

Doncaster Borough Charter of King Charles II, 2 May 1664

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The charter of 1664 was, in one respect, a bitter financial blow to the corporation of Doncaster. The borough had agreed to take over the rights and property of the manor of Doncaster from King Henry VII in 1505, in return for an annual payment of £74 13s 11½d (about £74.70p).

After the execution of King Charles I, the Commonwealth government had decided to sell off a range of royal assets. Amongst these was the annual payment that the Crown was receiving from the corporation of Doncaster for the manor of Doncaster. The corporation would have been keen not to let this right to receive the annual fee it paid fall into hands other than its own.

In September 1650, the Commonwealth government sold the corporation the right to receive the annual fee. This, in effect, abolished the corporation's annual obligation to pay the fee. The bargain cost the corporation £653 12s 1d (about £653.60p). The purchase deed is still to be found in Doncaster Archives.

Unfortunately for the corporation, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 overturned the agreement. All the acts of the Commonwealth government were now declared void. This meant that the agreement of 1650 was no longer valid, and the corporation would have to resume its annual payments to the Crown. These annual payments continued until the corporation finally paid a lump sum to buy out the obligation in 1896. By that date, the total of the annual payments for the manor of Doncaster by the corporation amounted to around £30,000.

At the Restoration the corporation had hurried (no doubt sincerely) to assure the king of its complete loyalty, resumed its annual payments for the manor and sued for a new charter. The resumption of the annual payments for the manor by the corporation was no doubt an advantage to the cash-strapped king Charles II. Most of the other major provisions of the charter, likewise, simply reaffirmed the status quo which had been established by the charter of 1604.

This had defined the membership of the council and how it was to be chosen. The council was to consist of a mayor, twelve aldermen (as senior council members were called) and twenty-four "capital burgesses" (or, as we would now say, councillors). The mayor was to be selected by the council annually from a choice of two aldermen. The aldermen were chosen by the council from amongst the councillors. Unlike present practice, councillors were not elected by popular vote at regular intervals, but were chosen from two "burgesses" (freemen) nominated by the council. Only a small proportion of the inhabitants of the borough were qualified as freemen. The man selected as councillor then served for life, unless displaced for misbehaviour.

In addition to the new departure of defining the structure of the council, the charter of 1604 had for the first time named the men who were to hold office on it. The charter of 1664 did the same, and required all members and officers of the corporation to take oaths of allegiance to the king and acknowledge his supremacy of the Church of England. The oaths of office were clearly intended to prevent anyone opposing the restored royal government from taking any place in public life.