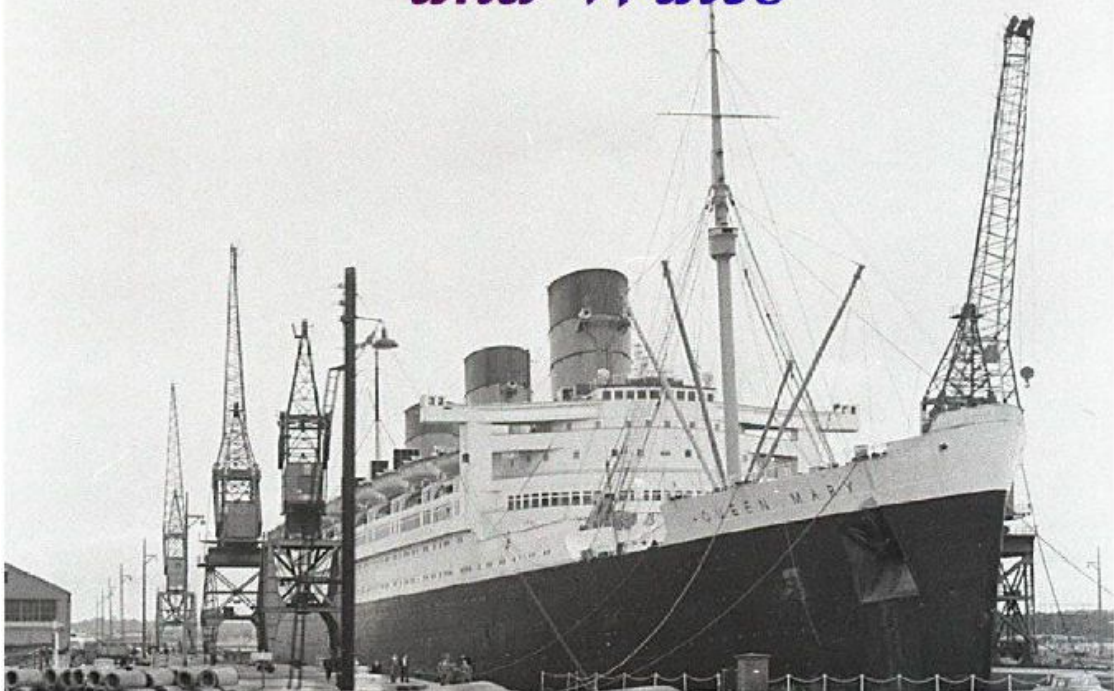
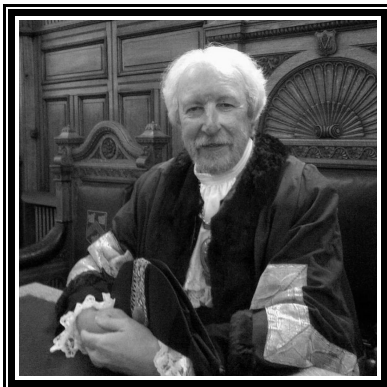


Freemen of England and Wales



**Journal 198.
Summer 2021.
With Compliments.**

President's Letter



This is the last letter that I will write to you as President. I would like to be able to say that it has been a memorable two years but if it has it has been for all the wrong reasons. Even now, with the general lifting of restrictions which had been imposed owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic it is generally felt that things are still very far from normal with cases once again rising although some protection is being offered by the vaccination programme.

It is against this scenario that the Executive have had to decide what form this year's AGM should take and, not least because of the amount of work and organisation a "full" AGM would take, or even a "mini-AGM" if we do face restrictions once again, we have decided to do as we did for the Court and hold it by Zoom. Full details may be found elsewhere in this Journal.

We seem to have been pre-occupied in recent times, in fact for the whole of my Presidential term, with matters relating to The Constitution and who does what and why, and I don't really understand why this should be.

It seems apparent to me, from comments and questions that have been raised, that we have some members who do not read the Journal, or the Annual Report, or look at our website or read their copy of the Constitution which they were given when they joined the Association.

I am also very concerned, as are the other Executive Officers, that the Court- which has been made the powerhouse of decision making rather than the AGM – is so poorly attended that it begs the question as to why we even bother holding it.

The proposal which went to the Court, held in June, which sought to make certain changes to the Constitution was defeated, mainly as a result of postal or email votes. The actual attendance on the day – by Guilds – was quite abysmal. I apologise if that sounds like harsh criticism but when I first joined the Association Bedern Hall (in York) used to be packed.

But the Constitutional Review goes ahead.

The question was asked “Why are the Executive Officers Trustees”? I don’t think that the person asking the question even realised that we had charitable status.

Initially, the Freemen of England was not a Charity, that only happened 20 years later in 1986. It was at that point that the Executive Officers were recognised as Trustees under Charity Law and written into the Constitution. You may be a Trustee of FEW without having a specific job (i.e. Officer without Portfolio) but anyone elected as an Executive Officer becomes a Trustee and certain responsibilities come with that. At the end of the day though we are just ordinary Freemen like you. The likelihood is that we have held positions within our own Guilds and have acquired the necessary skills and experience to offer for the benefit of FEW but we can be voted out just as easily as we are voted in.

Similarly, the Association operates under stated Aims and Objectives, to suggest any sort of change in them and you would need to justify the reasons to the Charity Commission.

Stephen White, President

Minutes of the Court Meeting **held on Saturday 26th June 2021 Via Zoom**

Due to the meeting being held via Zoom, all documents were circulated by email, to all Guild Representatives, prior to the meeting.

1) Attendees.

Derek Austin (Warden for the South Midlands), John Booth (Durham), Stewart Bristow (Lincoln), Alex Christison (Asst. Membership Secretary), John Edwards (Warden for the North Midlands), Capt. Jim Evans (Immediate Past President), Alan Fallows (Archivist), Sue Haigh (Chester), Stephen Healy (Warden for the North East), Lee Hensley (Hon. Secretary), Denise Laver (Warden for the North West), Ian Phillips (Warden for Wales), Angela Priestly-Gibbins (Warden for the East), Alan Shelley (Vice President), Stephen White (President & Hon. Treasurer)

a) The meeting was called to order, and the President welcomed everyone present.

