

ALTRINCHAM
Town in the county of Cheshire

The ancient Court Leet of Altrincham replaced a Portmote Court given to the people of Altrincham by a Charter signed by the Baron Hamon de Massey in the year of our Lord 1290.

THE ALTRINCHAM CHARTER

To all faithful people in Christ that shall see or hear this present charter, Hamon de Massey, Lord of Dunham, sends greetings everlasting in the Lord. Know you that I have granted and by this present charter, on behalf of myself and my heirs, have confirmed to my burgesses of Altrincham, that my town of Altrincham be a free borough, and that my burgesses of the same borough, shall have a guild merchant in the same borough with the same liberties and free customs pertaining to such manner of guild, according to the customs of Macclesfield. And they shall be quit throughout all my lands, as well by water as by land, of toll, passage, pontage, stillage, lastage, and all other servile customs.

Also I have granted to my said burgesses common pasture, and turbary of the heath, within the boundaries of Dunham, Altrincham and Timperley, saving to myself and my heirs our improvements and saving to myself and my heirs the enclosure of Sinderland at our free will, without contradiction of any person, whensoever we think fit to enclose the same, so that the aforesaid burgesses may have common pasture, always and everywhere for all cattle within the bounds of Sinderland so long as the aforesaid place of Sinderland shall not be enclosed, saving to myself and my heirs the whole season of pannage in the aforesaid Sinderland, so that at the season we shall have at our will to fence in the aforesaid Sinderland without contradiction of any persons. And when the aforesaid Sinderland shall be enclosed, my burgesses shall have their common up to the hedge of the aforesaid Sinderland and not beyond.

It is also my will that all my burgesses who shall have pigs in season of pannage shall pay the customary toll in my said borough either at the feast of St. James or at the time of pannage when they pasture in the aforesaid commons, and they shall not go elsewhere with their pigs of the same borough at the season of pannage. Also I have granted to my aforesaid burgesses, housebote and haybote in all the woods of the aforesaid places, except my "hays" and enclosed woods. Also I grant to my aforesaid burgesses, that they shall not be impeded outside the portmote of the aforesaid borough, nor tried in any court outside their borough, for offences committed within the borough, and if any one of them becomes liable to amercement for any offence, he shall be amerced by his peers according to the degree of his offence.

It is my will also that my burgesses shall grind all their corn growing upon the land of Altrincham or stored in the same town, at my mills, giving every eighteenth measure as multure. I also grant that my aforesaid burgesses may take for themselves reeves and bailiffs by common council of myself or of my bailiffs and themselves, and that no plea shall be held or determined in the said borough except before me or my bailiff. And that every burgess shall hold his own burgage of two perches of land in breadth and five in length, with one whole acre of land in fields, for twelve pence, to be paid to myself and my heirs at three times of the year by equal portions, namely at Nativity of St. John the Baptist, at the feast of All Saints and the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, quit, peaceably and wholly, with the aforesaid liberties. And that every burgess may sell, mortgage, give or bequeath his burgage to any person or persons he wishes, except to the officers of our lord the King and men in religious orders, without contradiction of any person or persons, saving to myself and my heirs the privilege of our bakehouse in the same borough. Indeed, I the aforesaid Hamon and my heirs will guarantee forever the aforesaid burgesses and the acres of land adjoining them and all liberties recorded above, to my aforesaid burgesses and their heirs and assigns against all people. In witness whereof I have set my seal to this present charter.

Witnessed by Sir Reginald de Grey, then justice of Chester, Humphery de Beauchamp, and Richard de Massey, Knight, Gilbert de Aston, Thomas de Aston, Hugh de Baguley, Matthew de Hale, Henry de Dunham, John de Bowdon and others.....

Altrincham
Title of Court
Altrincham Court Leet

Date of formation	1290
Date of Charter	July 1290
Lord of the Manor	The Rt Hon the Earl of Stamford Provost

Title of Leader of the Court

Provost of Altrincham	Burgess E Beasant
Past Provost.	Alderman D Bayliss
Foreman of the Jury	Alderman D Bayliss
Cattle Looker	Burgess D Morrison
Pounder	Alderman J Davenport
Recorder	Alderman C Hill
Bye Law Man and Archivist	Alderman C Hill
Ale Taster	Alderman A Jackson
Chimney Looker	Alderman R Higginbottom
Constables	Alderman D Mardon
	Alderman J P Tolley
	Burgess H Scholar
Dog Muzzler	Alderman C Jackson
Common Looker	Alderman S Trickett
Clerk to the Court	Alderman K Lancaster
Court Bailiff	Alderman K Lancaster
Affeerer	Burgess J Bowie
Swine Looker	Burgess D Morrison
Market Looker	Alderman D Mardon
Pump Looker	Burgess C Sparkes
Surveyor	Burgess H Scholar
Overseer of the Poor	Burgess E Shufflebottom
Deputy Affeerer & Deputy Clerk	Burgess C Crosbie
Steward	Bryan W Massey
Bailiff	B Mark Rae
Chaplain	Revd G Seddon
Town Crier	Peter Powell

