

THE FIRST MAYOR OF LONDON

The first Mayor of London, a patrician figure of medieval London, took Office nearly eight hundred years ago and not much information is known about him.

What was his name? Who was he? Where did he live? Who was his family? I will try to give you the information.

His name was Henry — he had no surname, his father and grandfather had no surname and his sons did not bear a surname. For several hundreds of years he has been called Henry Fitz-Ailwin, incorrectly inferring a surname.

There are more than one hundred and twenty documents or records bearing his name:

Henricus filius Ailwini filii Leofstan'
(Henry son of Ailwin son of Leofstan)
Henry
Henry of Londonstone⁶
Henry, son of Ailwin³
Henry, the Alderman²
Henry, one of the Barons of London
Henry, the Mayor⁵
Henry, Mayor of London⁴ etc. etc.

These deeds, records and references are to be found at:—

The Corporation of London Records Office, Guildhall
The British Library
The Public Record Office
St. Paul's Cathedral Archives
St. Bartholomew's Hospital
Westminster Abbey Archives
Canterbury Cathedral Archives etc. etc.

Since he is commonly known as Fitz-Ailwin, I will refer to him as such.

The earliest known reference to him is in AD 1165⁷ when he and his brother, Alan, paid a fine to take the property and lands of his father, Ailwin, who had recently died.

In 1177 he is referred to as an Alderman and thus he was in a powerful position and in authority at an early date. Most of the Aldermen at that time owned much of the land and property in their own wards and parishes.

The various charters, deeds and documents were witnessed and the seals affixed in the City Court of Hustings and recorded in that Court's records. This was a Saxon Court and it still survives in the City and is probably the oldest Court in the land.

Fitz-Ailwin held much property and lands in the City and also at Hoo, near Rochester, Kent, at Warlingham and Burnham, near Woking in Surrey, at Watton-at-Stone, Walkern and Sacombe in Hertfordshire.⁸

It appears that his ancestors originated in and held Manors at Watton-at-Stone in the time of King Edward the Confessor. The earliest one was named Ailwin Childe.

There are some five of Fitz-Ailwin's Charters or personal Grants surviving — to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, the Priory of St. Mary, Clerkenwell¹², Holy Trinity Priory¹³ and two others.

These Grants bear fragments of his personal seal — he is shown mounted in armour with a falcon on his wrist with the legend "Sigillum Henrici filii Ailwini filii Lefstan". It is uniface and non-armigerous.⁹

He is reputed to have had armorial bearings and these are illustrated in manuscripts at Guildhall, the College of Arms and the British Library,¹⁰ but all these appear to be of the late sixteenth century or early seventeenth century origin. It is my view that these were concocted or "made up" around that time for they are too complicated for the period of the late twelfth century. Also, I feel that his personal seal would have been armigerous if this had been the case. These arms are set in the floor in Guildhall and for those who are interested in heraldry Fitz-Ailwin's reputed arms are:—

Gules on a Saltire Argent between four weather-vanes the supporters and vanes of the second, the crosses or 5 martlets of the field.

The earliest official reference to him is in April 1193¹¹ as one of the Collectors of the Ransom for King Richard the First, who was captured on returning from his Crusade. This was as Mayor of London and the other collectors were the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Earl of Arundel and the Earl of Warrenne. He would have stayed in old St. Paul's Cathedral with the oak coffers containing the gold coins to protect them, as was his duty.

Where did he live? He lived in a great stone house with a courtyard and garden which occupied most of the area contained by the River Walbrook (now Wallbrook), St. Swithin's Lane to the East, Candlewick Street (now Cannon Street) to the South and almost to the site now occupied by the Mansion House to the North.

This is almost at the centre of the City, roughly twelve Wards to the East and twelve Wards to the West, close to London Stone, of which there is now only a fragment remaining, the Roman Mile-Post-Centre of London and just North of the great Roman Palace now occupied by Cannon Street Station. The City still retains the name of Candlewick for one of its Wards.

This great stone house passed to his heir, who was his grand-daughter Joan, daughter of his son Peter who had died in 1203. Joan married secondly in 1212 to William Aguillum and their son, Sir Robert Aguilon, on his death in 1286 bequeathed it to the Priory of Tortington in Sussex¹⁴ and at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, King Henry VIII in 1539 granted it to the 15th Earl of Oxford¹⁵ and it then became Oxford Place. It was sold in 1580 and Sir Ambrose Nicholas kept his Mayoralty there in 1579-80 and also Sir John Hart, his Mayoralty, in 1589-90. Sir John Hart's daughter Anne married Humphrey Smith who was Sheriff in 1629-30 and in 1641 The Salters' Company purchased it from their son and made it their Hall. They paid £9,000 for the property, which was destroyed in the Great Fire in 1666. Part of the site remained Salters' Hall until the last war.

During Fitz-Ailwin's time, the first stone London Bridge was built between 1176 and 1208 and he was one of the Wardens of the Bridge. This Bridge, was, of course, demolished in 1830 and we still have Bridge House Estates surviving from this early period.

One of the deeds at Guildhall¹⁶ relates to his land and a Quay adjoining London Bridge and this may suggest that he was a Ship Owner or a Merchant concerned with trade between the City and the Continent.

