

Doncaster Borough Charter of King Henry VI, 18 May 1445

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In one respect, the charter which the townsmen of Doncaster obtained from King Henry VI in 1445 contained nothing new, and indeed may have been evidence of disappointed hopes. Like the charter gained sixty years earlier, the charter of 1445 merely confirmed the charter of 1194. In addition, the new charter, however, also gives royal approval to another important agreement the townsmen had made. This is a grant from Peter de Mauley, lord of the manor of Doncaster, to the 'commonality', or community, of Doncaster.

This agreement between the lord of the manor and the townsmen is dated 13 October 1331, over a hundred years before the charter of 1445. The original no longer survives, and its existence, had its contents not been repeated in this charter of Henry VI, would be completely unknown. Unlike the royal charters, it is not written in Latin but in the language which de Mauley himself would have spoken, namely Norman French.

By the charter of 1331, Peter de Mauley had agreed that the townsmen, instead of his own officials, would be allowed the right to levy local taxes on traders, including bakers, brewers, butchers, fishermen and stable-keepers. (The specific mention of the stable-keepers is evidence of Doncaster's importance as a staging post on the main north-south road.) By this time, over a century since the charter of 1331, the de Mauley family had died out, and the lordship of the manor of Doncaster had passed into other hands. No doubt the townsmen thought it wise, under the circumstances, to have their right to levy local taxes granted by a long-dead lord given the force of royal approval.

By making an arrangement which limited the power of the lord of the manor to tax the town, and allowed the community the right to control important local taxes on traders, the townsmen of Doncaster had achieved a further advance along their road to self-government.