2) Apologies for absence were received from

Nic Christison (Warden for the South West), Howard Crapper (Warden for the West), Andrew Croose (Gloucester), Tom Gibson (Deputy President / Hon. Editor), Shane Hales (Rochester), Tony Head (Bridgnorth), Michael Herriot (Berwick), Nick Johnson (Warden for the South East), Ron Leek (Alcester & Southwark), Ray Mason (Newcastle under Lyme), Jimmy Mattison (Alnwick), Ralph Mills (Hale), Maxine Taylor (Beverley), Trevor

Ward (Northampton), Lionel Weaver (Montgomery), Charlotte Yeates (Membership Secretary).

A moment of silence was held for Val Pettifer, Freeman of York and former Warden of the East and Colin Davies, Guild representative for Montgomery both of whom had recently passed away, and to remember any others that have passed.

3) The minutes of the Court Meeting held on Saturday 16th March 2019 at the Durham City Town Hall, Market Place, Durham, were approved as a correct record, and will be signed by the President, when current covid restrictions are lifted.

Proposed by John Edwards, Seconded by Alan Shelley.

4) Matters arising not on the agenda. - None

5) Stephen White's President's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

6) Tom Gibson's Deputy President's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

7) Alan Shelley's Vice President's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

8) Capt. Jim Evans Immediate Past President Report was noted. A copy is appended.

9) Stephen White's Hon. Treasurer's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

10) Charlotte Yeates Hon. Membership Secretary Report was noted. A copy is appended.

11) Tom Gibson's Hon. Editor's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

12) Alan Fallows Hon. Archivist's Report was noted. A copy is appended.

13) No report from the Officer without Portfolio, position Vacant.

14) Wardens' Reports were noted as follows: -

Capt. Stephen Healy, Warden for the North East. Copy appended.

John Edwards, Warden for the North Midlands. Copy appended.

Howard Crapper, Warden for the West. Copy appended.

Nick Johnson, Warden for the South East. Copy appended.

Derek Austin, Warden for the South Midlands. Copy appended.

Ian Phillips, Warden for Wales. Copy appended.

The President, Stephen White, reminded the Wardens and Executive officers that reports should only contain matters relating to the role being undertaken by that particular Officer, they are not the place to include comments about the running of the organisation or to make comments about other officers of the association, and any report that had been

submitted for today, or any other time, that contain any remarks such as those mentioned, will be edited before publication in the journal.

Capt. Stephen Healy respectfully suggested that any edits to reports be run by the author and their approval gained on that. Stephen Healy also mentioned the content in his report was the outcome of communication with Guilds in his area and believes the comments made are within the remit of Warden.

Denise Laver asked if reports need to be sent to the President as well as the Hon. Secretary, Stephen White replied that reports should be sent to the Vice President and the Hon. Secretary.

15) Approval for FEW funds to purchase a chain for the Presidents Lady's medallion

Past President's Ladies have used their own personal chain to hang the medallion on, this was discussed at an Executive meeting and agreed that the Court would be asked to purchase a chain. After much discussion on what was required and at what cost it would be, it was agreed by the Court that Janet Leek (a Former President's Lady) who made and donated the medallion, be asked to advise on the type of chain required and a costing for it.

16) Discussion on the format of future AGM and Court meetings.

A discussion took place which ranged from the costs involved with the AGM, and the benefits of the social side of the AGM, ideas mooted from the discussions were that a Hybrid approach would be best, whereby members could still be involved remotely via zoom. It was agreed by all those present that moving forward that the AGM would take place in the afternoon, to enable members to travel to the event in the morning. Denise Laver believed that asking Guilds to hold both the court, then the AGM the following year was too much and was possibly putting Guilds off from hosting events. The President advised The Court that the way this came about was to give members a "taste" of the host Guilds facilities at the Court prior to the AGM, but there was no hard and fast rule why this had to be so.

Grimsby have been asked to host the 2022 AGM.

Lincoln have offered to host a Court Meeting and would possibly be able to host the AGM in 2023.

Altrincham have offered to host either a Court or AGM in the near future.

17) Appointment of the Working Group

Prior to the meeting all Guild representatives had been informed, via email, of the Executives' decision to propose the formation of a working party to look at the FEW Constitution and Policies & Procedures. This appointment is now finalised with the core working party members confirmed as Capt. Stephen Healy, Ian Phillips and Alan Shelley with others being added to consider specific subjects.

18) Proposal of change to the Constitution

There had been 2 proposals received, and sent out via email, prior to the meeting. The President Stephen White, gave a brief description on the two proposals before voting began. Capt. Stephen Healy lodged a formal objection to the meeting on the grounds that the second proposal received was not a counter proposal due to it not referencing the first proposal, after much discussion it was decided to take the proposals in the order they had been received.

1st Proposal

The proposal is as follows: - (changes in *italic*)

That the Constitution be amended as follows, in the form of an additional sentence or clause, in section 10) Officers, paragraph b):

With the exception of the President, who following election at an Annual General Meeting, shall serve in office for a term of two years, and also the Immediate Past President, all other Executive Officers shall be elected annually at the Annual General Meeting, and shall hold office until the next Annual General Meeting after their appointment. In the case of death or resignation of the President or any other Executive Officer, the Court shall have the power to fill the vacancy so caused until the next Annual General Meeting. Officers shall hold office as individuals, and not as representatives of their Gilds/Guilds, but may also act as such representatives. ~~One person may hold more than one office.~~ *No one individual shall simultaneously hold any combination of the offices of President, Honorary Secretary and/or Honorary Treasurer. Other executive duties may be held in combination by an individual officer.* The duties of officers shall be allocated by the Court, which may authorise the appointment of additional officers if required, subject to requiring ratification at the next AGM. The Executive may appoint Officers authorised by the Court, to vacancies between Court Meetings on a temporary basis.

Results of voting of the 1st proposal: - For 19 Votes, Against 8 Votes, Abstaining 1 Vote.

2nd proposal

That the constitution remains at its 2018 Edition and no further proposals for change be accepted until the deliberations of any approved working party instigated for that purpose have been fully completed and gained Executive approval. The reason for this being that continual changes to the Constitution convey inefficiency to the Charity Commission and could incur unnecessary investigation.

This is the feelings of the Trustees of the Newcastle – under Lyme.

