



*1 – Lord Chancellor of Ireland's purse from the reign of George V  
(courtesy Bank of Ireland)*

# Trappings of sovereignty: the accoutrements of the Lords Chancellor of Ireland

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THE LORD CHANCELLORSHIP OF IRELAND, AN OFFICE NOW EXTINCT, WAS ONE OF legal and political importance. The post was established under British rule when, after the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 and the subsequent English occupation, an English legal system gradually superseded the Irish Brehon laws.<sup>1</sup> As chief law officer, the Chancellor presided as supreme judge in the Court of Chancery, and in addition was chairman of the Irish House of Lords. With the title of Lord Justice, he frequently acted as temporary governor of Ireland when the chief governor (Lord Lieutenant) was absent from Dublin. In 1800, following the Act of Union, the Irish House of Lords was disbanded. The office of Lord Chancellor continued, but his official functions thereafter were mainly concerned with legal matters. Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the authority vested in the Lord Chancellor passed to the Chief Justice.<sup>2</sup> An array of accoutrements associated with the office – a Great Seal and the purse in which it was carried, a mace and an official gown – were similar to those held by the Lord Chancellor of England. Ceremonial aspects of the office were also duplicated in both countries.

The Great Seal of Ireland was a verification of royal authority entrusted to the Lord Chancellor by the monarch. Royal approval was also acknowledged by the royal arms, which were central to the ornamentation of the richly embroidered purse. The gilded mace accompanied the Chancellor when he presided in the House of Lords or the Court of Chancery. A slender white wand, a signifier of augmented power, was carried before a chancellor when, as Lord Chief Steward, he presided as supreme judge in the Irish House of Lords at trials of peers.<sup>3</sup> The white rod was ceremoniously broken by the Clerk of the Parliaments at the close of the trial.<sup>4</sup> The Chancellor's black robe trimmed with gold lace also proclaimed his jurisdiction.

Hilary Jenkinson maintained that the Great Seal of Ireland was 'perhaps the most important and almost certainly the earliest of a number of Deputed or Department seals' which extended the authority of the Great Seal of England.<sup>5</sup>

Jenkinson also believed that the seal ‘must have been in existence in 1227 when what is probably the earliest dateable copy of the *Registrum Omnium Brevium* was sent over to Dublin as a model for the procedure of an Irish Chancery’.<sup>6</sup>

Available information indicates that the Great Seal of Ireland was made in England and was, with some minor differences, a replica of the Great Seal of England. The term ‘Great Seal’ refers to the matrix, which consists of two circular open boxes, about six inches in diameter, made of precious metal, the inner bases of which were engraved with appropriate designs. The traditional design for Great Seals showed the sovereign enthroned on the obverse, and an equestrian image of the monarch on the reverse, but variations occurred in the artists’ depictions of the themes. Gold and silver have been used to make the matrices. The present English seal consists of an alloy, mostly silver.<sup>7</sup>

Except when the royal arms are changed, or as in the cases of Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, whose reigns were particularly long ones, it is customary to make only one Great Seal during a reign. The Great Seal of Ireland of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, issued in 1801 in the aftermath of the Act of Union, was also an exception to that custom.<sup>8</sup>

The making of the Great Seals and other State seals, which had been ‘jobbed out to all and sundry’, were regularly cut by the mint engravers from 1551.<sup>9</sup> Mint engravers were otherwise chiefly occupied making designs for coins. Designing and engraving a Great Seal was a coveted commission for artists of repute, among whom was Isaac Oliver, who devised the Great Seal of Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>10</sup> Engravers of seals were originally paid a salary, but from 1705 the salary was abandoned and fees were paid for the production of individual seals. The fee of £2,500 paid to one engraver for seals of solid silver appears exorbitant until it is understood that he would not be needed again until a new sovereign came to the throne.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Simon (c.1620-1665) was responsible for the execution of a larger number of Great Seals than any other engraver.<sup>12</sup> As chief engraver of the mint he designed seals for Charles I and Oliver Cromwell, and after the Restoration he engraved the Great Seals of Ireland and England for Charles II. Simon’s remuneration varied with the change of ruler. Cromwell paid him £43 6s 8d, but Charles II increased his salary to £50, and the artist was otherwise paid for his individual designs.<sup>13</sup> Seal patterns, designed for the three rulers by Simon, are preserved in a book of engravings by George Vertue, published in 1753.<sup>14</sup> Vertue noted that £150 was Simon’s fee for the Great Seal which he had engraved for Charles II.<sup>15</sup>

Simon’s design for the obverse of Charles II’s Great Seal of Ireland is known only from wax impressions of the seal (Plate 2). King Charles, wearing a crown, is shown enthroned under a circular curtained baldachin. The floor appears to be tiled, and the background shows a diaper pattern with alternating roses and harps in cir-

2 – *Impression of the obverse of the Great Seal of Ireland of Charles II (pl. xcii in ARCHÆOLOGIA, lxxxv, 1935)*



cles. The throne is elaborately decorated with a sunburst at the top. The royal arms appear on a shield at the centre of the sunburst, which is flanked by two heads on scrolls. The armrests are supported by eagles on carved plinths. The monarch holds a sceptre in his right hand, and an orb surmounted by a cross in his left hand. His feet rest on a cushion laid on a circular carpet. A large, crowned rose is to the right of the King, and on his left there is a crowned harp with angelic fore-pillar. Inside the carved border, an inscription proclaims the King's dominion over England, Ireland and France.

