

THE CHAMBER OF LONDON

Some Reflections by a Chamberlain of London

A little over six hundred years ago – in 1330 to be precise – Henry de Secceford, the Chamberlain, when rendering his account was granted by the Mayor and Aldermen the sum of six marks for the loss of a horse whilst following the King on urgent business affecting the City. Three hundred years later in 1633, the Court of Aldermen allowed Robert Bateman, the Chamberlain, additional help with making freemen and in-rolling and turning over apprentices because, in the words of the official record, “Mr. Chamberlain in regard of his extraordinary occasions of business at the East India House cannot so oft attend those affairs of the Chamber as cause doth require.” He was at the time, and altogether for twenty-five years, treasurer of the Honourable East India Company, then unsuspectingly laying the foundations of our former Indian Empire. A hundred and fifty years still later in 1780, during the Gordon Riots, John Wilkes, the Chamberlain and an Alderman of London, was busy day and night, bullying a reluctant Lord Mayor into giving him a body of troops, inspecting volunteers at 2 o'clock in the morning and directing the military defence of the Bank of England against the rioters.

Here we have three tantalizing glimpses into the official life of three past Chamberlains. The whole view, however, is denied to us because it is rare for anyone in the Corporation to record “the trivial round, the common task” of official life. We today are poorer for that, and so, in an endeavour not to give posterity cause for similar complaint, some attempt is to be made here to depict the life of a Chamberlain of London in the mid-twentieth century. The one way not to do this is to take the Chamberlain's duties as laid down by the Court of Common Council, dilate upon them, and embellish them with extracts from the Ceremonial Book. That would tell posterity nothing that could not be gleaned from the Corporation's records. It would also be misleading because, though the Chamberlain is for example the treasurer of the Corporation, he does not in person receive and pay cash and make entries in cash-books and ledgers. A moment's reflection is enough to show that he could not possibly be informed about everything that goes on in every department of his office. He has a staff, whose inherited experience is as old as the office of Chamberlain, to do the work required in the daily discharge of his routine duties and also to give him advice, as required, on the larger questions and issues that are his ultimate and sole responsibility. What it is therefore proposed to do in attempting carry out the task in hand is to describe the routine of an official day and comment upon the wide variety of matters that engage the Chamberlain's attention and occupy his time in the course of a year.

The pattern of the Chamberlain's official day is determined to a great extent by the ceremonies and duties of the mayoralty and the meetings

of Courts of Aldermen. These can cause the Chamberlain to be in his office for many hours. At half-past ten in the morning he is robed, and attends a meeting proceeding at eleven o'clock. Soon after twelve noon he returns to his office to attend a meeting at Mansion House to meet the Mayor at half-past three in the afternoon. He then changes into the clothes he arrives in at half-past ten that morning. On some days when, the Chamberlain in his office, he spends the day in the state; but these days of absence are occurring on the average once a year.

When the middle of the morning and afternoon are spent in the office to which Robert Bateman referred, we do not know how long after visiting the East India House the staff at Guildhall have moved in, the Chamberlain remains until it is time for him to return to the City or its suburbs.

This mention of stay in the office is a fascinating study, which has seen great changes in the hours of the past and the rather different of the Chamberlain's and the Corporation's levelling down is at work. The fact that, as the manual worker's day has grown longer, the hours at Guildhall were ten till five in the war, they were ten till five in the week, they are 9.15 till five in the habit when Chamberlain returns at four o'clock. A story is told of a man walking out of Guildhall at five o'clock and remark how early he was. Lamb – replied in his bl...

In order to reach a point it must be clearly borne in mind that the Chamberlain is treasurer of the Corporation and Common Council and the Bank of England or the Bank of London; and they are his customers. He is ordering him to make payments and requires an overdraft he

of Courts of Aldermen and Common Council and their committees. These can cause the Chamberlain, on occasion, to be away from his office for many hours on end. Michaelmas Day will serve as an example. At half-past ten in the morning he changes into Common Council dress, is robed, and attends a Court of Aldermen held at a quarter to eleven, proceeding at eleven o'clock to divine service at St. Lawrence Jewry; soon after twelve noon he is seated on the dais in Guildhall; when, a little after one o'clock, the business of Common Hall is concluded, he returns to his office to change into morning-dress, and then walks to the Mansion House to meet the Lord Mayor Elect at luncheon; by about half-past three in the afternoon he is back in his office and, after changing into the clothes he arrived in, is ready to continue where he left off at half-past ten that morning. To go from one extreme to another, there are days when, the Chamberlain's presence not being required outside his office, he spends the whole day in it, even lunching there in solitary state; but these days of comparative seclusion are few and far between, occurring on the average about only once a fortnight.

