THE DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY MACE

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THE design and history of university maces is rather an obscure subject, since no comprehensive study has been made of their origin or evolution. Their similarity to civic and ecclesiastical maces is interesting, in that all would appear to have been derived from the military mace, which later came to symbolize regal authority. Whence it might seem that they were varied expressions of that great movement toward local self-government that has characterized British history since the days of Magna Carta.

The succession of authority as expressed in the general pattern is perhaps seen in the difference between English and Scottish university maces. The former clearly derive from the kingly war mace and closely resemble the earlier examples of the civic mace, whereas Scottish university maces, whose heads are highly ornate, are "tours de force" of Gothic architecture.

It has been suggested that the mace as an ensign of authority had a Roman origin, and was comparable to the praetorian fasces. There is, however, no evidence of the continuity of this Roman custom in Britain, such as exists in other European countries. Indeed no municipal insignia such as the mace appear to have been in use in Britain prior to the 13th century, even though the civic mace was a natural development of an extremely ancient weapon.

In order to understand the significance of a mace it is necessary to study both the civic and war mace, and return to the period of the Norman Conquest, when the latter was a favoured weapon of offence. For example William the Conqueror carried a mace, as did his brother Bishop Odo of Bayeux, who is so depicted on the tapestry of that name. Medieval bishops thus conformed with the canonical law that forbade the shedding of blood and one writer has seen fit to refer to these brothers as a pair of "nutcrackers"! Again it will be recalled that maces were used by both Saracen and Christian at the time of the Crusades, which brings us to the period when the civic mace first appeared in Britain.

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During the 13th century municipal and borough officers were appointed by the king. These local representatives were accordingly attended by servants or serjeants who carried some emblem of authority. This emblem, which was at first a mere wand or stave was later bound with metal ferules or replaced by a weapon of iron since the serjeants' duties included the apprehension of offenders as well as attendance at the courts.

Such serjeants existed in London as early as 1252, and the right to appoint serjeants-at-mace, while apparently prescriptive in the case of the older towns and cities, later became a privilege conferred solely by royal charter or letters patent.

The maces used by the serjeants of a mayor or bailiff were now (13th-15th century) probably patterned on those carried by the king's serjeants-at-arms. These last were a royal bodyguard who protected the sovereign on all occasions and conveyed his messages and orders to local officials. First called serjeants-a-masses, because of their iron or latten (brass) maces, their institution is credited to Philip Augustus (1180-1223) of France. Fearful of assassination, he is said to have formed such a bodyguard on his desertion from the Crusades. Richard I of England also was attended by a similar body of officers.

Illuminated manuscripts of these times reveal that the maces carried by the serjeants of the royal household were actual war maces made of either iron or steel and ornamented with gold of silver as fitting tokens of royal authority. Apart from serving as weapons they were deemed sufficient authority for the arrest of traitors or court offenders.

The war mace in its simplest form was a short formidable weapon of iron or latten, capable of rending the strongest armour. It had a shaft surmounted by a flanged, knobbed or spiked head, and the lower end or button bore a thong for encircling the wrist. Earlier civic maces, being apparently copies of those borne by the royal serjeants-at-mace, were accordingly of this character. Since war maces ranged between fourteen and twenty-four inches in length, the first civic maces are known as small maces in contradistinction to the great or mayoral maces of a later period.

An interesting feature that served to distinguish the mace as carried by municipal or royal officers as an executive emblem, and no mere weapon, and that eventually completely dominated and determined its form was the button. This lower end of the

mace bore the royal or other arms on an enamelled or engraved shield as an outward symbol of vested authority.

With the passage of time increasing emphasis was placed on the royal arms and their enrichment caused a coronet to be added to the button, which now assumed an equal value with the flanged head. Either end could therefore be carried uppermost, according to circumstance, and this was apparently the custom for a period.

Serjeants' maces having thus become increasingly ornate objects, and weapons merely by tradition, it was only natural that the mace should now be reversed and borne button uppermost in order to display the royal cresting.

This reversal presumably took place during the early Tudor period, for the flanged head was still superior during the reign of Richard III, while maces surmounted with an open crown were in use in the time of Henry VIII. Such maces were carried before the last named king on the occasion of the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

The consequent transference of the flanged head to the region of the handle or grip not only rendered the mace obsolete as a weapon but caused the flanges to be reduced to ornamental scrolls or brackets unlikely to interfere with the bearers' dress.

Ceremonial appearance now called for a longer shafted mace and a larger more elaborate head emblematical of royal authority. These great maces, as they are generally called, were a development of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and were characterized by a heavy head that usually took the form of a large open crown. This last was counterbalanced to some small extent by the introduction of ornamental knops at intervals along the shaft and an ornamental foot. Royal maces such as these form part of the English regalia to be seen in the Tower of London, and were carried at coronations by the serjeants-at-arms.

