

Briefing note by Town Clerk on Freedom of the City

Background

The historic origins of freemen or burgesses can be traced back many centuries to the former municipal corporations in the twelfth and thirteenth century.

At that time, freemen enjoyed considerable privileges, including the ability to elect officers of the corporation and its Parliamentary representatives.

For the municipal boroughs to appoint men of national importance was not merely an act of recognition; these individuals could possibly secure economic or political benefit.

However, major changes to the role and influence of freemen were swept away by the Municipal Corporations Act 1835. This led, among other things, to the creation of an elected local government as we know it today.

Freedoms could not be granted until the passing of the Honorary Freedom of Boroughs Act 1885, which Chichester City Council adopted in 1901.

Chichester City Council assumed the status of a Parish Council on 1st April 1974 and following the major reorganisation of local government at that time, (but interestingly only from 1980 when a 'gap' in the provisions of the 1972 Act was rectified by representations made by the then MP for Chichester, Anthony Nelson MP), just 10 local i.e. Parish councils then had the standing to confer the title of honorary freeman.

In England these were the councils of Chichester, Ely, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, Truro and Wells. In Wales, these were the Cities of Bangor and St Davids and the Royal Town of Caernarfon.

Developments since January 2010 affecting Parish Councils

However, from 12th January 2010, **all** parish councils may now exercise powers to confer the title of "honorary freeman" or "honorary freewoman" upon what the legislation refers to as "persons of distinction" and those who, in the council's opinion, "have rendered eminent services to the council's area" (section 249(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1972 Act).

There is also the separate issue of 'Freedom of Entry' and the City Council has granted such an honour to a number regiments of the British Army and

RAF Tangmere who have rendered conspicuous service to, and are closely associated with, the City. This enables service units to march through the streets with 'bayonets fixed, swords drawn, drums beating and Colours flying'.

The City Council also conferred Freedom of the City on West Sussex Fire and Rescue in view of the work done in the Chichester floods in the 1990's.

The admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be given by a resolution made at a meeting of the full council that is specially convened for such purpose. The resolution must be passed by no than less than two-thirds of the members of the council voting (Section 249(8) of the 1972 Act).

The law also requires "notice of the object of the meeting" to be given. A local council may also spend a reasonable sum as it thinks fit for the purpose of presenting what the act refers to as "an address or a casket containing an address to a person on whom it has conferred the title of honorary freeman or honorary freewoman".

A list of Honorary Freemen of the City admitted since 1901, is on display on a board in the Assembly Room Ante Room in the Council House.

Rodney Duggua

Town Clerk