

CHAPTER VII.

Edward II. and his People—Civil War—Inquisitions held at Wigan in 1323—Local Characters implicated in Rebellion—Clyderhou a Rebel by Proxy: His Trial and Result—Cucking Stool—Stratagem of the King for Levying Taxes—Coal—Death of De Clyderhou: His Tomb in Saxoley.

LIKE most of the old kings of England, the indolent and fickle Edward II. was frequently hard pressed for money. Scarcely had the Scottish war finished when his own wife, his barons and their followers, rose up against him and finally dethroned him. He canvassed the whole country, the Mayor of Wigan amongst others, for money on security of his personal estates, to enable him to carry on war, for he could not constitutionally levy any tax. When his finances were low he had no conscientious scruples about making liberal promises, although there was no prospect of his ever being able to keep his part of the bargain. England would never have had such a grand Constitution as it has but for the monetary embarrassments of her kings. Many of her revolutions were but determined threats not to support the sovereign in his tyranny, or illegality, resulting in stopping his supplies, and so crippling his powers. Thus, the combined action of the people was stronger than any regal power. Englishmen, as a body, in no age have wished to be without a king, but have, nevertheless, been strongly determined to have liberty and fair play. The actions of the feeble and headstrong Edward were too arbitrary for barons and people. At his coronation he solemnly vowed to keep and preserve the laws and customs of the land, but at his convenience he recklessly disregarded his promises, governed unconstitutionally, and drove the people to rebellion. Many noble knights, yeomen, clergy, and people in the neighbourhood of Wigan joined the rebels. Again, as if it were the fate of our struggling young Constitution, the furies of civil war rampantly ravaged the land; ties of blood were disregarded, and unhappy England weltered in the blood of civil strife, under the Duke of Lancaster, against the king. There was the usual result of alternate victory and defeat. Ambitious hopes and cankering despair were the simultaneous possessors of every breast, and the poor in all cases suffered for the insatiable, ambitious jealousy of the great. Vast estates

were risked in the awful game of change and chance, as in the case of reckless gamblers trusting to the very last throw of the dice, while the hard-fighting, guileless poor staked their ordinary poverty against the chances of famine or death, and yet all fought for liberty. Liberty, often falsely so called, has been the standard hoisted on many a sanguinary field. In this rebellion there were the usual glorious victories, thousands slain, and tens of thousands rendered homeless. The king won, Lancaster lost, and yet, after all, the then victorious king was deposed, and murdered within four years.

The barons were at first the terror of all beneath them, for each one was a prince in his province; but they had fought bravely, distinguished themselves in every battle, and won glory for the country, and so, with genuine English spirit, the people not only forgave them for former wrongs, but looked up to them as their champions. Moreover, they had risked their lives and properties against the kings themselves in matters of freedom which concerned all. When the people had complained of injustice on the king's part, the barons had never been slow to take up their cause. It was the barons who had gained for them the Magna Charta, and the barons who had gained for them a representative government; moreover, barons and people were invariably found to make common cause of their grievances. In this reign the nobles were specially insulted and degraded by a weak king and his favourites. The barons rebelled against the injustice of the former and the insolence of the latter, and the lower orders were willing to take up arms in their cause. The most powerful baron of the age was the Earl of Lancaster, who raised an army to compel the king to banish his favourites. Many men from Wigan joined this army. Laity and clergy alike expressed their disapprobation of the king's conduct by helping the barons. There was scarcely a nobleman in the neighbourhood of Wigan who did not join the Earl of Lancaster with his followers. Bradshaigh of Haigh was at the head of a party of rebels. The Hollands of Holland led their disorderly bodies against the king. Longford and Pontefract committed all sorts of depredations against the Royalists. The rector of Wigan, Robert de Clyderhou, was not a soldier himself, but he instigated the people against the king, and promised them absolution if they fell in battle. He sent his son to join Lancaster, and paid for the outfit and maintenance of others. After the glorious victory came the usual inquisitions, hangings, drawings, and quarterings, in which Wigan was not without its episode. In the seventeenth year of Edward II. (1323) an inquisition was held at Wigan in the presence and at the command of his Royal Highness. The whole neighbourhood was full of gossip about the critical crisis. The accused were local potentates, and all felt it a duty to be interested; but few hoped for mercy, as they were no strangers to such inquisitions and their judgments. In the opinion of the common people, and they had cause for such

