

Institution: University of East Anglia
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: Magna Carta
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Magna Carta is the most famous document in English, perhaps in world history. Yet many of its aspects remain mysterious both to scholars and to the general public. It is much cited yet too little read or understood. From seeds first sown in the field of thirteenth-century manuscript studies, Vincent has harvested an enterprise that has earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records, that extends from the auction houses of New York to the Australian Senate, and that has been crowned by the award of a £910,000 AHRC research grant that will underpin the public understanding of Magna Carta during its 800th anniversary celebrations.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In the two centuries since the publication of the standard edition of Magna Carta vast numbers of charters, including originals and early copies of the document, have been unearthed. Many of these throw new light on Magna Carta's making and significance. Yet very little of this material has been properly synthesized into the political or constitutional history of England. It had been assumed (quite wrongly) that so significant and iconic a document was thoroughly explored by earlier editors. As a result, no-one was entirely sure how many original Magna Cartas survived, how many times Magna Carta was reissued in the century after 1215, or in what particular circumstances. There had been no full-scale study of the modern reception of Magna Carta published since the early 1970s. From his first book onwards Vincent's research has forced him to engage with Magna Carta as a key legal and historical document. He is recognized internationally as a leading expert in medieval charters and especially those of the early Plantagenet kings. He has published several monographs and more than a hundred academic articles on the history of the period 1150-1300. As a result, when Sotheby's of New York auctioned an original of the 1297 Magna Carta, previously owned by the American billionaire, Ross Perot, Vincent was invited to write a 100 page catalogue to present the document both to potential buyers and to the general public. He travelled twice to New York to oversee publicity and to attend the sale as a special advisor. He also, in a whirlwind tour of English and European archives, unearthed a large quantity of hitherto undiscovered material, extending from the discovery of previously unknown examples of original Magna Cartas, through to new discoveries concerning the document's reception in the twentieth century and the role played in its story by such figures as President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill (who in 1940 toyed with the possibility of gifting an original Magna Carta to the American people).</p> <p>The New York sale consolidated Vincent's position as an authority on Magna Carta, leading to a series of further broadcasts, books and research projects. In 2010, Vincent was commissioned by Oxford University Press to write a <i>Very Short Introduction</i> to Magna Carta, and by the Australian Senate to write an account of the circumstances in which, in 1953, an original Magna Carta came into the custody of the Australian people. He also became involved in the efforts by the Magna Carta Trust, chaired by Sir Robert Worcester, to ensure proper commemoration of Magna Carta's 800th anniversary in 2015. This in turn led him to put together a team from Norwich, Oxford, King's London, Canterbury and the British Library that in 2012 successfully bid for £910,000 of AHRC funding towards a 'Magna Carta Project', including a major public website devoted to Magna Carta. Much of this work is by now in the public domain to demonstrate significant and far-reaching impact. The intention here has been to bring to light a wealth of new information, on the life and letters of King John, on the nature of law and rebellion in medieval society, and on the degree to which Magna Carta has impacted on English law not just in the thirteenth but in all succeeding centuries. The Magna Carta website now caters to a variety of constituencies scholarly, journalistic and educational. For those interested in the law or medieval politics, it has already begun to supply the first clause-by-clause commentary on the 1215 Magna Carta published since 1914, and the first ever clause-by-clause commentary on the 1225 Magna Carta. Vincent's enterprise as a whole now offers a wide array of other materials, both cutting edge and synthetic, with a significant</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

emphasis upon broadening public awareness and understanding. This includes new materials on the life and times of King John and the reasons (his adulteries, his murder of his nephew, his financial predations) why John's barons rebelled against him.

3. References to the research*Key Outputs:*

- Nicholas Vincent, 'Who's Who in Magna Carta Clause 50' *Le Médiéviste et la monographie familiale: sources, methods et problématiques*, ed. M. Aurell (Turnhout 2004), pp235-64 (30pp)
- Nicholas Vincent, 'Jean, comte de Mortain: le future roi et ses domaines en Normandie 1183-1199', *1204, La Normandie entre Plantagenêts et Capétiens*, ed. A-M. Hélicher and V. Gazeau (Caen 2007), pp.37-59 (23pp)
- Nicholas Vincent, *The Magna Carta*, Sotheby's Sale Catalogue (New York 18 December 2007) (xx + 100pp.)
- Nicholas Vincent, *Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2012) (154pp.)
- Nicholas Vincent, *Australia's Magna Carta* (Australian Senate, Canberra 2010) (ISBN 978-1-74229-293-9) (35pp.)