Among Vertue's engravings of Simon's works are images of the reverses of Charles II's Great Seals of Ireland and England (Plates 3, 4). Differences between the images of the King on the two seals suggest an exercise in propaganda. A triumphant, confident monarch is presented on the English seal (Plate 4). Facing right, his windswept locks are uncovered and he wears a billowing cloak over his suit of armour. His expression is benign. The large, brawny, caparisoned horse appears to be smiling, and its mane and tail are carefully groomed.

On the Great Seal of Ireland, the monarch wears a helmet and is accompanied by a running hound (Plate 3). His rigid posture and vigilant expression suggest that he is prepared for conflict. The slightly built mount is bare except for the saddle. Its mane is untidy and its facial expression is fearful. On both Great Seals, King Charles' sword is drawn. It is, however, unaggressively held in a horizontal position



3 – George Vertue (1684-1756), engraving of the reverse of the Great Seal of Ireland of Charles II, from a design by Thomas Simon (1620-1665)  
(courtesy National Library of Ireland)



4 – George Vertue (1684-1756), engraving of the reverse of the Great Seal of England of Charles II, from a design by Thomas Simon (1620-1665)  
(courtesy National Library of Ireland)

on the English seal; on the Great Seal of Ireland the sword is raised in an alert, defensive gesture. The large mass of Westminster Abbey dominates a densely structured metropolis of large buildings and numerous spires in a scene of London as the background of the English seal. The spire of St Patrick's and the towers of Christ Church can be identified among the sparse array of buildings, arranged around a harbour, in the artist's impression of Dublin on the Irish seal. Some significance may be attached to the numerous ships in Dublin's harbour; there is only one light sailing craft and a few small rowboats in the London scene. Perhaps it is order and tranquillity, contrasted with the bustle and energy which must be expended to impose discipline on the unruly Irish tribes.

There is a crowned harp on the right-hand side of the mounted monarch on the reverse of the Great Seal of Ireland. Richard Hayward states that as a heraldic form representing Ireland, the harp was introduced in the reign of Henry VIII. It replaced 'three crowns in pale' which King Henry deemed inappropriate because it 'looked like a papal tiara'.<sup>16</sup> The harp became an element of the design of the Irish seal in the Elizabethan era, and with Charles I the device assumed the angelic form.<sup>17</sup>

A Great Seal of Ireland, which was in use in the reign of King Edward VII, is in the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks (Plates 5, 6). King Edward's reign extended from 1901 to 1910, during which time two Lords Chancellor, Edward Gibson (Ch. 1895-1905) and Samuel Walker (Ch. 1905-11) held the office in Ireland. Allan Wyon was at that time the engraver of Royal Seals.<sup>18</sup>

A procedure of affixing impressions of the Great Seal to documents took place in chancery with the Chancellor attended by various officers of his department, including a chaffwax and a sealer.<sup>19</sup> Impressions were made by compressing a substance, usually melted wax, between the two parts of the matrix. The chaffwax prepared the wax, and depending on the patent to be confirmed, the wax was coloured green or red.<sup>20</sup> A cord or lace for attachment was laid between the two parts, the composition of which was of some significance (Plate 7):

In the reign of Anne and perhaps earlier, the seals of Letters patent conferring titles of honour in Ireland were suspended by strings of a more costly character. A duke, a marquis or an Earl, then paid £2. 13. 4d. for gold strings, a viscount paid £2. for gold and silver strings, a baron paid £1. 6s for silver strings and a baronet paid 13s. 4d for strings of silk and silver.<sup>21</sup>

The sealer, using a variety of methods, attached the seal to the document.<sup>22</sup>

The posts of chaffwax and sealer had significant financial benefits. In addi-

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5, 6 – *Obverse and reverse of the Great Seal of Ireland of Edward VII*

(courtesy National Museum of Ireland)







7 – Impression of the reverse of the Great Seal of Ireland of Charles II,  
with intact attachment cord (courtesy Public Records Office, Kew)

tion to his salary, a chaffwax was paid fees for fuel and oil for tempering the wax. He also had board and travelling allowances. In 1833 it was estimated that an English chaffwax earned £1,272 15s 5d.<sup>23</sup> A sealer's salary for attaching seals was also augmented by sundry levies. He had an allowance for the 'baggs, stamell cloth and towells' used to protect the seal within the Chancellor's purse.<sup>24</sup> He was also paid 'for the carriage, clensing, mending and setting up in court, the instruments used for sealing', and a 'riding charge' of £15 for 'following the Great Seal into the

country'.<sup>25</sup> His guaranteed emoluments were such that the sealer eventually ceased to officiate in person, and his duties were passed to a deputy, paid partly by him, whose salary was augmented by gratuities.<sup>26</sup>

