

A FREEMAN of DOVER ¹⁴⁵

How did I become a Freeman of Dover? The short answer is that I married the right girl. Her father was a Freeman and I discovered that it was possible to claim it by marriage as long as Rosa was born "free", which she was.

The hereditary Freemanship was passed down from father to son (or daughter for her husband) and it was only by chance that Arthur Cloke, my wife's father, knew he could claim it. His father, Frederick, had died young and it was the arrival of voting papers after Frederick's death that made Arthur curious. "Your father was a Freeman and had the right to vote in elections", said his mother. Arthur rounded up his brothers and they all became Freemen.

At one time the privileges were various and were jealously guarded. These included the right to trade, and reduced rates for stalls, in Dover's market. They received a shilling at election times if they voted, and this was converted to ale at local pubs. There was an uproar whenever there was an uncontested election, and the Freemen demanded their shillings.

Apart from hereditary Freemanship it was possible to buy it for £20, and this gave you the right to trade in the town. If you attempted to do so otherwise you were fined 6s 8d (33 pence) a day.

You could also obtain it by completing an apprenticeship to a Freeman and it could be conferred on you by the Common Council. I can claim it by the fact that the Council made Thomas Ladd, a shipwright, a member in 1715. Jacob Todd was added to the Roll when he completed his apprenticeship to Luke Ladd (Thomas's descendant) in 1796. Thomas Cloke married Ann, daughter of Jacob, in 1826 and so it was passed down the line.



Joe Harman was admitted as
a Freeman of Dover
on 28th July, 1980

I should add that a son could not claim it until he was 21, and if a child was born before his or her father's admission they were not born free. I know of one family whose eldest son cannot claim it as his father was serving abroad and had not been admitted to the Roll of Freemen.

At one time I could have cried "fish" on Sundays and have grazed my sheep on the sidewalks, should I have wished to do so

J. HARMAN