

# FREEMEN OF ENGLAND AND WALES.



**Journal 196 Winter 2020  
Annual Report and Gazette  
With Compliments**

## Presidents Letter



“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity”, so wrote Charles Dickens. When I was elected as your President in 2019 I commented upon the fact that I was number 13 and expressed the wish that it wasn’t a bad omen. The only thing of any real national importance that was on the horizon, and to which I referred in the last Journal, was Brexit and hopefully that will be concluded by the end of 2020.

But, the big thing which has impacted all of our lives over the last year has been the COVID-19 Coronavirus. High and low-born, rich or poor, celebrities to the ordinary “man in the street”, nobody has been immune from its devastating effects. Speaking personally, and whilst we have all been seriously inconvenienced by the various distancing regulations and lock downs, none of my family or friends and colleagues have been seriously affected medically and I hope that the same applies to you all too. The promise of an effective vaccine now becoming available soon raises hopes that we will be able to get our lives back to normal and re-commence our planned meetings next year but time will tell.

Of course, nobody knew just how long the pandemic would last, and we all hoped that it would soon pass over resulting in “postponed” meetings most of which are still to be re-arranged. We held an Executive meeting by Skype, but we had a number of advance apologies and IT problems on the day which resulted in a poor attendance. As time has gone by alternative on-line conferencing such as Zoom and Teams have become more widely used. The Executive have maintained contact by telephone, email and post but from what I understand there has been very little activity at Guild level with AGM’s, dinners and banquets being cancelled. We left the cancellation of our AGM until the last possible moment in the hope that restrictions were about to be lifted but in the event they were re-imposed, so we took the right decision. This was particularly disappointing for me since it was to have been held in my home town.

One way to follow what is going on in the Guilds is by looking at our Facebook page, (Guilds – please contact Tom Gibson if you are unsure how to add items), and our Facebook stream also feeds into our website.

Unlike my predecessors I have only attended one event so far and that was the Winter Function in Berwick Upon Tweed last December, and most enjoyable it was too.

All of your Executive Officers work tremendously well together and it is unusual to single anyone out for special mention but I would like to publicly thank Charlotte and Alex who have admirably stepped into the void left by Gordon Vardell and rebuilt the membership database, chased up arrears and got more members into paying by standing order giving the Association a solid foundation to work from, thank you.

We don’t usually publish a Journal at this time of the year, so I would like to end as I started, with a quote. I hope that you have a Jolly Christmas, but have a Jolly Careful one, I would like to see you all when we are allowed to meet up once again.

Stephen White, President

## News from Member Guilds

### **Durham.**

#### **Leading Community Figures Sworn In As Freemen Look To The Future**

Three leading community figures have taken up rarely offered invitations to join the ranks of the Durham City Freemen — providing them the opportunity to initially support the organisation and then offer themselves for election to undertake key leadership roles. Admission into the freemen's eight surviving guilds is regulated by a strict criteria thought to date back to 1327. The last time such a direct approach was made to an “outsider” was more than 35 years ago.

The freemen currently enjoy a modern day record membership of 260 men and women but have, in recent years, struggled to find volunteers to fill management positions. Following a review of future heritage options last year the membership voted decisively in favour of a move to seek out “experienced and committed individuals” from outside their ranks willing and able to take on key responsibilities.

The trio invited to take up the unique offer are former Durham County Council chairman Mac Williams; ex-firefighter Arthur Lockyear, awarded the MBE ten years ago for his voluntary work; and retired teacher and computer specialist Trevor Carter, currently vice chairman of the Durham Pointers who welcome tens of thousands of visitors to the city each year. The three have all expressed an interest and desire in the development of the freemen and maintaining the guilds' history and heritage in the changing and challenging times ahead.

“All three men are passionate about Durham and are currently volunteers involved in promoting other aspects of the city's history. I am in no doubt they will prove a real asset to our organisation,” said Eric Bulmer, chairman of the freemen's charitable trust and a former chairman of the wardens.

Mac, started his working life at Dawdon Colliery in 1960 and after attending day and night classes at Sunderland and Durham Colleges he landed a job with Seaham Urban District Council in 1971. He then moved on to Wear Valley then Durham City Council as health and safety officer.

He became a Durham County Councillor in 2006 representing the Coxhoe ward and was elected chairman of the authority in 2010. During his year in office he raised many thousands of pounds in the wake of the Japanese tsunami and received letters of appreciation from the Japanese Embassy and Consul General. He stepped down from the council in 2016.