In former times, when a new seal was made, the old one was broken into several pieces. It is now the custom to invalidate the seal by defacing it in a ritual called 'damasking', which renders it useless by being tapped with a special hammer, the head of which is indented.<sup>27</sup> The defaced matrix, or one half of it, is usually presented to the Lord Chancellor by the monarch.<sup>28</sup> The Great Seal of Ireland, given into the custody of Chancellor Lord Thomas Wyndham (Ch. 1726-39), was still in his possession at his death, and was mentioned as a bequest in his will.<sup>29</sup> A large piece of plate 'on which the impression of the Great Seal of Ireland under King George the first is engraven' is also mentioned in the will. The plate may be an example of 'seal ware', a term used in the silver business to describe articles made from defaced Great Seals. Each object made from an obsolete seal was usually engraved with the obverse and reverse of the obsolete seal.<sup>30</sup> The Loftus Cup, a standing cup, was made from the Great Seal of Ireland held by Adam Loftus (Ch. 1581-1606), who was in office during the reign of Elizabeth I (Plate 8).<sup>31</sup> A second seal issued to Loftus was, after the death of Elizabeth in 1603, also made into a cup (Plate 9).<sup>32</sup>

The Great Seal held by Sir Richard Cox (Ch. 1703-7) was transformed into a monteith – a bowl, usually silver, in which glasses are hung to cool from a scalloped rim. A monteith is also commonly used as a punch bowl. In a diary he compiled during his term of office, Chancellor Cox gave the following account of his reception of the old seal and its transformation:

New Seales being sent over the old Great Seale and the Seale of the Common Pleas belonged to me, the former being 100 and the latter 25 ounces of plate, I made both into a handsome Monteth with the Duke of Ormond's arms on one side, and my own on the other, and desire that it, together with the afore-said box may be preserved in my family as long as may be.<sup>33</sup>

The Cox monteith is currently in the Chicago Museum of Fine Arts. A Latin inscription on the underside of the monteith identifies its origin as a Great Seal of Ireland:

*Factus ex magnum siligo illustrissimo Iacobo Duce Ormondia locum terreste & Richard Cox milite sumo cancellario Hibernia Anno serenissima Anna Regina Secundo 1703.*

Because wax impressions of seals are brittle and therefore easily broken, documents with intact impressions attached are comparatively rare. In 1935 Jenkinson listed forty existing examples of impressions of the Great Seal of Ireland, stating that there



8 – *The Loftus Cup (Elizabeth I)*  
(courtesy Ulster Museum)

were some good specimens, but regretting the fact that many, alas, were the merest fragments.<sup>34</sup> Efforts were made to counteract this vulnerability by protecting the seal impression in a bag of silk, wool or canvas, or a flat circular box of wood.<sup>35</sup>

Four documents with perfect wax impressions of the Great Seal of Ireland attached have recently been located, one of which, a document of King George III, is reproduced here (Plate 11).<sup>36</sup> These documents are illuminated in the manner of Books of Hours, with miniature paintings in gold and bright colours, and decorative, hand-written script. Overhead, the reigning sovereign's name is inscribed with elaborated capital letters, and a portrait of the king is contained in the initial letter of his forename. The arms of dignitaries holding royal appointments are on either side, and borders are ornamented with floral or leaf designs. On the document of King George III, heraldic devices above the King's title show the royal arms surrounded by banners at the centre. To the right of the arms there is an English rose. Scotland's emblematic symbol, a thistle, is entwined with the rose. Ireland is symbolically represented by a harp in an ornamental frame on the left. On the same document the arms of Chancellor Bowes (Ch. 1757-67) are seen centre-left, and a tribute to him from the King is in the text.<sup>37</sup>

As already stated, the matrix of the Great Seal was traditionally carried

in a special purse. If its purpose was unknown the purse might appear to be a superior type of cushion, but the long holding strap identifies its true function. Extant examples of chancellors' purses are rare, but three purses have been located in Ireland (Plates 1, 10).<sup>38</sup> A fourth purse, issued during the tenure of Sir Ignatius O'Brien (Ch. 1913-18), is presently in a private collection in England.

There appears to be no published history relating to the Irish chancellors' purses, but the existing examples and those seen in portraits and on memorials confirm that they are in most aspects of design similar to English chancellors' purses (Plates 12, 13).<sup>39</sup> A common origin is therefore suggested. The earliest record of an English chancellor's purse is a drawing in the margin of a memorandum relating to the seal in an exchequer roll of 1298.<sup>40</sup> The transformation to an elaborately ornamented bag is attributed to Cardinal Wolsey.<sup>41</sup> Wolsey, who was renowned for his love of display, was appointed Lord Chancellor of England by Henry VIII in 1515.

Maxwell-Lyte gives an account of the evolution of the Chancellor's purse.<sup>42</sup> He documents the alteration of the cost of its production from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, and the frequency of its renewal. He also identifies some of the materials used in the manufacture of the purses, and mentions people who were employed in their embellishment. The



9 – *The Loftus Cup (James I)*  
(courtesy Christie's, London)



10 – Lord Chancellor of Ireland’s purse from the reign of Queen Victoria  
 (courtesy Genealogical Office, Dublin)

purse was originally a simple white or red bag of cloth or leather, and was expected to be in use for a considerable time. In 1501, 6s 8d was charged for repairing a purse. The alteration in the size and appearance of the purse resulted in an escalation of the cost of its production. In 1353 the purse cost 6s and in 1415 it was 16s 8d. The price for embroidery, tassels and a strap was £20 5s 8d in 1551. By 1699 the cost had risen to £55, and in 1751 it was £58. Purses delivered in December 1800 and June 1801 each cost £70. The proximity of the two deliveries is likely to be associated with the evolution of Great Britain to the United Kingdom and a con-



11 – Document of George III with seal-impression of the Great Seal of Ireland of George III  
(Centre for Kentish Studies, courtesy Lord Brabourne)

sequent alteration in the design of the royal arms. In 1873 the price of the purse was reduced to £65.

