

The *Inspeximus* of King Richard II of the royal charters for Derby, 15 March 1378.

Dr Simon J. Harris (December 2020)

On 15 March 1378, an *inspeximus* of King Richard II (1377-1399) was issued for the burgesses of the borough of Derby. This royal document still survives in the possession of the city of Derby, in the hands of the successors of those medieval burgesses who originally received the document.

The *inspeximus* did not grant new privileges to the burgesses of Derby, but was rather a confirmation by the new king of privileges granted by his predecessors, and contains verbatim the privileges granted by two earlier monarchs – King Henry III (1216-1272), and King Edward III (1327-1377). The burgesses had undoubtedly requested this new confirmation and had to pay a substantial sum for it (they shared the cost of building a ship with the people of Nottingham).

Although the *inspeximus* and the liberties it contains have no real legal authority now, more recent government legislation having redefined Derby's governance and rights and obligations, until the nineteenth century the documents and its contents would have been of great importance and might well have been regularly consulted. The document is an important symbol of the town's long history as a major urban centre in the Midlands of England, a long history that saw the town elevated to a city in 1977. It is also an important chance survival for little of the early records of Derby survive today in Derby, most having been lost in the devastating Guild Hall fire of 21 October 1841.

The document might not have real force today, but many of the matters it touches would still be familiar to those who govern and trade in Derby. The document contains two charters of King Henry III dating to 1229 and 1256, and a confirmation of Edward III granting additional privileges:

- the boundary of the town;
- freedom for all those living in the town for a year and a day unchallenged;
- maintenance of the navigation of the river Derwent;
- grant of the borough to the burgesses for a rent (fee farm);
- the appointment of the official who governed the town by the burgesses (initially termed as provost/reeve, but later termed bailiff). They were later granted the right to have a coroner as well;
- when the markets and fairs were to be held (markets on Thursday & Friday; two annual fairs);
- return of royal writs, and legal protection (increased legal responsibilities);
- the establishment of a gaol for offenders within the town.

The city of Derby is a very different place to the medieval and later town, but it still owes a considerable debt to its predecessors. The site is the same site where the Anglo-Saxon burh stood on the Derwent river, a site in part selected because of the presence of a navigable river. The core of the city still has some old buildings, particularly the churches, and in the historic centre the street plan and property plots still have the shape that they would have had in the medieval borough. But most importantly, whilst the liberties granted in the various medieval charters might not have much immediate relevance to modern Derby, they are an expression of the independence and ambition of a thriving medieval community, and certainly find echos in modern Derby.

Timeline of Charters and Liberties.

- 1155-1166 Order of Henry II concerning property of the townsmen of Derby.
- 1204 Charter of King John.
- 1229 First charter of King Henry III.
- 1256 Second charter of King Henry III.
- 1261 Grant of King Henry III excluding Jews from living in Derby.
- 1290 Grant by King Edward I of pavage for the term of four years.
- 1301 Grant by King Edward I of pavage for the term of five years.
- 1327 *Inspeximus* and charter of King Edward III.
- 1378 *Inspeximus* of King Richard II