When the middle of the day is taken up with outside engagements, the morning and afternoon are occupied with the affairs of the Chamber, to which Robert Bateman in 1633 was unable to give the necessary time. We do not know how long Bateman spent in his office before or after visiting the East India House; but nowadays, when the majority of the staff at Guildhall have gone home and the evening charwomen have moved in, the Chamberlain is not infrequently occupied at his desk until it is time for him to dress for dinner, or some other entertainment, in the City or its suburbs westerly.

This mention of staying late raises the subject of office hours — a fascinating study, which deserves a paper of its own. The present century has seen great changes at Guildhall; the leisurely and gentlemanly hours of the past and the rather autocratic close-corporations of offices like the Chamberlain's and the Town Clerk's have gone for ever; a process of levelling down is at work, and it is nowhere more evident than in the fact that, as the manual-worker's day has grown shorter, the office-worker's day has grown longer. When the first world war broke out, the hours at Guildhall were ten till four o'clock; at the beginning of the late war, they were ten till five o'clock; and now, on the basis of a five-day week, they are 9.15 till 5.15 o'clock. It was Sir Adrian Pollock's daily habit when Chamberlain to arrive at about eleven and depart at about four o'clock. A story is told of a Common Councilman who met him walking out of Guildhall one afternoon and was incautious enough to remark how *early* he was leaving; Sir Adrian — a devotee of Charles Lamb — replied in his blandest manner, "Yes, but see how *late* I arrive."

In order to reach a proper understanding of the work of the Chamberlain it must be clearly borne in mind that the Chamberlain, while being the treasurer of the Corporation, is also its banker. The Courts of Aldermen and Common Council and their various committees do not bank with the Bank of England or any of the Big Five; they bank with the Chamberlain; and they are his customers, drawing on him by way of warrants or ordering him to make payments on their behalf. If one of his customers requires an overdraft he will provide it — for a consideration, of course,

— and he allows interest at more than Bank deposit-rate on current account balances. In the days of the old Public Health Department, one of its committees had under consideration a report involving the expenditure of rate-money before its receipt, the Chamberlain having agreed to make a temporary advance for the purpose. The committee was in a difficult mood and insisted on knowing how the money was going to be found. The Chamberlain (Sir Adrian Pollock) was accordingly sent for and, after the committee's views had been stated, the question was put to him: "Where is this money coming from?" Sir Adrian rose from his seat and leaning slightly forward over the committee-table and tapping himself on the chest with the forefinger of his right hand, replied: "From me, gentlemen; I am your banker." He thereupon sat down and, no further questions being possible, the report was adopted. Like every other banker, the Chamberlain employs to the best advantage the moneys in his hands, and this calls for a constant review of his customers' likely requirements of which, in his other capacity as treasurer, he has first-hand knowledge. The daily placing and calling of money does not need his personal attention, but the current policy of lending and borrowing as need arises is the result of personal decisions made by him. His functions as a banker are not perhaps generally understood or appreciated; and yet the Corporation derives greater benefit from them than it would from entrusting the management of its money to a joint-stock bank.

The Chamberlain is "persona grata" with the Bank of England and this is of benefit to the Corporation in many ways and in particular when it is seeking to enter the loan market, for he is accorded direct and immediate access to the Bank. The cordial relations that subsist between the Chamberlain and the Bank are given formal expression to once a year, when it is the pleasant duty of the Chamberlain, acting jointly with the Chairman of the Coal and Corn and Finance Committee, to entertain the Chief Cashier and other gentlemen of the Bank of England to dinner.

One result of the recent decision to buy equities has been that often the Chamberlain's whole morning has been taken up with the execution of transfer forms.

The other affairs of the Chamber to which the Chamberlain is required to give his attention are too numerous to mention or to be dealt with in detail; they include the Corporation's liability to Income Tax; its manifold insurance activities; mechanisation and making room for machines and operators in an office that was never designed to hold them; security measures to safeguard cash in the office and in transit; drafting or approving reports to committees on subjects ranging from the financing of the Corporation's capital projects to the distribution of the annual votes of money to poor widows of freeman; and the recurring and intractable problem of finding and retaining suitable recruits to the staff of the office.

