

Summary Article: **freeman**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

One who enjoys the freedom of a borough. Since the early Middle Ages, a freeman has been allowed to carry out his or her craft or trade within the jurisdiction of the borough and to participate in municipal government, but since the development of modern local government, such privileges have become largely honorary.

There have generally been four ways of becoming a freeman: by apprenticeship to an existing freeman; by patrimony, or being the son of a freeman; by redemption, that is, buying the privilege; or, by gift from the borough, the usual method today, when the privilege is granted in recognition of some achievement, benefaction, or special status on the part of the recipient.

Prior to the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 borough freedom was regulated by the borough charter. An admitted freeman enjoyed many rights and privileges which varied in different boroughs. Inter alia, a freeman generally had the parliamentary vote, immunity from county jurisdiction, exemption from the tolls, and a share in the revenue accruing from the corporate property. The act of 1835 did not affect the rights of admitted freemen, and the following are still entitled to be entered on the **Freemen's Roll** and to enjoy the above noted rights except exemption from tolls, and in some cases share in revenues from corporate property: wife, widow, son, daughter, or son-in-law of a freeman; apprentices to freemen; and those who before the act would have been entitled to be admitted, other than by gift and purchase, the two latter modes of admission being now abolished.

Borough councils may also admit people of distinction or people who have performed eminent services for the borough to be honorary freemen. Freedom of a city is tantamount to that of a borough. Freedom of the London livery companies is a survival of the guild-merchant system. There are four ways of acquiring the freedom of a company: (1) apprenticeship to a freeman either of the company or of the City of London; (2) patrimony (by reason of being the child of an admitted freeman); (3) gift (honorary); (4) redemption or purchase, usually limited to members of the guild trade.

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