

THE OFFICE OF THE CITY REMEMBRANCER

At the end of this year Sir Paul Davie, the present Remembrancer, will retire after nearly fifteen years distinguished service. This is perhaps an appropriate moment for a brief historical survey of his high and ancient office and of the men of character that have filled the office.

The office is nearly 400 years old, the first City Remembrancer being appointed in 1571. The situation which led to the creation of the post seems to have been one which will be readily familiar to members of the modern Establishment Committee – the need to engage new staff because routine office work is falling behind. In December 1570, a certain Robert Hogeson, one of the Lord Mayor's clerks, made humble suit to the Court of Aldermen that he might be given the task of engrossing the Journals and Repertories and be paid the same fees as the late Town Clerk had received for the same duty, plus such sum as the Court should think reasonable for bringing these books – then almost seven years behind – up to date.

It may be remarked in passing that a similar situation arose only ten years ago when the record in the Journals and Repertories was several years in arrear. In 1957 the problem was solved by the appointment of a *Journal Typist* in the Records Office in place of a *Journal Writer* and in consequence for the first time in over 500 years the full proceedings of the Courts of Aldermen and Common Council ceased to be recorded in manuscript.

In 1570 it was not possible to summon such office methods in aid but in any event the Court of Aldermen seem to have envisaged an appointment of more than clerical status for, instead of acceding to Robert Hogeson's request, they ordered the Lord Mayor, Recorder and Chamberlain to confer with one Mr. Norton whether he would be willing to take upon him the office touching the books, repertories and journals of the City and to make up calendars and other things necessary, for a fee of £20.

We are not told why the Court of Aldermen's choice fell upon Norton, for it was a surprising choice. Thomas Norton was already a man of some eminence both in literary circles and in the world of public affairs. Aged at this time nearly forty, he was a barrister of some note, had been appointed standing counsel to the Stationers' Company in 1562 and had been M.P. for both Gatton in Surrey and for Berwick. As a youth he had entered the service of the Protector Somerset, and his first wife was Margery, daughter of Archbishop Cranmer. All his life he was to maintain close links with extreme Protestant circles and to hold extreme religious views and he had already published a number of religious writings including a translation of Calvin's "Institutions of the Christian Religion". Norton produced, however, many secular as well as religious works, including a number of poems, published in his twenties, and, together with Thomas Sackville, the "Tragedie of

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Gorboduc", a curious play which is of some importance in the history of English literature as one of the earliest of English tragedies. This play was first performed by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple in their Hall on Twelfth Night 1561 and repeated by order of the Queen and in her presences a few days later. The subject of the play was taken from the legendary chronicles of Britain, Gorboduc being a king of Britain who divides his kingdom between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. The two quarrel over the division and Ferrex is killed by Porrex who in turn is murdered in revenge by their mother. After which civil war breaks out! It is almost a relief to learn that in this eventful drama no action took place on the stage, the tale being related in blank verse.

This, then, was the man of many parts whom the Court of Aldermen wished to be the first Remembrancer. Thomas Norton was willing and on 6 February 1571 was admitted to office. His duties were specified and were concerned with the entering and engrossing of the City's books and with reducing the matters contained therein to indices, tables or calendars "whereby they may be more easily, readily and orderly founde". "The said office shalbe called the remembrancer of the Citty and shall have place next —". Unfortunately the name of his immediate superior in the order of precedence is not filled in in the Repertory. A proviso safeguarded the rights of the Town Clerk. The Remembrancer was not to do anything that might be prejudicial to the office of Town Clerk nor to make any copies of books or records for that this appertained to the Town Clerk and the four clerks of the Mayor's Court. Why the title Remembrancer was adopted is difficult to understand. For two centuries there had been a royal Remembrancer attached to the Exchequer, but his main duties were to collect debts owing to the Crown. It might well be that a high sounding title had to be found for a man of Norton's stature. Remembrancer must have been used in the ordinary sense of the word, one appointed to keep in remembrance the important affairs of the Corporation, to act as the Corporation's memory. It might be suggested that the Deputy Keeper of the Records has succeeded to the original duties of the Remembrancer for he is now responsible for the entries in the Repertories and Journals and for making indices, tables and calendars.