Results of voting of the 2nd proposal: - For 8 Votes, Against 18 Votes, Abstaining 1 Vote.

The FEW Constitution states that on matters of amendments to the Constitution that “alterations to this Constitution must receive the assent of a minimum of two-thirds of the members eligible to vote at an Annual General Meeting or a Special General Meeting, following approval by the same margin at the preceding Court meeting.”

On this basis both proposals have failed to meet the requirements and will not proceed any further.

19) Appointment of Independent Examiners

The President, Stephen White, proposed the Lincolnshire firm of Forrester Boyd, Chartered Accountants, to carry out the independent examination of the FEW accounts, this was seconded by Alan Fallows. All those present agreed. Capt. Stephen Healy, although not opposed to the use of Forrester Boyd, had asked that as the Charity Commission refer to real and perceived conflicts of interest, and while Forrester Boyd are a reputable and large company, they are in the same town and have connections with the FEW Treasurer. Stephen Healy asked that a statement be added by Forrester Boyd “that there maybe a perceived conflict of interest because of our proximity to the Treasurer with which we work, therefore, our mitigating measures are as follows.....” Stephen Healy also asked that the fact the accounts are counter signed by Tom Gibson (Deputy President) be declared at the AGM so the Court is aware how the accounts are finally signed off.

Stephen White thanked Stephen Healy for his comments and confirmed he would discuss this matter with Forrester Boyd.

20) Any Other Business.

Alan Shelley offered to step in as acting Deputy President if required.

Ian Phillips raised the point that many of the Guilds have been doing really good work in the community during the covid crisis and could we just minute our thanks to anyone of any Guild who has done sterling work. He would particularly like to cite a member from Pembroke who played the bagpipes every Thursday evening when everybody was doing the hand clap. The President, Stephen White, asked that any information like that would be greatly received and added to the journal, as there has been very little to report this past year.

John Booth, the newly appointed Chairman of the Wardens for Durham City Freemen, made the following observation:

I haven't been actively involved with the FEW but I have proposed at our meeting on Thursday that Durham City Freemen should be actively involved, wherever possible, with the FEW. Having listened to what's being said and particularly along the structure of the FEW, I have grave reservations. I feel that its' excellent you have appointed a working group, we did exactly the same here in Durham, we have gone through a similar situation where we had to look at restructure and we have come up trumps, the difference is I believe is a body of trustees who are somewhat separate from the Freemen. The Freemen run the day-to-day business of the Freemen and the trustees handle the financial affairs and meet four times a year and share our collective business. From what I've heard today, and I would need to be convinced, I would like to think that the working group are given a totally free hand to look at what is wrong and what is right about the FEW. But I think

that the FEW needs to be very open minded about what the recommendations are possibly the route forward. However, if we look at the proposals that the working group come up with, and they are looked at objectively, I think Durham could become more and more involved, but I suspect that the Executive is steeped in its own ideas, and if I was thinking about being active or recommending someone to be a warden for the area, when Stephen Healy steps down for example, I would be reluctant at this present moment in time to do that. I feel that FEW is a lost cause, and I feel that the wardens of the FEW should have a greater voice within the running of the organization because I can see if nothing changes in a very short space of time that there will be dire consequences for the FEW, which would be absolutely tragic. I would expect that we look to the FEW for inspiration and the model of good practice for the rest of the Freemen. I'm not trying to be negative; I'm trying to be objective. We at Durham have been through the same and we have come through it and are absolutely moving forward now, and I beg you all to do the same."

Capt. Stephen Healy thanked John Booth for the support he and the Durham clerk, Kathleen Vasey, had given the working group and was looking forward to the continued support offered by Durham.

The President, Stephen White, explained the fundamental differences between Durham and the FEW is that each Guild has got its own focus and their own area. FEW is a collective of all those Guilds or representatives into one body, and FEW does not dictate to Guilds on how they run their affairs. FEW is a forum for Guilds to come and share experiences and to discuss problems and to try and get resolves to those problems, and at the end of the day through the funds that they have accumulated, help Guilds to fight legal cases which have been imposed upon them. Stephen White confirmed that the working Group had been given free rein to look over the Constitution and the way FEW runs itself.

Denise Laver thanked John Booth for his comments and said it matches what others had been saying to her.

Stephen White thanked everyone for their constructive comments and was pleased that the Guild representatives were comfortable having these frank discussions as it will benefit the organisation in the future.

Denise Laver wanted to minute how proud Altrincham Court Leet were of football referee Anthony Taylor, who is a Freeman of Altrincham, as he was the one who stop the European championship group game between Denmark and Finland, when a player collapsed during the game due to having a heart attack.

21) Future Court and AGM venues.

The 2021 Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 18th September 2021 at 1pm. Further details will be available in the journal.

22) Closure of Court.

There being no further business, the President closed the meeting.

Reports of the Executive Officers

President:

Owing to the ongoing Covid “situation”, and cancellation of events, my time as President has been quiet over the last year. I have not been asked to perform any “official” duties although I was delighted to receive an invitation earlier this year from the Mayor of Northampton to attend (by Zoom) the Investiture of Lord Earl Spencer as an Hereditary Freeman of Northampton; this was reported in Journal 197.

It is regrettable that the Court Meeting today is having to be held by Zoom and our AGM too since there are no guarantees in place that would enable us to gather in person.

The issues raised by the Wardens following the 2019 AGM, and the motivation behind them, continue to occupy my thoughts and those of the other Executive Officers.

They say that change is inevitable, and that in order to stand still you have to keep moving. Change is not always a bad thing and can be a driving force for good so long as sufficient thought goes into the reasons why a change is necessary and what will have to be actually done to bring such a change about.

The Freemen of England and Wales is an Association steeped in history and tradition, it would be easy for our newer and younger members not to appreciate the actions and nuances which brought it into being and shaped its’ development since 1966, one of those being granted Charitable status in 1986.

The Association was founded to protect the rights and existence of Hereditary Freemen; that is why full membership is granted to those bodies of people, as defined in The Constitution.

Our Constitution has undergone a number of changes during our history, these are noted within the Annual Report. We have, on occasion, allowed changes to take place which have then been regretted requiring further changes to be made to restore things back to how they were, or how we had intended.

Such changes have always been dealt with openly, receiving due approval from the membership and then from the Charity Commission to whom we are ultimately responsible.

