

Who made important decisions in the towns?

Enquiry: Who held power in medieval towns?



Town Charter

As the town grew bigger and richer, the chief town-man could buy a **charter** for a large sum of money. Once he had done this, he became a freeman and could buy and sell land and could elect a town council. A charter gave people in a town certain rights that were clearly stated in the charter that town had.

Many charters gave towns the right to collect their own taxes thus removing corrupt sheriffs from doing so.



Town Council

The town council was made up of the important men. They were responsible for the laws regarding the town. In 1238, in the City of York they introduced some new laws which looked at areas of:

- Food hygiene
- Behaviour of doctors
- Drains
- Public toilets
- Wandering pigs



Parliament

The English Parliament developed during the 13th century. In 1297, it was decreed that the representatives to the House of Commons would be allocated based on the administrative units of counties and boroughs — two **knights** from each shire, and two **burgesses** from each borough. It was the first time that the common man was invited to take part in making political decisions. This system would remain essentially unchanged until the Reform Act of 1832.



Burgesses and the vote

The selection of burgesses depended on the will of the King. He could make a town into a ***parliamentary borough*** through a royal charter. This could be granted to any settlement, regardless of its size or importance, and also set out the ways in which ***representatives*** were elected for each borough.



Knights

The **counties** remained important as the basis for the legal system. The **sheriff** was important for a period of time as the legal officer in each county. Each county eventually had its own court system for trials called the Quarter Sessions.

Knights were required to help keep the King's Peace. Eventually they were given the right to try petty offences. They were, however, representatives of the countryside.



Glossary

Charter: *legal document laying out the town rights.*

Knight: *Member of Parliament for the rural areas*

Burgess: *Member of Parliament for the towns*

Parliamentary borough: *Town which could send a MP to Parliament to vote*

Representatives: *a person who represents their town*

County: *region*

Sherriff: *an elected county official*



Comprehension Questions

1. Who did the introduction of the charters give more power to?

Sentence starter: *The introduction of the charters gave power to...*

2. How did the town councils have power in the towns?
3. Who gained power with the development of Parliament?

Challenge: Which groups of people were not considered important in the medieval towns? (see next slide)



Challenge: Which groups of people were not considered important in the medieval towns?

Sheriffs

Knights

Burgesses

Town
council

women

Jewish
people

Flemish
people

Guilds

Mayors

Merchants



Explain who you believed held the most power in the medieval towns

Sentence starters:

It can be argued that the group with the most power in the medieval towns was....

This is because....

Key words

- Guilds
- Mayors
- Burgesses
- Jewish people
- Sheriffs

