

## **Eight centuries of Magna Carta celebrated at community pageant**



A spectacular, once-in-a-lifetime pageant is to bring the streets of Salisbury to life with a carnival of colour as Wiltshire celebrates the birth of our nation's present day liberties 800 years on from the sealing of the Magna Carta.

The celebrations will take place on the evening of Monday 15 June, eight centuries to the day since King John met the group of rebel barons at Runnymede and consented to a series of promises for new civic liberties ranging from the protection of church rights to access to swift and fair justice.

The spirits of the barons will be reborn in the guise of a series of larger-than-life puppets, representing the diverse communities that make up Wiltshire. The barons will be paraded through the city from the Market Square to the Cathedral, which itself plays host to the most intact copy of the Magna Carta in existence.

Each of the barons will lead a delegation from communities across Wiltshire. Hundreds will participate in the pageant and thousands are expected to line the streets of the city as the procession weaves its way to its destination, where dignitaries will take part in the signing of a new Magna Carta statement for Wiltshire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The event is being organised by Wiltshire Council, working in partnership with Salisbury Cathedral and Salisbury City Council and a range of other partner organisations.

Jane Scott, leader of Wiltshire Council, said: "The sealing of the Magna Carta marked a watershed in our place as ordinary British subjects – ultimately it sparked our parliamentary democracy and rule of law, but it also stands out as the first time the people of this nation had their voices heard.

"The spectacular pageant in Salisbury on 15 June truly will be a once-in-a-lifetime celebration, not only of this historic anniversary, but also of our 21<sup>st</sup> century liberties.

"Communities from across the county are getting right behind this event, involving schools, young people and local groups, and it really does promise to be an extraordinary pageant and a night to remember."

The Very Rev'd June Osborne, Dean of Salisbury, said: "This day – the day on which Magna Carta was actually sealed 800 years ago – is a hugely significant anniversary for the Cathedral, the city of Salisbury and the county. It is an opportunity to publicly celebrate the values of Magna Carta and the liberties it has brought us, liberties that we hold dear today and are tempted to take for granted.

"As we celebrate with members of the community and visitors, we should remember what this day is all about – justice, equality, fairness and compassion – such values the church, national and local government should celebrate and share."

The procession will leave Market Place shortly after 8pm.

Magna Carta (Latin for "the Great Charter"), is a charter agreed by King John at Runnymede, near Windsor, on 15 June 1215. First drafted by the Archbishop of Canterbury to make peace between the unpopular king and a group of rebel barons, it promised the protection of church rights, protection for the barons from illegal imprisonment, access to swift justice, and limitations on feudal payments to the Crown, to be implemented through a council of 25 barons.

Neither side stood behind their commitments, and the charter was annulled by Pope Innocent III, leading to the First Barons' War. After John's death, the regency government of his young son, Henry III, reissued the document in 1216, stripped of some of its more radical content, in an unsuccessful bid to build political support for their cause. At the end of the war in 1217, it formed part of the peace treaty agreed at Lambeth, where the document acquired the name Magna Carta, to distinguish it from the smaller Charter of the Forest which was issued at the same time. Short of funds, Henry reissued the charter again in 1225 in exchange for a grant of new taxes; his son, Edward I, repeated the exercise in 1297, this time confirming it as part of England's statute law.

Salisbury Cathedral is home to the finest preserved of the four original 1215 Magna Cartas, displayed in a spectacular medieval setting. A major permanent exhibition opened in March 2015 presenting Magna Carta in its historic context and capturing the document's legacy and current relevance.

Salisbury Cathedral and the Magna Carta exhibition will be open to the public from 1pm to 10pm on the day.

A range of Magna Carta events will take place in Salisbury and Wiltshire during 2015. These include contemporary art installations, a barons' trail, musical performances, theatrical events, a wide range of family activities and a flower festival. Trowbridge, home of one of the 25 barons, will also be a focal point for activities.

You can find out more about Magna Carta 800-themed events here in Wiltshire at [www.visitwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk) or explore the subject further by downloading [a copy of the Magna Carta 800 trails leaflet](#)