Woollen cloth, velvet and satin were used in the manufacture of the purses. In 1551 the materials consisted of sixteen lengths of green woollen cloth, costing eight shillings a length. Smaller lengths of crimson velvet and satin were priced at 49s 8d and 28s 8d. The extant examples and numerous versions in portraits of Lords Chancellor show that the bodies of the purses were most commonly made of red cloth. The black velvet used in the manufacture of a purse used by a Lord

Chancellor of Ireland is exceptional (Plate 1).

Men and women were employed to embroider the purses. Jon Parr, appointed in 1581, was Queen Elizabeth I's embroiderer.<sup>43</sup> Continuing his account of the purse, Maxwell-Lyte noted a purse embroidered by Roger Nelham in 1652, and that Francis Greene was responsible for the embroidery on a purse provided in 1751. The two purses already noted as made in the early eighteenth century were delivered by Elizabeth Berry.

In 1652 a purse of crimson velvet was 'ingrained with the arms of the Commonwealth of England at large'.<sup>44</sup> The royal arms continued to be the principal decorative element of the purses, with the reigning monarch identified by his or her initials on either side of the crown which surmounts the arms. An English rose, a thistle for Scotland and some shamrocks for Ireland are part of the design. The arms are framed by a border, the decoration of which includes floral and leaf designs, with winged putti at the corners. On the extant Irish purses, putti, in the centres of the upper and lower borders, are flanked by overflowing cornucopias. Significantly, the symbol at the centre of one or both of the laterals is replaced with a harp on a cushion. The recurrence of this device on purses in portraits of Lords Chancellor of Ireland and on their memorial monuments suggests that it was the distinguishing native symbol (Plates 12, 13).<sup>45</sup>

Embellishment of the purses accorded them some significance in the history of the decorative arts. A purse recently acquired by the British Museum is described as 'one of the most exciting embroideries to be acquired' in recent years.<sup>46</sup> A variety of threads, stitches and appliqué ornaments were used in the process of decoration. In 1652 a purse for the Great Seal of England was embroidered 'with the best double refined gold and silver upon a rich crimson velvet'.<sup>47</sup>

Sequins arranged in circular patterns on a net of chevrons executed in couching, are on the backgrounds of extant Irish purses (Plates 1, 10). Couching is a technique whereby threads or cord are fastened down with stitches made by another thread. Sections of the floral ornaments and the hair of the putti consist of layers of needleweaving, using gold thread. Gold thread is also employed in the formation of the harps. The heads, cornucopias, floral ornaments and the cushions containing the harps are raised to high relief by stump work (padding). Stump work is also used to create the rampant supporters of the royal arms – a crowned lion and a unicorn. The unicorn is bound around its body and one hind leg with an applied length of gold chain. The crown is a mass of crumpled velvet. Pieces of green satin are applied to create shamrocks. Mottoes are stitched in gold thread on an oval of dark material which surrounds the royal crest and on a ribbon made of applied blue satin, woven through the lower section of the arms. The large tassels hanging from the ends of the holding strap are made of gold and coloured threads. The heads of the tassels are



12 – William Dickinson (1746-1823), engraving after Wyndham Madden (fl.1766-75) of James Hewitt, Viscount Lifford, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, 1767-89 (courtesy NGI)

bound with nets made of gold wire.

At sometime in the sixteenth century, a custom evolved whereby a new purse was provided every year.<sup>48</sup> The old purse then became the property of the Chancellor, and curtains, chair covers and fire screens were made from discarded purse, by the wives of chancellors who held office for several years.<sup>49</sup> The custom of a yearly renewal of the purse was discontinued in 1872 after the death of an old lady who had arranged their production, and it was then expected to last for three years.<sup>50</sup>

A business card of Lambert Brown & Clowes (Plate 14), attached to an Irish





13 – John Van Nost (c.1712-80), memorial to John, Lord Bowes, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, 1757-67 (detail)

(courtesy Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin)

opposite

14 – Business card found in a Lord Chancellor of Ireland’s purse

(courtesy Genealogical Office, Dublin)

chancellor’s purse in the Genealogical Office, Dublin, suggests that the purse may have been made in Ireland.<sup>51</sup> The business is described as ‘Gold Lace Manufacturers and Embroidery and Naval Military Outfitters, Cap Makers to the Royal Western Yacht Club of Ireland’. Lambert Brown & Clowes had addresses at 27 Dame Street, Dublin, and 236 Regent Street, London, but the firm no longer operates in either city.

