challenging people's beliefs. He insisted that his comments were not meant to cause offence to any racial or religious groups, see: 'Denning Expresses "Deep Regret" Over Book,' *The Guardian*, 2 June 1982, 4.

In total there were five major events planned to commemorate the anniversary within the City: a Service of Commemoration at St. Paul's Cathedral; a celebration at the Royal Courts of Justice; a charity ball held in the Great Hall at the Royal Courts of Justice to commemorate the anniversaries of Magna Carta and the Battle of Waterloo; a performance of *A Durable Fire* by Patric Dickinson to be performed at Toynbee Hall; and lastly a special play at the Mermaid Theatre was to be performed.²⁰ In addition to the events that took place within the City, 1965 also was seen as a chance to restore the memorial at Runnymede and make the surrounding area look more attractive.²¹ Across the country, these celebrations were supported by local commemorative events and schools across the country were closed in celebration to celebrate the joint anniversary of Magna Carta and De Montfort Parliament.²²

The City of London Corporation: Initial Anniversary Suggestions

At 12.15pm on the 6 May 1964, forty-one members of the City of London Corporation attended the first meeting of the Magna Carta Anniversary Reception Committee. Members had been invited by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir James Miller, with a clear purpose: 'to consider and report as to the steps the corporation should take to identify itself with the celebration in June 1965 of the 750th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta.'²³ Those present reflected both the background and conservative outlook of the City of London Corporation.²⁴ Members had been summoned on the advice of the Corporation's Court of Common Council following their meeting of the 19 March, which had resolved to see that a specific commemoration committee

²⁰ "Lord Denning to Lord Kilmaine, 22 February 1965," in Magna Carta, 750th Anniversary Celebrations, 10 June 1965, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter cited as LMA): COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001. Patric Dickinson's, *A Durable Fire*, was commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral as part of the 1962 Festival of Friends of Canterbury Cathedral. The play deals with the middle part of Archbishop Stephen Langton's life. This was the first, and, indeed, only performance to take place before the 1965 commemorations. See: 'England Under King John,' *The Stage*, 21 June 1962, 17.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'Magna Carta Day Off,' *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 June 1965, 32; 'Schools Day Off for Magna Carta,' *Middlesex County Times*, 11 June 1965, 15; 'Three Cheers for Magna Carta,' *Cheshire Observer*, 18 June 1965, 13.

²³ 'Agenda of Magna Carta Anniversary Committee, 6 May 1964,' LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

²⁴ In terms of the committee's membership there was: one Lord, five held knighthoods, five were former members of the armed forces holding the rank of Major, Lieutenant or Colonel, and a further six were either City Aldermen, Deputy's or Sheriffs. See, Ibid.

be established and a chairman elected. The Corporation had made a glaring error, stating they would be commemorating the *signing rather than sealing* of Magna Carta. Unsurprisingly, very little else took place at what can only be described as a very pragmatic and functional meeting. Those present sought some clarification over the exact role and duties that this committee would be performing.²⁵ In response, Edward Henry Nichols, the reforming, conscientious, and collected Town Clerk, informed members that very little was known with regards to what was being planned.²⁶ Despite the anniversary being just over a year away, the only certainty was there would be service at St Paul's Cathedral.²⁷ Although not stated explicitly, it appears there was no expectation on the City of London to commemorate the charter in any specific way; they were at liberty to mark this historic anniversary in any way they deemed suitable and appropriate.

It was, however, patently clear that there was an expectation on The City of London Corporation to mark this occasion in some capacity. Alexander John Buckley Rutherford was appointed as the Committee's Chairman and, prior to the meeting's conclusion, he asked those present to suggest suitable activities. In response, he was greeted with a series of unimaginative, but very traditional, responses and suggestions ranged from a masque or pageant to holding an event at Runnymede.²⁸ The practicalities of coordinating a committee of over forty people led to the establishment of a sub-committee, which was to meet with greater regularity and take the lead on both the organisation and delivery of the Corporation's anniversary activity. From this point on, the Grand Committee was in effect an advisory board, holding the sub-committee to account and ensuring that plans were progressing. Ahead of the next meeting, it was agreed that the Sub-Committee would meet to discuss some further ideas ahead of presenting these to the Grand Committee.

The second meeting of the Grand Committee took place on the 30th June 1964. As had been agreed, the Sub-Committee had met in the intervening months. A separate meeting had

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 'Sir Edward Nichols,' *The Times*, 25 September 1992, 17.

²⁷ Minutes of Magna Carta Anniversary Reception Committee (hereafter cited as MMCARC), 6 May 1964, LMA:COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

²⁸ Ibid.

also taken place between Sir Bernard Miles and the Committee's Chairman, Alexander Rutherford. Sir Bernard Miles was an actor and theatre manager of considerable reputation. Born in 1907 and raised in a strict Baptist household, Miles knew the meaning of thrift and hard work. After studying at Pembroke College, Oxford and spending some time as a Schoolmaster in Yorkshire, he turned his attention to acting, finding film fame in Noel Coward's 1942 film, *In Which We Serve*. With the help of his wife, Miles acquired a site in Puddle Dock, Blackfriars, and, over the course of six years, built the Mermaid Theatre.²⁹ By 1959, Miles' dream had been achieved and the New Mermaid Theatre was officially opened.³⁰ The opening of the New Mermaid Theatre was the first to take place within the City for over 300 years. The City of London Corporation had provided Miles with significant support during the theatre's construction, contributing £25,000 towards the cost of construction whilst lowering the rent of the site to token amount.³¹

Sadly, we do not know who initiated contact. Given the links that already existed between Miles and the Corporation, it is not inconceivable to imagine Rutherford, in his capacity as Chairman, meeting with Miles to discuss potential ways the anniversary could be celebrated. By 1964, Miles was still heavily involved with the theatre and was now a trustee. Given his background, his suggestion of celebrating the charter's anniversary by commissioning a play was unsurprising, offering the Mermaid Theatre as a potential venue. As the conversation progressed, Miles grew increasingly invested in this idea, offering the Corporation the use of the New Mermaid Theatre. In many respects, the theatre was an ideal location with capacity for five hundred guests, including a dining area overlooking the River Thames that could be used as a reception area. Above all else, the theatre was situated within the boundaries of the City of London and so, in terms of geography at least, was an extremely suitable location. The most surprising aspect of their conversation, was the fact that Miles identified a potential playwright, insisting that John Arden would be extremely well-suited.

²⁹ Sheridan Morley, 'Miles, Bernard James, Baron Miles (1907-1991),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 28 September 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/49899>, accessed 3 February 2020.

³⁰ It is referred to as the New Mermaid Theatre because Miles had originally built the first Mermaid Theatre in his garden in St John's Wood, replicating Shakespeare's Globe theatre. For further details see *Ibid*.

³¹ 'The Mermaid Theatre,' *The Times*, 16 September 1957, 9.

Details pertaining to these two meetings were presented to the Grand Committee on 30th June 1964 and two proposals quickly emerged as leading contenders, which were deemed worthy of further discussion. The first suggestion related to holding a luncheon for MPs. Unsurprisingly, the second proposal put forward reflected the recent discussions with Miles, stating that a commemorative play should be commissioned and performed at the New Mermaid Theatre.³² To provide the Committee with reassurance that Miles' offer was genuine, Rutherford read aloud a letter he had subsequently received, which reflected the direction of their discussions. Miles had confirmed that the Mermaid Theatre would be available for the Corporation's use for both the anniversary day and week.³³ Both proposals prompted questions and further scrutiny, but the idea of a play generated a far greater number of questions. Many members expressed their concern over the suggestion that John Arden be approached. Few recognised his name or had any knowledge of his work, and many asked whether a more recognisable and established playwright should be sought to fulfil a commission of this nature. This concern was allied with fears that related to commissioning a play. Quite sensibly, those present felt that perhaps it was more prudent to arrange a performance of a well-established play, such as Shakespeare, than embark upon a venture that had little collective knowledge.³⁴ Hugh Wontner, the urbane and charming Managing Director of the Savoy Hotel Group, expressed his anxiety over the potential commission, pointing out that in order for the play to be a success it would need to be well-written, otherwise it could be very tedious.³⁵ The biggest obstacle to any project's success was the time constraints they found themselves working under. Whilst there was great merit to suggestions that called for some form of competition to be held, the reality was that there was not the time to undertake such an endeavour.

³² MMCARC, 30 June 1964, LMA: COL//RMD/CE/01/143/001.

³³ Bernard Miles to Alexander Rutherford, 19 June 1964, MMCARC, 30 June 1964, LMA: COL//RMD/CE/01/143/001.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hugh Wontner in MMCARC, 30 June 1964. Wontner's involvement with the Magna Carta celebrations are absent from his Oxford Dictionary National Biography entry, see: Anne Pimlott Baker, 'Wontner, Sir Hugh Walter Kingwell (1908-1992),' *Oxford Dictionary National Biography*, 23 September 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/51374>, accessed 3 February 2020.

In drawing the meeting to a close, the Town Clerk provided some much-needed perspective on the situation. Whilst he agreed that people's views differ, he reminded everyone that they were acting on the advice of Bernard Miles who was, by comparison, more qualified to provide an assessment of a playwright's skill and suitability. As the Town Clerk reminded everyone, in Miles' professional opinion they 'could do no better than Arden' and he was 'one of the greatest young writers in England.'³⁶ The meeting culminated with an agreement that the committee proceed with plans to commission a play. To offset some of the concerns about John Arden, it was agreed that the advice and views of more recognisable writers, such as Sir Laurence Olivier and Peter Hall, would be consulted, acting as an extra layer of insurance. Everyone was acutely aware of the time pressures. Whilst they still had eleven months until the anniversary was upon them, the play needed to be written and this would take considerable time.

John Arden learns of the Commemorative Commission

Despite the Corporation's reservations over appointing John Arden as playwright, Bernard Miles had already in contact with him. In a letter sent to Rutherford on 2 July 1964, Miles admitted that he had 'run ahead of [his] mandate.'³⁷ He enclosed a letter he had received from Arden, and was unable to contain his delight and excitement, stating, 'I am so happy to have received the enclosed letter from John Arden. I am sure we can expect something brilliant.'³⁸ The enclosed letter, expressed Arden's excitement about the commission:

Thank you for sending the Magna Carta literature – I am getting quite excited about the play, though, at the moment I have no very clear idea about what form it should take. I have no hesitation though in saying that I will accept the commission...'³⁹

³⁶ MMCARC, 30 June 1964, LMA: COL//RMD/CE/01/143/001.

³⁷ Bernard Miles to Alexander Rutherford, 2 July 1964, LMA: COL//RMD/CE/01/143/001

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ John Arden to Bernard Miles, n.d, LMA: COL//RMD/CE/01/143/001.

The enclosed letter sadly has no date but, given the tone of his reply, it appears as though the two had already been in conversation for some time. The fact that Miles had already sent him some literature is illustrative of this point.⁴⁰ Arden was clearly excited by the proposition of this commission. With little creative direction, it was unsurprising that he had no clear idea of the form the play should take. One can only imagine how Rutherford felt reading this letter. Only a few days had passed since he had chaired a committee meeting in which its members had expressed reservations over the appointment of Arden. Despite this, he was learning that the playwright was already aware of the potential commission and had begun to undertake the required research. The crux of the issue centred around whether the relatively unknown John Arden was both able and, indeed, suitable to undertake such a project. However well-placed his intentions were, Bernard Miles' enthusiasm for the project threatened to force the agenda, leaving the Corporation with little alternative. The question remained whether the Committee was right to be anxious over the commissioning of John Arden.

Who was John Arden?

John Arden was born in Barnsley in 1930, His father, Charles Alwyn Arden was a glassworks manager and his mother, Annie Elizabeth, *née* Layland, a primary school teacher. Having received an education from Sedbergh School, he embarked upon two years of national service with the intelligence corps. After this, he attended King's College, Cambridge where he read architecture. After completing his architectural training, he worked in London as an architect and this is when he began to write his plays. In 1956, *The Life of Man*, was broadcast on BBC Radio and the following year his play, *The Waters of Babylon*, was performed at the Royal

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the literature to which Arden was sent is not disclosed. In terms of the historiography of the charter, this was a year before J.C Holt's *Magna Carta* monograph. Given this, it is likely that Arden would have consulted texts by scholars such as William McKechnie and Edward Jenks. These would have provided Arden with a particularly negative view of the charter, emphasising the presence of a *Magna Carta* myth and reinforcing the view that the Barons were motivated by a desire to protect their personal privileges. The charter was not a universal statement of democratic principles or individual liberties.

Court. These two successes led him to abandon his architectural career and pursue writing as a full-time career.⁴¹

As the theatre critic, Michael Billington, observes: 'By the early 1960s Arden had become one of the standard-bearers of new British drama, regularly mentioned alongside John Osborne, Harold Pinter, and Arnold Wesker. The difference was that, unlike them, he never found either a major critical champion or a loyal audience.'⁴² This, however, was reflected in box-office sales. Writing in the late nineties, John Osborne wrote, 'John Arden became an in-house joke for box-office disaster.'⁴³ It was estimated that between 1956 and 1961 the Royal Court lost almost £15,000 on Arden plays, whereas it made £50,000 on Osborne's performances.⁴⁴ He was at the vanguard of British theatre in the 1960s, constantly pushing the limits of social acceptability and viewed by some as the heir to Blake and Shelley and the English literary dissident tradition.⁴⁵ As was noted in his obituary:

Arden sought to reinstate poetic tradition, not in the elegant and self-consciously literary style of Christopher Fry but with heightened theatrical prose and ballads, and making extensive use of song and dance, masks and puppetry. He tried for a stronger, grittier, more muscular style which mixed the formal with the natural, the concrete with fantasy. But audiences tended to find his earnestness off-putting. His writing sometimes struck a portentous note, and his refusal to make it clear where the playwright stood could be a challenge too far.⁴⁶

It was his 1959 play, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, which brought Arden to the attention of the British public. The play sought to showcase the realities of war. A group of returning soldiers from a Victorian colonial war arrive at a northern mining town and make it their mission to highlight the violent atrocities being perpetrated abroad. It made for uncomfortable viewing. British soldiers had recently committed similar acts of violence in Cyprus and members

⁴¹ Michael Billington, 'Arden, John (1930–2012),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 7 January 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/104783>, accessed 6 February 2020.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ John Osborne, *Looking Back: Never Explain, Never Apologise* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 378.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Wroe, 'Britain's Brecht,' *The Guardian*, 3 January 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/jan/03/theatre.stage>, accessed 11 February 2020.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 'John Arden,' *The Telegraph*, 30 March 2012. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/theatre-obituaries/9177000/John-Arden.html>, accessed 11 February 2020.

of the public were confused as to whether he was making a contemporary comment, with many choosing to leave. His work was lampooned by critics, and one review described it as 'inordinately long-winded and [a] rather foolish play.'⁴⁷ At the box-office it fared no better, selling only 21% of tickets over its run.⁴⁸ Bill McDonnell explains that one criticism often levied against Arden was that his work presented a pessimistic and nihilistic vision of human nature.⁴⁹ Equally, his reluctance to act as a playwright as a moral guide, providing the audience with a clear interpretation of his drama also alienated him from his audiences, leading Billington to label him 'Britain's Brecht'.⁵⁰ This was one stylistic feature that separated him from the 'Angry Young Men' brigade, whose plays were clearly designed to make the audience question the state of British society.⁵¹

The City of London approach John Arden

With a sense of trepidation, the Corporation commissioned the young English playwright, sending him an invitation to take the project on 13 July 1964. As detailed in their letter, the Corporation wished to make 'significant contribution' to the anniversary celebrations:

The corporation is anxious, however, to make a more significant contribution to the occasion by commissioning the writing of a play, which, whilst based on the theme of Magna Carta, would afford an opportunity to treat the subject on a much wider

⁴⁷ 'Serjeant Musgrave's Punitive Expedition,' *The Times*, 23 October 1959, 18.

⁴⁸ Billington, 'Arden, John (1930–2012)'.

⁴⁹ Bill McDonnell, 'Introduction to John Arden,' in *Modern British Playwriting: The 1960s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, ed. Steve Nicholson (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 90.

⁵⁰ Billington, 'Arden, John (1930–2012)'. In commenting on Brecht's influence, Arden stated: 'Brecht was passionately concerned that the theatre should be something far more than a place of entertainment in the sloppiest sense of the word. He believed that it was a potential instrument of social progress; and that the playwright, by reflecting in his work the true image of human society, assisted the members of that society to diagnose the defects in the image and thence to improve the reality out of all recognition.' See: John Arden, *To Present the Pretence: Essays on the Theatre and its Public* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), 37.

⁵¹ The term 'Angry Young Men' was a catchall term used predominately to describe a group of novelists, poets, playwrights, and philosophers, most prominently Kingsley Amis, John Braine, John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, John Wain, and Colin Wilson. The group were characterised by their disillusionment with British society. For further information, see Michael Ratcliffe, 'Angry Young Men (1956-1958),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 21 May 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95563>, accessed 6 February 2020; Colin Wilson, *The Angry Years: The Rise and Fall of the Angry Young Men* (London: Robson, 2007); Martin Kroll, 'The Politics of Britain's Angry Young Men,' *The Western Political Quarterly*, 12, no. 2 (June 1959): 555-557; Leslie Paul, 'The Angry Young Men Revisited,' *The Kenyon Review* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1965): 344-352.

basis, in the context of the twentieth century than as a mere chronicle of an event in English history.⁵²

Arden was given little creative direction by the Corporation beyond that stated above, and he was at liberty to interpret the historical material as he saw appropriate. There was an obvious desire to see the play amount to more than an account of English history, recognising that the anniversary celebrations offered the chance to make a statement in the context of the twentieth century. This recognition highlights the malleability of memory and further illustrates the idea that the past can be used for the purposes of the present. Although they had not explicitly stated *how* they wished to see this happen, the fact that the comment was included displayed an awareness of its potential.

The next meeting of the anniversary committee did not take place until 18 November 1964 and there were two central points on the agenda. The first was to agree the exact terms of the agreement with regards to the commissioning of the commemorative theatre production. Before conversation could get onto the specifics of the commission, Deputy Turner expressed his sadness at the fact that the play was not being produced by local schools.⁵³ Other members supported Turner, believing that the play should have some benefit to school children. One suspects that part of this motivation came from members' personal links to schools through their respective associations to livery companies and ancient guilds. Given it was November this was no longer feasible, but Turner was adamant that the play should be of benefit to schools, leading him to suggest that schools should have the ability to perform the play after the anniversary week.⁵⁴ Providing schools with the ability to perform the play after the anniversary free-of-charge was a nice gesture, but it raised important questions about what the Corporation was buying and, more importantly, where did its long term ownership reside? The City of London Corporation desired to see the copyright of the play remain with them.

⁵² Town Clerk to Arden, 13 July 1964, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁵³ MMCARC, 18 November 1964, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Rutherford, however, had been advised that it was customary for the copyright to reside with the playwright.⁵⁵ At this point, the Corporation's solicitor interjected, providing clarification over what the author fee covered. Slowly it emerged that the £1000 fee Arden would receive bought the rights to performance during the anniversary week and ensured the Corporation would always be acknowledged for their part in its creation in any future billings.⁵⁶ The Committee were left in stunned silence and shock. In response, Hugh Wontner declared that Arden should assign the rights of the play for a set period of time for the same £1000 because he felt 'he'd lose nothing.'⁵⁷ In Wontner's opinion, Arden was gaining as much from this partnership as the Corporation were.⁵⁸ The City solicitor presented one final cause for concern. The Corporation was reserving the right to approve the play, but even if it was deemed inappropriate, they were still liable to pay Arden's fee. Of greater concern was the realisation that if the text was deemed inappropriate, they had no mechanism in place to distance themselves from the play.⁵⁹ Following these revelations, the meeting was adjourned on the understanding that answers to these issues would be sought before the next meeting.

A combination of both time constraints and the pressing need to resolve the legal issues surrounding the commission ensured that only two weeks passed before the next meeting took place. The meeting's objectives were clear: establish owned the performance rights, including the future rights for schools to perform; what would happen if the Committee rejected the play. The second objective consisted of two parts. Firstly, if they rejected the play, was there enough time to arrange something else. Secondly, the subject material and play possessed the potential to cast the monarchy in an unfavourable light. If this happened, how could they stop the play from being performed? Arguably, these issues stemmed from the limited time the Corporation had to organise their commemorative offering. Undeniably, Miles' involvement and excitement for the project had also played a part in guiding the Corporation toward this idea.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid.

By this point it was late November and an unabated paranoia spread amongst committee members who were concerned that a draft of the play had not been produced. To compound this issue further, neither the Mermaid Theatre nor John Arden had been formally engaged in a contract, and Rutherford was forced to remind everyone that the playwright was doing them a favour by writing in advance of the legal agreement.⁶⁰ This, in itself, created a problem. As the Corporation's solicitor explained, if the Committee did not like the play and refused to sign the contract, Arden was in a position where he could sue because letters had been exchanged.⁶¹ The solicitor had, however, added a clause in the draft contract that gave the Corporation the right to veto the play during a two week window.⁶² As Mr. Street adeptly summarised, the delivery and success of the project, 'hinges on whether we like the play.'⁶³

Bernard Miles and his assistant were invited into the second half of the meeting to help resolve these issues. Rutherford confidently opened with the assertion that the Corporation owned the rights of performance during the anniversary week.⁶⁴ But the Committee's interpretation had been wrong. Miles' assistant informed them that they owned no rights and the fee bought a licence to produce the play for one week.⁶⁵ It was rapidly becoming evident that the Corporation owned absolutely no part of the play they were commissioning. By the end of the meeting, the Committee had negotiated some solutions to these issues. It was agreed that over the course of the anniversary week the City of London Corporation would hold 'exclusive performance rights.'⁶⁶ Furthermore, the committee had successfully managed to secure performance rights for a period of fifty years for schools connected to the corporation, following the contract's completion. The committee had also managed to guard against the danger of being associated with a play that was not deemed appropriate, negotiating a veto that would prevent the play from being performed. The meetings of November 1964 illustrate the clash of professional worlds that the anniversary had caused. The City of London

⁶⁰ MMCARC, 30 November 1964, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Corporation was predominantly made up of City businessman and men of wealth drawn from the livery companies and merchant guilds. To call them philistines would be unfair, but they were clearly unaccustomed and unaware of the realities of theatre life and the way in which it worked. Miles had played a crucial role in ensuring the idea was endorsed, but he was perhaps less forthcoming over the intricacies involved.

