



Chester Pageant 1910



ON St. George's Day 1610 was performed on the Roodeye a Pageant, under the title of "Chester's Triumph in honor of her Prince." Three hundred years later, in 1910, Chester witnessed another Pageant though not on the same site. Though these Pageants differed, of course, widely in conception and in character, it is interesting to note some points of similarity. In each a mounted horseman represented "the most worthy Citie Chester," who, by his opening and closing speech, showed the interest which the citizens felt in the event. In each "an artificial dragon . . . casting fire from his mouth" took his part; whilst "Jack in the Green" in the one recalled "two disguised called Greene-men, their habit embroydered and stitch'd on with Ivie-leaves" in the other. Whilst the former Pageant owed its origin to the public spirit and liberality of Robert Amory, the Sheriff of the City, the latter had the warm support and active co-operation of the Mayor, Mr. D. L. Hewitt; and to both, the opinion of a former writer (*Drake's Shakspeare*. Vol. ii. p. 190) might be applied, "Nor were these fanciful and ever-varying Pageants productive merely of amusement; they had higher aims and more important effects, and . . . indirectly inculcated some lesson of moral wisdom . . . They had also the merit of conveying no inconsiderable fund of instruction from the stores of . . . history."

The Chester Pageant of 1910 received the cordial support of both County and City. The Duke of Westminster, as Lord Lieutenant, issued an appeal for subscriptions and guarantees to residents in the County, and the Mayor did the like for the City, and both appeals met with an adequate response. The project was approved of (almost unanimously) by a largely attended public meeting in the autumn of 1909, and the necessary Committees were immediately formed and active preparations commenced at once. In Messrs. Baring Brothers, as managers, the help of those who had had experience of Pageants at Bath and Cheltenham was secured, whilst Mr. G. P. Hawtrey, M.A., as Master of the Pageant, could claim the knowledge gained by occupying a similar post at Cheltenham and at Cardiff. The Master of the Music was a Member of the Society's Council, Professor J. C. Bridge, Mus. Doc., M.A., and it is needless to say that he contributed, in no slight degree, to the success of the Pageant, by his admirable arrangement of the music with its local colouring, and his conducting of the excellent chorus which he had collected.

The Society was well represented on the various Committees, and in the drawing up of the Book of Words under Mr. Hawtrey's editorship; and the efforts of Miss Clay, Mr. F. Simpson, and others, in preliminary lectures and in various directions, were unremitting and most helpful.

The Pageant took place on a beautiful site in Eaton Park from July 18th to July 23rd, and (with the exception of one day) was favoured with beautiful weather. The attendance was so satisfactory that it is hoped a goodly balance will remain for distribution amongst the

charities of the city and county, even after the return of the subscriptions. For months beforehand, working parties of ladies were engaged in making the necessary costumes, for the designing of which Mr. W. G. Schröder was mainly responsible. Nearer to the time, the performers, who numbered about 3,500, including children, were enrolled, and for two months were under the personal direction of Mr. Hawtrey and his able assistant Mr. F. Randle Ayrton. So perfect did the arrangements become that the performances took place without a single hitch, the promptitude with which the large bodies of actors appeared on the scene being remarkable. This was secured by telephonic communication from the Master's perch with the different places where they were massed; whilst the various clumps of trees on the ground covered their approach. Some 300 equestrians took part in the proceedings, and they were skilfully drilled by Lord Arthur Grosvenor, as Master of the Horse.

The scene presented by the many coloured costumes in each Episode, by the graceful movements in the many dances, and by the artistic arrangement of the whole, was most picturesque and baffles description. "The Midsummer Revels" were very popular, and it is not improbable that this memory of old times may be revived and repeated periodically. The impersonation of the principal characters was generally excellent, and they were well supported by the thronging crowds. The performers were enlisted from all classes of society. On one day the Duke of Westminster himself took part; whilst Lady Arthur Grosvenor, the Hon. Cecil T. Parker, the Mayor, the Sheriff, several of the Clergy, and many others, co-operated with other citizens and the children of the

Elementary Schools in the presentation of the various Episodes.

