

Morpeth Herald
Saturday 26 April 1890

Morpeth Town Council held a special meeting on 22nd April 1890 to present a new Mayoral Chain. Present were the Mayor (Councillor F E Schofield); ex-Mayor, Councillor W Clarkson; Aldermen G B Grey; W J Atkinson; W Burn & W Duncan; Councillors G Young; T Gillespie; S P Bates; J Swinney; R Summers; W C Wilkinson; J W Chirney; J Richardson; J W B Anderson; & W Webb; Town Clerk; F Brumell. The report says the Hall was filled with a large number of ladies and gentlemen.

Prior to the presentation of the chain, the Council paid tribute to the recently deceased Rector of Morpeth, Reverend Canon Grey. Then the Council let the contract to ring the Town Bells. 4 applicants - from £25 a year to £10 a year. Awarded to J Brown at £15 a year.

Transcript - 15th June 2020

PRESENTING THE MAYORAL CHAIN

The Sergeants Mace, the punch bowl, the town halberds, and chain were then placed in front of the platform, and the Town Clerk was deputed to make the presentation, and he addressed the meeting as follows: "Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, fellow burgesses of the old town - for the ladies are burgesses as well as the gentleman - I have been deputed to perform an important and pleasing duty this evening, and however unequal I might feel to discharge that duty with satisfaction to myself, I could not with propriety decline to undertake it. The duty thus imposed upon me, is no less than to present, on behalf of the subscribers, a new and handsome chain of office to be worn by you, sir, on official occasions, and to be handed on by you at the termination of your year of office to your successor and from Mayor to Mayor in perpetuity. (applause) The practice of adorning the Mayor and chief officials of our ancient cities and towns is not at all a novel one and perhaps the town of Morpeth, was in former years an exception to the general rule in this respect. I am not aware the Bailiffs of Morpeth, who were the chief officers of this borough prior to 1836, were ever graced by the use of any gold chain or other insignia or emblems of office. But besides the Bailiffs there were in Morpeth in the olden times other officers, each of whom appears to have had some badge of office for use on public occasions. There were two fish and flesh lookers whose duties were to examine the quality of those articles, but if the butchers of Morpeth were as good and honest in former days, as they are now, their duty must have been of a light description. Each of them had a badge or emblem of his office, consisting, I believe, of spears or halberds, still in existence. Then there were 2 ale tasters. One can conceive what an appreciable duty theirs must have been to taste and adjudicate upon the ale and beer used within the Borough, and their emblems of office were two small silver cups which they used in the discharge of their tasting duties. Each of the 4 constables carried a small baton or tip-staff as a menace to evildoers, and the Sergeant bore that splendid silver mace, the gift of Belted Will Howard to the town in 1604, which is now so ably wielded by our worthy and respected, vigilant and ancient friend, Mr Bolton, who has just completed his 63rd year, and

