



Gildhall News



*Two remaining founding members of the Gild,
Mick Ayres and John Tolton,
become Honorary Citizens of Leicester*

Number 109

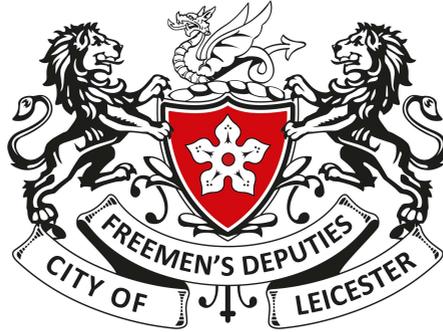
February 2026



*Crafters busily creating Christmas decorations for the
Community Centre...*

*and decorating the tree – we think they enjoyed
themselves!*





Number 109

February 2026

Gildhall News



THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL
OF THE
LEICESTER FREEMEN'S ESTATE



GILDHALL NEWS
February 2026

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Editor's Comments

"The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails."

—John Maxwell



Well, I'm definitely the pessimist at the moment, always complaining about the wind—bring on the warmer weather soon, please!

As usual, the Board continues its maintenance of Freeman's Holt, and residents and other Freeman have been taking part in a variety of activities over the last few months. Thanks to Sarah Allen, the Freeman's Engagement Officer, who keeps everyone on their toes with numerous regular activities in and outside of the Holt, including exercise classes, crafts, bingo, quiz nights, breakfasts, fish and chip suppers, a skittles night and, goodness me, she's talking about a trip to Skeggy! Get the bikini ready gals! Don't get too excited lads!

And, of course, let's not forget to thank Adam, Paul and the Board who work hard behind the scenes to make these things happen.

This edition of Gildhall News is mainly dedicated to the Gild and we'd like to thank everyone who has contributed towards it.

Val Moore

Report by Chair of the Board, Lynn Roffee



Welcome to this edition of the Gildhall News (GHN), which looks back on a number of events the Gild has been involved in over the past few years. The Gild would have celebrated its 50th anniversary this month, and this edition therefore includes some memories of past events to recognise this important milestone and mark the end of an era.

The GHN was originally circulated only to members, but about 15 years ago the Gild reached an agreement with the Board of Deputies, who agreed to contribute to its production so that every Freeman could receive a copy. The GHN has always been compiled on a voluntary basis by a Gild Court member.

Currently, the Editor is Val Moore, who is supported by her husband, Alastair, and they have decided that this edition will be their last. I would

like to take this opportunity to thank them both, on behalf of the Board, for the care, commitment and time they have given to producing the journal, which I know has been welcomed by many Freemen over the years. Former members of the Gild Court also wish to add their sincere thanks and appreciation.

I'd also like to thank my husband, Brian, for taking the many Gild photos over the last 15 years.

Looking ahead, responsibility for producing the GHN will pass to the Office. The Board will be discussing this in the coming months and considering what changes may be needed.

Events and Activities

We held several events towards the end of the year to help us get into the Christmas spirit which included a minibus outing to the Melton Mowbray Christmas Market, Christmas lunch in our Community Centre with a professional caterer providing the food, Southfield's Concert Brass Band visited for carols followed by a quiz, and we held two film shows. We have had more than enough mince pies and mulled wine to see us through to next Christmas.

Garden Party 2026

(also see separate flyer for further details)

We will be hosting the Garden Party in its usual format this year. The date to save for your diary is **Sunday 14th June 2pm – 5pm**. An invite will be sent separately with the Gildhall News. A professional caterer is providing food and you will have a few options to choose from.

Please contact the office to book your tickets and choice of food by 28th May at the very latest.

The planning committee would welcome any volunteers to help on the day, please let us know if you can help in any way.

We would welcome donations of wine or chocolate for the tombola.

Keep your fingers crossed for good weather!

Valentine's Afternoon Tea – Friday 13th February, 13:00

We will be having an afternoon tea to celebrate Valentine's Day, but as Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday we will be having the event on Friday 13th. Let's hope this does not mean we will be unlucky in love!

There is no charge for the event, but spaces are limited. We would love to see you there. Please contact the office to book your place.

Easter Coffee Morning – Thursday 2nd April 10:30

You are welcome to join us for a coffee morning with hot cross buns. We would be delighted to show you around the estate whilst you are here.

Deputy Recruitment

Joe Goddard retired from the Board in October and Linda Norman unfortunately had to retire from the Board in December due to a health issue. On behalf of all the Freeman of Leicester I would like to thank them for their service to our charity.

We currently have eleven Deputies, which is a healthy number, but we would like to encourage Freeman to consider becoming a Deputy. Applications from all walks of life are welcome. Full information will be sent separately with the Gildhall News. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact the office.

Meeting Dates 2026

All Freeman are welcome to attend the following meetings:

- Wednesday 11th March – 7.30pm Board Meeting
- Tuesday 17th March – 7.30pm Annual General Meeting
- Wednesday 10th June – 7.30 Board Meeting
- Wednesday 9th September – 7.30 Board Meeting
- Wednesday 9th December – 7.30 Board Meeting

Your Contact Information

We are reliant on Freeman updating us with their contact information. We know it is an easy thing to forget. The information we keep in our records is your name and spouse, date of birth, address, telephone number and email address. In order to keep our records up to date we would be very grateful if you could contact us to make sure all your records are correct.

