

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

### Magna Carta awarded unique UN status

**LONDON, UK – 30 July 2009.** The four surviving copies of the 1215 Magna Carta have been awarded ‘Memory of the World’ status by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today, in recognition of their outstanding universal value. With their Inscription on the Memory of the World Register, the documents, held by the British Library, Salisbury Cathedral and Lincoln Cathedral, join the ranks of some of the world’s most significant documentary heritage.

The UNESCO Memory of the World International Register is a catalogue of documentary heritage of global significance and outstanding universal value – akin to a World Heritage Site list for documents and archives. The International Register is the public face of UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme, which promotes access to the world’s archive holdings and library collections, as well as their preservation.

The inscription covers the four surviving copies of the version of Magna Carta forced on King John by the Barons of England at Runnymede in June 1215. Magna Carta is a charter which, for the first time, detailed written constraints on royal authority in the fields of church rights, taxation, feudal rights and justice. It has become an icon for freedom and democracy throughout the world.

Phil Spence, **Director of Operations and Services at the British Library**, said, "I am delighted that Magna Carta has been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. Magna Carta is a fundamental document in the history of our nation, and has international significance for its definition of the rights of the individual. The declaration that "no free man should be imprisoned without the lawful judgment of his equals" still has great resonance 800 years after Magna Carta was first drawn up. The two original copies of Magna Carta are among the British Library’s most historically evocative, precious and popular treasures. Their dedicated room in our exhibition gallery and expert presentation on our website are two of our most visited and widely appreciated public venues."

Mark Bonney, **Canon Treasurer at Salisbury Cathedral**, recognises the significant of the inscription. "Salisbury Cathedral is well aware of the global significance of Magna Carta and extremely proud to own the finest preserved of the original 1215 documents. Seeing this most famous of English charters, sealed by an English King almost 800 years ago, is for many visitors the highlight of their time at Salisbury Cathedral. Indeed, we know that for 50% of our overseas guests seeing Magna Carta is one of the primary reasons for their visit. Its 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 Very Reverend Philip Buckler, **Dean of Lincoln**, is delighted with the UNESCO award, commenting, "The significance of Magna Carta worldwide cannot be overstated. In particular, its status as the inspiration for the US constitution is very important. As we approach 2015, the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Runnymede confrontation, Magna Carta will be at the centre of a celebration of the universal values it created. The Memory of the World designation will help carry these values forward."

**Chairman of the Magna Carta Trust** Lord Clarke of Stone-cum-Ebony, Master of the Rolls, welcomed the UNESCO announcement, saying, “There are few documents which have had the resonance of the Magna Carta, the foundation of English law and the first recognition that the people have rights enshrined in law and that even monarchs’ powers are limited. Following the signing of the Magna Carta on June 15, 1215, virtually every country in the world has sooner or later, embraced democracy, recognised human rights and espoused the rule of law.”

“The four surviving copies of 1215 Magna Carta are a unique testament to the world’s rich documentary heritage,” says David Dawson, **Chair of the UK Memory of the World Committee**. “It is exactly these types of documents that the Memory of the World Register seeks to help preserve and promote access to.”

On 30 July, the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, approved the inscription following a recommendation by the 14-member International Advisory Committee of UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme.

Magna Carta is the fourth Memory of the World inscription from the UK. It joins the 1916 film about The Battle of the Somme (inscribed in 2005); The Appeal of 18 June 1940 by Gen. de Gaulle calling the French people to arms and made in the BBC studios in London (joint nomination with France, inscribed in 2005); and the Mappa Mundi held at Hereford Cathedral (inscribed in 2007). By receiving Memory of the World status, Magna Carta joins a list of exceptional documents which includes the likes of the pre-Colombian Aztec Codices in Mexico, the Korean Jikji (the earliest surviving book printed using metal type) and Gutenberg’s Bible printed in Göttingen, Germany. Following this most recent round of inscriptions, there are 193 items on the International Register.

Country-level Memory of the World Registers also exist around the globe to promote documentary heritage of local significance. The UK Memory of the World Register will be launched in Autumn 2009.

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#### **Notes to Editors**

- *UNESCO’s Memory of the World programme was established in 1992 to promote preservation of and access to the world’s archive holdings and library collections. The vision of the programme is a simple but powerful one – the world’s documentary heritage belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance.*

*Inscriptions to the International Register are made every two years. In addition to maintaining the International Register, the Memory of the World programme campaigns to raise awareness of documentary heritage and to alert governments, the general public, business and commerce to preservation needs. The programme also raises funds and provides expertise to support preservation and digitisation projects in developing countries and for archives at risk.*

- **Magna Carta** is one of the most celebrated documents in English history. It is often claimed to be the cornerstone of English liberty, law and democracy, and its legacy has been its enduring worldwide influence. The critical importance of the charter is that it imposed for the first time detailed written constraints on royal authority in the fields of church rights, taxation, feudal rights and justice, and it reasserted the power of customary practice to limit unjust and arbitrary behaviour by the king. It has become an icon for freedom and democracy throughout the world.
- **The British Library** is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The Library's collection has developed over 250 years and exceeds 150 million separate items representing every age of written civilisation. It includes: books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, patents, newspapers and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages. [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk).
- **Salisbury Cathedral** is one of Britain's finest medieval cathedrals. It offers a warm welcome to all who visit and seeks to strengthen church and community life in the diocese. Salisbury Cathedral celebrates the presence of God through worship, music and art and has a special commitment to challenging injustice and fostering reconciliation, both at home and abroad. Over 250,000 visitors come to the Cathedral each year to marvel at the peace and beauty of the 750 year old building and admire Britain's tallest spire. The finest original copy of the 1215 Magna Carta is on permanent display to visitors in the Chapter House.
- **Lincoln Cathedral** was commenced in 1072 immediately following the Norman Conquest and the first Romanesque cathedral was consecrated in 1092. It collapsed in the late twelfth century to be rebuilt by Bishop Hugh (now St Hugh) in its current magnificent English Gothic form. It had close links with Kings Henry II, Richard and John, the latter visiting the Cathedral in 1200 for Hugh's funeral. Magna Carta played a key role in the Battle of Lincoln Fair in 1217, when troops loyal to Henry III defeated the French, avoiding a second invasion.
- **The Magna Carta Trust** was established in 1956 when senior representatives from the judiciary, church, various County and District Councils, The English Speaking Union, The Pilgrims of Great Britain, The Royal Empire Society, The Victoria League, The Overseas League, The National Trust and all the High Commissioners came together to plan the Magna Carta Trust as successor to the Magna Carta Society. It has the following objects: The perpetuation of the principles of Magna Carta; the preservation for reverent public use of sites associated with Magna Carta; the Commemoration triennially, and on such special occasions as shall be determined by the Trust, of the grant of Magna Carta as the source of the constitutional liberties of all English-speaking peoples, and a common bond of peace between them.
- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making and programme implementation, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.