With such a richness of material, it was difficult to select incidents from the past history of the City which should give general satisfaction; but finally, the following were agreed upon as illustrating various periods from Roman to Stuart times:

- I. Agricola returns to Deva after defeating the Ordovices. A.D. 78.
 - II. King Edgar, on his Imperial progress, with Queen Elfrida, receives the Homage of Tributary Princes. A.D. 973.
 - III. Hugh Lupus, with St. Anselm, founds the Abbey of St. Werburgh. A.D. 1093.
 - IV. Archbishop Baldwin preaches the crusade at Chester. A.D. 1189.
 - V. Prince Edward, First Royal Earl of Chester, and Princess Eleanor visit Chester. A.D. 1256.
 - VI. Richard II. is brought a Prisoner to Chester by Henry Bolingbroke. A.D. 1399.
 - VII. King James I. visits Chester. Introducing the Midsummer Revels. A.D. 1617.
 - VIII. Siege of Chester. Visit of King Charles. A.D. 1645.
- Grand Tableau and March Past.

It would be invidious to single out any single Episode, when all were so delightful; or any single performer, when all did their parts so well. It may be enough to say that the result seems to justify the accordance to the Pageant of 1910 of the title of the Pageant of 1610, and to call it "Chester's Triumph."

It was the hope of the Executive Committee that the Pageant would encourage a wider and more intelligent study of our past history, and a thankful

acknowledgment of all we owe in the present to what our ancestors have done. This hope was clearly expressed in the concluding performance, which ended with the singing of the well-known hymn, "O God, our help in ages past." It is hoped that many will be led to read the pages of history with greater interest, whilst they say in their hearts, in Rudyard Kipling's words:

"O God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

Whilst it seems natural that some short account of the Pageant should appear in the Journal, it is impossible not to mention here the loss sustained by the death of its Master (Mr. Hawtrey) just three weeks after it had taken place. As an old Etonian, and a graduate of Oxford University, he had the advantages of a classical training, which was of great service in many ways. This was shown not merely in the difficult task of editing the Episodes, but also in introducing some features of his own; as in the Introduction and the Grand Tableau at the end. In his instruction and drilling of the performers he showed consummate skill and admirable tact; and he won the friendship of all with whom he came in contact. All, whether spectators or performers, heartily recognized his services, and gave a ready response at the end of the Pageant to the call of "Chester" (the Hon. C. T. Parker) for three cheers for the Master. Little did any of those present realise how significant was the verse of the hymn they had just sung:

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day."

His death from heart-failure was tragically sudden. He had indeed not been well, and must have laboured at some disadvantage and cost to himself. Only a week before he died he wrote: "I have been very poorly indeed. The asthma from which I suffered during the Pageant has proved a stubborn foe, and is still keeping me but a poor thing."

At his funeral, on August 20th, the Mayor attended in his official capacity, to show the regret felt by the Executive Committee and the citizens generally at his death.

E. B.

We give the description of the various Episodes taken from the preliminary Handbook (published under the direction of the Master), which was issued as an advertisement of the Pageant, as it is well that the account should be preserved.

THE INTRODUCTION

The Pageant opens with a pretty and majestic introductory scene of an allegorical character. Chester, who may be described as King of the Revels, rides into the arena, his chief attendants representing four Gates, four Pinnacles, and four Walls. In a short speech, marked by graceful diction and dignified utterance, Chester describes the purposes of the Pageant and introduces the first two Episodes.

Among all the events for which Chester is famous, none appeals more to the imagination than the beautiful story of the Saxon King Edgar being rowed upon the Dee by eight tributary Princes. This naturally appears at first sight the very incident for a Pageant; but it has been found impossible to utilise the Dee itself. What, then, is to be done?

Where actual matter of fact is not available, there is nothing for it but to call upon imagination, and we find a piquant use is made of this difficulty in the Introduction. Chester, having his attention called to it, invokes the aid of the Goddess Dee, who comes in state, accompanied by water nymphs and fairies. How she overcomes the difficulty should not be told now. Suffice it to say, there is material for a fascinating tableau, and having seen it, we are ready to forgive this brief excursion from the Regions of History to the Realms of Fancy.

EPISODE I.

AGRICOLA RETURNS TO DEVA AFTER DEFEATING THE ORDOVICES, A.D. 78

Although Chester, anciently "Deva," was an important garrison town during the Roman occupation of Britain, and although the City possesses a rich store of remains of that period, no record has come down to us of any scene that lends itself to adequate spectacular display. By making the episode one of a general character, applicable to any town in these Islands at that time, a scene possessing much dramatic force has been constructed.