If you sadly know of a Freeman who has passed away, please let us know.

The Freeman of Leicester – A Short History, John Tolton

The book is still available to purchase. You can purchase your copy via our online store, please visit our website – www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk The book is £20 plus £5 for postage and packaging.

You are also very welcome to purchase a copy directly from our office. If you live overseas, please contact our office who will be happy to calculate the postage costs and inform you how to make the payment.

Bungalow Vacancies & Extensions

We are hoping for the extension work of bungalows 18 & 30 to commence at the end of spring. Planning permission was finally granted to extend bungalow 18 to the rear in December. ***If you would like to apply for a two-bedroom bungalow you must submit your application by 31st March at the latest.*** We already have several applications for a two-bedroom bungalow, we will be carrying out interviews in April. A reminder that when we have multiple applications for a bungalow, the Board allocates the bungalow based on which applicant(s) are in most need at the time.

We have two standard bungalows which have been renovated to a high standard and are ready to be allocated. Please contact the office if you would like more information. You are more than welcome to view the bungalows and estate.

The Monthly Maintenance Contributions currently are:

One Bedroom Bungalow - £180.00

Two Bedroom Bungalow - £250.00



Allotments

Please contact the office if you would like to be put on the waiting list for an allotment. The cost for Freeman to rent an allotment is £5 per year.

Office Contact Details

Telephone - 0116 2834017

Email - office@leicesterfreemen.com

Address- 32 Freeman's Holt, Aylestone, Leicester, LE2 8NH

Website - www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk

Take care,
Lynn Roffee
Chair of the Board



Kitchen



Hallway

***A selection of photos of one of
the newly renovated vacant
bungalows on the estate***



Lounge



Bedroom



Bathroom

Programme of Future Events

Board Meetings — All Freemen are welcome and will be held at Freemen's Holt Community Centre:

Wednesday 11th March – 7.30pm
Tuesday 17th March – 7.30pm (AGM)
Wednesday 10th June – 7.30
Wednesday 9th September – 7.30
Wednesday 9th December – 7.30

Valentine's Afternoon Tea – Friday 13th February, 13:00,
Freemen' Holt Community Centre

Easter Coffee Morning – Thursday 2nd April 10:30,
Freemen' Holt Community Centre

Garden Party – Sunday 14th June 2pm-5pm,
Freemen's Holt (see separate flyer)

Have you changed your address?

In the event that it is necessary to inform the Board of any change in circumstances, the information should be sent to:

Leicester Freemen's Deputies
32 Freemen's Holt
Old Church Street
Aylestone
Leicester LE2 8NH

Telephone: **0116 283 4017**

E-mail: office@leicesterfreemen.com

Leicester Freemen website: www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk

Contributions to the Gildhall News

The Final Word

During the month of January 2026, the Gild would have celebrated 50 years since its revival, but as you all must know by now the Gild has drawn its final curtain. It would be nice to look back and remember some of the highlights of the last fifty years.

On the 13th of January, 1976, 62 freemen attended a formal revival of the Gild in the community centre at the Holt, and during that year three further meetings were held, at the Town Arms in Pocklington's Walk, the Empire Hotel on Fosse Road, and finally at the Hall of the Guild of Physically Handicapped in Colton Street on the 24th of November. By this time the total membership was 126 and we were known as the Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester. During that year the Gild also became a member of the Freemen of England, an association of the various freemen's bodies throughout England. An advantage of that association was the services of Charles Sparrow QC who expressed legal opinions on various matters affecting the swearing in of new freemen, the most important of which was the inheritance of freedom through any male ancestor providing that all descendants between were entitled to become freemen. This led to 50 new freemen being sworn in that year, an unprecedented number, including many grandsons and great grandsons.

The highlight of 1977 was a visit to Chester at the invitation of the Freemen of that ancient city, and the popularity of the event was so great that it was necessary to provide two coaches to accommodate everyone. We were royally treated by our hosts with a civic reception in Chester Town Hall, a guided tour of the city sites in the afternoon, and an informal tea and chatter in their Guildhall before the return journey. That was the beginning of a long friendship with the Freemen of Chester.

1978 saw us going from strength to strength. In January we held our first AGM, referred to as Common Hall, in the Council Chamber at the invitation of the Lord Mayor, attended by over 60 gild members in extremely cold weather conditions. Also, that year, the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Bert Baker, was invited to be the first President of the Leicester Gild of Freemen, a position held by all Lord Mayors since that date. One other event that is worthy of note is our visit to York at the invitation of York in September of that year. We were again treated royally by our hosts in York and made to feel welcome.

It was during the term of office of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Albert Watson, that a significant change took place in the swearing in of new freemen. Prior to this time prospective freemen had always been sworn in during a simple informal event in the Lord Mayor's Parlour, but it was

suggested by the City Council that the event should be a formal occasion, to be referred to as a Freeman's Court. The first Freeman's Court took place on the 3rd of November 1978, and all subsequent ceremonies have been formal events. On this day in 1978 there were 26 prospective freemen took their Oath of Freedom in the Council Chamber, and after the formal proceedings the new freemen were invited to the Lord Mayor's tearoom for light refreshments.

The Lord Mayor, Councillor Albert Watson, also opened our Common Hall that was held in the Council Chamber on Tuesday the 13th of February 1979.



