

HOW GENEROUS WAS KING HENRY VIII TO SUTTON?

There is a popular belief that King Henry VIII gave Sutton Park to the people of Sutton. For instance, John Willmott imagined the king saying: “Men of this chase and town, my saintly counsellor [Bishop Vesey] hath moved me to the granting of a favour. Know then, in token of his service to the throne and to relieve thy needs I grant the Sutton Chase to you and your posterity for ever. Likewise, by charter, I’ll bestow a plan of government, and name your town the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield.” {1}

Perusal of the Charter {2} dated 16th December 1528 tells a rather different story. The Charter mentions various officials who had been appointed for life, including Sir Walter Devereux, Bailiff of the Manor and Keeper of the Park, and Sir Henry Willoughby, Steward of Sutton Coldfield, and says that on the death or resignation of Devereux the newly-formed Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield would be free to make their own appointment but would have to pay the king £16.2.11½d. p.a. and on the death or resignation of Willoughby the Warden and Society would have to pay the king £5.11.0½d. p.a. Once all the office holders had died or resigned, the total sum payable by the Warden and Society to the king would be £58 p.a. (clause 28), which was more than he previously received. In 1480 the total receipts recorded in the bailiff’s accounts came to £45.12.8¾d. {3} There was, therefore, no element of gift on the part of the king; he was to receive from the Warden and Society more than his bailiff had previously collected on his behalf. Of course, it was a great advantage to Sutton that it could now manage its own affairs independently of the crown, and this was the extent of King Henry VIII’s generosity.

£58 may not sound much, but its present-day value is around £36,500. {4} An unskilled worker’s average wage was 2d. a day or £7 a year; skilled workers could earn twice as much. {5} When Bishop Vesey founded the Grammar School in 1527 he allowed £7 p.a. (raised to £10 in 1541) for the master’s salary and all expenses. {6}

The one thing that wasn’t taken into account was inflation, something that was generally overlooked at the time. In fact, the word ‘inflation’ was not used in its modern sense until the 19th century. {7} So, the £58 was fixed for all time; it was still being paid 300 years later, by which time the crown had sold the entitlement to the rent into private ownership. The entitlement eventually came into the hands of Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins of Moat House and he surrendered the rent to the Warden and Society in 1830 in exchange for forty acres of land in Roughley and Sutton. {8}

Conclusion: King Henry VIII did not give the Park to Sutton, but in effect sold it at its full yearly value, but made a bad bargain for his successors, as the purchasing power of money decreased over the years.

{1} *Tales of a Bishop and a Royal Town* by John E. Willmott (1948)

{2} *Sutton Coldfield Charters from Original Translations* (1836)

{3} *Fifteenth Century Sutton from the Bailiffs’ Accounts* translated by Anne-Marie Powell with Commentary by Roger Lea (Proceedings of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group Vol. 5 Autumn 1999)

{4} *Bank of England Inflation Calculator*

{5} *The History of England: Medieval Prices and Wages*

{6} *A Revised History of Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School 1527-1817* by Kerry Osbourne (2025)

{7} *Oxford English Dictionary* (1933)

{8} *Notes on the Fee Farm Rent* by A. Fentiman (Proceedings of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group Vol. 4 Spring 1997)



Sutton's 1528 Charter of Incorporation

[Vesey's Vision \[448\]](#)