In 1579 the Court of Aldermen ordered that Norton should be paid £40 in consideration of his pains in the affairs of the City and that in future years he should have such remuneration, over and above his salary, as the Court should see fit. He was also to be provided with accommodation nearer the Guildhall. On 5 April 1580 the Court ordered that for a further £10 p.a. Norton should engross the answers of all letters sent from the Court of Aldermen for the affairs of this City to any person of honour or otherwise. It is possible that the first volume of a series of books known as the *Remembrancia*, which was originally known by the title of "Letters from the Lords of the Council etc." and which contains copies of both in and out letters dating from 1579, has its origin in this order and was compiled by Norton.

In accordance with the practice of the period, Norton, although City Remembrancer, was not exclusively employed by the Corporation. He was officially appointed by the Government to take notes when the

Duke of Norfolk was tried for his negotiations with Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1572. He also played an active part in the persecution of Catholics, conducting, it is to be regretted under torture, the examinations of several Catholic prisoners. In the end Norton's extreme religious views, which led to his growing dissatisfaction with the episcopal establishment, involved him in a charge of treason and his own committal to the Tower. He was soon released but his health was broken and he died shortly afterwards in March 1584.

It is of some interest that Norton, in an exhortation addressed to James Hawes, Lord Mayor in 1574, required him and his brethren to begin all business with prayers: "I could gladly wish that some form of prayer might daily be used in your court and council chamber, by you and all your brethren, before you enter into causes. It is so used in the Parliament, and, though such use be but of late, I trust it shall be continued, and grow to be old: and surely I speak of it of good heart to yourself, I heartily wish to you the honour and blessing to have it begun in your time". Some members may recall that the desirability of opening the proceedings of every meeting of the Court of Common Council with prayers was a matter of debate so recently as 1944.

During the latter part of the 16th and the 17th centuries, the Court of Aldermen, was to exhibit a curiously fluctuating attitude towards the office of Remembrancer, at one time viewing it as an office of dignity and influence in the affairs of the City and at another seeking to lower its standing or even to abolish it altogether. The first of these abrupt changes of attitude followed Norton's death when the Court of Aldermen on 21 July 1584 decreed that no-one should be appointed in his place, "for that the same was never before hys tyme any offyce and ys thought by thys Courte for to be needeles and superfluous".

Eighteen months later the Queen addressed letters to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen requesting the continuance of the office and the appointment of one Doctor Fletcher in Norton's place. These letters were read on 21 January 1587 at a Court of Common Council which agreed to the Queen's request. This appears to be the only instance among the appointments of the early Remembrancers of election by the Court of Common Council. A few days later Dr. Fletcher was admitted in the Court of Aldermen to the place formerly held by Norton, with the title of "Secretary to the Lord Mayor". His duties were set out. He was "to attend and be ready as well in this Court as at the Mansion House of the Lord Mayor for the time being when the Lord Mayor shall send for him for the writing and ingrossing of all such letters as from time to time shall be sent from this Court or from the Lord Mayor for the time being to any person or persons whatsoever. And shall enter a true copy of every such letter in a book of the City's to be provided for that purpose. And also write the true copies of all such letters of importance as from time to time shall be written to this Court and enter the same into the said book". Further he was to be ready to be employed in all other the "messages, needs, services and affairs" of the City as the Court of Aldermen or Lord Mayor should think fit, provided always that he did not intermeddle with the offices of any of the sworn officers of the City without their consent. Doubt-

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less the Remembrancer composed letters as well as copied them, at a time when composition was a delicate art.

Like his predecessor, Doctor Giles Fletcher was a man of affairs and letters. He was brother to Richard Fletcher, bishop successively of Bristol, Worcester and London, and uncle of John Fletcher, the dramatist. Giles Fletcher himself had been M.P. for Winchelsea and he was sometimes employed by the Crown in diplomatic negotiations, his most famous embassy being his visit to Russia as ambassador from Elizabeth I to the Czar, when although subjected to some personal indignities he succeeded in securing considerable concessions for the English merchants trading with Russia. This embassy seems to have taken place in 1588-89, that is, after his appointment to the City office. In 1591 Fletcher published his "Russe Commonwealth", being a study of the institutions and form of government of Russia and the religion and customs of its people but this was considered to be so likely to give offence to the Russian court that it was quickly suppressed. It was published by the Hackluyt Society in 1856.

Fletcher's fee on appointment was £50 a year but in 1594 this was raised to £100 by the Court of Common Council. He remained in office until 1605 but in 1601 because of "the infirmitie of his bodie and the urgent occasion of busines otherwaies whereby he cannott in his owne person so daily attend ye service of this Citty as his desire is", he asked that he might have an assistant. It may be remarked that in 1596 Fletcher had been appointed an extra-ordinary Master of Requests and in 1597 Treasurer of St. Paul's. The Court of Aldermen agreed, and Fletcher was aided, at his own request, first by one Dr. Hawkyns and then by Clement Edmonds gentleman. The latter, on Fletcher's resignation, in 1605 succeeded him, at a yearly fee of £100. Incidentally entries in the Repertories show that from 1601 at least, if not earlier, the office had reverted to the original title of Remembrancer.

