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DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE

Chain of responsibility

The mayor chain travels the world: This article was published on Saturday, November 12, 1966, to commemorate the 200 year anniversary of the Limerick Chronicle newspaper

IN recent years it has become the accepted practice for the Mayor of Limerick to bring the great Mayoral Chain with him on visit to the United States. Only in very exceptional circumstances, however, did former Corporations (City Council) allow this priceless antiquity to be taken outside Ireland, and, up to a decade ago it had been abroad on only three occasions.

The first was in 1975 when Ambrose Hall attended a week's festivities given by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of London to all the mayors of the world; the second in 1901 when Limerick's first Fenian Mayor, John Daly, took it with him on a tour of America.

The third in 1957 when the Mayor, Alderman GE Russell, toured America to inaugurate a fundraising campaign for a memorial to Seoirse Clancy, Michael O'Callaghan, Brigadier Sean Wall and Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue, who died in Ireland's War of Independence.

The Mayor chain is of great historical interest and has been associated with civic events for over 140 years. It is recorded that during Ambrose Hall's visit to the Guild Hall, London, in 1875, no chain was so much admired by many of those present, including the Syndic of Rome and the Prefect of Seine.

The greatest story weathered by the emblem of our "ship of state" was in 1901, when Mayor John Daly took the Mayoral Chain with him on his visit to America. As he was not sent out as the direct representative of the city, or Corporation, it was held that he had no right to take away the chain of office.

The stormy of controversy raged fiercer on Daly's return but Limerick's first Fenian Mayor made a forceful retort to his critics when, at a banquet given in his honour in the Council Chamber he stated; "My right to take the chain was vindicated by the brainy men of America, for they said here is a man who has been in chains for the most part of his life, and Limerick now sends Him to use with the golden chain of office."

It was the first time that the chain was taken outside the British

Dominions. In 1875, Ambrose Hall wore it in London during the week's festivities given by the Lord Mayor and the Corporation of London to all the mayors of the world, and at the expiry of his term of office he expressed himself pleased to get rid of the responsibility of its safe keeping.

Somewhere about the middle of the last century it was very near being lost at the old Newcastle race-course during a race meeting - whether as a result of betting transactions or bad whiskey, we are not told! No mayor ever afterwards or before this occasion wore the chain unless on official occasions and representing the Corporation.

Limerick's Mayoral Chain is one of the city's most treasured possessions, and intrinsically its value is even greater than many of the more elaborate looking adornments of mayors of far larger cities.

What its intrinsic value is has not been computed, but it is undoubtedly very considerable. Its weight in 1866 was 19 ozs nine and a half dwts. And it has been considerable added to since then bringing it in 1944 to 2 lbs 7 ozs 14 dwts.

Its historic value is priceless, and the records inscribed on its links date back to 1822. It has been



Frank Prendergast putting on the mayoral chain just after being elected in 1984 with former Mayor Terry Kelly and City Manager, Tom Rice, and deputy manager, Flan O'Neill giving a helping hand

present at every function of civic importance for over 140 years. It travelled with John Daly on his tour of impassioned speeches in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. With him it participated in New York's great St Patrick's Day parade in 1901 and with him was present at the great banquet of the Sons of St

Patrick to 450 guests. The mayoral chain is of solid gold and was originally fashioned by a firm of London goldsmiths about 1820. In its early stages of growth the links from 1822 to 1842 were considerably smaller than at present and resemble a flat fringe, in circumference not much larger than a 1/2d. They had no room for elaborate engraving and each merely carried the name of the holder of the office.

The links added by the Mayors of the Reformed Corporation, however, differed in format, were much greater in thickness and value and carried a record of local, national and world events during each Mayor's term of office. They are mainly the size of a five shilling piece with a circular piece taken out of the centre, thus turning what would otherwise be a medal into a link, attached to the other links by a small ring of gold. Other links have two holes diametrically apart and punched near the circumference.

In three instances are the links wholly solid or medal-like and attached to the chain as pendants. One of these bears the crest of Martin Honan, the first Reform Mayor, with the City Arms on the

other side. (Honan by the way, contrived to have his representation on the chain as far removed as possible from those of the old corrupt Corporation, which went out of office in 1841.)

The other medallions, which are among the latest additions, to the chain, were presented by Mr Michael B O'Malley, solicitor, and the late James M Casey. The O'Malley medallion bears the family crest in relief with motto "Terra Marique Potens."

Casey's medallion commemorates the fact that he was elected first Mayor under the Limerick City Management Act and he acted as a Deputy Mayor from March 7 to 22, 1921 after the murder of George Clancy by the British Forces.

Two links added by the representatives of Limerick's murdered Mayors, George Clancy and Michael O'Callaghan, commemorate the greatest tragedy in the city's 700 years municipal history.

The last mayor to add a link to the chain was Ald GE Russell who occupied the office for the agreed consecutive terms, 1954/5, 1955/6 and 1956/7. It commemorated a banquet given by Alderman Russell during his Mayoralty to the 26 surviving former Mayors of Limerick.

Like the "Chronicle" it Recorded the Great Events of the Past

The Mayoral Chain has Links with History

Presented to the Mayor of Limerick on the occasion of his election to the office of Mayor of Limerick, the Mayoral Chain is a link in the chain of history. It is a link in the chain of the past, and it is a link in the chain of the future. It is a link in the chain of the city's history, and it is a link in the chain of the city's future.

who says we're growing old?