We are introduced to Julius Agricola, the great statesman and warrior, whose administration of this country forms the most brilliant epoch of the Roman occupation. He was a man profoundly skilled in the arts of peace and war. He strove to conciliate the native tribes by acts of kindness, and introduced among them many of the advantages of civilisation.

Agricola came to Deva at the close of a successful campaign in Wales. In the scene before us, he is engaged in business with his officers. A Briton steals up behind him, and Agricola turns only just in time to save himself from assassination. The native is seized by the angry soldiers, and we gather that the motive of the man's action is to avenge his bride, who had been flagrantly insulted

by a centurion. The centurion is under arrest, but the Briton mistrusts the honesty of Roman justice, where the life or at least the liberty of so important an officer is at stake, and only a native has been wronged.

Agricola, however, has the clemency to forgive the assault upon himself, and further vindicates the honour of his race by having the centurion brought to immediate trial, and, after conviction, sending him to death within the hour.

EPISODE II.

KING EDGAR ON HIS IMPERIAL PROGRESS, WITH QUEEN
ELFRIDA, RECEIVES THE HOMAGE OF TRIBUTARY
PRINCES, A.D. 973

With the visit of King Edgar to Chester is associated one of the prettiest and most romantic incidents in Chester history.

Two years before the close of his peaceful reign, he had a splendid coronation at Bath at the hands of the masterful Dunstan, who, in those days, was "the power behind the throne." Then, as King of the English and over-lord of many princes, Edgar came to Chester by sea, to receive the homage of those who held their titles under him. The ceremony in this City must have rivalled in brilliance and impressiveness even the crowning at Bath, by which it had been preceded. All the princes of the Isle of Albion came to render their homage and take their oaths of allegiance, and they themselves rowed Edgar in the Royal barge up the Dee to the Collegiate Church of St. John, where was witnessed a scene of splendour such as never had been known in these realms.

EPISODE III.

HUGH LUPUS, WITH ST. ANSELM, FOUNDS THE ABBEY
OF ST. WERBURGH, A.D. 1093

Hugh Lupus, the second Norman Earl of Chester, and ancestor of the present Duke of Westminster, came over

to England from Normandy with William the Conqueror, and was made responsible for holding Chester, then an important strategic position, against the Welsh.

When we are introduced to him in this Episode, Hugh is announcing to his barons and retainers his intention of establishing at Chester a Benedictine Abbot and Convent.

The great Anselm, friend of Hugh, and later, Archbishop, arrives from Bec in Normandy, having been summoned by the Earl during a dangerous illness of the latter. He offers advice and suggestions as to the building arrangements, and describes the rules of monastic life.

We hear Anselm enlarge upon the benefits of a monastery as a seat of learning, and centre of Christian influence, and his eloquence is such that his hearers vie with one another in offerings of themselves and of their substance. The Countess Ermentrude and the nobility and townsfolk join the Earl in gifts of land and tithes to the monastery. Richard, Anselm's Chaplain, who had accompanied his master from Bec, is nominated first Abbot.

EPISODE IV.

ARCHBISHOP BALDWIN PREACHES THE CRUSADE AT CHESTER, A.D. 1189

Maundy Thursday, the 14th April, 1189, was a stirring day in Chester. Archbishop Baldwin had traversed Wales on behalf of the Third Crusade, in which the unfortunate Richard, the Lion-Heart, took part. His Grace arrived at Chester from Basingwerk Abbey, near Holywell, at the head of a stately procession. With crucifix borne aloft and banner flying, marched the vast concourse of Welsh, who, fired by the Archbishop's eloquence, had flocked to his standard. At the High Cross, Baldwin appealed to Chester on behalf of the desecrated Jerusalem, and the appeal was surely not in vain.

We can imagine the dramatic scene which this Episode will present, as, animated by the prospect of adventure, or moved by the glamour of war, or impelled by Christian indignation against the unbeliever, the crowd of townsmen press forward to take the Crusader's vow, listening eagerly to the friends who encourage, but disregarding the entreaty of wife or sister or sweetheart, whose forebodings, alas, were many times too true.

EPISODE V.

PRINCE EDWARD, FIRST ROYAL EARL OF CHESTER, AND
PRINCESS ELEANOR VISIT CHESTER, A.D. 1256

Pageant week will be the actual anniversary of the first visit of Prince Edward to Chester. He was then a stalwart youth of 17, and recently had been appointed to the earldom by his father, Henry III.

