

## "BEATING OF THE BOUNDS" CEREMONY - History of the Tradition

The ancient ceremony of "Beating of the Bounds" had its origins many hundreds of years ago in the necessity to remind people from towns and villages of the extent of their boundaries in the days before precise map making. The first recorded viewing of Chester's boundaries was carried out by the Black Prince's Officials in 1351/53 and a description of the boundaries is contained in the Charter which the Prince issued to the City on 9 March 1354.

The Bounds were viewed for the first time by City Officials in 1539/40 during the Mayoralty of Henry Gee. "Beating the Bounds" ceremonies have taken place periodically from 1573 and in this century have been held 7 times, in 1913, 1930, 1972, 1989/90 and from 1994 to 1996. Last year stones were laid marking the eastern and southern extremities of the present boundaries.

When the ceremony was revived by the Mayor of the day Mr Harry Dutton in 1913, after a gap of 40 years, it was hoped that the "Beating of the Bounds" could be held every 7 years. The First World War, however, together with boundary changes in 1936, when Blacon and part of Newton were incorporated in the City, prevented a consistent 7 yearly ceremony. It was decided to revive the ceremony in 1972 to officially mark the boundaries of the City of Chester as an independent local authority prior to its establishment as a district in 1974.

### The Ceremony

With regard to the ceremony, custom varied from place to place throughout the country but each ceremony was intended to be memorable to those taking part. In Chester in the nineteenth century the procession was headed by the Bluecoat Band followed by the Sword & Mace, The Mayor, The Sheriff, City Council Officials and Citizens. The oldest and youngest inhabitants were represented in the procession and the Sword and Mace were laid on each boundary stone viewed. In 1972 the official party included Mr H Oakley who had taken part in the ceremony of 1913, 13 descendants of the then Mayor, Harry Dutton and two specially selected school boys (boys from the old Bluecoat School being no longer available to take part in the ceremony). These school boys were ceremonially bumped on the boundary stones. In addition the City Surveyor tapped each stone down with a ceremonial rod to establish its setting, and the Mayor made the following announcement at each stone :

"I, Mayor of the City of Chester, do hereby set this stone and declare it well and truly laid to mark the boundary of the City and County of the City of Chester at this point. God Save the Queen"

At the ceremonies in 1989 and 1990, 6 new stones were laid at Threapwood (Sarn Bridge), Agden, Tilstone Fearnall, Elton, Puddington and Kinnerton. The ceremony followed the pattern that had traditionally been followed by the predecessors of the then Mayor in the earlier parts of the Century.

Little has changed except that the Mayor of Chester is now, of course, a Lord Mayor and March 1994 was the first occasion that a Lord Mayor of Chester "Beat the Bounds" of her territory. On that occasion the Lord Mayor laid a new boundary stone on the Chester side of the Farndon/Holt bridge crossing the River Dee and re-dedicated two of the existing stones, at Agden and at Threapwood (Sarn Bridge). In all other respects, the tradition remains intact except that the District Surveyor has now been replaced by the Head of Property & Project Management Services who will be present to carry out those traditional duties of the office. The "Bumper of Ale" that was passed around to those present in earlier times is also available when the ceremony is re-enacted.