*Photograph in
Leicester
Mercury dated
Wednesday,
February 14th
1979*

Pictured at the first meeting of the Gild of Freemen since the new system of admission, held at Leicester Town Hall last night, are (left to right): Mr. J. E. Tolton, clerk designate Mr. G. R. Agar, clerk to the Gild, the Lord Mayor, Mr. Albert Watson, Mr. R. L. Langton, master of the Gild, and Mr. M. E. Ayres, chamberlain.

**REVIVED GILD
FLOURISHING,
MEETING TOLD**

The year 1978 was closed with a Christmas Party for the children of members of the Gild, including a film show, party games, food, and a visit from Father Christmas, a tiring, but enjoyable day.



*This photograph was taken
in 1981 at a later party.*

The first Freeman's Court held the 3rd of November 1978

Mayor holds court at ancient ceremony to swear in Freemen

AN ANCIENT ceremony which has not taken place for about 200 years was revived yesterday when the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Mr. Albert Watson, held a Freeman's Court, a mass swearing in of new hereditary Freemen.

The 25 new Freemen were sworn in during a ceremony in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall.

Previously the Lord Mayor swore in Freemen individually

in his parlour, but since rules of qualification were changed recently, more people have applied to become Freemen and it was decided to hold a Freeman's Court twice a year.

At the ceremony the candidates paid a 50p fine, signified their presence to the Lord Mayor, who was wearing his robes, before taking and signing an oath.

The Master of the Guild of Freemen, Mr. R. L. Langton addressed the candidates followed by the Clerk to the Deputies, Mr. R. A. Moore.

The Lord Mayor then declared the Freeman's Court closed and invited the new Freemen to take tea with him.

Also present at the ceremony were the City Attorney, Mr. D. Mellor, the Chief Executive, Mr. J. S. Phipps, members of the Guild of Freemen and members of the Freeman's Deputies.

Descendants

Hereditary Freemen of the City of Leicester are direct descendants or the male line of the family of Freemen, who were originally enrolled to keep the peace and other such duties.

In 1811 local authorities took over the functions of the Freemen, and the Freeman's Courts were no longer held.

The new hereditary Freemen are: Mr. David Rouse, Mr. Darryl Rouse, Mr. Kevin Rouse, Mr. Edwin Rouse, all of 44 High Street, Desford; Mr. John Johnson, 32 Adlington Road, Oadby; Mr. Ernest Cave, 34 Twycross Street, Leicester; Mr. Herbert Cave, 27 Herrick Road, Leicester; Mr. John Cave, 51 Pine Road, Glenfield; Mr. Arthur Cave, 278 Braunstone Lane, Leicester.

Steven English, 15 Minster Crescent, Leicester; John Mills, 96 Davenport Road, Evington; Cyril Mortimer, 62 Gairbridge Crescent, Braunstone; Reginald Mortimer, 58 Silvester Road, Cowplain, Portsmouth; Robert Mortimer, 84 Brooklands Road, Cosby; Steven Mortimer, 11 Springbrook Drive, Scampton;

Edward Mortimer, Flat 2B Malpass Road, Worthy Down, Winchester.

Malcolm Clarke, 4 Cedar Drive, Market Bosworth; Cyril Burdett, 138 Gwendolen Road, Leicester; Mr. Martin Porter, 29 The Fairway Blaby; Mr. David Allen, 242 Milligan Road, Leicester; Mr. Derek Allen, 107 Gloucester Crescent, South Wigston; Mr. Sidney Allen, 11 Tythorn Drive, Wigston Fields; Mr. George Allen, 11 Shackerdale Road, Wigston Fields; Mr. Joseph Allen 144 The Fairway, Leicester; Mr. George Ross, 31 The Homestead, Ashton Lane, Sale, Cheshire.

Article in Leicester Mercury 4th November 1978

The Gild of Freemen had matured and looked forward to a bright future. Here are a few newly sworn in freemen.

HISTORIC TOWN HALL CEREMONY DATES BACK 900 YEARS

22 accept awards as freemen

A FRENCH resident and five sets of brothers are among those who have accepted awards as freemen of Leicester.

Twenty-two men were admitted to the Gild in the historic ceremony at the Town Hall.

The Lord Mayor, Councillor Henry Dunphy, presided over the court, which also included the Master of the Guild of Freemen, Mr Frank Pocklington, the chairman of the Leicester freemen's deputies, Mr William Hargrave, and the town clerk, Mr Arthur Price Jones.

The freemen date back to the 11th Century and originate from the Merchant Gild of Leicester which together with the Portmanoot (local court) formed the municipal authority for the borough.

Those admitted were: Mr Arthur Ballard, Mr Guy Bramley, Mr Peter Bramley, Mr Nigel Clements, Mr George Daniell, Mr Arthur Dudgeon, Mr Paul Harding, Mr Jamie Hargrave, Mr Jocelyn Hargrave, Mr John Hargrave, Mr John Hlaton, Mr Andrew Lester, Mr Christopher Lester, Mr Paul Lester, Mr Richard Lester, Mr Adrian Lewitt, Mr Andrew Lowitt, Mr Neal Lewitt, Mr David Manship, Mr James Manship, Mr Peter Manship, Mr Calvin Townsend and Mr Matthew Warren.