judgment, to be accused was to be well-nigh condemned. In their experience few were placed for trial at the bar of justice and discharged as not guilty. The popular wonder was not whether they should be found guilty, but whether they should be put to death. Though all knew they were guilty, each still speculated on the chances of escape through the likelihood of evidence being suppressed or witnesses being suborned. The arguments for and against each individual were familiar to every inhabitant, but the wisdom of the law was the bugbear of their hopes. Every great crime, or treason, naturally caused a sensation throughout the country; but when the nobility, or local gods, were summoned to the bar of justice, excitement and wonderment to an extraordinary degree prevailed. The ordinary presence of the judges gave rise to much speculation and awe, but now a royal commission was specially convened to enquire into the conduct of local gentlemen of eminence and leaders of the town's party, whose whole deeds were popularly known to be treasonable, and consequently all were deeply interested in the proceedings. The parish parson, Clyderhou, Bradshaigh, the head of the house of Haigh, the three brothers Holland, and others were now prisoners at the bar. They were each known to and revered by every child in the parish, and every gossip in the place knew they were liable, and likely, to lose their heads. Even those of them who were not popular were pitied, for civilised humanity commiserates the misfortunes of even its enemies. In every ale-house and at every fireside the approaching trial was the topic of conversation. Everybody knew they were guilty, but such are the loopholes of law and the hopes of merciful men that few dared to utter openly the verdict on which they had been secretly compelled to decide in their minds. The day came, the royal judges arrived, and the accused were brought up for trial in the public court-house or primitive Moot Hall at the Rector's Manor. The inhabitants were eager, yet afraid, to hear the judgment. It was no surprise to hear the sentence was severe, and yet there was a feeling of relief on hearing of the almost unexpected leniency, for the heaviest fine is more lenient than death.

Nicholas de Longford, of the county of Lancaster, was fined 200 marks (£133 6s. 8d.) Ricardus de Pontefract, Robertus de Holland, Johannes de Holland, and Ricardus de Holland found security to keep the peace; that is, they were found guilty, but told not to do it again—a narrow and happy escape for these local rebels. But these were not the only men who were wanted. The head of the house of Haigh, son of the penitential Mabel, had led a disorderly body—no doubt from Wigan and its neighbourhood—into the field against the king. A special warrant for his apprehension or head was issued under the royal seal, but he was nowhere to be found; and soon the fiery wrath of the king, who gave special powers to Johannes de Weston, marshal of the household, to pursue, arrest, and to take both him and Ricardus de Holland, cooled and was appeased, for he had so many enemies

and difficulties to contend against that he found it a more profitable policy to be reconciled to the repentant than to hang them; and so we find that the very next year Bradshaigh had not only been forgiven, but trusted and honoured, for he was appointed the head of a force sent to protect the Lancashire people against Scotch invaders. Clyderhou also was tried at this Wigan assize. He was accused of inciting others to rebel, and of having provided an outfit for a man-at-arms and four soldiers. Whether more obeyed his call history does not relate, but of the cases mentioned he was found guilty, fined £200, and imprisoned in Nottingham, but ransomed for 300 marks (£200).—(Rot. Plac. Coram. R. Mich., 17th Edward III., p. 2, m. 19). He put in such a reasonable defence that he was not deprived of further rights. According to the law he had but done his duty,¹ and in his prayers before his parishioners he had prayed for the king and kingdom. He was assessed for lands in Lancashire held under the Earl of Lancaster, and, according to the charter by which he and his predecessors had held their estates, he had agreed to find a man, mounted and armed, for the service of Lancaster whenever he went to war; and it was no business of his whether the war was for or against the king. He had but kept his feudal promise, like other landed proprietors of his neighbourhood. However, he had been fined, and there was no remedy, for, however much money the law may devour, it disgorges little.

This rector did not by any means have his own way always in his parish, for we find him at war with his burgesses for depriving him of his rights, against which he petitioned. He complained that the burgesses had violated the charter by taking toll and assize of bread and beer, but the only answer he obtained was that he had the right to sue them at common law, and there the dispute ignobly rested.