Turning now to the Chamberlain's Court, the picture is essentially the same but on a much smaller scale; the routine work is carried out by the staff, and only matters of first-class importance receive the Chamberlain's personal attention. It could not be otherwise, considering

that there are well over a dozen times a day, to offer the right-hand pleasantries, would be breakdowns, it has much but by being Chamberlain, like the select few; they friends or acquaint have been presented these, there are the hall, when the Char Corporation. This p of the Royal Comm 1957-1960, as one distinguished perso recollections of free however, he would wearing a plaster str breaking his back; i ation to realise the combination of the great public occasio

Admissions to the Chamberlain's Court that confront livery apprenticeships, the laws, and points of only the major prob attention, though v luncheons, dinners, ation of all of them the experience gain livery company; all served the office of chamberlainship; an companies of having underestimated. The granting of new live required to report, j it is the Chamberlain One aspect of the gr London is the move variably seeking the matter.

One further matt to oversee the Insign which the Lord May is an agreement betw

that there are well over one thousand admissions to the freedom every year. No Chamberlain could admit everyone. To break off, perhaps a dozen times a day, in order to hear the declaration of a freeman misread, to offer the right-hand of fellowship, and to exchange a few social pleasantries, would prove intolerable to the point of distraction. Nervous breakdowns, it has been observed, are caused not by trying to do too much but by being prevented from doing what matters most. The present Chamberlain, like his predecessors, therefore admits to the freedom only the select few; they include his friends or acquaintances, and their friends or acquaintances, and persons of distinction, some of whom have been presented with the freedom of a livery company. Apart from these, there are the ceremonial presentations of the freedom in Guildhall, when the Chamberlain addresses the recipients in the name of the Corporation. This particular ceremony has been described in the Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, 1957-1960, as one of the highest compliments England can show to distinguished persons. The present Chamberlain has many agreeable recollections of freedom ceremonies in Guildhall, among which, however, he would scarcely include those he performed in summertime wearing a plaster straight-jacket as a result of falling off his horse and breaking his back; it does not call for any great exercise of the imagination to realise the degree of bodily heat that was engendered by a combination of the jacket, the floodlights, and the nervous tension of a great public occasion.

Admissions to the freedom do not constitute the only work of the Chamberlain's Court; the Court is in fact a clearing-house for the problems that confront livery companies on such matters as freedoms and apprenticeships, the interpretation and amendment of charters and by-laws, and points of procedure and usage. As has been remarked, it is only the major problems that demand the Chamberlain's personal attention, though very naturally questions are sprung upon him at luncheons, dinners, receptions, and even in the street. To the consideration of all of them it is a help to any Chamberlain to be able to bring the experience gained from serving on the court and as master of a livery company; all but four of the last thirteen Chamberlains have served the office of master of a livery company before or during their chamberlainship; and the value both to the Corporation and to the companies of having a Chamberlain with such experience should not be underestimated. The increasing of liveries and livery fines, and the granting of new liveries, are questions upon which the Chamberlain is required to report, jointly with other officers, to the Aldermen though it is the Chamberlain himself who pilots these reports through committee. One aspect of the growing interest now shown in the life of the guilds of London is the movement to form new companies, the sponsors invariably seeking the advice of the Chamberlain on how to set about the matter.

One further matter is worthy of mention - the Chamberlain's duty to oversee the Insignia and Mansion House Plate. The Plate Indenture, which the Lord Mayor signs on the occasion of his admission to office, is an agreement between him and the Chamberlain, whereby the Lord

Mayor acknowledges the receipt from the Chamberlain of all the articles listed in a schedule to the indenture, and undertakes for himself, his executors, and administrators to hand them back to the Chamberlain at the end of his mayoralty or at his death "If it shall happen (as God forbid) within the same". This is no empty form of words; at the end of every mayoralty two members of the Chamberlain's staff attend at the Mansion House and check every article of Plate against the schedule to the indenture; a similar check was made four days after a Lord Mayor died in office in April 1885. The Chamberlain is in a sense the permanent custodian of the Plate and Insignia; new pieces are in theory handed first to him by the Aldermen and then by him to the Lord Mayor, and all questions of repair and replacement are carried by the Chamberlain to the Aldermen for their instructions. Arrangements for the making of replicas of the Insignia ordered by the Aldermen have been the present Chamberlain's particular personal concern.

Having given some account of what keeps the Chamberlain in his office, it is now necessary to give some account of what keeps him out of it. First and foremost are the ceremonies and duties of the mayoralty, such as, Common Hall on Midsummer Day and Michaelmas Day; accompanying the Lord Mayor Elect to the Lord Chancellor's to receive the Sovereign's approval; the admission of the new Lord Mayor in the Silent Ceremony; the Lord Mayor's procession to the Law Courts to make the declaration of office before Her Majesty's Judges; the admission of the Sheriffs; state luncheons; and attendances in state at St. Paul's. Next are the meetings of the Courts of Aldermen and Common Council, and meetings of trustees. When the official day is over, there is often an evening engagement to be kept, always of a pleasant nature, but nevertheless generally in the way of duty.