Now in his 70s, Mac was appointed a magistrate in Durham City in 1979, taking on the chairmanship of the bench in 2001 before accepting the same role with the North Durham Bench two years later. He retired from the bench in 2014 after a remarkable 35 years of service.

He became a member of the Durham Police Committee in 1988 and continued sitting when it became the Durham Police Authority, serving both for more than 15 years. He was a member of Durham University's Ruth First Trust until 2016 and is currently a governor of the Durham and Darlington NHS Trust. He was admitted an associate member of the Freeman of England and Wales in 2017.

Last year Mac became Durham's Pant Master – now an honorary role represented in mayoral processions - but was once, as guardian of the city's wells and water, vital to every citizen's well being.

Sixty-seven-year-old Arthur, also brought up in Seaham and now based in Durham, served as an operational fireman in stations in Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead. While with the fire service he helped organise Remembrance Day parades in Sunderland and since 2014 has played a key role in Durham City's Remembrance Parade and the Durham Cathedral Festival of Remembrance.

He is the author of the book "Warriors in Fire Boots" – a tribute to the valour of firefighters and has taught the Japanese martial art of Aikido in Durham for over thirty years.

Arthur was instrumental in bringing many internationally renowned martial arts masters to the city and as a consequence of his efforts a three part television documentary, entitled "Budo Sai," was commissioned by Tyne Tees Television and syndicated internationally. He is a well-known teacher of and writer on Aikido and is currently a 5th Dan Black Belt. Trevor arrived as a student at Durham University 50 years ago - and never left. He taught maths and computer studies in three local schools for 20 years and was a head of department before leaving to set up his own I.T. training business. For the last five years of his career he worked with the I.T. advisory service for a north-east local education authority.

After serving as a governor at three different schools he was elected as the region's representative on the National Governors' Association and for more than a dozen years has been a member of a Foster Care Panel, interviewing prospective foster carers. He was a founding member of the local history society in his home village, serving on its committee for over 20 years and has also been an active member of a local PCC. In addition to his work with the Pointers he is also a steward at the cathedral and a volunteer at the World Heritage Site Visitor Centre. Having been a mentor at one of the university's colleges and an invigilator in exams, he has more recently been seen as a Beadle, fronting academic processions and other ceremonies.

## **Chester.**

Since March, Chester Freeman and Guilds have managed to keep busy and in touch with one another by holding zoom meetings and posting photos of Chester in lock-down on our Facebook page. All of the events we had hoped to attend in the City have been cancelled but fortunately virtual commemorations of VE and VJ Day have been shared. We are hoping to publish The Deva Pentice later in the year but a long awaited return to the

Guildhall for our Annual Banquet in October will now have to wait until next year!

## **Northampton.**

The Northampton Guild of Freemen are sad to communicate that due to uncertainties related to the current COVID-19 pandemic they have taken the decision to postpone their planned 2021 Charity Weekend event. This is now planned to take place on the 8th and 9th April 2022. In order to provide an opportunity for the Guild members to meet in the near future our social secretary (Giles Moore-Thompson) will be looking at organising a local event as soon as is feasible.

The current situation is also very sad for the Guild as we are currently within the mayoral year of Cllr Brian Sargent and as a result most civic events have been cancelled or moved to a 'virtual' setting. As many of our friends will be aware Cllr Sargent is an hereditary Freeman of the Borough of Northampton and he is following in the footsteps of past generations of his family in serving as the Mayor of our borough. As such it is extremely unfortunate that we have not been able to celebrate the joyful occasion of having a Freeman serving as Mayor of Northampton, especially as Cllr Sargent will be the last Mayor prior to the local government reorganisation that will see Northampton Borough Council absorbed into a new wider unitary authority.

The leadership of our guild would like to extend to all our friends across the country our warmest wishes, and we look forward to when we will be able to meet with you again.

## **Changing Rules Of Admission To The Freedom.**

It has come to my attention that the problem of diminishing membership has been causing some Guilds to look for new ways to counter this trend.

Whilst I would generally support our stance that FEW does not issue instructions to our Guild Members, and only responds to requests for advice, this problem requires that I give a reminder of the legality of the Freedom.

All member Guilds operate independently and must follow the constraints of their local customs as set in their original charters, or modified by later statute or local Acts. Some Guilds have already (through ignorance of the Law of Custom) pursued changes to membership criteria through Local Acts and have inadvertently diluted the dignity of the Freedom as a result.