Today’s Agenda has an item calling for a change in The Constitution, there is a counter-proposal against this.

The Executive recognise that there are parts of the Constitution which require clarification and revision and support the proposal to create a working group to carry out this piece of work. The Change being proposed today is just one of those items which would be covered by such a review.

I would ask you all to consider carefully as to how you vote; we have seen from past history how easy it is to enact a change and then regret it, the Working Group will ensure that full and careful consideration will be given to all elements where revision is thought to be necessary. In addition, we don't really want to be going back to the Charity Commission too regularly to approve changes, they will start to wonder whether we know what we are doing.

Thank you.

Deputy President:

Apart from chairing an executive Zoom meeting, I have no activities to report.

Vice President:

My wider activities have been constrained due to the Covid epidemic. However, in some respects the regularity of electronic communications has allowed a constancy not previously enjoyed. There have been several meetings with the Area Wardens, by Zoom, where a range of in-depth discussions have taken place.

Again, with the advantages of 'Zoom Meetings' I have been saved from distant journeys to my Guild of Freemen at Sudbury in Suffolk. We have had many interesting discussions. Most importantly we have been devising a beneficial 'modern apprenticeship scheme' from whence to improve the intake of new candidates into the Freedom of Sudbury.

Of course, I miss meeting with my friends 'in the flesh' as it were, particularly, in Sudbury and locally at Gloucester. It should not be too long now, for us to be getting together again.

This Court Meeting, the first to be run under the restrictions of remote electronic communications, is a most important event and we have several matters that require urgent discussion and resolution.

My best wishes to all,

Immediate Past President:

I have not been required to do any duties as IPP. Although we have completed the pilot archives project work is continuing with the help of 20 volunteers. The final report for the cataloguing is still underway. We are now putting together our presentation of the results for when we are allowed to hold meetings once more. We are also preparing an electronic presentation which we hope to make available to FEW member Guilds.

Treasurer:

This report is for the year-ending 31st March 2021. This is not as fully detailed as the

Annual Report in that it only includes summaries for the Income and Expenditure Account and Designated Funds and does not have the same extensive notes found in the Annual Report.

The total cash funds held at the end of March were £56,547, there has been no valuation made at this time for the stock of resale items, Officer's Regalia or other assets. Neither has a calculation been made in respect of the set-aside for the Self-insurance Fund nor the claim to be made for tax recovered under the Gift Aid Scheme.

INCOME

Subscriptions – Both Individual subscriptions and Guild subscriptions show improvements over the previous year, this is due to the efforts of the Membership Secretary and her Assistant.

Donations – to various Funds are not too different to the previous year.

Sales – are self-explanatory and the lack of sales is due, mainly, to the fact that we have not held face-to-face meetings over the last year which is when most sales are made.

Interest – rates have been very depressed, reflected in the interest received.

Total receipts should be a little more than the previous year once Gift Aid is taken into account.

EXPENDITURE

Administrative – some expenses in this section have increased, others have reduced. The membership Secretary has been very proactive in chasing up members (both individuals and Guilds) and this has come at a cost but has yielded good results. The Zoom Licence was purchased in order to allow us to hold meetings (Court and AGM in mind) that would have been more problematic had we continued with Skype or the free version of Zoom.

Purchases – have been nil but with some stocks now running very low that is about to change.

Journal – only 2 issues were produced compared to 3 the previous year. Costs for the printing are in proportion for the number of copies printed but postage costs have increased.

AGM – since there was no physical AGM held last year, and none planned this year owing to Covid restrictions, there are no costs here.

Legal & Regalia – there have been no costs here.

Court & Officers Meetings – there have been no costs here due to meetings either being cancelled or held by Zoom.

Total Expenditure is a little less than the previous year producing a gross surplus of just under £2,200. This will increase once the Gift Aid amount has been factored in.

Designated Funds – there will be an element of Gift Aid to add here. A further provision will be made in the Self-Insurance Fund based on revised value of Regalia etc. and this will be shown as an increase on the Balance Sheet but a reduction on the Income and Expenditure nett surplus.

MOVEMENT OF DESIGNATED FUNDS - 2019/20 to 2020/21

	2019/20	2020/21
Legal Fund		
Balance brought forward, 1st April	5,061.87	5,286.77
Donations received	193.40	180.00
Tax recovered	31.50	-
Addnl Tax recovered	-	-
LESS: Costs Incurred	-	-
Balance at 31st March	<u>5,286.77</u>	<u>5,466.77</u>
Regalia Fund		
Balance brought forward, 1st April	228.64	270.78
Donations received	171.00	170.00
Tax recovered	29.00	-
Addnl Tax recovered	-	-
LESS: Purchases made	-157.86	-
Balance at 31st March	<u>270.78</u>	<u>440.78</u>
Regalia Self-Insurance Fund		
Balance brought forward, 1st April	9,377.40	10,685.40
Amount Provided	1,308.00	-
Amount set against Fund	-	-
Balance at 31st March	<u>10,685.40</u>	<u>10,685.40</u>
TOTAL DESIGNATED FUNDS	<u>16,242.95</u>	<u>16,592.95</u>