With less than six months until the anniversary, Arden signed a contract with the City of London Corporation. The contract indicated Arden would receive 1000 guineas, which would be paid in three instalments. The first instalment paid upon the signing of the contract; a second sum of two-hundred and fifty to be paid on 31 December 1964; and the remaining figure paid upon the delivery of the finished manuscript.⁶⁷ As part of the agreement, the Corporation had ensured the play would have a legacy of its own. Arden had agreed to let 'the play be performed [at theatres] in and outside the City of London which are controlled by the Corporation.' Additionally, he had given permission for the play to be performed at schools connected to the Corporation free of charge for fifty years.⁶⁸

The draft of Arden's text was available for the Committee to read in February 1965. Rutherford was not present for the 12 February and, in his absence, the meeting was chaired by Sir Ian Bowater. In general, reaction to the play was positive and many members were on record as stating it was 'rather good.'⁶⁹ The minutes of this meeting capture the relief that was felt by committee members and the words 'great relief' appear as marginalia.⁷⁰ The anxiety that was felt over both the playwright and quality of the play had plagued the Committee. Confirmation that it was of a good standard provided members with a great sense of relief. Hugh Wontner continued to praise the play, commenting that it was 'historically interesting and beautifully written'.⁷¹ Not one to pass up on a potential business opportunity, he also noted that he felt the play possessed 'very little commercial value', but admitted that wasn't of any

⁶⁷ John Arden Contract with City of London Corporation, 18 December 1964, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ MMCARC, 12 February 1964, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid.

major concerns.⁷² The one major area of concern was in relation to the proposed title, *Left Handed Liberty*. Many members expressed their concern over the use of the word left and the potential political connotations it had. This was not seen as too big an issue, and it was decided that the proposed name was fine.⁷³

Two weeks later Rutherford met with Bernard Miles and Mr David Williams, the play's producer at the New Mermaid Theatre. This was one of the final meetings before the play was performed. All expressed similar views regarding the play, with everyone seemingly pleased, if not totally enamoured, by the play's content. Some expressed concerns over Act Three. It was felt that some of the passages were overly long and some asked whether they added anything to the play.⁷⁴ In response, David Williams said he had experienced similar initial thoughts, but felt that the speeches 'threw a valuable light on the author's intention'.⁷⁵ The play's title did not escape their attention and Williams voiced his disappointment that the title was not more positive.⁷⁶ Rutherford commented that members of his committee had voiced similar concerns regarding the title; he caveated this with the fact that many of his committee members had not read the play and thus the 'satirical implication of the title' was lost on them.⁷⁷ The play might not have been set to become an instant classic, but everyone was satisfied that the play was satisfactory. Following the conclusion of this meeting, attention turned to production and rehearsals. For the most part, the Corporation's involvement had come to an end. It was in the hands of Miles, Williams, and Arden to ensure that the performances lived up the expectation.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Minutes from Meeting at Mermaid Theatre, 24 February 1965, LMA: COL/RMD/CE/01/143/001.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Left Handed Liberty: Traditional Historical Account or New Interpretation?

Between the 7 and 12 June 1965 *Left Handed Liberty* was performed at the New Mermaid Theatre in front of invited audiences, including the Queen, dignitaries, and school children, under the auspices of the City of London Corporation. The total runtime of the play was two hours and twenty minutes and its first public performance of the play took place on the 14 June 1965. The play represented one of the more provocative attempts to commemorate the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the charter. It was not the only play to be performed as part of the anniversary celebrations, with Patric Dickinson's, *A Durable Fire*, performed at Toynbee Hall. Unlike *A Durable Flame* *Left Handed Liberty* had been especially commissioned. Given this, it is worth analysing specific sections of Arden's work to see how his play either challenged or reinforced traditional interpretations of the legacy of Magna Carta.

Left Handed Liberty is set in England in the midst of civil war, following King John's acceptance of Magna Carta at Runnymede. The play revolves around King John, charting his various attempts to annul the document and win the civil war. The play ends with King John's death in 1216. The play boasted an impressive cast. Patrick Wymark, fresh from featuring in the science-fiction horror film, *Children of the Damned*, played the role of King John. Meanwhile, a young Jennifer Clulow of *Avengers* fame, played the role of Queen Isabelle. It is fair to say that *Left Handed Liberty* is not a triumphant celebration or cultural appreciation of Magna Carta and its legacy. Arden appreciated that an obvious theme to explore and construct his play around were the events leading up to Runnymede and Magna Carta's sealing. There is no doubt that this would have produced a play fit for the purpose, but he was more interested with the charter's complete failure in its own time. For Arden, this was to be a more fruitful theme to construct the play.⁷⁸ Arden provides a reflective and thought-provoking assessment of the play's direct message:

⁷⁸ John Arden, *Left Handed Liberty* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1965), xi.

I suppose it is that an agreement on paper is worth nothing to anybody unless it has taken place in their minds as well: and that if we want liberty we have to make sure that

(a) We know what sort of liberty we are fighting for:

(b) Our methods of fighting are not such as to render that liberty invalid before we even attain it:

(c) We understand that we are in more danger of losing it once we have attained it than if we had never had it...⁷⁹

It is ironic that Arden's main message is contradictory to the essence of the charter. After all, Magna Carta is an agreement formed on paper. This is, however, his point and his play acts as a study of why this message is important. Arden's King John views Magna Carta as little more than an agreement on paper; it possesses or represents no greater moral value. But in order to gain greater liberty, people need to know the type of liberty they are after and pressure for this in a way that does not undermine their calls.

Arden's handling of King John is particularly interesting, choosing to avoid the classic cliché of bad King John. As part of his author's notes, he reflects, 'the chronicles of the period are usually bald and prejudiced. John himself was very roughly handled by their compilers.'⁸⁰ In the process of researching, Arden noted that he was drawn to the 'weird charm' of King John. In explaining how he arrived at this conclusion, he wrote:

I think the weird charm of King John was that although he was a king, and therefore necessarily concerned with what elsewhere is described as the business of good government, he refused to take his job any more seriously than any other job that would have been available to him ... He is serious, and yet he is not in any way deceived by the pomposity of the circumstances attending kingship. At least, this seems to be true of the historical John. I found this in reading the history of the time ... To me, he was far more interesting than his alleged villainies. In fact, he was no more villainous than any other king, and in many respects less so than many kings who were described as good kings.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid, xii.

⁸⁰ Ibid, x.

⁸¹ George Gaston and John Arden, 'An Interview with John Arden,' *Contemporary Literature* 32, no.2 (1991): 164.

Arden uses his play to explore the complexities of this character and he presents the audience with a complex, attractive, and engaging character. As a result, the audience is never sure whether they should like or detest King John. In typical Arden fashion, he provides the audience with little by the way of direction, preferring them to make up their own minds on this character. In describing the character, Albert Hunt writes, 'he would use any weapon that comes to hand to achieve his own immediate ends.'⁸² Much of the play is a study of political expediency. King John exemplifies this idea more so than any other character. At times, John lives us to his historical representation, showing no sign of remorse over the massacre of people or the burning down of villages. But these moments are contrasted with acts that cast the character in a more reasonable light. For example, upon discovering that his mistress has been engaged in affairs with the cook-boy he says: 'If I were the tyrannical Tiberius my loyal barons would have you believe, I would have put her eyes out. Instead, I went to bed with my wife.'⁸³ Undoubtedly, the success of this is achieved in part through Arden's writing style. The character of John often breaks the fourth wall, addressing the audience directly. This allows his character to reference his reputation and contrast it with his actions. It is an effective literary technique, ensuring the audience is in a position where it is having to constantly question its preconceived ideas and opinions.

The play reaches its crescendo in Act Three, Scene Seven. Arden 'destroys any illusion that the rest of the play might have created.'⁸⁴ Act Three, Scene Seven is the only point during the play in which the interpretation and legacy of the charter is referenced. As Hunt argues, Arden forces his audience to question Magna Carta and think about what it meant then and what it means now.⁸⁵ Much of this part reinforces the idea that the charter was a failure in its own time. Over a couple of pages, however, John engages Lady Vesci in discussion over the rights of women. The scene begins with a stage direction that calls for the house-lights to be

⁸² Albert Hunt, *John Arden: A Study of his Plays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 102.

⁸³ Arden, *Left Handed Liberty*, 15.

⁸⁴ Hunt, *Arden: Study of his Plays*, 105.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

switched on. This provides this whole episode with a completely different visual aesthetic to the rest of the play, signalling to the audience a shift in the play's tone.

Despite King John remaining in character, he directly addresses his audience, removing his sword and crown in the process and asking the audience, 'What in fact have you seen tonight?'⁸⁶ His soliloquy continues:

A document signed, and nobody knew what for – or at least, nobody knew or could possibly know the ultimate consequences thereof. A document repudiated, and nobody knew what for. A villainous king and his villainous barons sprinkling each others blood over the map. A good Archbishop disgraced. A sagacious Pope flung all cack-handed in the Vatican by contradictory letters coming in on every post, from an island which he might be pardoned for believing had never been properly converted in the first place. And finally, a few little tit-bits of scandal not even proved to be historically true.⁸⁷

The soliloquy continues with John demonstrating the irrelevance of most of the clauses. In a particularly amusing sequence of events, John reads aloud clause fifty-four of the charter and is then handed a copy of William McKechnie's book to provide the rationale for its conclusion.⁸⁸

John's attention then turns to Lady Vesci. After a particularly long monologue, John ends by saying, 'the lady is peripheral, both to the play and to the document.'⁸⁹ Over the proceeding pages John embarks upon a long dialogue, seeking to illustrate the absurdity of the charter not extending its liberties to women. He concludes by referencing clauses thirty-nine and forty, declaring:

My work, d'you see – not the Archbishop's nor the Marshall's, and certainly not Fitzwalter's. I said: make those clauses general – lax, if you like – because by their very laxity they go some way to admit the existence of dandelions, of disobedient women, and ribbons of cloth-of-gold.⁹⁰

The fact that the wording of these clauses are open to interpretation was their strength, not their weakness. Women thus had as much right to interpret these clauses in the same way as

⁸⁶ John Arden, *Left Handed Liberty*, 84.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 93.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 85.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 91.

men. Arden's inclusion of this sequence of events must be placed in the context of the sixties, and women's call for greater social and legal equality. The publication of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in America in 1963 is seen as beginning Second Wave Feminism.⁹¹ As the decade progressed, legislative reform in Britain such as The Divorce Reform Act and the campaigning efforts of the Women's Liberation Movement, began to reduce the levels of sexual inequality. In this vein, Arden's direct reference to women and their right to press for liberty, freedom, and equality is in keeping with the socio-politics of the time.

The Reaction to the Play

Left Handed Liberty received a great number of reviews within the national press. Despite being one of the last of Arden's plays to have appeared on the London stage, *Left Handed Liberty* is not considered to be one of Arden's best works. Many contemporary reviews were negative of his historically accurate representation of Magna Carta and its contemporary failure. The *Illustrated London News* description of the play stated, 'All in all, it is hardly the pageant that is often produced for this sort of occasion.'⁹² *The Times* was equally scathing, saying it was 'less of a patriotic flourish than a study of the Great Charter's failure in its own time.' Albert Hunt provides the most suitable explanation for the play's perceived failure: 'the City of London Corporation no doubt expected an illustrated account of the schoolbook story of "bad" King John, forced by his "good" barons to sign a charter from which we all derive our general liberties.'⁹³ Here in lies the central issue. Arden was battling against commemorative expectations, which, by their very nature, are not the place for nuanced interpretations of the past. The stage had been set for a celebration of Magna Carta and its wider legacy, not a commentary on its contemporary failure. In being true to the history books, Arden had seemingly fluffed his lines.

⁹¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 1965).

⁹² 'Magna Carta Seen as Left Handed Liberty,' *Illustrated London News*, 16 June 1965, 31.

⁹³ Hunt, *Arden: Study of his Plays*, 98.

Conclusion

The commissioning of *Left Handed Liberty* for the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of Magna Carta represents one of the more creative ways in which the charter has been commemorated. Until this point, previous commemorations were dominated by ceremonies and services. With so much other activity going on around London in 1965, it is perhaps unsurprising that a more creative response was chosen. It is safe to assert that the City of London Corporation wanted to make a valuable contribution to the anniversary celebrations. The Corporation, however, had no experience in dealing with such a project, which is reflected in the minutes of their committee. As their conversations progress and they begin to realise that they have little control over the final product, the sense of panic and anxiety that it induces is clear to see. The commissioning of the play is thus a humorous anecdote of history. The Corporation were lucky, and their worst fears were never realised.

In terms of the play, *Left Handed Liberty* did not go on to become a success, defining the trajectory of Arden's career in the process. The play did not meet the commemorative expectations. Arden's decision to produce a play that was true to the historical record was viewed as a source of disappointment. This is the central point: *Left Handed Liberty* was and remains an obscure episode in the history of Magna Carta commemorations because it was not a rip-roaring reaffirmation of the charter and its legacy. It was too historically accurate at a moment that called for over-zealous declarations of patriotism. There is no doubt that his play is thought provoking, employing various theatrical techniques to help tell his story. But it lacks any real drama to keep his audience engaged. *Left Handed Liberty* was one of Arden's last plays to be performed in London. From 1965 onward, he grew increasingly frustrated with the London theatre scene and moved to Ireland with his wife, Margaretta D'Arcy. In Ireland, the pairs' work would take a different theatrical direction.

In 1965 Runnymede was a forgotten partner in the anniversary celebrations. However, despite the absence of any formal national commemorations at the site, the anniversary was celebrated at Runnymede and the spirit of the 1960s was very much alive. When King John sealed Magna Carta he was not surrounded by belly dancers. But on the evening of Tuesday 15

June 1965, the barons were women, preferring to wiggle their hips and entertain the crowds, rather than witness the sealing of Magna Carta. This commemoration seems to have escaped the national press' attention, with the only notable mention of the event featuring within the *Staines and Egham News*.

The celebrations were organised by The Society for Individual Freedom, an association formed in 1942 that was predominantly drawn from the individualist wing of the Liberal party.⁹⁴ Festivities included 'wenches, wining, juggling, and jousting' and the newspaper described that the celebration would be celebrated in a 'riotous fashion.'⁹⁵ The newspaper could not have been any more accurate in its description. Starting a little after seven o'clock in the evening, it was estimated that at least 15,000 people attended the festivities, admiring the jousting, wrestling, whilst enjoying the beer that was served by wenches.⁹⁶ The event proved so popular and the crowds so vast that chaos quickly ensued. The weight of the crowds led to people being pushed to the ground and children were reportedly trodden on.⁹⁷ Scantily clad wenches walked across Runnymede selling commemorative programmes and serving beer. One girl commented, 'unfortunately, these dresses aren't exactly made for walking through fields in, and the shoes are absolutely killing our feet.'⁹⁸ The evening was rounded off with fireworks. As they dissipated in the air, so too did the crowds: 'Runnymede soon returned to silence with yet another memory to carry into its history book.'⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Society for Individual Freedom, <https://www.individualist.org.uk>, accessed 2 February 2020.

⁹⁵ 'Magna Carta - in 13th Century Style,' *Staines and Egham News*, 11 June 1965, 8.

⁹⁶ 'They Came to Remember the Birth of Freedom,' *Staines and Egham News*, 18 June 1965, 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Setting the Scene for 2015: Magna Carta in an age of Public History

This chapter acts as a prologue for the following three chapters, which will collectively focus on case-studies relating to the eight hundredth anniversary events that took place both at Runnymede and in the surrounding areas. However, there is a considerable chronological jump between the events that characterised the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary and that of the eight hundredth anniversary. Before turning our attention toward the twenty-first century, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of some of the ways the charter had been used, appealed to, and commemorated in the intervening decades. Additionally, it is also important to consider how academic attitudes towards the practice of history had developed, as well as considering issues relating to heritage.

Magna Carta, 1965-2010

Following the seven hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the charter, commemorative activity at Runnymede declined sharply. But this is not to say that the charter fell from public usage and appeals to its legitimising power were frequent. Against the backdrop of the conflict between the police and black community in Notting Hill, which has escalated from the end of the 1960s, Darcus Howe, the broadcaster and civil liberties campaigner, would make an appeal to the charter.¹ The Mangrove case began when roughly one hundred and fifty black people began to protest police harassment of the Mangrove Restaurant in Ladbroke Grove. In total nine people were arrested, including Darcus Howe, and they were arrested on charges of incitement to riot, being in possession of offensive weapons, and police assault. They went on trial at the Old Bailey in December 1971, and the case lasted for a total of two months. With the assistance of his barrister, Ian McDonald, a strategy was developed, which included a direct appeal to Magna Carta. As part of their defence, they appealed to clause 39 of the charter, asking that a black

¹ All details relating to the Mangrove Nine Trial are taken from: Robin Bunce and Paul Field, 'Mangrove Nine: the court challenge against police racism in Notting Hill,' *The Guardian*, 29 November 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/nov/29/mangrove-nine-40th-anniversary>, accessed 12 November 2019.

jury be called as this constituted a true jury of peers. The appeal to Magna Carta failed but remains an important public appeal and interpretation of the charter.

In terms of commemorative activity at Runnymede, this period is defined only by the lack of activity that takes place at Runnymede. The American Bar Association (ABA) rededicate their monument to Magna Carta three times, returning to Runnymede in 1971, 1985, and 2000. Whilst there might not have been any regular commemorative observances, the site was at the centre of some controversy in 1995. Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) announced an ambitious plan to construct an interpretation centre on the site. Costing an estimated £3.5 million, the Council wanted the Centre to be open for the turn of the millennium.² The Council desired to see a copy of the charter housed within their new building, hoping that it would improve visitor numbers. Councillor Geoffrey Woodger, said, 'there is very little there at the moment to inform or stimulate the curious, and so the Council will work with the National Trust and other parties to provide a scheme of the highest quality.'³ Their plan, however, rested on the need to get the necessary funding for the project. Unsurprisingly, there was public uproar at the suggestion, with many arguing it would ruin the landscape of Runnymede.⁴ In March 1996, it was announced the plans had been scrapped because the National Trust were unwilling to support the project. In providing their rationale for pulling out of the project, one National Trust spokesperson commented, 'we would favour a more holistic approach, looking at interpreting the site as a whole, rather than having a visitor centre...'⁵ This would not be the first time RBC would propose building an interpretation centre at Runnymede and a similar plan would characterise the build-up to the 2015 celebrations.

Moving into the twenty-first century, the charter took on increased significance. Following the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, Magna Carta was increasingly used as a political tool to defend against increasing state powers. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2005, the veteran Labour MP, Tony Benn, suggested that recent anti-terrorism legislation, allowing the

² 'Ambitious Plan for Magna Carta Centre,' *Staines and Egham News*, 22 June, 1995. Egham Museum.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Press clipping from *Staines and Egham News*, 6 July, 1995. Egham Museum.

⁵ Press clipping from *Staines and Egham News*, 28 March, 1996. Egham Museum.

arrest and detention without trial, was eroding the principles of Magna Carta.⁶ Similarly, in 2008, the Conservative MP, David Davis, prompted a by-election, having resigned his seat over the Counter-Terrorism Bill, which would extend the limit that a person could be detained without trial from forty five days to ninety.⁷

New Fields of Scholarly Research, 1960-1990

Issues of memory, heritage and preservation provoked historical debate in Britain before the memory boom of the late 1980s.⁸ Outside of the confines of the discipline, the 1960s witnessed a renaissance in history, which saw it become a more prevalent feature of public life. Public interest and consumption of history in all forms has not wavered since and, if anything, has grown over the decades. Accounting for the rise in public interest of history in the 1960s has proven difficult. Peter Mandler speculates that there are myriad reasons for this, ranging from a rise in living standards to a sense of cultural anxiety felt during this period in the face of waning global dominance and an increasingly diffused national identity.⁹ This undoubtedly fuelled the emergence and eventual elevation of both social and cultural history as recognised disciplines of historical study. These changed the focus of historical study away from traditional accounts of great men to stories of real life and individual experience. In turn, it also changed the sources of study, openly encouraging the discipline to look beyond its classical boundaries to explore new narratives.

E. P. Thompson is seen as one of the central pioneers of social history. The publication of *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963 is regarded as the first instance in which this methodological approach was adopted.¹⁰ Deliberately written for a non-academic audience, his

⁶ Tony Benn, 'In the name of security,' *The Guardian*, 22 June, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jun/22/terrorism.uk>, accessed 13 April 2019

⁷ David Davis, 'Why am I resigning?,' *The Guardian*, 12 June 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/12/speeches>, accessed 13 April 2019.

⁸ Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, "Introduction" in *The Collective Memory Reader*, Ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27.

⁹ Peter Mandler, *History and National Life*, (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2002), 102-105.

¹⁰ E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

work proved to be a 'sprawling account of democratic thought and action in England at the height of the Industrial Revolution.'¹¹ In using thousands of obscure sources, Thompson had successfully managed to restore the lives of the ordinary people to the historic record that had, until then, been invisible. In reflecting upon his methodology, Thompson would famously use the term 'History From Below' in a 1966 special issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*.¹² The 'history from below' movement had a more discreet political purpose, putting itself at the service of 'the historically disenfranchised.'¹³ However, more broadly speaking, the 1960s witnessed an increase in a more democratised and participatory history. The development of oral history and establishment of Raphael Samuel's History Workshop Movement in 1966 all serve to underline the increased participatory nature of the discipline.¹⁴ The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a rapid expansion in historical participation and public awareness and consciousness of history. New methodological approaches would allow narratives of the underrepresented to be explored, resulting in the expansion of an historically anchored public memory. However, the optimism of these two decades would be dampened by the political use of the past during the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher.

During the 1983 General Election, Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative and Unionist Party called for a return to 'Victorian values'. Thatcher's use of 'Victorian values' was a shorthand for a return to the traditional and old-fashioned. As Raphael Samuel wrote in 1992, 'if the return to Victorian values struck a chord in 1983, it was perhaps because it corresponded to widespread disenchantment with the modernisations of the 1960s, together with the post-1960s awareness of the limits of economic growth, and also to transformations in the perception of past-present relations.' However, Thatcher's adoption of this term was an act of cynicism, a 'process of selective amnesia' in which the real past of Victorian Values became 'timeless tradition' and what made Britain great.¹⁵ The Conservatives contradictory promotion

¹¹ Mandler, *History*, 111.

¹² Ibid, 112.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gareth Steadman Jones, 'Samuel, Raphael Elkan (1934-1996),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4 January 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/64002>, accessed 3 January, 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid, 18

of both 'enterprise' and 'tradition', as Stuart Hall proposes, promoted the idea of a return to Victorian values based on 'regressive modernisation.'¹⁶ It was on from these conflicting ideas that a commercialised and economically driven 'heritage industry' emerged. These issues would fuel the heritage debates of the 1980s in Britain and the academic interventions of David Lowenthal, Patrick Wright, and Robert Hewison were central in this.¹⁷ This debate was prompted by the proliferation of new heritage sites across Britain during the 1980s. Hewison's work was allegedly written in reaction to the claim that new museums were opening roughly every week.¹⁸ 'The national past', Wright asserted, was a *modern* past defined not only by its relationship to past events, but 'more pointedly around the leading tensions of the contemporary political situation.'¹⁹ Thus the turn to heritage, it was felt, was directly fuelled by the decline in cultural production and industry mixed with an historically charged political rhetoric that advocated a return to the good times of the past. The presence of heritage was not the central issue, but instead the perceived difference between history and heritage. Within his introduction, Hewison would confidently assert that 'heritage is not history'.²⁰ Echoing the same sentiment, David Lowenthal would later write:

History and heritage transmit different things to different audiences. History tells all who will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are. Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origin and continuance, endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose.²¹

Lowenthal, would continue, suggesting that 'heritage thrived on persisting error' and, using the earlier work of Renan, would argue that getting history wrong was central to the creation of nations.²² This concern reflected the apprehensions of Wright and Hewison who felt that the

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, (London: Verso, 1988), 85.

¹⁷ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987).

¹⁸ Moody, 118.

¹⁹ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

²⁰ Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, (London: Methuen, 1987), 9.

²¹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128.

