

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East Anglia		
Unit of Assessment: 28 - History		
Title of case study: The Magna Carta Project – enhancing the legacy of Magna Carta as a cultural, historical, and legal icon		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2003 and 2015		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Nicholas Vincent	Professor of Medieval History	2003 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between 2013 and 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Magna Carta, first issued by King John in 1215, reissued on several occasions thereafter, is venerated across the world, not just in the UK but with particular enthusiasm in the USA. The liberties it claims to guarantee are considered fundamental to the Anglophone system of justice, constitutional stability, and the rule of law. By exploring and contextualizing the document, and by disseminating new discoveries, not least through a website and a major British Library exhibition, our project permanently enhanced the legacy and public understanding of an iconic artefact. Our findings were central both to Magna Carta's 800th anniversary celebrations in 2015 and to the new ways in which Magna Carta has since been displayed in the UK, Australia, and the USA. At the same time, we advised and informed key policy makers in Parliament, the heritage industry, the Bank of England, and the legal profession. Our archival discoveries included an entirely unknown Magna Carta, now a museum centrepiece. All of this with direct impact upon local visitor economies and the enhancement of wider public heritage.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>From the 1990s onwards (<i>King John: New Interpretations</i>, ed. Stephen Church, 1999), the UEA School of History became a major centre for the study of Magna Carta and the political and intellectual context from which Magna Carta sprang. In 2010, Vincent was commissioned by Sotheby's of New York to write a 100-page catalogue, to accompany their sale (for USD21,300,000) of the only original Magna Carta owned by a private individual, now on permanent exhibition in the National Archives in Washington. Cataloguing the Washington charter revealed how little had been done to contextualize more than two centuries of scholarly investigation of the 20 or more original Magna Cartas thus far identified. Until 2010, the chief finding aid remained William Blackstone's commentary, published in 1759. In 2012, Vincent was commissioned by OUP to produce a popular guide to the charter (3.1). In the process, he brought to light at least 4 original Magna Cartas previously overlooked or misidentified. He also assembled a team that bid for and obtained GBP618,767 of AHRC funding towards a 'Magna Carta Project', 2012-2015.</p> <p>There were three principal aims here: to support and inform the 2015 800th anniversary celebrations, in particular via a British Library exhibition; to revisit the archives, disseminating new discoveries via a website; and permanently to enhance the legacy of the charter by explaining its wider European or international as well as its specifically British impact, from the 1120s through to the 21st century. The project was led by Vincent (UEA PI), with David Carpenter (KCL), Paul Brand (Oxford), Louise Wilkinson (Canterbury), and Claire Breay (British Library) as CIs, and a team of RAs: Geoff French (UEA RA 2013-2016) to build the website; Henry Summerson (UEA RA between 2014 and 2015) to write the website's clause-by-clause commentary on the charter (the first such compiled since 1914); Alex Lock (British Library RA) as link to the British Library; Hugh Doherty (UEA RA between 2012 and 2013, subsequently appointed to a permanent lectureship at UEA) and Sophie Ambler (UEA RA between 2013 and 2016, now permanent lecturer Lancaster, Philip Leverhulme Prize 2020) to assist with archival and web-based queries.</p>		

The project website (3.5) went live in February 2014, offering upwards of a million words (c.200,000 of them by Vincent) of commentary, discovery, context, teaching materials, and blog. Prior to 15 June 2020 (Google analytics) the website had received 43,651 visits, from 27,837 individuals, including 10,573 from the USA, 9,168 from the UK, over 2,200 from Canada and Australia, and more than 200 each from France (787), Germany (439), Brazil (253), Italy (305), Japan (256), and the Netherlands (237).

From 2013, the archival discoveries came thick and fast, including an entirely unknown Magna Carta from the town of Sandwich in Kent (3.4), unearthed in the Kent Archives in Maidstone (itself attracting 10,310 hits on the project website). These discoveries helped boost the project's international media engagement (3 front page stories in the *Sunday Times*, one of them broadcast around the world; articles in the *Times*, BBC Radio 4 week-long series hosted by Melvyn Bragg; upwards of 50 newspaper TV and radio interviews, including India, Brazil, Armenia; American schools (Annenberg Foundation); front page comment from Vincent in the *New York Times* ('Quote of the Day', on the anniversary date itself, 15 June 2015) (details of upwards of 100 such outputs on AHRC Researchfish).

Between 13 March and 1 September 2015, the project-assisted British Library exhibition 'Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy', sponsored by Linklaters, curated by Breay and officially opened by the Prince of Wales, attracted over 125,000 visitors. Of these, 115,000 were paying visitors, 39,000 (34%) of them from overseas, and 56,000 (49%) of the UK visitors from outside London. Vincent and Carpenter served on the exhibition's advisory group (12 minuted meetings) and were major contributors to the exhibition catalogue (3.6) (272 pages). Smaller exhibitions, informed by the project, were mounted in the Bodleian Library (Doherty UEA), at Lincoln, Salisbury, by the Society of Antiquaries (Church UEA) and in several other places where Magna Cartas are preserved, with Vincent, Church, Doherty, and Ambler (all UEA) speaking or giving advice at each of these venues.

