

Section from relief in front of United Kingdom Supreme Court depicting King John granting Magna Carta.

PART ONE

My area and the Magna Carta Story



LOTTERY FUNDED

The Magna Carta Armoury



Research and investigation

Does your local area have a connection?

On the Battlefields Trust and Magna Carta website <http://magnacarta800th.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/The-Magna-Carta-cover.pdf> is information about the many battles and sieges that are known to have been part of the Magna Carta story, this should be the first place to look for a local connection.

If you think that your area has a connection to the battles or sieges that followed on from the encounters between King John and the Barons that led to Magna Carta but it's not mentioned in the link then perhaps carry out some research for yourself.

You might also like to look at the Part two section here on where can I get information about Magna Carta?

If you decided that you need to carry out research about the local dimension, then you might want to visit your local library, contact your local history society and, or a nearby university library. One of the most important places to contact will be your local archives or county records office

Using local archives

Information about your town or areas will be past in your local archive. Many towns and cities have archives alongside government buildings and or libraries. Many of those archives are now accessible online so your first point of contact might be from your home computer online.

If you have not used an archive before it can seem quite daunting. Here is some excellent advice from the Archives hub:

<http://archiveshub.ac.uk/about/>
an organisation based out of the University of Manchester.

They provide the following information for anyone not used to using an archive:

www.archiveshub.ac.uk/guides/workingwitharchives/



13th century crossbowman in chainmail.



Working with Archives

This page is part of: Using Archives: A Guide for the Inexperienced

I don't feel that I know how to use archives in my research...

It is useful to gain an understanding of how to read and interpret primary sources before you embark upon your main research project, so that you are well prepared. Talk to your tutor, or to staff in the library or archive, about getting help with using primary sources. Many places offer introductory sessions where you can handle sources and learn more about how to use them.

Usually it is good to frame a research project from the very beginning, before looking for primary sources. Once you have a subject, frame your research question, refine it in the light of initial reading and research, and start to explore sources.

I'm not sure what sort of questions I need to ask...

You need to think about contextualizing your sources' using basic questions such as what is it? By whom and when was it created? What does it say? How does it relate to the topic I'm studying? Does it agree or disagree with other interpretations of the topic? These types of questions help you to think about the evidence that original material can provide and help to make connections that can inform your work.

It can also help to ask questions about how complete the archive is – What is missing? Who are the authors and what were they trying to achieve? Did they have an agenda?

It might help to start with your research question and break it down into smaller questions or statements, and it can help to think about key phrases or words that relate to your research. This can help to define your scope and give you focus for your research strategy.

If you are struggling to orientate yourself, it may help to think about your own 'archive' –

your personal collection of material – emails, comments on Facebook, tweets, letters, diaries, photographs. Whatever it is, what does it say about you? What could others learn from it about your life, your opinions and your connections? It will probably leave quite a bit out, so they would only get a glimpse into your life. Archives won't tell you everything and what is left out is worth thinking about.

Visiting an Archive

You may wish to consult an archive collection, in which case you are likely to need to visit a repository or record office – a collecting institution that provides a reading room where you can consult the materials that they hold.

Making an Appointment

You will sometimes need to contact the repository in advance to make an appointment to consult the materials, although this is usually not necessary. Some reading rooms have quite limited opening hours, so it is best to check before you go....and check whether it is free entry. Some collections are held by private institutions and they may have an entry charge.



Rolled 13th century manuscript.
Courtesy of the Pipe Roll Society.



Rochester Castle in Kent was the site of an epic siege by King John against the rebel barons in 1215.

Readers' Tickets

You may need a reader's ticket, which will require registration. Some local record offices are part of a scheme where you register and your ticket is valid for all those participating in the scheme.

Know What you Need

If you know the collections or items you want to look at, take note of the title and the reference number in order to give these to the archivist when you arrive at the reading room.

Ordering Archives

Archives are very rarely on open access, so you usually order what you would like to see and it is brought to the reading room.

Surrogate Material

The original material is not always available for use and surrogates may be provided. This may be because the originals are fragile, damaged, or heavily used. Archives may also be closed for a period of time because information is sensitive.

Online descriptions of collections usually include information about closure periods on collections.

Size of Collections

Be aware of the size of the archive collection(s) you want to view - some are just a few items, some are hundreds of boxes.

Language of Collections

Some archives will not be in English, and sometimes they are not easy to read. Descriptions of archives usually include the languages they are written in.

Using Pencils

Many archive repositories only allow pencils to be used in the reading room. This is to lessen the chances of damage to the documents.

Using PCs and other Devices

Many repositories have sockets for laptops, and wireless internet available, but it is worth checking this before you arrive.

Making Copies of Archives

You may be able to get copies made of parts of archives, either photocopies or photographs. Each repository will have its own policy on this, and it often depends upon the condition of the material.

If you are in doubt about any aspect of visiting or consulting an archive collection, it is a good idea to check with the repository you are visiting before setting off.

Non-archives

For sources on the Magna Carta other than your local archive you might want to look at

Other local sources:

- English Heritage
- A local guildhall
- Church records, either locally or by contacting your local parish vicar
- Local university or FE college libraries
- A local Museum
- The National Archive

Tips

Also when using the archives and looking for references consider the following:

Has the town or locale that I am looking for changed its name or spelling at any time?

Might the area I am looking for have been mentioned in relation to a person or a building e.g. the shire of Baron Red or Battering Castle/Abbey.

Does your area come under the possession of a one of the key figures but

managed to escape a siege – if so why? Knowing why your town escaped the battles may still be an interesting and important part of the Magna Carta story. E.g. my town was under the protection of Baron Red and not attacked, but the Guild people there supplied all the weaponry and food for the attack on Baron Red's neighbour.