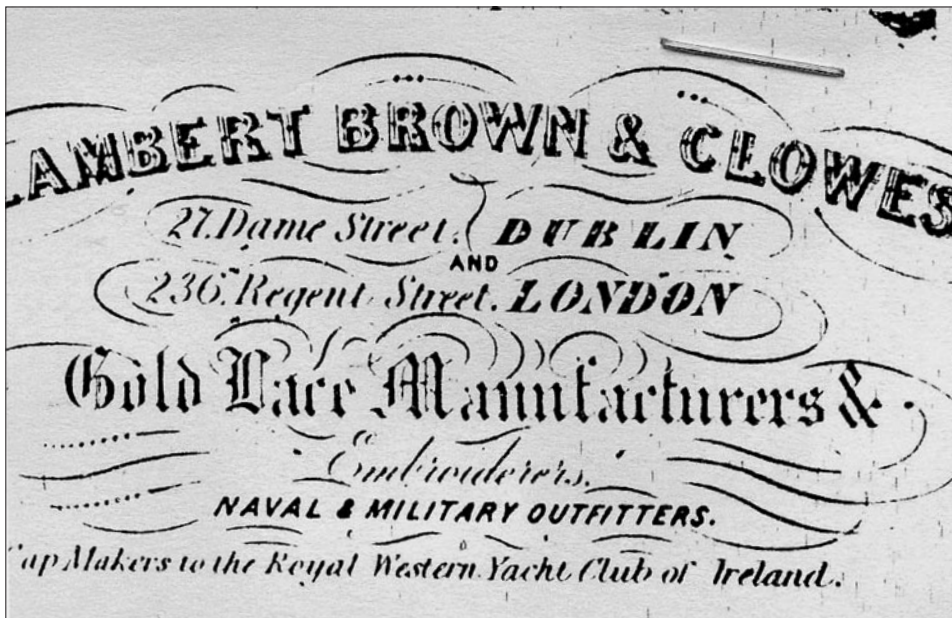
On official occasions the purse was carried before the Chancellor by a purse-bearer, ‘an honest and understanding man’, who sometimes acted as a secretary.<sup>52</sup> Chancellor Wyndham appointed the poet Ambrose Phillips as his purse-bearer.<sup>53</sup> Michael Foss observed that it was common practice to include great writers and poets among ‘place holders’, and Phillips is one of the authors mentioned as examples.<sup>54</sup> The accumulative fees for various tasks associated with the post apparently made it a much sought-after situation. John Fitzgibbon’s biographer, Anne Kavanaugh, described the position of purse-bearer as ‘a lucrative sinecure’, which Fitzgibbon (Ch. 1789-1802) bestowed on his nephew John, a member of the ‘patronage-glutted Beresfords’, at a salary of £700 per annum.<sup>55</sup>

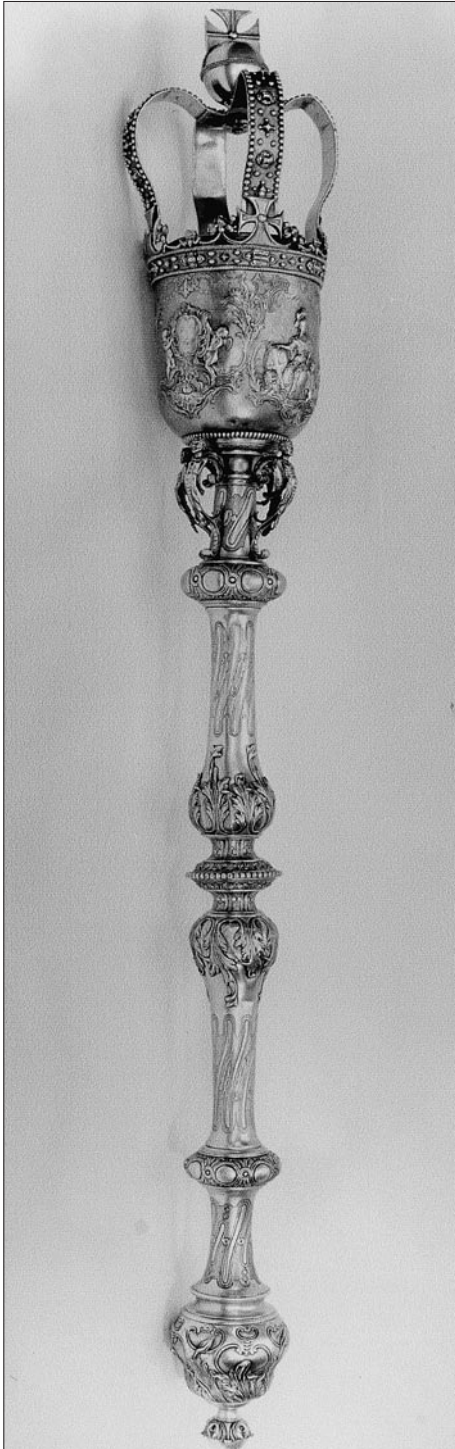
The custom of carrying the purse before the Chancellor persists in England, but it no longer holds the matrix of the Great Seal. The purse is normally empty, but it is used to hold the Queen’s speech at the opening of parliament. Although the

time when the change took place is unknown, a legendary account attributes it to an accident that occurred in the eighteenth century. The Lord Chancellor of England reputedly dropped the purse containing the seal and it broke a bone in his foot (the weight of the present matrix is eighteen pounds).<sup>56</sup>

The origin of the Chancellor's mace lies in the heavy-headed metal clubs used in battle during the middle ages. The mace eventually evolved into a tall, elegant silver staff, stabilised by the insertion of a wooden shaft and surmounted by a large ornamented head. Decorated with heraldic devices, it gradually became a symbol of power rather than aggression, for persons of importance. For Lords Chancellor it represented regal authority. In his progress to the House of Lords and the Court of Chancery, the mace was carried before the Chancellor by a serjeant-at-arms.<sup>57</sup> It is not known when the office of serjeant-at-arms was established, but a silver mace is noted being borne before Cardinal Wolsey, who was Lord Chancellor of England in the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

