

A CHARTER CELEBRATION

In this article, Derek Barnard reminds us of the long history of Rochester's City status and recall the celebrations associated with the 600th anniversary of the Charter which gave us our first Mayor.

From 24 June to 8 July, *forty* years ago, the City of Rochester donned her entertainment cloak to stage a series of events to celebrate 500 years of Mayoralty. For it was in 1461 that King Edward the Forth granted the charter that allowed the City to create a mayor, and in 1961 the City was still doing so, though within ten years it was having to share him/her with other parts of the Medway Towns.

The Charter relates that 'the citizens of Rochester had, time out of mind, been accustomed to appoint a Bailiff to the City, and that the King, considering that the City was more defensively fortified against enemies, and deservedly contemplating the fidelity and obedience of the citizens and their successors, that from henceforth for ever they should be one Mayor and Citizens, one body perpetual, in fact and in name. That the Bailiff should be called Mayor, and that they should be called the Mayor and Citizens of the City of Rochester, and should hold all privileges, franchises and liberties contained in former charters.' The gentleman elected to be the first mayor was a certain William Mungeam.

An excellent souvenir programme was produced to cover these two weeks in 1961. It included pictures of the visit of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on 30 March in that year when they had inspected Rochester's fine collection of charters, signed the Customal and presented the Maundy Money at the Cathedral.

The celebration events were wide and varied; lots of sports, including an Olympique Cycle Race starting and finishing at KingEdward Road. The Peter Hudson Players presented an operetta, 'The Jousts', words and music by Peter Hudson and Donald Pink, each evening of the first week in the castle gardens. Act one was 'The exterior of the castle', Act two was 'The same, a few hours later'. I'm glad they didn't decide to change the set. The military took over the second week with what must have been a fine Tattoo, featuring the Household Cavalry, the Royal Engineers, the Buffs and the R.A.S.C. with their massed bands. There was a Civic Ball, a dance, tea parties, garden parties, a regatta and a firework display for all to enjoy.

An interesting centre spread tells of The Rochester High Street Improvement Scheme, instigated by The Civic Trust. Other towns had already benefited from this initiative. We are told that 'The High Street from the bridge to the roundabout at the bottom of Star Hill has great potential in architectural character. The diversity of styles and quality of buildings from all periods, the varying heights, scale and projections, give the street a unique character'. A panel of five architects had been appointed to prepare a unified scheme and advise frontagers who decided to participate in the scheme, on a facial improvement to their properties. Proposals were 'To Tidy the Street, To Simplify the Street and to Unify the Street'. By the time of going to press, 20 frontages had completed, 64 hoped to join the scheme and a further 45 undecided. Was this the start of conservation during an era of demolition?

As usual the advertisements bring back memories from firms no longer with us, Woodfield Hoist, Burnett and Rolfe, Wingetts, Gyproc, Harwoods, Leonards and of course the Rochester

Co-op.

If you were one of the 125 performers in mediaeval costume for The Jousts, or participated in events, then tell us about it. Were any of our members involved in the Improvement Scheme? There must be some stories out there somewhere.



The Queen in Rochester High Street

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