²² David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

preservation of a past based on romanticised 'nostalgic yearning for times gone by' was problematic.²³ Both Wright and Hewison's arguments did not escape scrutiny. Scholars, such as Raphael Samuel, would postulate that the perceived chasm between history and heritage was just the rhetoric of a historical discipline feeling insecure.²⁴ Samuel would later produce his own work, dealing with British nostalgia in his 1994 publication of volume 1 of, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*.²⁵

Away from issues of heritage, ideas of nationhood and identity were a subject of common study. Benedict Anderson's 1983 text, *Imagined Communities*, argued that nations were essentially imagined.²⁶ Anderson forwarded the idea that membership of a nation pointed to its participants sharing similar communal values, interests, and a projected identity. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's edited collection of essays argued that the formulation of European nation states in the middle of the nineteenth century relied on 'the invention of tradition.'²⁷ Their central thesis argued that the process of nation-building was reliant on the appropriation of old custom, civic tradition, cultural symbols and ritual to provide a sense of legitimacy to these new states. In lieu of long-established ritual and custom, states were required to blur the boundaries of time and invent an array of ceremonies for the state's use. The exploration of invented commemorative rituals is a defining feature of their publication, demonstrating the centrality of commemoration in creating communal bonds, projecting legitimacy, and connecting the past to the present. Each publication dealt, in its own way, with how communal bonds could be constructed and how history and memory could be distorted for the benefit of the creation of national identity.

At the same time as debates around heritage were being had, the field of Public History was emerging. Public history is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Over the year's scholars

²³ Jessica Moody, 'Heritage and History' in Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (eds), *Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 118.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume I: Past and Present in Contemporary Cultures* (London: Verso, 1994).

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Rev, 2006).

²⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

have provided various methods of defining it. John Tosh outlines a number of ways in which we might begin to categorise it, ranging from the dissemination of academic research to the public, the active engagement of historians with community based ‘amateur’ history projects, or history that serves the state.²⁸ As Karen Harvey reminds us, within the US context public historians tend to be practitioners, rather than academics.²⁹ Public history’s emergence as an academic pursuit has not always been well-received by traditional academics, with its focus on the production and communication of history being one central concern.³⁰ However, as Harvey acknowledges, the move towards wider societal impact, characterised by the Research Assessment Exercise of 2008 and later Research Excellence Framework of 2014, historians within the United Kingdom at least, are not segregated from a defined body of public historians.³¹ Within the public domain, the establishment of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, greatly increased the amount of history projects that could be funded, along with the type of institutions that could apply for funding. History was no longer the preserve of scholars. Its production was, and remains to be, a public enterprise.

The 2015 Celebrations Begin

On 12 November 2010, Ken Clarke, the then Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary, along with Lord Neuberger, the then Master of the Rolls, prominent members of the Magna Carta 800th Committee, and representatives from Salisbury and Lincoln Cathedrals gathered at Runnymede to formally launch the ‘five years of celebrations leading up to the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta’ (**figs. 32-33**).³² As part of this launch event, many of the organising committee’s aspirations for the event were publicised – with a public holiday on 15 June 2015 being one of the more ambitious aspirations. Sir Robert Worcester, Chairman of the Magna Carta Trust’s 800th Committee, was coordinating the anniversary plans. The Magna Carta anniversary was set

²⁸ John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 99-119.

²⁹ Karen Harvey, ‘Envisioning the Past: Art, Historiography and Public History,’ *Cultural and Social History* 12, no.4, (2015): 527.

³⁰ Jessica Moody, ‘Heritage and History’, 117.

³¹ Harvey, ‘Envisioning the Past,’ 527.

³² ‘Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Celebrations Begin,’ BBC News, 12 November 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11735060>, accessed 23 September 2019.

to be a truly national affair, with events across the country and international stakeholders being consulted. As part of the anniversary, the British Library was planning its most high-profile exhibition ever, in which they would display two copies of the charter and take visitors from 1215 to the present day. Likewise, the cities of Lincoln and Salisbury – the two cities that also own a 1215 iteration of the charter – were also beginning to plan their anniversary celebrations. The following chapters, however, tell the a very local story and see how the anniversary of the charter was commemorated and celebrated in Runnymede and its surrounds.

Runnymede Borough Council and the 800th Anniversary of Magna Carta

We're looking at making June 2015 a very special occasion, perhaps over two or three months leading up to June 2015, but we're also looking at legacy.¹

Speaking in September 2010, Mr Paul Turrell, Runnymede Borough Council's Chief Executive Officer, confidently outlined his ambitions for the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta. With just under five years until the anniversary date, this was the time for confident and bold pronouncements. As part of this 'very special occasion' Turrell outlined an ambitious vision and set of plans for the Runnymede commemorations, which included calls for a bank holiday and a Magna Carta interpretation centre that would be built on the site. The proposal for a bank holiday was not as ludicrous a suggestion as it at first might seem. In an address to the Fabian Society in 2006, Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, called for an annual day to celebrate Britishness.² His suggestion prompted *BBC History Magazine* to run a poll, asking its readers to select an historic event that would be most suitable for this. The surprising winner was 15 June, the anniversary of Magna Carta, winning with a 27% share of the vote.³ But, as the British Historian, Linda Colley, suggested, 'The problem with a Magna Carta day is that this was originally very much an English, not a British significant event.'⁴ Within the context of 2010, however, Mr Turrell and Councillor Alan Alderson were both confident that the an annual bank holiday would serve as an annual reminder of the continued importance of the charter. With reference to the proposed interpretation centre, Turrell noted that an 'interpretation centre would demonstrate the significance of Magna Carta, which had been influential across the

¹ 'Runnymede Council Calls Magna Carta Bank Holiday,' BBC News, 2 September 2010, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-11166702>, accessed 13 February 2020.

² 'Brown Speech Promotes Britishness,' BBC News, 14 January 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4611682.stm>, accessed 13 February 2020.

³ 'Magna Carta tops British Day Poll,' BBC News, 30 May 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5028496.stm>, accessed 13 February 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

world.⁵ There was the added expectation that the anniversary celebrations and potential interpretation centre would provide the council with an economic boost to the borough.⁶ Given how early these conversations were taking place, these grand pronouncements could be taken more as visionary statements. To his credit, Turrell was acutely aware of this fact too, adding, 'we're very much at the ideas stage at the moment, but although 2015 may seem like a long way away, we need to start preparing.'⁷

This central focus of this chapter focuses on the commemorative activity that took place in Runnymede during the eight hundredth anniversary. In terms of structure this chapter will provide a chronological overview of how the commemorative plans developed from September 2010 onwards. For the most part, Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) will be the central actor as these chronological developments unfold. Of course, other cultural organisations and institutions played their role in the commemorations too. Egham Museum was one such institution that arguably played a much larger role within the anniversary celebrations than its size and reputation might, at first, suggest. The chapter ends by examining the sequence of events that led to the erection of a statue of Her Majesty The Queen as one of their lasting tributes to the eight hundredth anniversary celebrations. Beyond this, the chapter will also draw out how this monument engages with a very particular interpretation of the charter.

Heritage Lottery Fund Bids and Failed attempts to build an Interpretation Centre

In August 2011, RBC took their first steps towards the submission of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application, which, if successful, would have contributed towards the cost of building a Magna Carta interpretation centre at Runnymede. RBC and the Magna Carta Trust (MCT) appointed the consultancy firm, JDD Consulting, to help draw up a feasibility study to support the proposal of a new interpretation centre. Having been asked to undertake this scoping exercise, John Sherlock, a founding partner of JDD Consulting, commented: 'The UK has earned a strong reputation for staging events of international significance. Peoples all over the world

⁵ 'Runnymede Council Calls Magna Carta Bank Holiday'.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

will look to Runnymede in 2015 as a beacon for the principles set out in Magna Carta 800 years ago. We must show them something remarkable.’⁸ Although he would not have been aware of this, his description of Runnymede being the ‘beacon’ of the principles of the charter was more than a little reminiscent of the rhetoric that framed the charter in 1957.

Following their appointment, plans moved apace, and, by the 12 January 2012, RBC were preparing for their first public consultation regarding their proposed HLF application and the new interpretation centre. Speaking ahead of their first public consultation, Turrell noted that the council needed to provide ‘a solid business case’ and that HLF had informed the Council that ‘the type and quality of outreach work from the centre, involving schools, voluntary organisations and the community is very important to our bid.’⁹ Aware of this need, the Council had begun designing the centre as a flexible community space, incorporating areas of interpretation, with a bespoke events and education space that was accompanied by an activity programme. The Council were acutely aware of the importance of hearing the views and suggestions of local people. ‘We need residents’ input’, Turrell said, ‘into the kinds of activity the visitors’ centre can offer and how we can reach out to community groups of all ages and interests. This is a good opportunity for them to have their say.’¹⁰ Without their support the chances of the project receiving any form of funding was slim. The early indications were positive. Brian Perry, a member of the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede and heavily involved with Egham Royal Show, commented that Egham Royal Show Committee Members all supported the plans and he hoped ‘other organisations will embrace it - not just those in Egham but those in the south of the borough too.’¹¹

The council submitted their first application to HLF in the late spring of 2012. In total, they submitted a proposal asking for a sum of £3,843,000. It was projected that the

⁸ ‘Runnymede and Magna Carta for 2015,’ JDD Consulting, <http://www.sherlox.org/JDD/2020/news/runnymede.htm>, accessed 13 February 2020.

⁹ ‘Runnymede Council Plans Magna Carta Celebrations,’ BBC News, 12 January 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-16534461>, accessed 13 February 2020.

¹⁰ Russell Butt, ‘View Sought on Proposed Magna Carta Visitor Centre,’ Get Surrey, 2 July 2013, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/view-sought-proposed-magna-carta-4812130>, accessed 13 February 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

interpretation centre would cost £8,000,000 with the rest of the money coming via match funding from the private sector. Unsurprisingly, the Council were quietly optimistic, believing that Magna Carta's anniversary was too important a moment in British history, to not receive funding. HLF, however, took a different perspective, rejecting the proposal in July 2012. In commenting on this, Graham Smith and Anna Green suggested that there were intrinsic weaknesses in the funding bid of which the biggest single problem was the lack of a proposal to engage the public either in the preparing for the funding application or the project itself.¹² As Smith and Green argue, for funding bodies such as HLF it has become a goal, indeed an expectation, that the public are actively involved in history and heritage, with high levels of community involvement.¹³ Whilst RBC had held a number of public forums to discuss the proposals, HLF deemed that their project did not provide the required cultural benefit to the local community in the longer term. The Council were disappointed with the outcome: the interpretation centre had been styled as the 'jewel in the crown' of the Magna Carta commemorations.¹⁴ Despite the set-back the Council remained stoic in its determination to build a visitor centre in time for the anniversary, seeking project funding through alternative methods. Accompanying this, was the admission that it was unusual for HLF to fund major infrastructure projects or new builds.¹⁵

¹² Graham Smith and Anna Green, 'The Magna Carta: 800 Years of Public History,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, eds. Paula Hamilton and James B. Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 400.

¹³ Ibid, 401.

¹⁴ Russell Butt, '£8m? Now you are on your own: Magna Carta Celebration Visitor Project in Doubt as Lottery Bid Bites the Dust,' *Egham and Staines News*, 26 July 2012, 1.

¹⁵ Russell Butt, 'Magna Carta "Legacy" Plans Lose Out on Funding,' *Get Surrey*, 2 July 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/magna-carta-legacy-plans-lose-4810023>, accessed 13 February 2020. As a rule, this might be the case. However, in January 2012 HLF announced its support for a new digital interpretation centre at Bannockburn, supporting the construction with £3,940,300. It is highly likely that the success of this application had implications for the Magna Carta interpretation centre project. See: '£3.94 Heritage Lottery Grant for State-of-the-Art Bannockburn Visitor Centre,' *Heritage Fund*, 27 January 2012, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/ps394m-heritage-lottery-grant-state-art-bannockburn-visitor-centre>, accessed 13 February 2020.

Heritage as ‘competition’: Runnymede Borough Council and Egham Museum

Whilst RBC were preparing their HLF application, the two-room community museum in Egham was in the process of both devising and submitting their own HLF application. Established in 1968, by members of the Egham by Runnymede Historical Society, the museum sits on Egham’s high street, within the confines of the Literary Institute. It was established in direct response to the changes that were taking place in the local area. As bulldozers threatened the high street with urban regeneration and diggers grazed on the surrounding landscape, which supported the construction of the M25, residents and history enthusiasts were moved to start preserving Egham’s past.¹⁶ As its website states:

Egham Museum is an independent community museum and registered charity reliant on volunteers. Through our exhibitions, outreach programmes and innovative use of our collections, we provide ... a centre of life-long learning dedicated to raising awareness, sharing knowledge and promoting the enjoyment of history.¹⁷

In the words of the then Museum Curator, Dr Matthew Smith, ‘the museum had until 2012 operated on a shoestring budget of just £2,000 per year.’¹⁸ Much like RBC, however, the Museum recognised both the economic and cultural potential of the eight hundredth anniversary. Under the direction of Smith, and with the support of a few volunteers, the Museum pulled together an ambitious heritage project, which was a radical departure from the its previous model of operation.

The Museum had attempted to collaborate with RBC, but these approaches had been not well-received. Working within the confines of his collection and without a copy of Magna Carta, Smith produced a ‘programme of educational activities, exhibitions, and events ... devised to engage local residents.’¹⁹ Central to this, was the idea of Magna Carta, something which he was keen for the project to explore in further detail:

¹⁶ Egham Museum, ‘Egham Museum at 50: Anniversary Documentary 2018,’ YouTube Video, 17:51, 29 September 2018, <https://youtu.be/Bd2e3UGRS7c>, accessed 22 November 2019.

¹⁷ ‘About Us,’ Egham Museum, <https://eghammuseum.org/about-2/>, accessed 13 February 2020.

¹⁸ Matthew Smith, ‘Curating the Idea of Magna Carta,’ *Curator: The Museum Journal* 61, no. 3 (2018): 432.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 433.

Rather than focussing on Magna Carta itself ... we're most interested in the idea of Magna Carta and its symbolic usage through the centuries, how it's been picked up and used by people for different political ends and in different political circumstances. Why it became such a useful symbol, such a useful tool, during the English Civil War or the American War of independence and its road to becoming a heritage commodity as it were. How that's manifested itself. So the later part of the exhibition will be why and the way it has been commemorated. So, for example, one element we'll be look at will be the pageant in 1934 another element will be the wartime commemoration in 1944 when there was a large American presence ... Why the Americans were so interested in having that event then? [Well] of course it plays into what the allies were saying [about] what they were fighting for: liberty and so forth. So again it is a very useful symbol that was employed at that point. All the way up to current commemorations and how the topic is being discussed.²⁰

Egham Museum's project demonstrated the virtues of good public history practice. It was collaborative; engaging; served a purpose; demonstrated its public value; and was, above all else, grounded on a platform of good history.

Upon hearing of the Museum's proposal, RBC did not respond positively, believing that the small museum's project threatened to undermine the chances of their own project receiving funding. Whilst RBC's HLF bid was unsuccessful, the Museum's was, securing almost £100,000 in May 2012.²¹ The Museum had, however, attempted to collaborate with the local authority prior to the submission of their proposal to HLF, but approaches had been repeatedly rebuffed. RBC had been confident that their own HLF bid would be successful and did not feel the need to entertain or accommodate the requests of the small independent museum. The Museum's success was interpreted as a fundamental reason in the Council's failure to secure their own funding, and volunteers found themselves the subject of criticism from Council officers. This was, despite the fact, that the two proposals had been submitted under different categories of project, which meant they were not in direct competition.²²

²⁰ Matthew Smith quoted in Smith and Green, 'The Magna Carta,' 400.

²¹ 'Egham Museum Magna Carta 800 Project,' Heritage Fund, 22 May 2012, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/our-work/egham-museum-magna-carta-800-project>, accessed 13 February 2020.

²² Smith and Green, 'The Magna Carta,' 398.

Runnymede Borough Council Looks to other Funders for Commemorative Plans

Despite the setback, RBC remained resolute in its aspirations to erect a Magna Carta interpretation centre at Runnymede. All was not lost. The Council was still in a good position from which it could quickly and efficiently move forwards. Having drawn up a detailed project proposal, the background work and project rationale was all in place, and very little needed to be changed. The Council was confident that it could entice some form of investment from a combination of the private and commercial sectors.²³ Whilst the Council explored these avenues, there was growing unrest amongst the public over its erection at Runnymede. There were a number of reasons that the public were opposed to the Council's suggestions, ranging from the inability of the local infrastructure to cope with increased visitor numbers to the fact that the proposed site would lead to the demolition of three homes.²⁴ RBC had publicly stated that it would be forced to shelve their plans by the autumn of 2012 if no alternative sources of funding could be found. By this point, it was the beginning of October and it was increasingly likely that the Council would be forced to admit defeat.

In an unlikely turn of events, Surrey County Council (SCC) was the source of the project's salvation, agreeing to contribute a £5,000,000 cash injection. The Magna Carta visitors' centre had 'risen phoenix-like from the ashes.'²⁵ Until this point, the County Council had been noticeable only by their absence from these discussions. Given that Runnymede sat within the county's borders, the anniversary presented the same potential economic and cultural opportunities. These discussions took place against the backdrop of the London 2012 Olympics and SCC were one of the host counties, playing a key role in organising the Olympic Cycling Road Race, which was the focus of much of their energies. SCC's support for the visitors' centre was contingent on RBC being able to secure the remaining £3,000,000 from external partners.

²³ Butt, 'Magna Carta "Legacy" Plans'.

²⁴ See: 'Opponents Ready for Magna Carta Centre Fight,' 4 October 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/opponents-ready-magna-carta-centre-4808434>, accessed 13 February 2020.

²⁵ Russell Butt, 'Council Gives £5m Magna Carta Centre Funding,' 24 October 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/council-gives-5m-magna-carta-4808734>, accessed 13 February 2020.

But as Councillor Derek Cotty gleefully declared, 'it means the project schedule is on track and doesn't diminish our efforts, and we can go ahead with the timescale we need.'²⁶

Much like Egham Museum, however, RBC and SCC did not possess one of the four surviving copies of the 1215 charter or, indeed, any of its later reissues. This had always been a major weakness in their desire to build a visitors' centre.²⁷ Councillor David Hodge, Leader of Surrey County Council, called for one of the original four copies to be put on permanent display in the new visitors' centre.²⁸ Paul Turrell welcomed the idea, but was quick to point out that the costs of insuring the document might prove to be prohibitive, especially set within the context of economic austerity. It was felt, however, that the interpretation centre would provide the perfect place to both see and learn about the charter. Many continued to argue that the visitors' centre would deliver an economic boost and improve the offering to tourists. If it were also possible to see a copy of the charter, the potential economic and cultural benefits would be strengthened and increased.

On the 1 November 2012, RBC's Corporate Management Committee formally approved the visitors' centre proposals. The centre was to be built on the Runnymede Pleasure Grounds. Owned by the Runnymede Pleasure Ground Trust, comprised of the forty-two local councillors, the site sits on the banks of the River Thames and it is located approximately half-a-mile away from the National Trust site. In accepting these proposals, the Council had acknowledged that it would have to demolish two occupied cottages. This was already a considerable point of tension with local residents and many believed that this investment would be better served elsewhere.²⁹ As RBC celebrated the project's approval, SCC were beginning to waver in their commitment. Not everyone within the County Council supported their backing and on Wednesday 14 November it was agreed that these plans would be reconsidered and their

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The idea that objects are central to museum experience is increasingly the subject of academic debate. For example, see: Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

²⁸ Russell Butt, 'Costs Threaten Return of Magna Carta to Runnymede,' 31 October 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/costs-threaten-return-magna-carta-4808828>, accessed 13 February 2020.

²⁹ Russell Butt, 'Borough Council's Approval for Magna Carta Centre,' 2 November 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/borough-councils-approval-magna-carta-4807982>, accessed 13 February 2020.

support for the project reviewed. Speaking after the announcement of this decision, John Orrick, a SCC Liberal Democrat and opponent to the project, was forthright in expressing his views:

We are being sold a pig in a poke by Runnymede. Surrey's Conservative Cabinet decided to spend £5m of council tax payers' money based on just nine paragraphs in a report. Many Surrey residents would have seen the equivalent of a 1% council tax increase being spent on a hugely expensive centre that they would get minimal benefit from.³⁰

A list of recommendations and considerations were drawn up, which were sent back to the SCC's cabinet for review on the 27 November. Issues surrounding the visitor's centre were twofold. On the one hand, there was the economic argument. With both borough and county councils working within a climate of austerity measures, the question was whether this was a wise investment? To the project's supporters, it most definitely was and presented an opportunity to stimulate economic and cultural growth within the local area. On the other hand, there was an issue surrounding the project itself and many questioned the proposed location and whether the local infrastructure could cope with the increased pressure that it would be placed under.³¹

On January 15, 2013, SCC was forced to make a public U-turn on its support for the visitors' centre and withdrew its pledge of funding. Following the SCC announcement, John Orrick welcomed the news and supported the decision, noting that 'the important anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta can now be celebrated in a way that is far cheaper, more imaginative and more inclusive of all of Surrey.'³² As justification for their decision, SCC explained that its focus was now 'on improving what was at the site, in a sustainable and economically viable way, not building something new, and on developing a programme which

³⁰ Russell Butt, 'Magna Carta Visitor Centre Funding to be Reviewed,' 15 November 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/magna-carta-visitor-centre-funding-4808142>, accessed 13 February 2020.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Russell Butt, 'County Pulls Plug on Magna Carta Centre Funding,' 16 January 2013, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/county-pulls-plug-magna-carta-4720216>, accessed 13 February 2020.

would encourage more visitors to enjoy the natural setting close to London.³³ This announcement effectively put an end to the prospect of building a visitors' centre at Runnymede for the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta. RBC were thus forced to reconsider their plans and refocus their energies elsewhere. Despite this, however, the idea of erecting a visitors' centre did not vanish. Speaking in June 2013, Sir Robert Worcester, Chairman of the Magna Carta Trust's 800th Committee, called the lack of an interpretation centre at the site a 'travesty' and still supported the idea of a centre being built, suggesting, at the very least, a cornerstone of the interpretation centre be laid as part of the anniversary celebrations.³⁴

From Interpretation Centre to Magna Carta Monument

With the proposals for an interpretation centre no longer viable, RBC were forced to reconsider their anniversary plans. Unsurprisingly, it was suggested that the erection of a monument might be an appropriate form of commemorating the charter's anniversary.³⁵ The next few months were spent thinking about alternative commemorative plans. The decision to stop pursuing the interpretation centre left the Council with over two and a half years to finalise their plans. Admittedly, over a year had been lost in their attempts to fund the interpretation centre, but there remained enough time to make a worthwhile and significant contribution.³⁶ Plans and proposals were not as forthcoming as the Council had hoped. The weeks and months passed, and discussions continued, but, by June 2014, there was still no concrete plan in place. In 2011 the Council had made bold assertions and outlined an ambitious set of proposals. By the summer of 2014 there was a growing reality that the Council might not deliver anything of note

³³ Tanya Gupta, 'Runnymede Council Plans Magna Carta Celebrations,' BBC News, 14 June 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-22882941>, accessed 13 February 2020.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Russell Butt, 'Council's "Plan B" for Magna Carta Monument,' 24 January 2013, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/councils-plan-b-magna-carta-4720307>, accessed 13 February 2020.

³⁶ In October 2013, RBC announced that it was supporting an ambitious project to create a Runnymede equivalent to the Bayeux Tapestry. Rhoda Nevins had designed a ten-panel tapestry, depicting the history and legacy of the charter. See: Russell Butt, 'Magna Carta Embroidery will be "like Bayeux Tapestry",' 3 October 2013, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/magna-carta-embroidery-like-bayeux-6124150>, accessed 13 February, 2020.

for the anniversary. It was possible that the eight hundredth anniversary might be remembered locally as the anniversary that promised much but delivered little.