It is one of the weaknesses of human nature to think that the work one has to do today is always so much more difficult and complicated than it was in the time of one's predecessors. For example, law students often tell me how much more difficult the law final examination is now than it was in my time, and I feel sure that I used to say much the same thing to my Father, who was a solicitor.

Some of the problems with which Chamberlains of the past have had to cope must have seemed to them just as difficult as any that arise today. A striking example of this is to be found in the year 1643 at the height of the Civil War when the Chamber, in addition to a loan of £150,000 and an expenditure of £12,000 in fortifying the suburbs, was providing Parliament with no less than £10,000 per week. In addition to this, the Chamber bore the cost of raising, equipping, and maintaining four regiments of foot, one of horse, and eleven pieces of cannon to help in raising the siege of Gloucester. By the end of the Civil War the Chamber was in debt to the tune of £220,000 – a lot of money in those days – and I can imagine that the Chamberlain of the day was worried to death.

Then comes the story of the one and only "Loyal London" the Navy ever possessed. The first "London" was built by Cromwell. She was launched on the 30th July 1656 and was one of the most powerful ships in the fleet, being a vessel of 1020 tons carrying 64 guns. She

never saw a naval battle in the second Dutch War. As Pepys wrote, "She was a water." Her loss came in the City. The Lord Mayor was informing the King that the ships of equal size and power were three ships in the fleet that he decreed that she should have the pay-sheets of the other three, their rates of pay, and on paying off, all of which were done. Furthermore, we have the "London", showing her to be the greatest ship of her kind and on more than one occasion. Matters were not made worse by the fact that she was proved at the butts at the 10th June 1666 with the carpenters still at work on the fleet at the Nore. On the 10th June 1666 she was in a fight and its sequel. In a year and three months she was a burned-out shell and she lay a burned-out wreck. She was salvaged and rebuilt. The citizens, at a great cost, declined to have her as a mark of his displeasure and she was just "London".

More trouble was caused at a time the burden did not seem to come to the rescue by the fact that coal brought into the City was assigned to the City for its public buildings, and the Parish Churches and the City. In twenty years the City spent £265,000 and the Chamber spent the Chamber. As collieries were and measured by coal duty was into the Chamber from their shares from the Chamber. Loans were raised to pay the trouble. Loans were raised to be paid to the lenders. From street widening and improvement of Guildhall to carry the coal duty received. Chamberlains were dealt with. Five Chamberlains presided over her and she had an end in 1687, just two

never saw a naval battle, but when preparing for sea at the outbreak of the second Dutch War she blew up in the River with great loss of life. As Pepys wrote, "She lies sunk with nothing but her round house above water." Her loss came at a critical time and caused consternation in the City. The Lord Mayor of the day, Sir John Lawrence, lost no time in informing the King that the City would replace her with another ship of equal size and power and that until this could be done would support three ships in the fleet at *their own charges*. The King was so delighted that he decreed that she was to be named "The Loyal London". We still have the pay-sheets of the ships, showing the names of the ship's companies, their rates of pay, their lengths of service, and the amounts due on paying off, all of which payments were made out of the Chamber. Furthermore, we have the accounts for the building of "The Loyal London", showing her total cost at £18,000. Trade in the City was so bad that the greatest difficulty was experienced in gathering in the money and on more than one occasion the Chamber had to come to the rescue. Matters were not made any easier when all her guns burst on being proved at the butts at Moorfields. Eventually, she was launched on the 10th June 1666 with but few guns and little or no equipment and with carpenters still at work on her as she sailed down the River to join the fleet at the Nore. On the 25th July she took part in the St. James's Day fight and its sequel. In October the fleet was laid up for the winter and a year and three months after her launching the *Duch* arrived at Chatham and she lay a burned-out hulk at the bottom of the Medway. Later she was salvaged and rebuilt at Deptford at a greater cost than her original building. The citizens, who had not then finished paying for her first cost, declined to have anything more to do with her, and the King, as a mark of his displeasure, on her launching ordered her to be named just "London".