It has been pointed out that both Thomas Norton and Giles Fletcher had been members of Parliament before being appointed Remembrancer. In addition Norton while holding the appointment was twice elected one of the City members and is said to have spoken frequently in the House. That the Remembrancer's duties already in 1610 included Parliamentary business is clear from an order of the Court of Aldermen concerning the payment of monies due to William Dyos, then Remembrancer, "touching the Parliament billes" and this may have been fostered by the Parliamentary connections of the first two Remembrancers. The character and duties of the office resulted from the character of the men who held it.

The Remembrancer, however, was shortly due for one of his periodic set downs. By 1619 the growing part which he played in the affairs of the City would appear to have aroused the resentment of the Aldermen. The Court of Aldermen on 24th April 1619 taking into consideration the place and employment of the Remembrancer found the same to be no office but a service and employment devised of late years for the making of indexes and performing of some other services now wholly out of use. Because the Remembrancer had often been sent by the Court to the Lords of the Council, the Aldermen — and this is probably

the nub of their complaint – had not managed those affairs as they and their predecessors had been wont to do. This the Aldermen declared to be both inconvenient and expensive in fees, payment of bills and such like matters and “little or no good or benefit hath thereby accrued”. They ordered that henceforth the affairs of the City as well with the King as with the Lords should be attended by Mr. Recorder, some of the Aldermen and such others as the Court should appoint, that no successor to William Dyos should be appointed, that Dyos himself while continuing in office should attend the Court only when specially called and, final snub, that a chest of letters hitherto in his custody should be transferred to the Chamberlain.

However, when in December of the same year, William Dyos surrendered his office, the Court did appoint a successor, Robert Bacon, although, in view of his diminished duties, at the much reduced salary of £20 a year. In 1635 Bacon’s successor, Thomas Wiseman was granted £100 as a gift by the Court for his constant attendance upon the weighty affairs of the City, so it may be taken that the Remembrancer had resumed some at least of those duties the exercise of which had been deprecated by the Court in 1619. But in February 1643 Wiseman was dismissed by the Court of Common Council “as not fitte to contynue the same place any longer it being conceived an unnecessary charg unto the Citty”. All books, letters and writings in his custody were to be brought in and his closet and trunk in the gallery in the Council Chamber to be sealed up. A few months later the Court of Aldermen held that it was not bound to admit any person holding a grant of reversion of the office. But once more the Court changed its attitude and when, after an interval of three and a half years, in August 1646 Thomas Skinner was appointed it was “to execute the place of Remembrancer of this Citte to negotiate the extraordinary affaires of this Citty havinge addresses to the honorable houses of parliament and elsewhere”. No further reference to the duty of engrossing and registering letters has been found and it seems probable that his original secretarial duties rapidly declined. This may be, therefore, an appropriate moment at which to pause in the story of the development of the Remembrancer’s office and to look briefly at those volumes of records, the *Remembrancia*, which were the product of its early years.

The *Remembrancia* contain, as has been indicated, copies of letters exchanged between the City on the one hand and the Crown, the Lords of the Council and other eminent personages on the other. In many instances the originals of these letters do not exist, thus rendering the contemporary official copies of unique value. The whole series covers 1579–1664, although there is an unfortunate gap for the period of the Civil War and Commonwealth. They relate, therefore, to a time when the affairs of the Crown and the Government and the affairs of the City were closely related. There are letters from Elizabeth I for the levying of 300 soldiers for service in Ireland, from Charles II for a loan of £100,000, and from Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State, concerning provision by the City of houses for the accommodation of the Spanish and Swedish ambassadors. Also letters from the Lord Mayor to the Council concerning the high price and scarcity of corn, to

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the Queen refusing, in discreet phrases, to appoint her nominee to City office, and to the Archbishop of Canterbury concerning the evils brought about by an increase of plays and players. An "Analytical Index" to the *Remembrancia* was published by the Library Committee in 1878 and was much used by Dr. Sharpe, Clerk of the Records, in writing his *London and the Kingdom*.