The Council's salvation came in September 2014, however, after its Community Services Committee (CSC) were approached by Runnymede Magna Carta Legacy (RMCL), a not-for-profit company. RMCL offered to provide RBC with a statue of Queen Elizabeth II. As part of their offer, they had identified Runnymede Pleasure Grounds as a suitable place for the monument to be situated. The venture would be covered in its entirety by RMCL, leaving the CSC to consider whether they would accept this generous offer. The company had only come into existence in May 2014. Its company logo bore a striking resemblance to the council's and many of its directorate were active Runnymede Borough Councillors.³⁷ The company believed that the statue would be a fitting tribute to the principles of freedom and democracy. As the minutes of the CSC indicated, these were all values contained within Magna Carta, and these values were arguably more important in the context of the twenty-first century than they were in 1215.³⁸

RMCL had already identified a suitable statue, but it was not one that had been especially for the anniversary of Magna Carta. Instead, it had been originally commissioned for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee of 2012 and produced by the figurative sculptor, James Butler. A member of the Royal Academy since 1964, the Royal West of England Academy, and the Royal Society of British Sculptors, Butler has established a worldwide reputation. Many of his monuments and memorials can be seen across London and abroad in countries such as the United States of America.³⁹ In reaction to this, some councillors questioned whether a statue that overtly venerated monarchy was compatible with the celebration of eight hundred years of

³⁷ The company's directorate comprised of: Councillor Derek Cotty, Councillor Paul Tuley, Councillor Hugh Mears, and Mr Paul Beck. For the company's logo, see: 'Runnymede Magna Carta Legacy,' <http://www.runnymedemagnacartalegacy.org.uk/>, accessed 13 February 2020.

³⁸ Runnymede Borough Council, 'Community Services Committee: Agenda,' 11 September 2014, 7, https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/10817/Community-Services-110914-AG/pdf/Community_Services_110914AG.pdf?m=635453490961470000, accessed 4 February 2020.

³⁹ For further information about the monuments and memorials he has produced, see: 'Commissions – International,' James Butler, <http://jamesbutler-ra.com/commissions-international/>, accessed 13 February 2020.

Magna Carta.⁴⁰ Many shared these views, seeing the actions of the barons at Runnymede and the sealing of the charter as being deeply anti-monarchical. Writing in May 2015, Nicholas Vincent expressed similar sentiments. However, he acknowledged that the planning of the Magna Carta commemorations had been characterised by stakeholders who were at pains to involve the British royal family.⁴¹

For all the historical discordancy between the monarchy and the charter, there were many advantages to the project. The first obvious advantage was the fact that RBC would have to pay nothing towards the statue's installation. Given RBC had failed to find the necessary funding for the visitor's centre and austerity measures placed an increasingly heavy burden on the council's purse, there was considerable attraction in receiving a gift. In fact, Councillor Cotty, in his capacity as RMCL Director, declared that there was no intention for this project to be delivered through the public purse.⁴² It is uncertain how much of an influence these economic considerations had on committee members. Early estimates for the project projected a figure of £350,000, which, in comparison to the interpretation centre, was small, but by no means was it an insignificant amount of money. Additionally, RMCL had already received support and sponsorship from local and international partners, and it promised that there would be further investment following an extensive media campaign, asking for donations.⁴³ As their company name suggested, they wanted to provide a lasting legacy of the eight hundredth celebrations. Undoubtedly, this chimed with RBC's own aspirations, and much of the rhetoric surrounding the visitor's centre placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of legacy. The CSC ultimately agreed to proceed with the proposals submitted on the basis that further information was issued and presented to the committee in addition to other issues being resolved.

⁴⁰ Runnymede Borough Council, Minutes of the Community Services Committee, 11 September 2014, 246, https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/11025/Community-Services-110914-Min/pdf/Community_Services_110914_Min.pdf?m=635472318975530000, accessed 4 February 2020.

⁴¹ Nicholas Vincent, 'A Blend of Fact and Make-Believe,' Online Library of Liberty, last modified 26 May 2015, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/libertymatters-mc>, accessed 29 May 2019. The Queen was announced as the patron for the eight hundredth anniversary celebrations in October 2011. See: 'The Queen is Patron,' Magna Carta 800th, <https://magnacarta800th.com/news/the-queen-is-patron/>, accessed 13 February 2020.

⁴² Runnymede Borough Council, Minutes of the Community Services Committee, 11 September 2014, 245.

⁴³ Ibid.

It was not until four months later that the matter was officially discussed again at the next CSC. If time was of the essence back in September 2014, by February 2015 things were now critical. RMCL wished to unveil their statue on the anniversary weekend of Magna Carta for maximum impact, something which had been expressed in their last meeting.⁴⁴ In the intervening months, RMCL had been busy, addressing some of the CSC's concerns and questions. They had approached Crest Nicholson, a property development company based in Surrey, and were in the process of receiving both design and technical advice. However, of greater significance and importance was the fact that RMCL were now in a position where they could present the CSC with a set of robust proposals. The various proposals that were presented differed only in scale and this was because nobody knew what the final figure of donations would be and, therefore, what could ultimately be spent. By this point RMCL, however, confirmed that they had already received over £100,000 in donations towards the project and expected this figure to continue to increase.⁴⁵ In terms of the known costs, RMCL informed the CSC that the statue cost £220,000, excluding VAT, and, depending on the final proposal that was selected, would require a further £635,000 to fund the most expensive plan.⁴⁶ These figures were far greater than those that had initially been projected, with the cost of the statue alone taking up a considerable proportion of that initial figure. The project might have been cost neutral for the Council, but it certainly was not cheap.

As the projected figures suggested, RMCL's proposals involved more than just the erection of a statue. These various proposals were outlined in 'Appendices D, E & F' and provided the Council with several options to choose from. The most expensive proposal – referred to as the 'Gold Version' – looked to transform part of the Runnymede Pleasure Grounds into a Magna Carta Memorial garden.⁴⁷ A particularly innovative feature of some of

⁴⁴ Runnymede Borough Council, 'Minutes of the Community Services Committee,' 12 February 2015, https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/12418/Community-Services-120215-Min/pdf/Community_Services_120215_Min.pdf?m=635622880933170000, accessed 4 February 2020.

⁴⁵ Runnymede Borough Council, 'Community Services Committee Special Meeting: Agenda,' 12 February 2015, 8, https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/12213/Community-Services-120215-Ag/pdf/Community_Services_120215_Agenda.pdf?m=635600265488530000, accessed 4 February 2020.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the more expensive proposals, was the creation of an 'Anniversary Avenue', which would see eight pre-existing birch trees mirrored by eight new ones on the opposite side of the road. Apart from looking aesthetically pleasing, each tree represented a century of Magna Carta's existence. The site, however, would not only commemorate and celebrate the history and legacy of the charter. It also acted as a very overt celebration of the history of the monarchy and royalty, embodied by Queen Elizabeth II. As such, it was proposed that part of the garden would include mulberry trees on either side of the statue due to their visual and historic ties to the royal family.⁴⁸ While the intricacies and exact details of the symbolism included within their proposed Magna Carta Memorial Garden would be lost on many, these were very clear attempts to intertwine the narrative of Magna Carta with that of the monarchy. Importantly, this connection was not attempting to emphasise the role the charter played in curtailing the power of the monarchy, but, instead, chose to frame this connection in a positive way. Magna Carta was the first step toward the constitutional form of monarchy. This space was to be an area that celebrated this.

There were some very practical considerations that needed to be considered by the Council. Whilst the installation of the statue and its associated groundworks and landscaping were covered by RMCL, the statue would have long term financial implications in terms of both upkeep and insurance. The Council were required to fund these moving forwards. The insurance for the statue proved to be particularly difficult, and RBC's insurers said that they were unable to cover the item: 'Due to the high sums insured, the proximity of the river, lack of security as well as the easy access from the road we are not willing to provide cover for this item.'⁴⁹ This development might have been a shock, but one doubts that it was a total surprise. November 2012 had seen much of Runnymede and its surroundings hit by extreme flooding, and people had used this as an argument against the construction of the interpretation centre.⁵⁰ Not wishing to let an administrative issue such as this derail the plans, Councillor Paul

⁴⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Russell Butt, 'Flooding "Makes Magna Carta Centre Site Unsuitable."' 6 December 2012, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/flooding-makes-magna-carta-centre-4807644>, accessed 13 February 2020.

Tuley, speaking as an RMCL company Director, provided some assurance, informing the committee he had found a company willing to insure the installation for a sum of £2,000 per annum.⁵¹ Additionally, the completed installation would impact upon the profitability of the Runnymede Pleasure Grounds. The site's funds were predominantly derived from the revenue generated through car parking and the most ambitious plans would see the number of spaces reduced. This, in combination with the upkeep and maintenance of the site, put the Runnymede Pleasure Ground Trust in a much less stable financial position, as its annual income was projected to be reduced by an estimated £9,000 per annum.⁵² The question nobody really could provide the answer to was whether the erection of the statue and subsequent improvements to the area would raise the profile of the site for visitors and, in turn, increase the average number of people visiting the site each year.

On the evening of the 3rd March 2015 the HM Queen Statue decision was brought before the Runnymede Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC). The decision was brought to the OSC as it was felt the proceedings of the last CSC had been deeply undemocratic. Councillors Alderson and Browne challenged many things that took place including the choice to limit the previous meeting to an hour, which led to many members being unable to pose questions and voice their concerns. In addition to this due to the hurried nature of the previous meeting they and others were left uncertain of what the final motion was.⁵³ The OSC did manage to give the project a definitive deadline of April 2015 to get the proposals agreed and presented to full council.⁵⁴

A final discussion on the matter took place at in the CSC March meeting. On account of the time constraints, there were some key decisions made that would have serious implications for the project. It was decided that they would put this matter to a public consultation to see if there was a general level of support for the project. The CSC also chose to defer the ultimate

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid/

⁵³ Runnymede Borough Council, 'Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee,' 3 March 2015, 668, https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/12502/Overview-and-Scrutiny-030315-MIN/pdf/Overview_and_Scrutiny_03032015_Min.pdf?m=635634752487200000, accessed 4 February 2020.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

decision to three people: Councillor Marissa Heath, Councillor Patrick Roberts, and Paul Turrell.⁵⁵ Did the public share the same enthusiasm for the project as RMCL and other councillors, or, were they, like a majority of other councillors, mystified by the idea of erecting a statue of the Queen for the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta? On the 27th March 2015, the consultation period ended, and the responses were assessed. The results made interesting reading. The precise outcome was thirty-one votes against to only twenty-three votes in support. Out of the borough's total population of roughly 80,000 inhabitants, only fifty-four people had offered their views on the project. Was this a sign of public ambivalence and Magna Carta commemoration fatigue? Much like the Council, the public's view was split over whether this represented a suitable form of commemoration for Magna Carta. One respondent held a similar view to that of RMCL and said, 'what a fitting way to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, when King John gave us rights that are still protected via the role of our current Queen.'⁵⁶ In contrast, another pointed to the historical irony:

I find it utterly bizarre and ridiculous that a statue of a monarch should be erected near land which has so many connotations with democracy, justice, liberty and the rights of the ordinary person, all of which have been vigorously opposed by royalty since before 1215.⁵⁷

Despite the results of the survey, it was decided that the project would go ahead as planned. In defence of the Council's decision, Councillor Roberts said, 'the view that we have 80,000 residents in the borough and a response of less than 60. We did not feel that was particularly significant.'⁵⁸ In the framing of his argument, Roberts clearly felt that results reflected a public ambivalence to the project and did not represent a big enough reason to halt the project's progress. Runnymede's decision to go ahead with the statue will remain a moot point. The irony that a statue raised for Magna Carta was ultimately decided in a fashion that sullied a democratic vote, however, will not be lost.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Eleanor Davis, 'Magna Carta Queen Statue to be Placed at Runnymede Pleasure Grounds for 800th anniversary,' 22 April 2015, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/magna-carta-queen-statue-placed-9094127>, accessed 13 February 2020.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

HM The Queen: Upholder of 800 years of the Principles of Magna Carta

The morning of the 14 June 2015 was grey and wet. The clouds were thick and stubborn, reluctant to shift on the gentle breeze. Despite the damp conditions, the spirits of those in attendance remained undiminished and the expectant crowd sought refuge from the rain under complimentary blue umbrellas. The most high profile guests in attendance were the Rt Hon. John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons, who undertaking the official unveiling duties; the Rt Hon. Phillip Hammond MP, in his capacity as MP for Runnymede and Weybridge; The Runnymede Borough Councillors and staff, alongside key benefactors. All present were aware of how divisive the statue's construction had been.⁵⁹ In truth, it was a major achievement that they were able to formally unveil the statue on the anniversary, given that it was April 2015 when construction had commenced. The unveiling speeches and the commemorative brochure, which accompanied the unveiling, provide a useful window onto how this statue was framed and linked to the charter.

The four-metre-tall statue was covered in a large blue cloth and its shape resembled that of an obelisk. Speaker Bercow took to the podium and addressed the crowd. Magna Carta 'was the bedrock of so much we have come subsequently to honour and to cherish' he said, adding, 'it was a day for anyone who believes in the rights of citizens and the importance of representative democracy to count their blessings.'⁶⁰ Having finished his speech, he duly attempted to uncover the monument to a musical accompaniment. His attempts to unveil the statue were interrupted by his inability to remove the blue cover, forcing the band to stop their musical accompaniment until the sheet had been removed.⁶¹ In his speech, Speaker Bercow made little reference to historical tension that was felt between a statue of The Queen and the sealing of Magna Carta. In contrast, Phillip Hammond directly addressed the issue, saying:

⁵⁹ One member of the public criticised the statue's aesthetics, saying 'it is an awful likeness of the Queen' in Ibid.

⁶⁰ 'Statue of the Queen Unveiled to Mark Magna Carta Milestone,' ITV News, 14 June 2015, <https://www.itv.com/news/2015-06-14/statue-of-the-queen-unveiled-to-mark-magna-carta-milestone/>, accessed 2 February 2020.

⁶¹ Ibid.

It struck me this morning that there might, to some people, appear to be something slightly incongruous in celebrating the 800th anniversary of the curtailing of the power of the monarch by unveiling a statue of the monarch.

Not at all. Because while John represented arguably the worst of monarchy, Queen Elizabeth II represents undoubtedly the best of monarchy.

While John exercised arbitrary power, Queen Elizabeth is the embodiment of the laws that protect our rights.

She represents the ultimate refinement of the principle of constitutional monarchy that has served the UK so well.⁶²

This was the same interpretation that was adopted by RMCL. In his introductory notes, Councillor Cotty, wrote, 'that is why I and my colleagues at Runnymede believed that a statue of Her Majesty the Queen, perfect constitutional monarch, would constitute a celebration of the successful monarchy which Magna Carta helped to bring into being.'⁶³ The context in which these events were taking place was equally important. Later that year, Queen Elizabeth was set to become Britain's longest serving monarch, surpassing the sixty-three years that Queen Victoria reigned. For Cotty, Magna Carta was a moment of beginning, setting into motion a series of events that culminated in the present day. This was a story of progress that, in Cotty's interpretation at least, had a degree of inevitability about it:

there should remain a lasting memory at Runnymede to record our admiration for and gratitude to those men of principle (and some rascals as well) who pushed through the Great Charter and then, over the next 800 years steered Britain to the free and stable country that it is today.⁶⁴

Some would view Cotty's interpretation as an overly romanticised and nostalgic understanding of the legacy of the charter, reminiscent of Whiggish interpretations of the charter.

Turning our attention to the penultimate paragraph of his introductory greetings Councillor Cotty briefly details that the erection of the statue is just the first stage of the project. He reminded his readers that, in order to complete the project, further funding was required. Future stages of the project would involve the installation of a stone path down towards the river, which would be flanked by two separate timelines (**fig.35**). One timeline will

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 'Magna Carta 800: A Pageant to Celebrate Magna Carta and a Ceremony Unveiling a Statue of HM The Queen,' booklet accompanying ceremony, 14 June 2015, Justin Champion, email message to author, 3 September 2015.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

feature all the Kings and Queens of England, Wales, Scotland, and for much of this time Ireland. On the opposite side a series of key milestones representing the development of liberty, freedom and justice. The piece will visually depict the journey from 1215 to today's constitutional monarchy.⁶⁵ This stone pathway will terminate at a newly constructed landing stage, and it was hoped this would act as the impetus for establishing a network of other historically interesting points along the Thames that people on boats could access.⁶⁶

Conclusion

With the unveiling of the statue complete, RBC's central contribution to the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta was installed and ready for the public to enjoy. This chapter has sought to provide a chronology of the Council's commemorative plans from 2010 to the anniversary in 2015. In this regard it represents one of the first histories of the commemorative activity at Runnymede in 2015. This chapter has predominantly focussed on some of RBC's more high-profile projects and activities, at the expense of their smaller initiatives.⁶⁷ There are two central points that begin to emerge. Firstly, the erection of the Queen statue once again underlines the malleability of the charter and its legacy. This was a new interpretation and way of viewing framing the charter that had not been made before. It also serves to illustrate the point that competing interpretations of the same event can exist at the same time and, as was the case here, come into conversation with one another. This further reinforces the idea that there is not one homogenous 'collective memory', but, instead, there exists a series of collective memories. The second point that is excavated from this episode relates more to the practice of public history. If, as we are told by Hilda Kean and Paul Martin, one of the purposes of Public History is to involve people in the creation of their own histories, then this seems to be what fundamentally characterised RBC's approach to the anniversary celebrations.⁶⁸ Unlike the independent museum, the Council had been blinkered in its approach to the anniversary,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁷ Runnymede Borough Council provided Egham Museum with £25,000 to supplement their pop-up exhibition in the local church. Smith, 'Curating the Idea of Magna Carta,' 43.

⁶⁸ Hilda Kean, 'Introduction,' in *The Public History Reader*, eds. Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (London: Routledge, 2013), xiii.

viewing it as a financial opportunity. It was the lack of engagement with the public, and an appreciation of the need to provide a robust legacy programme that was defined by its local benefits, that prevented the visitors' centre idea from being realised. Although it might seem unfair, does this then become an example of bad Public History practice, rather than simply bad history?

The next chapter will explore SCC's contributions to the eight hundredth anniversary celebrations. Following their decision to withdraw funding for the visitors' centre, SCC began working closely with the National Trust. The next chapter explores how this partnership developed, concentrating on how they approached these celebrations before detailing what was delivered. In doing this, it is possible to offer some tentative comparisons between the approach of RBC and that of SCC.

Art and Public History: Hew Locke and The Jurors installation

In December 2012, Surrey County Council (SCC) formally withdrew its support for the visitors' centre at Runnymede. In taking this action, it ended its partnership with Runnymede Borough Council (RBC). As the previous chapter explored, RBC moved forward with their own plans, unveiling a statue of Queen Elizabeth II on 14 June 2014 (**figs. 34-35**). Unsurprisingly, having publicly declared its intention to commemorate the eight hundredth anniversary, SCC were equally keen to move forward with their own plans. There were several reasons that contributed to SCC withdrawing their pledge of funding, but, as detailed in the previous chapter, many of the issues related to whether the investment would be of benefit to the whole county. It was decided that commemorative investment would be best served developing what already existed at the site, rather than necessarily building something new.¹ Interpretation at the site was an issue. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Runnymede was a palimpsest of commemorative moments. Each of its monuments and memorials had been erected at different times and were the products of distinct contemporary circumstance. In their own way, they responded, interpreted, and indeed framed the charter in different ways. The site was lacking in any interpretive continuity, which would explain to the site's visitors how these disparate memorials and monuments established connections to the moment of 1215. The historian, Nigel Saul, echoed these sentiments, 'currently, the Runnymede site is lacking in interpretive aids to assist the visitor who knows little of nothing about the site, or about the events of 1215.'² SCC does not own the Runnymede site. Given the direction of the statements made, following their withdrawal of funding for the visitors' centre, everything pointed toward a potential collaboration with the National Trust. Indeed, this proved to be where SCC directed much of their energies and resources for the anniversary from the beginning of 2013.

¹ Tanya Gupta, 'Magna Carta: Passions Still Running High in Runnymede,' BBC News, 14 June 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-22882941>, accessed 13 February 2020.

² Ibid. For further discussions relating to interpretation at heritage sites, see: Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016), 149-150.

This chapter explores the development of this partnership, focussing much of its attention on one contribution to the eight hundredth anniversary of commemorations, the commissioning of a public piece of artwork. The chapter is structured chronologically, tracing the development of SCC's commemorative plans from January 2013 up until the unveiling of *The Jurors* installation in June 2015 (**fig.36**). However, this chapter provides more than a simple chronology of events. The chapter looks to engage with two major themes and ideas. Firstly, it reflects upon the practice of public history as a collaborative and democratised method of producing history.³ In this sense, the circumstances that led to the artwork's commissioning and the motivations of both SCC and the National Trust become a central concern. Equally, this approach allows for some tentative comparisons to be made with the approach adopted by RBC in the previous chapter.

The second major theme that this chapter directly engages with is the idea is the relationship between Art and Public History. The relationship between Art and Public History is a burgeoning academic field of theoretical study.⁴ On the surface at least, it seems that this is a natural partnership of mutual interest and intersection. If we accept that a central tenet of Public History is its adoption of new, innovative, and creative ways of communicating the past, artwork that directly responds to history, using it as the foundation of its work, constitutes a form of Public History. In many respects, public artworks of this nature blur the traditional boundaries of established historiographical fields like that of memorialisation. When it comes to public artworks, issues of aesthetic, space, and experience come into sharp focus and, in many respects, are reminiscent of the memorials and monuments.⁵ Indeed, members of the public would not necessarily differentiate between a memorial and a piece of artwork on account of the similar functions they perform within society. Whilst it is undeniable, however, that there is a certain degree of creative commonality that links memorials, monuments, and

³ Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 7; Jay Winter, 'Public History and Historical Scholarship,' *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996), 169.

⁴ For example see: Karen Harvey, 'Envisioning the Past: Art, Historiography and Public History,' *Cultural and Social History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 527-543; Rebecca Bush and K. Tawny Paul, *Art and Public History: Approaches, Opportunities, and Challenges* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); Cauvin, *Public History*, 155-157.

⁵ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), ix-x.

artworks, I would argue that on account of their very nature pieces of art place a greater emphasis on creativity.

It seems unfair, then, to think about the informative and communicative implications of public artwork by using a similar theoretical frame to that of memorials and monuments.⁶ In many cases, the artists themselves are at pains to emphasise this distinction. To this end, *The Jurors* by the internationally acclaimed artist, Hew Locke, falls into this category of artwork. The second half of this chapter examines the creative process, drawing on an interview with the artist himself. This section is provocative, rather than definitive, raising questions about the value of art's expressive power to convey and communicate the past and the potential implications this might have for the Public Historian. In doing this, it will argue that *The Jurors* installation represents a more progressive form of remembering the past. One in which the public are not explicitly led in any interpretive direction, but, instead, are challenged to respond and engage with the issues raised. Locke's artwork provides a forum in which a conversation and debate around the themes and legacy of the charter can be had. In this sense, his artwork is far more dynamic than the American Bar Association monument to Magna Carta or the statue of the Queen.

The Background

From the very outset of SCC's first involvement with the Magna Carta anniversary commemorations, it was clear that, like RBC, they recognised the economic and cultural value in celebrating the charter. Six months after they withdrew their financial support for the visitors' centre at Runnymede, a report had been compiled by a small working-group, which was presented to Surrey County Council's Communities and Select Committee on 11 July 2013.⁷ The purpose of the report was to identify what steps SCC would take with regards to commemorating the anniversary of Magna Carta and it outlined a number of early ideas and

⁶ Whilst it might be unfair to approach the subject in the same way, there are undoubtedly some considerations and ideas that could be employed, relating to engagement and changing meaning.

