

# The Civic Regalia of the City of Chester

BY

MARGARET J. GROOMBRIDGE, B.A.  
CITY ARCHIVIST

CHESTER is the proud possessor of some very fine symbols of its authority. These have existed from very early times, as it was customary to have some outward sign of one's authority.

Legend has it that a sword was granted to the City as a symbol of justice by Richard II when he visited Chester in 1394, but though there is mention of a swordbearer in the 15th century, the first written evidence of the City's right to bear a sword is in the charter of incorporation granted to the City in 1506 by Henry VII. In it, the City is permitted to carry the sword upright on all occasions except when the King is present. This privilege was challenged by the Canons of the Cathedral in 1606, but as a result of the Judge's decision, made after the incident, what had formerly been largely a custom, now became a definite right. It was a very great honour to be granted a sword as it was a sign of considerable independence in the administration of justice. Chester's sword has never been a fighting sword, as it is too long to be a one-handed sword and not long enough to be a two-handed one. The date of its manufacture is full of uncertainties. It is thought that parts of the sword itself may date from the 15th century, but the style of decoration on the blade, which incorporates four shields, suggests that the blade at least may date from the 17th century. The scabbard of cedar wood covered with silk plush is also 17th century in date and has on it several gold plaques and bands commemorating some of the notable occasions when it was used, including one to its use as the state sword at the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarvon in 1911.

The early history of mace-bearing in Chester is equally wrapped in mystery as it is known that the present mace belonging to the City is not the first that it possessed. The earliest evidence of the existence of a mace is to be found indirectly in the fact that in Henry VIII's reign there were Sergeants-at-Mace. There were four of these officers who were responsible for delivering summonses and making arrests, but in addition, there

was another officer called simply the Macebearer. He also acted, at least from Elizabethan times, as Sergeant of the Peace. The mace itself is one of the earliest of the style to be elaborately ornamented. It is silver gilt about 4 ft. 3 ins. long and round the base of the mace-head is an inscription which gives its origin in these words, "A guift to the Cittye of Chester by Charles, Earle of Derbye, Lord of Man and the Isles, Maior, 1668." The bowl is ornamented with cherubs interspersed between the emblems of the Stuart Kings, the Tudor rose, thistle, harp and fleur-de-lys, and is surmounted by a royal crown. The shaft, on the other hand, is decorated with spirals of roses and thistles and is divided into three by massive knobs, one of which bears the arms of the Lords of Man and the Stanleys and another, that of the City. Its condition at the present day is excellent, and there is evidence that it has only been re-gilt twice since it was first made; once in 1711 and again in 1772, when the repair work cost £24 13s. 6d. Today the sword and mace are always present at Council Meetings, when the Judges come to hold the Assizes, and on all official occasions. Since 1835 the offices of Swordbearer and Macebearer had been allowed to lapse. The then holders of the offices were permitted to continue to carry out their duties until their death, but afterwards it was arranged that two policemen, who dress in 18th century uniform, should carry the sword and mace at all functions.

The third emblem of privilege which the City possesses is a silver oar about 14 inches long. This is the emblem of the Mayor as Admiral of the Dee and was carried by the Water Bailiff in the execution of his duties. The origin of this post of Admiral, which was largely judicial and rarely seafaring, lies in the grant made by the Black Prince in 1354 which gave the City complete authority over the estuary of the River Dee from Chester to Hoylake to make arrests, regulate the shipping and collect customs. The oar itself dates from 1719 and bears on one side of the flat part of the oar the arms of the City and on the other, the arms of Whitmore of Thurstaston impaled with those of Haselwell of Heswall. The only occasion when it is now used is at the time of the Chester Regatta, when the Mayor is rowed up the Dee by the Sea Cadets.

Apart from these, the City possesses several emblems of office, all of which are less than a hundred years old. The Mayor's and Sheriff's chains are very simple in design, consisting of a gold medallion bearing the City crest with a chain of gold links for the Mayor and silver links for the Sheriff. These are worn at all daytime functions, but for evening occasions pendant jewels are worn. The Mayor's consists of a gold medallion surrounded by 51 diamonds with the City coat of arms in true colours in the centre, while that of the Mayoress is a delicate ornament of sapphires and diamonds surmounted with a fleur-

de-lys, also with the City coat of arms in the centre. The Sheriff and his Lady have jewels as well, but they are much less ornate, being of gold with a coat of arms in enamel on them. Though these badges are not old, the Mayor, Aldermen and Sheriffs did not in the past carry out their duties without wearing something to distinguish their rank. This distinguishing mark lay in the gowns and tippetts\* which they wore. These varied in colour and style, but it does not seem that they were always particular to wear them as there were comparatively frequent orders requesting these dignitaries to remember to wear their robes. How different is the position today.

\*Tippetts were worn down the back and were modelled after the merchant's hat of the 15th century in the same way that a modern university hood is modelled on a monk's hood.

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## ROMAN WEIGHT FOUND AT KELSALL

In 1950 a farmer near Kelsall, digging in his garden found a Roman weight on which the figures VIII were impressed. He gave it to Mr. T. H. Clark, in Watergate Street, Chester, and asked him to hand it in to the Grosvenor Museum.

Since then the Curator has unsuccessfully tried to find where this weight was discovered and to thank the farmer for his gift.

The weight, which is shaped like a small flat cheese, weighs  $3,302\frac{1}{2}$  grains; only 64.2 grains less than the VIII *unciae* the weight claims to be.

Help from anyone living in the Kelsall district who knows anything about this weight would be much appreciated by the Curator as this discovery may possibly indicate the presence of a Roman site hitherto unsuspected.