Civic and royal maces have henceforward much in common since a great or mayoral mace now superseded the small civic maces, possibly in imitation of royal practice. Many city maces in England and Scotland have therefore a large crowned head, as does the mace of the House of Commons. Royal charter, however, decreed the lowering or reversal of these maces in the presence of royalty. As regards the speaker of the House of Commons, it should be borne in mind that the

mace symbolizes his authority and is carried before him by a serjeant-at-arms both on entering and leaving the House.

With the coming of the Commonwealth there was an attempt to dispense with anything that savoured of regality, with the result that not many great maces survived this period.

The Oxford university maces or bedel's staves, which date from the second half of the sixteenth century, somehow escaped destruction during the Commonwealth, as did those of Cambridge university, which were apparently made early in the seventeenth century. These staves, which were of silver or silver gilt and about four feet odd in length, were in the case of the former institution the staves of the particular faculties. Unfortunately it has not been possible to discover what factors determined their origin, although English university maces, as already stated, are believed to derive from the war mace.

In passing it is interesting to note that a beadle, or bedel, was originally a subordinate parochial official who served as court messenger or summoner and accordingly carried a stave or mace as a badge of office. Mediaeval universities also retained such officials, who exercised various executive and ceremonial functions.

The fine maces belonging to the ancient Scottish universities of St. Andrews and Glasgow reflect Scotland's religious interest and her auld alliance with France, for all, with one exception, were made in Paris and are characterized by elaborate heads of towering Gothic architectural devices. Executed during the fifteenth century, they are magnificent examples of mediseval goldsmiths' work and are graceful objects ranging from about four to five feet in length.

The purpose of these "silver staffis", as they were formerly called, is indicated in the pre-Reformation inventories of St Salvator's College at St. Andrews, which read: "ane beddell wand silver and ourgilt . . ." and "twa othir beddele wandis of silver pertening to the Universite, ane for the Faculty of Art, and the tother for the Facult e of Canoun".

This old university by the North Sea has recently commissioned a fourth mace, whose ornamental features are based on medical motifs, since it is intended for the Faculty of Medicine. Incidentally Aberdeen university possesses a seventeenth century mace of Scottish origin, while Edinburgh is credited with one prior to that period.

Turning then to the American scene, it is not surprising to find, in view of their early historical background, that both Virginia and South Carolina possess maces of British pattern dating from the mid-eighteenth century.

Dalhousie University has recently decided that it should have a mace, which is most fitting considering that it ranks among the oldest seats of learning in Canada, and should accordingly have an emblem proper to its dignity, authority, and the heraldic devices which it bears by virtue of its titled founder and the royal act signed at his hand.

The Dalhousie University mace has been designed by the author to relate symbolically as the eye ascends its length the proud maritime tradition of the seagirt provinces and the historical heritage of the university that serves them. It is being carved in oak and enriched with silver and enamel, and will be four and a half feet in length.

The lower end, or what is technically known as the button, is adorned with silver fish in recognition of the source of our economy. It may be noted that the fish is also an early symbol of Christianity. Above this is a carved circular scene depicting a sea nymph calling across the waves toward the setting sun in representation of the impulse that led navigators to sail westward to our shores.

The roots put down by the early settlers, and the tall trees that first met their gaze are formally suggested by a simple grooved pattern extending the entire length of the shaft.

The head of the mace first bears the distinctive leaf of the national emblem, the maple. Set above this is a carved circlet of mayflowers, simultaneously symbolizing the province and the flowering of the new civilization therein which led to the establishment of the university.

Four robed mediaeval scholars facing the main compass points represent the university faculties and their old world heritage. Each figure bears a silver enamelled shield emblazoned with either the arms of the University or the province of Nova Scotia. Alternating with these figures are the rose, thistle, fleur-de-lys, and shamrock, depicting the major racial groups of our country.

The uppermost part of the mace head is surmounted by a five-rayed Scottish earl's coronet in recognition of the University founder, the 9th Earl of Dalhousie. This part of the mace will incorporate some oak kindly presented by and felled on the estate of the present Earl.

Gracing the cap of the coronet and therefore set above all is a silver Celtic cross surrounded by the university motto "Ora et Labora". This type of early cross was chosen as one most befitting a non-denominational institution with Scottish affiliations.

In conclusion, it will be seen that the mace in its general design conforms both in pattern and material to historic and academic precedent, while maintaining an originality that is essentially linked with the story of Dalhousie University.

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