⁷ Surrey County Council, 'Communities Select Committee Report: Magna Carta,' 11 July 2013, <https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s6963/Communities%20Select%20Committee%20Report%20-%20Magna%20Carta%20Programme%20-%2001.07.2013.pdf>, accessed 24 January 2020.

opportunities that could be explored. SCC ultimately were looking to turn Runnymede into a 'culturally branded destination and tourism identity for the Runnymede area'.⁸ It was hoped that 'Magna Carta Country', as it was to be called, would provide a method of unpacking the national and international historic importance of the location. In many ways, what they were proposing was a direct response to the issues and concerns articulated above by Nigel Saul.

Whilst Magna Carta was undoubtedly the central attraction, SCC acknowledged the importance of improving the visitor experience as a whole:

The area will embrace the site of the sealing of the Magna Carta, Runnymede Pleasure Ground, the ancient historic National Trust Runnymede Meadow Estate, Wraysbury, Ankerwycke, the Magna Carta and Kennedy Memorials – as well as including the RAF Memorial and its adjacent woodland setting... Key to the concept would be the promotion of access to the wider adjacent countryside and landscape for leisure and recreation purposes – land-based on the southern stretch and water-based activities in the northern-section ...⁹

Runnymede and the sealing of Magna Carta was to become an entry point and the main attraction, which would initially draw people to the site. Once visitors were at the site, however, there was a clear desire to keep them either on the site or within the local area, contributing to the local economy.¹⁰ Consideration had also been given to the concerns of businesses within Egham. Local business owners and managers had expressed concern over the potential influx of tourists to Runnymede and that this might not directly provide an economic benefit to them within Egham town. In response, SCC proposed to brand Egham as the 'gateway' to Magna Carta Country, with one point of access to this being through the town, providing benefit to all.¹¹ The 'gateway' to Magna Carta Country had potential. One suspects that much of this thinking was influenced by the success of places such as Gettysburg National Park in the United States. Like Runnymede, Gettysburg is an expanse of open space, notable for the fact that something of great national importance happened there. Over the years, however,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid

it has slowly morphed and been framed as the site where America's 'New birth of Freedom took place', employing increasingly inventive methods of interpretation to aid visitors.¹² Given much of the rhetoric that surrounded the commemorations, one suspects that a similar project – albeit on a much smaller scale – was the source of inspiration.

There were some less inventive suggestions that joined the Magna Carta Country idea, such as making improvements to the existing facilities on site. There were, however, some more inventive ideas also suggested. A smart phone application to be developed in partnership with Royal Holloway, University of London, reflected the desire to improve the site's interpretation and offer visitors with a more modern method of engagement with the site than the traditional interpretation boards. Another suggested the erection of a nationally funded and designed memorial for the anniversary.

Despite the many positives that can be drawn from the various proposals, the Community Services Select Committee raised several concerns. Unsurprisingly, given the economic climate of the early 2010s and the austerity measures and cuts to public expenditure faced by local and regional councils, scrutiny of the proposal's financial implications dominated proceedings. One of the most scathing criticisms reads: 'the absence of a detailed business case justifying the expenditure by the County Council of £1.2m (in addition to the highways provision) on these proposals at a time when there is considerable pressure on the Council's resources.'¹³ The committee, however, was cognisant of the fact that there was an expectation on them to celebrate the charter's anniversary. Having been so publicly supportive of the visitors' centre, this was hardly a surprise, but several committee members remarked that the council would be widely criticised should they not mark the occasion in some way.¹⁴ Although cautious in its appraisal of the plans outlined within the report, this was a project that was widely supported. As has been a theme throughout this thesis, the committee members had a

¹² 'Gettysburg: National Military Park, Pennsylvania,' National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/gett/index.htm>, accessed 24 January 2020; see: Emily George, 'Then and Now: Gettysburg Battlefield,' *On Point: The Journal of Army History* 18, no. 1 (2012): 67; J. Peter Byrne, 'Hallowed Ground: The Gettysburg Battlefield in Historic Preservation Law,' *Tulane Environmental Law* 22, no.2 (2009): 219-221.

¹³ Surrey County Council, 'Communities Select Committee Recommendations: Magna Carta,' 11 July 2013, 53, <http://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s7190/Communities%20Select%20Committee%20recommendations%20-%20Magna%20Carta%20Anniversary.pdf>, accessed 24 January 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

clear appreciation of the level of expectation that was on them, recognising both the potential contemporary benefits and acknowledging the importance of investing in a project that was fitting of the moment being celebrated.

Over the course of 2013, SCC's plans and proposals moved forwards apace and it was agreed that one of their main contributions to the anniversary would be the erection of a monument. By 19th May 2014 SCC and the National Trust were in formal collaboration, with both organisations contributing to the development of the installation. The Bristol-based art production company, *Situations*, was appointed to assist with the commissioning process as this was an area that lay outside the expertise of both SCC and the National Trust. A selection of high profile and internationally acclaimed artists had been shortlisted and were in the process of submitting their proposals based on the information they had been sent.¹⁵ Interestingly and unsurprisingly, the manner in which the memorial was now being described had changed over the intervening year. No longer was this just a nationally funded and designed monument but instead had become an 'iconic commission in the landscape of a British memorial to Magna Carta'.¹⁶ It is interesting to observe, that at this point the rhetoric accompanying the proposal was suggestive of a traditional memorial or monument, rather than the piece of public artwork that was delivered.

Briefing Note: Magna Carta Art Commission at Runnymede

Attention needs to be given to the briefing material that was sent out to the artists. This document outlined the purposes of the project, providing a frame of reference in which the artists could respond and base their ideas. But it also serves as a suitable indication of the motivations and desires of SCC and the National Trust. Given that this was a public funded venture it would not have been unreasonable to suggest the artists were expected to work within a certain scope. The artists' brief sent was incredibly open to interpretation. The key stakeholders were progressive in their thinking of what form this artwork might take. This is

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Surrey County Council, 'Communities Select Committee Report: Magna Carta 2015,' 19 May 2014, 110, <http://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s13803/Magna%20Carta%20progress%20report.pdf>, accessed 24 January 2020.

reflected by the inclusion of phrases such as ‘willing to be stretched in their consideration of what a permanent public artwork might be’.¹⁷

However, being stretched to their limits in terms of what they expected was one thing, yet one can clearly see that this artwork had to be more than just aesthetically pleasing: ‘This partnership will oversee the art commission with the ambition to create a high quality, enduring artwork, which responds to and broadens the public understanding of Runnymede as a place of profound historic importance.’¹⁸ The stakeholders clearly wanted a piece of artwork that not only responded to and engaged with the public, but also actively increased their understanding of the events of 1215. In summarising what they wanted from the final commission, they stated:

The proposal should address the following key points:

The work should be integrated or interact with the landscape and its history in a truly innovative and exciting way;

The work should have a strong visual and aesthetic presence;

The work should act as a catalyst for discussion and exploration about the key ideas embodied in the Magna Carta – in particular gathering and conflict resolution;

The work should mark the Magna Carta’s 800th anniversary year, but should also take into consideration the on-going significance of the area.¹⁹

In contrast to the RBC’s statue of the Queen, the approach adopted by both SCC and the National Trust was completely different. One could argue that this is an unfair comparison, as, beyond sharing the same end objective – commemorating the charter – these were two entirely different projects. This reflects the diversity in form and methods with which Public History is practiced in the twenty-first century. Unlike RBC, the partnership between SCC and the National Trust wanted to promote creativity and engage with the Magna Carta narrative in a meaningful fashion, which was in a manner that many would not have expected. The historical context included is brief. No other information is included apart from quoting Clause

¹⁷ Situations, ‘Magna Carta Art Commission at Runnymede: The Artist’s Brief,’ 25 April 2014, Peter Milton, Head of Cultural Services, email message to author, 21 September 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

39, of the 1215 charter, and stating the document laid down: ‘the fundamental principle of English Justice, the basis of law for all modern democracies, including the United States Constitution, and inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.’²⁰ This was the only historical frame in which the artists were required to respond, and it was hardly one that limited their creative potential.

The importance of place was another central theme, which was of great importance to the stakeholders. As has been referenced in previous chapters, to some, the landscape at Runnymede is a landscape of liberty. There are no other physical reminders that have been left behind. For the most part, the site has remained undeveloped, and the erection of monuments and memorials have not altered its historic character too drastically, allowing the imagination of visitors and commentators to contemplate how that historic meeting in 1215 might have unfolded. A quote from the National Trust neatly captures the historic importance of the site both for the events that have taken place there and as a continual place of meeting:

Part memorial, part pleasure ground, the Spirit of Place at Runnymede and Ankerwyke is evoked not only by the events of 800 years ago, nor just the ideas that flowed from it since, but the sense of gathering, of bringing people together, echoing the early significance of the place as a meeting point long before and long after King John stood here. In many ways the landscape is the legacy of Magna Carta.²¹

In many respects the finest memorial left for Magna Carta is the physical landscape itself. There are two overarching themes that emerge from the Artists’ Brief. Firstly, the stakeholders wanted something more than a traditional commemorative monument and were actively encouraging proposals that would stretch their expectations, providing endorsement for creative responses. This commission needed to be dynamic. It was expected that members of the public should actively engage with this artwork rather than observe it. The second theme running through the brief was the importance placed upon the landscape. The artwork commissioned needed to respect, complement, and reflect the themes of the locality.

²⁰ Ibid, 3.

²¹ Ibid, 5.

The Artist is Commissioned

On 20th June 2014 the stakeholders listened to a selection of presentations from their shortlisted artists. After much deliberation, the British artist Hew Locke was selected to deliver the commission. The internationally acclaimed artist, Hew Locke, was born in Edinburgh in 1959. In 1966, along with his family, moved to Guyana where he stayed until 1980 when he returned to the UK. He completed his MA degree in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art.²² Since this, Locke has become a world-famous artist and sculptor having successfully created and installed several prominent public art installations across the world. His work has been displayed in prestigious institutions such as *Tate Britain*, *The New York Museum of Art and Design*, and *The Bell House*.²³ In addition to this, Locke has also produced art for commemorative events. As part of the 2011 Folkestone Triennial his piece *For those in Peril* was displayed.²⁴ The fact that the commission was won by someone of such repute was a reflection of the internationally important event that the installation was set to celebrate. Over the years, Locke has not been limited to a specific size of work and he is equally adept at producing large-scale wall hangings to small-scale, layered drawings. His work predominantly engages with the appropriation of the emblems of power. Much of his work has used royal portraiture, coats of arms, or, public statues as his canvas. He then adds to these through the addition of beading, ornaments, and even plastic flowers as a means of commenting and engaging with the idea of power.

A uniting theme in all of Locke's work, however, is his fascination with history. Speaking to *The Guardian* in 2015, ahead of the opening of the *Artist and Empire: Facing Britain's Imperial Past* exhibition at the Tate Britain, he explained that if he was not an artist, he would have been an historian.²⁵ He continued by articulating the contemporary

²² 'Hew Locke,' Hales Gallery, <http://www.halesgallery.com/artists/15-Hew-Locke/overview/>, accessed 23 January 2020.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hew Locke, 'For Those in Peril on the Sea,' <http://www.hewlocke.net/thoseinperil.html>, accessed 12 February 2020.

²⁵ Tim Adams, interview with Hew Locke, 'Hew Locke: "If I wasn't an artist, I'd be a historian",' *The Guardian*, 22 November 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/22/hew-locke-artist-interview-artist-and-empire-tate-britain>, accessed 24 January 2020.

importance of his artwork. In relation to a piece that was set to be exhibited in New York, he said:

I want to make art about what is happening today. I mean, we are sitting surrounded by a collection of model boats that I am working on for a show in New York. The boats may have some historical background, but they are also about what is happening now in the Mediterranean, what is happening with people trying to get from Haiti to the US. History is both now and in the past.²⁶

This is a central theme in much of Locke's work. Through the medium of art, Locke comments and engages with contemporary issues. The importance that Locke places upon historical context, in addition to his awareness of seeing the current through the prism of history made him an obvious choice for the commission. Locke believes that history is a tool to be utilised for public education as it is much the backbone of his own work. In many respects the differences between his own work and that of an historian are small. The imaginative aspect of the historian's work has been the subject of academic debate. Writing in the 1980s, Raphael Samuel argued that the professionalised disciplining of the historical profession limited the potential of public history. In the quest to deliver an account of the past that was factually accurate, the historian's imagination was an unnecessary component.²⁷ Locke's work is obviously stimulated by his appreciation for history, and as such, he is arguably as much artist as he is public historian.

Hew Locke in Conversation: Working up a proposal

As a commission for the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, *The Jurors* is intriguing for the fact that very little of it makes explicit reference to the charter itself. Apart from one panel on the twelve chairs, all the others depict a range of individuals and historic moments from a global history, spanning from ancient history to the present day. There

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume I: Past and Present in Contemporary Cultures* (London: Verso, 1994), 430.

is no doubt the commission is thought provoking piece, which combines his undoubted artistic skill and his thoughtful approach to history. What follows is his personal reflections on his piece, which provides an insight into both the commissioning and his creative process. Unless otherwise stated, Locke's comments are drawn from an interview that I conducted with him on 25th October 2015, a few months after *The Jurors* was officially unveiled.

Our discussion started with Locke's knowledge of the charter prior to the award of the commission. His response contained two central ideas. Firstly, there was a visual element to his answer, reflecting upon the charter's appearance:

I knew it as this very dull looking document. I'm a visual artist so I'm into visual stuff – a dull looking document but like Leonardo's cartoon in the National Gallery – it's a dull looking document in a separate room at the British Library and that instantly makes it something significant.²⁸

In commenting upon Magna Carta's appearance and highlighting the fact that it was a 'dull looking document', he acknowledged one of the key challenges that faced those celebrating the anniversary. As historians and commentators have pointed out, Magna Carta is a tatty piece of parchment, written in a language that many are unable to read and certainly do not feel a connection towards. One of the key challenges of the anniversary was to connect the physical relic to its wider legacy in a way that was both meaningful and appropriate, but most importantly engaging. Additionally, Locke reminisced on an encounter he had with the charter when he was a child as he was growing up in Guyana. He remembers 'seeing this document almost fall out or being in the middle of some children's educational material'. Through his childhood eyes, he had no appreciation of what the document was or what it represented. But he knew it was significant, if only for the fact that it had fallen out of the educational material he had referenced. When he became aware of the commission, he admitted that this same

²⁸ Hew Locke, in discussion with the author, 23 October 2015. Unless otherwise stated, the following observations are drawn from this interview.

memory popped into his mind, leading him to say: 'Oh yeah, this thing was knocking around in my head for a very long time.'

Before expanding on the commissioning process, he took one last moment to seriously reflect on the charter and what it was that most interested him about the commission:

On a serious note you become aware that this is quite a significant document, you know? Even though people will say well it didn't mean this much, didn't mean that much in reality, what it means in the national psyche is something different. Do you see what I mean? And that's what I find interesting about the document.

This was a very important and nuanced historical point, reflecting an awareness and appreciation of the complexities of the charter and its legacy. What interests him the most is the dichotomy that exists between the charter as viewed by the individual and Magna Carta as a key part of a national story. As the proceeding chapters have demonstrated, Magna Carta has been a source of inspiration across the decades for certain individuals and specific groups, but this reverence for the charter has not been homogenous or, indeed, necessarily continuous. In comparison, our national story is intimately intertwined with the charter, becoming something that we are characterised by. One of the biggest issues for Locke was the fact that he had a 'crazy busy year' ahead of him, and, as a result, was fully aware that taking on a potential project of this magnitude presented a real professional risk. Despite his busy schedule, Locke confessed that commissions such as this do not come about very regularly, and when you are invited to propose an idea, it is very difficult to refuse. Regardless of his previous work and international reputation, this fact alone, serves to underline the fact that this represented a huge professional opportunity, and to be commissioned as the artist was a privilege and honour.

Unsurprisingly, there were a host of potential ideas that came into Locke's head. At the same time, however, he was trying to second-guess what the stakeholders and public might go for: 'you're trying to put forward an idea which is acceptable, which people will go for on the committee - right?' His early ideas responded to the theme of justice, ranging

considerably, from a figure of a Black Lady Justice to twelve children as justice figures, dressed in every day clothes holding swords and shields. Even at this very early stage, Locke confessed to being drawn to an idea involving twelve. He later professed to being unsure of what these might be: 'the idea of the twelve, that was an early thing – but twelve what?' With art, he reflected, you must go through the embarrassing ideas, before you begin to hone it down, it is a fundamental part of any creative process.

On the 20th June 2014, the shortlisted artists presented their proposals to the stakeholders. Each artist had a maximum of one and a quarter hours to present: forty-five minutes' presentation followed by a thirty-minute question and answer session.²⁹ Locke, by this stage, had whittled down his ideas to two concepts - a Lady Justice figure and the twelve chairs. Even at this stage, Locke confesses that his ideas were still extremely abstract. With the aid of some pre-fabricated Marquette, Locke presented an idea which saw his chairs adorned with animal features that would also tie into the wider theme of justice.³⁰ It was during this process of thinking about how to decorate and make use of the chairs, that Locke had an idea which, one suspects on reflection, seemed 'very simple and obvious'. One of the abstract possibilities that he proposed was an idea based on Nelson Mandela's prison cell. The back of the chair was going to be sculpted into bars to represent the cell and the arms of the chair would be the keys. It was this breakthrough idea that Locke described as, 'the key to the whole piece for me and also obviously for the committee who ...commissioned me.' A few days passed before Locke learnt that his proposal had been successful. On the one hand, his idea relating to his Lady Justice figure had not been successful because the panel felt that it was not interactive enough. On the other hand, his proposal of the twelve chairs was deemed suitably interactive, engaging, and, indeed, creative enough to win the commission, underlining the notion that the committee were looking for something more than a traditional monument.

²⁹ Situations, 'The Artist's Brief,' 9.

³⁰ Locke, in discussion with the author.

Hew Locke in Conversation: From Commissioning to Unveiling

Once Locke was commissioned, he had just under a year to research and fabricate the finished piece. He arrived at the final style and shape of his chairs through experimentation and what made most practical sense. One of the first things to be removed from consideration were the chair's armrests after Locke realised these were both redundant and technically irritating to fabricate, resulting in a longer and more expensive build time. Also, by making this decision the chairs had become less prescriptive in the manner that people could or should sit on them. There were many prototype chairs made by a local furniture maker in London. Many basic wooden chairs were made and after a period of making their backs shorter and seats slightly longer a design was settled upon. On top of this however was the matter of getting individual panels for each chair also fabricated. The time spent on these was obviously dependent upon the direction that the research was heading. Practically speaking, once Locke had decided upon the subject for each panel and worked up a design, he was able to send them off to the fabricators. They would then send back the modelled-up design for Hew to personally work on:

I would work on them myself personally because otherwise it looks like something off – trust me – no matter how skilled the work is – and these sculptors and model makers I work with are very, very, very skilled, it still has this - a deadness to it which is a very insulting thing to say, maybe, but that's to do with the fact that, that it's something fabricated – it's not their own work, their own work would be very, very different..... so I have to bring it to life in this studio you know? And also in the foundry.

This is an important point to consider. For Locke each chair has an individualism and sense of life, which something that is fabricated would not possess. Each chair then is a unique piece of artwork, that has been lovingly crafted. They are aesthetically pleasing and visually rich, demonstrating both their craft and skill. Some of the panels fell into place quicker than others, and the process of research and production varied drastically between each of the pieces. There were some panels which did not fall into place as quickly as others. For the installation to be ready for unveiling in June 2015 the foundry required all the designs by January. Hew

confesses that even by November 2014 he was still frantically researching and, if the truth be told, was researching and adding to designs right up to the absolute deadline. There were moments when he was working on adapting the moulds at the foundry instead of his studio due to the proximity of the deadline.

If the practicalities of getting the final chair design and panels was difficult, the historical research that went into each chair was more time consuming and as Locke wryly acknowledged, 'where it got interesting'. One gets the impression that bringing together twenty-four individual panels, which were ideally all to be thematically connected, was always going to be a challenge. This challenge was undoubtedly exacerbated by Locke's own passion and love for history. In describing his research process, a number of things become apparent. The first noticeable feature of Locke's work was the fact that from the very outset he saw his piece as being more than a comment on British justice, which would only speak to British people. This fact alone should not come as a great surprise given his own ethnic origins. However, it is the reasoning that he provides that says a lot about Hew as an individual:

Then I spent ages trying to decide, well how do we involve it as a wider thing...how do we make it less about – this is about British justice... Britain today is very different to what Britain was, you know what I mean? Even say 100 years ago, you know what I mean? So let's make this universal. Also, I wanted to be sensitive to other people's sensibility of the law because you're doing this and start to realise this is about Magna Carta, but then there is Sharia Law which is with all it's things, so I decided you know what let's not get in to all that – that's, that's too problematic an area right? Let's not go there. But at the same time we have to figure out a way to deal with that ...

It is a testament to Locke that he appreciates the difficulties of dealing with this very long and complicated history. But it is his awareness and appreciation for the way in which society evolves and is never constant that is perhaps most marked. His sensitivity towards other global laws also demonstrates the ways in which he wanted his finished piece to speak to people of all races and religions. For a man that was commissioned to create an artwork for the anniversary of a document key to British justice, he clearly wanted to create more than an installation that celebrated this fact. Arguably, the greatest testament to both the installation as a finished piece and Locke as the artist was his desire not to shy away from the challenge that his global

approach presented. This was not an artwork that celebrated one group or looked to venerate one nation; it was an artwork that was inclusive, responding to the central themes of the commission. But this is fundamentally part of the expressive power and value of art. It can be bolder in the questions it asks or poses and more imaginative in the way these questions *are* constructed and framed.

Each panel on the chairs represents a different piece of history that in some way speaks to the theme of global justice (**figs.37-38**). Some could say that Locke's choices are an eclectic combination of moments taken from history. For example, on the inside panel of chair number two, Locke chose to depict the running aground of the Exxon Valdez in 1989 – an event that led to eleven million gallons of crude oil being spilled into the Gulf of Alaska. This event, and the subsequent environmental disasters after, led to the establishment of the Ceres Principles, a code of environmental moral conduct. By contrast, the inside panel of chair eleven is a depiction of an Ancient Egyptian scales which are topped by the head of Ma'at, the goddess of truth justice and balance.³¹ To some observers, the artwork has an incoherence in its form because it draws on seemingly disparate topics. But this is its strength, rather than weakness. Unlike other memorials or monuments, it does not project one clear message. It instead presents people with an array of topics that will spark debate around some of the issues and concerns that the memorial depicts.

Reflecting upon how he identified each historical moment to depict, Locke describes a process that gave him as much pleasure as it did difficulty. Some panels were obvious from the outset. For example, Locke reels off three panels that were obvious – these being Magna Carta, Mandela, and Aung San Suu Kyi. By contrast, Locke laments over some panels that caused him much greater issues than others. He admits to struggling with how to depict the issue of women's rights:

³¹ For a more in-depth breakdown of all of the historical moments Locke chose to represent, see: 'What Does The Jurors Represent?' The National Trust: Runnymede and Ankerwycke, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/runnymede/features/what-does-the-jurors-represent>, accessed 22 January 2020.

... trying to deal with women's rights was a bit of a nightmare because I was trying to find – well find – who can I find here, who I find here to represent this? Erm, and I, and try not to avoid any kind of overt feminist statement because I'm a man making this piece of work, I'm not getting into that whole Nick Clegg and that kind of I, I find that very cringy. Ok, so, I did lots and lots of research trying to find out – flag up this woman, flag up that woman and then I came up with this Phillis Wheatley, who was an African-American poet who had to prove her poetry in, not in court but she had to prove her poetry because it was being denied as being poetry. I was trying to find an image about slavery and the abolition movement from a black point-of-view basically. So, I wanted to have an image of Mary Prince, who wrote an autobiography, a slave autobiography. Quite important in the abolition struggle, but the problem was I couldn't find an image of Mary Prince, so I had to go with an image of Phillis Wheatley and get both of their names in there.

