

LORD MAYORS OF LONDON AND THE BARONETCY

As this paper is abstracted from an article that I wrote (with great research assistance from Mr. Sewell) for the Baronets' Journal, perhaps a little preamble is necessary. The article was written by a Baronet for Baronets and therefore assumes a knowledge of the history of the creation of this "dignitie" by James I in 1611 for English Baronets, 1618 for their Scottish Brethren and 1625 for Newfoundland (implemented by Charles I to recoup the colonisation costs of that country).

James perceived a need for an hereditary rank between Baron, which was, and Knight which was not, particularly to help pay for his colonisation plans for Ulster and later Newfoundland. It was not a great success for this purpose but was used at home to reward loyalty and service without granting any political power.

Though not strictly comparable to Lloyd George's notorious "sale" of honours it had a strong fund-raising element, typical of the House of Stuart. Recipients of the honour were "fined" on creation, often after considerable pressure or coercion. It was somewhat akin to the old practice of nominating a man as Sheriff and then fining him if he refused the office, although in James's and Charles's case he was fined if he accepted!

This system ceased at the Restoration and it became a true reward for service with no strings attached. As the City remembers to its cost, Charles II's cupidity was expressed by calling in Charters and re-granting them on suitable payment. We in the City should perhaps not be over-critical as many Livery Companies to this day "fine" Liverymen on joining and again on promotion to the Court or to being Warden and Master!

In the early days of the Baronetcy the City Fathers seemed to have escaped the Stuart net of persuasion to purchase the honour. Somewhat surprising in view of their undoubted means to pay for it and the mulching of Livery Company funds by the Crown to pay for the colonisation of the "Plantation of Ulster" through the Honourable the Irish Society. Later, as we shall see, it became the recognised award for serving the Office of Lord Mayor which, whilst in itself an expensive duty to undertake, yielded no return to the Royal coffers.

The first Lord Mayor to be created a Baronet whilst in office was Sir Richard Gurney (LM 1641-42) but the first to be a Baronet (c.1629) was Sir Robert Ducye (LM 1630-31). The first Alderman (a necessary qualification for the Mayoralty) was created a Baronet in 1620; this was Sir Robert Hicks, but he never became Lord Mayor. Whether these early examples "paid" for the honour or not the City archives do not record. The first Lord Mayor to inherit a Baronetcy was Sir Samuel Garrard (LM 1709-10) who succeeded his brother in 1701.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the award was intermittent and not invariably for the Mayoralty per se. It was not uncommon for an Alderman, or Lord Mayor, to be an MP during this period, the City returning six members to Parliament.

The custom of creating the Lord Mayor a Baronet at the end of his term of Office, although becoming a fairly regular practice by the turn of the century, can be said to date positively from the Mayoralty of Sir Thomas Bowater (LM 1913-14). It continued to and included the Mayoralty of Sir Ralph Perring (LM 1962-63) with only four exceptions, or five if one includes the last one eligible before creations ceased, Sir James Harman (LM 1963-64) who elected to take a GBE instead.

The recognition of the Office has been preserved by substituting the GBE, now given on the day of the approbation of the Sovereign to the election. This means that the Lord Mayor goes into Office with a "K", the practice of knighting the Aldermanic Sheriff (another qualification for the Mayoralty) having ceased in 1971. There were some, at the time, who thought that the new system was "giving the prize before running the race", but so far it has proved justifiable and "saved" honouring a man twice in a short space of time and also divisive comparison with the Lay (non-Aldermanic) Sheriff who, after all, had done the same job without recognition.

In 1989 the City celebrated the 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty and, lest critics might suspect the Office of being nepotistic, it is interesting to record that there have been only seven sons succeeding fathers into the Office in all that time. There have been a further eleven nephews, great nephews, grandsons and two brothers. Not the stuff of which dynasties are made but then through the ages the City has tended to favour the Whittington image of the "industrious apprentice" making it to the top.