AWARDS: The new freemen of Leicester together with officers of the Freemen's Guild and the Lord Mayor, Coun Henry Dunphy, after the ceremony in the Council Chamber

October 1993



SPECIAL OCCASION: The new Freemen of Leicester with the city's Lord Mayor, Town Clerk and other council officials
PICTURE: Ailie Day / 10s-87944

803 years old – but going strong!

HEREDITARY peers may be heading for extinction – but an historic Leicester group for men only is still going strong, 803 years after it was founded.

The Guild of Freemen has signed up 18 new members, who come from as far afield as Southampton and Chesterfield, in a tradition which dates back to 1196.

Past gild master Frank Pock-

lington said: "The Guild of Freemen were effectively the municipal government of Leicester, until the 1835 reform created elected councils.

"Membership is hereditary – it goes from father to son and there are no women.

"But the Freemen of Beverley in Yorkshire have lodged a private members' bill in Parli-

ment so that they can admit women, so we may be under pressure."

The Freemen now have a ceremonial role, and recently escorted Mr Justice Auld at the city's Cathedral services to mark the opening of the Crown Court.

Freemen originally owned and had livestock grazing rights over Freemen's Common, which was

sold to create Leicester power station.

Today, the Freemen own Freemen's Holt in Aylestone, where they have developed one-bedroom bungalows for elderly members and their widows.

The latest Freemen were inducted by Lord Mayor Councillor Phil Swift at a ceremony in Leicester Town Hall.

16th of January 1990

TOP ACCOLADE: MALE FAMILY MEMBERS BENEFIT AS LORD MAYOR BESTOWS HONOUR

Brothers give freedom of city

In most families, it is characteristics like eye or hair colour which are handed down through the generations.

In the Yates family it is the freedom of Leicestershire. Darren Yates and his younger brother Shaun have become the latest members of the family to be given the honour. It was bestowed upon them by the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Coon Barbara Chambers, at a ceremony on Saturday. The accolade, which is the ultimate honour a local authority can give to its citizens, has been handed down to male members of the Yates family for generations. It dates from medieval times when their ancestors were made freemen because they

BY ELAINE GALLOWAY

were traders. Since then it has become a tradition to hand it down to their descendants. Darren and Shaun's father Paul, from Wigston, said: "Any male members of our family over the age of 18 can be given the freedom of the city. It was handed down to me from my father. His father was a freeman, as was his father before him." In medieval times, traders had to be freemen of the city and members of the Guild of Merchants before they were allowed to trade. Freemen were also allowed to enter the city without paying tolls and were the only people allowed to vote in 1265. It is thought the tradition of handing down the freedom of the city is linked to the fact that

fathers often passed their trade to their sons. Now, freemen of Leicestershire, of which there are about 600, may be entitled to live in one of 35 bungalows kept by the city council for "aged and needy freemen or their widows". John Tolson, Master of the Guild of Freemen, said: "It is an honour and it is something families do like to lose." Darren, 26, also from Wigston, and Shaun, 18, from Wigston Fields, join the likes of Lord Attenborough, David Attenborough and Gary Lincker as freemen of Leicestershire who were given honorary accolades. Darren said: "I have been waiting a long time for this, I could have received it when I turned 16, but I waited for my brother Shaun to join in together." Shaun said: "It is a great honour. I'm pleased it has been passed down the family line."



NEW GENERATION: Shaun Yates, centre, and his brother Darren, after receiving their freedom of the city honour, with their parents Paul and Debbie Yates, and Shaun's girlfriend, Leonie Duff

The Yates family after a ceremony in November 2000

Hereditary Freemen are enrolled

Thirteen Hereditary Freemen of Leicester have been enrolled by the Lord Mayor, carrying on a centuries-old tradition.

The tradition stems from the 12th century, when the honour was bestowed upon those who contributed towards the building up of the civic and commercial life of the city.

The freemen owe their origin to the Merchant Guild of Leicester, a local court with some administrative functions.

The Merchant Guild, formed in the 11th century, was a local trade brotherhood set up to protect and regulate commerce in Leicester.

Descendant

Hereditary freedom is passed along the male line of a family, normally from father to son. But anyone who can prove he is a direct descendant of a freeman can be made an hereditary freeman.

The Hereditary Freemen enrolled at a special ceremony at the Town Hall by the Lord Mayor, Mr Michael Cufflin, are:

Michael David Ayres, The Green, Old Dalby, Melton Mowbray, Colin Paul Wisdich, 55 Lindfield

Road, Western Park, Leicester; Jack Chettle, 17 Army Street, Leicester; James Anthony Chettle, 30 Pindar Road, Leicester; David Chettle, 51 Langton Road, Rugby, Warks.

Stephen Chettle, 15 Sanderson Road, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Colin Chettle, 1 Frome Avenue, Oadby; Christopher Mark Chettle, 47 Gladstone Street, Anstey; James Manship, 13 Darwen Close, Leicester; Edward Manship, 42 Corporation Road, Leicester.

Robert Manship, 31 Falconer Crescent, Leicester; Anthony Edward Manship, 42 Corporation Road, Leicester; Bruce Stephen Agar, Cheney's, Welford Road, South Kilworth.

Long life runs in the family

Former Sunday school teacher Mrs. Elizabeth Smith celebrated her 101st birthday at her Gloucester home yesterday. Longevity runs in her family — her sister, Ethel, is 98.

