

THE QUIT RENTS CEREMONY

The City Sheriffs obtained from the Crown the right to elect their own Sheriffs for the City and Middlesex over eight hundred years ago. But as with all bargains, there was a price and the City had to concede right of the Crown to require the City to make another selection if the first selection was not approved.

The Wic reeves, Port reeves and the Shire reeves exercised the King's authority over the citizens collecting the royal revenues and enforcing the royal justice. From the earliest times the citizens were informed at the Michaelmas Folkmoot of the name of the new Sheriff and listened to his charge. The City was the first of twenty odd cities to acquire City Sheriffs. In 1130 Middlesex bought a charter from Henry I who for a farm fee of £300 per annum allowed the port of London to elect a Sheriff and a justiciar – a judge - to hear the pleas of the Crown. Henry II raised the fee to £500 and removed the right of the City to elect their own Sheriff but Richard I, for an increased fee of 1,500 marks, allowed the City to change the appointment of a justiciar for the right to elect a second Sheriff. The City's support of Simon de Montfort lost it all these privileges in the reign of Henry III but in 1270 their right to elect two Sheriffs was restored to them and confirmed. The privilege of electing the Sheriffs was secured by the liverymen in 1475 and confirmed by Act of Parliament in 1725.

The payment of the fixed farm fee and the approval of the election of the two Sheriffs had to [be] sought from the Court of Exchequer which since 1100 was the chief arm of the administrative and judicial functions of the Crown.

In 1164 Henry II decided that Royal supervision was needed to ensure that the Crown lost none of its revenues and rights. Hence he sent to the Court two of his most trusted servants. The senior of the two was Richard of Ilchester, the Archdeacon of Poitiers who later became the Bishop of Winchester. He was to attend the court and preside alongside the Treasurer and to "put the King in remembrance

of all things owing to the King”. His colleague was Master Thomas Brown, a former Treasurer in the Court of the Norman Count Roger of Sicily. He was to be the Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer and to “know all the secrets of the Kingdom”.

By the 18th Century the revenue business of the Court was performed by the Cursitor Baron or Judge of the Court who with the aid of the two Remembrancers was responsible for ensuring that the Sheriffs paid their farm. In the reforms of 1830/40, the revenue side of the Court was transferred to the newly formed Treasury headed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The post of Cursitor Baron became redundant and on a memorable occasion in 1845, Chief Baron, Sir Frederick Pollock, passed to Henry Vincent the then Queen's Remembrancer, the Cursitor Baron's Tricorn hat which he had traditionally worn on top of his full-bottomed wig and ordered that the Queen's Remembrancer should in future wear the hat in the presence of the Lord Mayor of London - a feat which he performs to the surprise of some in the City.

Since 1211 and 1235 respectively, two Petty Serjeanties have been rendered to the Court by men who held land directly of the Crown. This entitled them on the performance of the 'service demanded of them to go 'quit of rent'. Nicholas de Mora held the Moors, a property of 80 acres of land, 20 acres of meadow and 80 acres of pasture, south of Bridgnorth in Shropshire upon the rendering of two knives, one sharp and one very bad to the Exchequer at Michaelmas. Walter le Brun held a forge in Tweezers Alley just south of St Clements Dane on the rendering of six horseshoes and 61 nails. In the 1521 six Mercers acquired the Moors and the obligation provide the knives. By 1556 the land had passed to a Richard Mylles. In that year the Sheriffs went to the Court and for some reason, probably because he was known to be a very thrusting man, Sir Martin Bowes, one of the aldermen in the City party, attempted to perform the service. Neither knife would cut through the hazel rod used to test their qualities. The poor tenant, Richard Mylles was ordered to pay a fine of ten shillings for contempt.

Whilst the knives which were restored to perform the service in the 1970's are new each year, the horseshoes date from 1361 when the then tenant of the Forge, one Emma of Tewkesbury sought to commute the presentation of new shoes each year for the payment of 18 pence. She was permitted to pay an annual rent of 18 pence provided she had a set of six shoes especially made for this ceremony. The current shoes are these very shoes and must be the oldest set of horseshoes in the country.

The Worshipful Company of Cutlers of London have the knives made for the City each year and they bear the hallmark of the Company, an elephant. Such knives might have been used for the cutting of the tally sticks which served in the Exchequer as receipts or for scrapping the surface of the parchment rolls so as to enable their surface to be written on and to be used for the Court records. There is no record as to why the Court of Exchequer needed six horseshoes only fit for shoeing a Great horse.

At the Annual Quit Rent Ceremony, the Queen's Remembrancer presides as the last Officer of the now defunct Court of Exchequer. The chequered cloth is still laid on the table with the authority of the Court manifested by the Great Seal of Exchequer. The Royal Approbation is given by two beautifully illuminated deeds prepared by the Writer to the Queen's Remembrancer, which bear the green seals of the Exchequer. As befits the ancient traditions of the City, the Sheriffs still come by boat up the Thames as if they were bound for the ancient venue of the Court at Westminster Hall. The Queen's Remembrancer is proud to retain this ancient link with the City in the form of the Quit Rents Ceremony which is the oldest legal ceremony that is still performed other than the Coronation.

The Queen's Remembrancer