Simply and briefly described by a former city archivist as ‘a poor copy of an unidentified original’, the portrait of Charles I was, according to city records, acquired together with the portrait of James I in 1626. Whilst the workmanship of the artist is indeed quite average, I am keen for opinions as to whether there is more significance to it as a unique depiction of the King. I can find no other extant depiction of the King that bears any resemblance to this portrait, which adds weight to the theory of a ‘lost original’, but is there another known portrait (or engraving of) that is similar? Quality aside, this portrait has significance in that it is a depiction of the King from the first year or so of his reign, and may actually date from just days, weeks or months after his coronation of February 1626, if we are to interpret the robes and regalia of state in this way. The detail of most interest is the document scroll held in the right hand, the unrolled portion bearing the words 'MAGNA CHART'. As far as I am aware, this is unique amongst known portraits of Charles I, and leads to different avenues of interpretation. Again I would welcome opinion on what this represents (and whether there is a parallel in other state portraits). The popular view has been to regard this as an ironic statement by the artist, wishing to please the Puritan city of Coventry by ridiculing the King and the likelihood of his upholding the principles of the Magna Carta. I find it very difficult to accept, however, even following the controversy of the dissolved Parliament of August 1625, that at this very early stage in the King's reign, the city of Coventry would be provocative enough to commission and display a royal portrait that could be interpreted in this manner. There is also an entry in the archives from 1661 that refers to restoration of the portrait, just a year before Charles II ordered the demolition of the city walls as punishment for the city's Parliamentarian stance. Again it is highly unlikely that a portrait with any hint of disrespect would be restored for display at this most sensitive of times.

Expanded on from this enquiry:

<http://www.thepcf.org.uk/artdetective/discussions/discussions/is-this-work-a-lost-original-of-charles-i>