13 BECOME FREEMEN OF LEICESTER

THE THIRD SESSION of the new Freemen's Court was held at the Town Hall yesterday.

The 13 new Freemen were sworn in at the ancient ceremony, chaired by the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Mr. Bill Scotton.

The ceremony was held for the first time in about 200 years last year after the rules of qualification had been changed. The court is now held twice a year because of the high number of applications.

At the ceremony the candidates paid the traditional 50p fine, signalled their presence to the Lord Mayor before taking and signing an oath.

The Master of the Gild of Freemen, Mr. R. J. Langton, then made a short address to the candidates followed by the deputy chairman of the Board of Deputies, Mr. P. H. Kellett.

The Lord Mayor then declared the court closed and invited the new Freemen to take tea with him.

Also present at the ceremony were the City Attorney Mr. D. Mellor, Mr. G. R. Agar and Mr. G. Plummer, both members of the gild and Mr. K. W. Ayres and Mr. A. J. Slater, representing the Board of Deputies.

Hereditary Freemen of the City of Leicester are direct descendants on the male line of the family of the Freemen who

originally kept the peace in the city until local authorities took over from them in 1811.

The new Hereditary Freemen are: Mr. Henry Smith, of Gaisborough, Cleveland; Mr. Peter Hull and Mr. Frank Hull, of Norwich; Mr. George Marriott, of 18 Belgrave Drive, Birstall; Mr. Ernest Marriot, of 71 Edystone Road, Thurnby Lodge.

Mr. William Marriott, of 62 Bow Hill Grove, Thurnby Lodge; Mr. Henry Bates, of 83 Waship Avenue, Birstall; Mr. Neale Findley, of 22 Ledweli Drive, Glenfield; Mr. Robert Strong, of 112 Carlton Drive, Wigston; Mr. John Belland, of 41 Gable Road, Queniborough; Mr. Malcolm Smith, of 102 Pindar Road, New Parks; Mr. Stephen Smith and Mr. John Smith, of 6 Main Street, Lyddington, Rutland.

The 7th of November 1984 and 8th of May 1979 respectively



Swearing in ceremony held in the Council Chamber on Saturday 12th October 1996 celebrating the 800th anniversary of the first swearing in ceremony that took place on Wednesday 9th October 1196.

Those made free at the ceremony were; Malcolm Ballard, Mark Ballard, Steven Mark Bates, Michael Oliver Boulter, Adam Lee Bramley, Dale Mark Bramley, Simon Chawner, Paul Raymond Joseph Daniell, Peter James Daniell, Philip Edward Daniell, Andrew John Dudgeon, Peter James Dudgeon, Simon Whyatt Gumley, Christopher Harding, Kevin Anthony Harding, George Rowles Harrison, Andrew John Higginson, Glen William Juba, Andrew Fergus Johnson, Anthony James Kellett, Andrew Christopher Manship, Darren Paul Manship, James Thoas Manship, Michael Charles Manship, Richard Frank Manship, Robert Colin Manship, Duncan Roger Porter, Roger John Porter, Mark Richard Smith, Steven Henry Smith, Edward Anthony Strange, Steven Marc Tolton.

Two freemen were sworn in 'in absentia', Christopher John Ayres, resident in South Africa, and James Guy Tolton, resident in Vancouver, Canada.

Visits to and from other Freeman's Guilds

Over the last fifty years it has been our good fortune to meet many free-men from different parts of the country and below are just a few of those towns and cities to give a flavour of our travels.

Our first ever visit to another free-men's guild was Chester in 1977, and there have been numerous visits to Chester since then.



Just one of the occasions when Leicester Freeman visited Chester to attend a banquet held in the Guildhall in Chester



One of many visits to York. On this occasion a Sunday gathering after a banquet in the Merchant Adventurer's Hall.



The Freemen of Lincoln hosting a visit of Leicester Freemen in the Council Chamber with the Lord Mayor of Lincoln.



Coventry Freemen enjoying the hospitality of the Leicester Freemen in the community room at Freemen's Holt

Other visits by the Gild included...



A coach trip to view the Blackpool Illuminations in October 1988



Another coach outing, this time to Crich Tramway Museum

The London Eye and its many views



Victoria Embankment overlooking the Thames



Westminster Bridge and the Houses of Parliament

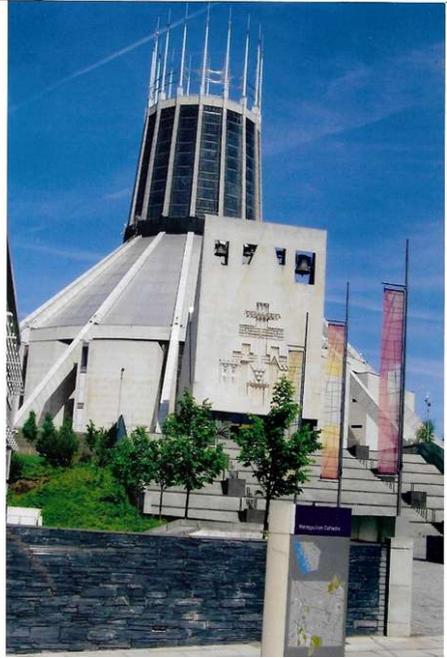
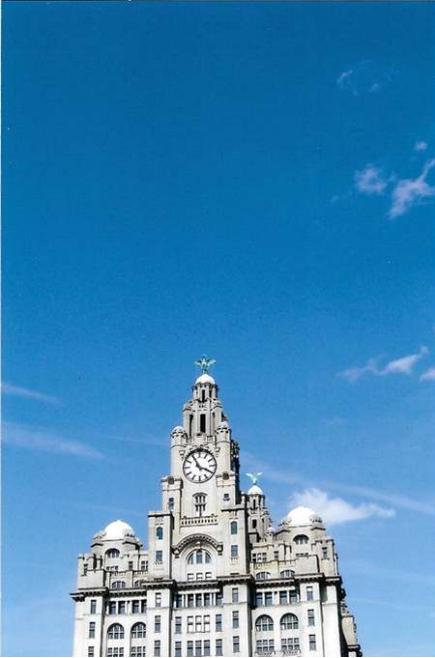


