

The Town Maces

Pride of place among Sudbury's Mayoral Regalia must go to the two ancient maces which are carried before the Mayor on Civic occasions. Eight hundred years have passed since the first mention of a Mayor in Sudbury – a few years after the freemen of the town received their first charter in the mid 13th century from the Lord of the Manor, Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford.

A century later another Lord of the Manor, Roger Mortimer, 4th Earl of March, granted another charter, written in Norman French, and dated 'at our Castle of Clare the 17th day of June in the 20th year of the reign of King Richard the second (1397)'.

This proclaims: 'know that we have given licence for us and our heirs to the Mayor and Bailiffs of our Town of Sudbury and to their successors for ever that they may elect and appoint every year two sergeants to carry before them Maces of our Arms within the franchise of our said town'.

Those Maces would have been of much simpler design than the ones we see today, which are surmounted with ornate heads. In the proceedings of the Suffolk institute of Archaeology for 1892 William Walter Hodson, the Sudbury historian, suggested that the original Maces were reversed, the original heads becoming the handles, and new heads being attached to the other end of the staff, a procedure known to have been used in other Boroughs. This work would have been paid for by the bequest of a former Mayor, Richard Firmyn, whose will, made in 1614, included 'legacy of tenne poundes, given to the Mayor and Aldermen of Suthburie for the tyme beinge, to be by them employed and laide out towards the newe-making, bettering and inlargynge of the two Maces used to be carried by the Sergeants there before the Mayor of the Towne of Suthburie aforesaid for ye tyme being'. So the present heads may be about 400 years old but the staffs are almost certainly older.

The Maces are of silver gilt, 2 feet 5¾ inches long, with their heads crested with seven crosses and fleurs-de-lys alternately, and surmounted by open crowns, with orbs and crosses. The 'Crowns of the Heads' are engraved in high relief with the Royal Arms (of Charles II), and round the heads, which are divided by vertical lines of conventional leaves and terminal flowers with thistle-like heads, into four compartments, are the Borough Arms, the Rose of England, the Thistle of Scotland, and the Fleur-de-lys of France (crowned). The staffs are 16½ inches long, with a bold, semi-globular moulding in the centre, and a smaller ovolo at the lower end.

The Sergeants at Mace of earlier days had other duties as well. In the 17th century they had to execute processes and warrants. In the early 18th century it was the Sergeants at Mace who distributed 'common money' to the Freemen who did not exercise their right to pasture cattle on the Commonlands.

Today new Freemen of Sudbury still pledge their support to the Mayor and his Sergeants at Mace when they are admitted and in recent years the Sudbury Freemen have been proud to provide honorary Macebearers to maintain the centuries-old Mayoral tradition.