Nicholas Vincent to Present

“Magna Carta from Runnymede to Washington: Old Laws, New Discoveries”

Noted Magna Carta scholar Nicholas Vincent, in a lecture at the Library of Congress, will discuss Magna Carta’s connection to Washington D.C., which he says is a story with many strange twists and turns. He also will reveal new information about the great charter of rights and liberties that was created in England in 1215.

Vincent will present “Magna Carta from Runnymede to Washington: Old Laws, New Discoveries” at 1 p.m. on Monday, April 6 in the Montpelier Room, on the sixth floor of the James Madison Memorial Building, 101 Independence Ave. S.E., Washington, D.C. The event is free and open to the public. Tickets are not needed.

One of the world’s leading experts on Magna Carta, Vincent will reveal new information on copies of Magna Carta elsewhere in the world, on the meaning and history of the great document and the many peculiar ways the legend of Magna Carta has been exploited by all shades of political opinion.

The Library of Congress commemorated the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta with a 10-week exhibition, “Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor,” which ran from Nov. 6, 2014 to Jan. 19, 2015 and featured the Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta, one of the four remaining originals from 1215. In addition, the Law Library of Congress held a symposium and a series of talks. Vincent’s lecture will be the last talk in the series and also will celebrate Law Day.

According to Vincent, “Magna Carta is an iconic, old document. As a result, it is assumed that there can be little about its history that has not already been explored. In reality, and until very recent times, there had been surprisingly little investigation of the document as artefact, to calculate quite how many Magna Cartas survived across the world, or to find out quite how those that survive had fared across the centuries, or to explore the archives of England and France to find out what other treasures might still lurk there.”

Vincent is professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia. In 2007, he acted as special adviser for the Sotheby’s sale of a 1297 Magna Carta that is currently on display in the David M. Rubenstein Gallery at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. Trained at Oxford, and then as a fellow of Peterhouse Cambridge, he has held chairs or fellowships at Oxford, Cambridge, Canterbury, Norwich, Paris and Poitiers.

In December 2014, Vincent was responsible for the discovery of yet another previously unknown Magna Carta, in the archives of the English borough of Sandwich. He acts as principal investigator for the Magna Carta Project. Its website carries a wealth of new materials on Magna Carta and its meaning.

The Law Library of Congress planned the lecture series to complement the Library’s earlier exhibition. The series, co-sponsored by the American Bar Association Standing Committee on the Law Library of Congress, was designed to provide further context on how the great charter fits into expansive historical and contemporary topics. Previous lectures focused on jury trials; techniques used in selecting and conserving primary sources for exhibitions and education outreach; the relationship between Magna Carta and the U.S. Constitution; and the status of women in Medieval England.

The Law Library of Congress was established in 1832 with the mission to make its resources available to members of Congress, the Supreme Court, other branches of the U.S. government and the global legal community and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of law for future generations. With more than 5 million items in various formats, the Law Library of Congress contains the world’s largest collection of law books and other resources from all countries and provides online databases and guides to legal information worldwide through its website at www.loc.gov/law/.

The Library of Congress, the nation’s oldest federal cultural institution and the largest library in the world, holds more than 158 million items in various languages, disciplines and formats. The Library serves the U.S. Congress and the nation both on-site in its reading rooms on Capitol Hill and through its award-winning website at www.loc.gov.

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