Lambeth Bridge

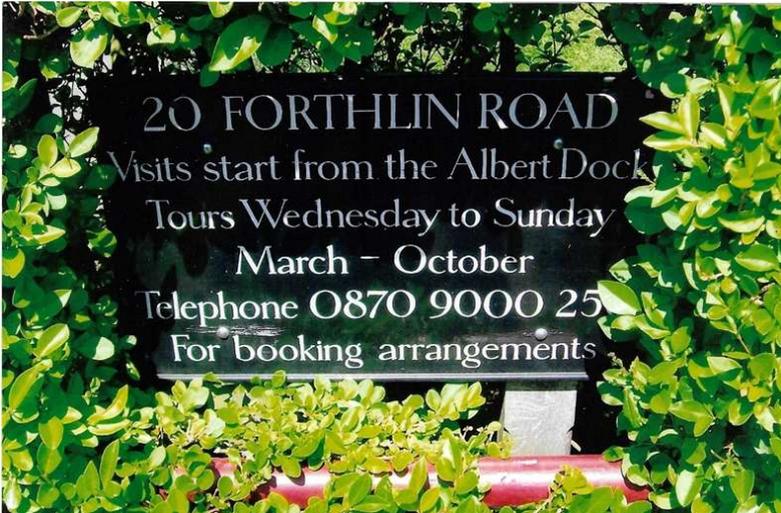


Another sell out trip, this time to Windsor Castle

A day trip to Liverpool



The Liver Building and the Roman Catholic Cathedral



20 Forthlin Road, the home of Paul McCartney in his pre-Beatle days

Other outings enjoyed by the Gild

In 1979 an outing was arranged to visit the Worth Valley Steam Train in Yorkshire. We boarded the train at Keighley and travelled up the Worth Valley to Haworth along the line used in the film 'The Railway Children'. After lunch at the White Lion we had free time to visit the many places of interest in Haworth.

The following year there were two outings. Firstly, a visit to Grimsby to meet the Freemen of Grimsby and enjoy a conducted tour of that famous fishing town, and later in the year a visit to the Severn Valley Steam Railway Line.

The main event during 1981 was a visit to Oxford which included a guided tour of the City followed by a picnic lunch in Christ Church Meadow. In the afternoon there was a cruise on the river by river steamer to Abingdon, finally departing by coach to Leicester via a stop at a riverside pub on the way home.

In 1982 an outing was arranged to Worcester and to enjoy a guided tour of the Royal Worcester Porcelain factory in the morning, and in the afternoon there was a reception in the Mayor's Parlour in the Guildhall followed by free time to enjoy the sites of Worcester.

On two occasions the Gild have enjoyed a coach trip to Kew Gardens in London, and on another occasion a trip to the Houses of Parliament with a guided tour of the House of Lords.

Further visits to London have included a guided tour of Buckingham Palace and a guided tour of the Tower of London.

There had also been two visits to R.A.F. Cottesmore when it was still an operational air base.

Not all visits were to far away places, some were much closer to home.

The Gild were visitors to the Leicestershire Records Office based in Wigston Magna where we were treated to view ancient documents relating to freemen, including a parchment scroll listing the gild members enrolled in the 1196 ceremony.

A guided tour of Everard's Brewery was also on the itinerary one year.

The Riding of the George



Old custom can restore our pride

OUR PATRON saint has taken a bit of a battering in recent years and he deserves more serious attention from we who are proud to be English.

Now, I'm happy to hear that good old Saint George has some local champions. One of them, Mr. Ray Lewitt of Scraftoft Lane, Leicester a Freeman of the city, is taking a key role in a revival of the ceremony of Riding the George.

Mr. Lewitt, head of Humberstone Adult Education Centre, says it was the most important event in Leicester's civic calendar in medieval times, and he's hoping to see it restored.

What is the Riding of the George, you may ask? Mr. Lewitt can explain.

"In Leicester, as in many other towns in the Middle Ages, the pageant and procession was a great occasion and public holiday. It was held sometime between St. George's Day (April 23) and Whit Sunday; a life-sized effigy of the saint kept in St. George's chapel in what is now the cathedral, was paraded through the town amid great rejoicing.

"The event was so important that the mayor and corporation could be heavily fined for not staging it."

So, with the support of the city council and the ancient Guild of Freemen he has planned the procession and pageant for Sunday, May 23, and hopes it will inspire other English towns and cities to follow Leicester's patriotic lead.

