

WEIGHING-IN AND WEIGHING OUT! By Ian Welland.

In May 1996, I was a property manager for Octagon Shopping Centre, High Wycombe –now part of Eden Shopping Centre. As a professional nod to my position, I was invited to become a member of the town’s Charter Trustees and as such would be subject to ancient traditions such as “weighing-in of the Mayor of High Wycombe.” It was a ceremony stretching back over centuries and mirrored similar in other towns. The Mayor making ceremony was held annually in those days outside the 18th century Cornmarket building and consisted of a set of scales erected and balanced, which were used to weigh-in and weigh-out the Mayor. All trustees would be subjected to the same weighing-in and weighing-out, as the Trustees were effectively the Mayor’s Privy Council, but with no governing power. If the Mayor and Trustees had put on weight during the year, then the town’s people would believe the Mayor and Trustees had all “lived-it-up” at the taxpayers’ expense. Such behaviour would not go down well with the gathered locals who occasionally would be armed with rotten vegetables from the Market.

And so, a year later, I duly lined up to await my turn to be weighed-in and weighed out. As this was my first full weighing ceremony, I was naturally anxious having seen the ceremony as a mere mortal of the people’s republic over the years. Only this time, it was fast becoming like the stoning scene from *Life of Brian*. Ahead of me were a number of pals including, Bill Pollard. The Town Cryer, Sergeant Snelling, who was also a great pal of mine, announced the Mayor had done well and come in under weight. The mace beagle, Roy Bagley, was next – he was on the line I seem to remember. The Mayor’s secretary was fine. Pollard was next. He nervously mounted the scales. The Town Cryer grinned as only he could, rang his bell and yelled...

‘Oh yeh, oh yeh, oh yeh. Pollard, last year 14st 7. This year 14st 8. The crowd ooh’d and booed. A vegetable was thrown from the rear and narrowly missed Pollard’s torso. He had escaped, just. I sense the crowd wanted blood. They were brewing in revolutionary mood. I thought, any more dereliction of duty and the shameful walk to the scaffold could be a possibility. I was next. I stepped forward a vision with an outwardly display of confidence. But, I also knew the Town Cryer and Pollard were up to tricks – they always were where I was concerned.

‘Oh yeh, oh yeh, oh yeh. Welland, last year 12st 6. This year 16st 4!!!!’

‘Bloody hell,’ I shouted, ‘no way!’

All hell broke loose and tomatoes were hurtled through the air toward me! I ducked and dived but got hit a few times. I got off the scales and sat down bruised and battered. Pollard and Snelling just fell about laughing!

‘Same time next year!’ shouted a heckler.

‘Come on Jimmy me-lad,’ said Snelling. Let’s get an ale inside you!’