

Introduction to the Great Charter of 1609

This has been typed from the copy of the Great Charter 1609. The written English is a mix of early Modern English and Middle English with only 24 letters of the alphabet. The Great Charter needs to be read phonetically, it has been typed exactly as the copy. The spelling of words change throughout the Charter. There is evidence that more than one person was responsible for drawing up this document - the writing changes enough not to be the same hand. The framed Copy of the Great Charter of 1609 hanging in the Town Hall is a transcription by Harry Guy of Shalfleet in 1912 and differs to the typed copy in several respects.

“Cracking the Code”

As soon as you start to read this Charter it becomes obvious that an early form of code or abbreviating of words was used throughout. The English Language can be separated into four distinct styles: Old English or Anglo Saxon (c500 - 1050), Middle English (c1050-1550), Early Modern English (c1550-1700), Late Modern English (c1700 onwards).

The first obvious one is ‘s^d’ which is our ‘said’. The letter ‘y’ as in ‘ye’ translates to ‘the’ therefore where you see ‘y^r’ it is ‘their’, or ‘there’, ‘y^b’ becomes ‘that’, ‘y^m’ becomes ‘them’ and so on. If all else fails remember to say the word phonetically, in most cases it becomes clear what the word is although the spelling is not familiar. In particular ‘x’ is usually ‘sc’ especially at the beginning of a word such as ‘exercise’. However, there are three words that we have not been able to understand, these are: mocõu, cullo^f and usurpacõu (possibly usurpation).

King James VI and I

Born in Edinburgh Castle in 1566 was proclaimed King in 1567 - Scotland ruled by a succession of Regents. He assumed power in his own right in 1583. On the death of Elizabeth I in March 1603. He assumed the crown of England as well as Scotland. He died in 1625.

The last line in the Charter says that he witnessed it in the seventh year of his reign of England and the forty third of Scotland, that would seem to indicate 1610 as the year of signature.