Key Grants:

Funding of a total £910,000 (£350K to be spent by the census date of December 2013) from the AHRC for a 'Magna Carta Project', announced in March for start in July 2012, involving Vincent as principal investigator assisted by four co-investigators, three research assistants, and a computing officer. Within the current REF cycle, Vincent has also obtained a further £30,000 in research grants from the British Academy towards his edition of the letters and charters of the Plantagenet kings, including those of King John, of direct relevance to Magna Carta.

Justification of Quality:

Magna Carta continues to excite very great public and media interest. The New York sale realized the highest price ever paid for a single document: a world record of \$21.3 million acknowledged by the Guinness Book of Records. The assessment procedures for the AHRC are particularly stringent, with the external peer reviewers commenting on the exceptional quality of the application, described by one of them as 'simply the best' they had ever seen. For his work on Magna Carta, as more generally on thirteenth-century constitutional and political history, Vincent was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2010, aged 48. Vincent's podcasts on Magna Carta are regularly visited on BBC, British Library, and Historical Association sites. The translations he supplied to the American National Archives and the Australian Senate are regularly visited and downloaded. He was invited onto the anniversary committee of the Magna Carta Trust, and was asked by its chairman (Sir Robert Worcester) to give one of the Chancellor's Lectures at the University of Kent. He has contributed articles on Magna Carta to the *BBC History Magazine*, and his work in discovering previously ignored versions of the charter has been regularly reported in the national and international media.

4. Details of the impact*The Process and Beneficiaries:*

From work intended principally to inform the scholarly community about the circumstances, physical survival and significance of Magna Carta, Vincent's enterprise has extended into a far wider attempt to disseminate knowledge amongst the general public, to advise government bodies (UK, Channel Islands and Australia) and national Archives (UK, USA and Australia), private business (Sotheby's) and individuals (not least the libraries, corporations, cathedrals and other institutions that own originals of Magna Carta or the Forest Charter). The £910,000 AHRC grant (£350K to be spent by December 2013) is intended to broadcast these discoveries even further afield, bringing to light further new material on the reign of King John, on the circumstances and survival of Magna Carta, supplying information for the public and a forum for public discussion of perhaps the most important document in British history. Not only have previously undiscovered Magna Cartas been brought to light (in Oxford, London and Faversham, widely reported in the

international media), but the treatment of the document in the twentieth century, and its ongoing cultural, legal and political significance, have been spotlighted in a way not previously possible. The public interest that this work excites is demonstrated in the regular coverage afforded it by national and international media. One particularly widely reported incident involves Vincent's work on the 1300 Magna Carta belonging to the Faversham Town Council (see *Sunday Times*, 13 November 2011, http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Society/article820351.ece). This was previously insured for a mere £10,000, but has now been revalued into the multi-millions, with an entire visitor centre proposed to house it, and a commemorative volume of essays commissioned in celebration. In 2011, Vincent was able to demonstrate to the Baillis of both Guernsey and Jersey that Norman customary law, first written down c.1300, incorporates several elements borrowed from the 1225 Magna Carta. In order to guard themselves against English statutory law, the modern Channel Islands and their offshore trusts claim the protection of the customs of medieval Normandy. It is of no small legal and commercial significance to discover that these customs are themselves infused with the spirit and indeed the terminology of Magna Carta, the first and most important of English statutes.

The Impact/Benefits: Although the AHRC's 'Magna Carta Project' is still ongoing, the following impacts can already be claimed:

