

# Magna Carta

*and the Canterbury*  
*maquettes*



**BOB COLLINS**

**APRIL 2011**  
(Updated October 2021)

# Magna Carta

## and the Canterbury maquettes

The *Magna Carta* (Great Charter), issued on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1215, is the most famous symbol of the power struggle between John, King of England, and several of the ruling barons. Sealed by the King at Runnymede near Windsor Castle, it specified that the subject had certain liberties that the state could not interfere with, such as the right of a freeman to be tried by due process of law. The charter was adapted and reissued many times, but some of its conditions still remain part of the law today.

King John, the youngest son of King Henry II, and brother to King Richard I "The Lionheart", succeeded to the throne in 1199. He quickly alienated both the Church and many of the powerful barons of England due to his arbitrary rule, heavy taxation, and military failures that lost most of the English lands in France. Although a number of the barons remained loyal, many who had suffered from John's actions moved against him and forced him to submit to the terms of their charter, which placed limits on the royal authority. Neither side expected to abide by it, and a civil war (known as the First Barons' War) quickly ensued. The rebel barons' ultimate aim was to remove the King, even inviting the French Prince Louis to come and rule in his place, but John's death in 1216 and a French military defeat at Lincoln by the loyalist camp the following year put paid to the plan. Peace quickly returned, but as the years passed, *Magna Carta* would come to be seen as a hugely significant constitutional document.

In October 1834, a terrible fire swept through the Houses of Parliament building in London, and almost all of it had to be rebuilt. Many new designs were submitted, and the one chosen was by the famous architect Charles Barry. The House of Lords chamber was finished first, in 1847, and a committee of the Fine Arts Commission appropriately decided to decorate the upper part of the chamber with a series of figures of many of the barons who had been involved with the *Magna Carta*. For this work, they hired some of the leading craftsmen of the day; Henry Timbrell had work on display at Buckingham Palace, Frederick Thrupp at Westminster Abbey. Thomas Thornycroft was a designer for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and later designed the statue *Boudicca and her Daughters* on Westminster Bridge. The Irish sculptor Patrick MacDowell had been a member and exhibitor at the Royal Academy for many years.

Each artist was to design a maquette (from the French for "scale model"), with an iron-framed centre which was then filled out with plaster, although the weapons held by the barons were made of wood. The models were then lacquered in black and sent to the Fine Arts Commission for approval. All were completed by 1851, ready for the series to be cast. The final versions were cast in zinc and coated with copper by the plating firm of George Elkington in Birmingham, and were placed around the House of Lords chamber in 1858. They can still be seen, looking down onto the members of the House, and making sure that the due processes of law are observed.

The maquettes were acquired from Elkington's firm in 1906 by Francis Bennett-Goldney, the highly controversial Mayor of Canterbury. They were then displayed in the new Westgate Museum which was opened that same year. They remained on show there until 1987, when the majority of them were removed from display and instead stored in the lower turret chambers, where they became surrounded by rubbish and were much neglected. The rooms were finally cleaned in 2008 but the maquettes are in great need of restoration. They are very rare survivals of Victorian plasters, but at present are a sadly forgotten part of Canterbury's museum heritage.

# The Maquettes



**William Longespée, Earl of Salisbury** (1169-1226) was a natural (illegitimate) son of King Henry II and therefore half-brother to King John, under whom he was one of England's most senior military commanders. He was one of the few barons to remain loyal to the King up to the sealing of the *Magna Carta*, and was rewarded for this in the next reign, that of John's son King Henry III. He was a patron of Salisbury Cathedral in Wiltshire, and was eventually buried there; his tomb can still be seen.  
*Sculpted by John Thomas.*



**Almaric de St. Maur** (fl. 1200-1215) had been the Grand Master of the Knights Templar in England since 1200. Not much is known about him, but he appears to have been close to King John, and was probably advising him to agree to the charter; the Knights Templar was a religious order, and the disputes with the barons and Church had led to the King (and therefore the country) being excommunicated by the Pope. Due to his religious associations, he appears on the charter as "brother".  
*Sculpted by Patrick MacDowell.*



