

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 23

Great Yarmouth Market

A market is presumed to have existed at Great Yarmouth before the granting of King John's charter of 18 March 1207/8, that is during the time that the town was in the king's hands. Henry Manship, writing in 1609, says that 'Yarmouth hath, time out of mind, enjoyed by prescription a very fair market' (History of Yarmouth, p.176). The market's origin, then, is prescriptive, that is, arising from or recognised by long-standing custom or usage.

The Corporation's title is based on King John's charter. One clause of the charter grants

'quod burgus ille sit liber burgus in perpetuum et habeat socam et sacam, thol et theam et infangthief et outfangthief'.

This translates as

'that the said borough should be a free borough for ever and should have soc and sac toll and team and infangtheof and outfangtheof'.

It is the grant of toll that is important here: toll is defined as 'a payment in towns, markets and fairs for goods and cattle bought and sold' (Whishaw's Law Dictionary). Hence it was stated in 1862 that 'under this Charter the Corporation have always claimed and exercised dominion over ... Markets' (*Reference to the Property of the Mayor etc. of Great Yarmouth 1861, vol. 1*).

The market is not mentioned in royal grants to the borough by later medieval charters, except by implication in periodic confirmations of John's charter. The next explicit mention of it is in Queen Elizabeth I's letters patent of 26 May 1559 which says

'And further we ... do grant ... that the bailiffs of the borough ... for ever after are and shall be clerks of the market ... so that the clerk of the market of our household ... for the breaking of the assizes of bread, wine and ale, or weights and measures ... by no means may intermeddle'.

Under this clause the Corporation was empowered to hold a special market court or 'market quest' for such things as the trial of weights and measures. The records of this court have survived among the Corporation archives for the years 1562-94 and 1691-1834.

The market was specifically confirmed to the Corporation by the letters patent of James I (22 July 1608), Charles II (8 January 1663/4 and 22 July 1684) and Anne (11 March 1702/3).

Accounts for the receipts of stallage from the market have survived among the Corporation records from 1446 onwards. Stallage is defined as 'a sum of

money paid to the lord or owner of the soil for the liberty to erect stalls' (*Whishaw's Law Dictionary*).

The Corporation's title to the soil of the market was vindicated in a legal case, *Corporation v. Groom*, in 1862. The inhabitants of Ormesby claimed exemption from the toll as tenants of ancient demesne, that is of land owned by the King at the time of the Norman Conquest. The court upheld this claim but at the same time said that they had to pay the Corporation stallage like anyone else before they could put up goods for sale on the market.

The market was regulated through the Borough Court from at least the end of the fourteenth century. The earliest known reference to regulating trade in the market is in the court roll of 1390-1: Alice Goodgroom and John Lokard were both prosecuted for hoarding eggs to raise the price on the market. Common crimes that took place in the market were also dealt with at the Borough Court. The earliest recorded case of this kind is in 1291: Walter de Clippesby was accused of assault because he had grabbed a jug of milk that Felicia Nigrum was carrying in the market place and broken it over her head. The Market Place must have been very noisy and very smelly for most of its existence. Beatniffe wrote about it in 1776

'it is shocking to see butchers daily slaughtering calves, sheep etc. in the centre of such an opulent town, resorted to by crowds of genteel company from almost every part of England.'

It was only in the later nineteenth century that the Shambles or animal slaughtering area was moved out of the Market Place.

There was a Market Cross in the centre of the Market Place from very early times. This is where punishments like whipping, the pillory and the stocks took place. The last Cross was pulled down in 1836 - a plaque in the covered section of the Market indicates its site. There are many engravings showing it, for example in A W Ecclestone's *A Yarmouth Miscellany* and in C J Palmer's *Perlustration of Great Yarmouth*.

Records relating to Great Yarmouth market

All are available at the Norfolk Record Office. Document references are given in brackets.

- Borough Court rolls (see list Y/C 4, some on microfilm)
- Market Court rolls 1562-93, 1637-50 (Y/C 4/256-288, 330-342)
- Sessions records, including those dealing with offences in the market (Y/S 3/94)
- Market quest court 1691-1735, 1769-1835 (Y/C 14/1-3)
- Rental and statement of market receipts (Y/C 4/192)

- Rentals (Y/C 29/1-6)
- Part of rental, referring to market stalls 16th cent. (Y/C 45/2)
- Market tolls receipt book (Y/L 16/7)
- There are descriptions of Great Yarmouth market in the Youell diaries (see list Y/D 87, especially volume 9) and in Mr. Martin's journal (MC 26/1). There are also some pictures and postcards of the market place (Y/D 71/1)].



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