is still mercifully spared in good health and strength. (Applause.) Thus the Bailiffs, the chief officers of the old Borough, were the only ones who had no badges or insignia of their office, unless the two handsome silver punch bowls which were relegated to their custody could be considered as such. Though they could scarcely be used on the occasion of processions, or suchlike ceremonies, they would naturally come into use on the festive occasions after dinner, when we may be sure, many a good flowing bowl of punch - that generous liquor - has been drained out of them. And as the old Bailiffs went out of office without their insignia, so the new Mayor came in without any gold chain or any similar decoration, and so they continued without decoration during the reign of several of the early Mayor's, until at length about 1846, Doctor Trotter came into office as Mayor. The doctor was an old Morpethian.. His father, the Reverend Robert Trotter, was the Presbyterian Minister of Morpeth for 50 years, and the doctor had spent all or most of his lifetime here, and was a man of great wealth and importance in the town, and it was thought fitting that the doctor should be decorated with a gold chain. How the money was raised for the purchase of it. I cannot exactly say. Perhaps the doctor may have contributed part of it. I have also heard, and believe it was the case, that one of the old punch bowls was cast into the melting-pot to raise part of the money. Fortunately the handsome of the two is still preserved. There it is (pointing to the bowl). It was made by Richard Hobbs of Newcastle in 1712, and is called a Menteith (Monteith). As you will see it is an ample and handsome vessel. It is also said that the emblems of the Ale Tasters were consigned to the name the same ignominious fate. But however the money was raised and the chain procured, and has been in existence for the use of the successive Mayor from that time to this, and may now be seen gracing the shoulders of our present worthy Mayor. Well, the old chain was sufficient for its purpose for a great number of years, but of late years a conviction has been springing up that it was not sufficient for the use of the Mayor of this ancient and respectable Borough. It looks well enough at a distance, but when examined closely is found to be very light and flimsy and the question of procuring a new chain of more adequate proportions was frequently discussed, but that mighty obstacle to fulfilment of many a good and laudable object - the want of funds - stood in the way. At length, on 5 November last, after the Hollon Tea, most of the members of the Corporation were met together, and the project was renewed, and at length the cry was "Put the names down of those who will subscribe", and the result was most satisfactory. Before the meeting separated the larger portion of money was actually booked, and little difficulty was experienced in procuring the remainder. A committee was formed, and offers were received from the jewellers in this town, as well as from others at a distance, and ultimately the order was given to Messrs. Bragg, an eminent firm in Birmingham, which appears to be the headquarters of that kind of business - the manufacture of gold chains. The chain has now been supplied, and it has been pronounced by all who have seen it as eminently satisfactory. There is no tinsel about it, and it presents no gaudy display, but it is a good, plain, solid article, weighing about a pound and a half of troy weight, and is of solid 18-carat gold or, to be precise, 18ozs 2dwt 18gr - of gold (Applause.) And I may inform you, Mr Mayor, you need feel no scruples in assuming the chain. It is burdened by no debt. The money is paid, and I have it exactly a shilling left of the subscription money.

Moreover, it is eminently satisfactory to you, sir, as well as to the public of Morpeth in general, to know that no burden has been cast upon the public revenues of the town by the purchase. The whole of the money has been subscribed by individuals out of their private resources. These individuals, consisting entirely of members of the Council and some of their officials - none of it out of public money, and no one outside of the Council was even asked to contribute to the cost. (Applause.) The chain is paid for and I hold the contractor's receipt for the price - all except the old discarded chain, which is to be surrendered, and a small sum of money allowed in part payment. All the rest is paid in cash. (the Town Clerk, having placed the chain upon the Mayor). And now, Mr Mayor, I have the honour and pleasure, on behalf of the subscribers, to place the chain round your shoulders and I ask your acceptance of it during the remainder of your office, and that the termination thereof, to be handed over by you to your successor in office and so on from Mayor to Mayor in perpetuity to be held as the property of the Council, but to be used by the Mayor of Morpeth for the time being, and I devoutly (unreadable) wish you health and happiness during the remainder of your term, and hope you will use it on all suitable occasions, and more frequently than it has been customary to use the old one of late - for there is no reason to be ashamed of it, and I have no fear, but that at the termination of your year you will hand it over to your successor unsullied and untarnished. (Loud Applause.) The Mayor, on rising, said: Mr Town Clerk and Gentlemen, - As Chairman of this Council and the representative of the Burgess of this Borough, I have much pleasure in accepting your beautiful gift. It will be idle of me to attempt to conceal the fact - and I certainly have no wish to do so - that I am just a little proud that such a magnificent emblem of office should be first placed upon my unworthy shoulders. You have just told me that the first wearer of the old chain was Dr Trotter. After that the "Northenders" may take heart. For I believe I am correct in saying that Dr Trotter was a "Northender", and very near a "Bools-greener", born and reared above the Copper Chair. To me it is rather an interesting coincidence that his more humble successor nearly half a century afterwards should be able to lay a similar claim to the same illustrious quarter. And if Dr Trotter waxed fat in earthly goods upon Calvinism and Physic, his obscure successor also was, at all events, able to keep himself from starving upon the same pasture. (Laughter and cheers)

