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EXEMPTION FROM JURY SERVICE

Berkhamsted's Lost Rights

I wonder how many people, when visiting St. Peter's Church, have read the framed copy of Edward IV's Charter of 1476? It is a fascinating document, full of grand, powerful phrases which must have made our forefathers proud to belong to a town with so many royal privileges.

Confirming and extending earlier Charters, Edward IV recalled how Henry II and Henry III, out of "sincere love and affection" for the "faithful Liege Men and Tradesmen of the Honour of Wallingford and Barkhamstead," gave them various liberties and privileges.

They were to enjoy "for ever all laws and customs as well and as honourably, and better and more honourably," than in former times, and wherever they travelled with their goods and merchandise "bought or sold throughout my Realm of England and Normandy and Aquitaine, by Water and by Strande, by Wode and by Lande," they were to be free of all tolls and duties.

PENALTY: FIVE POUNDS

Not only were the men and merchants excused payment in cash and kind for toll, portage, passage, Danegeld, etc.; they were exempted from forced labour ("working of Castles and digging of Trenches and from Secular Customs and Exactions and from such like business and let none in this case disturb them on penalty of forfeiting Ten Pounds.")

The additional privileges granted by Edward IV were important.

The goods of the men and merchants of Berkhamsted and Wallingford were to be "quit and free and disburdened in all Sea Ports as well on this side the sea and beyond it throughout our Dominions of all Toll, Cartages,

Carriage, Paniage, Pickage, Muriage," etc.

No "Mercate" (market) was to be held "within eleven miles in any village near Wallingford and Barkhamstead."

Then came a privilege of unusual interest:

"We further of our Especial Grace Grant to the Men and Tradesmen of the Honour of Wallingford and Barkhamstead aforesaid that they and their successors have free liberty, viz. that they and their Heirs and Successors be not impanelled and summoned in any Assize . . . and if any of them shall be obliged and chosen . . . the said Men and Merchants their Heirs and Successors may refuse and reject them, and that none of them may incur any penalty or forfeiture upon contempt for refusing the same . . ."

LAPSED PRIVILEGES

As the years passed by it was perhaps unrealistic to claim a market monopoly within an eleven miles' radius of Berkhamsted. It can be imagined, too, that our men and merchants, when many miles away from their home town, were either laughed to scorn or roughly treated if they sought exemption from tolls and duties by citing little-known charters relating to a little-known country town.

But exemption from serving on juries greatly appealed to the inhabitants, who were occasionally in conflict with the High Sheriff of Hertford.

He continued to summon local men for jury service even after James I had decreed, in the last Charter granted to Berkhamsted, that the inhabitants should "hold and quietly enjoy all the customs, liberties, privileges, franchises, immunities, exemptions, exonerations, quittances, rights and jurisdictions heretofore granted by any of the Kings or Queens of England or by Prince Charles to them or their predecessors."

Angered by the High Sheriff, the inhabitants of Berkhamsted sought the intervention of Prince Charles (afterwards Charles I) who, in his early days at least, was a very good friend of the town. After taking up the matter with the High Sheriff, Prince Charles obtained from James I full authority to insist upon the exemptions.

PRINCE CHARLES' LETTER

The following letter has been preserved in the Church chest:

" . . . Whereas the Prince's Highness' Tennants and Inhabitants of the Towne and Burrough of Barkhamsted St. Peter, in the Countie of Hertford, being parte of His Highness' Duchie of Cornewall, and the chiefe seate of His Highness' Honour of Barkhamsted, who have heretofore enjoyed divers Liberties and privileges (as appeareth by sundrie ancient records), and amongst these gave them freedom and exemption from their attendance

at Assizes and Sessions, and all other services before ye Sheriffe; And his Highnesse being desirous to advance the said Towne to its former or a better Estate, obtained from the Kings Majestie the revyving and confirmation of the said former privileges, for the ease and benefit of the said Tennants and Inhabitants; And for the better usage and enjoying of the said Exemption, wee did heretofore adresse a Letter unto the said Sheriffe; thereby praieing him to forbear to somon or retourne anie of the said Tennants and Inhabitants to appeare at the Assizes, Sessions or other Services before him; Yet, nevertheless (as wee are informed) either he, or some Sheriffe since, have called, somoned and returned, and yet intend to call, somon and retourne divers personnes of the Towne and Burrough aforesaid, at sundrie tymes to the said Services, contrarie to the privileges aforesaid, and contrarie to His Highnes' pleasure by his former letter signified; Wee have therefore thought fitt to adresse this our second letter as well unto you the High Sheriffe, as to your Under Sheriffe for the tyme beinge, which Letter wee will to remaine in the Custodie of the Bayliffe of the Burrough aforesaid, to be showed unto you and your Successor successively from tyme to tyme as often as wee shall require; thereby willinge and requiringe you to take knowledge both of His Majesties Graunt and of His Highnes' pleasure herein, and henceforth to forbear to somon or retourne anie of the said Tennants or Inhabitants for the services aforesaid . . ."

VALID IN 1840

For a few years, Berkhamsted men were spared jury service; then came the Civil War and its aftermath of poverty and apathy, when the Corporation languished and most of the ancient privileges were forgotten.

In 1840, a fresh bid was made on behalf of the reluctant jurors of Berkhamsted. At Hertford, Lord Abinger and the Hon. Joseph Littledale Knight examined the ancient charters and the letter of Prince Charles, and declared that the inhabitants of Berkhamsted were fully entitled to the exemptions and privileges they claimed. Two inhabitants who had been summoned, and were in court, were discharged from their present and from any future service as jurors.

Thereafter the following instruction was issued to the townspeople: "The Jury List, which is returnable every year to the Clerk of the Peace, must not be returned without the words 'Exempt by Charter,' or words to the like effect, being prefixed or added thereto, in some conspicuous place—the omission of which, either by accident or design, would inevitably occasion as much, or more expense, than was incurred in obtaining the exemption in 1840."

All such exemptions, however, were abolished by Act of Parliament in 1870—400 years after Edward IV's Charter had first freed Berkhamsted men from jury service. 'BEORCHAM'

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6-7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

May 29—June 4: Dickman.
June 5—11: Taylors.
June 12—18: Boots.
June 19—25: Figg.
June 26—July 2: Dickman.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:—

Mon., Tues., Thurs. & Fri.—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.;
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday—CLOSED ALL DAY.
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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