The 2009 LDED&C Act held within it the right for daughters of freemen to be afforded the same rights as sons of freemen subject to the local customs applicable in their towns or cities of entry. We also took the opportunity to include an enabling clause to permit Guilds to modify their local rules of admission; but only within strict rules and procedures. Here is a link to the appropriate part of the act on the Government website for reference: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/part/1/chapter/5>

It is vitally important that Guilds realise that these permitted changes MUST still comply

with the overall restrictions of the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act and subsequent revisions. As Officers of your Guilds you will, no doubt, have agreed (under your constitutions) to be trustees of your Guilds which makes you jointly and severally liable for any breaches of their legal requirements, or for giving erroneous advice to prospective members or members/officers of your local Council.

I will reiterate. The Freedom of the towns and cities of England and Wales is a legal entity. It cannot be revised without legal intervention and strict adherence to the rules of the various Acts that govern it. To do so reduces the Freedom to the level of a simple members club and removes its cherished status as the highest honour available for a town or city to grant its citizens.

Alan Fallows (Archivist and Past President)

## **Annual Reports**

## **Officers Reports**

### **President.**

## **Constitutional Changes**

A proposal for a change in our Constitution was received and under Rule 3 of The Constitution a notice was circulated to all members. Enquiries with the Charity Commission however informed the Executive that the proposed amendments would not be allowable under Charity Law and this would have been an item for discussion at the AGM, had it gone ahead as planned. The proposal did, however, reveal a requirement, yet again, to make changes to the wording of The Constitution since although the final paragraph states. "This constitution is subject to the regulation of the Charities Act 2011 and any subsequent legislation, plus any applicable statutes under the laws of England." Some of the language and terminology that we use is contradicted by the requirements set out by the Act. The reference to the Act was included to obviate the need for continually making minutiae amendments but clearly we do need to make The Constitution more self-explanatory for the avoidance of any doubt in future and this will be discussed and agreed by the Executive for submission to the next available Court Meeting.

### **Deputy President.**

With the cancellation, due to Government Restrictions in response to Covid 19, of the York Banquet Weekend, including the Church Service at which I was to Deputize for our President, I have not had any duties to report on in this capacity since election at the last AGM.

## **Vice President.**

Like many of you, my activities have been somewhat limited over the past few months due to 'shielding' from the Coronavirus. I will briefly outline some actions since my last report (when we were joyfully unaware of the impending changes). Generally, there has been an increased rate of electronic communications to compensate for the lack of travelling.

Directly before the seriousness of this Coronavirus really struck home, I attended the Civic Service held at Gloucester Cathedral 8th March. We had begun 2020 with a bounce, oblivious of what was to come. Looking back before the 'lock-down' we can reflect and enjoy the memory of the excellent AGM last September hosted by the Freemen and Freewomen of Gloucester.

Last year prior to the AGM, I was kindly invited by the Freemen of Gloucester to the 'Gloucester Day Parade' 7th September, in which we marched through the town. I also attended a 'welcome home' celebration service at the Cathedral 23rd November to commemorate the 'Glorious Glosters' First Battalion, the 'Rifles' returning home from a long stay in Afghanistan.

It has been most regrettable but necessary to cancel this year's AGM, as our health and safety are the first priority. I am sure that this will make the next General Meeting all the more desirable and constructive.

Back in January, the Executive attempted a Skype meeting with a few officers attending but this had limited success. We abandoned this method of ongoing discussion, anticipating a conventional face to face meeting at a later date to discuss outstanding items yet to be resolved. Unfortunately, this never materialised.

Then we rapidly moved into March and the various restrictions hampered any further physical activities. Understandably communications have been difficult, and this may have affected the Warden's particularly, in their ability to speak face to face with the gilds. However, we have all tried to reach out, support and communicate through the various means available, and I am personally thankful for the distractions these have provided during this rather strange summer.

I am extremely sad to report that our excellent Warden for the North, Roger Sutton has found it advisable, under the current circumstances, to retire from his Wardens activities. He has been an invaluable part of the team, and we thank him for the time and dedication he has provided.

However, following some changes at last year's AGM, we have been blessed by the appointments of Charlotte as Hon. Membership Secretary accompanied by her father Alex who have formed a dynamic duo. They have reorganised our membership records and introduced some new, much-needed procedures. This process has brought to light the great importance of regular communication between the Gilds and our Association.

Unfortunately, it is often the case when Guild officers change their roles that our (FEW) records are overlooked.