**Richard de Clare, Earl of Hertford** (d. 1217) originally swore a peace with the King in the war against the barons, but he later changed sides. This gave him, as one of the senior barons, a chief negotiating role of the terms of *Magna Carta*. However, in switching sides, he forfeited his Kentish castle of Tonbridge, which was taken by the Crown, followed by many of his lands in the east of England. He died just over a year later.  
*Sculpted by Henry Timbrell.*



**Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford** (d. 1221) was the Master Chamberlain of England, having succeeded his brother the year before *Magna Carta*. He supported the barons from the beginning, and lost his castle at Hedingham, Essex to the King's forces in the fighting following the breakdown of negotiations. The Earl supported the arrival of Louis, the French prince, to rule in place of John, but when this failed due to John's death, he abandoned the rebel cause. He was buried at the priory at Hatfield Regis, Essex.  
*Sculpted by Frederick Thrupp.*



**Saer de Quincy, Earl of Winchester** (1155-1219) was an experienced soldier who had fought in Normandy and Scotland alongside his cousin Robert Fitzwalter (see below). He strongly supported the rebels and travelled to France with Fitzwalter to invite the French prince to take the English throne, but the plan did not succeed. Following this failure, he joined the Fifth Crusade, but died of an illness whilst serving at Acre.

*Sculpted by James Westmacott.*

*On display at the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge (Royal Museum).*



**Henry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford** (1176-1220) was the Constable of England, making him one of the great Officers of State. This gave him command of the royal armies and he was therefore a powerful opponent of King John. He was another supporter of the French invasion and was subsequently captured as a prisoner at the Battle of Lincoln in 1217, where the French were defeated, ending the First Barons' War.

*Sculpted by Thomas Thomycroft.*

*On loan to Trowbridge Museum, Wiltshire.*



**Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Gloucester** (1191-1216) was one of the younger Barons. He married Isabel, Countess of Gloucester in 1214; she had previously been the wife of King John but the King had the marriage annulled shortly after his accession. Gloucester's tenure as Earl was brief; he died the year after *Magna Carta*; Isabel died the year after that, and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral.

*Sculpted by James Westmacott.*



**Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk** (1140-1221) served as a royal steward and a justiciar (minister) under King Richard I, and was also one of the King's ambassadors to France. As a result of holding these offices he was frequently in King John's household on royal business. This may have initially made him one of the loyalists, but if so, it did not last and he joined the rebels. Following the Battle of Lincoln in 1217, however, he was reconciled to John's son & heir, and his regents.

*Sculpted by Thomas Thomycroft.*



**William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke** (1146-1219) was described by the Archbishop of Canterbury as "the greatest knight that ever lived". He had served under both Henry II and Richard I, being in charge of the King's safety, and supported John from his accession although the relationship was strained at times. He was one of those who remained loyal to John throughout; as a result he was given charge of John's funeral and became regent for the young King Henry III. Under his leadership, *Magna Carta* was reissued in 1217. He was one of the most famous men of his day. He is buried at Temple Church, London.

*Sculpted by John Evan Thomas.*



**William de Warenne, Earl of Surrey** (1166-1240) succeeded to his earldom in 1202 and originally held lands in Normandy, but when these were lost by King John in 1204 he was granted lands in Lincolnshire, and also served as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in Kent. Like Salisbury and William Marshal, he was loyal to the King - his cousin - and advised John to agree to the charter. Also like Salisbury, he was a patron of Salisbury Cathedral. He also held the office of High Sheriff of Surrey. In 1225 he married Maud Marshal, the daughter of William Marshal.

*Sculpted by Patrick MacDowell.*



**William de Forz, Earl of Albemarle** (d. 1242) was the son of a minor noble from Poitou in France, but had recently been confirmed by the King as lord of the territories of Albemarle, gaining him lands in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. This meant that he was loyal to John during the revolt. He switched sides when the King's cause looked lost, only to switch back when fighting restarted. Eventually declared a rebel in 1219, he was then excommunicated, only regaining baronial influence after he surrendered to King Henry III. He died at sea on his way to the Middle East.

