

N
Snapshots in Time:
Mapping Wells

GRANT OF WATER BY BISHOP BEKYNTON, 1451

(Wells City Council Archives, WCC/1001/20)

Charters were not only issued by kings or queens, they could also be issued by the church and particularly by bishops.

In 1451 Bishop Bekynton (Bishop of Bath & Wells from 1443 to 1465) issued a charter to the people of

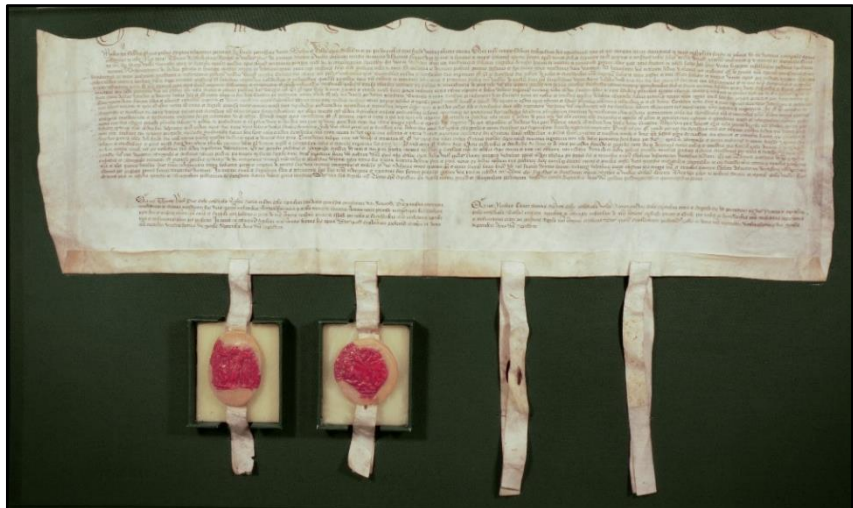


Figure 1 Original Grant of Water by Bishop Bekynton. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/1001/20)

Wells and the document represents a hugely significant landmark in the history of this city. The charter granted in perpetuity a supply of fresh water to the people of Wells which was piped from the well pools within The Bishop's Palace. Bishop Bekynton paid for the pipework to be laid from the well pools to the market place and for the conduit which dispensed the water supply.

The following is a transcript¹ of the Latin text as written, i.e. without punctuation.

TO ALL faithful people in Christ to whom this present Writing Indented shall come THOMAS by Divine permission Bishop of Bath and Wells GREETING in him who for the gift of a cup of cold water hath promised eternal life FORASMUCH as we know that none of the faithful doubt but that those things which we Sow on Earth with a regard to Eternity

¹ Transcript from Wells City Archives (WCC/3058)

we shall be certain to gather in Heaven with multiplied increase and as we may express ourselves by copious handfuls WE THEREFORE Thomas de Bekynton by divine permission the undeserving Minister of the Churches of Bath and Wells in the Diocese of Bath and Wells most earnestly desiring while time is allowed us upon Earth to labour for the good of all people but more especially for our nearest and most dear Sons William Vowell the Master and the Co-brethren and fellow Citizens and Burgesses of our City or Borough of Wells and also to perform some work of Charity for all and singular the Inhabitants thereof which may be especially acceptable to God and for the singular benefit advantage and comfort of them all and may finally be a perpetual Memorial of our desert the fruit of which we may after this transitory life infallibly find deposited in Heaven. To the Praise, Honour, and Glory of Almighty God, and considering of the very great love and charity which towards our aforesaid most dear Sons of approved fair duty and Devotion we have born do bear and sincerely so long as we shall live do intend to bear We will that it should be known to you all by these presents that of our especial Grace we have granted and confirmed and by the tenor of these presents do grant and confirm to the aforesaid William Vowell the Master of our City or Borough aforesaid and to the Co-brethren and Burgesses thereof and their successors for ever that they and their successors aforesaid shall and may effectually have and hold of us and our Successors forever One head for a Water Conduit with troughs, pipes, and other necessary engines above and underground to have receive enclose and conduct a certain parcel of our water springing and arising within the lands and Precinct of our Palace of Wells from a certain most limpid well of ours called Saint Andrew Well in that situation or place which we have now assigned for that purpose and in which at our Costs and expenses by reason of the affection we bear them we have now erected such head sufficient and competent to lead and supply from thence in certain pipes containing 12 Inches in circumference of Lead stone chalk or other Materials whatsoever with Ditches Trenches Standards Cisterns and other necessaries above and underground where they as shall be fitting in manner and form hereinafter mentioned as well within the Precinct of our said Palace as within the Streets and public ways of our said City And that they may for ever hereafter when and as often as it shall be necessary place construct erect refit repair and have the said head and break and dig our land there and place and cause to be placed under any our Land when it may rightly and well be done Leaden pipes, Troughs, Cisterns, and other Engines in which the said Water may descend and run in and from the aforesaid Head and Well of Saint Andrew unto the high Cross built in the Market of our said City and also from thence to other different places to be