May I conclude by thanking all officers of the Executive and particularly the Area Wardens for their diligence and for their patience during these difficult times. I wish I could come up with something especially inspirational, but I am afraid we must all hold tight and await a magic vaccine but, in the meantime, stay safe and thank you. We must all look out and support each other.

### **Immediate Past President.**

With the severe restrictions in mobility throughout 2020 I have not been required to do any duties as IPP. I have gained some time to research my own and other local family trees. It is the intention of the Berwick Guild to have a cell in the Town Hall dedicated to local Freemen families. In addition to showing those families which have been researched there will be a computer with access to the different programmes we have set up over the past five years.

We are nearing the end of the pilot scheme to catalogue our local archives which includes the early Guild records. We have kept Alan Fallows, our FEW Archivist, in touch with our various reports,

### **Membership Secretary.**

Since taking over the membership in 2019 a new database has been constructed all known members and guilds/gilds that are in arrears have now been contacted. Also a mail out to all members about the cancellation of the AGM has been achieved.

There has been a move to persuade members and guilds/gilds to pay by standing order either on 1st April or 1st September and have had a reasonable success rate. This will help members not to fall into arrears and the administration of payments as cheques require more work to cash.

All those still paying the old membership of fee £8 have been advised and most have responded setting up new standing orders for £10.

GDPR has also been acquired from some members who did not return forms from the first time of asking in 2018, there are some seventy still outstanding.

### **Guilds and Court Leets**

38 are registered as members

There are at the time of writing 14 in arrears, which have not paid since 2018, all were sent reminders in February and have been written to again this September.

Two have been in contact as there is an issue because of Covid that they have not been able to meet to sign off the payment to FEW.



The Wardens have been informed of the non- payers and will endeavour to contact them as we might not have the correct contact details.

If they were individual members rule 9 would be applied, surely the reason FEW exists is support guilds/gilds.

### **Individual, Associate and Honorary Members.**

In September there were 246 paid up members,.

62 have not paid since 2018 or before, nor responded to our letters or email reminders, therefore they have been removed under rule 9.

### **Since taking over as Membership Secretary in 2019**

There has been notification of 12 deaths, some prior to 2019

17 members have resigned, mainly through age and ill health

6 New full individual members have joined this year

We have one member an R.Wainer of Ipswich Guild who pays by standing order we have been unable to trace , as he is no longer at the address we have for him. If you are able to help with this please contact me.

### **Membership Cards**

A new style of membership cards will be issued in October for those members paying in September and then issued each month to members paying that month.

## **Archivist.**

Dear Members,

As with all organizations, 2020 will be a year we want to forget, and I sympathize with all those who were looking forward to attending and enjoying the AGM.

As expected contact with members has been thin on the ground but I would like to thank Howard Pate from Chester for the offer of a set of FEW journals gifted by one of their members and for enquiries from Pembroke and again from Chester.

Other questions have been raise regarding membership eligibility and I have added a small article to this journal to address this.

The main work regarding archive research has been undertaken by Berwick and I understand that this is nearing fruition. I look forward to receipt of the final revisions and hope to be able to adapt FEW archives to follow their lead. In preparation for this I have completed an up-date of the archive books and articles and hope to add the final list of Guild papers when I know the format to follow.

Best wishes to all for this year and into next. Keep safe and well.

## **Editor.**

Both Journals, 194 and 195, produced in the year were well-received according to the feedback sent to me, especially the cover picture of the Royal Armouries on the second, which followed the one from Tintagel on the equivalent edition (Winter) the year before. It has now been suggested that where possible the edition issued each year that does not contain either AGM or Court Meeting reports should have a cover picture from places we might not otherwise use but, of general interest.

Sadly our printers along with numerous other businesses were forced to close as the government restrictions bit. Those same restrictions also forced the cancellation of the March Court, so it was impossible to produce a Journal this spring. I am however happy to report that the printers, a small local company, have survived to reopen in July,

My thanks to all those who have contributed to the Journals in the past year, as always I look forward to seeing what is sent in during the next year as well.

My best wishes to you all.

## **Wardens Reports.**

### **Warden For The North East.**

As of course everyone will expect and appreciate, like other areas, activity in the north-east has been much reduced in recent months, with all events and ceremonies cancelled. Committees have however maintained contact for the purpose of doing necessary business, often utilising online communication.