The Prince, accompanied by his beloved Princess, Eleanor of Castile, was received at the Eastgate with great enthusiasm by the loyal citizens. He remained in the City three days, and received the homage and fealty of the Lords in his Earldom and of Llewellyn ap Gryffydd and other chieftains of North Wales. At the close of the ceremony, he set out on a tour of his domains and castles in Flintshire and the middle county (Perveddwlad) of North Wales.

EPISODE VI.

RICHARD II. IS BROUGHT A PRISONER TO CHESTER
BY HENRY BOLINGBROKE, A.D. 1399

Chester was bound up closely in the exciting events which ended in the deposition and death of Richard II. and the accession of Henry IV.

Richard had exiled Henry Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, in consequence of a quarrel between these noblemen. Henry went to France, and after the death of his father, landed in Yorkshire, being joined

quickly by a large force. Richard was in Ireland at the time, but on hearing the alarming news, he hastened to England and arrived at Conway, habited as a Friar.

Henry marched to Chester, of which he obtained possession by crafty representations of his purpose, employing in the negotiations Robert and John Legh. Both were Cheshire men, who had received special marks of Richard's favour. Henry entered the City on August 8th, being received in great state with a procession of all the religious orders. The next day, he treacherously beheaded Peter Legh, who, although a brother of Robert and John Legh, had remained loyal to Richard.

A fortnight later, the unhappy Richard arrived at Chester, the prisoner of Henry, who had so much "joy and satisfaction" that "with great difficulty could the thunder of heaven have been heard for the loud noise of their instruments, horns, and trumpets; insomuch that they made the seashore resound with them."

EPISODE VII.

KING JAMES I. VISITS CHESTER A.D. 1617 THE MIDSUMMER REVELS

The representation of the state visit to Chester of King James I., on August 23rd, 1617, affords a suitable opportunity for the introduction of the Midsummer Revels, which will be a unique feature of the Pageant. Nothing more quaint can be imagined than these old-time festivities, for which the ancient City Guilds chiefly were responsible. For instance, among the *Harleian MSS.* is an agreement between Sir Lawrence Smith, Mayor of Chester in 1540, and two artists, "for the annual painting of the city's four giants, one unicorn, one dromedarye, one luce, one camel, one asse, one dragon, six hobby-horses, and sixteen naked boys." The Revels date, at least, from 1498, but now have been long buried in oblivion.

King James, who was attended by noblemen, bishops, courtiers, and the gentry of the County, was received by the Mayor, the Sheriffs, the Sheriff's Peers, the Common Council, the Train Bands, and the Citizens. The Mayor presented His Majesty with a cup containing a hundred Jacobins of gold. The King offered his Worship a knight-hood, but the honour was declined.

His Majesty and retinue attended service in the Cathedral, and in the west aisle heard a Latin speech by a King's School boy.

After a sumptuous civic banquet in the Pentice, the King went on to Vale Royal.

EPISODE VIII.

SIEGE OF CHESTER AND VISIT OF KING CHARLES I.

A.D. 1645

The final episode brings us to an important phase of the Civil War. Throughout the deadly struggle between King and Parliament, Chester remained true to the Crown and suffered heavily for her loyalty.

Charles, accompanied by a brilliant train, entered the City on September 23rd, 1642, and was presented by the civic authorities with two hundred pounds for his military needs, while another one hundred pounds was given to the Prince. Exactly three years later, the King was in Chester again in sadder circumstances, the City being then in a state of siege. From the Phoenix Tower on the City Walls, Charles witnessed, with growing mortification and despair, the overthrow of his last field force at Rowton Moor. On the following day he intimated to Lord Byron, the commander of the City Forces, that unless they were relieved, he might negotiate at the end of eight days the best procurable terms of surrender. Byron's answer accorded with his loyal, fearless, and determined character. Amid sorrowful prayers and blessings the King then left Chester.

The Chester Garrison made a heroic and noble defence and capitulated, not at the end of eight days, when, according to the King himself, a justifiable surrender might have been made, but twenty weeks beyond that time, namely, on February 3rd, 1646.

THE TABLEAU

At the end of the eighth Episode there will be a magnificent massing of all the performers taking part in the Pageant. From every direction the various Episodes will march on simultaneously and take up their position in front of the Grand Stand. The brilliant colours of the dresses and banners, and the rapid but well-organised movements of the performers, will provide a spectacle that should make a worthy Finale to a noble Pageant.

