

Conservation and Encasement: 1297 Magna Carta

Interest in sealed anoxic encasements for long-term preservation has grown in the past few decades, particularly in the United States, where a number of encasements house some of the nation's most historically significant parchment and paper documents. The National Archives and Records Administration recently completed an 18-month project to encase a 1297 Magna Carta. The parchment document with attached pendant seal had been placed in an encasement designed by Nathan Stolow in the 1980s, shortly after it was purchased and brought to the United States. Soon thereafter, the Magna Carta was placed on long-term loan for display at the National Archives building in Washington, DC, where it was on almost continuous display. A team of National Archives conservation and exhibitions staff partnered with staff of the National Institute of Standards and Technology to develop a state-of-the-art anoxic encasement for one of the two copies of the Magna Carta held outside the United Kingdom and the only copy in the Americas.

The collaborative effort provided an opportunity to revisit the exacting standards developed by the two federal agencies during the late 1990s and early 2000s for the encasement of the United States Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, and to adapt them to the unique needs of the Magna Carta. The resulting encasement ensures long-term stability of the document and meets additional requirements for security and exhibition.

This paper will discuss various aspects of this project, including a brief overview of the history of this particular copy of the Magna Carta, including its 1980s encasement. However, the authors' primary focus will be on the 2011 and 2012 conservation treatment, as well as the design, fabrication, and assembly of the new encasement.

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