Really the only matters of interest outside this come from the Freemen of the City of Durham. Firstly, the Wardens of the eight surviving Companies there have now added to their structure, by creating a layer of Deputy Wardens, a move which is described as involving more Freemen at an operational level and providing for a line of succession. Secondly, I have in previous reports relayed information on the long-standing issue of the new Durham County Council civic headquarters and the proposal by the Council to deregister part of the Sands, over which the Freemen retain rights of common. Sufficient to say here that the matter is proceeding to a Public Enquiry, but a comprehensive update appears on the City of Durham Freemen's website for those who are interested in the detail.

### **Warden For The East.**

I was honoured to accept the position of Warden for the East last September and was looking forward to making contact with the Freemen of Sudbury and being able to report back on all the events and happenings in Lincoln...

After the AGM the Lincoln Freemen supported the Civic Party at the Remembrance Service and the switching on of the Christmas Lights. They held their annual teddy tombola at the Heighington Christmas Market raising money for the Pink Ribbon Charity. An event attended by our very own real Santa. Our Christmas Service is the last event of

the calendar year and the first is at the end of January, our Annual Dinner. Whilst the 2020 dinner was slightly smaller in numbers than previous years it was still an enjoyable event and thank you to the visiting Freemen who were able to attend. It is good to be part of the FEW family. Bishop Grosseteste University provided excellent service and food. The Lincoln Freemen presented the Mayor with a donation to the Mayor's Charity and a further £200 was raised on the night by raffling off the flower decorations (supplied by a Freeman of Lincoln). In addition, during Lockdown, the Gild made a donation of £250 towards the cost of scrubs for local medical staff.

I was then looking forward to attending the Coventry, York, Leicester, Altrincham and Chester Dinners, the Court Meeting and AGMs in Lincoln and Grimsby. Lincoln had planned their fund-raising activities and annual picnic. But none of this happened. Lockdown did instead, and we have entered a strange and worrying time. Whilst I am not aware of any Lincoln Freemen who have been lost to Covid 19 we have, during lockdown, lost dear friends and have a number of friends within Lincoln battling illness.

Like many other Cities, there have been no Freemen invested this year, and we are only just considering re-starting Committee meetings.

However, we do have some positive news. We have an event to attend! The Travelling Medieval Market arrives in Lincoln on the 11th of September. The City of Lincoln Freemen's Gild has been asked to be Patron of the Lincoln Medieval Market and will be opening the Market. It is still hoped that the 2020 Heighington Christmas Market and Medieval Christmas Market go ahead as planned and that life returns to nearer normal in 2021. Whether we shall hold our Annual Dinner in January 2021 is still to be decided.

## **Sudbury**

Nick Johnson very kindly forwarded on to me the Annual Report that he had received from Charles Andrew Grimwood, (known to most as Andrew) who was elected Chairman of the society by the membership of Sudbury Freemen's Society, taking over from Michael Wheeler.

They have had no new Freemen invested during the 2019/20 year but have sadly lost 4 Freemen.

The Sudbury Freemen provided Honorary Mace Bearers at the Remembrance Day Parade and Sudbury Civic Service. They are looking for Volunteers for Mace Bearers.

The Sudbury Freemen's Trust provides support to their elderly freemen and widows by contributing towards Local Authority Contact Care Line costs.

Grants paid:-

Several 'Contact Care Line' payments to Freemen and Widows of Freemen.

Restoration of the Gainsborough family graves headstone in Sudbury Cemetery

Funding for the Sudbury Freemen's Society 'website' which also includes information about the projects supported by The Trust.

There are several pending projects that the Trust is supporting with funding commitments and advice – though most of these are 'on hold' given the current situation of the country.

In spite of the restrictions imposed over the past few months of lock-down the rangers have continued to maintain the jewel in Sudbury's crown; the Sudbury water meadows. Each year a programme of farming and conservation works is put in place in order to sympathetically manage the land and allow nature to flourish. This vital work is on occasion supported by volunteers from the Riverside Project team. Part of the farming project is the annual grazing on the meadows which, thanks to John Coleman, has again taken place albeit at a reduced capacity.

After thirty years of excellent stewardship in the role of head ranger, Adrian Walters has passed the baton over to Nick Shimwell, who we wish well in his new role. As well as being available to offer support to Nick, Adrian will continue in his role as clerk to the charity.

Christopher Wheeler has stepped aside from his role as the chairman of the finance sub-committee. Chris has always had a firm hand in overseeing the finances of the charity thus ensuring that monies are available to be dispersed wisely, and we thank him for his work. The role of chairman of the financial sub-committee has been taken up by Michael Wheeler.