Amongst the team's various books and articles ([Researchfish AHRC](#), 59 published outputs listed, besides 321 individual engagement activities), Vincent was commissioned by the Bodleian Library to write a major illustrated survey of the charter's impact, from 1215 across eight centuries (3.2), and as editor, for the Magna Carta Trust, to produce a commemorative collection of interdisciplinary essays (3.3), including contributions from leading historians, lawyers, and the former chief prosecutor of the UN International Criminal Tribunal (Richard Goldstone). Working with American partners (Princeton, Colorado College, Franklin and Marshall, Library of Congress, New York University Law School etc), Vincent and Ambler (both UEA) gave 11 key-note lectures in the USA. Elsewhere, in 2015, the project team delivered in excess of 200 public lectures on 4 continents (83 by Vincent alone, details on AHRC Researchfish). These were attended by upwards of 10,000 individuals and in many cases are still available as podcasts or YouTube videos (AHRC Researchfish). Vincent's catalogue of the original Magna Carta in Canberra has informed the Australian Senate's display of the charter, and was republished in 2015, with a half-hour televised broadcast lecture to the Senate's anniversary colloquium. At the request of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Vincent and other members of the team gave public lectures in Russia, Armenia, Abu Dhabi, Italy, Mexico, and Portugal. Vincent, Ambler, and Carpenter were part of an official delegation to Beijing (University of Peking) at the same time that Hereford's Magna Carta was displayed in China, and Vincent continued to work with the FCO thereafter, giving talks in Vercelli, and at the British embassies in Rome and the Vatican, to coincide with the 2019 Italian tour of Hereford Cathedral's Magna Carta. Many of these presentations drew parallels between British and other European legal traditions, easily overlooked in a story too often told as one of British exceptionalism. Others, outside western Europe, were directed towards audiences themselves struggling to obtain constitutional liberties not presently sanctioned by state authorities.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Magna Carta: A Very Short Introduction
Nicholas Vincent
 Oxford 2012, ISBN 13: 9780199582877

easily have become a celebration of myth rather than substance, the project offered repeated reminders that the past is a foreign place. Not only did people do differently then, but to various constituencies (Ireland, India, Jamaica or wherever else English 'liberties' have been employed as a means of distinguishing the rights of 'subject peoples from those of native-born Englishmen) the triumphalist account of Magna Carta as a 'passport to liberty' must appear grossly oversimplified. Acknowledged for its scholarly nuancing of the record, the project's advice was solicited by a variety of public figures, including Downing Street, members of the British royal family, and institutions and individuals both nationally and internationally. For example, ██████████ (Governor of the Bank of England) used materials supplied by Vincent for a keynote public lecture on Magna Carta and the economy (Lincoln Cathedral 2015), drawing parallels between economic outlooks in 1215 and 2015. ██████████ himself reports that without Vincent's *'advice and the academic research programme from which it flowed, that lecture simply could not have happened'* (5.2). ██████████ (Master of the Rolls) and ██████████ (Chief Treasury Counsel) took advice from Vincent and other project members before staging a major Magna Carta debate ('The Trial of the Barons') in Westminster Hall. Flying the flag for UK PLC, project members toured four continents, with the British ambassador to Italy, for example, commenting that Vincent's FCO-sponsored speech in Rome, in May 2019, was *'informative, insightful ... a great prompt for a lively discussion'* (5.7). ██████████ (former House of Lord librarian 5.4) reports that in the build up to the 2015 celebrations, Vincent's *Very Short Introduction to Magna Carta* offered *'a masterly yet accessible overview'*, supplying *'essential and informative reading to parliamentarians of all parties'*. Vincent's collection of essays, she writes, *'underpinned our whole programme of exhibitions and events'*. This included a display in Parliament's Royal Gallery visited by 800 MPs and peers. In the process, she concludes, the UEA project not only made a substantial contribution to Parliament's celebrations, generating 76 media articles with an estimated reach of 11,611,910, but through both the Westminster exhibition and its subsequent regional outreach (extending from Newcastle-upon-Tyne via Birmingham to Cardiff), *'informed and enhanced debate about the future of the UK's democracy'*. In the Australian Parliament, Vincent's broadcast was described by the Clerk to the Senate (5.6) as *'a triumph ... a big part of the success of our Magna Carta celebrations'*.

