



Devon Family History Society
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FREEMEN OF BARNSTAPLE

1839

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Barnstaple was an ancient borough and, like other incorporated towns, it had a long tradition of admitting many of its citizens to the freedom of the borough. Admission as a freeman entitled one to trade within the town, gave exemptions from various tolls, provided a vote in local elections and eligibility to serve on the borough council. In most towns, freedom was gained by inheritance, by serving a recognised trade apprenticeship within the town, by purchase, or by order of the mayor and corporation. Many towns kept registers of their freemen, and some include details of date of admission, name of freeman and abode, name and occupation of father or master.

Among the records of Barnstaple Borough Council held by the North Devon Record Office are lists of freemen going back to the 16th century, although records tend to be very patchy before the nineteenth century. In more recent times, admission to the freedom of a town or city became more of a ceremonial honour bestowed on" only a few noteworthy individuals or groups.

This register of freemen and burgesses of Barnstaple are in the series with the reference starting with BC/Misc/ and is held at the North Devon Record Office in Barnstaple.