

Mayoral Regalia and Insignia

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IMAGINE THE MAYOR of Limerick parading down O'Connell Street in full mayoral robes bedecked in fur and carrying a white staff, preceded by the bearer of the Civic Sword wearing his hat of maintenance described as a bearskin cap with a red bag hanging down from the top, and accompanied by horsemen with kettle drums and trumpeters! I don't refer to the opening of Civic Week, instead I quote the recording of such an event which is graphically described in Lenihan's *Limerick; Its History and Antiquities*. The relevance of this piece is that it very clearly describes the pomp and ceremony attached to the mayoralty and refers to the mayoral regalia of the day.

The first reference to the white wand or staff appears in a footnote in Lenihan's History which states '1543 David White being Mayor of Limerick was the first mayor who carried a white wand'. Lenihan also states 'The sword had been sought for in the reign of Henry VIII but refused; Elizabeth, however, in her charter, which she granted to Limerick in 1582, and not in 1575, not only bestowed the sword but gave the 'hatte of mayntenance' also'.

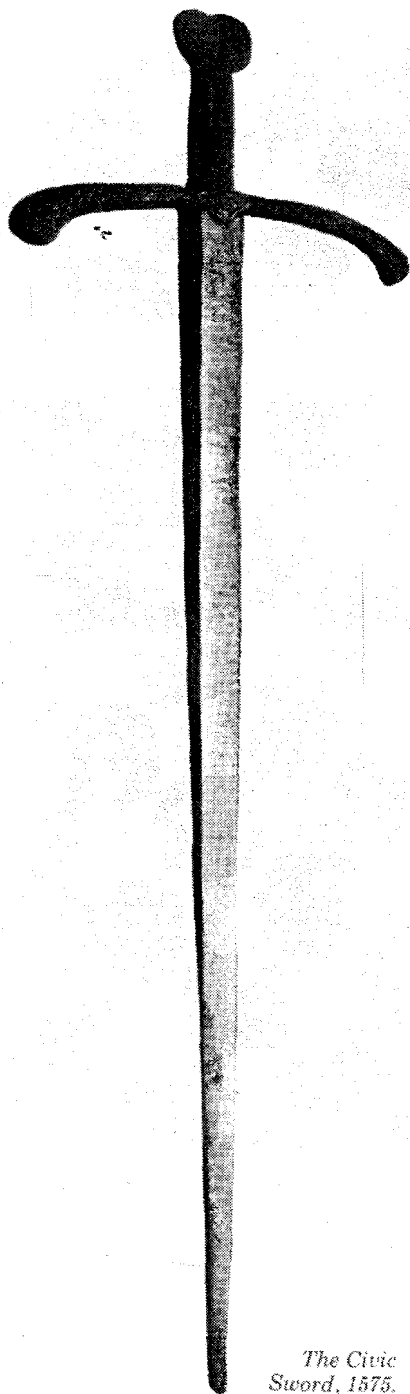
Of the three items mentioned above, the only piece in existence today is the Civic Sword, which is in Limerick Museum. It is the earliest surviving piece of Limerick Corporation regalia and is also the second oldest Irish civic sword in existence after Dublin. The sword is supposed to indicate that the power of life and death was vested in the mayor. It is of iron, double edged, with a large transverse guard forming a cross, which was often used to swear on. The blade is plain, without maker's mark. The guard is decorated with a cast pattern of roses and fleur-de-lis, and ends in human faces with ram's horns. The egg-shaped pommel is formed of two horned laughing human faces, back to back. The original scabbard, of crimson velvet with silver bands, was missing by the mid-nineteenth century.

The City Maces are also still in existence but are seldom used in present times and only when the mayor and council are present in full robes on very formal occasions such as when the Freedom of the City was conferred on John and Trudy Hunt in July 1997. Like the Civic Sword, the City Maces may be seen at Limerick Museum.