The mace presently used in the English House of Lords dates from the time of Charles II; it may therefore be assumed that replacement was not a frequent occurrence.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the new Chancellor's mace made for the Irish House of Lords in 1766 must be considered an artefact of great importance (Plate 15). An old Irish mace, the origins of which are unknown, was pronounced in the Irish House of Lords in 1766 to be 'quite decayed, and not suitable to the dignity of the House', and Lord Chancellor Bowes was asked to request the sanction of the Lord





Lieutenant to order a new mace.<sup>60</sup>

The 'new' mace, now in the National Museum of Ireland, is made of silver, and remaining traces indicate that it was originally gilded.<sup>61</sup> It is 148cm long, and is composed of nine separate pieces. The mace is marked in several places with the Harp Crowned and Hibernia – the Dublin hallmark for c.1765. The hallmark bears no date letter. It is also marked in several places with the maker's mark W.T. (William Townsend).<sup>62</sup> Townsend's fee for his work is unknown, but on 22 December 1766, Isaac D'Olier, silversmith, who probably secured the commission for Townsend, was paid £286 9s 4.3/4d for the mace.<sup>63</sup>

A wealth of decoration which covers the mace for the whole of its length includes figures, stylised acanthus leaves, scrolls, interlace, fluting and beading. The shaft is interrupted with several bulbous extrusions, and ornaments include plant elements and one circlet of beading. Curved herms, terminating in tapering acanthus leaves and decorated scrolls, spring from the top of the shaft to support the head. On the head, surrounded by symbolic emblems, seated figures of Britannia and Hibernia emphasise the dual authority of England and Ireland. Plumed helmets are worn by both figures, and above each there is a sunburst with a head at the centre. Assisted by

15 – *The Lord Chancellor of Ireland's mace*  
(courtesy National Museum of Ireland)

winged cupids, Britannia supports a shield which bears the French arms; her shaft is also held by a cupid. Hibernia holds her staff with her right arm, and with her left hand she supports a shield bearing a harp. Between the human images there is a profusion of plant ornament, and on two shields, supported by putti, the entwined letters GR identify the reigning monarch George III. The royal arms, executed in repoussé, are on the flat top of the head, which is surmounted by a four-ribbon crown with an orb and a cross overhead.<sup>64</sup> The ribbons and the base of the crown are ornamented with a pattern of beading.

The new Irish mace became the property of the Irish Free State when the office of Lord Chancellor of Ireland was abolished. It was deposited in the National Museum of Ireland in 1925 by the Executive Council of Ireland, and is now permanently exhibited in the National Museum at Collins Barracks, Dublin.<sup>65</sup>

To emphasise his personal stature and the dignity of his occupation, the Lord Chancellor eventually assumed a distinctive mode of dress. Churchmen, who were the original holders of the office of Lord Chancellor, would have worn their 'ecclesiastical robes or their episcopal Parliamentary robes'.<sup>66</sup> In the preface to his *Lives of the Lords Chancellors of Ireland*, Roderick O'Flanagan noted that the earliest Chancellor's robe was 'a green tunic of a woman, with a cape of the same colour'. O'Flanagan attributes the description to Matthew Paris, but does not name the source of the information.<sup>67</sup>

The black gown trimmed with gold lace which became the familiar attire of Lords Chancellor is, with minor differences, the ceremonial attire for a number of dignitaries: these include the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and heads of universities. The robe is usually made of the finest black damask – a figured silk or linen material – believed to have originated from the city of Damascus. Three-inch-wide bands of gold lace and other gold ornaments are affixed to the robe by hand. The gown originated in the sixteenth century, at which time it may have been 'a rich form of lay fashion for those of outstanding dignity'.<sup>68</sup>

Christopher Allen states that the exclusivity of chancellors' robes was probably a consequence of the Sumptuary Laws introduced in the Tudor period. One of the laws stipulated that certain types of material and embellishments could be worn only by people of elevated social standing. Subsequently, senior officers of state assumed ornate versions of standard robes as signifiers of their authority.<sup>69</sup>

Allen also documented the following evolution of the ornaments that adorn chancellors' robes.<sup>70</sup> In the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England, wore a gown trimmed with gold braid. A century later robes were embellished with hand-made lace manufactured from gold wire. The lace, affixed by hand, was used on the facings of the robe and continued around the lower end. Two



*16 – Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), John Mitford, Lord Redesdale, Lord Chancellor of Ireland (Ch. 1802-06) (courtesy Westminster Palace, London)*

rows of lace were affixed to the openings of the sleeves, and there were four rows above the opening. Lace decorations were also attached to the wings of the shoulders. Gold buttons, formerly used to fasten the sleeves, eventually evolved into ornamental toggles. Allen observed that no tradition of design emerged in the manufacture of the lace, and inspection of portraits of Irish and English chancellors shows great variety in the creation of patterns (Plates 12, 16). The uniformity in the number of rows of gold lace attached to the gowns, indicated by Allen, is not evident in portraits of Lords Chancellor of Ireland. The non-conformity may, however, be indicative of artistic creation.

The richness of the cloth and the value of the gold ornaments must have made the purchase of a gown a costly investment for a chancellor. Allowances of £1,000 granted by the monarch to Richard West in 1725 and to Thomas, Lord Wyndham in 1726 'towards the Equipage and Preparation for the Employment of Chancellor', may be relevant to the cost of such attire.<sup>71</sup> A similar grant made to John, Baron Fitzgibbon in 1789 suggests that inflation was not a problem in the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

The business card of Lambert Brown & Clowes, found in the Chancellor's purse in the Irish Genealogical Office, states that one of their occupations was the manufacturing of gold lace. It should, therefore, be considered possible that the firm was responsible for the production and affixing of the gold lace to chancellors' robes.