As far as I can tell no father, formerly a Lord Mayor, has lived to see his son into the Office; the nearest being in my case when my father, Sir

Harold Gillett (LM 1958-59), died eight days before I was elected (1976). Nor in my case was the GBE withheld on the grounds that I was a Baronet already - to the relief of my juniors who feared that the "Chain might be broken"! At the present time the only heir to a Baronetcy who is an Alderman, and therefore a potential Lord Mayor, is David Howard, son of Sir Edward Howard (LM 1971-72) who succeeded his father Sir Seymour Howard (LM 1954-55) the 1st Baronet, c.1955. It is to be hoped that Sir Edward will be spared to see David elected thus creating a "first", in addition to a three generation record in the direct line. As Aldermen now retire at 70, a rule introduced in 1969, it seems likely that this is the last chance to achieve this.

The Baronetcy has had its share of colourful characters, perhaps one should say un-fair share. It was perhaps no accident that W.S. Gilbert chose this "dignitie" for the principal character in "Ruddigore" that operatic send-up of Victorian melodramas. Even today the gutter-press delight in exposing the misdemeanors, true or invented, of our Brethren. Our image in the public mind as Bold/Bad still, it would seem, excites the baser appetites of their readers.

In this context some of the Lord Mayor Baronets were larger than life. In earlier days the Office was not, as now, apolitical and, as has been mentioned, many were MPs, almost invariably Whigs, who got involved in the burning questions of their day.

Sir Robert Vyner (LM 1674-75) was apprenticed a Goldsmith and rose to fame and fortune and became Goldsmith to Charles II and one of the Masters of the Royal Mint. At his Lord Mayor's Banquet at which the King was a guest it is recorded that "Vyner grew a little too fond of his Majesty and entered into a familiarity not altogether graceful in so public a place. The King understood very well how to extricate himself in all such difficulties and with a hint to the company to avoid ceremony, stole off, and made towards his coach ... Vyner pursued him hastily and catching him fast by the hand cried out with vehement oath and accent "Sir you shall stay and take t'other bottle". The airy monarch looked kindly at him over his shoulder and with a smile and graceful air repeated this line of the old song: "He thats drunk is as great as a King" and immediately returned back and complied with his hosts's invitation".

Lord Mayor Sir Brook Watson (LM 1796-97) was an orphan sent to learn business with a relative in Boston. At the age of fourteen he had his leg bitten off by a shark while bathing in Havana. Supplied with a wooden leg

he proceeded undaunted, spending much time in Canada and North America. He acted as a Secret Service Agent just prior to the War of Independence, returning to England in 1775. He was an MP, a member of the first committee of Lloyd's and a Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. As Lord Mayor he had two confrontations with Common Council, on one occasion terminating a meeting by removing the Mace.

Sir Matthew Wood (LM 1815-16) served two consecutive years as Lord Mayor, an unusual thing in more modern times. A leader of the advanced Liberal Party in the City, he is remembered for his defence of Queen Caroline, wife of George IV, which made him the butt of wits of the day.

Sir John Key (LM 1830-31). Another two year server who had his share of "excitement". He started with a flourish when he wrote to the Duke of Wellington advising him to provide a guard for himself when coming to Guildhall. A worried Ministry advised the King against attending and caused near panic - "business was suspended, funds fell 3% and the Tower Moat was flooded". The newly formed Metropolitan Police were attacked by rioters. Although things calmed down he earned the epithet "Don Key" from his opponents. He was created a Baronet on the opening of the (then) new London Bridge by William IV (this is the bridge now rebuilt in Lake Havasu City, Arizona). His second term was initially opposed by the Aldermen but the Livery, in recognition of his reforming zeal, insisted on his re-election.

What amazes me is that of the 115 Baronet Lord Mayors since 1630 so few heirs chose to follow in their father's footsteps. Perhaps their reply would have been as was mine in earlier years when asked that question: "Can't afford two Lord Mayors in two generations!".

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29.6.92