The first record of the right of carrying maces being granted to Limerick is in the Charter of James I, 1609, which enables the Corporation to choose 'as many aldermen, sergeants-at-mace and other offi-



Link on the Mayoral Chain
in memory of Mayor George
Clancy, murdered 7 March,
1921



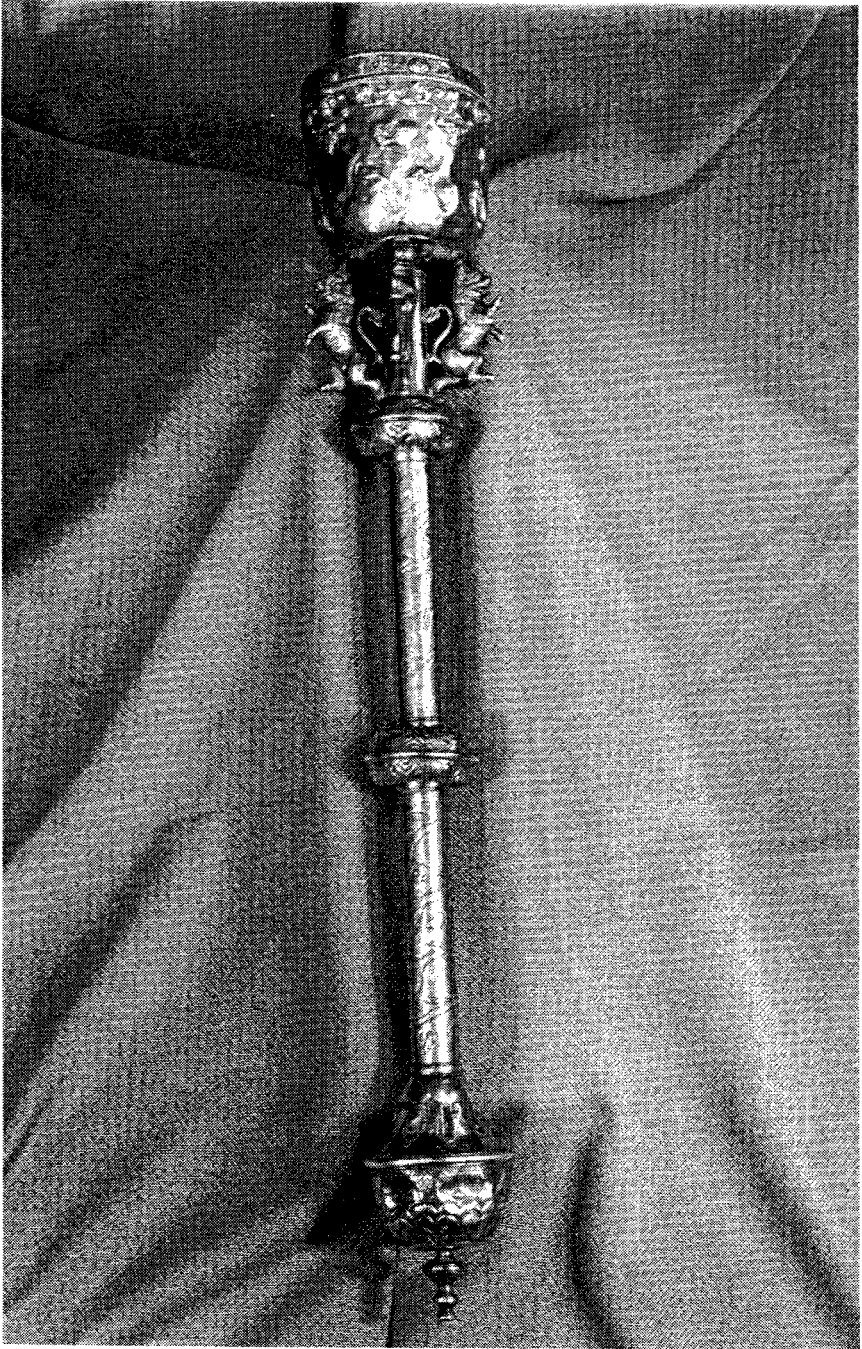
*The Civic
Sword, 1575.*

cers as they had used to nominate, elect or choose'. The sergeants-at-mace were keepers of the peace, attendants of the mayor, bailiffs of the **Tholsel** (Town **Hall**) Court and the Mayor's Court of Conscience, as well as bearers of the maces before the mayor on ceremonial occasions.