The old Saxon judgments by ordeal had long become obsolete, and trial by jury been substituted, as well as wiser methods of punishment adopted. The rector was the local judge for ordinary offences, and he had a prison at the Manor House in which judgments were executed or prisoners retained until the time for the Lancaster Assize, to which all felons had to be committed. Public punishments were very common, some of which, such as the cucking stool, pillory, and stocks, were not abolished until this present century. The stocks were for drunk and disorderly persons generally, the pillory for thieves, the cucking stool for debtors, cowards, sluggards, debauchees, prostitutes, and gossips. Burgesses could not be ducked on the cuck-stool for debt until the fourth time on which they were found defaulters. It has been called by some the ducking, or choking, stool. It was a long see-saw beam, with a chair fixed on one end, which hung over the river or pond, or sometimes a dirty mud hole. The culprit was tied to the chair or stool, whilst raised out of danger or on a

high and dry place for the convenience of those carrying out the popular law, and then lowered into the water again and again. Hundreds of people would turn out to see a notorious person ducked and rejoice at his or her discomfiture. The *London Evening Post* of April 27-30, 1745, says:—"Last week a woman that keeps the Queen's Head ale-house, at Kingston, in Surrey, was ordered by the Court to be ducked for scolding, and was accordingly placed in the chair and ducked in the River Thames, under Kingston Bridge, in the presence of 2,000 or 3,000 people." The price of making one of these limbs of the law in 1572 was twenty-two shillings and fourpence. A man who called a woman a bad name was, after she had cleared herself on oath, "to take himself by the nose and say he had spoken a lie," and this he had to do in public.

This grotesque custom was a favourite with old authors. Antiquaries and historians have written pleasant chapters on it, and poetasters have adorned the memory of the cucking-stool with verse, in which the hilarity of the assembled crowds, and the *burlesque* baptism of the unhappy culprit, have been described in glowing language. The following is a specimen of a confused and confusing effusion:—

" Down in the deep the stool descends,
But here at first we miss our ends.
She mounts again, and rages more
Than ever vixen did before ;
So throwing water in the fire
Will make it burn up but the higher.
If so, my friends, pray let her take
A second turn into the lake ;
And rather than your patient loss,
Thrice and again repeat the dose.
No brawling wives, no furious wenches,
No fire so hot but water quenches."—WEST.

Although many people may well remember the stocks being publicly used in Wigan, and that by order of the magistrates, it must not be forgotten that such a mode of punishment was one of the earliest ordeals of English civilisation. It came into existence in the infancy of the country, and gradually became obsolete with the country's maturity. At the open space beside the south entrance to the Wigan Church was the public pump-well for supplying the inhabitants with water, and of which detailed notice shall be hereafter taken. Close by this well were the stocks, in the very thoroughfare of all religious people, who, no doubt, in passing the woe-begone culprits, earnestly breathed that ancient prayer, "I thank God I am not as this publican."

It was at this period, and for long after, considered right to punish the offending member of the body, or satiate the guilty man with an overdose of what he was very fond. As the drunkard showed special partiality for the contents of a barrel,

it was thought that no better, or more appropriate, punishment could be devised than that of placing the toper in a barrel, and thus expose him to public view and scorn. After lying in prison all night the sobered drunkard, longing in vain for a hair of the dog that bit him, was brought before the magistrates, found guilty, and ordered to parade the streets in the drunkard's cloak, which was a barrel turned upside down, with a hole, from which his bare head and woe-begone face protruded, whilst from a hole, at fitting places, in either side, his trembling hands hung out. The cloak reached to the knees of an average-sized man. The break or bridle for scolding women was a great degradation to the guilty and a source of much amusement to the hilarious crowds. It was a sugar-loaf cap of iron hooping, with a flat piece projecting into the mouth, to keep the unruly member still. The whole was firmly padlocked, and the culprit led by two strings—the reins of the bridle—all over the town.

There was neither a Southport nor Blackpool in those days, nor any necessity for them. Seaside resorts for the populace are necessities of the nineteenth century. Flirtation visits there to resuscitate the jaded mind from commercial despondency were undreamt of. Cooing and billing in Winter Gardens whilst under the impression of lingering lovingly in Paradise were stretches of the imagination far beyond the reach of Lancashire witches of the middle ages. More homely and serious, though less expensive, methods of convalescence and courtship were adopted. Then it was the acknowledged fate of mankind that each should win his bread by the sweat of his brow. That this life was merely a state of probation for a future existence was the belief of the multitude. To hoard up wealth and accumulate vast fortunes had not yet become a Lancashire fashion, and, consequently, there was not that perennial, present-day, high-strained, excitement and competition in the commercial and professional world requiring that entire change of scenery and circumstance now an annual and absolute necessity for repairing the wear and tear of body brought on by mental worry. Week in and week out, each laboured and existed. There was no national system of education, nor over-thronged competitive world in which each was trained, by the force of surrounding circumstances, to excel in craft or deceit, or to debilitate the mind with scientific or speculative, but impracticable, ideas. All were workers, unworried by ideas that are begotten by a superficial education. Holidays were unneeded and unknown. Manual labour wearied the body, but never worried the mind, and the fatigued body provided its own antidote by inviting refreshing and dreamless sleep. These were days of physical toil, when even the half-holiday on Saturday afternoon was not requested. Yet, although the labours of husbandmen and craftsmen were very hard, they were by no means so overpowering as to prevent any class from joining in the popular sports during the summer evenings and on