Although the Court of Aldermen never again after the mid 17th century attempted to abolish the office of Remembrancer, it was still unsettled in its opinion of the duties and responsibilities attached to the post. In 1685, after considering a written submission from the Remembrancer for the continuance of his attendance upon Parliament which duty he described both as "very ancient" and "the chief branch of the office", the Court of Aldermen confirmed him in his Parliamentary duties and ordered that he should receive in respect thereof the same allowance, viz: 6s. 8d. a day for every day that Parliament should sit, as had been allowed his predecessors. Yet less than four years later the Court asked that the Remembrancer justify his demand for 6s. 8d. a day and in the meantime ordered him to forbear his attendance on the Parliament. This order was confirmed on 8 April 1690 and a bill of £33. 6. 8d. for 100 days past attendance disallowed. A petition of Mr. Remembrancer to continue the duties led to several reports on the office but on 28th March 1693 the opinion of the Court remained "that his attendance at Parliament is unnecessary and that there be no such allowance for the future". Less than three months later the Court reversed its decision once more and ordered that the allowance for attendance be continued.

In the 18th century the office of Remembrancer, like many other City offices, was offered for sale. In 1760 Mr. Brass Crosby, who was then a Common Councilman and was to become an Alderman and Lord Mayor, paid £3,600 into the Chamber for the office but a few months later he successfully petitioned to surrender and for the return of his purchase money on the ground that Mr. Deputy Paterson had been appointed to solicit a bill in Parliament touching Gresham College and Mr. Roberts had been jointly employed with the Remembrancer in another application to Parliament, to the diminution of his expected fees and emoluments. In 1761, the City Lands Committee put up the office for sale for £3,000; no bidder being found it was then put up for £2,800 but again there were no bidders. Eventually Peter Roberts offered to give £2,000 which was accepted but on learning that the office of Register of Orphans Stock was not, as he thought, united with the office of Remembrancer he asked to withdraw and was refunded his purchase money. The Court of Common Council thereupon, making a virtue of necessity, resolved that the place of Remembrancer be not sold and that the person elected should not be entitled to any of the ancient fees, gratuities or perquisites hitherto enjoyed by the Remembrancer except the use of the Chambers at Guildhall, his bills for business done, and the usual fee of 6s. 8d. a day during the sitting of Parliament. Under these new terms, Peter Roberts was elected on 7 June 1761 and remained in office until his death in 1793.

Roberts' successor, Timothy Tyrrell, also held office for many years. In 1827 he successfully petitioned the Court of Aldermen, on the ground of ill health and overwork, that his son Edward might be appointed his deputy. In support of his petition he enclosed a letter from his medical man which is a model of its kind.

"My dear Sir,

Having been for so many years in the united capacities of friend and Medical Adviser, had almost daily opportunities of witnessing the state of your health, I can have no hesitation in saying that I have for some time past observed a visible change arising no doubt from the combined effects of advancing years, long residence in Town and continued application to your weighty and anxious official duties, I am therefore decidedly of opinion that occasional relaxation, the air of the country and moderate and regular exercise would be the most likely means of restoring your constitutional powers and preserving their continuance.

I remain, My dear Sir, etc".

Edward Tyrrell succeeded his father in the office of Remembrancer and his great interest in City history and precedent made him an avid collector of manuscripts and extracts, many of which were purchased by the Corporation after his death.

The Remembrancer's Bills had been the subject of prolonged and detailed investigation in 1787-89 and in 1818-21 and in the latter case were referred to Arbitration. Subsequently it was decided by the Court of Common Council on 12 April 1821 that the Remembrancer should be paid an annual salary of £700 in lieu of former charges and allowances. This should be in respect of his general attendance at the Houses of Parliament, his duties in relation to Addresses to the Royal Family, Petitions to Parliament, Lord Mayor's Day and other Entertainments, Public Thanksgivings, attendance on the Courts of Aldermen and Common Council and Committees and in fact all his duties other than conducting business as solicitor in Parliament or at the Council or Treasury Boards on behalf of the Corporation for which he was to be paid as other solicitors for public bodies were paid. On 20 December 1832 that part of the business conducted by the Remembrancer in Parliament which was chargeable to City's Cash was also brought within the scope of the annual salary which was raised on this account to £1,000 per annum. Only business done by him in respect of funds created by Acts of Parliament and otherwise continued to be remunerated by a system of legal charges.

