**Magna Carta Background Information**

**Introduction**

Magna Carta is one of the most celebrated documents in English history. This iconic document was a practical solution to a political crisis which primarily served the interests of the highest ranks of feudal society. In 1214 many nobles rebelled against King John. They believed that he could not rule the country properly and was treating them unfairly. In 1215 the nobles forced John to grant a charter, which was the first time anyone had expected an English king to obey a set of rules.

**Legacy**

The real legacy of Magna Carta as a whole is that it limited the king's authority by establishing laws to which the king had to follow. Sir Edward Coke interpreted it as a declaration of individual liberty and it echoes in the American Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Why is Magna Carta hard to read?**

The scribes who produced Magna Carta wrote in medieval Latin using the typical handwriting found in English documents in the early 13th century. The scribes also followed the usual practice of abbreviating words to save space on the parchment, because it was so expensive to produce.

**How much of Magna Carta is valid today?**

Only three of the 63 clauses in Magna Carta are still valid today. These are the first clause guaranteeing the liberties of the English Church; the clause confirming the privileges of the city of London and other towns; and the most famous clause of all which states that no free man shall be imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed or exiled without the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land. The other 60 clauses were either left out of the early confirmations of Magna Carta or have become redundant and been repealed in modern times.

**Why is Magna Carta important?**

Magna Carta was the first grant by an English king to set detailed limits on royal authority. Through its statement of liberties, it sought to prevent the king from exploiting his power in arbitrary ways and it made clear that the king was subject to the law, not above it.