



Good morning Worthy Knights, in this Part 105: The Sovereign.

Wikipedia

Sovereign is a title which can be applied to the highest leader in various categories. The word is borrowed from Old French *souverain*. The roles of a sovereign vary from monarch or head of state to head of municipal government or head of a chivalric order.

Head of State

The word *Sovereign* is frequently used synonymously with Monarch but also generally used in place of "Grand Master" for the supreme head of various orders. In the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the Grand Master is styled "Sovereign", e.g. Sovereign Grand Master, due to its status as an internationally independent sovereign entity.

Municipal Government

Commonly used throughout Ireland, as chief officer of municipal government, *the Sovereign* had duties and responsibilities deriving from the charter which established the local town borough or council. This usage was less common in the United Kingdom.

The candidate for this position was elected by the freemen and burgesses of the town, borough and city councils and had to be a Burgess himself.

The level of responsibility ranged from enacting by-laws about tolls up to the death penalty, and some charters established the sovereign as the local magistrate or Justice of the peace. The office generally had no salary though some patrons provided a stipend to the Sovereign in their borough. Once the parliamentary franchise was lost with the Acts of Union 1800, the role became largely ceremonial or forgotten.

The title of the chief officer of a city council has become known as a Mayor. In some municipal boroughs the titles Borough Master or Burgomaster, Bailiff, Portreeve, Warden and Provost were used interchangeably with mayor and sovereign.

History

Ireland had established self-governing municipal boroughs which gave a city-state status to the locality in existence since the Norman conquest. These were most typically in the denser populated provinces of Munster and Leinster.

As we have seen, the provision of the borough and the corporation was established through a charter, the granting of which was known as incorporation. Freemen and burgesses were the usual governing members of the council and elected their chief officer, the Sovereign. In earlier incarnations the council also managed the law court known as the "hundred court" and dealt with local administrative and legal business. Boroughs also elected the local MP. Positions on the council were predominantly from among the wealthy and related families in the area.

The first mention of the Sovereign in Kilkenny dates from 1231. The *Liber Primus Kilkenniensis* is a contemporaneously written account of the proceedings of Kilkenny municipality beginning in 1230 and running to 1538.

Weakening power

Early Irish borough had a city-state status however with the unification of Ireland under the crown in 1603 they were transformed into more ordinary municipal towns on the English model. Part of this was to reduce the autonomy of the Irish borough and partly to establish the new rules by which the towns of Ireland were to operate.

Since the MPs to the Irish parliament were elected by the borough council, and to prevent a Catholic majority there, additional boroughs were created in areas with a strong Protestant base. A direct result of this was the Protestant majority of 232 to 100 in the 1613 House of Commons.

The new charters placed the government of the borough with the Sovereign and twelve chief burgesses, who are to elect all the rest and stipulated that all had to conform to the established church by taking the Oath of Supremacy.

The **Oath of Supremacy** required any person taking public or church office in England to swear allegiance to the monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Failure to do so was to be treated as treasonable.



British Gold Sovereign

Legacy

There is a sailing race held in Kinsale which references back to the chief officer of the town council. When looking to name a new trophy the local yacht club discovered that the 'Sovereign of Kinsale' used to put up a trophy for a sailing race in the late 1700s. The result is that the race and trophy today is known as The Sovereign's cup. Kinsale had been given its charter to set up a borough led by a Sovereign around 1319.



Sovereign's Cup 2021 – Kinsale Yacht Club