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In 1290 King Edward I gave a Charter to the Lord of Altrincham, the fifth Baron Hamo di Masci (Hamon de Massey) of Dunham, allowing him to hold a weekly market and annual fair at Altrincham, probably a growing village at that time. On receipt of the Charter, Hamon created Altrincham a market borough by giving its inhabitants his own Charter (original Charter in the care of the local authority) by which they became Burgesses. There were many privileges and, through one of these, the Burgesses were given a Portmote Court by which they could regulate trade and distribute necessary obligations amongst themselves to administer the Town and carry out petty justice. They could appoint their own Reeves and Bailiffs (one of whom would be equivalent of a Mayor today). Probably in the fourteenth century the Portmote Court changed its name to the Court Leet and its chief representative was called Mayor from that time.

The Court Leet eventually gave way to modern forms of administration in the late nineteenth century, though its Mayors continued to be elected until 1937. The Court Leet was re-formed in 1977 by the late Earl of Stamford and continued its duties ceremonially.

The modern Court Leet follows the ancient ceremonies and a leader is appointed annually by the Lord of the Barony via his Steward and this appointment is made at the Michaelmas Assize (or Sessions) held at Altrincham Town Hall in September each year. This leader is now called the Provost who appoints his Officers in to such ancient offices as Constables, Dog Muzzler, Ale Taster and many others. Their duties are to observe the present day Police, Weights and Measures, Environment etc., and present any irregularities to the Court in their Presentments. They also act as a voice to

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further the interests of the people of Altrincham and keep alive the history, traditions and ceremonial of past Altrincham and help to promote a happy and progressive future for the Borough.

Provost of Altrincham

Appointed by the Steward annually. Responsible for the day to day running of the Court, organising and attending all Court functions. Attending outside functions. Chair meetings of the Court Leet and initiate innovations.

Deputy Provost

To assist and stand in for the Provost as needed. To take over as Provost if vacated during year. Learn Provost duties for coming year.

Cattle Looker

In days gone by to report on cattle suffering from scab, mange etc. Today the job is much the same to report to the Court on cattle diseases such as anthrax, BSE etc.

Pounder

Originally to ensure stray animals were impounded in a pincfold, and their owners had to pay to recover them Today mainly ceremonial.

Recorder

Relative new Office. To record the minutes of Court meetings.

Bye Law Man

To ensure that no paths and rights of way are blocked and ensure free from blocking by grass, weeds etc. To prepare and ensure free access for the Beating of the Bounds. Report that all local Bye Laws are observed.

Ale Taster

To arrange and carry out Ale tastings at local public houses. Ensure ale is fit for mens bodies.

Chimney Looker

In days gone by he had to ensure that thatch was safe and fireplaces were safe. Today to report to the Court on local fire precautions and fires that have broken out within the Town.

Constables

Usually three. To escort the Provost on all official occasions. To ensure good order and discipline of Court Members. To collect fines imposed by the Steward.

Surveyor

To report to the Court on all developments within the Town, check planning permissions given. Ensure that action is taken to list all buildings of historical interest.

Clerk to the Court

To deal with and action (liaising with the Provost) all correspondence. Prepare letters to be sent for the Carol Service and Provosts Sunday.

Court Bailiff

To call forward Aldermen and Burgesses holding Office to make their Presentments to the Court at each Assize. Call forward Provosts appointed Officers for swearing into their Office at each Michaelmas Assize and new sworn Burgesses at other Assizes.

Swine Looker

Originally to ensure all swine were fit and in their enclosures. Today reports on matters to do with pigs health, housing and movement.

Market Looker

To arrange with the Market and Shopkeepers dates and times for tastings and inspections To carry out all tastings and report to the Provost. To liaise with the Market Secretary and the Chamber of Trade.

Pump Looker

To ensure that all waterways are kept clean and that the standard of drinking water is up to the required standard.

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Dog Muzzler

To ensure that all dangerous dogs are muzzled and report all wandering dogs. In the old days he would impound and destroy strays.

Affeerer

To look after all Court finance on the Courts behalf. Collect all monies due and pay all bona fide expenses. Prepare accounts to be presented at each meeting and a balance sheet to be presented at the Michaelmas Assize.

All the above are appointed annually at the Michaelmas Assize.

Ale Tasting

Court Leet assembles outside public house, and processes inside being announced by the Town Crier, led by the Constables, the Provost, the Ale Taster and other members of the Court.

The Ale taster asks the Landlord to draw him a pint in his tankard, he tastes it, checks it for clarity and body, and then pronounces to the Provost that it is fit for mens bodies.

