

Description of a Freeman

Freeman (Freemen) had a recognised status and certain trading privileges. They voted for the mayor with or without freeholders or other 'burgesses'. Residence at Lyme was enjoined in the 16th century. The sons of mayors, the sons of freemen, and apprentices obtained the freedom of Lyme on easier terms than other people.

Oath of a Freeman

You shall swear that you shall be good and true to our Sovereign lady the Queen that now is, and to her heirs (and successors), kings and queens. You shall be obedient to the mayor and other officers of this town of Lyme Regis for the time being; the franchises, liberties and customs and all other orders which are for the common wealth thereof you shall maintain and keep harmless, to your power. You shall be contributory to all manner charges within the said town, as "watche, tasks, lott, and skott," and all other charges, bearing your part according to your power as other freemen do. You shall colour no foreigners' goods. You shall know no foreigners to buy nor sell any merchandise with any other foreigner within the town or liberty, but you shall warn the mayor thereof or his brethren. You shall implead or sue no freeman out of this town whilst you may have right and Justice within the same town. You shall not by writ oremoving of any cause or matter, or the tenor of any cause or matter that shall be depending before the said mayor or his deputy by action to be commenced against you by any freeman or foreigner without the licence and concent of the said mayor for the time being. Ye shall know no gatherings, conventicles or conspiracies made against the Queen's peace, but you shall warn the mayor thereof and let it to your power. All these points and articles and every of them you shall well and truly keep according to the orders and customs of the town, to your power, so help you God, and by the holy contents of this book, and upon peril of losing of your freedom. The names of them that be made free, viz., those that are no burgesses, they to be called free men; and those that are burgesses, they to be called free burgesses, all of which do pay a fine and take their oaths.

The above oath would seem to originate from documents in the late 16th century.