

## **“800 YEARS AND ALL THAT”**

Few Guildhall Historians will have celebrated their birthday with a special concert given by the Corporation of London, conducted by a former Prime Minister, and ending with a firework display and the singing of Happy Birthday. As will be known, however, your writer was fortunate enough to hold office as 661st Lord Mayor during the 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty, and on the strength of this, your lately retired, but not so retiring, persuasive and indefatigable secretary, Ralph Hedderwick, suggested that I repair my previous omission of failing to present a paper, by attempting a brief resume of the background and events of the 800th Anniversary Year.

It is perhaps a brave or foolish man, who attempts such a task, when his listeners are undoubtedly better Historians, equally aware of all the events of a memorable year, which included the presentation in Guildhall by Mr. Gorbachev of his statement on perestroika, leading on to radical changes in East-West relations and in Eastern Europe, and there are already a number of learned papers on aspects of the year, together with a full report of the Corporation's 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty Committee. It may, however, be helpful to try and summarise in a short paper something of the background, objectives and achievements of the year, particularly in view of the dearth of information regarding the 700th Anniversary in 1889.

1989 marked the 800th Anniversary of the Office of Mayor, later Lord Mayor, which the Corporation of London resolved to celebrate as a special year, with a series of events to educate the City and the nation on the important role of the Lord Mayor, the Corporation, and the business of the City of London, not only to the benefit of the Square Mile, but also for the country as a whole.

It was in 1189, or so we believe, that Henry Fitz Ailwyn became the first Mayor of London. In many parts of Europe, associations of citizens had already been formed as “communes”, which had appointed their leader as “Mayor” under an oath very similar to that of the Freedom of the City of London, swearing obedience, not only to the Sovereign, but also “to the Mayor and to following and keeping the decisions of the Mayor and his echevins”. In London, where previously the King had the Portreeve as his appointee, the commune was first declared on October 8, 1191, as part of a bargain struck between the citizens and Prince John in exchange for the citizens' support for his succession on the death of King Richard.

The exact date of the creation of London's Mayoralty has been much debated, and a previous Guildhall Historian, Mr. H. Hobbs, in his paper “The First

Mayor of London” in 1985, suggested the date should be 1192, based on the volume of contemporary records and documents of that date of the Court of Husting and the Public Records, referring to Fitz Ailwyn by name and to him as Mayor, and to the Office of Mayor. 1192 was also quoted as the date in the Corporation’s official guide, and quoted in the evidence to the Royal Commission into Local Government in Greater London in 1958. Further to this, 1193 has been advanced as the date of the first Mayor, being the first recorded occasion when the title “Mayor” appears in formal documents, and finally, in 1215, King John granted a charter to the citizens of London to elect a Mayor annually, subject to the new Mayor being obliged to present himself to the Sovereign, or to his Judges, for approval, a practice which continues to the present day.

The traditional date of 1189 was based on the writings of Alderman Arnald Fitz-Thedmar in the **Liber de Antiquis Legibus** of about 1270. In this he refers to Henry Fitz Ailwyn being made first Mayor of the City in 1188, in the first year of the reign of King Richard (in fact 1189), with a cross-reference to another event of that year, the destruction of the Jews, which has been verified as occurring on September 3, 1189. The City’s archives record:-

“In the same year (1 Richard I) Henry Fitz Eylwin of Londenestone was made Mayor of London; who was the first Mayor of the City, and continued to be such Mayor to the end of his life, that is to say, for nearly five-and-twenty years”.

The above evidence was duly considered by the Corporation in resolving to celebrate the year. It was felt that the arguments in favour of the traditional date were the most convincing, based on Fitz-Thedmar’s evidence, written within a reasonable time of the event, and that the likelihood was that the formal declaration of 1191 was a recognition of an existing, unrecognised custom, in exchange for new service, rather than an instant invention of a new system with the Mayor as independent Head of the City and no longer a direct vassal of the King, and this had been recorded formally in contemporary documents in 1192, before the final charter in 1215. Finally, and most compelling of all, there was the fact that the Corporation had celebrated the 700th Anniversary in 1889.

