

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 11th September 2008

Mayors I have known (but not necessarily liked) over four centuries –
Jeremy Gibson

This talk was part of our Society's contribution towards celebrations of the former borough's fourth centenary of the granting of our second charter, whereby we were led by a Mayor rather than a Bailiff. The emphasis was mainly on the pre-1835 unreformed Corporation, particularly the turbulent Tudor and Stuart times, culled from Jeremy's research over fifty years, much published in *C&CH*.

Thursday 9th October 2008

New Robes or Old Hat – the past and prospects of the House of Lords –
Sir Paul Hayter KCB

This was a lecture that thoroughly deserved the huge audience, in excess of 70. Paul Hayter began by outlining the history of the evolution of the House of Lords from Saxon days of councils known as Witan that were attended by religious leaders, magnates and the king's own advisors.

Our speaker then reflected wisely and logically on the very diverse nature of the House of Lords. Almost surprisingly and before about 1958 there were fewer Lords in the House than out of it. It was an all male preserve, solidly Conservative and rarely had more than a hundred seats filled. Since that time there has been much revitalisation, all the leading parties are well represented as are Crossbenchers and above all daily attendance has shot up. The House has come a long way since the pre-Reformation mix of nobles, bishops and abbots. Whatever the variation of composition with time, the trend, especially since 1850, has been towards a wider representation of interests and a more business-like institution – more like the Commons.

Acts of Parliament in 1911 and 1949 settled the power of the House of Lords in relation to that of the House of Commons, setting out the delaying power of the Lords. Evidence of this within the earlier Act was that Money Bills approved by the Commons became law if not passed without amendment by the Lords within one month. The effect of the 1949 Act was to reduce the delaying power embodied in the 1911 legislation in respect of Public Bills other than Money Bills.

Peerage Acts of 1958 and 1963 permitted the creation of Life Peers of either sex who were joined under the second act by hereditary peeresses and all Scottish peers. Importantly this second Peerage Act also allowed hereditary peerages to be disclaimed for life. In the decades that followed the Chamber