Assigned by the said Master Burgesses and their successors for the convenience of the said City as shall to them seem best and most commodious and the said intermediate Land to break, dig, and with reasonable dispatch to cover in And may receive, have, hold, and possess to them and their successors for ever the said head with the troughs, pipes cisterns and other necessary engines to be placed erected made and had at their proper costs and charges and the Water collected and to be collected in the same head cisterns and leaden pipes diffused and running into and to our said City in manner hereafter mentioned together with free ingress and egress to the same and also to survey search into repair and renew all and singular the Premises as often as it shall be necessary without the Impeachment vexation or hindrance of us or our Successors our Officers or Ministers whomsoever SO NEVERTHELESS that he the said Master and Burgesses and their Successors shall as Justice requires forthwith make sufficient amends and satisfaction to us or our successors and Tenants there for all damages as often as the same shall happen which we or our Successors or any of our Tenants there shall at any time hereafter sustain by reason of the building digging repairing or renewing of the said Conduit Leaden pipes or other the engines to the said conduit belonging PROVIDED ALWAYS that, as it is agreed the first Head and Trough in which our whole water shall be received shall be round and made (by reason of our great affection for and in ease of the Costs and charges of the Master and our Burgesses aforesaid) at our Costs and Charges of Stone Chalk or other materials often feet breadth within the Walls; with a round cistern made of Lead of five feet deep and four feet broad with pipes joined to each side of the said Trough or Cistern at the costs and charges of the said City In which one part of the Water above granted shall be assigned and divided to be conducted towards the said City but the other part shall run to and within the different parts of our Palace in such manner as shall by our discreet workmen be there planned Which said head or trough shall be secured with one door and two keys one of which keys shall for ever remain in the custody of us and our Successors and the other in the custody of the said Master, Burgesses and their Successors for the purpose of making their Survey PROVIDED MOREOVER that when the Moats which surround our Palace shall be to be purged cleansed or scoured by us our Successors or any of them it shall be lawful for us and our same Successors to divert and transfer all the Water which shall be then collected and during such purging, scouring or cleansing to be collected in the said Head into the said Moats until the same shall be by that means fully cleansed or scoured and filled again after which so soon as it can well be done without any guile Fraud or sinister intention whatsoever the Water shall be divided and flow as before IT IS MOROVER covenanted

and agreed between us on both sides that the said head or Trough shall at least once in six months yearly for ever upon due warning thereof being given be by the said Master Burgesses and their Co-brethren and their Successors opened examined into and cleansed and due repair if necessary of the said Leaden Cistern shall as is fitting be made at the costs and charges of the said Master and burgesses for ever ——— PROVIDED ALSO that the Waste Water running night and day from the said Conduits and Standards so made and to be by them new made and erected shall hereafter in the straightest best and most commodious manner that it can be effected run and fall into the course of our great Brook for the service of our Mills there AND We the Master Co-brethren and Burgesses aforesaid that the remembrance of so great and acceptable a benefit may be famous upon earth amongst us and our Successors and never be forgotten by us do grant for us and our Successors that so long as the aforesaid Grant shall remain firm and unbroken the Master or his Deputy Burgesses & Co-Brethren of the Borough aforesaid for the time being will once yearly for ever visit the place where the aforesaid Lord Bishop shall happen to be buried within the Church of Saint Andrew at Wells aforesaid most devoutly there to put up their prayers to the Most High for his Soul and the Souls of all the faithful deceased AND We the aforesaid Thomas that they the Master Co-Brethren and Burgesses aforesaid may be the more readily exited to the premises of the unbounded mercy of Almighty God relying upon the merits and prayers of the most Glorious Virgin Mary his Mother and also of his blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and also of the Pious Andrew our Patrons and of all the Saints do by these presents grant to the said Master Co-Brethren and Burgesses and their Successors and to all other our Parishioners and others whose Diocesans shall ratify and accept this our indulgence being truly contrite for repenting of and confessing their sins forty days indulgence, to continue for ever so often as they and each of them shall visit such place where it shall please God we shall be buried most devoutly to put up their prayers to the Most High for our Soul and the Souls of all the faithful deceased IN FAITH and Testimony of all and singular which premises we have caused these our letters Indented and of three parts to be made patent One part whereof to remain for ever in the custody of us Thomas the aforesaid Bishop and our Successors Bishops of the Churches of Bath and Wells Another part among the Archives of the Dean and Chapter of the Church of Wells aforesaid And the third part in the Custody of the Master and Burgesses aforesaid and their Successors GIVEN as well under the Seal of us Thomas the aforesaid Bishop as under the Common Seal of the Master and Burgesses aforesaid the 20th day of September in the year of Our Lord 1451

A N D We Thomas Lacock Prior of the Cathedral Church of Bath, also the Chapter of the same Church, considering the aforesaid Grant of the said Reverend Father to be gracious charitable advantageous and highly necessary to the said Master Co-Brethren Burgesses and other the inhabitants of the aforesaid City and also that the other premises in the above written Letters specified are just and consonant to reason Ratifying and holding for acceptable all and singular the same DO by these presents with our common consent and assent for us and our Successors ratify approve and confirm the same IN TESTIMONY whereof we have caused our Common Seal to be hereunto put GIVEN as to the Sealing of these presents in our Chapter House at Bath the 27th day of September in



Figure 2 Original seal to the Grant of Water by Bishop Bekynton. © Wells City Council Archives (WCC/1001/20)

the year of our Lord above said.

A N D We Nicholas Carent Dean of the above said Cathedral Church of Wells and also the Chapter of the same Church DO by these presents Sealed with our Common Seal for us and our Successors with our Common consent and Assent in like manner ratify approve and confirm all and singular the matter so as aforesaid by the said Prior and Chapter of the Cathedral Church of Bath ratified approved and confirmed GIVEN as to the Sealing of these presents in our Chapter House at Wells the 27th day of September in the year of our Lord above said.

If you would like further information on the history of Wells and its buildings, you are welcome to contact or visit Wells City Archives (archives@wellsmuseum.org.uk) and Wells & Mendip Museum (admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk).