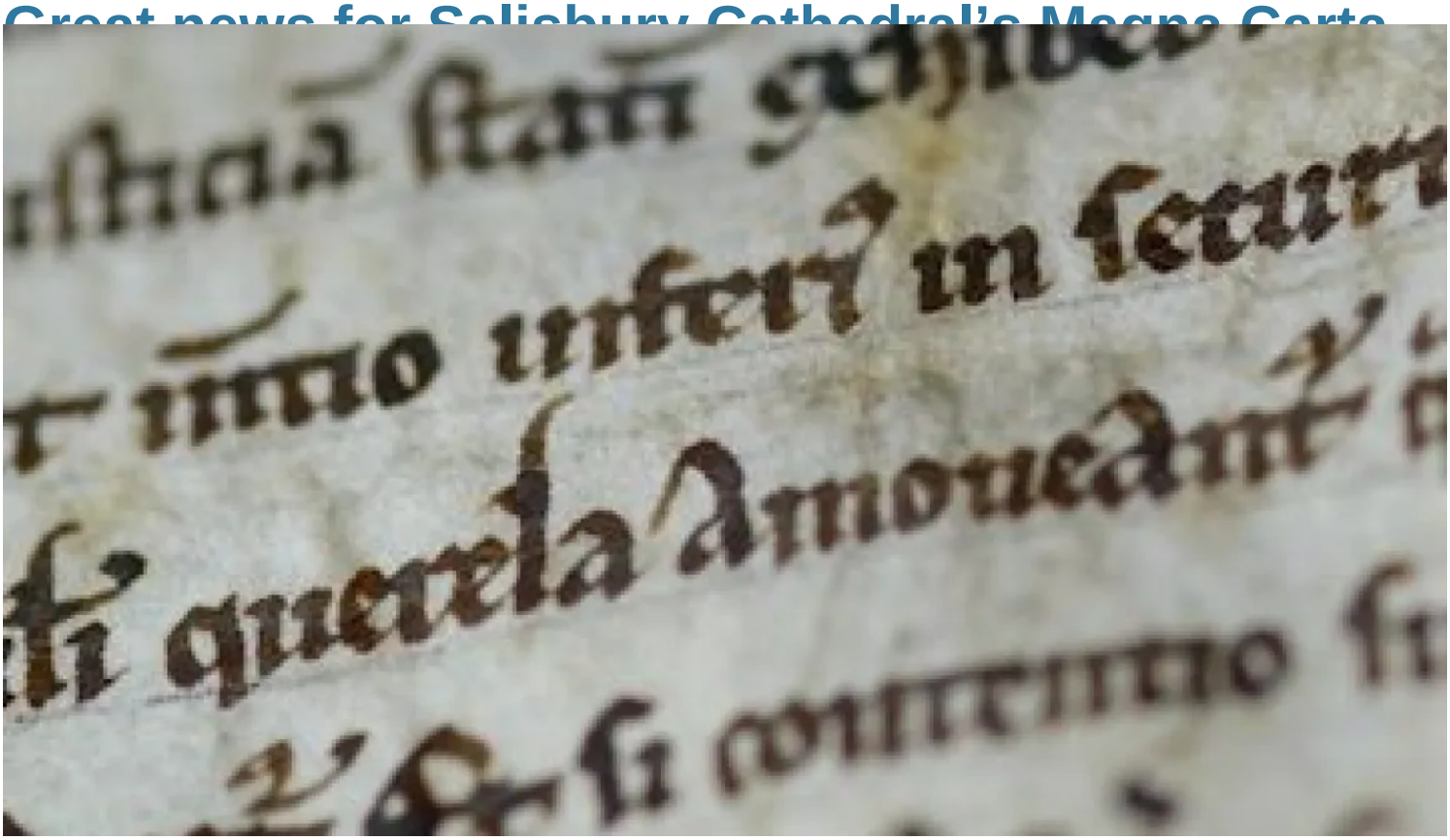
Great news for Salisbury Cathedral's Magna Carta



Close-up of the 1215 Magna Carta at Salisbury Cathedral Copyright Ash Mills

Plans are advanced to re-display and re-present the cathedral's Magna Carta in the Chapter House alongside other documents from the cathedral's extensive archive, using the latest interpretation techniques to communicate Magna Carta's historic background and modern significance to the many extra visitors expected in 2015 and beyond.