For centuries he was claimed or held to be a Member of The Drapers Company and in their Hall they have a portrait which purports to be Fitz-Ailwin, but, of course, such portraits were not in existence in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries and this is probably of the late sixteenth century.

It shows him in late 15th century dress, with a balance and gold coins suggesting that he was a Moneyer or a Goldsmith and also gives him a Collar of Office which did not happen until 1535.

Also, the Drapers Company have a certificate dated 1613 signed by the Great William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms, certifying that he was a Brother of the Company long before it was in existence as such, also confirming his name as "Fitz-Ailwin" as well as his armorial bearings.

In the year 1179-80¹⁹ some nineteen Associations or Guilds were fined for carrying on a business or trade without a Royal Licence and amongst those mentioned were Goldsmiths, Pepperers (Grocers), Butchers and Clothworkers. These Associations were the forerunners of the present Livery

Companies and they were generally known as Adulterine or Unauthorised Gilds.

The Weavers were, of course, in existence since AD 1130 and thus they had an Upper Bailiff as Chief Officer. The Bailiff was the Senior Officer in the City before the Office of Mayor.

Around the time of the beginning of the Mayoralty there was a Building Assize¹⁷ to control the planning and methods of building and materials and this was, in effect, the first building bye-laws and town planning. The Mayor and twenty responsible men heard complaints and claims arising from the Assize.

There was a great fire in the City in July 1212 and it has been said that 3,000 persons perished on London Bridge with the buildings erected thereon. There was a further building Assize¹⁸ and this was probably the last public meeting attended by Fitz-Ailwin before he died on 19th September, 1212.

Who was his family? His wife was Margaret and we know nothing more about her. He left three sons, Alan, Thomas, and Richard and two grand-daughters, Margaret and Joan, daughters of his son Peter who died in 1203.

Writs were issued by the King to the Mayor and Sheriffs of London and to the Sheriffs of Kent, Surrey, Middlesex and Hertfordshire to protect his property and to give the widow her Dower and the children their entitlement.

About twenty members of the family became Aldermen, i.e. Fitz-Ailwin, his brother, father, grandfather and sons-in-law etc. but Fitz-Ailwin himself never became a Sheriff, probably one of the very few or perhaps the only Mayor not to have held that Office.

He was buried at the Priory of Holy Trinity, now Duke's Place, Aldgate, and a tomb was set up in 1213 but this was destroyed at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The sons were not heard of in public life after this but the grand-daughter Joan married well and her descendants have been traced through noble families to the present time, who is one of our great Dukes.

What is the date of the origin of the Mayoralty? This has never been precisely settled, but, in my view, bearing in mind the volume of contemporary documents and records, recorded by the Court of Hustings and the Public Records and the important Witnesses to the Charters and documents, some of them referring to him by name only and others referring to him as Mayor and to the Office of Mayor and also his own order on the lists of such Witnesses I have placed the date, at most, between the 25th March 1192 and 13th March

1193 and, at least, between the 29th September 1192 and 13th March 1193, with a tendency to say the Autumn of 1192.

When Sir Kenneth Cork was Lord Mayor I wrote to him pointing out an error on the City State Coach. One of the door panels depicts "the genius of the City standing with her right hand on the Civic Shield; Mars, the Especial deity of Citizens, pointing with his spear to a scroll held by Truth, bearing the inscription 'Henri Fitz Alwin 1189'". The name, date and Civic Shield are all incorrect.

Henry Fitz-Ailwin was the first to hold the Office of Mayor. He held it for the longest period and the only person to hold it for life. He must have been a great person and administrator to have survived for so long in a very turbulent period of national and civic strife. The 800th Anniversary of the Mayoralty will be in 1992 and I hope that it will be suitably and adequately commemorated. We should recall that the City celebrated the 700th Anniversary in 1889, 3 years too early!

The only statue of Fitz-Ailwin in the City is a Victorian one which is situate at Holborn Viaduct.

Mr. Chairman, I have some items for you to see viz:—

A piece of stone from the original London Bridge, the Corporation Medal issued in 1889 and a number of facsimiles of Charters and documents witnessed by Fitz-Ailwin and illustrations of his reputed Arms from the British Library.

I hope that this talk has been of interest to you — I am not a Professional Historian — but merely an enthusiastic amateur.

Footnotes and References

1 — *Ancient Deeds P.R.O.* A2507. 2 — *Ancient Deeds P.R.O.* A7295. 3 — *Ancient Deeds P.R.O.* A6461. 4 — *Ancient Deeds P.R.O.* A2180. 5 — *Ancient Deeds P.R.O.* A2462. 6 — *Rep.* 2a. 7 — *Pipe Roll 11 Hen. II.* 8 — *Close Rolls 14 John (1212).* 9 — *C.L.R.O. BH Deeds F35.* 10 — *B.L. Harl M.S.1349.* 11 — *Chronicle of Roger de Hoveden 1193.* 12 — *Cart. fo 78V.* 13 — *H.T. Cart. 426 fo 82.* 14 — *Cal. Wills i 75.* 15 — *Letters and Papers XIV 1192(8).* 16 — *C.L.R.O. Deeds B95.* 17 — *Mun. Gild. Lond. (Rolls Series) i 319.* 18 — *BL Add. MS14, 252 fo. 133b to 134b.* 19 — *Pipe Roll 26 Hen.II (1180).*