

Dear friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

This was an unmissable date! Magna Carta is one of the most totemic documents in the world, still a cornerstone of British liberties and a potent, international rallying cry against the arbitrary use of power. But it is also a most eloquent testimony to the fruitful links between France and the United Kingdom throughout the ages.

Magna Carta was a peace treaty granted to rebel barons by King John of England, weakened by his defeat by the French at the Battle of Bouvines in northern France. We commemorated that major victory last year - with the utmost discretion, I might add! This iconic British text came into being 150 [*a hundred and fifty*] years after the Norman Conquest and was greatly influenced by the French: indeed, the Paris-educated Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton's energetic leadership was a key factor in forcing John to sign the charter in Runnymede.

And of course, Magna Carta established a number of fundamental values that proved highly adaptable in future centuries: these values were both upheld and fleshed out by our *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* in 1789 [*seventeen-eighty-nine*].

Today, Magna Carta's core principles are echoed in many constitutional documents around the world, not least in the European Convention on Human Rights, which is very much a legacy of British lawyers, stimulated by Churchill's vision. Something we should keep in mind...

But these principles must never be taken for granted: that is why we will discuss the present and the future of Magna Carta. Whose powers now need constraint? How can we tackle international terrorism, climate change, trafficking of all sorts and financial chicanery [*prononcer: shi-kay-nerly*] without creating an effective system of international law? How can we overcome people's instinctive suspicion of, and resistance to courts beyond our borders? How do we guarantee freedom of conscience? Magna Carta's anniversary provides us with an opportunity to tackle these fundamental questions.

Roger Errera (1933-2014 [*nineteen-thirty-three to twenty-fourteen*]), whom we are honouring today, would no doubt grasp those questions thanks to his rigorous intellect, infectious humour, deep integrity and profound commitment to the values he passionately believed in.

A senior member of the *Conseil d'Etat*, France's supreme administrative court, Roger Errera was a driving force behind the periodic exchanges between British and French judicial bodies. He was for many years a member of the board of Interights, and was on the editorial

board of Public Law, to which he contributed a regular section on the jurisprudence of the Conseil d'Etat.

Over the years, he spent much time in the UK. As a visiting professor at University College London, he introduced many students to the French and European approach to public and international law, showing how the French system evolved in similar fashion to common law, albeit with more precise concepts. He was also engaged on issues of freedom of religion and expression and was a prominent expert in refugee and asylum law in and outside Europe.

A defining figure in the *Conseil d'Etat*, Roger Errera also held high offices outside it: he was the French expert on the UN Human Rights Committee, and a member of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature* and the *Haut Conseil de l'intégration*. Passionate about law and passing on his knowledge and beliefs, he was a professor not only at Sciences Po and the *Ecole nationale d'administration*, but also Princeton, Salzburg and Budapest, as well as frequently taking part in exchanges between the *Conseil d'Etat* and the House of Lords or the Israeli Supreme Court.

His books on liberty and the role of judges and the judicial system in France attracted a large readership. He was also editor of the respected series 'Diaspora'.

Many of us did not know what Roger Errera and his family endured through World War Two. In 1944 [*nineteen forty-four*] both Roger and his sister (born in 1938 [*nineteen thirty-eight*]) were looked after by a childless couple in Brive-la-Gaillarde, while their parents went into hiding in the vicinity with their newborn son Gérard. Gérard was French Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 2002 to 2007 [*two thousand and two to two thousand and seven*]. Roger Errera's consciousness of the precarious nature of life under tyranny had a good deal to do with his principled contributions to the development of refugee law and the protection of human rights.

We were deeply moved by the desire of so many of his British friends to pay their respects to his memory and recall his thoughtfulness, sincerity and energy – so much so that honouring him today seemed the right thing to do!

Let me finish by very warmly thanking all the speakers, and the Franco-British Council, which has once again demonstrated its ability to strengthen the relationship between our two countries - the “sweet enemies” as Robert Tombs so nicely put it - with imagination, determination and dedication. Thank you also

- to the FCO, our host in this magnificent building,
- to our sponsors, LexisNexis and Magna Carta 800th [*eight hundredth*],
- and to all of you who chose to take a day out of your very busy professional or student lives to benefit from the discussion between our high-profile speakers.

I now leave the floor to Lord Sumption, for what promises to be a very stimulating lecture!

Thank you.