

The Deputy's Robe

Most Ceremonial Robes are red.

In 1457 the French Marshal Pierre de Breze, with 4000 men of Honfleur invaded the Town of Sandwich. After a long and bloody conflict the French withdrew, leaving our Mother Port plundered and many of its citizens, including Mayor John Drury, dead. Since that day subsequent Mayors of Sandwich and their Deputies have worn black Ceremonial Robes, in memory of the event.

In 1957 Sandwich and Honfleur began moving towards a twinning agreement and now the twinned Towns meet annually on more favourable terms.

When Brightlingsea re-established its connections with the Cinque Ports the Deputy of 1893, Joseph Richardson, wore the Robe now exhibited in the Brightlingsea Museum. This was modelled on that worn by William Beriffe, Deputy circa 1570, as depicted in the Memorial Brasses at All Saints Church. The Robe presently in use by The Deputy was presented by the Gild of Brightlingsea Freemen in 1984.

The Deputy's Badge and Chain

Presented by John Bateman in 1893, the Badge is a very large opal known as "The Great Opal", which John Bateman had carved to represent a seascape.

Round the mount is the Latin inscription "Urbs Brictriceseiae ex dono Johannis Bateman" (The town of Brightlingsea by the gift of John Bateman). The pendant has the inscription "Pulchra Matre Filia Pulchrior" (From a beautiful Mother, a more beautiful Daughter). The chain of solid silver is made of alternate links of oyster shells and crossed sprats.

Held in trust by the Corporation of Sandwich, the Deputy's badge is to be the badge of the Mayor in the event of Brightlingsea becoming a Corporation. If the appointment of the Deputy should cease in any other way, it is to return to the head of the Bateman family.

The chain was designed by Piers Egerton Warburton, late MP for Mid-Cheshire. The maker was M G Chambers, Silversmith of Colchester. The badge was carved by C Bryant of New Bond Street.

The Opal has a large crack, its origin being the subject of many stories. It has recently come to light that in 1992, Deputy Ron Rayner had a chance meeting with Mrs Burgess (née Sawyer) whilst wearing the Opal. A child in 1926, her parents were Landlords of the The Yachtsmans Arms in the Waterside, Brightlingsea, when the then Deputy, C A Brasted, placed the chain of office around the child's neck. As she bent forward the chain slipped to the floor and the Opal cracked.

Being such a large opal, it is possible a flaw had been present since it was mined and worked into the shape we know today, and the sharp knock finally revealed this flaw. We shall never know for sure, but the story does show how the Opal has been close to the people of Brightlingsea for many years.

The Regalia