

Civic Party Roles

The Civic Party and other following civic offices are appointed or announced every year at the Council's Annual Meeting, traditionally held at the end of May.

The Lord Mayor

Historical Background



According to Francis Drake, York's great eighteenth century historian, the Mayors of York date back to the reign of King Stephen, with Mayor Nigel being the first person to bear this title in 1147. However, the first historically attested Mayor was Hugh de Selby in 1217. The first Lord Mayor of York was Thomas Smith. Traditionally this title was granted in 1389 by Richard II when visiting the City and upon presenting a sword to the Mayor.

By tradition a Lord Mayor could only hold the office once every twelve years and to be in office for one year only. The idea was that a Mayor who was in power too long could become corrupt or dominate the city. However this didn't prevent Nicholas de Langton being Mayor a total of 16 times in a 20 year period!

The Lord Mayors were basically the top of a hierarchical pyramid structure. They were expected to collect taxes, preside over courts and keep the peace which John Stockdale, Lord Mayor in 1501-02, proudly proclaimed when he bought new stocks and fetters for mysdoers!

The Mayors were accountable to the monarchy for the citizens behaviour and they were expected to ensure that the city walls were kept in good repair and the city militia were trained.

Protecting the city's dignity was also an important aspect of the mayors role, especially when it came to providing feasts and good cheer. When taking office Lord Mayors were expect to announce which days the Mansion House would be used for public entertainment. Entertainment would consist of eating and dancing and musical recitals.

The Lord Mayor of York takes precedence over all other Civic Heads with the exception of London and, in England, only the Lord Mayors of London, York and Bristol are entitled to use the prefix "The Right Honourable". Equally, they are the only Civic Heads to be included in the list of Church Commissioners in England and Wales.

The Role

Each year, the incoming Lord Mayor traditionally sets some achievable objectives for their year in office. These range from supporting local schools, to promoting local businesses and tourism. But, whatever, individual aims each Lord Mayor may have,

a Lord Mayor is expected to attend many traditional and ceremonial events as outlined in the events protocol below and also to act as an ambassador for the city, in this capacity the Lord Mayor would be expected to carry out the following:

- Opening new premises
- Promote local businesses
- Host business breakfasts
- Hold an annual business luncheon and/or dinner in the Mansion House
- Make the Mansion House available for York business community hire
- Opening, attending and closing conferences held in the City and Mansion House as appropriate
- Attend business forums and events as required

- Promote local tourism
 - Actively promote and support the Mansion House as a tourist attraction and conference location
 - Support the Mansion House as a cultural venue and attraction, for example concerts, community events, lectures and so forth
 - Where possible actively support tourism to the city
 - Actively support tourism initiatives for the city

 - Promote the aims of the Council's Corporate Strategy in working to to make York:
 - A sustainable city
 - A safer city
 - A Learning city
 - A Thriving city
 - A Healthy city
 - An Inclusive city
 - A City of Culture; and

In helping to make City of York Council an effective organisation

The Sheriff

Historical Background

In 1396 Richard II gave the City the status of a County and granted it the right to appoint two Sheriffs. The Sheriffs replaced three Bailiffs who had similar duties. They presided over County Courts (not the same as modern County Courts) held monthly, and over Courts previously held by the Bailiffs. Sheriffs were elected by the Mayor, Aldermen and Members of the Twenty-Four (a body analogous to Councillors) who presented their nominees to the commonalty for endorsement. They were elected on 21st September and took up their office at Michaelmas (29th September) in each year. The Sheriffs were expected to keep considerable state and



move about the City attended by mace bearers and other attendants.

The first Sheriffs, Thomas de Ruston and William de Alne, were elected on 18th May 1396 and served until Michaelmas.

In 1500 George Essex was fined for dereliction of obligations because he had no proper entourage during his "Riding" (progressing through the City and proclaiming by-laws at various places); no mace was borne before him when he visited a vintner, he failed to provide proper towels at the Dinner after his riding and failed to invite Chamberlains and others to his annual feast.

The Sheriffs had to provide an annual feast for the dignitaries of the City after their "Ridings". It was an expensive office but they had at their disposal certain rents, tolls, stall rents and other profits.

Because of the expenses of the office, from time to time people paid a fine rather than be elected. In 1486 Nicholas Vicars paid £40 and in the eighteenth century fines varied between £70 and £200.

The Sheriff had a busy life presiding over his Courts. His County Court (or Tourne in the Ainsty) was held monthly. His Court of Pleas sat on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and dealt with debts and trespasses and breaches of the Statutes of Labourers (early version of the Industrial Relations Legislation!!). He also sat in the Lord Mayor's Court of Common Pleas on Mondays.

When Corporations were reformed by the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 the new York City Council created by that Act was enabled to appoint one Sheriff only and this continued until Counties of Cities were abolished by the Local Government Act 1972. Since 1st April 1974 York has been enabled under its new Charter to appoint a Sheriff but the appointment is one of honour only and there are no legal duties or obligations attached to the post. For legal purposes the City of York is within the jurisdiction of the High Sheriff of North Yorkshire.