We pass our thanks to all rangers, voluntary rangers and various working parties whose work allows us to continue to enjoy the beautiful riverside and water meadows.

### **Warden For The South West.**

I think we can all agree it has been a most difficult year, in any aspect for all.

This year I was really looking forward to giving my report verbally and having the same stamina as my fellow wardens. Alas, this isn't the case.

In respect of being able to speak to any member guilds in the South West, to complete the annual report, which we know hasn't got any guild members. I therefore unfortunately haven't got much to report on.

Something that is still ongoing. I'm still haven't got anyone on-board. It's a case of "where's wally." That being trying to locate the right person to get hold off, and engaging with. Most have gone into hiding, one can only presume Co-vid has stopped guilds having anything to say or do, and therefore no response to me.

I'm awaiting response back from information given regarding Exeter Freeman.

The passion to get others to join and relish their heritage is still ongoing, but with the worldwide pandemic the lack of communication is frustrating, and not the report I, or other wardens imagined would be submitting.

### **Warden For The South Midlands Warden.**

#### **City of Coventry Freeman's Guild.**

On January 21st the annual Apprentice of the Year Awards was held at a new venue of Coombe Abbey Hotel, between Coventry and Rugby. This remodelled Cistercian Abbey, and now impressive hotel sits in 500 acres of parkland, and is also the provisional venue for the 2021 FEW AGM. The six finalists had been selected by interview panels in two

categories: small & medium employer; and large employer. Winners were Daniel Donnell of the Romero Academy and Callum Sproul of Severn Trent Water respectively, who received £1000 each. An Endeavour Award was also presented to Tyreek Roberson of JLR. All finalists received a plaque and £100 for their efforts. Thanks to our Sponsors, and Enterprise Warden Matt Johnson and his team for organising the event.

On 7th February our Junior Warden Steven Morson organised a fascinating tour of the JLR Classic Car Centre built on the old Peugeot Ryton site. Here the latest batch of rebuilt Jaguar 'E' types and new build 'D' type sports racers were in work – besides Land Rovers fitted with Jaguar V8 power units. The site also holds a vast store of other unrestored classic cars.

On 14th March our Senior Warden Ron Robinson organised the Guild's Ladies Night at a new venue of the Masonic Dalecote Hall, with widows of Past Masters given complementary tickets, and all ladies receiving a red rose. Our Master Carole Wilson then introduced entertainment. This turned out to be the last Guild event so far this year, as regrettably due to the coronavirus pandemic the planned events of: Guild AGM; FEW Court meeting; Barnacle skittles match; Guild banquet; 2020 Apprentice of the Year competition; Lord Mayor's Freedom ceremonies; and other events up to December had to be cancelled, with the Christmas Dinner at Coombe Abbey now looking unlikely. After consultations, it was agreed in general that Guild Court Officers will remain in post for another year.

### **Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester.**

The annual Leicester & Coventry skittles match at the Wheatsheaf Inn in Thurcaston went ahead on 21st February, with a hot supper to follow. Coventry's Tony Archer was the highest scorer.

Regrettably due to the coronavirus pandemic the subsequent events, including the April Common Hall meeting, and the annual Banquet in June were cancelled.

### **The Guild of Freemen of the Borough of Northampton.**

The Northampton Guild of Freemen are sad to communicate that due to uncertainties related to the current COVID-19 pandemic they have taken the decision to postpone their planned 2021 Charity Weekend event. This is now planned to take place on the 8th and 9th April 2022. In order to provide an opportunity for the Guild members to meet in the near future our social secretary (Giles Moore-Thompson) will be looking at organising a local event as soon as is feasible.

The current situation is also very sad for the Guild as we are currently within the mayoral year of Cllr Brian Sargent and as a result most civic events have been cancelled or moved to a 'virtual' setting. As many of our friends will be aware Cllr Sargent is a hereditary Freeman of the Borough of Northampton, and he is following in the footsteps of past generations of his family in serving as the Mayor of our borough. As such it is extremely unfortunate that we have not been able to celebrate the joyful occasion of having a Freeman serving as Mayor of Northampton, especially as Cllr Sargent will be the last Mayor prior to the local government reorganisation that will see Northampton Borough Council absorbed into a new wider unitary authority.

The leadership of our guild would like to extend to all our friends across the country our warmest wishes, and we look forward to when we will be able to meet with you again.