There is evidence that when he died, a chancellor's robe was considered an article of such value that it became a desired inheritance. Thomas Lord Wyndham bequeathed his 'Chancellor's velvet gown trimmed with gold' to Mr Matthew 'for having always had the care of it in Ireland'.<sup>73</sup> In her will, the widowed Viscountess Lifford assigned her late husband's robe of office to her son, who had inherited the title of Viscount Lifford.<sup>74</sup>

The accoutrements of the Lords Chancellor of Ireland appear for the most part to have faded into obscurity with the annulment of the office. However, portraits of the chancellors continue to remind us of the grandeur and pomp annexed to the title. Although the Lord Steward's white rod was destroyed at the close of trials of peers, it is an accessory in a portrait of Thomas, Lord Wyndham (Ch. 1626-39).<sup>75</sup> In the majority of the portraits the sitters are attired in the gold-trimmed gown and mandatory long wig, with the purse and mace occupying a salient position in the composition. Two instances of a desire for preservation of a chancellor's gown have been noted, but there is no evidence of concurrence with those hopes. The existing Irish purses, though possibly made in England, are fine examples of complicated traditional needlework. Variations in the illustration of the mace in portraits suggest artistic invention, but the sculpted mace on the memorial of

Chancellor Bowes, who requested the new mace, is an acceptable reproduction of the original. The extant mace demonstrates the skills of an eighteenth-century Irish silversmith.

The Chancellor's most important definition of authority was the Great Seal of Ireland, and the only known extant example is Edward VII's Great Seal, now in the National Museum. King Edward was the penultimate English monarch to govern Ireland. Since outdated seals were sometimes melted down and made into alternative objects, the extant seal must be one of the Irish museum's most prestigious acquisitions. It is a fine example of silver engraving. Otherwise, the designs of Great Seals of Ireland can be deduced from Vertue's engraving of Thomas Simon's designs for the seal of Charles II, and existing seal impressions.

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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Brehon is a derivative of the Irish *breitheamh*, meaning judge.
- <sup>2</sup> National Museum, register no. 21, 1925, 113. The office was abolished by the Courts of Justice Act 1924, Section 19.
- <sup>3</sup> Roderick O'Flanagan, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors and Keepers of the Great Seal of Ireland, from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Queen Victoria*, 2 vols (London 1870). The ceremonies associated with trials of peers is described in ii, 69-70.
- <sup>4</sup> Maurice Bond and David Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor* (London 1977) 18.
- <sup>5</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, 'The Great Seal of England: Deputed or Department Seals', *Archaeologia*, lxxxv (1935) 314.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Jenkinson's theories were based on information gleaned from an untitled article by F.W. Maitland, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge 1911).
- <sup>7</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 22.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 15 January 1801 (London): 'Friday the Great Seal of Ireland being delivered up to his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant by the Right Hon. Arthur Lord Viscount Kilwarden, C.J.K.B. and Baron Viscount Avonmore C.B.I., two of the Lords Commissioners for keeping the Great Seal of Ireland, in the Lord Chancellor's absence, the same was defaced in his Excellency's presence, and his Excellency was thereupon pleased to deliver to their Lordships a new Great Seal of the United Kingdom to be used in that part of the United Kingdom called Ireland, and to direct that the same be made use of (*pro tempore*) for sealing all things whatev-

- er which pass the Great Seal’.
- <sup>9</sup> John Craig, *The Mint* (Cambridge 1953) 201.
- <sup>10</sup> A list of engravers of Great Seals is given in vol. 2 of William J. Hocking, *Catalogue of the Coins, Tokens, Medals, Dies and Seals in the Museum of the Royal Mint* (London 1910) 279.
- <sup>11</sup> John Craig, *The Mint*, 201.
- <sup>12</sup> Hocking, *Catalogue*, 297.
- <sup>13</sup> John Pinkerton, *And Essay on Medals*, 2 vols (London 1808) ii, 171.
- <sup>14</sup> George Vertue, *Medals, Coins, Great Seals and other Works of Thomas Simon* (London 1753, 2nd edition).
- <sup>15</sup> Vertue, *Works of Thomas Simon*, 92.
- <sup>16</sup> Richard Hayward, *The Story of the Irish Harp* (Dublin 1954) 13.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.* The term ‘angelic’ refers to the human winged figure which forms the fore-pillar.
- <sup>18</sup> Hocking, *Catalogue*, 297.
- <sup>19</sup> H.C. Maxwell-Lyte, *Historical Notes on the use of the Great Seal of England* (London 1926) 264-98.
- <sup>20</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 23.
- <sup>21</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *Historical Notes*, 301.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 300-05.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 292.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 290. ‘Four bags of “buckes leather” and four bags of coarse, red cloth called “stamell” were it appears, considered necessary for the protection of the Great Seal within its embroidered purse’. The ‘towells’ were used for cleaning the Great Seal from oil and wax.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 21.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Wiltshire Records Office, document no. 234/16. Copy of the will of Thomas Lord Wyndham, dated 29 July ‘To my nephew, Sir Wyndham Knatchbull the late King’s Great Silver Seal of Ireland as broken in the Privy Council of Ireland, and a desire that it may be left in his family as a remembrance of me’.
- <sup>30</sup> Harold Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Silverware* (London 1987) 297. Thomas, Lord Wyndham (Ch. 1726-39) held seals for George I and George II.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.* (mark: WI, Christie’s, London, 2 December 1981).
- <sup>33</sup> Richard Caulfield (ed.), *Autobiography of the Right Honourable Sir Richard Cox Bart, Lord Chancellor of Ireland* (London and Cork 1860) 19. In 1860 the Cox monteith was in the house of the Hon Villiers Stuart of Castletown, county Kilkenny, the property of his wife who had inherited it from her brother, the late Sir Richard Cox. The box mentioned was given to Cox when, on Saturday, 4 December 1703, ‘the Lord Mayor, Recorder, Alderman and Sheriff of Dublin, came to my house and presented me with my freedom to the city in a gold box, which cost 30*Li.*, and wished me many years enjoyment of my office’.
- <sup>34</sup> Jenkinson, *The Great Seal*, 316.
- <sup>35</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *Historical Notes*, 312.
- <sup>36</sup> Patricia McCabe, *Images of Law and Order, Accoutrements, Carriage, Portraits and Memorials of Lords Chancellor of Ireland, 1660-1860*, 3 vols, unpublished PhD thesis, 2002,