Sundays, for these were rather hailed by all as envied relaxations, even when they entailed much exertion, as they were such as elevated the spirits and brought other muscles into play. Pleasure was doubly enjoyable because of the limitations to its amount. These were not the days of wealth, when rich men boasted they were gentlemen who did not work for a living—a most useless, despicable, and imbecile class of mortals who can only foster degeneracy of race and national retrogression.

The games of the period are thus poetically summarised by an old versifier :—

“ Any they dare challenge for to throw the sledge,
 To jump or leap over ditch or hedge ;
 To wrestle, play at stool-ball, or to run,
 To pitch the bar, or to shoot off a gun ;
 To play at loggata, nine holes, or ten pins,
 To try it out at foot-ball, by the shins ;
 At tick-tacks, seize nobby, maw and ruff,
 At hot cockles, leap frog, or blind man's buff ;
 To drink the halper-pots, or deal at the whole can,
 To play at chess, or pos, and inkhorn ;
 To dance the morris, play at barley braks,
 At all exploits a man can think or speak ;
 At shove-groat, venter point, or crop and pile,
 At beshrew him that's last at any stile ;
 At leaping over a Christmas bonfire,
 Or at the drawing dame out of the mire ;
 At shoot cock, Gregory, stool-ball, and what not,
 Pick-point, top and scourge, to make him hot.”

The barons continued to acquire great power both over the king and the people. They had had many grievances, and bravely opposed the king, whilst wisely persuading the people that they were fighting their battles. It required great political skill to extricate the king from the dilemma into which he was certainly being placed. It would have been unwise in him to oppose the combination of barons and people, for together they had him completely under their control. They could stop supplies, and thereby destroy his power. He had failed to secure the confidence of the nobles, and the wisest policy left, if not the only one, was to seek the loyalty and favour of the guilds of different towns, the members of which had now grown to be an influential middle class. Their united loyalty was stronger than the power of the barons. To make them the real arbiters of the country's weal or woe would show a confidence in them that would make them proud of their importance, and by legislating according to their own rules they would take pleasure in advancing the laws and supporting the King and Constitution, of which they themselves formed the most important part.

Royalty was advised that these guilds had maintained their civic rights to the good of the country, and the likelihood was they would not work to the detriment of

the government, but be distinguished and conscientious supporters of it. To carry on the government and the numerous national wars money was wanted, and it seemed a hardship for those burgesses to be called upon to pay heavy taxes without their having any power to say yea or nay. The king wisely resolved to give them a voice in the matter, hoping that the Commons, through their representatives, would willingly submit to any tax imposed by their fellow-townsmen. The policy was a great success. Boroughs sent their representatives, and steps were taken to grant charters to other influential and prosperous towns whose representatives might make the laws and tax their townsmen. The members, as expected, were pleased at the confidence placed in them, and passed laws of supply, enabling the king to levy taxes on their constituents who could not reasonably refuse to submit to the laws of their representatives, which they practically were.

The science of geology was not dreamt of. People, generally, never for a moment considered that the earth was otherwise than it was then. That the world was made in one day of 24 hours was an axiom which they could no more think of doubting than they could that two and two make four, whether added or multiplied. People of Wigan never dreamt of mines of wealth and resources of domestic comfort lying close beneath them. They were ignorant of the carboniferous strata that were to make their county one of the richest and most thickly populated in the country. The burgesses were allowed to gather sticks for fuel from the forests of the rector; then peat was discovered to be an excellent and more easily conveyed substitute, and, finally, cannel coal, at the beginning of the 14th century, was discovered in some neighbouring *fault*, and found to give both great heat and excellent light. When the *fault* portion of the stratum was used up, the properties of coal appreciated, and its value as a mercantile commodity fully perceived, speculating capitalists were found bold enough to dig for the combustible rock, and, finding the work profitable, founded and fostered a new trade, which has long since become the staple business of the town. Smiths, wrights, millers, merchants, weavers, tanners, bleachers, masons, and colliers were now the common tradesmen of the town.