The procession starts at the Guild Hall in the afternoon, led by an armour clad St. George (portrayed by student, Simon Cotgreave) on horseback, accompanied by a retinue of characters from the famous dragon-slaying legend. At St. Mary de Castro Church a short

celebratory service will take place, complete with medieval-style incense burning, and singing of lusty patriotic hymns.

They will then enact, on Castle Green, the legend of St. George and the Dragon, before parading through The Newark and Castle Gardens back to the Guild Hall.

The dragon is being designed and made at the Fosse Industrial Unit, Aylestone Road. Mr. Donald Starkey in charge of that project will also be donning the dragon costume in the pageant.

One tradition which will have to be dropped, is the throwing of red roses of England to onlookers. "Alas they are far too expensive at this time of year," laments Mr. Lewitt.

Footnote: Saint George is commonly believed to have been an officer in the Roman army who was martyred for his Christian beliefs.

Article in the Leicester Mercury dated Friday May 7th 1982

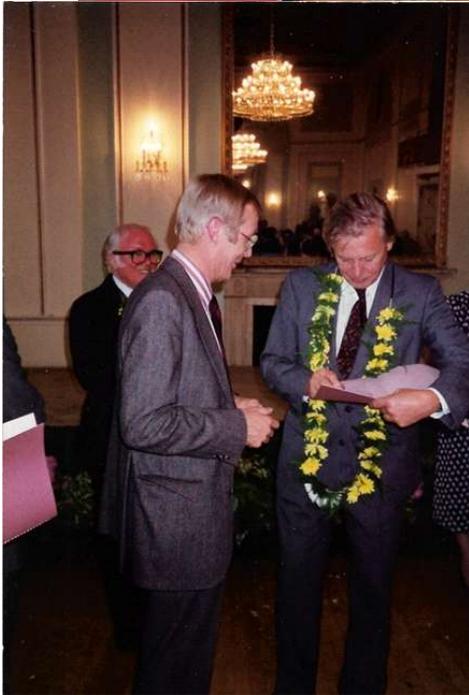


The Riding of the George

Some famous faces we met along the way



*“Nice to see you!”
The Guild of
Freemen meet
Bruce Forsyth*



*The Attenborough’s
at their
Honorary Freeman
Ceremony*

The birth of the Gild's Newsletter

THE GILD OF FREEMEN OF THE CITY OF LEICESTER

3 Castlefields House,
Stoneygate,
Leicester.
LE2 3JH

To all members of the Gild,

29 Jan 76

You will recall that at our excoductory meeting held at the Freeman's Hall on Tuesday 23rd January 1976 it was agreed that future meetings of the Gild should, whenever possible, be held on Tuesday evenings. It is pleased to be able to tell you now that arrangements have been made to hold the next meeting of the Gild at 7.30pm on Tuesday 10th February 1976 at the "Lion Area" Pocklington's Hall, Leicester.

The purpose of the meeting is to enable members to meet each other under informal conditions followed by a 'Chaired' Meeting to arrange the future business of the Gild.

Your voluntary co-operation is sure that it can count on your full support for this, our first semi-formal get together. Please come with plenty of ideas to help the Gild on its way to success, such as future social occasions, fund raising schemes - your committee want to know what you want to do!

Those members who attended our meeting at the 'Gild' will be pleased to know that 47 members were enrolled on the spot and that since the meeting, a further 6 members have been enrolled. This is an excellent start for the Gild and your committee has already taken further steps to increase membership by public notices in the Leicester Mercury, the first entry appeared on Monday 27 Jan and the second notice is to appear on Tuesday 3rd Feb. If you know of any members of the City LL parties where they live who are not members of the Gild please invite them to write to me at the above address, or alternatively, send me their full name and address and I will write to them.

Hope to see you all on the 10th Feb

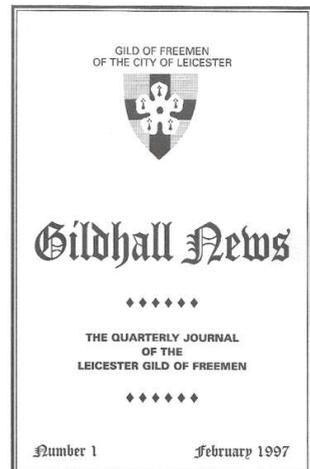
Yours sincerely,



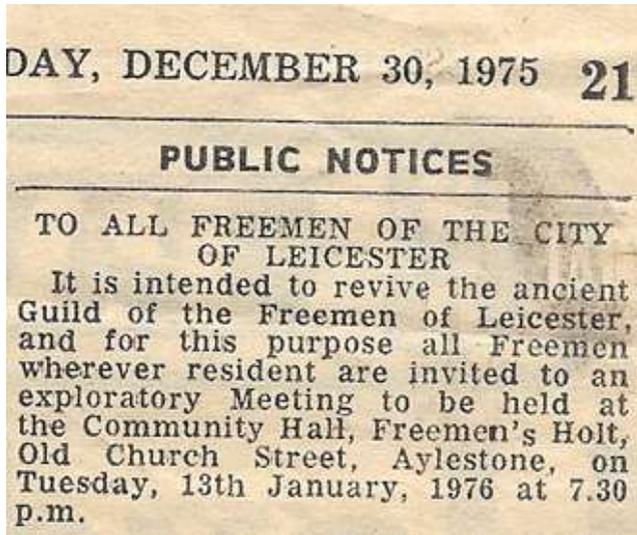
G. J. ADAMS
Secretary

A copy of the very first Gild newsletter issued on the 26th January 1976

A facsimile of the first Gildhall News in the A5 booklet form, dated February 1997. In the early editions of the Gildhall News there was no colour, it was totally black and white, and there were no photographs.