- iii, pls 200-03.
- <sup>37</sup> Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, document no. F5, 'our [the King's] Right Trusty and Well beloved Counsellor John Baron Bowes of Clonlyon; our Chancellor of our said Kingdom of Ireland'. This was the only document among the four mentioned which was available for close inspection. It concerns the elevation of Kenneth Mackenzie to Baron and Viscount.
- <sup>38</sup> The third example, a purse of Queen Victoria's reign, is in Malahide Castle, county Dublin.
- <sup>39</sup> See also the Jocelyn memorial in Great St Mary's Church, Sawbridgeworth, and the Wyndham monument in Salisbury Cathedral in McCabe, *Images of Law and Order*, iii, pls 111, 190.
- <sup>40</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *The Great Seal*, 318.
- <sup>41</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 34.
- <sup>42</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *The Great Seal*, 318-19.
- <sup>43</sup> Anne Wanner, 'Textiles in History', *British Museum Newsletter*, 5 (London 1997).
- <sup>44</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *The Great Seal*, 319.
- <sup>45</sup> The purses in portraits are not all as described above. The alternative designs may be artistic invention, or perhaps if portraits were executed in England, the pattern of an English chancellor's purse may have been used.
- <sup>46</sup> Wanner, *BM Newsletter*.
- <sup>47</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *The Great Seal*, 319.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 318.
- <sup>49</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 36.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> The information was made available from the archives of the Genealogical Office, Kildare Street, Dublin, by John Farrell, with the permission of Brendan O'Donoghue, Chief Herald.
- <sup>52</sup> Maxwell-Lyte, *The Great Seal*, 264.
- <sup>53</sup> *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 24 December 1726.
- <sup>54</sup> Michael Foss, *The Age of Patronage, Arts in Society 1660-1750* (London 1971) 141.
- <sup>55</sup> Anne Kavanaugh, *John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare* (Dublin 1997) 209.
- <sup>56</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 36.
- <sup>57</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>60</sup> *Journals of the Irish House of Lords*, iv, 2 May 1766, 377.
- <sup>61</sup> Information from Dr Michael Kenny, director of the NMI.
- <sup>62</sup> Information from Conor O'Brien who is preparing a catalogue for a forthcoming exhibition in the NMI silver galleries.
- <sup>63</sup> 'An Account of Money expended under the Head of Concordium from Lady-day 1765 to Lady-day 1767', *Journals of the Irish House of Commons*, lviii (1771) appendix 2, cxxx.
- <sup>64</sup> NMI, register no. 21, 1925, file no. 30 A 1, 1925. In the entry for the mace it is stated that the 'fleur de lys cresting and orb and cross are missing'. The orb and cross presently on the mace are believed to be restoration additions. Information from Michael Kenny, Assistant Keeper NMI, Collins Barracks.
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> Bond and Beamish, *The Lord Chancellor*, 36.
- <sup>67</sup> O'Flanagan, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors*, 15.
- <sup>68</sup> W.N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *History of Legal Dress in Europe* (Oxford 1963) 68.

- <sup>69</sup> Christopher Allan, 'Theatre of State', unpaginated, unpublished essay (London 1999). C. Allan is Specialist Operations Co-ordinator at Ede & Ravenscroft Robemakers, London, a firm established in 1689 during the reign of William and Mary.
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>71</sup> *Journals of the Irish House of Commons*, v (1723-30); West, 510, Wyndham, 513.
- <sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, lxvi, 1 Feb 1790, appendix 3, ccxc. The £1,000 0s 0d granted to John Fitzgibbon, described as 'his Majesty's free Gift', towards his Equipage and preparation for the Employment of Chancellor' was remitted on 30 July 1789.
- <sup>73</sup> Wiltshire Records Office, document no. 234/16 in Knatchbull Papers, Will of Thomas Wyndham, 29 July 1745, codicil, 2 September 1745.
- <sup>74</sup> Coventry Records Office, Hewitt Family Papers, document no. 1484/8/1.
- <sup>75</sup> McCabe, *Images of Law and Order*, iii, pl. 185.
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