More trouble was at hand in the shape of the Great Fire, but this time the burden did not fall so heavily upon the Chamber as Parliament came to the rescue by granting the produce of a duty of 3s. a ton for all coal brought into the Port of London. Half the duty — 1/6d. a ton — was assigned to the City for improving its streets and quays and rebuilding its public buildings, and of the other half 1/1½d. was used in rebuilding the Parish Churches and the remaining 4½d. towards rebuilding St. Paul's. In twenty years the City received over £382,000, the Parish Churches £265,000 and the Cathedral £88,000. All this money passed through the Chamber. As colliers arrived in the Port, their cargoes were checked and measured by coal meters, the duty paid to collectors who paid it into the Chamber from day to day. The Churches and St. Paul's received their shares from the Chamberlain and paid him £100 a year for his trouble. Loans were raised on the security of the duty and interest paid to the lenders. Freeholders were compensated for land taken for street widening and improvements. All the expenses, from the restoration of Guildhall to the provision of innumerable money bags to carry the coal duty receipts from shipper to collector and collector to Chamberlain were dealt with and recorded in the books of the Chamber. Five Chamberlains presided over the work, but when the duty came to an end in 1687, just twenty years after the Fire, London, apart from a

few Parish Churches and St. Paul's, had been completely rebuilt — an astounding tribute to the unbounded energy of our forbears.

By 1693 the Chamber was in debt to the extent of £750,000, and it was this fact that gave the final push to the foundation of the Bank of England in 1694. At this point the Chamberlain, with feelings, I imagine, of considerable relief, laid down the role of Banker to the Government of the day and confined himself to the smaller and less-exacting function of Banker and Treasurer of the Corporation of London.

I have referred to these matters of history for they illustrate so clearly that every period produces its own peculiar problems, which at the time must have seemed to be just as difficult and as complex as the problems of the times in which we live.

These reflections on the official lives of Chamberlains present and past have of necessity depicted the Chamberlain as being very much pre-occupied with official business. He does, of course, devote some of the time he spends in his office to private affairs, for the simple reason that, the duties of his office being what they are, his private and official lives tend to merge and become one. There are two things, however, that he covenants with the Corporation not to do while he is Chamberlain: one is not to engage in any other business or occupation; the other is not to concern himself with the promotion or direction of any public company. Sir Joseph Dimsdale went so far as to ask the Court of Common Council in 1907 to permit him, notwithstanding the latter covenant, to accept a seat on the board of the London, Tilbury, and Southen Railway Company, but he withdrew his request before the Court had time to come to a decision upon it. The present Chamberlain, on the other hand, found that the same covenant provided him with a graceful means of escape when he received a pressing invitation a few years ago to become the treasurer of the Cremation Society. The two covenants do ensure, unfortunately perhaps, that there will never again be a Chamberlain who is a director of the Bank of England, as Benjamin Hopkins was, or a Chamberlain who is a member of the House of Commons, as Sir Joseph Dimsdale was; but these are matters only of passing regret.

All things considered, if John Wilkes could re-visit Guildhall today more than 160 years after his death, it is highly improbable that he would express approval of all the many changes that have taken place in the office he once adorned; but, however much he might disapprove of particular changes, it is equally probable that he would still be content to say of the office of Chamberlain what he said after first being elected to it — that it is one of "profit, patronage, and extensive usefulness with rank and dignity." That it may long continue so should be the wish of everyone who holds the City in esteem; for the greatness of the Corporation depends in large measure not only upon its principal officers but also upon the greatness of the offices they hold.

"WIT CITY"

In September 1958 — the August body — our work for the Association an excellent reading) on "The Theatre: the long struggle between the puritanical City Fathers and the theatre in London." This account inevitably Today it is my purpose to make available a picture of William Shakespeare's period of his residence in London. Lamboll's earlier paper on Shakespeare. My title — "William Shakespeare: an attempt to anticipate the work of our greatest poet and dramatist" (which has succeeded in showing of his birth in that pleasant place where he passed the months of his early theatre the fruits of which I properly claim him as a native son. I invite you to consider his work.

The fact that there are no records of Shakespeare's personal life makes him to my mind a very interesting figure since there is ample scope for speculation. Dr. Johnson who was credited with the discovery if Bacon did not write the plays, had the opportunity? We do not know but the Parish Register of St. Dunstons, baptism on the 26th of April 1564, his father, was an Alderman (or Mayor) in 1568 and lived in the village of Wilmshurst. Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway in Worcester in November 1582 bore him a daughter Susanna. Shakespeare's fortunes soared to prominence in Stratford about William until 1592 when a fire at the Rose on Bankside, which was in squalor, made an attack on the City of Wit" including the work