The Provost then proclaims that the ale has passed the test and then presents the landlord with a certificate to that effect for one year next ensuing. All Officers then receive a pint.

When duly refreshed they proceed out of the public house.

Assizes (General)

At Assizes other than the Michaelmas Assize, all Alderman sit at the Aldermanic Bench and the Burgesses around the Court Room. Families and friends are seated on the left of the Court from the door and the visiting dignitaries on the right.

Town Crier calls "all stand for the Steward of the Barony and the Provost of Altrincham", who process into the Chamber led by the Constables. Steward seated in the centre of the Bar and the Provost on his left, Deputy Provost on his right.

Steward bows to the Court and asks all to be seated. Chaplain blesses the deliberations.

The Steward then numbers all those present then all absentees. He then asks the Foreman if there are any new Burgesses to swear. If so they are sworn into the Jury.

He then reads a shortened version of the Charge and hands Court over to the Provost who changes seats with him.

The Provost then asks the Court Bailiff to ask Officers to make their Presentments. After which he asks Court Bailiff if there are any new Burgesses to be sworn into Office, if so they are sworn.

He then hands Court back to the Steward.

The Steward opens the Court Baron and deals with absentees and any petitions put to the Court.

After this the Town Crier calls all to stand, and the Steward and Provost proceed out of the Chamber. The Town Crier dismisses the assembly until the next Assize

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In addition to the above at the

Michaelmas Assize

All the Aldermen and Burgesses sit in the well of the Court and the Assize proceeds as above except only the Steward processes into Court as there is no Provost as yet.

After the Chaplain the Steward asks all Officers to make their Presentments for the past year.

The Steward then calls the roll of attendees and absentees.

Then he calls all Court members before the Bar and the front three put their hands on a bible and the rest on the man in front's shoulder. The Steward prior to this has called for the Foreman who is sworn separately.

Steward then asks the Foreman who he presents for Provost for the coming year and he presents three Burgesses and the Steward comes down from the Bar and puts his hand on the shoulder of the man he selects. He then swears the Provost into Office. Enchains him and the new Provost then takes his seat next to the Steward at the Bar.

The Steward then reads the full Charge, after which he hands over to the Provost. He then swears in the Court Bailiff then asks him to call forward his Officers for swearing into Office.

Beating of the Bounds

Usually take place at the end of Festival week on the Sunday.

Assemble at 10.30 am at a boundary post in Altrincham and process round the ancient borough boundary (about eight miles), stopping half way for refreshments at a local pub.

The Beating is done by the Steward with a willow wand at twelve points, all marked with a Court Leet boundary plaque, and he reads an ancient proclamation at each point which advises the Town people where the boundaries are. In the old days they were accompanied by the village and children and it showed the limit of the Lords protection. The procedure normally takes about four hours.

Court Meetings

Held each month on the first Monday, unless a Bank Holiday and if so then on the second Monday. Chaired by the Provost and local issues are discussed and, if possible, acted upon. At the September meeting the Steward dissolves the Court Leet and they are then summoned and re-sworn at the Michaelmas Assize.

Market Tasting/ Inspection

Carried out as arranged by the Market Looker.

The Town Crier opens the proceedings with a proclamation and the Provost, Market Looker and Court members process to the stall selected for the tasting or inspection.

The Market Looker samples the wares offered and reports to the Provost who then calls the Jury into conclave after which he pronounces the goods fit for sale and mens bodies. Usually three or four stalls are inspected. This also applies to local shops. The Town Crier closes the proceedings.

Pie Poudre

Proclamation used to open the St James' Fair (Samjam) which is held occasionally. This is read by the Provost after which, accompanied by the Court, they process round the fair. If any wanderers, beggars or thieves are found they are tried on the spot and sentenced (set up for the public's entertainment.)

Provost's Sunday

Assemble in the Church Hall for robing then process to the Church which has been selected by the Provost, who also selects the Service. During the Service the Steward swears in the new Chaplain selected by the Provost. The Provost usually makes an address to the congregation. After the Service all proceed to a convenient venue for refreshments.

Altrincham Festival Parade

The Court Leet usually leads the Procession behind the Town Crier and Festival Banner. The Parade leaves Altrincham at 11 am and slowly processes to the Field where events are taking place (about four miles). Passing the saluting base the Court give eyes left to the Mayor and Festival Party. At the field the Provost is usually asked to help with judging.

Trading Awards

Are granted on the recommendation of the Market Looker for twenty five, fifty or one hundred years award for service to the people of Altrincham.

The Town Crier announces the ceremony of award outside of the establishment concerned and the Market Looker presents the trader and the details of the service to the Provost who assembles the Jury at the premises, enquires of their opinion and on their agreement a Certificate confirming the Award is given to the trader for public display.