

UK Parliament

[UK Parliament](#) > [About Parliament](#) > [Living Heritage](#) > [The evolution of Parliament](#) > [Origins of Parliament](#) > [Birth of the English Parliament](#) > [Overview](#)



The contents of Magna Carta

Magna Carta is Latin for 'great charter' and the term was first used in 1217 to distinguish it from the Charter of the Forest, a document that also set out limits on the king's administration, this time of the royal forest, areas of the country set aside for royal hunting and subject to much harsher laws and restrictions. Both charters set out what the king could and could not do. In other words, Magna Carta set out the laws which the king and everyone else had to follow for the first time. Copies of Magna Carta were sent out to be read out in each county of England so that everyone knew of its existence.

The Clauses of Magna Carta

There are 63 clauses in Magna Carta. For the main part, the clauses do not deal with legal principles but instead relate to the regulation of feudal customs and the operation of the justice system. There are clauses on the granting of taxes, towns and trade, the extent and regulation of the royal forest, debt, the Church and the restoration of peace.

Only four of the 63 clauses in Magna Carta are still valid today - 1 (part), 13, 39 and 40. Of enduring importance to people appealing to the charter over the last 800 years are the famous clauses 39 and 40:

"No free man shall be seized, imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed, exiled or ruined in any way, nor in any way proceeded against, except by the lawful judgement of his peers and the law of the land.

"To no one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay right or justice."

These clauses remain law today, and provided the basis for important principles in English law developed in the fourteenth through to the seventeenth century, and which were exported to America and other English-speaking countries. Their phrasing, 'to no one' and 'no free man' gave these provisions a universal quality that is still applicable today in a way that many of the clauses relating specifically to feudal custom are not.

Did you know?

Magna Carta was not intended to be a great charter of rights for all people, but designed by the barons to ensure that their rights were protected against the king's power.

Popular

[What's on in Parliament](#)

[Petitions](#)

[Careers at Parliament](#)

[Commons Media Relations](#)

[Lords Press Office](#)

[Contact us](#)

Research

[Commons Library](#)

[Lords Library](#)

POST

Search Parliament

Watch Parliament Live

Parliament Live TV

Follow Parliament

X Instagram Facebook YouTube

Legal

Accessibility statement

Modern slavery statement

About this site

Privacy notice

Cookie policy

Cookie settings