



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

**LORD DYSON, MASTER OF THE ROLLS
(AND CHAIRMAN OF THE MAGNA CARTA TRUST) AT THE 800TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE SEALING OF MAGNA CARTA AT RUNNYMEDE**

15 JUNE 2015

(1) Introduction

1. Your Majesty, your Royal Highnesses, your Grace, your Excellences, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen.
2. We love anniversaries in this country. Of battles, the start and end of wars, the birth and death of famous people and significant events which have helped to shape our history. Any excuse for a commemoration, and we take it. When it comes to really important anniversaries, new stamps are printed and coins minted; new music is written; and the media pull out all the stops.
3. The anniversary that we are celebrating today is worthy of the royal treatment that it is receiving. We are commemorating the making of a treaty, an event which has turned out to be of huge significance for the development of this country and other democratic systems throughout the world. King John and the barons would have been bemused that thousands of people from all over the world were willing to set off at the crack of dawn to come here today, in order to stand for several hours in a field without shelter and uncertain of the elements. All this to mark what they did in 1215.

4. They would surely have been astonished to learn that over time Magna Carta came to be regarded as one of the most important constitutional documents in our history and that it continues to be so regarded 800 years after it was sealed on this very spot. They would not have believed that the barons' list of demands would become a symbol of democracy, justice, human rights and perhaps above all the rule of law for the whole world. But that is exactly what has happened.
5. Magna Carta has had its ups and downs. But it was a hugely significant step on a journey which led to the building of a society where everyone has equal rights and nobody is above the law. A few clauses of Magna Carta are still part of our law, including famously the provision that no free man shall be taken or imprisoned except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land; and to no one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay right or justice. These words still have a thrilling majesty even today.
6. Magna Carta was one of the English documents that inspired the US Bill of Rights. Other governments around the world have been greatly influenced by Magna Carta. The fact that visitors from far and wide are here today is eloquent testament to its continuing significance.
7. Lord Denning described Magna Carta as the greatest constitutional document of all time, the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot.

(2) Conclusion

8. With those ringing words in our minds, it now gives me great pleasure to invite the Prime Minister to speak.

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