The painstaking approach Locke took when deciding upon how best to capture the issue of women's rights is something which credits his approach to the piece. It wasn't because there was a lack of potential females, but rather the issue was finding the correct person. As he quite perceptively noted, if this subject was handled in an insensitive fashion he ran the risk of producing something deemed as 'cringy'. Locke appreciated that a high-profile installation such as this could be open to criticism. The moments from history were all picked on the basis that they could be used as examples for much broader points.

Hew stresses that as an installation, *The Jurors* is not a 'collection of heroes.' The Rhodes Must Fall Campaign of 2015 has brought ideas such as these into an increasingly sharper focus within the public domain.³² How do we interpret past heroes, in a society that no longer shares the same values? The rationale for his comment is:

I was putting some, some people in who I disagree with. Cornelius Sorabji was the first Indian to study at Oxford, first Indian woman to practice Law, first this, first that ... She was so many firsts that I felt, well look I can't exclude this woman but there is lots of things about her I have issues with – a lot of issues ... but ... Ok fine this person [is] here. So ... what the whole thing started to become is this is not a collection of heroes.

In demonstrating his point further, Locke makes reference to Nelson Mandela and in particular the recent film starring Idris Elba. Nelson Mandela is seen by many as a hero of

³² Carolyn E. Holmes and Melanie Loehwig, 'Icons of the Old Regime: Challenging South African Public Memory Strategies in #RhodesMustFall,' *Journal of South African Studies*, 42 (2016): 1219-1221.

sorts, however, as the film depicts quite graphically there was a stage in his life where he beat his wife. There were calls for this scene to be removed but Mandela himself said it must stay citing that this was who he was at that stage in his life. *The Jurors* is not a collection of heroes and by Locke's own admission some of the figures represented within his installation he does not agree with.

Ultimately, the last word on the installation and what he attempted to do should belong to Hew Locke:

I'm putting something out there of people who I may not necessarily agree with but that's the point – the point of this thing is for people to sit down and have a conversation with other people who they may not necessarily agree with, but that's our parliamentary system, that's our judicial system, that's, that's how we operate here – you know what I mean? You don't beat somebody up, or you do, some people may do, but I mean, it's about sitting down and thrashing things out with – you don't make peace with your friends, you make peace with your enemies basically – you know what I mean? – that type of thing so, that was the driving force with this thing all the way along you know?

Locke argues that his work is only ever complete when it has people sitting on the chairs talking about the issues that are reflected in his artwork. This is part of the rationale for calling his installation an artwork rather than a monument or memorial. But as Locke admits, his work is designed to be provocative. People are supposed to respond to the scenes that are depicted, and question some of his creative choices. The installation is not a collection of heroes and it does not project a central message. It is an exploration of an idea, and one that invites you to explore those ideas as well. It is defined by its multicultural inclusivity and will continue to evolve with changing contemporary circumstance.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the circumstances that surrounded the commissioning of Hew Locke's, *The Jurors*. It has showcased the artist's creative process, providing a background narrative of artistic process that complements the finished installation. In many ways, however, this chapter acts as tentative point of comparison between the previous, highlighting the

different processes that lead to the erection of monuments, memorials, and artworks. Moreover, it clearly demonstrates the various ways in which the practice of public history in relation to commemorative moments – that is work that manifests itself outside of the academy - can differ. SCC and the National Trust's project was characterised by a commitment to creativity and collaboration. The way in which they went about their work was in line with what we might think of as good public history practice. At every step of the way, the project was properly scrutinised, and the key stakeholders were held accountable. Turning our attention back to the previous chapter, could the same be said for the relationship between RBC and RMCL?

This chapter has also attempted to engage with the burgeoning historiography that seeks to analyse the relationship between Art and the discipline of Public History. Artistic responses to history are becoming an ever-present feature of our society and so too will the critical examination of this relationship. Work is, however, already beginning to be conducted. As Karen Harvey asserts, 'history draws upon techniques and skills that rely on creativity, aesthetics and the imagination.'³³ Undoubtedly, public art presents the historian with a challenge. The issues it raises in concern to *how* people engage with the past are indeed complicated. There are, however, two points at which the historian's intervention is required. The first relates to the creative process of the artist, and the way in which the evidence is interpreted in non-textual forms. The second, relates more to how people respond and engage with public art as a means of getting historical knowledge. But as Harvey concludes, 'it is as a literary practice that the discipline of history becomes an act of representation; it is as a creative practice that the discipline of history becomes an imaginative way of knowing.'³⁴

³³ Harvey, 'Envisioning the Past,' 538.

³⁴ Ibid.

'800 years ago, King John put his seal to a document that would change the world': Reflections on Magna Carta 2015

'It's the kind of thing we Brits do so well....This whole thing is saying something important did happen and it's worth commemorating,' said David Starkey, as he described the events that took place at Runnymede on 15 June 2015.¹ Those in attendance would have no doubt echoed Starkey's sentiments. For those that were not invited to Runnymede and, instead, followed proceedings via the BBC's live web feed, one suspects that they too would have arrived at a similar conclusion.

The morning of 15 June – the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta – possessed a magisterial quality. Everything about that morning was choreographed. There was drama and ceremony, mixed with celebration and 'national' pride. As Starkey said, everyone present that day knew something important had happened. It was a classic example of actions speaking louder than words. But for some – probably those not present - what took place in June 2015 was deeply incongruous. Those in attendance at Runnymede were remembering an event that sought to limit the monarch's power, but rather ironically, did so with the same levels of ceremony and pomp commonly associated with occasions of royal celebration. There is no doubting that there was an historical irony in what took place, but it needs to be remembered that the monarch, much like those invited guests, was ultimately at Runnymede to reaffirm her commitments to the principles of the great charter.

For those gathered at Runnymede on the morning of 15 June, this commemorative service was about much more than simply remembering the events of 1215. Instead, guests were pausing to reflect and celebrate the eight-hundred-year legacy of the settlement reached at Runnymede. A legacy that had far surpassed the confines of the water meadow that had witnessed the events of 1215. What was taking place in 2015 was a physical manifestation of the multi-layering of memory – the event and its legacy and their symbiotic relationship.

¹ Tanya Gupta and Clark Ainsworth, 'As it Happened: Magna Carta 800th,' BBC News, 15 June 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-england-surrey-33030384>, accessed 12 December 2019.

The focus of this chapter is simple: ‘what was it all about?’ Should we, as historians and interested members of the public, uncritically accept that the commemorative service which took place on Monday 15 June 2015 was simply a well-orchestrated event of remembrance? The 5,000 people gathered on the water meadow were there simply to remember the sealing of a rather tatty brown piece of parchment, written in a language that most no longer comprehend. Or, should we accept that the act of remembrance is, in itself, a political act? Therefore, it stands to reason, we should break the event down, and critique and analyse it as such. Acts of remembrance are deliberately choreographed and designed to reinforce narratives of the establishment.

There are many ways in which the commemorative ceremony could be deconstructed and critiqued, but my analysis will be conducted as follows. First, and most importantly, we must view commemorative moments historically. Despite what some might think, commemorative moments are not ahistorical. Commemorative events are multi-purposed and any survey of the growing literature concerned with theorising the practice of commemoration stresses this point. As part of this, we need to accept that an historic event is rarely remembered and celebrated on a national scale solely because of its importance. Historic events punctuate national psyches and there is no better example of this than in Britain. However, historic moments, and likewise people, are remembered as much for the narrative structures to which and with which they can connect. Sadly, one result of this is the cynical manipulation of history for the benefit of the state.²

Second, it is pertinent to consider the idea of social expectation, that is that significant events, such as the anniversary of Magna Carta, need to be commemorated in a fashion that is appropriate to their perceived importance. There were many markers of this anniversary’s significance: a national committee had been planning and coordinating events many years before the key date; investment both in the form of time and money, and perhaps in an age of austerity this was more important; and lastly, this was an event of local, regional, national, and

² There are plenty of academic works that cover these ideas. For a general introduction to the state manipulation of history outside of commemorative contexts, see Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London: Profile Books, 2010). Ludmilla Jordanova’s *History in Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006) provides another detailed discussion of the political uses of the past.

even international standing. Given the level of pre-event excitement anything less than a commemorative event with the usual British pomp would have looked, and, no doubt, felt odd.

Third, building upon Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, there is no long-standing tradition of commemorative services of this scale happening at Runnymede.³ What took place in June 2015 was actually very new. As a result, this service was situated within a long history of commemorative activity, but the events at Runnymede were taking place there for the first time. How were those organising going to ensure they gave the public their quota of historic frivolity?

Equally, this chapter will also pursue a further line of argument, namely that anniversaries, such as this, which are not an overt celebration of monarchy, expose holes in the material nature of commemoration within Britain. For example, if we were to assume that the traditional forms of commemoration were not available – for this I refer to royal pageantry – what other ways could we conceivably celebrate such a milestone anniversary? From this perspective, it might be argued persuasively that the presence of royalty and its associated pageantry actually serves a symbolic function – one that denotes importance and grandeur – and, even slightly controversially, suggests that they too are a part, rather than observers, of a broader commemorative culture. Lastly, this chapter will consider how these performative elements help to reinforce established structures and serve to bind participants and observers into a sense of collective belonging and identity.

Setting the scene for 2015: the political and cultural context

Politically however, 2010 was a year of change within Britain, when, following the general election and after 13 years, a Labour government was replaced by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. One of the most immediate, and in some people's opinion necessary, changes was the introduction of economic austerity; indeed, a private letter from Liam Byrne, former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, stating 'I'm afraid there is no money', was

³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

made public.⁴ Within this context, public funding suffered and financing any form of commemorative event was likely to be liable to increased scrutiny. When asked what he felt one of the greatest challenges confronting the anniversary celebrations would be, Sir Robert Worcester, Chairman of the Magna Carta 800th Committee, speaking in August 2011, stated:

We're living in a time of austerity and, for something that would receive millions from the Government for its celebration, I'm afraid now has to beg, borrow and steal funding for a commemoration that is deserved for the 800th anniversary of the most important legal document ever written in English.⁵

2010 also marked the beginnings of a cultural shift that increasingly emphasised the importance of nationhood and identity. This was evident within much of the political landscape of the day. Under Michael Gove, the then Minister for Education, a broad programme of reform was carried out on the National Curriculum. There was not a subject that did not escape the proposed reforms, but some of the most radical proposed changes were directed at history. Speaking at the annual Conservative Party conference on 5 October that year, 2010, Gove outlined his plans to ensure all students learned a narrative of British history:

Our history has moments of pride, and shame, but unless we fully understand the struggles of the past we will not properly value the liberties of the present. The current approach we have to history denies children the opportunity to hear our island story. Children are given a mix of topics at primary, a cursory run through Henry the Eighth and Hitler at secondary and many give up the subject at 14, without knowing how the vivid episodes of our past become a connected narrative. Well, this trashing of our past has to stop.⁶

Gove, in his choice of title, was making the connection to Henrietta Marshall's *Our Island Story: A History of Britain for Boys and Girls from the Romans to Queen Victoria*, first published in 1905.⁷ To bolster the legitimacy of his reforms he also announced that Simon Schama, presenter of the BBC series, *A History of Britain*, had agreed to act as the historical advisor to

⁴ 'Treasury Chief's Note to Successor: There's No Money,' BBC News, 17 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8688470.stm, accessed 23 September 2019.

⁵ Sir Robert Worcester, in discussion with the author, 7 August 2011.

⁶ Michael Gove, 'All Pupils will Learn Our Island Story,' speech delivered at Conservative Party Conference 5 October 2010, <http://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/601441>, accessed 23 August 2019.

⁷ H. E. Marshall, *Our Island Story: A History of Britain* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014).

ministers for the planned overhaul. Gove's plans were greeted with a tepid response, with many left-wing critics accusing the Coalition government of turning history lessons into nationalist propaganda classes. Academics such as Professor Tom Devine remarked: 'I am root-and-branch opposed to Gove's approach. It smells of whiggery; of history as chauvinism. You cannot pick out aspects of the past that may be pleasing to people.'⁸ This debate, however, did not dissipate and attempts at reform continued well until the next general election in 2015.

The planned changes to the curriculum were music to the ears of those sitting on the Magna Carta 800th Committee, who, in 2010, had stated their desire to see Magna Carta put back onto the school curriculum. In an interview in 2011, Sir Robert Worcester recounted a conversation between the former Canadian ambassador, the German ambassador, and himself, whilst attending a meeting at Ditchley Park. He had asked both about the general level of interest or knowledge of Magna Carta in their respective countries. He had expected to be greeted with an answer that reaffirmed his suspicions – that the levels of knowledge would be good in Canada, whilst in Germany it would be non-existent. However, to his surprise, the German ambassador answered by saying that Magna Carta featured on their syllabus as the foundation of democracy. In a state of surprise, Worcester replied by noting that he did not know this and that, interestingly, it did not feature within the British syllabus.⁹ This was a rather embarrassing truth that, for those connected with the anniversary committee, needed to be rectified.

This was not the only aspect of politics and British culture that would slowly turn inwards over the next five years. In 2010, the Conservatives' pledge was to make Britain 'Great' again and 'change Britain for the better'.¹⁰ Many of their undertakings were to give greater autonomy to the individual, based on less state intervention and more 'people power'.¹¹ However, nestled within the manifesto of 2010 was the promise that there would be a

⁸ Charlotte Higgins, 'Historians say Michael Gove Risks Turning History Lessons into Propaganda Classes,' 17 August 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/aug/17/academics-reject-gove-history-lessons>, accessed 24 August 2019.

⁹ Sir Robert Worcester, in discussion with the author, 7 August 2011.

¹⁰ 'Cameron: Tory Manifesto Will Change Britain for the Better,' 13 April 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/8616777.stm, accessed 24 August 2019.

¹¹ Ibid.

referendum on any future European treaty resulting in the transferral of power from Britain to the European Union.¹² The Conservatives failed to gain a majority following the election, and many of their more Eurosceptic policies were shelved as part of the terms of the Coalition government. However, over the duration of Coalition government's term, the EU question did not go away. The notion of a British 'Bill of Rights' had been promoted by prominent Conservative figures – Gove and Cameron to name a couple – and the relationship between the European Court of Human Rights and Britain's own courts was strained over issues of prisoner voting.

However, though the political relationship between Britain and Europe was becoming increasingly strained, so too was the issue of whether Scotland would remain part of the Union. Within Scotland there was an increasing call for a referendum over independence which was unwillingly granted and eventually took place on 18 September 2014. The result was perhaps a little closer than many south of the border would have liked, but it was at least for Prime Minister Cameron a positive one, with 55% of voters electing to stay within the United Kingdom.

By the summer of 2015, another general election had taken place, this time delivering the Conservative Party a very small working majority. Another surprise that came out of this election was the performance of UKIP (UK Independence Party), led by Nigel Farage, a prominent Eurosceptic. Whilst the election results might have only yielded UKIP a single seat within the House of Commons (Douglas Carswell, MP for Clacton), the five million votes they won clearly demonstrated an obvious appetite for a different kind of referendum amongst the public. One of the key Conservative manifesto pledges of 2015 was a referendum on the question of Britain's EU membership, and one suspects that this was a deliberate act of political manoeuvring by Cameron, himself an advocate of the EU, both to gain a larger share of the vote, but also to appease Eurosceptics present within his own party.

The 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, therefore, needs to be viewed through this political lens and cannot be viewed as an apolitical event. It would not be overstretching the severity of the situation to say that Britain by this time was on the cusp of a great cultural and

¹² Ibid.

political shift. Even after the 2014 Scottish referendum result, there remained a great divide between the politics of many of those living in Scotland and people in England and Wales. As tensions simmered domestically, the future of Britain and its relationship with the EU was also an undercurrent that could not be ignored. Many of these issues were present during the commemorative event that took place on Monday 15 June 2015.

Commemorators, guests, and those who were not invited

In order to attend the event of Monday 15 June, organised by Surrey County Council under the auspices of the Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Committee, a person needed to be in possession of an invitation. Historians working in the ever-growing field of commemoration, and commemorative moments more broadly, make the point that in order to conduct a robust analysis of such events, it is essential to direct part of their attention towards the commemorators.¹³ This is because these commemorative moments are shaped directly by those choreographing the methods of remembrance. The act of remembrance is, therefore, not an unbiased action, and those orchestrating commemorative activity do so for specific reasons.

In this context, the anniversary of Magna Carta is both extremely complicated and interesting precisely because of the levels of bureaucracy involved in its organising. To reiterate an earlier point, the Magna Carta anniversary was in the broadest sense coordinated by a national committee, led by Sir Robert Worcester. The primary function of this committee was to synchronise the year's activities, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that this committee also had considerable sway over the shape and nature of the ideas that were firstly proposed, and then actioned.

However, Surrey County Council along with the National Trust were the main stakeholders that were in charge of organising the 15 June commemorative service. In one sense, Surrey County Council and the National Trust can be viewed as commemorative facilitators, rather than actual commemorators. And once we choose to make this distinction, then further questions arise when we factor in the contributions and involvement of dignitaries

¹³ See: Geoff Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

such as the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the American Attorney General, all of whom delivered speeches celebrating the charter's achievements to those congregated at Runnymede. Even those who were invited guests were also commemorators. Indeed, all of the individuals and groups identified above were commemorators in one sense or another, and so trying to apply a framework of differentiation is a time-consuming activity for the insights it might produce. One comment can be made for certain, however: the nature of commemoration in the twenty-first century is both complicated and deeply bureaucratic. Stakeholders come in many different forms, represent a wide-ranging set of interests, and stand for institutions of local, national, and international importance.

Reports indicate that over 4,500 invited guests were present on the morning of 15 June.¹⁴ The anniversary was not just important because of the historical moment that it was celebrating. It also served as a crowning moment for all of those associated with the national organising committee, headed by its chairman, Sir Robert Worcester. A few of these members had been present at Runnymede in November 2010 when the anniversary festivities had been publicly launched and so there was no doubt a sense of 'book-ending'. The majority of the committee members, all of whom were stakeholders in the anniversary in their own right, were in attendance. The Magna Carta 800th's official website provides a good sense of the institutions they represented and the professional backgrounds of the individuals involved. Understandably, the academic community made up a large proportion; on the one hand, they represented interested institutions, such as Professor Nigel Saul of Royal Holloway; on the other hand, they formed part of research projects like Professors Nicholas Vincent and David Carpenter.¹⁵ Other members represented interested institutions from outside the academy, such as the British Library and National Trust. Other parties represented were from the various Charter Towns, the American Bar Association, and, lastly, individuals from the world of politics

¹⁴ Gupta and Ainsworth, 'As it Happened: Magna Carta 800th'.

¹⁵ This project, led by Professor Nicholas Vincent and Professor David Carpenter, was funded by the AHRC and run, in part, with the assistance of the British Library. For Further details see: The Magna Carta Project, <http://magnacarta.cmp.uea.ac.uk/>, accessed 29 November 2019.

and policy.¹⁶ Whilst this list is not exhaustive, it provides more than a flavour of the different parties that were both represented and played a part in the organisation of the various Magna Carta events that took place during 2015.

Another key group in attendance was made up of councillors and officers of Surrey County Council and Runnymede Borough Council. Given that this anniversary was being celebrated in a place under their collective responsibility this was unsurprising. Also, just as for the 800th Committee, this was as much a moment of achievement as it was commemorative. As discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, both councils had invested a great deal in terms of time and energy, and though some of the decisions taken during the planning process were not free from criticism, they had worked to ensure that the 800th anniversary was suitably commemorated. Lastly, one of the largest groups present at Runnymede comprised members of the American Bar Association. It is difficult to know the precise numbers of lawyers at Runnymede that day. Newspaper reports suggested that 800 lawyers were to be invited.¹⁷ However, speaking as someone present at the anniversary, it would not be overstating things to suggest that it felt like there were far more than this number in attendance. The reason for their presence was clear. They had made the trip not only to reaffirm their commitment to the legal and democratic principles of Magna Carta but were also there to see the latest rededication of their newly renovated memorial.¹⁸

What this brief survey highlights is the unavoidable fact that many in attendance on 15 June had a vested interest in the charter and its commemoration, either through professional links, or personal interest. This meant that the service was performed and enacted to guests who would have been acutely aware of Magna Carta and its wider legacies, and hence it could be argued that the organisers were ‘preaching to the converted’. But this should not be viewed as a great surprise. What would be the point of delivering a commemorative service to

¹⁶ For a comprehensive list of all those who were members of, and associated to, the Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Committee, see: <http://magnacarta800th.com/magna-carta-today/membership-of-the-magna-carta-800th-committee/>, accessed 13 February 2020.

¹⁷ Harry Mount, ‘Why are the Americans so excited about the Magna Carta?’ 25 November 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/10465560/Why-are-the-Americans-so-excited-about-the-Magna-Carta.html>, accessed 8 October 2019.

¹⁸ Ibid.

an audience that had little, even no interest, in what was being remembered? However, interest is in itself, a good indicator of collective identity. Historians, anthropologists and social scientists have long argued that acts of remembrance help build, reaffirm and crystallise a sense of a shared belonging and community spirit.

Ironically, one of the main features that characterised the 800th anniversary celebrations was the level of security that accompanied it. Runnymede, a meadow famed for the manner in which it has been imagined in prose and verse, as the birthplace of liberty, the rule of law and democracy, was - for the weekend preceding the celebrations - surrounded by a police cordon. No longer could members of the public saunter to Runnymede on an afternoon stroll or dog walk. It was off limits. Given the importance of the dignitaries scheduled to attend, the potential risk was deemed too high. These restrictions contrasted hugely with the scenes described in *The Times* in the 1920s where members of the public flocked to the annual commemorative service, as explored in chapter 1 of this thesis.

It was in this context that an offshoot of the *Occupy* group, entitled the *Diggers 2012*, were forced to leave their eco-village, established on disused land on Cooper's Hill, formerly belonging to Brunel University in the summer of 2012. The group, by virtue of the name that they adopted, tied themselves directly to the Diggers of the seventeenth century – a group of Protestant radicals, led by Gerard Winstanley, who believed in the farming of common land and the creation of egalitarian communities. The *Diggers 2012* believed that it was their right as free-born Englishmen, as secured by the settlement at Runnymede in 1215, to make use of this disused land. Though the manner in which they appropriated history was perhaps somewhat distorted, this was a clear attempt to link their political agenda to a much broader historical tradition of liberty and protest. In the months leading up to the 2015 anniversary commemorations there were repeated attempts to get the *Diggers 2012* moved. After several court appearances, the local authorities successfully managed to serve the *Diggers 2012* with an eviction notice. There is no disputing that the illegal nature of the *Diggers* eco-village, but the need to evict them on the basis of the security-threat they posed seems to have been spurious. This episode highlights that this commemorative event was not one for all to enjoy. In

fact, arguably the greatest irony was that a group that obviously tied themselves to the concept of liberty, was excluded.

Constructing an Amphitheatre of Remembrance

For the members of the public fortunate enough to have received an invitation to the anniversary commemorations, 15 June 2015 was a long day. Invited guests needed to ensure that they arrived with plenty of time to clear the required security checks. The proceedings commenced at 9 am, meaning that many arrived at Runnymede from 7am onwards. But many of the guests in attendance would not have known what was set to greet them at Runnymede, given that a police cordon that prevented public access to the field had been in place since the Friday before.

