

# Prince John's Charter to Limerick - 1197

WHEN PRINCE John gave Limerick its first charter in 1197 he declared in a document dated 18th December that the citizens shall, 'have all the liberties and free customs through all Ireland which the citizens of Dublin have'. Although Limerick's original charter did not spell out precisely what these privileges were, we do have the complete text of Dublin's 1192 Charter from which Limerick's 'liberties and free customs' were copied. By publishing the details of the Dublin document we have, by substituting 'Limerick' for 'Dublin', the full content of Limerick's first charter.

## GRANT OF CIVIC LIBERTIES TO DUBLIN, BY PRINCE JOHN 1192

John, Lord of Ireland and Count of Mortain, to all his men and friends, French, English, Irish and Welsh, present and to come, greeting.

Know that I have given, granted and by this my charter confirmed to my citizens of Dublin dwelling both without the walls as within, even to the boundaries of the town . . . Liberties which I have granted them to have, are

as follows:

That no citizen of Dublin shall plead outside the walls on any plea save for the pleas of external tenements which do not belong to the Hundred court of the town.

And that they shall be free of murdrum within the boundaries of the town.

And that no citizen shall make duellum [ordeal of Battle] in the city for any appeal [charge] which anyone may make against him, but he shall clear himself by oath of 40 lawful men of the same said city.

And that no one shall take forced quarters within the walls by assise or by order of any marshal against the will of the citizens.

And that they shall be free of toll, lastage, passage and pontage and all other duties throughout my whole land and jurisdiction.

That no one shall be put into mercy for a fine except according to the law of the Hundred [court], viz. by forfeiture of 40 shillings for which he who falls into mercy shall be quit of half and shall give the other half as a fine, excepting the three fines for bread, ale, and the watch, which are fines of 2 shillings and 6 pence, of which one half shall be pardoned and the other paid.

That the Hundred court shall be held once in the week.

That no one shall in any plea be debarred by miskenning.

That they shall justly have their lands, tenures, pledges and debts throughout all my land and jurisdiction whosoever shall owe them, and that they may distrain their debtors by their pledges in Dublin.

That of the lands and tenures which are within the walls justice shall be done to them according to the custom of the city.

That of debts which are arranged and pledges given within the city the pleas shall be held according to the custom of the city.

And if any one anywhere in our land or jurisdiction shall take toll of the men of the city and does not return it after being summoned to do so, the reeve of the city shall take pledge therefor in Dublin and distrain for its return.

That no extern merchant shall buy within the city of any extern man corn, hides or wool save from the citizens.

That no extern merchant shall have a tavern for wine, save on a ship. But this liberty is reserved to me, that from each ship which happens to come thither with wine, my bailiff in my place shall choose two tuns of wine according as he wishes in the ship; namely, one before the mast and one behind the mast to my use, for 40 shillings; one for 20 shillings and the other for 20 shillings; and he shall take nothing further therefrom, save at the will of the merchant.

That no extern merchant shall sell cloth in the city by cutting [*ad decisionem*].

That no extern merchant shall stay in the town with his wares, for the purpose of selling his wares, more than 40 days.

Also no Dublin citizen anywhere in my land or jurisdiction shall be pledged or distrained for any debt, unless he himself be debtor or pledge.

And that they [my citizens] may marry, both themselves, their sons, daughters and widows, without leave of their lords.

Also that none of their lords, on the ground of extern estates, shall have wardship or giving [in wardship] of their sons, daughters or widows, but only the wardship of their lands which are in their [the lords'] fee, until they come of age.

That no assise [recognitio] be made in the city.

Also that they shall have all their rightful gilds, as fully as the burgesses of Bristol have or are accustomed to have.

That no citizen shall be compelled to repledge anyone, unless he wishes to do so, although he may be dwelling on his land.

I have granted also all tenures within and without the walls up to the abovesaid boundaries, to be disposed of according to their will by common assent of the city, in messuages, thickets and buildings on the water [river] and elsewhere wherever they shall be in the town, to be held in free burgage, viz. by the service of land-gable which they pay within the walls.

I have granted also that each of them may improve himself, as far as he is able, in making buildings wherever he shall wish upon the water [river], without damage however to the citizens and the town.

Also that they may have and possess all vacant lands and plots which are contained within the said boundaries; to build on at their will.

Also that neither Templars nor Hospitallers shall have any man or any messuage free of the common duties of the city, within the said boundaries, save one only.

All these things I have granted, saving the tenures and lands of all those who have lands and tenures by charter from me outside the walls up to the said boundaries, so that the city may not dispose of these as it may of others, but let them all obey all the customs of the city like other citizens. Of those however I say this, who had my charter for any lands within the same boundaries outside the walls, before We granted to the city the aforesaid liberties and this charter.

Wherefore I well and firmly command, that my abovesaid citizens of Dublin and their heirs after them shall have and hold all the abovesaid liberties and free customs, as is written above, of me and my heirs as fully entirely and well as they ever had them, in peace and honourably, without any impediment or hindrance which anyone may make against them.

Witnesses: Stephen Ridell, my chancellor; William de Kahaigues, my seneschal, Theobald Walter, my butler, Hamo de Valognes, etc.