Wigan owes its present prosperity to the rich coalfields that lie, stratum upon stratum, beneath it. During the middle ages its progress was quite equal to that of any other town, but even that was of the most conservative nature. It was famed for its manufacture of coverlets, rugs, blankets, bed-ticks, linen, checks, calicoes, fustians, braziery, pewtery, and its brass and iron foundries, in which labours it employed a very large number of workmen. These trades had their day in the borough, and died out; but, with the invention of steam, came the tide of greatness which, had it been taken at its flood, would have made it the most prosperous and richest town in Lancashire. Its proximity to Liverpool, its Act of Parliament to make

the Douglas navigable, its unlimited possession of coal—the primary necessity for steam power—gave it extraordinary advantages over Manchester and every other town in the county. But it is easier to lament than to recall and amend the past. The day of golden opportunities went by, and other towns sprang up and superseded the loyal borough in commerce which nature might well be said to have designed for Wigan alone. Its general prosperity has literally been forced upon it, as the inevitable share of that which has been national; and it can only look back, like thousands of able men, on the great and golden opportunities irrevocably lost, or, like a degraded aristocrat, boast of its antiquity and the greatness which it *might* have acquired. Like a foolish speculator, it allowed its talents to lie hidden in the earth, instead of trading with them to the best advantage that posterity might acquire its own with usury; yet, notwithstanding this, it has remained in affluent circumstances because of its natural entailed legacies.

Robert de Clyderhou had been presented to All Saints' Parish by Sir John de Langeton, patron of the church, and instituted by the Bishop of Lichfield on the 22nd September, 1303, where he remained parson for upwards of 30 years, being succeeded at his death, in 1334, by Robert, son of John de Langeton. He was buried in the family vault in the most northerly side chapel of the north transept of Sawley Abbey, where he had been rector for one year, 13 years after his appointment to Wigan. On his tombstone is carved the effigy of a priest wearing the chasuble with amice, written round which is the conventional inscription of the period, "*Sir Robert de Clyderhou, parson of Wigan, lies here. God on his soul have real mercy.*" Four years after his death "Edward III. granted a licence, dated at the Tower of London 16th March, in the 12th year of his reign (1338-9) to Henry de Clyderhou, to alienate land in mortmain, to messuages in Ribchester and Dutton, 40 acres of land, 40 acres of meadow, two acres of wood, and 6s. rent for a perpetual chaplain, to say mass daily in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, in Bayley, built by Robert de Clyderhou, late rector of Wigan, for the souls of the said Robert, of Henry de Clyderhou, and of their ancestors, and for the souls of all the faithful."—(Lanc. MSS., vol. 27, p. 19).

A respected gentleman, long resident in the neighbourhood of Bayley, says:—"I have often visited this old chantry. It was barbarously destroyed by order of its owner, Mr. Fenton, about twenty years ago, notwithstanding an earnest remonstrance on the subject. It was a small chapel, without aisles, in a secluded situation. On its north side it was lighted by three pointed windows, exhibiting the curvilinear tracery of Edward II.'s time. At the west end was a bell gable. The tracery of the east window (which, as well as the windows of the south side, had been previously removed) is preserved among the much more recent architecture of the

principal front of Stonyhurst College. Near the chapel was a house for the chantry priest, and opposite to its south side was a mansion, which may be ascribed to the 16th century, but which probably marked the site of the original mansion of the De Clyderou family, or at least that branch of it from which Robert de Clyderhou sprang." In 1330 the celebrated Black Prince was born, and in that same year the Rector of Wigan obtained a new charter for holding a market and fair in Wigan.

The Statute of Mortmain had lately been passed (1281), and so it was illegal for Clyderhou to give this land to the Church; but money could buy anything, and a fine paid to the king was sufficient to quail the conscience of the law-breaker and purchase a royal charter to confirm and carry out the wishes of the donor. This law was wisely instituted for the protection of the heirs of dying persons, who often in their last moments of spiritual unhappiness or hopelessness, or semi-consciousness, might be persuaded by the crafty priests to bequeath their estates to the Church by way of purchasing absolution, and so unjustly deprive their heirs of their lawful possessions. By this Act the king was often enabled to rob the Church and enrich himself, for no small portion of his income was derived from fines surrendered for liberty to endow chantries and churches with lands which would else have been acquired without a fine. Thus it was necessary for Clyderhou to pay the fine before his wishes in regard to Bayley Church could be carried out. By this same law no corporate body—civil or clerical—could take into its possession any lands or property. Thus, neither lands nor tenements could be appropriated by the borough of Wigan, either by purchase or gift, consequently all ancient property and gifts meant for the use and benefit of the town were bestowed by deeds on trustees and their heirs or successors. A special privilege, however, was first bestowed on the borough by the charter of Charles II., allowing an infringement of this law to a very limited extent. By that charter the Corporation were allowed to purchase or accept as gifts to the extent of £50 annually manors, messuages, lands, tenements, meadows, pastures, feedings, boscages, &c., &c.