On March 24, 1887, in considering the celebration of the 700th Anniversary of the Mayoralty in 1889, the Court of Common Council resolved to refer to the Library Committee the preparation of a work showing “the pre-eminent position occupied by the City of London, and the important function it exercised in the shaping and making of England”. It further resolved that “the

work should record the times and deeds of those remarkable men, who have filled in succession through seven long centuries the highest civic office ... and to show how, at many of the most critical periods of our history, the influence of London and its Lord Mayors has turned the scale in favour of those liberties of which we are so justly proud". This work, "at a cost not exceeding £1,000", was placed in the hands of Dr. R. R. Sharpe, the Records Clerk, and appeared in three volumes under the title "London and the Kingdom". In addition, a medal "illustrative of the event" was struck, with, on the obverse, the heads of King Richard I and Queen Victoria, woven intertwined circles (emblematic of seven centuries), and, below, St. George and the Dragon, and, on the reverse, St. Michael presenting to London the City Sceptre, while in the background are London landmarks.

The Lord Mayor's Show in 1889 of Sir Henry Aaron Isaacs attracted much larger crowds than in previous years, and featured the Sports and Pastimes of Old England, English Worthies who traced their descent from Aldermen (including Queen Elizabeth, Lord Bacon, John Hampden, Oliver Cromwell, the Duke of Marlborough, Sir Robert Walpole, and the Earl of Chatham), and famous Lord Mayors, including Henry Fitz Ailwyn, Richard Whittington, and John Wilkes. The Banquet invitation reproduced a design by Bartolozzi, used for the Lord Mayor's Banquet of 1789. Apart from the above, it appears that the year was celebrated in low key, possibly due to the recent establishment of the London County Council by the Local Government Act of 1888, and a reluctance by the Corporation to draw over-much attention to their respective rival claims to importance.

Over the years since 1889, the celebration of anniversaries by cities has increased in scale and importance, and more recently has included the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Storming of the Bastille in Paris, the City of Westminster's 400th Anniversary, the City of Hamburg's celebration of 800 years as a Port, and Dublin's celebration of its Millennium, with multi-million pound budgets and elaborate publicity drives by the cities concerned. Other recent anniversaries widely celebrated and publicised included those of the founding of Australia, the Honourable Artillery Company, Lloyd's of London, and the William and Mary Tercentenary. It was against this background and brief outline objectives that the 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty Committee set to work and agreed its more detailed objectives:-

to involve people, be educational, interest the younger generation, benefit charities, provide enjoyment, give a sense of history, establish permanent mementoes, and communicate with set target audiences.

To do this, the Corporation voted a budget of a million pounds. This was supplemented by the generous sponsorship of numerous City firms and organisations, both in cash and in kind, enabling the Committee to undertake more events, and involving an even wider spread of active participation and interest.

A special team was recruited to arrange and orchestrate the events, under the leadership of Mr. Alec McGiven, working from a separate 800th Anniversary office established for eighteen months and located over the Guildhall entrance. Over one hundred events took place, considerable press and television publicity was achieved, and some £400,000 raised for nearly 30 charities. Guildhall was enhanced with a handsome stone bench in the yard, presented by the Masons' Company, and by the 800th Anniversary stained glass window, presented by the Glaziers' Company. Further to this, the Corporation made available the Blackfriars Foundry to the London Enterprise Agency as workspace for small business enterprises, which was opened by the Prime Minister on October 27 and incorporates a special 800th Boardroom. The Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal, primed by a generous donation from the Corporation, established the Lord Mayor's 800th Anniversary Awards Trust to provide travel scholarships and training courses for young people, and already to date more than 90 Awards have been made out of the income of the Trust to those connected with the City, including the disabled and disadvantaged, with projects ranging from Newfoundland to Nepal and from Brazil to Bangladesh.

The detailed programme for the year is well reported in the final report of the Committee, dated February 19, 1990, and for the purposes of this paper, it will suffice to mention only the highlights and outline of the programme.

The launch in Guildhall on January 11, 1989, with the cutting of the giant cake, 7 ft. tall and weighing just over one ton, provided by the National Bakery School in conjunction with the Worshipful Company of Bakers, and the first performance of "Happy Birthday My Lord Mayor" attracted wide publicity, including interviews with the Lord Mayor on both wireless and television. The story of the Corporation and Mayoralty over 800 years, as told by Mr. Samuel Pepys, in a brilliant, almost solo performance by the actor, John Watts, was accompanied by spectacular sound and lighting effects for five nights before an invited audience of past Lord Mayors, Members of Common Council, Corporation guests, officials and staff, Livery Company Masters and Clerks, and a wide representation from the business City and media. This provided a start in style for the year, and its success was confirmed by further sponsored performances in September.