The Role

The role of Sheriff is long established within the traditions of supporting the Lord Mayoralty. The Sheriff traditionally accompanies the Lord Mayor on most civic engagements. Officially, the Sheriff deputises for the Lord Mayor at events/functions which the Lord Mayor may be unable to attend. In addition in York, the Sheriff traditionally leads the Assize of Ale, an annual event held in the city. Specifically, in undertaking this role, the following will be required:

- Accompany the Lord Mayor on engagements wherever possible.
- Attend civic events and functions with the Lord Mayor or alone;
- Give speeches at events as required;
- Lead the Annual Assize of Ale.

Lady Mayoress

Historical background

This was an essential role in support of the Lord Mayor, the significance of the role can be illustrated with the purchase of the chain of office in 1670.

A Lady Mayoress was expected in many ways to be a good hostess for the city and lead the York 'ladies' at fashionable events. Such events could be 'At Homes' where they would provide light lunches and dainty dishes to invited guests. Lady Mayoresses could and often did become actively involved in the welfare of the citizens of York, in 1925 the then Lady Mayoress throw open the doors of the Mansion House on Sunday evenings to give the young of York, who otherwise maybe causing mischief, somewhere to go and entertainment was provided.

The Role

The Lady Mayoress or Consort traditionally plays a supporting role to the Lord Mayor. As such, they equally act as an ambassador for the Council and City for the year, being required to :

- Attend civic events and functions in their own right;
- Accompany the Lord Mayor on engagements wherever possible.

Sheriffs Lady/Consort

Historical Background

Traditionally the Sheriffs Lady role would be to support her husband and the Lady Mayoress at events and At Homes held in the Mansion House. This role was not as dominant as that of the Lady Mayoress until the early years of the twentieth century when a chain is provided for the office and it seems their role becomes enhanced.

The Role

These days the role is equally performed by a male Consort to a lady Sheriff, but is still traditionally a supporting role to the Sheriff and Civic Party, requiring the following:

- Attendance at civic events and functions;
- Accompanying the Sheriff on engagements wherever possible

Deputy Lord Mayor

The Role

Each retiring Lord Mayor is traditionally appointed to be the following years Deputy Lord Mayor. This had the advantage of continuity and understanding of the role, since, on occasion the Deputy Lord Mayor is required to substitute for the Lord Mayor at events/functions etc.

Historically, the Deputy Lord Mayor is not a member of the Civic Party. Most usually the Sheriff will substitute for the Lord Mayor at civic functions the Lord Mayor is unable to attend. However, increasingly, due to the hectic schedule of the Civic Calendar, the Deputy Lord Mayor is asked to deputise for both the Lord Mayor and Sheriff. Specifically, the Deputy Lord Mayor has the following responsibilities:

- Chair Full Council meetings in the absence of the Lord Mayor
- Chair Pre-Council Seminars

The Lord Mayor's Chaplain

The Role

Chosen by the Lord Mayor and announced at the Annual Council Meeting, the Chaplain is most usually the Minister from the church most local to the Lord Mayor. The role normally requires attendance at approximately 4 events, these traditionally being:

- Lord Mayor's Day/Annual Council, both at the beginning and end of the specific civic year
- Remembrance Sunday
- Annual civic dinner
- Christmas Eve Carol Service

The Lord Mayor's Chaplain would also be expected to lead the Annual Civic Service, which would normally be held in his or her church. The service would be planned with the Lord Mayor, and should involve participation from the Sheriff's Chaplain.

The Sheriff's Chaplain

The Role

Chosen by the Sheriff and announced at the Annual Council meeting, the Chaplain is most usually the Minister from the church most local to the Sheriff. The role normally requires attendance at approximately 4 events, these traditionally being:

- Lord Mayor's Day/Annual Council, both at the beginning and end of the specific civic year
- Remembrance Sunday
- Annual civic dinner
- Christmas Eve Carol Service

The Under Sheriff

The Role

Chosen by the Sheriff and announced at the Annual Council meeting the Under Sheriff is authorised to sign writs on behalf of the Sheriff during their year of Office. The role normally requires attendance at approximately 4 events, these traditionally being:

- Lord Mayor's Day/Annual Council, both at the beginning and end of the specific civic year
- Remembrance Sunday
- Annual civic dinner
- Legal Sunday Service (invitation from the Northern Legal Circuit)

Other Civic Roles

Sword and Mace Bearers

Historical Background



In 1389 the city council appointed the first sword bearer, it is probable that mace bearers or sergeant at arms existed before this date but their exact role is unclear. The Sword and Mace are symbols of the Monarch's recognition of the dignity of office of the Lord Mayor of York.

The Role

To carry the City's Sword and Mace before the Lord Mayor in all civic processions. On average, this happens approximately 4-6 times a year and usually on the following occasions:

- Civic Service
- Remembrance Sunday
- Various Guild Services
- Annual Council and Council meetings

For more information on the sword or mace carried by the bearers, see the Section on the Civic

Collection