

## Doncaster Borough Charter of King Henry VII, and the other Tudor Borough Charters

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### Doncaster Borough Charter of King Henry VII and the other Tudor Borough Charters



After the town was given the status of an incorporated borough by the charter of 1467, there remained just one feature of local life which prevented the mayor and corporation of Doncaster ruling unhindered in their own town. The Crown remained lord of the manor. Its manorial steward would still hold manor courts which the townsmen would be obliged to attend. Manorial officers would still patrol the borough market, checking the quality of the bread and ale and other goods offered for sale in shops and in the market and the manor court would regulate the use of the common lands used for growing crops and grazing animals. As in manors elsewhere, the lord also had a monopoly of corn-milling, and all inhabitants of the manor were obliged to grind their grain at the lord's mill and pay fees to his miller.

In 1505, the town negotiated its final freedom. It made an agreement with king Henry VII to acquire all the rights of the manor. In exchange, the borough was to pay the royal exchequer £74 13s 11½d (about £74.70p in modern money, and a substantial sum in 1505) every year for ever. The borough continued to make this payment until 1897, when the payment was finally bought out for a lump sum of £2,300. By that date, the right to hold the manor of Doncaster had cost the corporation about £30,000.

As a result of the charter of 1505 the corporation took over the manorial courts, so it now controlled all the courts which regulated the lives of the townspeople. It took over the corn mills, and gained an income from leasing them out. Residents of the borough were obliged to mill their corn at the 'King's Mills' on the river Don until the eighteenth century. It gained control of the markets. The corporation also took possession of the commons, and at some time in the sixteenth century, allowed the commons on the boundary of the parishes of Doncaster and Cantley to be used for horse-racing, as they still are. It also came into the ownership of the whole of the land in the parish of Rossington, which in 1838 it had to sell off to clear its debts.

Under the terms of the charter, the town was to be completely free from the interference of the county magistrates, the most important local law-enforcing body. The mayor, who had been created the sole magistrate by the borough charter of 1467, was joined in his responsibilities by three aldermen. They were to be helped in their legal duties by a recorder, or judge for the borough court, an office which continued until 1971. Only the king's own judges, touring the country in assize courts, had the right to intervene in local law enforcement. The civil court, mentioned in the 1467 charter, was to meet weekly on Thursday. This court ceased to function when county courts were established in 1846, although it was not formally abolished until 1972.

The borough markets were to take place twice a week, on Tuesday and Saturday, and the three-day March fair was now supplemented by a second fair on 24 to 26 July.



Every year the borough chamberlains (who looked after the corporation's accounts) made their payment of £74 13 shillings and 11½d to the royal Exchequer for the rent of the manor and

received an elaborate official receipt. The parchment receipts were carefully filed in the borough archives, where, several centuries later, they still remain. A typical receipt is illustrated here.

### **The Charter of 1505**

The charter of 1505, important as it is, does not survive in Doncaster Archives, and its contents are known locally (there is a copy in the text in the Public Record Office, the national archives in London) as the text is repeated in the next borough charter, that granted by king Henry VIII.



### **The Charter of King Henry VIII**

The Charter of King Henry VIII, dated 13 May 1532, repeats and confirms all the borough charters from 1194 to 1505, but does not grant any new powers. The same is true of the two other Tudor charters, that of King Edward VI of 21 November 1549 (original also lost) and of Queen Elizabeth I of 9 May 1559. The charter of 1532, like several earlier ones, has an elaborate initial letter, whilst that of 1559, has a portrait of the young queen, showing her, most unusually, in profile. It also bears a greater resemblance to her elder sister and predecessor, Queen Mary.