### **Alcester Court Leet.**

The February Pancake Races was the usual epic event - with races for all ages down the closed High Street. Regrettably the follow-on calendar events, including the Town Criers competition, were cancelled due to the pandemic.

### **Henley - in- Arden Court Leet & Court Baron**

The annual Court Leet of the Manor was held on 13th November 2019 in the Guildhall. David Lodder, the Leet Steward for over 40 years, took up his new post of Lord of the Manor. New Steward is Jonathan Dovey, a local historian and author of several books on the town. Repairs to the Heritage Centre are now complete, and around 2500 visitors were seen in the seven months of the annual opening period. Past Bailiff Norman Kench as chairman of the Guildhall and Gardens committees reported that the downstairs tenant had signed a long lease, but roof repairs are now needed. The Guildhall Trust, who maintain the Guildhall, the Heritage Centre, and the Guild Cottage is now an incorporated charity to limit liabilities. After Officer Reports, the Steward did the roll call of Jurors, who then withdrew to elect the new Officers for 2020. On return, the Steward sworn into Office the new High Bailiff Tom Mangan, and the retiring Officer Graham Smith presented robes and chain of office. New Low Bailiff Laurence Marshall was also attired. The Chaplain, the Rev John Ganjavi was re-appointed, and invited the Burgesses to divine service on 26th November in the adjoining St John's church. As there was no Presentments, Les Long the Town Crier then closed the Court with due ceremony.

2020 Group activities, like the annual Court Leet Dinner in April, have been cancelled due to the pandemic lock-down.

### **Warwick Court Leet**

2020 started with the Court's New Year Feast at Alderson House in January, followed by a closed Court meeting in the Council Chamber. The February Beer Festival organised to help raise funds for the medieval Lord Leycester Hospital was well-supported, with a range of beers, ciders – and hot food from the Brethren's kitchen. The Hospital was built as Warwick's Guildhall – and demanded by Earl Leycester in 1571 to house old soldiers, and continued in this role ever since. It thus predates the opening of the Chelsea Pensioners hospital in 1692 by over 100 years, and also has a distinctive residents uniform – a black cloak and top hat. Later 2020 Court Leet calendar events were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, though a 'remote ale taste' was tried – quite different from the usual robed event! Six new Jurors will be sworn in when normal service is resumed – hopefully before the Autumn Court meeting on 22nd October.

### **Warden For The South-East.**

Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery (ROFF)

The Admiralty Court was cancelled this year because of the Covid-19 virus.

The business of fishing continues steadily in the River Medway, although somewhat

impacted by lock-down measures, and by some Freeman of the River who are shielding for a variety of health reasons.

Earlier this year, the Fishery negotiated two successful claims against British Petroleum and also Hanson Aggregate Limited for illegal dredging in the River Medway.

Next year (2021) will see the commencement of the National Grid Link Project, which will bring a huge power cable from France, into the River Medway. Efforts are being made by all contractors to minimise any disruption to fishing rights and to fish stocks. A further report on this Project will follow next year.

### **Warden for the North Midlands.**

I think that the calendar page on the Derby Guild web site sums up this year quite well. It just says, "No upcoming events". It might as well have said "no recent past events either"! I suspect that all of the guilds will have done the responsible thing and cancelled or postponed the vast majority of events. Having said that, the emergence of Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft teams and the like, has opened up communication channels we would never have thought about, let alone used.

Indeed, I have attended several virtual meetings where all members were present with no apologies needed. It's clearly not the same, but it is quite a good substitute when meetings in person are impossible.

In my area, most of the Civic occasions where guilds would normally play their part, Mayor-making, VE Day, VJ Day, Remembrance, Christmas Tree Festivals, etc. have been cancelled. Hence, I am literally writing a report about nothing happening. Bizarre, but true!

On the other hand, at Stafford there has been an unexpected bonus. The trustees decided to keep our allotments site open, albeit with closed toilets, social distancing and lots of hand sanitiser. Most years, we typically have 20 to 30 of our 250 plots vacant, but with people having time during lockdown, 2020 became the first time for over 100 years when we had full occupancy. Indeed, we now have what many sites normally have, a 'waiting list'.

As an FEW Warden I have had less than usual to do, but as Scribe to The Stafford Freeman's Allotments it has been an entertaining period. Sorting out problems among our 40 or so nationalities and tenants aged 18 to 90 have included: boundary disputes; shed abduction; over-size sheds, (complete with beds and table lamps); threats; roaming dogs; badgers destroying crops, etc., etc. Even one poor soul who spent weeks digging an overgrown plot only to discover that it belonged to someone else!