Martin Field, Deputy Chapter Clerk and Development Director said: "We are delighted to have received this support from the Heritage Lottery Fund allowing us to develop our exciting plans for a new Magna Carta exhibition and other celebratory activities in 2015, bringing Magna Carta to many new audiences. The 'Great Charter' has inspired and influenced people to stand up for justice and freedom around the globe and across the ages. People will be able to come to Salisbury and experience for themselves the extraordinary sway the ideas expressed in this document continue to hold."

Canon Edward Probert, Canon Chancellor and Acting Dean of Salisbury said, "Magna Carta lay unnoticed in our archives for centuries before someone spotted it and realized its huge significance. I'm delighted that this funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund will also enable us to employ a full time archivist so that other important manuscripts from our archives can be experienced by the public for the first time. Salisbury Cathedral's archive is a real medieval treasure trove with documents going back to the founding of the first cathedral at Old Sarum – so who knows what else might be

discovered?”

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “Salisbury Cathedral’s original 1215 Magna Carta is one of the world’s most important documents and is still hugely relevant to our lives today. This initial HLF support will mean the cathedral can work up detailed plans to restore, re-present and open up the Magna Carta’s fascinating story for visitors long into the future. We are looking forward to seeing these exciting plans progress over the coming months.”

In order to ‘unlock’ Heritage Lottery Fund, the total amount will be over £500,000, the cathedral will need to raise nearly £200,000 in partnership funding. Wilsons Solicitors LLP, the oldest legal business headquartered in Salisbury, has pledged £30,000 towards this total. Managing Partner Andrew Roberts said: “Magna Carta is probably the most famous document in English legal history. Its application of the rule of law to all, including the state, continues to underlie the personal and commercial freedoms that we enjoy today. We feel privileged to be the first business to support this internationally important project to showcase this document, its context and impact."

Salisbury Cathedral will be looking to work with a range of partners to deliver its ambitious programme. These include the British Library; Lincoln Cathedral; Magna Carta 800th Committee/Magna Carta Trust; Diocese of Salisbury; the American Bar Association; BBC; Wiltshire Council; Visit Wiltshire; Dorset County Council; Salisbury City Council; AGEAS Salisbury International Arts Festival; Salisbury Museum Salisbury Playhouse and Sarum College.

Further details of Salisbury Cathedral’s Magna Carta 800th anniversary celebrations will be published in February 2014.

Notes to editors

- Salisbury Cathedral will take a leading role in the 2015 celebrations marking the 800th anniversary of the historic and iconic document whose legacy has been its enduring global influence. Magna Carta’s clauses on social justice form the cornerstone of modern democracy and liberty worldwide and are as pertinent today as they were 800 years ago.
- The 1215 Magna Carta is inscribed in the UNESCO ‘Memory of the World’ register underlining the fact that the four documents held by Salisbury Cathedral, Lincoln Cathedral and The British Library are regarded amongst the world’s most significant documentary heritage.
- Salisbury Cathedral will hear in June 2014 whether it is successful in its final bid.
- At Runnymede King John was urged to accept the demands of the barons and agree Magna Carta by his half-brother, William Longspeé, whose Effigy is in Salisbury Cathedral. Also present at Runnymede was Elias of Dereham, who at the time was steward to one of the key players in the crisis, the Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton. Elias himself was a skilled negotiator and was at the very centre of the discussions between the King and the barons. Once Magna Carta was agreed and sealed he was entrusted with delivering ten of the thirteen copies made, one of which was given to the original cathedral at Old Sarum. Elias later became a Canon of Old Sarum before masterminding the building of the present Salisbury Cathedral.
- Salisbury’s copy of Magna Carta 2015 is in excellent condition. Written in a neat business hand, it is closer in some ways to a book hand than to the business hand of the royal chancery. It has various medieval and post-medieval endorsements including anno domini 1215 written in a hand very similar to that of the antiquary and herald Robert Glover. It is assumed to be the exemplar of the charter delivered to Wiltshire and thence stored in the cathedral archives.
- HLF initial support, or a first-round pass, means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in

competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

Further information

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