CAMBRIDGE MAYORS: 800 YEARS

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

FORMATIVE HISTORY

THE EARLIEST RECORDS

The Domesday Book (1086) describes Cambridge as the most important town in the county, even though the town was not at this time self-regulating. The county was under the control of the Sheriff, and over a period of approximately one hundred years the burgesses (members of the borough) of Cambridge sought to remove themselves from being under his control. After 1186, fees were paid directly to the Exchequer, rather than *via* the Sheriff. The first municipal officers the borough possessed were those who were responsible for the collection of these fees. These officers were perhaps known as Bailiffs, and they were probably four in number.

Fifteen years later, in 1201, King John granted a charter to the town, which conferred upon the Burgesses the right to hold a Guild Merchant, in order to control the commerce of the town.

This Guild Merchant was absorbed into the Borough Corporation, which was created by a second charter granted by King John – on the eighth of May, 1207. Prior to 1207, the Reeve, or Provost, was appointed by the Crown. After 1207, the burgesses of Cambridge possessed the right to choose this officer themselves.



Map of Cambridge, 1504.



Charter of 1575.



Coat of Arms.

COAT OF ARMS

Cambridge received its coat of arms in the year 1575. The earliest bridge, on the site of the present Magdalene Bridge, formed part of the seal used by the town long before this date. The fleur-de-lis with the roses are emblems of royal charters granted to the town. The supporters are hippocampi: Neptune's horses. The three ships are marine features which carry us back to the time when the town was, to a considerable extent, surrounded by water and trade was conveyed chiefly by means of boats.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES

Initially, the prescribed date for elections had been the day after the Nativity of the Virgin Mary: 9 September. In 1506, however, this was changed to the day after the Assumption of the Virgin Mary: 16 August. This continued until the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, when it was changed to 9 November. Elections now take place in May.

The Cambridge Improvement Commissioner's powers passed to the town Council in 1889. This gave the town effective control over roads.

In 1897, Chesterton voted against being amalgamated into the borough. 1897 was also the sixtieth jubilee of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

THE TITLE OF THE OFFICE

The title for this office varied; in the latter part of the twelfth century, however, London had settled upon the title of 'Mayor' for its chief magistrate. This practice spread, and the title of Mayor was established in Cambridge by the early part of the fourteenth century.

The importance of the role of Bailiff at this time was seen in the convention of each and every Mayor serving as Bailiff, as a sort of introduction to the higher position of Mayor. During the Tudor era, the role of the Bailiff declined in importance. This corresponded with an increase both in the number and in the importance of the Aldermen, an office which was created in 1268.

The first *recorded* election of a Cambridge Mayor dates from 1295.



Chris Lakin, 2001/2002 and bailiffs.