But, so it is my duty, on behalf of those whom I represent, to thank you and those who have been associated with you, for your great generosity in this matter. I wish for the moment to disassociate myself from the gentleman by whom I am surrounded, and speaking as a native of this town. I say it is a very handsome thing on the part of its representatives to make such a valuable and beautiful present. It is only another proof that whatever errors of head - and so long as Morpeth Town Council, like other Town Councils is composed of human beings there will be errors - I say what there are errors of head may be committed; there is making no mistake as to the heart being in the right place. (Applause.) But I have to do more than thank you, I have to congratulate you upon which a successful termination of your labours. I know something of the ins and outs connected with this chain. And I know how you and many of those with you whom you have been so long and so honourably connected have felt that the old chain was not equal to the times. If the truth must be told I had a lurking suspicion myself that two and a half

ounces of fifteen carat gold was not quite the thing to adorn the manly bosom of the Mayor of Morpeth! (Loud laughter.) But this new 18 carat one, stamped on every link, will stand examination, and I'm quite sure there will be but one opinion as to its beauty and the taste displayed in it. (Applause.) I have to congratulate you also on the time of procuring it - though by luck and not by merit I chance to be the wearer of it.

It is -

"Ever again old decay
The greenest mosses spring (cling)" *

and I think you must have proceeded upon this poetic principle. As far as I can make out the old chain had no special epoch to mark its birth; the new one has a very distinctive one. Last year we were to all intents and purposes, a decaying institution; but we have risen to life again with a larger area, with increased powers and duties, and correspondingly increased responsibilities. And if this is true of the council generally, it is especially true with regard to the wearer of the chain. I take it, sir, that you wish to mark this change, and know quite well that both the present wearer and its successors will find that it has many labours and many responsibilities attached to it which the old one had not. (Applause) I hope, sir, the whole ceremony will be viewed in its proper light, especially by the young men and boys of the town. I hope many of them will count it amongst the noblest of their ambitions to wear this chain. It is a proper and commendable ambition for every lad and young man to have - to become the wearer of it. It is something worth struggling for and striving after, something worth looking forward to as a reward for an honest discharge of duty. (Applause and cheers). In conclusion, sir, I have only again to thank you very heartily on behalf of the Council and constituency for this beautiful chain, and to repeat the lines of good old Whittier: **

Our fathers to their graves have gone,
Their strife is past, their triumphs won,
But sterner trials wait the race,
Which rises in their honoured place
A moral conflict with the crime
And folly of an evil time.

(Loud applause.) The Mayor, then moved that the Town Clerk be instructed to enter a record on the minutes of the Council of the proceedings that night. Councillor Young moved that the Mayor be authorised to dispose of the old chain. Alderman Burn seconded this and the motion was carried.

The public were then allowed to come up and inspect the chain and other articles of Corporation plate. The new chain is of neat and exquisite workmanship, and is of the double-link pattern, and presents an imposing and massive appearance, and reflects the highest credit upon the makers, Messrs. Bragg of Birmingham. A very pretty oak casket, lined with blue velvet and mounted with a brass handle, and a plate in centre bearing the following inscription; "***This chain was presented to the Corporation of Morpeth, on 22***

April 1890, for the use of the Mayor for the time being, by the members of the Council and officials. The badge was portion of the old chain. Fred E Schofield, Mayor. - was made by Alderman W Burn cabinet maker and upholsterer of Bridge Street, to hold the chain.

* Thanks to Alison Byard, this extract (misquoted) comes from "A Dream of Summer" by John Whittier.

** John Greenleaf Whittier (1807 – 1892) - Moral Warfare (1836). (NB: In the actual poem the word "conflict" is replaced by "warfare")

NB: Some lines in the newspaper article were almost or actually unreadable. I think, with Alison's help, we have a true transcription, but if you see mistakes, please advise!