

THE CIVIC REGALIA

Though there are a number of parts of the city which may each justly lay claim to have been its heart in social or geographical terms over the years, the natural repository of Newcastle's civic soul has always been its council. A city only since 1882 and its Mayor a Lord Mayor only since 1906, Newcastle has nevertheless a long and proud municipal history as a town and county in its own right, stretching back nearly six centuries. As would be hoped and expected, the corporation has over the years accumulated an impressive collection of civic regalia, insignia, plate, and various mementos and symbols of events relating to that history. Most of these are on display in the Lord Mayor's Gallery at the Civic Centre, which is open to the public by prior arrangement.

In pride of place at the top end of the long narrow gallery are the civic mace and the ceremonial swords of state. The Great Mace is an impressive 4ft 10ins long and consists of a head piece, a shaft, and a foot knob – all of silver gilt. The head is surmounted by a Royal Crown sitting on a raised cap of roses and thistles, and bearing the royal arms. The cap is supported by four panels and the figures of female caryatids. The shaft is decorated with foliage patterns of thistles and roses, and the foot knob is

engraved: "Made for the Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne anno regni Jacobi Secundi tertio annoque domini 1687 Nicholas Cole Esq., Mayor: Thomas Paise Esq., Sheriff."

Whilst many towns and cities can boast a mace, very few indeed are granted the royal privilege of a civic sword. This rare honour was bestowed upon the town by King Richard II on 25th January 1391. Said to be a reward for services to the crown at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388, the king entitled the then Mayor William Bishopdale and all of his successors: "... that before him and them a sword may be carried." Of the two swords on display, the older one dates from 1460. It is pleasing to note that both mace and sword are still carried at civic functions by their respective bearers in ceremonial costume.

An unexpected exhibit close by is the original Northumberland Plate, awarded to the first ever winner of the celebrated 'Pitmen's Derby'. The large silver plate bears the arms of Newcastle and those of George Bowes Esq., owner of the winning horse Cato, and a prominent local

landowner. The inscription gives the date of the race as 25th June 1753 and records the lucky winner's purse as having been 100 guineas.



The Armorial Bearings of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne



The Town Clerk of Newcastle making the proclamation of St Luke's fair in the Cathedral Square, Newcastle, c.1930. Note the Great Mace and the Sword.

Among the collection are various ceremonial trowels, scissors, keys, and the like which have been used by dignitaries to perform formal openings. Perhaps the most interesting of these is a silver gilt spade which was used by the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) on 20th August 1884 to perform the official opening of Jesmond Dene.

In another cabinet, a small collection of coins commemorates the ancient custom of 'Dagger Money'. From time immemorial in the town, it was the practice for the Mayor to present some coins to the Judges upon their leaving the town at the end of each Assizes. In 1595 for instance, it was recorded that the Mayor gave "two spur ryals" to the judges "as yearly accustomed." It is said that this custom was based upon the dangers of travelling in the violent border country of those turbulent days, and that the Dagger Money was intended to enable the judges to buy protection while on their circuit of the north. It is interesting to note that although the ceremony died out with the demise of the Assize system in 1970, it has recently been revived for High Court judges visiting the city. Much of the plate and silver on display is engraved with Newcastle's Coat of Arms – the heraldic device which is the insignia of the city and its corporation. This Coat of Arms is certainly the most visible and widespread symbol of Newcastle's civic authority, and it appears in a variety of forms throughout the modern city – from the simplified shield design on the side of council vehicles, to the full representation on road signs at the approaches to Newcastle. The almost forgotten story behind these Arms tells much about the history of the place and the people they represent.

Newcastle first acquired a heraldic symbol when King Henry I made a grant of 'Laws and Customs' which entitled the town to a Common Seal for official use. This was not a full Coat of Arms, but a simple design representing a fortified castle gateway with three triple-turreted towers behind it – an appropriate visual symbol in harmony with Newcastle's name. This seal emblem gradually evolved into a badge and

then into a red shield bearing three triple-towered castles, which was later to form the centre of the full Coat of Arms. The earliest known surviving example of this shield is in a 14th century stained glass window in St John's church (see that chapter for details). The armorial shield emblem was further adorned in 1575 when William Flower, Norroy King of Arms, granted an armed helmet, a crest, mantling, and supporters to the shield. The final piece in the jigsaw was the addition of the motto "Fortiter Defendit Triumphans" ("A Triumph, Bravely Defended") which is said to have been awarded to the town by King Charles I after its brave Royalist defence against the siege by the Scots army in 1644. With the addition of the motto, the town's heraldic blazon has remained unchanged to this day, though with a variety of interpretations. One unusual example is that on the Fish Market (see *The Hidden Riverside*) which for obvious reasons has larger than usual seahorses supporting the shield. The present official design dates from 1954 and still complies to the 16th century blazon, which for the record reads:

Arms: Gules, three castles triple towered Argent.
Crest: On a wreath of the colours a Castle as in the Arms issuant therefrom a demi lion guardant supporting a Flagstaff or flying therefrom a forked pennon of the Arms of Saint George.
Supporters: On either side a Sea Horse proper crined and finned Or.