INCOME

April to March

EXPENDITURE

<u>2019/20</u>		<u>2020/21</u>		<u>2019/20</u>		<u>2020/21</u>	
£		£		£		£	
Note 1				Note 6			
	<u>SUBSCRIPTIONS</u>				<u>ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES</u>		
2,239.00	Individual	2,437.00		76.05	Postage	170.67	
635.00	Guilds	<u>1,310.00</u>		-	Archives	-	
<u>2,874.00</u>		<u>3,747.00</u>		-	National Archives - Travel	-	
				136.95	Other Travel	-	
	Annual Subscriptions are taken at £10.00 for each individual and the set level for Guilds. Any donation above this amount is, in the absence of any other instructions split equally between the Legal and Regalia Funds			286.21	Stationery	129.70	
				285.00	Printing/photocopying	424.00	
				144.00	Website	144.00	
				-	Zoom Licence	<u>143.88</u>	
				<u>928.21</u>		<u>1,012.25</u>	
Note 2				Note 7			
	<u>DONATIONS TO:-</u>				<u>PURCHASES</u>		
54.00	General Fund	44.01		-	Robes	-	
193.40	Legal Fund	180.00		-	Ties	-	
171.00	Regalia Fund	<u>170.00</u>		-	Members Medallions	-	
<u>418.40</u>		<u>394.01</u>		-	Robe Badges	-	
				-	Blazer badges	-	
Note 3				-	Lapel badges	-	
	<u>SALES</u>			-	Wall Plaques	-	
-	Robes	-		-	Pens	-	
69.00	Ties	-		-	Cufflinks	-	
-	Members Medallions	-		-	Membership Wallets	-	
21.90	Robe badges	-			<u>50th Anniversary Souvenirs</u>		
237.00	Blazer badges	-		-	Pens	-	
49.50	Lapel badges	3.30		-	Badges	-	
-	Wall plaques	-		-	Mugs	-	
8.80	Stickers	-		<u>-</u>		<u>-</u>	
-	Headsquares	-		Note 8			
-	Books	-			<u>JOURNAL (3/2 editions in period)</u>		
10.50	Pens	-		788.00	Production	480.00	
40.50	Cuff Links	-		581.05	Postage/distribution	<u>500.00</u>	
-	Membership Wallets	-		<u>1,369.05</u>		<u>980.00</u>	
-	"The Guilds" - M E Pickering	-		Note 9			
-	Aspects of the Freedom	-			<u>ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS</u>		
2.80	Membership Certificates	2.80		-385.80	2019 ~ Gloucester (Deposit 2018/19)	-	
28.00	50th Anniversary Pens	-		-	2020 ~ Grimsby	-	
20.00	50th Anniversary Badges	-		-	2021 ~ Coventry	-	
-	50th Anniversary Mugs	-		<u>-385.80</u>		<u>-</u>	
<u>488.00</u>		<u>6.10</u>		Note 10			
					<u>LEGAL & REGALIA EXPENSES</u>		
Note 4					-	Legal Expenses	-
	<u>INTEREST RECEIVED</u>			157.86	Past-President & Lady's Medallions	<u>-</u>	
260.73	COIF Deposit A/c	36.46		<u>157.86</u>		<u>-</u>	
14.84	NatWest Reserve A/c	4.39		Note 11			
4.80	Gift Aid Tax Refund Interest	<u>1.72</u>			<u>COURT & OFFICERS' MEETINGS</u>		
<u>280.37</u>		<u>42.57</u>		-	Court/Exec Meeting Room Hire	-	
				-	Court/Exec Catering - Nett	-	
Note 5				-	Other Court/Exec Meeting Expenses	-	
	<u>INCOME TAX RECOVERED</u>			<u>-</u>		<u>-</u>	
0.00	Re: Gift Aid Declarations 2018/2019	-		2,069.32	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>1,992.25</u>	
457.25	Re: Gift Aid Declarations 2019/2020	-					
0.00	Re: Gift Aid Declarations 2020/2021	-		2,448.70	SURPLUS FOR YEAR	2,197.43	
<u>457.25</u>		<u>-</u>					
<u>4,518.02</u>	TOTAL RECEIPTS	<u>4,189.68</u>		1,575.04	Less transfers to Designated Funds	<u>350.00</u>	
				<u>873.66</u>	AVAILABLE SURPLUS	<u>1,847.43</u>	

Membership:

Individual Membership

We have now issued membership cards to individual members as they pay from September last year until end of this April. There are currently 309 paid up individual members, of which we have no GDPR forms for 44. These 44 have been written to at least once since I took over as Hon Membership Secretary, we are reminding them again when we send the membership card, this process should be completed by this September. Some have now been written to a second time warning them that if they do not return the form FEW will no longer legally be able to contact them.

There are still twelve members paying at the old membership rate of £8, all of whom have written to including a standing order form encouraging them to pay by this method asking them to pay at the correct rate of £10.

There seems to have been a problem with some of the new standing orders that were due to start this year not being activated. This is being investigated by the Hon Treasurer but we may need to write to the effected members with new forms.

There are nine members who have not paid since 2019, and have not replied to letters.

On a positive side we have resignations to report, and welcomed five new members and three who had lapsed and are now fully paid up.

Guild/Gild Membership

There are 38 member guilds/gilds of which some are in arrears, brought about by the pandemic not allowing them to meet to ratify payment to FEW. One guild has not responded since 2018 to any communication.

Now that we are coming out of lockdown there should be a chance for Wardens to talk to members and guilds/gilds again.

There have been two notable deaths from individuals who gave their time and skills to their guild/gild and to FEW. It is with great sadness to state that Val Pettifer died, she served as a Warden for many years and Colin Davies who was the Guild Representative for Montgomery.

Editor :

Since my last report Two editions of the Journal have been published, and have generally been well received by most, including a phone call from a member, who wanted me to know how much they enjoy reading about the activities of Guilds, other than their own. However, in contrast, one of the Wardens of FEW recently informed me that they did not bother reading the journal at all, because they found it “boring”.

While the first of the two editions (196) contained the reports that should have been given at the 2020 AGM, the second (197), and indeed a third (198, for which I have only received 4 pages of material at time of writing) have been extremely difficult to fill. This,

of course, was due to most members activities, as well as those of FEW, being curtailed by the various restrictions we have all been living under so having little to report. This, combined with the printers being closed due to lack of sufficient work to make it worth opening much during 2020, also necessitated the schedule for issuing Journals being delayed, I am grateful to Gill and Jill at Focus4print for doing all they could to help minimise delays as much as possible.

Issue 198 will be published as soon as possible after the court meeting, so it can include reports from it. My thanks to those who have contributed to it.

While I am aware that most member Guilds will be concentrating on re starting activities as restrictions allow and on recovery from the unprecedented times we have been in, I remind you all that the copy date for items for the next edition is published on the last page of each edition. I can only include what I receive and hope it is of interest to the reader.

Archivist:

In the period since our last meeting there have been no calls for information from the Archives however information has been added from Great Grimsby, York, Leicester and Berwick.

Berwick continue with the digital archives project and I look forward to receiving instructions upon completion which we may be able to incorporate into our own archives. I have, of course, spent an inordinate amount of time giving information and advice to gild members concerned about the proposals listed for today's meeting. It will be necessary to revisit the details of this process and ensure that we do not suffer a repeat.