On February 8, the 800th Anniversary Luncheon was held at Guildhall, attended by HM The Queen, and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. Great Hall looked its best, fitted out as for a state occasion, with flowers, gold plate, trumpeters, and a menu in the form of a commemorative silk scroll, and was packed to capacity with guests drawn from the Corporation, Livery, City, Government, Diplomatic Corps, Mayors of London Boroughs, and the Lord Mayors and Lord Provosts of the United Kingdom, who also attended Mansion House afterwards for tea, and a group photograph. The Lord Mayor referred to the royal intervention on the appointment of his predecessors on four occasions, which was perhaps justified, since on the death of King Henry I, the Court of Aldermen had claimed the special privilege "on the occasion of the King's death to provide another in his place", and elected his nephew, Stephen, as King. Honour was, however, served, for in 1397 on the death in office of the Mayor, the King had appointed a new successor to complete the year. This was none other than Dick Whittington, and so wise was the royal choice, that the citizens elected him thrice more. In reply, the Queen spoke generously of the contribution over many years by the Mayoralty and the Corporation of service and tradition to the City and the nation.

On May 21, a celebratory church service was held at Pauntley in Gloucestershire, Dick Whittington's birth place, attended by the Lord Mayor, the 800th Committee and local dignitaries, following which the Dick Whittington Charity Walk to London took place. This covered some 180 miles and took two weeks to complete, and was led by another actor in the role of Dick, accompanied by his cat and youngsters from Operation Raleigh, and created much interest en route. The walkers arrived at Guildhall on June 5 for a formal welcome by the Lord Mayor and the Reception Committee, together with a hot air balloon and wide publicity. There was also an exhibition at Guildhall from July to September entitled "Dick Whittington : the Man and the Myth", with items from the Corporation's archives.

The start of the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race from London to Hamburg provided one of the finest sights on the river for many years, with 152 vessels moored in the Thames, either side of Tower Bridge, from July 4 to 8. The fleet was visited by The Lord Mayor and 800th Committee members, and an estimated three million people came to watch the tall ships during their stay. The presence of the Russian 'Kruzenshtern', a 324 ft. masted barque, and the British 'Winston Churchill', crewed by 44 girl trainees, was of particular interest as being the last occasion for such large ships to moor in the Pool of London, in view of the building of two new bridges downstream. On July 5, a banquet was given in Guildhall for the captains and organisers of the race.

The first every Livery Exhibition at Guildhall from July 11 to 12 was visited by HRH The Princess Royal, Honorary Liveryman of the Loriners. No less than 54 companies took part to great effect, and attracted wide publicity and interest in their crafts and displays on show. Such was the enthusiasm and success of this item that plans are now in hand for a second exhibition in 1994, as a further opportunity to demonstrate to the public the purpose and work of the Livery Companies.

Music played an important part in the year, catering for all tastes, with three major concerts and numerous other events. The performance of the Verdi Requiem at a charity royal gala concert at the Albert Hall on May 14 was attended by HRH Princess Alexandra, as patron of the Mental Health Foundation. In the City a gala concert was held at the Barbican on November 9, involving the choirs of the City schools, the musicians of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the playing of Walton's "In Honour of the City of London", written in 1937, and this also marked the 661st Lord Mayor's last public engagement. Other major events included a series of concerts at Kenwood from June to September, 23 lunch-time band concerts in the City, with a variety of regimental jazz and big band music, a special 800th Anniversary City of London Festival in July, a concert given by the City of London Girls' School, and jazz at Tower Bridge.

August Bank Holiday Monday saw the organisation of the Tower Bridge Fun Day, attended by some 100,000 people, and focused around the most spectacular of the London Bridges on the City's eastern boundary. The programme included a parachute drop into the river, a non-stop fairground, a procession of historic vessels on the river, a flypast, the release of some 2,000 balloons, and a spectacular firework display. Tower Bridge itself perhaps provided the highlight of the day, with a ceremonial raising of the bascules to the music of the Trumpet Voluntary. Regrettably the event, was overshadowed by the disaster in the previous week involving substantial loss of life of those on board the pleasure boat MV 'Marchioness'. Out of respect for the victims of the disaster the Lord Mayor's party did not attend.