*Sculpted by Henry Timbrell.*



**Robert Fitzwalter, Baron Fitzwalter** (d. 1235) was important to the barons' cause as he held Baynard's Castle in London, as well as lands in Essex where he was a feudal baron. One of King John's administrators, he had gradually become an opponent of him because of his perception of the King's mismanagement of government. In the First Barons' War he defended Rochester Castle against John's forces, but was eventually forced to surrender. He travelled to France to support Prince Louis' taking of the throne, but was taken prisoner at the Battle of Lincoln.

*Sculpted by Frederick Thrupp.*

*On display at the Beane House of Art & Knowledge (Royal Museum).*



**Stephen Langton** (d. 1228) had been Archbishop of Canterbury since 1207, and was the focus of attention between King John's dispute with the Pope; he had been made Archbishop on the Pope's orders, which had infuriated John. He was also a supporter of the barons, believing the King's laws to be unjust, and so when the Pope later excommunicated the barons for rebelling, he refused to carry out the sentence, and continued his support for them into the next reign. He is buried in Canterbury Cathedral.

*Sculpted by John Thomas.*

*On display at the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge (Royal Museum).*



**William Mowbray, Baron of Thirsk** (1172-1222) served King John in his early military campaigns and was described by his contemporaries as generous and valiant, although he later became a staunch opponent of the King, and his northern lands were confiscated. Captured at the Battle of Lincoln, he had to be ransomed. He soon made peace with King Henry III and was restored. Later he defended the Crown during another attempted rebellion by William de Forz.

*Sculpted by Alexander Ritchie.*



**Eustace de Vesci, Lord of Alnwick** (1169-1216), based in the north of England, was one of the guardians of the bishopric of Durham. He was accused in 1210 of conspiring against King John, and his lands in Northumberland were seized. He became a prominent opponent of the King, and joined forces with Fitzwalter to ride south against him. He also supported the invasion of Prince Louis of France. Shortly after Magna Carta, he was killed whilst attacking the loyalist forces at Barnard Castle.

*Sculpted by Alexander Ritchie.*



The statues of Almaric and Oxford on display in the early years of the Westgate Museum

# The Sculptors

**John Thomas (1813-1862)** was from Gloucestershire and was apprenticed to a stonemason in his youth. He set up in business in Birmingham where his brother was an architect, and was noticed by Charles Barry, who was later to redesign the House of Lords chamber. Under Barry, he carved the figures of the kings and queens at the Palace of Westminster, and other works of his in London are a series of allegorical statues at Euston Station, the statue of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century engineer Sir Hugh Myddleton at Islington Green, and carvings at Buckingham Palace. He also exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851. His statue *Lady Godiva* is on show at Maidstone Museum. A statue of the playwright William Shakespeare was his final work, and was displayed at the International Exhibition of 1862.

**Patrick MacDowell (1799-1870)** was from Belfast but came to England as a sculptor's apprentice. He had a long and successful career, exhibiting at the Royal Academy in 1822 (his statue *Linneaus* can be seen on the outside of the building), and becoming a member in 1846. He enjoyed success at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and his *Europe* forms one of the groups around the Albert Memorial in South Kensington. His *Viscount Exmouth* can be seen at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, and his *William Pitt* and *Earl of Chatham* at Westminster Palace. Other places where his work can be seen include St. Paul's Cathedral (*Turner*) and the Mansion House (*Leah*), the latter one of his finest achievements.

**Henry Timbrell (1806-1849)** was born and studied in Ireland, attending the Schools of the Royal Dublin Society in 1827. He won sculpting prizes at the Royal Hibernian Academy, and then came to London to work for the sculptor Edward Baily. The Royal Academy provided him with a scholarship for his most famous work, *Hercules throwing Lycas into the sea*, and he would later exhibit there. He worked at Buckingham Palace, making reliefs for the garden house, and also executed works in the classical style, having spent some time in Rome. The Magna Carta statues of *Richard, Earl of Hertford* and *William, Earl of Albemarle* were among his last works.