Reports of the Area Wardens

North East:

Guilds in the North East have proved resilient over recent months and have continued to do the necessary business, whether that is by electronic means or in person.

No more so than in the City of Durham, where John Booth, Warden of the Barbers' Company, has recently been elected as the new Chairman of the Wardens. We congratulate him on his appointment. The Freeman continue to engage with, and watch closely the situation on the Sands, an area by the river Wear, in which they have a long-standing historical interest. Durham County Council lodged an application to the Planning Inspectorate in 2019 to deregister part of this land, to provide a car park for a new Civic Headquarters. A public enquiry has been taking place but, at the time of writing, it is too early to advise on any outcomes.

The town of Berwick upon Tweed has made huge strides with the digitization of its archives over the last year, a sizeable part of which documents the history of their Freeman. Capt. Jim Evans in particular, has been heavily involved in the project. The Freeman now also have two bequeathed photographic collections, which they are also

intending to add to the available historic material. Alongside this, the plan to redevelopment Berwick barracks is gaining momentum, including a purpose built repository for many of the archived records. A plan to create a 'research room' at the Town Hall has stalled due to the pandemic, but will hopefully be picked up again shortly.

North West: No Report Received

North Midlands:

When I took on this role some eleven years ago, I understood that my role was principally to act as a communications channel between the guilds in my area and FEW. I have endeavoured to do this including attending local events, such as the Bridgnorth Banquet, a Shrewsbury dinner with their London associates, the Newcastle-under-Lyme annual pay-out and the Derby AGM, in addition to my local Stafford events. All area guilds have been represented at various Stafford events and they have always been pleasant and amicable.

Sadly, since the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic there have been very few events where I can participate and talk directly to the members of my guilds. I was sorry to learn that Doug Crompton, the excellent secretary to the Shrewsbury Gild had been hospitalised with the disease and decided to resign as the FEW representative. The long-term representative of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Mr Brian Simpson, a stalwart of their group, now has communication problems and has also been replaced. Hopefully, when things get back to normal, the new representatives will keep me aware of their ongoing programmes so I can once again carry out my role in the North Midlands.

I have tended to glean information about the local freemen's events from their various web sites, but like so many things in the past 18 months, few of them have kept up to date. I must admit that the Stafford site has stagnated due to equipment failure and a lack of people willing and capable of keeping it current. This is all rather sad, as Web sites, Facebook, WhatsApp etc., are now the primary means of communications, particularly by young people. I am not sure what I can do about this, but if more people are going to find out about the freedom and what it stands for, it must be addressed.

Anyway, at Derby they have a couple of interesting projects in hand, notably that they have commissioned professional support in translating an ancient charter from medieval Latin to modern English. It is intended that this document will be a feature of new public developments in the City, assisting an understanding of its heritage. The attempts to read the old fire-damaged freemen's rolls using MRI scanners continues, but obviously that has gone down the priority for the equipment in 2021.

At Stafford, the show goes on, at least as far as Covid will allow. Stafford Guild Council has held monthly Zoom Meetings, as have the Trustees of the Stafford Freemen's Allotments. The pandemic has been advantageous to the allotments with many more people seeing the benefits of 'grow your own'. Unfortunately, that has complicated my job as Scribe to the Trust, dealing with everything from thefts, vandalism, boundary disputes, neglected plots and fly tipping. The next project is the installation of an

electricity supply to help with security. Administering the land for some 300 gardeners can be hard at times, but it is a worthwhile use of the Freeman's ancient heritage. There is light on the horizon, with the booking of the Stafford Annual Dinner in 2022. Hopefully, as lockdown starts to ease, we will once again be able to welcome representatives from local guilds to that event. As with everywhere else, as Warden for the North Midlands, I have been able to contribute precious little during this past extraordinary year.

South Midlands:

Coventry Freeman's Guild.

The Chinese virus restrictions caused the cancellation of the FEW Court Meeting arranged for the 4th April 2021 in the Tudor style Coventry Council House. Delays exacerbated by the pandemic caused the completion of the St Mary's Guildhall refurbishment slipping from December 2020 to December 2021 – hence the cancellation of the FEW AGM planned for September.

Salvaging some events for the Guild's 75th anniversary year, it was planned to invite the Lord Mayor to become Guild President at a dinner on 16th July – now could be in doubt with restrictions not being lifted on 21st June. Provisional Guild banquet with change of Officers, and church service, is planned for 25/26th September respectively.

Gild of Leicester Freeman.

Zoom meetings have given some continuity during the lockdown, with the annual Common Hall meeting also on zoom on 14th April – with Officers resplendent in robes. Brian Mudford stood down from his second term as Gild Master, with Jeff Lewitt taking over. No volunteers for the vacant FEW Representatives post. Provisional Gild's Carol Service listed for 20th December, and 2022 banquet weekend for 4-5th June.

Northampton Guild of Freeman.

With the Governments inspired demise of the Northampton Borough Council, Freeman Brian Sargeant became the last Mayor of the Borough. In March, he invested eight new Freeman over zoom – some internationally! The replacement Northampton Town Council took effect on 1st April, and assurances are awaited that the legal position, customs and boundaries relevant to the Freeman will be carried forward. Provisional Freeman's plans include a 'get together' in the autumn, and resumption of the annual Charity Weekend event in 2022.

Alcester Court Leet & Court Baron.

With activities curtailed, virtual Ale Tastings have enabled some Leet continuity in these lockdown times. It is hoped that the annual Court Meeting will return to normal on October.

Henley-in-Arden Court Leet & Court Baron.

Some smaller 'socially distanced' events like the Christmas Windows competition, and the opening of new businesses on the High Street have been held. A special 'Court Baron' meeting was held on zoom – the first for over 400 years. The medieval Guildhall has had

a significant loss of income with the pandemic, but luckily government grants should help with urgent roof repairs.

Warwick Court Leet.

With regard to the governments road map out of restrictions, it had been hoped to hold the Pageant Gardens Beer Festival over 9-10 July – now cancelled. Hopefully the 14th August Court Leet Assizes of town food and ale can be held, with the Market Place Classic car Show the day after.

Finally a plea to all Guilds and Court Leet– please get the dates of your major events listed in the FEW Journals, to help stop clashing events.

West:

Very little to report for the period of the Pandemic.