Other events included a service at St. Paul's, a special "Songs of Praise" programme at Guildhall watched by millions on television, a mediaeval 'fayre', the Royal Tournament, and a final farewell evening at Guildhall, and, with exhibitions, flower festivals, cycle rallies and sports meetings, an extremely varied programme was arranged to interest, entertain and delight audiences of all ages, and from all backgrounds, both within and without the City. In addition, the Lord Mayor's Shows in 1988 and 1989 had a special 800th Anniversary Year float, accompanied by the Society of Young Freemen and

Operation Raleigh volunteers with 800th Anniversary banners, and led by Dick Whittington and his cat.

Events for children and young people included a photographic competition, a "Dungeons and Dragons Fun Day" at the Barbican, stories of London in the Old Library and a special Blue Peter programme on television. A particular success was the Epping Forest conservation project at Gilwell Park, with five linked Scout camps, involving some 224 Scouts in the Forest on a series of conservation and study activities.

For permanent mementoes of the year, the Corporation provided an 800th Anniversary Scholarship at each of the City Schools, First Day postage stamps were issued, and Valerie Hope's history of the Mayoralty, "My Lord Mayor" was published, attracting the subscription of no less than 2,700 listed Liverymen, and which sold successfully throughout the year. A special shop was set up in Guildhall and St. Paul's to handle a wide range of Anniversary memorabilia, including a Royal Mint 800th Anniversary commemorative medal which was issued in an attractive and informative pack, and which showed Guildhall on the obverse, and the Arms of the Corporation of London on the reverse. This was given as a memento to Corporation staff, visiting crews in the Tall Ships Race and schoolchildren, and was also offered for sale.

From the outline given above it is clear that the aims and objectives of the Corporation to involve, educate, interest, benefit charities, provide enjoyment, a sense of history and mementoes and to communicate were met. The events attracted the attention of several million people, and gave much pleasure to all who took part, as members of the Corporation, sponsors, or spectators, and in addition, established a new educational charity and scholarships and a new small business enterprise scheme. Whether this has resulted in a really significant increase in the awareness of the work of the Mayoralty and Corporation is more difficult to tell. Some critics may say there were too many events and it would have been preferable to concentrate efforts and resources on fewer, more significant occasions; others may decry the use of sponsorship merely to create more events, rather than generating money for charity; others still may suggest the necessity for earlier preparations for such a year, and perhaps more emphasis, as in 1889, on the Mayoral rather than the Corporation contribution in the period. That said, the year was indeed a success, and the Committee and staff were rightly congratulated on a job well done.

What of the future? 800 years of unbroken continuity of the Mayoralty of London is of itself a significant achievement in a constantly changing world. Like the Monarchy and Parliament, the Mayoralty has adapted successfully to

the demands of each century. The Corporation likewise has adapted with its unique tradition, history and structure to continue to provide the infrastructure and background for the City of London, which remains one of the major financial centres of the world, with its valuable contribution to the nation's invisible earnings.

Part of the success of this adaptation to change and of the current role of the Mayoralty and the Corporation lies in the unique features of Lord Mayor and Members being drawn from a wide range of business and professional backgrounds, giving their services freely and unpaid, and being non-party-political, which is so essential for good continuity. As a result, each individual brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the task, and votes according to conscience and not on party political lines. Further features not to be underestimated are the joint roles of the Lord Mayor and Corporation in helping entertain visitors from overseas on state and government occasions, and the Lord Mayor's ambassadorial role abroad, promoting the business City and the industries and exports of the United Kingdom.

Elsewhere in the country, and overseas, the role of Mayor or Lord Mayor is party-political, and in many cases much of the tradition and ceremonial role has been abandoned or downgraded, with loss of prestige, pageantry and the businessman's valued contribution to public service. Once again, the official policy of the Labour Party is to abolish the Corporation of London, and to change the character of the Mayoralty. It should, however, be recalled that both the Mayoralty and Corporation in this century have successfully served the government of the day, of whatever political party, to the continued advantage of the business City and the nation, and that many critics, who have taken time and trouble to learn more, have become firm supporters.

Guildhall Historians, and your writer, are clearly biased, but in the view of the writer, the work and achievements of 800 years should not be thrown away in a further local government reorganisation. In this respect the celebrations of the 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty can be seen to have assisted in increasing the awareness and appreciation of the public as to the value to the nation of the Lord Mayor and the Corporation, and hopefully in convincing politicians of all persuasions to continue to permit them successfully to adapt to new circumstances - the account of which will be the task of another Historian.

C.C.  
28.10.90