"We have granted, and by these presents, for us, our heirs, and successors, do grant and give, special licence and free and lawful faculty, power, and authority to the aforesaid Mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses of our borough of Wigan aforesaid, and their successors, to have, receive, and take to themselves and their successors for ever, manors, messuages, lands, tenements, meadows, pastures, feedings, boscages, subboscages, rectories, tithes, rents, revenues, and other hereditaments whatsoever within our kingdom of England and elsewhere within our dominions, as well from us, our heirs, or successors, as from any other person or any other persons whomsoever, so that the same manors, messuages, lands, tenements, meadows, feedings, boscages, subboscages, rectories, tithes, rents, revenues, services, and other hereditaments, so as aforesaid to be had, received, and taken, do not exceed in the whole the clear yearly value of £50 by the year, besides all burthens and reprises, the statutes concerning lands and tenements not to be put into mortmain, or any other statute, act, ordinance, or provision heretofore had, made, ordained, or provided, or any other thing, cause, or matter whatsoever, to the contrary thereof, in any wise notwithstanding. We do also give, and by these presents, for us, our heirs, and successors, do grant to each our subjects and every the subjects of us, our heirs, and successors, special licence and free and lawful power, faculty, and authority that they or any one or

any of them may and can be able to give, sell, grant, bequeath, or alien manors, messuages, lands, tenements, meadows, feedings, pastures, boscages, subboscages, rectories, tithes, rents, revenues, services, and other hereditaments whatsoever to the aforesaid Mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses of the borough aforesaid and their successors, so nevertheless that all the aforesaid manors, messuages, lands, tenements, meadows, feedings, pastures, boscages, subboscages, rectories, tithes, rents, revenues, services, and other hereditaments to the same Mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses of that borough and their successors by virtue of these presents, so, as aforesaid, to be given, granted, bequeathed, or aliened, do not exceed, in the whole, the clear yearly rent or value of £50 by the year, besides all burthens and reprises, the statutes concerning lands or tenements not to be put into mortmain or any other thing, cause, or matter heretofore had, made, published, ordained, or provided to the contrary thereof, in any wise notwithstanding."—(Wigan Charter, 14th Charles II.)

Liverpool, called Lyrpul, in its charter from Henry II, now the second port of the world, was not even at this period constituted a parish, and contained only 140 householders. Its wealth, which is now so great, originated with its success in the slave trade, in reference to which said the famous and religious, but dramatic actor, Cooke: "There isn't a brick in your town that is not cemented with the blood of a slave," thus reminding one of the barbarous customs in Ashanti of mixing the *suish*, or cement, for building royal palaces, with the blood of hundreds of virgins.

Three charters were obtained for Wigan in the long reign of Edward III, but such charters were only equal to the modern passing of bills for local improvements. In 1334 a charter was granted to bridge the Douglas and pave the town, both pressing necessities that the conservative town should long before have had power to carry out. The river previously had to be forded, but during the winter floods this was very dangerous, and often impossible. Foot passengers stepped across on large boulders, placed at convenient distances, or on a rude plank stretched across from bank to bank. When the charter was granted the burgesses did their work well, for long afterwards the historian of the time recorded that it was "a well paved town."

In the 24th Edward III. two charters passed the Great Seal, one constituting Wigan a Parliamentary borough, and the other confirming the liberties of the borough. As the borough was in the barony of Newton the bailiffs of Wigan owed suit and service to the court and fee of that barony for a portion of the Corporation land, although the borough proper is independent of that fee. There were two annual court leets in the borough, the rector's held at Easter, and that of the Corporation at Michaelmas. Dr. Kuerden says that the rector, John Langeton, preferred a claim, besides all the privileges formerly conceded to the burgesses, upon the chattels of fugitives and felons, waif and stray, view of frankpledge, gallows, and timbrel, pleas of withernam, jurisdiction over offences committed within the borough, and exemption for the burgesses from being tried without the borough for matters ensuing within it, saving the pleas which belong to the crown.—(4to. MS. Chet. Soc., fol. 52).