Oxford did celebrate St Georges Day with an online screening of the service from St Michaels. Only our Chairman attended and his reading of the first lesson was transmitted. In Malmesbury, the Freemen continue to bolster the flood defences around their housing stock.

Wales:

I should say lack of a report. My Guilds have chosen not to hold meetings until post pandemic so nothing to report. They are staying in touch with their own Members. As you know Colin Davies at Montgomery has passed away sadly.

As you will have seen from a previous journal many of us are doing our bit during the pandemic. Mel Phillips at Pembroke wrote a book of her journal during the pandemic, the funds raised being donated to Withybush Hospital in Haverfordwest.

London and the South East:

Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery (ROFF)

The business of fishing continues steadily in the River Medway, although having been somewhat impacted by lockdown measures, and by some Freemen of the River who are still shielding for a variety of health reasons.

The Admiralty Court was cancelled for 2021, and there have been no meetings whatsoever owing to restrictions.

South West: No Report Received.

News from Guilds.

Warwick Court Leet

With the Government's roadmap out of the Covid-19 pandemic predicting easing of restrictions by June, it is hoped that the following events can be held:

9-10 July: Beer Festival in the Pageant Gardens

14th August: Court Leet Assizes with tasting of town food & Ale with pomp & ceremony

15th August: Classic Car Show in the Market Place
28th October: Annual Court in the Jury Street Courthouse

Gild of Leicester Freeman

With the pandemic lockdown continuing into 2021, there is little Gild activity to report, with some meetings on Zoom.

The 2021 Common Hall meeting was held on Zoom on 14th April, with Gild Officers resplendent in robes. Master Brian Mudford thanked the Deputy Lord Mayor for his speech, and advised Gild donations to the Mayoral charities of the PDSA and the Air Ambulance. After his report, Brian stood down from his extended tenure as Master, and was replaced by Jeff Lewitt, with Malc Ballard becoming Deputy Master. Clerk Hazel Lake reported no takers for the vacant FEW Representatives role.

It is hoped to hold the Gild's Carol Service on the 20th December at St Andrews church, and the 2022 banquet weekend is provisionally proposed for the 4th – 5th June.

Henley in Arden Court Leet & Court Baron

As with many organisations the Coronavirus pandemic has seriously affected the activities of the Court during the last year. None of the normal large calendar events like "Court Leet Day" took place. However, in conjunction with the Parish Council, we were able to officially "re-open" the town after the first lockdown ended in July. Some smaller 'socially distanced' events were able to take place including the Christmas Window competition and the opening of new businesses on the High Street.

The Annual Court Leet in November was unable to take place as normal because of the second lockdown. Instead a 'Special Court Baron' was held on the same evening via Zoom. This was the first separate Court Baron to be held in Henley for over 400 years and the first ever virtual court to be held. Reports were given but election of officers were delayed until a full Court Leet can be re-arranged.

The Court Leet always has a close relationship with the Guild Hall Trust. Again the Pandemic hit the Guild Hall with a significant loss of income from cancelled events and bookings. Happily government grants have helped the situation especially as the main focus of the Trust going forward is the urgent repairs to the roof.

Chester

Chester Freeman and Guilds have continued to hold their meetings by zoom and are busy planning events in the hope they can go ahead in 2021.

Members have been renewing our website, updating our Freeman booklet and collecting articles for our Deva Pentice to be published later in the year.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our Pentice Court ceremony in April but now have a new date in September when 11 new prospective applicants will become Freemen of the City of Chester.

Recently, our President Ian Dutton was honoured to be invited to attend a very special occasion in our Guild Church for the Collation of our Guild Chaplain Jonathon Phillips to become the Vicar of St. Peters Church.

As restrictions ease, we expect our AGM will be able to go ahead on June 19th with limited attendance but connected via zoom. This will be the first time both a face to face and virtual meeting will take place allowing members far away to be able to take part too. A small committee is planning our Annual Banquet Weekend for 8/9/10 October when we will hold a supper buffet on the Friday evening, Formal Banquet on Saturday concluding with our Church Service in the Guild Church.

Finally, it is with great sadness we inform you of the passing away of Peter Dutton. Peter was a proud Freeman of Chester devoting much of his time to the Freemen and Guilds as President, Past President and 3 terms as Honorary Secretary. Many of you will remember Peter for his enthusiasm and passion for the fellowship of Freemen.

Coventry Freemen's Guild

With the pandemic restrictions continuing into 2021, the FEW Court Meeting planned for the 4th April in the Coventry Council House had to be cancelled. Also the refurbishment of the St Mary's Guildhall, which was targeted to complete by December 2020 has slipped a whole year – so the FEW AGM based there in September 2021 also had to be cancelled – a sorry start to the Guild's 75th anniversary year – and Coventry as 2021 City of Culture!

Looking ahead to the predicted ending of the pandemic restrictions in June, the Guild will invite the Lord Mayor to become President of the Guild at a Guild Court Dinner on the 16th July.

On 13th August at 7pm in the Barnacle Village Hall, the annual Skittles and Supper event is programmed.

On 1st September at 7.30pm in the Coventry Council Chamber, the postponed Guild AGM is planned

On 25th September the Coventry Guild Banquet will see the Master designate Matt Johnson installed with his Officers – replacing our first Lady Master Carole Wilson and her team. The next day the postponed annual Freemen's Sunday service at the Guild church of Holy Trinity is programmed.

Bearing in mind the speed at which the Coronavirus is mutating, and hence a possible third lockdown, all these dates have to remain provisional at time of writing.

Northampton Freemen's Guild

Northampton Freeman Cllr Brian Sargeant had the honour of being the last Mayor of the Northampton Borough Council, and this was celebrated at the Mayor's Charity Service in All Saints Church on 21st March on Zoom. In this role he was also the Honorary President of the Guild. On 25th March Brian invested eight new Freemen over Zoom: including two in Nairobi in Kenya; and one in Nashville USA – so Zoom does have advantages!

On 1st April Cllr Rufia Ashraf took over as the first Mayor of the new Northampton Town Council.

Whilst the Freeman Trustees have continued to have virtual meetings by Zoom, it is hoped to have a Freemen's Get-Together in Stoke Bruerne in late August/September, and return to hosting the Annual Charity weekend at Moulton College over 8th – 9th April 2022.

