# Harvard Law’s lost Magna Carta confirmed as priceless 1300 original



In an astonishing revelation, a document stored within the vaults of Harvard Law School for over seventy years has been identified as a highly valuable version of the Magna Carta, previously thought to be a mere copy. Initially purchased for just $27.50 in 1946, this manuscript is emerging as an authentic original, dating back to 1300 during the reign of King Edward I, making it one of the last surviving examples from that era. The significance of this find cannot be overstated; it contributes not only to the historical narrative of the Magna Carta but also to contemporary discussions surrounding constitutional rights.

The rediscovery was spearheaded by Professor David Carpenter of King's College London and Professor Nicholas Vincent from the University of East Anglia. Using advanced techniques such as spectral imaging and meticulous handwriting analysis, they confirmed the authenticity of the document, which has now been estimated to be worth millions. This particular version is notable for containing variations from earlier iterations of the Magna Carta, establishing its unique position as the last one sanctioned by a reigning monarch.

The Magna Carta, signed in 1215 by King John, has long been hailed as a cornerstone of individual liberties and the rule of law, with its influence stretching far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. It laid the groundwork for modern democratic principles, significantly impacting the development of legal systems in various countries, including the United States. The newly authenticated document's journey traces back to the borough of Appleby in Cumbria, suggesting it was once owned by Thomas Clarkson, a prominent 19th-century abolitionist. This historical lineage is reflective of the importance placed on the Magna Carta within discussions of justice and civil liberties.

Harvard Law School's library boasts a substantial collection related to the Magna Carta, with it housing approximately 39 early manuscripts that span from around 1300 to 1467, reflecting the document's enduring significance. This particular find underscores the shifting understanding surrounding such artefacts and their value in framing the historical context of law and freedom. Previous sales of similar documents, such as a 1297 original that fetched $21.3 million in 2007, illustrate the lucrative market for rare historical texts and raise questions about the implications of such discoveries in an era where academic institutions like Harvard face scrutiny over funding and inclusivity issues.

As discussions around the Magna Carta's impact continue, the rediscovery of this document serves as a timely reminder of its role in shaping the legal landscape. As Harvard plans to integrate this artifact into educational initiatives, the document's potential as a teaching tool about democratic principles and the rule of law offers a promising avenue for engaging new generations with historical legacies. The Magna Carta stands not merely as a relic of the past, but as a vibrant symbol of the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice, echoing the values it represented when first sealed centuries ago.

Through the lens of this recent revelation, historians and educators are reminded of the importance of such documents in understanding our rights and responsibilities within modern governance, embodying the intricate relationship between history, law, and civic freedom.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4
3. Paragraphs 2, 3
4. Paragraphs 3, 4
5. Paragraph 4
6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2055411/magna-carta-copy-bought-7> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/97754aee08aaab65a36e49bedebd5992> - Harvard University recently discovered that a document it had long considered a cheap copy of the Magna Carta is actually an extremely rare and valuable 1300 edition authorized by King Edward I. Purchased in 1946 for only $27.50, the document had remained largely unnoticed until Professor David Carpenter of King's College London identified it during a 2023 search on the Harvard Law School Library's website. Carpenter, alongside Professor Nicholas Vincent of the University of East Anglia, verified the document’s authenticity using spectral imaging and handwriting analysis. This edition is significant as it marks the final version sealed by a reigning monarch and contains variations from earlier versions. The document, now estimated to be worth millions, was traced back to the borough of Appleby, England, possibly passed down from abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. Its rediscovery is especially poignant as Harvard faces political pressure, highlighting the Magna Carta’s enduring role in promoting the rule of law and individual liberties. The university plans to preserve the historical artifact while using it to educate a new generation on the significance of democratic principles and self-governance.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/harvard-laws-magna-carta-copy-is-actually-rare-relic-researchers-say-2025-05-15/> - Researchers from King's College London and the University of East Anglia have revealed that a Magna Carta document in Harvard Law School's library, long believed to be a 1327 copy, is actually a rare original from 1300 issued by King Edward I. This makes it one of only seven known surviving originals from that year. Acquired in 1946 for just $27.50, the document was identified as authentic after close analysis of its text, dimensions, and handwriting, which matched the other six known originals. Professors David Carpenter and Nicholas Vincent suggest it may have originally been issued to Appleby, a former parliamentary borough in England. The finding highlights the document's immense historical value, especially given its foundational role in shaping modern constitutional law, including the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence. The discovery coincides with recent controversies surrounding Harvard’s federal funding being cut due to allegations of race discrimination and anti-Semitism, emphasizing the symbolic importance of the Magna Carta's presence at the university. An earlier 1297 original sold for $21.3 million in 2007, underscoring the potential worth of Harvard's newly authenticated artifact.
4. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Magna-Carta> - The Magna Carta, sealed by King John of England in 1215, is a foundational document in the history of constitutional law. It established the principle that the king is subject to the law, laying the groundwork for modern concepts of individual rights and the rule of law. The Magna Carta has been a symbol of liberty and justice, influencing legal systems worldwide.
5. <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/magna-cum-laude/> - Harvard Law School's library houses 39 early manuscript copies of the Magna Carta, dating from around 1300 to 1467. These manuscripts, including one from the early 1300s, are part of the library's extensive collection of English statutes and legal texts. The Magna Carta has been a symbol of liberty and the rule of law, influencing legal systems worldwide.
6. <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/hls-scholar-explores-the-complicated-legacy-of-the-magna-carta/> - Harvard Law School's library has approximately 30 copies of the Magna Carta, almost all of which are included in compilations of English statutes dating from around 1300 to 1500. The library is planning an exhibit to coincide with the anniversary and to highlight its copies, which include those found in a small volume only 3.5 inches long, as well as a sheriff’s copy that would have been read aloud yearly in a public square.
7. <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/what-precedes-precedent-hint-the-answer-goes-back-to-the-13th-century/> - To celebrate the 800th anniversary of one of the most famous legal documents in history—the Magna Carta—the Harvard Law School Library’s Historical & Special Collections mounted an exhibit titled “One Text, Sixteen Manuscripts: Magna Carta.” The library recently digitized its entire manuscript collection of English statutory compilations, which include the Magna Carta, dating from about 1300 to 1500.