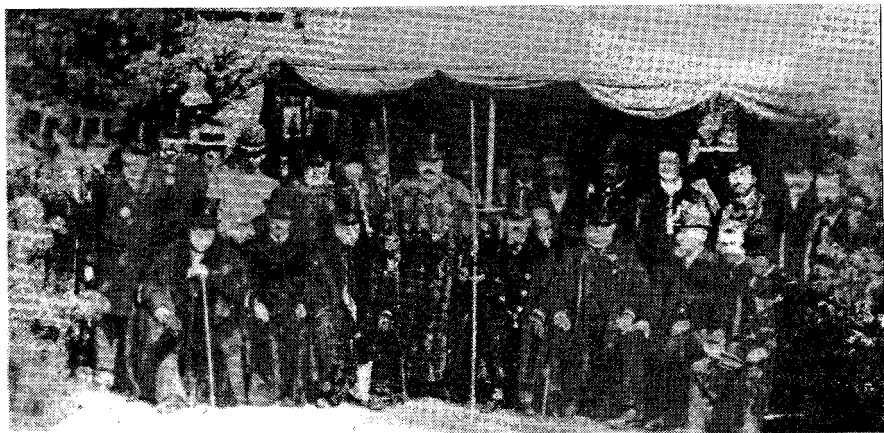
The present City Maces, four in number, are silver, and were made in 1739 by the Limerick silversmith, John Robinson. The head, supported by four rampant lions, has the Royal Arms of George II on top, and is embossed around the body with the Castle of Limerick, the Rose and Thistle on one stem, the Harp, and the Fleur-de-lis. The stem, with two knops, is engraved with a spiral rose tree with flowers and leaves. The crests of maces were cut off and stolen some time in the early nineteenth century.

Possibly the best known and most used piece of regalia is the mayoral chain. The first reference to chains of office is in the early 1820s, according to Robert Herbert's article in the *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 1945, which states: 'There are at present four chains of office. These were purchased about the year 1820 and cost, together with boxes for complimentary freedoms, a portrait of Lord Gort, costing 200 guineas, and the gilding of some pictures, a total sum of £377.0.10. There is no historical reference to use of a mayoral chain before this date'. There must have been a very good purchasing officer in those days and he seems to have got very good value for his outlay and for good measure the chains are made of gold. They were originally provided for use by the mayor and two sheriffs.

The ceremonial mayoral chain, the largest of the four, is worn by the mayor on formal occasions. This chain has over eighty links, the latest one was presented in July 1997 to Mayor Kieran O'Hanlon, to mark Limerick's 800th year, by Wyeth Nutritionals Ireland. From the year 1822 onwards it became the



City Mace - 1739



Mayor William Nolan and members of the Town Council at the Garryowen Fete, 1895

custom, but was not obligatory, for the mayor in office to add a link on which was engraved his name and the year of his mayoralty. As time went on, and in particular after the reform of the Corporation in 1840, the inscriptions became more detailed and described events of local, national and international importance which had taken place during the terms of office of the different incumbents. The links became larger and more elaborate and assumed the shape of medallions. They provide an interesting record of the history of the development of the city. Some of the more recent additions are excellent examples of present-day craftsmanship.

The second mayoral chain consists of fifty-one plain gold links. It is worn by the Mayor when he is carrying out the daily duties of his office.

The Sheriff's chain consists of a number of elaborate links, but is much smaller than the ceremonial chain, while the fourth chain is similar to the second mayoral chain. These were worn by the Town Clerk and Treasurer in former days, but the practice was discontinued and they are no longer worn in public.

A very notable piece of Limerick Corporation insignia is the Mayoral Chair, a fine example of Celtic Revival art made by Joseph P. Lynch, a cabinetmaker of Bedford Row, Limerick in 1897, to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the incorporation of the city. The Chair may be seen in Limerick Museum.

The mode of transport has always been kept up to date by our City Fathers, my article started with the Mayor parading down the main street on foot, but no doubt later there was the mayor's horse and later still, a horse-drawn carriage. Now we have horse power of a different nature - the motorcar. Even in this regard we have witnessed progress from the mayor leading a civic week parade in a vintage car to the mayoral car. Since 1991 a car has been provided for the use of the mayor during his term of office. This mayoral car is updated each year and has the distinction of being the first registered car of the year in Limerick. This year's registration 1 L 97 is only right and proper for Limerick's first citizen.

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