York

On the evening of the 21st July the Secretary of State announced that the devolution of North Yorkshire would not involve merging the City with neighbouring District Councils, instead accepting the proposal which was supported by the Gild and strays council. As a result the threat to the post of Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of York and to the future creation of Freemen of the City that such a merger made has been removed. Yorks existing Unitary authority will remain unchanged with The County Council becoming a Unitary Authority covering the rest of North Yorkshire.

Berwick Upon Tweed

The Berwick Guild of Freemen has been allocated two cells in the Town Hall as family rooms. One room will be used to show family trees, the second to house a library of books about Berwick. These books were collected over the past 100 years by Tom and Jim Evans, who each served 40 years as Chairman of the Berwick Guild. There are over 300 books and pamphlets at present in the Town Hall with a further 100 to be added at a later date. Most of these books are out of date, several are not replaceable and are valuable. For this reason the library will be a reference library rather than a lending library. Books may be accessed through the Berwick Archivist, Linda Bankier, who will arrange for individual books to be available in her office, or through the Town Hall Keeper. As the Town Hall is a grade A listed building the books will be located in a free standing bookcase within a cell on the first floor of the building.

Due to Corvid 19 physical work on the two rooms has had to be suspended. However research continues with individual family trees being investigated. It is intended to display some family trees in conventional form on boards round the room. In addition there will be a folder for each family giving details regarding individuals from that family. These will be entered in chronological order. Due to GRDP restrictions names will be withheld for the past 60 years (81 with the minimum age for taking the freedom at 21). There are over 500 families who have been or are Freemen of Berwick.

Freemen in England by Harry Ward

When the book “Freemen in England” was published by Harry Ward, founder of this Association, back in 1975, (successor to Freemen of England, also published by Harry Ward in 1967), it has been regarded as THE reference book to turn to for all aspects of the Freedom within England and Wales; their origins, their history – and their future, potted histories of those places still admitting Freemen and those not so doing. And the all-important effect of the Local Government Act 1972 and how it could have ended it all but instead preserved the Freedom as a living entity.

Since then though some things have changed; local (Private) Acts of Parliament affecting singular places to the much more recent “Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009” (introduced 2011) which had the far reaching effect on granting equal rights to daughters of Freemen, previously only enjoyed by the sons, in addition to other, what might be seen to be beneficial changes to enhance the prospect of the survival of the Freedom in places where it otherwise might struggle to continue.

Despite these recent changes the book remains of great interest to both Freemen and others studying the subject but “Freemen in England” has been out of print for many years and no copies remain for sale. However, a digitised copy may be viewed, or even downloaded, from our Website via this link.

<http://freemen-few.org.uk/about/freemen-in-england-by-harry-ward>

Notices from the Archivist.

Unitisation.

You may be forgiven for thinking that the creation of unitary authorities was a thing of the past but you would be wrong.

In October 2020 the Government issued invitations to principal councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset to submit proposals for further unitisation, in readiness for devolution. These consultations closed on 19th April but you may have heard very little about them outside their specific areas.

Cumbria will now have East and West unitary authorities, but an overall county wide authority was refused. Somerset will have one authority for the whole county and North Yorkshire will have one authority with York as a separate authority.

The scope of these changes is such that Mayoralties may be affected and the likelihood of further unitisation will follow under the banner of devolution. It is likely that in a quest for cost-savings existing authorities themselves will be superseded by even larger district authorities.

I would urge vigilance in case of a need to prepare for defence of possible changes to the Freedom through changes to the controlling local authorities who validate and admit claimants.

Common Spaces.

There is a further area of concern that is arising from a misunderstanding of the terminology of common lands.

It appears that more youthful and exuberant members of the urban associations of architects and surveyors are calling unused open spaces and sometimes derelict properties common spaces ie to be available for common use.

If it involves free planting of unused verges etc this may be a commendable project, but we must beware. Such endeavours usually end up trying to grab what may be town “greens” or spaces protected by charter, local Act or covenant.

Again be vigilant and watch for groups promoting these aims in local press or on local television news programmes.

Appeal to Member Guilds.

The following is a copy of a request recently sent to all appointed reps of member Guilds.

There have been several instances over recent years where Guilds have varied their membership criteria by utilising Local Acts or Statute.

It is likely that FEW archives may not have been updated to take account of these changes and might respond to requests for information incorrectly.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with the details of the latest governing documents that your Gild is now operating under so that I can update the FEW archives accordingly.

Secretary's Notices

Nominations for Executive Officers

Dear Member's, as yet there have not been enough nominations received for positions of Executive Officers. If you wish to be nominated for a position on the Executive, could I please have your full nomination papers by the 20th August 2021 (Forms were published in the last issue of the Journal, No 198). Thank you.

AGM

Due to the continued rise in Covid cases, the Executive have decided to hold this year's AGM as a Zoom meeting on the 18th September at 1pm. If you would like to attend the meeting, please email the Hon. Secretary by the 1st September 2021, who will then email the Zoom link and AGM papers to you.

54th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Saturday 18th September 2021
at 1.00pm**

Via Zoom

AGENDA

- 1) Call to order, Welcome and Opening of AGM**
- 2) Apologies for absence**
- 3) A moment of silence in respect of those members we have lost this past year.**
- 4) Minutes of the 53rd AGM held on Saturday 21st September 2019, in The Buckholt Suite, The Cheltenham Chase Hotel, Shurdington Road, Brockworth, Gloucester, and circulated in the Annual Record and Gazette, Journal No. 194, Autumn 2019.**
- a) Approval of Minutes**
- b) Matters Arising, not forming any other part of this Agenda.**
- 5) Future Court and AGM Venues**
- 6) President's Report**
- 7) Deputy President's Report**
- 8) Vice President's Report**
- 9) Immediate Past Presidents Report**
- 10) Hon. Treasurer's Report**
- 11) Hon. Membership Secretary's Report**
- 12) Hon. Archivist's Report**
- 13) Hon. Editor's Report**
- 14) Officer Without Portfolio's Report**
- 15) Executive Officers 2021-2022**
 - a) Installation of New President**
- 16) Wardens 2021-2022**
- 17) Wardens Reports**
- 18) Any Other Business**
- 19) Closure of Proceedings**

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Please note the closing date for the editor to receive items for the next issue (No. 199) is the 30/9/21

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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