One of the late 19th century Remembrancers, Charles Henry Robarts, brought a law suit against the Corporation. This involved much research into the history of the office the results of which have proved most useful in compiling this short paper. Robarts was elected to office in 1878 but in 1881 certain charges were made against him. The official records are discreet to the point of obscurity but the matter concerned some alteration in the books. It was investigated by a

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Committee of the Whole Court – a proceeding which was later much criticised by the Master of the Rolls – which acquitted Robarts of any dishonourable conduct but nevertheless called upon him to resign. This he refused to do but at the next Court, which was concerned with the annual election of officers, Robarts was not re-elected. The case which he brought against the Corporation was not fought on any question of misconduct but on whether the office was a freehold office or one held from year to year subject to re-election. Robarts lost his case and appeal, the Appeal Judges holding that since 1832 the office had been held only subject to annual re-election. In 1885, however, the Common Council agreed to pay him £1,600 compensation for loss of office and that costs payable by him to the Corporation be not enforced against him.

Little mention has been made of the duties of the Remembrancer in relation to Ceremonial. As members know, the Remembrancer not only participates personally in many civic ceremonies but also bears much responsibility for the arrangements for ceremonial, particularly in connection with Entertainments to Heads of State, Members of the Royal Family and other distinguished persons, with Addresses to the Sovereign and Royal Family, and with those civic ceremonies which are particularly associated with the Lord Mayor such as the Sovereign's Approval and the Presentation, the Lord Mayor's Show and Banquet. These responsibilities may be assumed to have arisen from the Remembrancer's special position as intermediary between the Lord Mayor and the Corporation on the one hand and the Crown and High Officers of State on the other.

Of the recent Remembrancers Sir Leslie Bowker was perhaps more interested in the ceremonial side of his duties than were his predecessors. During the eventful 20 years he held office he had to observe protocol on the deaths of two sovereigns, George V and George VI, on the abdication of Edward VIII for which there were no precedents and the accessions and coronations of George VI and Elizabeth II with the attendant State Luncheons and other celebrations. In addition he marshalled royal freedoms, the jubilee celebrations of George V, the usual receptions to returning Royalty, to foreign Heads of State and the Victory celebrations and expressions of thanks to commanders of the Forces. He enjoyed this spate of ceremonial activity and delegated most of the Parliamentary work to Mr. Mould, who had served him before he came to Guildhall. Bowker was forthright, practical and powerful.

In contrast Sir Paul Davie has not the simple practical approach of his predecessor, his is the intellectual approach. He loves to expand and discuss at length, to worry a problem until he has torn it to shreds. His deliberate words always suggest mature thought drawn from the depths of a profound official memory, but his opinions of what is opportune and advice on what is practicable, especially in Parliament, are given with force. His tall figure, cultured voice and measured stride command attention. He is sometimes unconventional, mingling courtier and country squire. To me he is the reincarnation of early literary Remembrancers.

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Thomas Norton	1571-1584
<i>No appointment</i>	1584-1587
Giles Fletcher, D.C.L.	1587-1605
Clement Edmonds	1605-1609
William Dyos	1609-1619
Robert Bacon	1619-1633
Thomas Wiseman	1633-1643
<i>No appointment</i>	1643-1646
Thomas Skinner	1646-1647
William Pullen	1647-1657
John Hind	1657-1659
John Topham	1659-1660
John Wright	1660-1662
Richard Lightfoot	1662 (Jan-July)
John Lightfoot	1662-1664
George Dalton	1664-1665
John Burrowes	1665-1666
Edward Manning	1666-1667
Richard Brawne	1667-1673
George Doe	1673-1677
Richard, <i>later</i> Sir Richard, Dearam (Dearham)	1677-1681
Abraham Clerke (Clarke)	1681-1696
John Sandsford	1696-1698
William Bellamy	1698-1708
John Johnson	1708-1719
John Preston	1719-1727
John Lethieullier	1727-1743
William Hamilton	1743-1745
Richard Cheslyn	1745-1760
Brass Crosby	1760-1761
Peter Roberts	1761-1793
Timothy Tyrrell	1793-1832
Edward Tyrrell	1832-1863
William Corrie	1864-1878
Charles Henry Robarts	1878-1881
Gabriel Prior, <i>later</i> Sir Prior, Goldney	1882-1903
Adrian Donald Wilde Pollock (<i>later</i> Chamberlain)	1903-1913
Col. Herbert Stuart Sankey	1913-1927
John Bridge Aspinall	1927-1932
Leslie, <i>later</i> Sir Leslie, Cecil Blackmore Bowker	1932-1953
Paul, <i>later</i> Sir Paul, Christopher Davie	1953-1967
Geoffrey Arden Peacock	1968-

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