Upon clearing security, guests were greeted by a variety of flags fluttering in the summer breeze, a large stage that would not have looked out of place in Glastonbury and its associated rows of seating, and, lastly, a wide selection of high-end catering establishments populated the field's perimeter all serving a variety of breakfast rolls and pastries, teas and coffees, at prices that reflected their quality. The meadow of Runnymede had been transformed into a venue fit for a festival, albeit one of culture and heritage, instead of music.

With an expected audience of 5,000 people, the transformation that had taken place was undoubtedly necessary. This fact alone did not prevent comment. The world's leading historian of Magna Carta, Professor Nicholas Vincent, in a blog that formed part of the AHRC Magna Carta project, noted Runnymede was "a wonderfully English combination of village fête and fascist flag rally".¹⁹ There is no disputing that the image conjured by Vincent's words was powerful and evocative. It was no doubt grounded in reality, but his description was equally the product of hyperbolic exaggeration. However, setting aside matters of hyperbole, Vincent's primary argument – that Runnymede was a curious mixture of English fete and fascist flag rally – captures the way these two juxtaposing cultural images, along with the emotional responses they respectively engender, coalesced that morning.

¹⁹ Nicholas Vincent and Steven Franklin, 'Runnymede and the Commemoration of Magna Carta (1923-2015),' July 2015, http://magnacarta.cmp.uea.ac.uk/read/feature_of_the_month/Jul_2015, accessed 11 September 2019.

Much of this was certainly a direct consequence of where the event was taking place. Runnymede, as it had been in 1215, occupies a vast open expanse of green land. This fact made staging a commemorative event more difficult. Organisers were faced with the uneasy challenge of accommodating a large number of guests for the morning, knowing that many would have dispersed by the afternoon. However, the challenge was far greater than that. This particular anniversary held great weight: it was a milestone moment within British history – a pivotal part of the Govean agenda- and, at the same time, the birthday of one of the world's greatest legal and constitutional documents. The setting in which this commemorative occasion was going to be enacted had to reflect this importance. Achieving this within the confines of a field would be no mean feat.

The manner in which this was translated for the public's consumption was simple: physical size tends to denote relative importance and grandeur. From history, we can look towards castles, cathedrals, churches, or palaces as physical manifestations of this theory. Today, we may choose to look at the size of people's houses or cars as proof. Logic, therefore, dictates that an event of great importance would naturally be presented on the grandest scale possible. In this instance, the presence of a large Glastonbury-like stage along with large flags underlined this point.

Another challenge that no doubt presented itself to the organisers was the manner in which the British public has become conditioned to experience moments of remembrance in specific locations. For instance, the ceremony and pomp that accompanies the annual Armistice Day service at Whitehall feels 'natural' and 'traditional' precisely because it happens annually. Through the process of yearly repetition the choreography that goes with each service has become almost 'second nature'. In the context of Magna Carta, however, there has been no long-lasting tradition of commemorative services being observed at Runnymede. True enough, as a previous chapter showed, the inter-war years witnessed a sustained attempt to get the practice of an annual remembrance at Runnymede culturally embedded, but, because of war, and the death of those encouraging this activity, it failed to gain any firm foundation.

Equally, the previous two milestone anniversaries of Magna Carta during the twentieth century, those of 1915 and 1965, witnessed no mass gathering at Runnymede. In the case of

1915, this was because of war, but in the case of 1965, much of the ceremony and pomp took place in London. Accordingly, 2015 was the first moment within Magna Carta's long history when a milestone anniversary had the monarch, leading dignitaries, and the eyes of the world, focus their collective attention on Runnymede. It was thanks to this relative 'newness' that the ceremony lacked the inherent reverence associated with many more established commemorative moments.

All the same, in an effort to ensure that the grandeur of the moment was obvious for those attending and following via live newsfeeds, the organisers employed various forms of more accustomed pageantry to ensure the importance of the event was not lost. These were very easy to spot. Any picture taken that morning would, without doubt, contain a host of these appropriated cultural symbols. The most obvious example would be the presence of the British flag, alongside other flags that had been especially created for the day. Additionally, the sight of the Coldstream Guards, dressed in their scarlet tunics and bearskin hats, would be seen, and the entire event would be rounded off nicely by a beautifully timed and choreographed fly-past by the Red Arrows. The involvement of royalty, in the form of the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and the Duke of Cambridge, was another means of conveying the inherent significance of the day. Even if, as mentioned earlier, their presence was incongruous, their patronage alone gave the ceremony added cultural and national weight. This was clear from the manner in which, firstly, the Queen's acceptance to become the Patron of the Magna Carta 800th Committee was announced in November 2011, and, secondly, the manner in which her attendance at the commemorative ceremony was announced: 'This anniversary will be an occasion of immense local, national and international importance so it is fitting that The Queen and other members of The Royal Family will help to celebrate it in the county that gave Magna Carta to the world.'²⁰ Many of these performative and ritualistic elements are synonymous with royalty and its celebration. Yet, in this instance, they were clearly being deployed to provide the ceremony with a sense of majesty, credibility, and even perhaps familiarity.

²⁰ 'The Queen to Attend Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Event,' Magna Carta 800th, 16 April 2015, <http://magnacarta800th.com/news/the-queen-to-attend-magna-carta-800th-anniversary-event/>, accessed 27 November 2019.

The Commemorative Service

The ceremony did not formally get underway until 9.45am and so until that time, congregating guests were entertained by local school children, who performed parts of a specially-commissioned opera entitled *The Freedom Game*.²¹ Alongside this, the Magna Carta Giants – eight figures from history that had been created by four local schools, including figures such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Malala Yousafzai, and Johannes Gutenberg – and *London Philharmonic Orchestra* entertained guests.²²

The Duke of Cambridge, Prince William, was the first member of the Royal Family to arrive at 9.45am, and he was given the responsibility of unveiling *The Jurors* installation, created by the world-renowned sculptor and artist Hew Locke. However, rather than simply unveiling a plaque, Prince William took part in piece of commemorative theatre, in which he, alongside Locke and ten other members of the public, sat on the twelve bronze chairs. Locke, as discussed in the previous chapter, has always maintained that his artwork is only complete once the twelve chairs are sat on. In this moment, the artwork was complete and all twelve participants represented a jury. In this moment also, it can be argued that each individual's social class was momentarily removed. In keeping with the principles of Magna Carta, all were even and accountable to the rule of law and a jury of peers. The symbolism of this moment will be one that endures. This piece of theatre captured an essence of civic equality and egalitarianism that, for the most part, was missing at other moments. It is also worth highlighting that it was Prince William, future King and firmly part of the new generation of royals, who was given this responsibility. This was surely a deliberate move. Prince William, along with Prince Harry, represent the future of the institution and, as such, it too has had to move with the changing times. Prince William then unveiled a

²¹ This was a performance created by Katie Green, a contemporary dance choreographer and artistic director, who was commissioned by Surrey Arts for the 800th anniversary. It formed part of an opera that was performed at the Royal Albert Hall on 12 May 2015, and involved 1000 Surrey residents. More information available at: 'The Freedom Game,' Made by Katie Green, <http://madebykatiegreen.co.uk/commissions/the-freedom-game>, accessed 27 November 2019.

²² For further information relating to the Magna Carta Giants see: Blind Crow Pictures, 'Eight Magna Carta Giants,' Vimeo, 3:12, 7 October 2014, <https://vimeo.com/108200559>, accessed 27 November 2019.

commemorative plaque to mark the occasion, before being introduced to prominent organisers from Surrey County Council and other dignitaries.

The Queen, along with the Duke of Edinburgh, arrived at Runnymede at 10.22am. Ironically, it was reported that the Queen had followed the same route to Runnymede as King John had, eight hundred years before. Once the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh had taken their seats on the stage alongside the other VIPs, the event's central proceedings could start.

The first speech was delivered by Lord Dyson, Master of the Rolls and Chairman of the Magna Carta Trust. Once Lord Dyson welcomed those in attendance, he quickly moved on to consider commemorative culture within Britain. "We love anniversaries in this country", he stated, before remarking upon the type of events that are commemorated: "Any excuse for a commemoration, and we take it". He then went on to list the very many ways in which major anniversaries are commemorated, triumphantly explaining that "The anniversary we are celebrating today is worthy of the royal treatment it is receiving". While he may not have meant it as such, his use of the words 'royal treatment' reiterated the idea that royal patronage is a signifier – albeit a rather impressive one - of deeper cultural importance.

Apart from this, Lord Dyson's speech merely set out the historical context which had brought everyone to Runnymede that morning, making the point that King John and his Barons would have been astonished at the sight of seeing everyone congregated there 800 years later. Interestingly, however, Lord Dyson was very precise with his wording – unsurprising for a man of the legal profession – and, in reference to the document sealed by John, he commented that, 'Magna Carta was one of the English documents that inspired the US Bill of Rights'.²³ The sentence in itself is unremarkable. Indeed it is a well-known fact. But, his distinction between *English* and *British* is telling. Said at a time when the future of the Union was secured, but still remained politically divisive, this subtle distinction highlighted his awareness of both the history involved and contemporary politics. But outside of the context of the Scottish referendum, this

²³ Lord Dyson, speech delivered at the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta, 15 June 2015, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MR-Magna-Carta-Anniversary-Speech-15-June-2015.pdf>, accessed 26 November 2019.

was said at a time when the two words - English and British – seemed almost interchangeable in politics. The *Our Island Story* that Gove and the Conservative party pushed was shorthand for an Anglo-centric British history, and the two were used as synonyms for each other on many occasions.

After Lord Dyson had finished, he invited the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to take centre stage. It did not take long for Cameron to make an impact with his words and, more importantly, to demonstrate that commemorative moments are not apolitical events. After establishing the charter's contemporary relevance and providing those listening with a brief historical overview of those moments in British history when Magna Carta had inspired action - such as the English Civil War, the Chartists, and the Suffragettes - he moved on to the issue of human rights. 'Magna Carta takes on further relevance today,' he proclaimed with a sense of political assuredness:

For centuries, it has been quoted to help promote human rights and alleviate suffering all around the world. But here in Britain, ironically, the place where those ideas were first set out, the good name of 'human rights' has sometimes become distorted and devalued. It falls to us in this generation to restore the reputation of those rights – and their critical underpinning of our legal system.²⁴

For many observers, this represented a blatant attempt to advance the Conservative's political agenda. In saying these words Cameron seemed to be trying to use this occasion to inspire confidence in the Conservative dream of a new British Bill of Rights and to end the uneasy relationship with Europe and in particular its Human Rights Act. He finished with a rousing challenge: "It falls to us in this generation to restore the reputation of those rights – and their critical underpinning of our legal system".²⁵

The significance of Cameron's contribution was not lost on his audience – especially those following online. He was soon attacked by the political left for his actions. *The Guardian* ran with the headline: *Cameron condemned for 'using Magna Carta day to push British bill of*

²⁴ David Cameron, 'Magna Carta 800th Anniversary: PM's Speech,' UK Government, 15 June 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/magna-carta-800th-anniversary-pms-speech>, accessed 26 November 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

rights.²⁶ The central argument rested upon the prime minister's apparently tactless use of the historic ceremony to further his own political goals.²⁷ Yvette Cooper, Labour MP and at the time contending for the leadership of her party, publicly admonished Mr Cameron: 'The Prime Minister is trying to hijack this important celebration of Magna Carta to push his ill-thought-through plans for abolishing the Human Rights Act.'²⁸ There is no doubting that such criticism levied against the Prime Minister was politically motivated. Interestingly however, much of it was founded on the principle that commemorative occasions are not political moments. As identified earlier, historians have accepted that the act of remembrance has political connotations. Yet, in this instance, there was an unwillingness to accept this connection, and, one suspects, much of the disapproval lay in the unsubtle way in which he went about making his point.

Following the conclusion of Cameron's speech, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, came to the lectern and delivered the final speech of the proceedings. Once the speeches were concluded, the dignitaries on stage walked to the front of the audience to meet with stakeholders and members of the public, all of whom had played a prominent role during the anniversary preparations. Following this interlude in proceedings, the Royal Car containing the Queen, Duke of Edinburgh, and Duke of Cambridge departed Runnymede to an array of seemingly euphoric flag waving.

Another celebration of the Special Relationship?

Following on from the events that took place on the main stage, the audience were invited to divert their gaze and attention towards the right. Standing at the foot of Cooper's Hill and glowing a brilliant white in the late morning sun, stood the American Bar Association's memorial to Magna Carta. Having been specifically refurbished and cleaned for the day's events, the next thirty minutes of the ceremony would revolve around this memorial. In an

²⁶ Matthew Weaver, 'Cameron condemned for "using Magna Carta day to push British bill of rights",' 15 June 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/15/david-cameron-magna-carta-push-british-bill-of-rights-claim>, accessed 27 November 2019.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

echo of previous historic moments at Runnymede, including the 1944 St. George's Day celebrations, the 1957 ABA Memorial and the 1965 Kennedy Memorial unveiling, the British flag and American flag stood symbolically together, fluttering in the light breeze.

Runnymede was awash with members of the American Bar Association, all of whom had made the trip across the Atlantic to witness the rededication of their memorial and take in the atmosphere of the day. Having been officially unveiled in 1957 in front of a similarly sized audience of 5,000, this was the fourth occasion when the memorial was being rededicated, but the first time that this that it coincided with a milestone anniversary year. On each previous occasion the commonality of the principles of liberty, freedom, and the rule of law – ideas that bind the two nations together – had been evoked and there was nothing to suggest that this moment would be any different.

Before turning our attention to the speeches delivered, it is worth taking a moment to pause, and reflect upon the symbolism that was employed during this section of the commemorative ceremony. The Coldstream Guards, dressed in full ceremonial attire complete with bearskin hats, were involved in one of the most bizarre instances of symbolism throughout the day. Wearing their scarlet tunics, they stood in a line along both sides of the path leading up toward the memorial. Their presence created an impressive pathway which dignitaries involved within the rededication ceremony could follow. In terms of their function, they were probably there to fulfil a crowd-control function as much as they were present for ceremonial purposes. The point needs to be made that this was yet another example of recognisable pageantry being used to add extra ceremonial weight and gravitas. As an image however – the Coldstream Guard standing to attention in front of the American flag and memorial – this was a rarely seen and very visual merging of national cultures and identities. In this instance, it was unique, involving an unspoken irony that many ignored - the monarch's guard created a pathway to a memorial representing freedom under the law, a freedom bestowed because of the monarch's assent?

The rededication ceremony, like the proceedings on the main stage, involved many speeches from dignitaries who included Loretta Lynch, US Attorney General; Phillip Hammond, the British Foreign Secretary; the Princess Royal, Princess Anne, and William Hubbard, President

of the American Bar Association. Each of them respectively added their own contribution and reflections of the anniversary and the charter's enduring legacy. For instance, Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, following Philip Hammond, took the opportunity to reflect upon the manner in which the charter's overriding principles were being enacted domestically. 'We are engaged in initiatives to promote trust between law enforcement officers and the communities we serve,' she said, quite clearly referencing recent, and ongoing, moments of conflict between the police and ethnic groups in America.²⁹ The issue of terrorism and states that deny citizens basic human rights was another theme on which she chose to reflect, commenting that: 'We are working with partners in the United States and around the world to pursue those who would deny human dignity, whether through trafficking or corruption, violence or terrorism.'³⁰ To conclude, she unsurprisingly sought to reaffirm an American commitment to the special relationship, commenting with pride that she was 'humbled to stand shoulder-to-shoulder... in our shared pursuit of a more just world' and that she looked 'forward to all that our nations will achieve together in the spirit of their promise in the years ahead.'³¹

By contrast the speech delivered by the President of the ABA, William Hubbard, followed a slightly different tack, and, unsurprisingly, focussed on the charter's contribution to the legal system. However, he too took the opportunity to reiterate time and again the strength of the American special relationship with Britain, and the importance of maintaining it:

Then, as we do now, he [Lewis S. Powell] extolled the close relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom in a speech at the Royal Courts of Justice. He said, "In war and peace our nations have sustained the same ideals and the same principles that we proudly attribute to Magna Carta."³²

Throughout his speech his repeated use of the word 'we' as a method to promote inclusivity helped to reinforce this point. Of course, he might have been using this as a shorthand

²⁹ 'Attorney General Lynch Delivers Remarks at Magna Carta Commemoration Ceremony,' Magna Carta 800th, 5 November 2015, <https://magnacarta800th.com/articles/attorney-general-lynch-delivers-remarks-at-magna-carta-commemoration-ceremony/>, accessed 26 November 2019.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² William Hubbard, speech delivered at 800th anniversary commemoration of Magna Carta, 15 June 2015, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/WmHubbard_remarks_Runnymede.pdf, accessed 27 November 2019.

reference to the American lawyers and people more generally, but, within the setting of the ceremony, it would be difficult to argue against this 'we' being used as a synonym for the shared heritage of Britain and America.

Once the rededication ceremony was complete, the respective national anthems of each country were sung which, in line with the participatory atmosphere, served as another means of stressing the shared heritage.

The morning's events were formally brought to a close at just before noon with a flypast by the Red Arrows which were accompanied by a Spitfire and a Typhoon fighter jet. As the crowds looked up into what was a clear blue sky they were treated to the traditional plumes of red, white and blue, streaming from the rear of the aircraft. It was a fitting end to what was, for those present, an event of great significance. It had managed to wow through its patriotic pageantry and celebratory character. The Red Arrows provided the figurative cherry, ready for placing on top of the figurative cake. In this sense they too performed an important commemorative function. They delivered the conclusive act, whilst at the same time underlining the significance of what had just finished taking place. It is worth noting that the Red Arrows are not seen commonly at events that are not historically and culturally revered or valued.

Conclusion

In conclusion, maybe Starkey was correct – something not often said – when he summarised the day's events by saying 'It's the kind of thing we Brits do so well ...This whole thing is saying something important did happen and it's worth commemorating.'³³

The 800th anniversary of Magna Carta and the memorial ceremony that accompanied it definitely underlined the fact that something important had happened. It was given the full commemorative treatment in order to stress its significance. On the one hand, its setting presented the organisers with logistical challenges that would not have been present in other locations. On the other hand, its setting effectively highlighted the tools and framework employed by commemorators. Whether this was the staging, the multitude of flags, the

³³ Gupta and Ainsworth, 'As it Happened: Magna Carta 800th'.

Coldstream Guards, the Red Arrows, or simple Royal patronage, each - in their own way - endowed the day with a sense of grandeur and spectacle. Without these, the event would have had a very different feel. These are the means and methods employed by commemorators to convey ideas of significance and importance. The manner in which they are deployed – as Runnymede in 2018 underlined - can drastically shape the means by which the event is received and perceived by the public.

Anniversary moments, moreover, cannot be viewed on an apolitical basis. The act of remembrance remains inherently political. In the first instance, events that are remembered and commemorated are done so precisely because of the larger narratives to which they can link and which they support. In the context of Magna Carta and Britain, these links are many. The charter serves as important, perhaps even a foundational moment, in Britain's democratic heritage. Within the broader context of 2015 and the politics that proceeded it, Magna Carta became closely linked to the Govean (re-)interpretation of history, however Whiggish this may have proved to be. It was from this basis that Cameron was able to launch his patent attempt to push for a renegotiation of Britain's relationship with Europe, and especially its commitment to the European Human Rights Act. These political subversions of history were fuelled by the increased desire for British independence from Europe within England in particular. But project 'let's make Britain great again' also followed in the wake of the Union no longer being assured. The Scottish referendum may have put Scottish independence on hold, but the domestic cracks looked here to stay. The anniversary moment, therefore, served as an opportune moment to put such differences aside and move forward as Britain united, rather than divided.

Ultimately, the 2015 Runnymede celebrations will be remembered for the choreographed success that they were. Undoubtedly, 15 June was the pinnacle of the anniversary year and the crowning moment for those involved. But such is the temporal nature of commemoration, that no sooner had the world gazed toward Runnymede that its attention was diverted elsewhere toward the next commemorative moment.

Conclusion

With the rededication of the American Bar Association's Monument to Magna Carta complete, the crowds slowly dispersed. The red, white, and blue plumes of the Red Arrows slowly dissipated across the clear blue sky before eventually fading from sight. Those in attendance were encouraged to keep the party spirit alive by enjoying a picnic on the sun-drenched meadow. Others departed, travelling onward to commemorative lunches. By the time the sun set on 15 June 2015, Runnymede had returned to its usual levels of peaceful tranquillity. The hubbub and commotion of the Magna Carta moment had passed. In many respects, the commemorative activity of 2015 was just another footnote – albeit a significant one – in Runnymede's long history, dating back to King John and the sealing of Magna Carta .

This thesis began with Lord Sumption's bold assertion that 'it is impossible to say anything new about Magna Carta, unless you say something mad.'¹ But this thesis has looked to address and, indeed, fill a specific lacuna within the history of Magna Carta and its legacy: its commemoration. In adopting this particular approach, by interweaving theories of collective and social memory, and through thinking about Magna Carta's legacy through the lens of public history, my repost to Lord Sumption is that you can say something new about Magna Carta without saying something mad. Within this study's introduction, three key methodological questions and considerations were outlined, framed as both the toolkit and practical issues on which this thesis would answer and expand.

The *Who, What, Why, When* approach articulated by Peter Burke provided a clear and simple way in which to begin to analyse both the organisation and production of commemorative events. Alongside Burke, other historians and social scientists underlined the importance of concentrating on the motivations and socio-political backgrounds of commemorative organisers or 'memory agents.' In response to these calls, this thesis has sought to keep these questions at the forefront of its analysis, treating every commemorative moment as an opportunity to reveal, as far as possible, the motivations and backgrounds of

¹ Lord Sumption, 'Magna Carta Then and Now: Address to the Friends of the British Library,' 9 March 2015, <https://www.supremecourt.uk/docs/speech-150309.pdf>, accessed 18 May 2019.

their organisers. What has emerged and become apparent over the duration of this study is that, more often than not, commemorations have been led and dominated by conservative members of society and the political right. Turning our attention back to the interwar years, the Egham-based Magna Carta Commemorations were comprised of both respectable members of the local community and establishment figures from politics, the Church, and legal profession. It is undeniable that this small group were progressive in their views, and none more so than Helena Normanton. But their interpretation was fundamentally conservative. Magna Carta in their eyes was not a moment of revolt where the rights of the free man were established. Instead, the great charter was a manifesto of good governance that was closely intertwined with notions of 'British Liberty' – a liberty that had been given, rather than extracted through force. Within the context of the interwar years, this rhetoric and framing of the charter was repeated each year during the annual commemorative services. Indeed, one only needs to look at the speakers each year to see this conservatism. During these years, Magna Carta, and the associated ideals of British liberty, was the bastion against German totalitarianism and a safeguard against the threat of socialism. It was a document imbued with history and tradition, which, in the broader context of British history, had proved that political fairness and equality could be achieved gradually through the actions of a benevolent state. Magna Carta, viewed in this vein, was thus not a document that legitimised revolutionary change through force – even if the circumstances of its sealing in 1215 suggested otherwise.

This framing of the charter and the people involved in commemorative activities around the charter changed little over the coming decades. In the shadow of the Second World War, Magna Carta once again was used to extol the virtues of British Liberty and celebrate the triumph over fascism. Within the context of the Cold War, this rhetoric was slightly tweaked to suit the increasing ties between the United States of America and Britain. No longer was Magna Carta the paradigm of British Liberty, instead it increasingly represented the virtues of western democracy and a shared Anglo-American heritage in the face of the Soviet threat.