- The New York sale realized \$21.3 million: the highest price ever paid for a single sheet document, supplying some indication of the extent to which the document continues to command public awareness throughout the Anglophone world. Vincent's catalogue, which was an integral part of the sale, supplied the first ever full census of Magna Carta manuscripts, including photographic copies and descriptions of all of the twenty or so surviving originals of the charters. It has been followed by further consultancy work for Sotheby's and for other commercial operations within the field of rare books and manuscripts. Wealth creation is merely one of the impact factors here.
- Besides the very real commercial benefits to Sotheby's generated from Vincent's work, owners of Magna Carta manuscripts have for the first time been able to assess both the significance of their own documents, and the broader context against which those documents must be set. Cultural capital is thus reinterpreted.
- This has led, in the case of the Magna Cartas housed in Oxford and Faversham, to the far more elaborate display of such documents, and a far greater appreciation of their significance. Tourism is stimulated.
- As a result of his recognition as a leading expert in the field, Vincent has delivered many broadcasts and public lectures on Magna Carta, including Melvyn Bragg's *In Our Time* broadcast on Radio 4, and a much-visited podcast for the British Library. This enhances the public sense of the past, both nationally and internationally.
- The new translation of the 1225 Magna Carta that Vincent first published in his Sotheby's catalogue has since been adopted as the standard version supplied online to accompany publicity for the original Magna Cartas housed in the American National Archives in New York and the Australian Senate in Canberra. Education is informed, and public bodies are encouraged to rethink the management of their resources.
- Vincent's catalogue, his OUP Very Short Introduction, his booklet for the Australian Senate, and his other published works have led to his involvement in efforts by the Magna Carta Trust, chaired by Sir Robert Worcester, to co-ordinate celebrations and public awareness towards the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. Vincent sits on the academic committee of the Magna Carta Trust, intended to co-ordinate Parliamentary and other celebrations. Policy makers are informed, at national government level, not just in the UK but elsewhere throughout the English-speaking world.
- Journalists and the general public have answers to questions that were previously unanswerable (How many Magna Cartas are there, and where? How many times was it reissued? How does the physical artefact 'Magna Carta' relate to the legal or constitutional principles it embodies?). Vincent regularly answers media queries of this sort, and has advised at least a dozen production companies looking for television angles on the Magna Carta anniversary celebrations.
- Lawyers, not least the Baillis of the States of Guernsey and Jersey (addressed by Vincent

Impact case study (REF3b)

in 2010 and 2011 in St Peter Port and Cerisy), have access to new sources of information on one of the key documents in British constitutional history.

- Vincent's AHRC project funds the work of three research assistants who together are not only supplying a major public data base and information resource assisting with the organization of a public exhibition and conference for the British Library, the principal focus of celebrations of the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.
- Under Vincent's supervision, they are also responsible for uncovering previously unknown information about King John, including nearly three hundred previously unprinted royal letters. Some of this material has knowledge transfer potential, not least for what it tells us of royal beastliness or profiteering. It is already beginning to appear in the public domain.
- Vincent's principal research assistant (Dr Hugh Doherty) not only helped with the Sotheby's catalogue, and with ongoing work on King John, but was invited, on the back of his work with Magna Carta, to act as historical advisor to a Hollywood film – 'Snow White and the Huntsman' – released in 2012 (in which he has a walk-one part as 'Archbishop', and whose gross box office takings are today in excess of \$381 million). This in turn led to an invitation to act as advisor to two other Hollywood productions, the Angelina Jolie film 'Malificent', and Kenneth Branagh's 'Cinderella', the last of these still in production. Further such projects are in train. In such ways has medieval expertise been brought to a vastly wider public.

Magna Carta and the reign of King John have enormous popular resonance. The new information gathered about King John, his laws and his chancery are of long-lasting significance to the public as to the academic community. They have both great reach and internationally recognized significance.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Organisations: David Redden, Vice President Sotheby's, New York ('Vincent's) extraordinary contribution... (despite) an impossible commercial deadline... a series of brilliant essays'); Dr Claire Breay, Lead Curator Western Manuscripts, The British Library, London ('key member... valuable input... deep expertise'); Maureen Weeks, The Senate of Australia, Canberra ('Vincent's work... essential in enabling the Parliament to interpret this important document... of enduring historical value... combin(ing) rigorous research with the ability to tell an enlightening and compelling story for a general audience').

- Online Translations by Vincent: The National Archives, Washington (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/magna_carta/translation.html)
- Other Translations: *Australia's Magna Carta* (Canberra, Senate of Australia, marketed as the chief guidebook to the document now in Canberra), and the website: (<http://www.magnacarta.senate.gov.au/index.php/translation/>)
- Widely consulted podcasts: BBC Radio 4 'In Our Time' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00k4fg7>)
- British Library podcast by Vincent (<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/takingliberties/reviews/081112magnacarta.html>)
- KCL Revealing Records podcast by Vincent (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ikings/index.php?id=537>)
- Historical Association podcasts by Vincent (http://www.history.org.uk/resources/student_resource_6307,6311_109.html)

Media coverage includes all major British broadsheets including the Sunday Times.