

Prescot Manor Court

For most of the 13th Century the D'Acre family owned Prescot Manor, but in 1391 it was sold to John of Gaunt, 3rd surviving son of King Edward III. On his death the Manor was inherited by his son who subsequently became King Henry IV.



Henry VI, King's College, Cambridge

King Henry VI (grandson of Henry IV) established the University College of Saint Mary and Saint Nicholas in Cambridge, which later became known as King's College. In 1445, among the gifts he gave to fund the new University College was the Manor and Rectory of Prescot, making Kings College, Cambridge responsible for the town.

As the Lord of the Manor was so far away in Cambridge, the running of the town was left to the Steward, who was the Earl of Derby at nearby Knowsley Hall. As the Earl was also often absent, Prescot was assigned a unique early town government, known as the Court Leet or Manor Court. With their own form of self-government 'Prescotians' had enjoyed rights denied to those outside the town, a rare privilege enjoyed as the tenants of Kings College.

The day-to-day running of the town was left to the responsibility of the local Deputy Steward. The townspeople elected and provided the jury and officers of the court who regulated the day to day life of the town.

There were many different types of town officer, each with their own special responsibilities. The most important of these were the Four Men, a Constable, a Coroner, the Aletasters, the Burleymen and the Streetlookers.

<http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/things-to-see-and-do/galleries-and-museum.aspx>

Stone Coat of Arms



The Arms of King's College, Cambridge was adopted as the Coat of Arms for Prescot. The crest was originally on the old Town Hall in Market Place, and can now be seen above the entrance of 8 Vicarage Place.

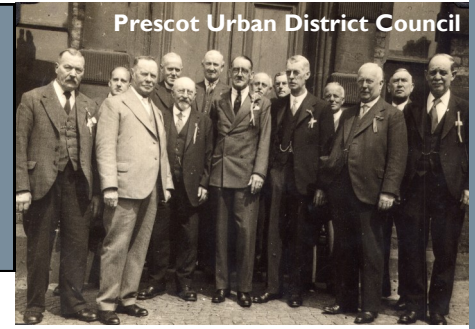
'Perrying' outside the Town Hall, Market Place



The men of the Court Leet



Prescot Manor Court



Prescot Urban District Council

The Four Men ensured woodland and common waste ground was protected, and made sure no one was admitted to live in the town without the permission of the court. Two of the Four Men were nominated by the court jury to represent the local people, the other two by a steward for the interests of King's College. The Constable was responsible for law and order. He would have to tackle all sorts of law breakers, from minor arguments to thefts and sometimes murder. All townspeople had to help if he called. The Coroner was responsible for presenting the causes of deaths. If someone had committed suicide all his goods were forfeited to the Earl of Derby. If someone had died in an accident, the thing that had caused the accident was forfeited to the Earl. Streetlookers were responsible for sanitation in the town, ensuring rubbish and animal dung did not pile up in the streets. Burleymen had to make sure that people built their fences and hedges in the right place and kept in good order, and that ditches did not pollute or block the waterways. The Aletaster had to check the quality of flour, bread and beer, that there were no short measures and prices were fair. In order to test the beer the Aletaster would pour some onto a bench, then sit on it wearing leather trousers while he drank the remainder. If he was stuck to the bench after drinking, then it was too sugary and not strong enough!

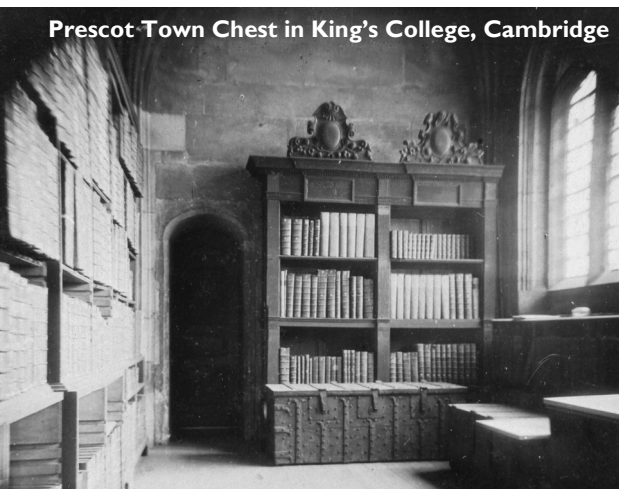
The Court Leet met at the Court House in Market Place. The meetings of the Court Leet were written down each year on what is known as the Prescot Court Rolls. It is these town records which give such a vivid account of the town and its people.

The Manor Court was finally superseded by what is today recognised as Local Government.

In 1867 the Prescot Local Government Board was formed which eventually became Prescot Urban District Council in 1895. As a result the importance of the Court Leet or Manor Court as a public administrative body sharply declined.

In 1597 the court ordered that to preserve the records of the town there should be "*one sufficiente cheste bounde with iron, with five lockes upon the same.*" There were 5 keys held by the Steward, and each of the Four Men. The chest is now on display in Prescot Museum.

Prescot Town Chest in King's College, Cambridge



Prescot Town Chest