Conservative organisers and their interpretation of the charter and its legacy often clashed directly with opposing views. This was most obvious with the 750th anniversary celebrations in 1965, and the circumstances that led to the erection of the statue of Queen

Elizabeth II in 2015. In the instance of 1965, the commissioning of *Left-Handed Liberty* by the City of London Corporation is intriguing on account of their decision to appoint the Marxist playwright, John Arden. The evolving dynamic between the commemorative organisers – the City of London Corporation – and Arden, as they came to realise what he had the potential to write a piece that ridiculed monarchy and rubbished the establishment, was a great source of conflict. Their evident relief when the manuscript proves not to be damaging is the source of great entertainment, but it also serves to underline their personal failure to recognise that the charter's legacy can have multiple interpretations. The explosive potential of the situation, however, was somewhat defused by Arden's decision to focus more on Magna Carta's contemporary failure than deliver a cutting comment on the politics of the 1960s. Similarly, the Conservative Runnymede Borough Councillors responsible for the erection of the statue of Queen Elizabeth II did not see the moment of 1215 as a point of royal humiliation. Instead, it was the beginning of a constitutional journey, ending with the embodiment of the perfect constitutional monarch in Queen Elizabeth II. Historians and members of the public were all too quick to point out this historical incongruity, but the pressures of commemorative expectation, combined with economic struggles, ensured the project came to fruition.

Considering all the above details, we arrive at a position not too dissimilar from that of Frost and Laing, who ask whether commemorative events are a medium to reinforce elites.² If you were to look at the launch of the eight hundredth commemorations at Runnymede in 2010, you could answer this question with an emphatic yes. But the selection of people who attended this event was no different in make-up from those that were central to past commemorations at Runnymede. In fact, one only needs to look at the footnotes of the preceding pages to see that *The Times* is by far the most consistent in its reportage of Magna Carta commemorations. Perhaps it comes without surprise, that *The Guardian* devoted the most column inches to reporting the events of 1965 and *Left-Handed Liberty*. These observations support Frost and Laing's proposition that commemorative events serve to reinforce the elites.

² Frost and Laing, *Commemorative Events*, 170.

However, we should be wary of placing too great an emphasis on the observations and be aware of the limits and boundaries of this project. On account of the nature of its study, this thesis has had a very limited geographical focus and, whilst it has offered an overarching narrative in an attempt to provide it with coherence, there remain smaller commemorative moments that were given little more than a brief mention. The 1965 production of *A Durable Flame* at Toynbee Hall – an institution founded in 1884 with a reforming socialist agenda – offers an avenue for future research, and one that could act as a foil for the events that surrounded the commissioning of *Left-Handed Liberty*. Equally, in a more contemporary context, the Diggers 2012 movement and their interpretation of Magna Carta's history offers another avenue for future enquiry. Similarly, its geographical focus on Runnymede has meant that providing a more well-rounded national picture of Magna Carta commemorations has been challenging. These avenues demonstrate that there is still much work to be done in this area, and that this thesis is just a starting point of a much larger conversation.

The research within this thesis, however, challenges the assertion that Magna Carta deeply resonates with the British public. Even by exclusively concentrating on commemorative practice, the areas and people most eager to commemorate the charter have either had a local connection to the charter or are from a more traditionally conservative background. It is these groups of people and individuals that have ensured that it is possible to talk of a tradition of Magna Carta commemoration. But geographic affiliation does not always constitute interest, and we only need to look at the tepid public response to Runnymede Borough Council's public consultation in 2015 to get a sense of this. For some, Magna Carta continues to resonate, upholding established ideas of liberty, freedom of the individual, and the rule of law. For others, it is a medieval charter whose influence is consigned to history. Commemorative episodes have and continue to offer those that believe in its contemporary resonance a chance to remind others of its cultural importance. In this sense, commemorative practice unquestionably offers a chance for the revivification of the myth of Magna Carta.

With regards to the second point of this study's methodology, the overriding conclusion is that the contemporary contexts in which Magna Carta commemorations have taken place

have shaped the form of the activities. However, as outlined within the methodology, it is one thing to observe superficial rhetorical connections and entirely different proposition to observe meaningful narrative connections. It is within the context of the latter, that this thesis has offered some of most conclusive observations, demonstrating the inter-connected relationship between history, memory, and the socio-political situation of the time the commemoration was occurring. This thesis has ultimately proved that Magna Carta commemorations have responded to contemporary circumstance. At each moment, the narrative of Magna Carta and its legacy has been connected to contemporary events. These connections, however, have held more weight than any superficial connection would, often being a legitimising force or lending some form of authority. To achieve this deep engagement, both the charter and contemporary moment of commemoration were connected to larger narrative structures. Within the context of this thesis, narratives of tyranny versus freedom have been clearly visible within the contexts of the First World War, Second World War, and Cold War. In each case, the circumstances of the deployment have slightly differed, but the same overarching narrative has been clearly visible. Likewise, within chapter 2, the narrative of a shared Anglo-American democratic heritage framed the unveiling of the American Bar Association memorial to Magna Carta.

These have been the most obvious overarching narratives to emerge over the course of this study, but others have also been present during sections of this thesis – if not as dominant. Not all these narratives have necessarily been positive either. The emergence of a narrative that celebrated the shared Anglo-American democratic heritage sprung, in part, from an ideology that placed a heavy emphasis on the racial superiority of an Anglo-Saxon heritage. Equally, this study could have easily been re-framed to place greater importance on Magna Carta's relationship to Britain's royal past, and the ways these two narratives have clashed with and complemented each other. As alluded to in the final chapter, future research could explore the ways in which the charter interacted with the Brexiteers' interpretation of Britain's past, using Magna Carta and other milestones from Britain's past to justify British exceptionalism. Although these narratives are present within this thesis, they fall outside the remits of this study, as they do not directly engage with commemorative practice. They could however provide an entry point for future scholars wishing to examine interpretations of Magna Carta.

Lastly, this thesis sought to answer the question of whether we can talk of commemorative continuities in relation to Magna Carta, in the sense that Olick talks of memory traces. The research undertaken for this thesis has revealed that memory traces *can* be observed in the context of Magna Carta commemoration. One only needs to point to the continued activity and presence of American interests at Runnymede to underline this point. Since the St George's Day celebrations of 1944, Runnymede has become a landscape that reflects the narrative of a shared Anglo-American democratic heritage, and remains unique in this regard to this day. Beyond this, however, one only needs to look at the similarities in format and consistency in ritualistic structure of the commemorative services during the interwar years to observe these memory traces.

Like previous commemorations, 2015 is just one moment in a much longer history of Magna Carta moments. In this regard, the public history of the charter has not remained static or constant. No sooner had the eight hundredth anniversary celebrations passed than the National Trust announced that it had secured £1.6 million of National Lottery Heritage Fund money for a five-year project to improve interpretation at the Runnymede site.³ Weeks before the announcement of their successful heritage application, the National Trust unveiled a further piece of public artwork commemorating Magna Carta. *Writ on Water* was unveiled on 16 June 2018, commemorating the charter's eight hundred and third anniversary, and was designed by the visual artist Mark Wallinger (**fig. 40**). Unsurprisingly, this latest artwork responds to the charter and represents the charter in a completely unique way when we compare it with the other memorials that now adorn Runnymede. As the National Trust's own website explains: 'Writ in Water reflects upon the founding principles of democracy, and through a meeting of water, sky and light, provides visitors with a space for reflection and contemplation (**fig.41**).'⁴

³ '£1.6 Million to Transform Historic Magna Carta Site at Runnymede,' National Lottery Heritage Fund, 20 July 2018, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/ps16million-transform-historic-magna-carta-site-runnymede>, accessed 3 February 2020.

⁴ 'Writ on Water,' The National Trust, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/runnymede/features/writ-in-water-mark-wallinger>, accessed 3 February 2020.

All the same, if there is one criticism that could be levied against Runnymede as a site of public history, it would be its lack of historical interpretation. The landscape is currently defined by the physical presence of its various monuments, memorials, and artworks. As this thesis has demonstrated, each has responded to the charter and its legacy in different ways and has been the product of different contextual circumstances. Each engages with a certain part or aspect of the charter's history and legacy. Hence this thesis's assertion that a key feature of memory is precisely the way in which it creates and is made of up layers of perceived understanding. Commemorations too generate their own unique history and add fresh layers to pre-existing collective memory. From the position of 2020, we can look at Runnymede and see a visual depiction of this process. However, without the contextual narrative surrounding each, and a framework within which these successive interpretations and representations can be traced and understood, they risk becoming almost meaningless. Hence, the National Trust project 'Runnymede Explored' is seeking to improve the site's interpretation, explicitly linking its various monuments, memorials, and artworks around the themes of 'liberty, people, and commemoration'.⁵

In summary, this thesis provides a direct response to the various interconnected themes outlined above. On each commemorative occasion, the overarching notion of liberty associated with Magna Carta has been central. And it has been through the belief of individuals and groups that the tradition of Magna Carta commemoration has continued. These people have not belonged to the same generation or even necessarily shared the same political beliefs, but each has felt that the charter embodies principles that are worth remembering and disseminating. Through their efforts, they have provided the impetus for commemoration. In summary, Magna Carta is a compilation of material, textual and performative moments, the combination of which over time has shaped and preserved the many individual and shared social and cultural understandings of the charter.

⁵ Runnymede Explored Project: Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.' The National Trust, last updated 15 October 2019, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/runnymede/projects/heritage-lottery-fund-support-for-historic-magna-carta-site>, accessed 13 February 2020.

Appendix



Fig. 1. Map of Runnymede



Fig. 2. Helena Normanton, QC, Secretary of Magna Carta Society, 1921-1951



Fig. 3. The Dedication of the American Bar Association Memorial at Runnymede, 1957

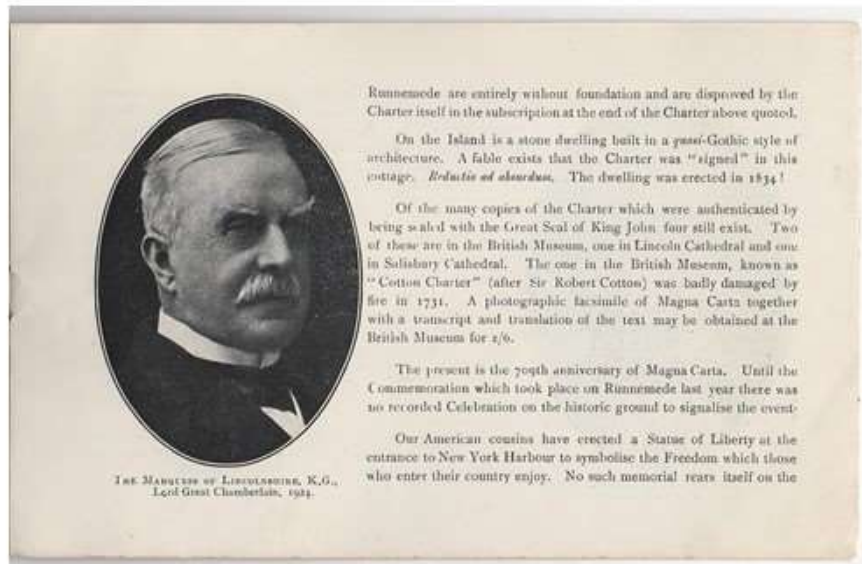


Fig. 4. The Charles Wynn Carrington, 1st Marquess of Lincolnshire, in Magna Carta Commemoration booklet, 1924

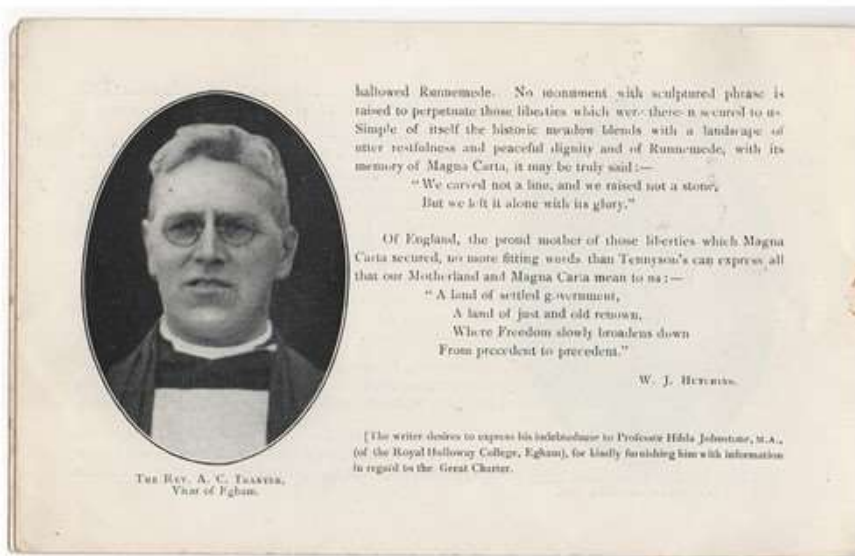


Fig. 5. The Rev. Albert Cecil Tranter, Vicar of St John's Church, Egham, in Magna Carta Commemoration booklet, 1924



Fig. 6 Magna Carta Commemoration booklet, 1924

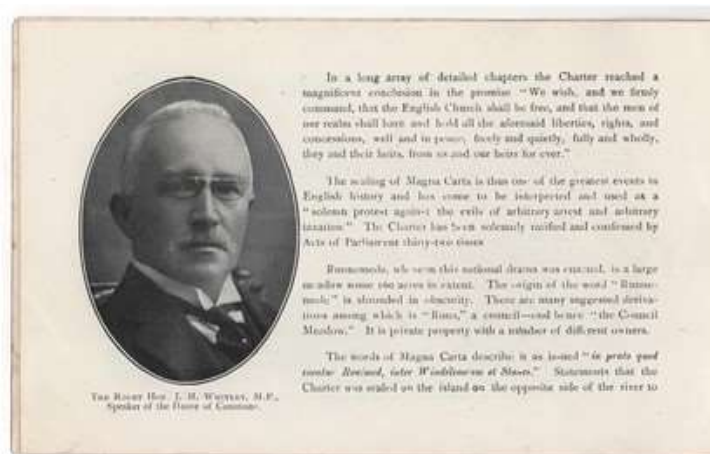


Fig. 7. Mr J H Whitley MP, Speaker of the House of Commons, in Magna Carta Commemoration booklet, 1924



Fig. 8. Magna Carta Commemoration booklet, 1924



Fig. 9. Posthumous portrait of Urban Hanlon, c.1931, by Oswald Birley



Fig. 10. Portrait of Cara Leyland Rogers, Lady Fairhaven, 1925, by Oswald Birley



Fig. 11. Mr Edward Marjoribanks MP, speaking at the Magna Carta commemoration service, 1931



Fig. 12. Front cover of Pageant of Runnymede Programme, 1934



Fig. 13. 'The Sealing of Magna Charta' from the Runnymede Pageant, 1934



Fig. 14. 'King John Sealing the Magna Charta,' from the Runnymede Pageant, 1934



Fig. 15. The Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede



Fig. 16. The American Bar Association Memorial at Runnymede



Fig. 17. The John F. Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede



Fig. 18. Magna Charta Ceremony (St George's Day), Runnymede, 1944



Fig. 19. Magna Charta Ceremony (St George's Day), Runnymede, 1944



Fig. 20. Cloisters of the Air Force Memorial



EGM.32. R.A.F. Memorial. Runnymede Near Egham.

Fig. 21. Inside the cloisters of the Air Force Memorial



Fig. 22. The Stone of Remembrance at the Air Forces Memorial



Fig. 23. Relief sculptures of Justice, Victory and Courage by Vernon Hill at the Air Forces Memorial



*View from Air Forces Memorial
Coopers Hill, Englefield Green*

Fig. 24. View from the top of the Air Forces Memorial



Fig. 25. The unveiling of the Air Forces Memorial, 1953



Fig. 26. The unveiling of the Air Forces Memorial, 1953

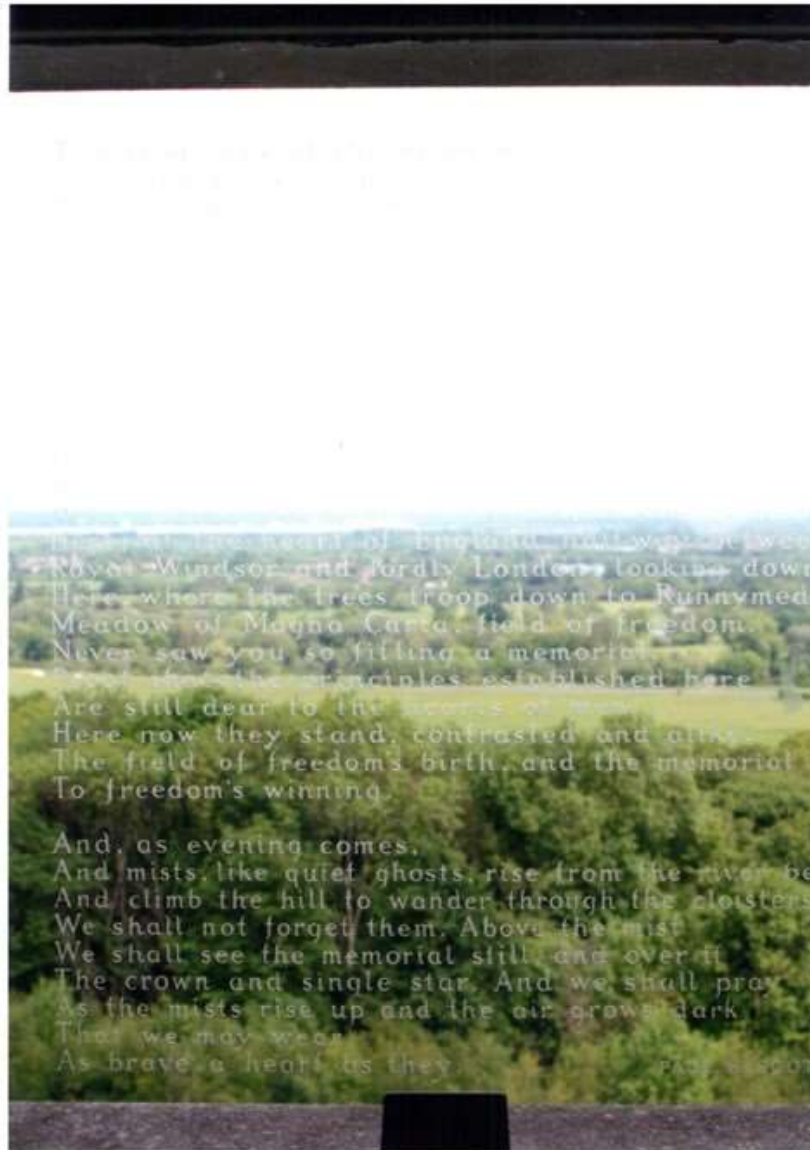


Fig. 27. Photograph of Paul H. Scott's poem at the Air Forces Memorial



Fig. 28. The ABA Monument at Runnymede

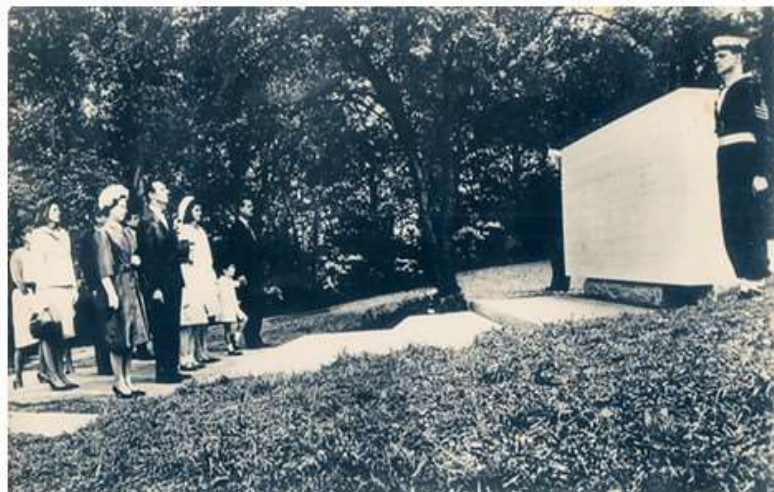


Fig. 29. Queen Elizabeth II and Jacqueline Kennedy at the unveiling of the John F. Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede, 1965



Fig. 30. The Memorial Stone at the John F. Kennedy Memorial

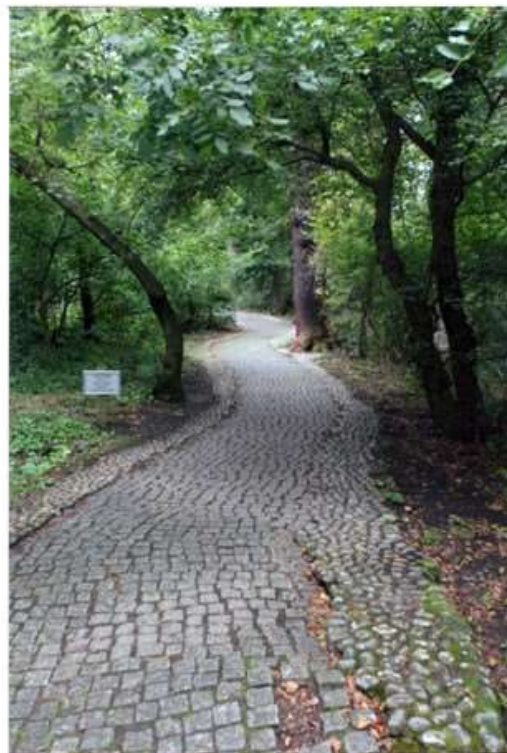


Fig. 31. The steps leading to the JFK Memorial



Fig. 32. The launch of the commemorations for the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta in 2015, November 2010



Fig. 33. The launch of the commemorations for the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta in 2015, November 2010



Fig. 34. Unveiling of the statue of Queen Elizabeth II



Fig. 35. Statue of Queen Elizabeth II, featuring path toward the River Thames



Fig. 36. The Jurors installation at Runnymede



Fig. 37. Close up of the backs of the chairs, highlighting artworks on the front and backs



Fig. 38. Close up of Exon Valdes artwork on chair

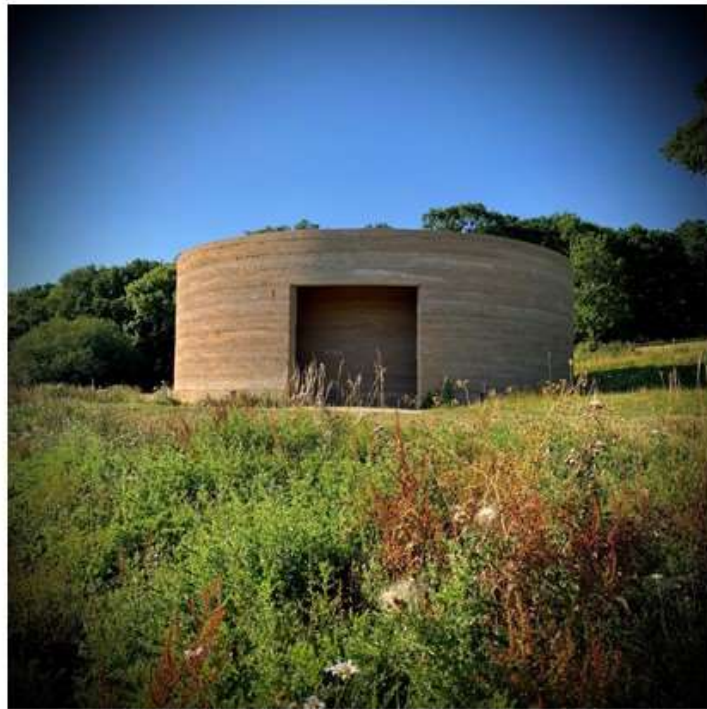


Fig. 40. *Writ on Water*



Fig. 41. Pool of reflection inside *Writ on Water*

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