

Ceremonial proclamation of the historic St Ethelbert's Mayfair



Opening ceremony of the Hereford May Fair in 1975



Opening ceremony of Hereford May Fair, 1968

Ceremonial proclamation of the historic St Ethelbert's May Fair

Tuesday 6th May 2025

Members of the Herefordshire Council, Hereford City Council, the representatives of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, South Wales and Northern Ireland Section and Officials will assemble in the Cathedral Close (Broad Street end). They are asked to be in their places by 3.30pm.

At 3.45pm The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Hereford, Councillor Kevin Tillett accompanied by his Consort, Junior Mayor and the Chairperson of Herefordshire Council, Councillor Roger Phillips will be escorted by the Town Clerk of Hereford City Council and will arrive in the Cathedral Close from the Town Hall. On the trailer will be carried 12½ bushels of best wheat, the measure and other items needed for the ceremony.

On arrival in the Cathedral Close, members of the Showmen's Guild will join the Civic Party.

THE CEREMONY

The Town Cryer will say: “Pray silence for the City Marshal.”

The City Marshal will say:

“Pray silence for the Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Kevin Tillett.”

The Mayor will then read the following which is a short account of the May Fair:

“The Fair was founded by the Charter of King Henry I to Richard de Capella, Bishop of Hereford, granting him the right to hold a three day fair every May. The Fair was by later grant, extended to nine days. In ancient times the Fair was proclaimed annually by the Bishop’s Bailiff, accompanied by a posse of horsemen and on the last day of the Fair the Mayor demanded of the Bailiff the cessation of the Fair, as well as the remission of all unsettled complaints at the Mayor’s Court. At least as early as the twelfth century the Bishop allotted to the Canons a tenth part of the profits of the Fair.

There is ample evidence that through the centuries that there were ongoing conflicts between the Bishop and the Mayor. The Bishop’s control continued until 1838 when an Act of Parliament was passed restricting the Fair to just two days and transferring all the Bishop’s rights in the Fair to the Hereford Corporation, but reserving as compensation to the Bishop 12½ bushels of best wheat or its equivalent money value. This corn rent was paid each year until recently, but even though the annual liability has now been replaced by a payment in money, we Councillors and citizens

of this ancient City still wish to make the traditional payment of 12½ bushels of best wheat. This act serves both as a remembrance of ancient custom and also as an earnest expression of our heartfelt desire that peaceful relations should always exist between the local authority and the Bishop and Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Ethelbert King and Martyr”.

The City Marshal will then announce The Bishop, the Right Reverend Richard Jackson.

The Bishop will say:

“Mister Mayor. Before you declare and proclaim this Fair, let me tell you, as was done by Bishop Bennett in 1608, that I know your Charter and every branch of it. Our records say that you must pay me for the rights of this Fair 12½ bushel measures of the best wheat”.

The Mayor will say:

“My dear Bishop. We acknowledge the debt. Our ancient quarrels are forgotten and I will ask the Chairperson of Herefordshire Council to hand you the measure of best wheat”.

The Bishop will say:

“Mister Mayor. Before accepting payment I require you to prove to me that proper quantity and good measure is being offered”.

(The Mayor will agree to this request and will request the Chairperson of Herefordshire Council check the contents of one of the sacks. The Chairperson of Herefordshire Council will empty the contents of the sack into a bushel measure, which will be provided, and The Bishop will observe that the measure is full.)

The Bishop will say:

“Mister Mayor. I am satisfied that this is a proper measure and that it is of the best wheat. I am prepared to accept your word that each of the other sacks contain the correct amount”.

The Mayor will say:

“My dear Bishop, our debts are paid. The lawful dues of the Fair have been handed over. I now ask you to publicly acknowledge receipt thereof”.

The Bishop will then make his own short speech of acknowledgement and then ask God’s blessing on the Fair.

The City Marshal will announce the Chairperson of Herefordshire Council.

The Chairperson of Herefordshire Council will say:

“Mister Mayor, now that the lawful dues of the Fair have been handed over and receipt thereof duly acknowledged, it is proper for you to proclaim this Statute Fair”.

The Mayor will then read the Proclamation.

“I, Councillor Kevin Tillett, Mayor of this City of Hereford and the liberties thereof, do by this present proclamation publish and declare that this present Fair, commonly called St Ethelbert Fair or the May Fair, doth begin at four o’clock in the afternoon of this 6th day of May and is to be held and continued for the space of two days next following, during which time I hereby signify that it shall and may be lawful for all persons to come and repair unto the said Fair which is to be kept and held within certain streets in Hereford; they paying toll at the respective gates to the City.

And all persons are strictly charged and commanded to leave their arms or weapons within their inns or lodgings during the said Fair to prevent the disturbance of the King's Peace. All persons that erect or make booths or standings within the said streets shall and are hereby required to pull them down at the end of the said Fair and to cause the soil to be carried away for the cleaning of the said streets upon pain and penalty thereon". "GOD SAVE THE KING"

The Chairperson of Herefordshire Council will say:

"Mister Mayor, the representative of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain will speak on behalf of the Showmen".

The Chairperson of the Showmen's Guild will then addresses the gathering.

The Bishop will ring the Fair bells to officially signify the opening of the May Fair.



Opening ceremony of the Hereford May Fair, 1949



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