It is good that Freeman's Lands still exist, but like my friends, the Freeman of Alnwick, who have lots of mundane things to deal with like Mrs Jones's broken gate, Mr Brown's dangerous apple tree, or someone's broken window, it is not that easy maintaining an ancient heritage. Sadly, this year I shall miss swapping stories with them over a pint at the FEW AGM.

Yes, we all know that the COVID-19 has to be handled carefully and as someone in the vulnerable age group, I have been at home more than I would like. However, I am still

alive and maybe, just maybe, missing a year's Morris Dancing, and not meeting my FEW colleagues is a price worth paying!  
An all too short report this year.

### **Warden for the West.**

In Gloucester ,most activities have been cancelled due to COVID 19, however 2 freeman including President and our own Hon Sec ,Lee Hemsley, were invited to take part in a socially distanced ceremony for the raising of the Merchant Navy Flag, and just recently for Gloucester Day ,again 2 freeman were invited to escort the Mayor around the city , to give thanks to all shop keepers and workers who have been open and continue to work through these troubling times.

In Malmesbury , flood defences remain a priority and additional funding is being allocated to protect the riverside properties. Charitable works have included donations to the local Food Bank.

Our Freeman of the City of Oxford activities and meetings have been disrupted. The annual Dinner planned for December has been unavoidably cancelled . Oxford Laborites are high in the research and development of a vaccine to rid us all of this ghastly disease. Good luck to them.

Our first Admission ceremony to be carried out by way of Zoom technology was made in April . The Freeman's Port Meadow has never been so popular with literally thousands of visitors on the sunny days of lock down in glorious May when no other sports or entertainments were available .It has been tremendous to see people enjoy the Meadow but the piles of litter left behind was up setting . It is always the minority and in this case it appears to be the late night revellers. The Meadow Ranger, Julian Cooper and his Field Wardens really came together to arrange litter picking and removal of the waste at all hours of the day and night. I sent our collective thanks and support to the whole team including Councillors . Litter and meadow animals do not mix and sadly several animals succumbed to eating and suffering the effects.

You may recall the tremendous fund raising three years ago for the memorial to the seventeen unrecorded pilots who lost their lives training at Wolvercote on Port Meadow. Our thanks to fellow Freeman in FEW . The collection exceeded the needs of the stone work and it was decided to use the remainder to carry out a non invasive Geophysical Survey of the aerodrome area . This is basically an x-ray of the sub strata or sub soil. It took a while to get a start date for this work but I am pleased to report that this exciting survey has just begun . It is too early to issue results but we do hope to get these on to the Oxford Freeman website as soon as possible this late autumn.

Not much to report from Chippenham, other than we have been in discussion about moving forward. We've been having a push on local history related things in the town and having talked to several of the Burgess's we will be making a definite move to pull everybody together. Uncertain times have put many plans on the back burner but we will prevail.



## *F.E.W. Gazette & Guilds Directory.*

2020 - 2021 A full listing of all members of the Executive, Area Wardens, The Court, the Guilds and their representatives.

Registered Address: 86 Painswick Road Gloucester GL4 6PT

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1966 - 1981 Harry Ward MSc FRIC FCIS York (deceased)  
1981 - 1991 Col John Kenyon OBE MC Shrewsbury (deceased)  
1991 - 1996 William F Healey Chester (deceased)  
1996 - 1999 Richard Bishop BEd DASE Altrincham  
1999 - 2002 Alm Robson Newcastle upon Tyne  
2002 - 2005 Maurice Pickering London (deceased)  
2005 - 2008 Philip Bowman York and London (deceased)  
2008 - 2010 Colin Hardcastle York and London (deceased)  
2010 - 2013 Alan Follows Shrewsbury  
2013 - 2015 Gordon Vamdell London  
2015 - 2017 Ronald Leek Alcester and London  
2017 - 2019 Capt. James Evans Berwick upon Tweed

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**The person so named is that Guild's notified holder, at time of press, of their vote at General and Court Meetings.**

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**Changes of representatives or their contact details should be directed to the  
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**Please note the closing date for the editor to receive items for the next issue (No. 197) is the 13/2/21 for publication in March. Member Guilds are particularly invited to send news for this edition.**

If you would like to receive future editions of this journal by email (as a PDF) rather than through the post, please contact the editor with your details.

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