**James Westmacott (1823-1900)** was from London and his career lasted from 1846 to 1890. His two most celebrated works are the statue *Alexander the Great* at the Mansion House, and the philosopher *Aristotle* at Burlington House at Piccadilly. The Victoria & Albert Museum houses his marble statue *The Artist's Daughter* from around 1870, believed to be of his own daughter Constance. Westmacott's maquette of *Saer de Quincy* (see above) was exhibited, along with his statue of Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, at the Great Exhibition of 1851. He exhibited at the Royal Academy a total of 34 times, but was unsuccessful in two applications for membership.

**Thomas Thornycroft (1815-1885)** hailed from Cheshire, the son of a farmer. He started out as an assistant to London sculptor John Francis, marrying Francis' daughter Mary who also worked as a sculptor. His sculpture of Queen Victoria on horseback for the Great Exhibition of 1851 was much admired by the Queen, and Thornycroft later produced a full-sized version for St. George's Hall in Liverpool; similar ones by him can also be seen at Wolverhampton and Halifax. Like MacDowell, he worked on the Albert Memorial; the group *Commerce* is by him. His most famous work, although it was not cast in bronze until after his death, is the mighty *Boudicca and her Daughters* statue on Westminster Bridge. He sometimes collaborated with his wife on works, such as the *Poet's Fountain* at Hyde Park Corner, and also with their eldest son John, with whom he designed steam launches in his later years. Other London works of Thornycroft can be seen at Westminster Abbey and the Old Bailey.

**John Evan Thomas (1810-1873)** was born in Wales and started his sculpting career there, producing church monuments in his native Breconshire, and also in Brecon Cathedral. Much of his principal work can still be seen in Wales, including the *Second Marquess of Bute* in Cardiff, the *Duke of Wellington* in Brecon, and the *John Henry Vivian* in Swansea. He also had a studio in London, and his *Marquess of Bute* was exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 along with an electrotype of his *Death of Tewdrig*. He also exhibited portrait busts at the Royal Academy.

**Frederick Thrupp (1812-1895)**, like Westmacott, was a Londoner. He was born in Paddington, and attended the Academy of the artist Henry Sass in Bloomsbury. He has two statues of his work in Westminster Abbey, of the politician & prison reformer Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and the poet William Wordsworth, and also at the House of Lords and the Mansion House. He was also a regular contributor to the Royal Academy. Outside of London, he designed the bronze *Pilgrim's Progress* panels for the Bunyan Chapel in Bedford, and a monument to Lady Coleridge in Ottery St. Mary, Devon. In his last years he lived in Torquay and many of his works and drawings can be seen there at Torre Abbey - the largest collection of its type.

**Alexander Ritchie (1804-1870)** was born in Scotland, at Musselburgh, the son of an ornamental plasterer and grandson of a sculptor. He studied at the Edinburgh School of Arts, and then opened a studio in that city, receiving commissions for many municipal buildings there including the Public Library, the Commercial Bank, and the Royal College of Physicians. Many public works of his can still be seen in Scotland, including statues of the novelist Sir Walter Scott, the clergyman Ralph Erskine, Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel and the medieval knight Sir William Wallace. He worked at Stirling Cemetery making the monuments *Agnes and Margaret Wilson*, and *John Knox and Ebenezer Erskine*, and also at the Hamilton Mausoleum. He exhibited his work frequently at the Royal Academy and the Royal Scottish Academy, being elected an Associate of the latter in 1846.

**Note:** There is seemingly no record of the other three baronial maquettes - those of *Henry de Loundres, Archbishop of Dublin* by Alexander Ritchie, and *William d'Aubigny, Earl of Arundel & Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent*, both by William Woodington (1806-1893). They were not part of the acquisition from Elkington & Co., and do not appear on any Canterbury museum inventory. They were perhaps purchased by another individual, but it seems more likely that they have disappeared.



Some of the maquettes arranged in one of the lower turret chambers in 2008