

## In the Footsteps of William Marshal (1147-1219)

Magna Carta centenary 1215-2015 [www.magnacarta800th.com](http://www.magnacarta800th.com)

Travelling down by train to Manchester recently, a fellow traveller came to sit by me at Preston. He revealed that he was a Professor of History at one of the regional Universities and we chatted about the wealth of local historical provenance in the North West. As his speciality was Industrial England he admitted to knowing less about the Cartmel Peninsula than perhaps he should. He had never been inside Cartmel Priory Church! And even as an academic historian, he appeared to be unaware of the name and influence of William Marshal. I have to admit to being unsurprised - this ignorance about the founder of Cartmel Priory is quite common. How many of our own congregation and certainly of the visiting general public to this wonderful building had previously heard of him before entering through its Norman porch which forms the South doorway.

So who was this man? And why should we acknowledge his life at this time?

A man of faith, legendary loyalty and military accomplishments, he grew up in the royal Norman court of Henry II, under the care of Eleanor of Aquitaine, to whose sons the princes Henry, Richard and John he became a tutor especially in chivalry and martial arts. Subsequently it is said that he became a hero at tournaments and was known as the greatest soldier of his age. He travelled for three years as a soldier and crusader through the Holy Land. On his return, now in middle age, he was granted, in marriage, the hand of the teenage Isabel de Clare, daughter of the King of Leinster, Richard Strongbow. Through her he inherited Pembroke Castle and Chepstow Castle as well as extensive lands in Ireland. He was also granted the keeping of the large royal estate of Cartmel, where in thanks to God in 1189 he decided to found his Priory of Cartmel, one of three known foundations set up by him. William Marshall remained as close and loyal counsel for the young King Richard Lion Heart and after Richard's death for his brother, the unpopular King John. Differences, indeed hostility, between King John and his Barons, including William Marshal, eventually led to the instigation of a Charter of Rights culminating in the sealing of Magna Carta, the basis of law and justice to this day in the western world, at Runnymede on 15 June 1215... When King John died in 1216, it was William Marshal who was named by the major Barons as Lord Regent of England during the childhood of the nine-year-old King Henry III. In 1217 he re-issued Magna Carta of which he is a signatory as one of the witnessing Barons. As he approached his death, he was invested into the order of Knights Templar, dying in his old family home in Berkshire but buried at the Crusaders' Temple Church in London.

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