Teaching and Popular Perception: In 2013, Magna Carta became specifically incorporated within the UK National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 (5.10) and, following this, materials from the project website were freely distributed as teaching packs to schools across southern England. These materials are still used online in UK and US schools, as are short films that Vincent made for the Annenberg foundation, the American Bar Association, the British Library and interviews with Melvyn Bragg (still available via YouTube and BBC), with Reddit (5.10, estimated by Reddit as receiving 8000 reads, besides occasional visitors), and Russ Roberts (econtalk, 5.10, including posted comments such as *'wonderful'*, *'fascinating'*, and *'cogent'*). Books, articles, and teaching materials produced by the UEA project appear on the syllabuses of university courses in which Magna Carta is taught, around the world, from Brazil via Turkey to China. Vincent's Bodleian book is judged *'the standard listing for students'* (5.10), his *Very Short Introduction to Magna Carta* has been translated into Bulgarian and Chinese, and others of his essays were translated into French, Armenian, Chinese, and Italian, in edited collections specifically intended to offer a nuanced understanding of Magna Carta to international and non-Anglophone audiences. The project's findings are also more widely disseminated via popular works of history, including ██████████ bestselling *1215: The Year of Magna Carta*. ██████████ himself writes *'The Magna Carta Project website ... was one of the principal sources on which I drew ... elegant and richly populated, it presents world-class research and scholarship in a way that is accessible to all'* (5.5).

Legacy and Display: The anniversary celebrations also confirmed the need to rehouse and re-display Magna Carta, not only at the British Library but elsewhere. The new permanent exhibition in the British Library incorporates materials from the UEA project, including talking-heads videos by Vincent and Carpenter (upwards of 20,000 YouTube views, 2.5 million views via the BL site by 2018) (5.1). At Salisbury, Hereford, Lincoln, Canberra, Washington and elsewhere, Magna Carta was likewise redisplayed, with materials from the project integral to these efforts to explain and contextualise the charter. At Washington, for example, Vincent's translation of the Latin charter

into English is an integral part of the display. From Hereford, the Canon Chancellor reports that Vincent and the project were not only complementary to the charter's tours of China, Portugal, and Italy, but *'of vital help to us'* (5.8). In Hereford, London, Lincoln, Salisbury, Washington, Canberra and all those many other places around the world where it is displayed, not only is Magna Carta better understood as a result of the project, but the charter's legacy has been permanently enhanced. In the process, a regular stream of income has been generated, not least for those institutions such as Hereford Cathedral capitalizing upon Magna Carta as an object of popular fascination. As reported by the Chancellor of Hereford, the project *'enabled us to achieve a far greater impact than we would have otherwise managed, driving up visitor numbers and helping us to make a financial success of things'* (5.8).

As a particular instance, consider the case of **Sandwich Town Museum**: Thanks to Vincent's rediscovery of the Sandwich Magna Carta (5.3), the Kent Archives in Maidstone achieved unprecedented media attention ([time.com/3700712/magna-carta-scrapbook](https://www.time.com/3700712/magna-carta-scrapbook)). In consequence, Vincent's chief contact there, ██████████ was reassigned from administration to direct engagement with the archives and the general public. The Archives have since enjoyed enhanced advocacy at County Council level, with consequent protection in terms of funding. An exhibition of the charter in Maidstone was visited by 4,956 members of the public. In turn, international media attention led to a bid from Sandwich Town Council for a permanent exhibition of the charter, and a new town Museum. GBP120,000 was granted from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Museum reopened in 2017 with Vincent as chief patron (5.3). Vincent's discoveries, and the consequent publicity, gave the Museum a *'centre piece'* around which their collection could be reimaged and rebuilt. It is open all year, and, according to the Mayor of Sandwich, *'in a more accessible, interesting and informed manner ... trace(s) the story outwards from the Sandwich charters to a much more nuanced appreciation both of Magna Carta's significance, and of Sandwich's place within a wider national and international past'*. Visitor numbers have increased tenfold from 1500 to *'16,000 visitors a year from all over the world ... Families, school groups, and extra-curricular organisations that previously would not have been represented or interested'* (5.3). At a time of general retrenchment in local government expenditure, the Museum's success, a direct consequence of the project's discoveries, led to the employment of a full-time heritage professional, using Magna Carta itself as a means of reaching out to local schools and community youth groups. This is done through workshops, asking children to write and seal their own personal Magna Cartas, setting out terms that they consider relevant to the present day. In a part of Kent that has otherwise faced severe difficulties over the past 10 years, *'all of this has had a positive impact on the people of Sandwich and surrounding villages ... undoubtedly bringing large numbers of visitors and hence renewed prosperity to the local economy'* (5.3).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 British Library: including Head of Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts
- 5.2 Governor of the Bank of England
- 5.3 Sandwich Town Museum: supporting testimonial and articles (Time & Kent Online)
- 5.4 Former Director of Information Services at the House of Lords
- 5.5 Popular historian, TV presenter and journalist
- 5.6 Clerk of the Senate, Australian Senate
- 5.7 HM Ambassador Rome
- 5.8 Canon Chancellor of Hereford Cathedral
- 5.9 Deputy Chairman, Magna Carta Trust
- 5.10 Teaching and popular perception, including [Researchfish UKRI, Magna Carta Project](#)