And finally



A public notice in the Leicester Mercury notifying all Freemen of Leicester of the intention to revive the ancient guild.

A working committee of eight freemen was formed to take practical steps to reviving the Gild, namely:

Geoffrey Agar, Michael Ayres, Maurice Ayres, Albert Chawner, Harry Dudgeon, Gordon Johnson, Roland Langton, John Tolton.

Sadly, only two members of that group are alive today, Michael Ayres and John Tolton, but the hard work of those not with us any more will not be forgotten.

John Tolton

Memories of the Gild by Michael Ayres

My early memories of joining the Leicester Gild from fifty years ago.

I used to take my father, Ernest Ayres, to the Leicester Board of Deputies meetings which would take place on the first Wednesday of every month.

In December 1975 when the Board meeting had ended, Roland Langton one of the deputies, gave a short talk on the advantages of forming a Gild. He explained that the formation of a Gild would allow the Freeman to meet independently from the Board and organise outings and events which the Board were not permitted to do.

At that meeting eight members joined the Gild including myself and John Tolton who are the only two original surviving members left today.

Before all this took place Harry Ward the President of the Freeman of England had been in contact with the Board asking them if they were interested in forming a Gild.

The first meeting of the Gild was held at the Freeman's Holt on 13th January 1976 when 62 Freeman attended. The second meeting was held at the Town Arms in Pocklington's Walk and the third was held at the Empire Hotel in Fosse Road North. The third meeting was attended by Harry Ward who gave a talk on the advantages of forming a Gild.

Every Year in April a Common Hall Meeting was held in the Town Hall Council chamber which was normally attended by about 50 Freeman in robes. The Lord Mayor would open the meeting and each year was presented with a cheque for his charity and a gift from the Gild. Following the meeting refreshments would be served in the Lord Mayors tearoom.

One of the Gild's first outings was a visit to Chester Gild to see how they arranged their meetings and outings. It was a most successful day and we learned a lot. The outing proved so popular that we had to book two coaches to take us there.

At Christmas time we would join the Lord Mayor for the switching on of the Christmas lights from a raised platform in Town Hall Square. After the lights were switched on we all used to sing carols. In the early days of the Gild we would put on a Christmas party for four to ten year old children, which John and myself used to arrange with help from our wives. Mick Warner who at the time was the Warden at Freeman's Holt would dress up as Father Christmas to give all the children a present.

Throughout the year we held car treasure hunts on Sunday afternoons where we were given clues to find around Leicestershire. Another of our early activities was to hold dances at the Glenhills public house on the Eyres Monsell estate.

The Gild also visited other Gilds including places such as York, Coventry, Grimsby, and Shrewsbury where we made many new lasting friends.



A visit to Coventry

Regular Skittles night competitions were organised with the Coventry Gild which took place in Leicester and Coventry.

We had many good evening talks from some interesting speakers, these included one of the Tiller Dance Girls, an original Cabin crew member who used to fly for Derby Airways (before it became East Midlands Airlines and moved to Castle Donnington), and a very interesting talk from one of the Beefeaters who had retired from The Tower of London.

The coach outings which were predominantly organised by Roger Allen were very successful, so much so that nearly every time we made a trip to London we had to book two coaches. Our outings included visits to The Crich Tram Museum, the Air Show at Duxford, Telford Museum, Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, the London Eye, Liverpool, the Black Country Museum and so many more. On many of the outings we would have a raffle on the return journey which was also very popular and a lot of fun.

I could write a lot more of the Gild's activities but I will close now with many happy memories of fifty wonderful years with the Gild.

Mick Ayres

What an Honour!

After being told the disappointing news that the Gild was to cease, the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Teresa Aldred decided to bestow Honorary Citizen Awards to both Mick Ayres and John Tolton in recognition of the 50 years service they had given to Leicester Freemen and the Civic Office. They are the only two surviving founder members of the Gild. The re-formation of the Gild started in 1975 after a number of Leicester Freemen discussed meeting up socially. Adverts were placed in the Leicester Mercury inviting Leicester Freemen to a meeting to discuss the setting up of a Gild. In January 1976 the Gild was re-formed. Sadly, it didn't quite make it to 50 years but even so, it's a great achievement nonetheless.

Both Mick and John have been past Masters of the Gild (and incidentally, past Chairman of the Board of Deputies as well). Mick was the Leicester Gild's Freemen of England and Wales (FEW) Representative and he attended many meetings with other Gilds across the country. A number of former members of the Leicester Gild attended other Gild's annual Banquets across the country each year. Locally, the annual skittles competition between Coventry and Leicester Gild's was always a favourite event.

The Lord Mayor invited Mick and John and their respective wives, Jean and Josie, and Lorna Kirk, my husband Brian and myself to the ceremony on 19th November 2025. Afterwards we all enjoyed afternoon tea with the Lord Mayor and her Consort Maggie Corley. Lorna was the Second Lady Freemen to sit on the Gild Court and her father, Reginald Moore, also a Freemen, was Clerk to the Board of Deputies for a number of years. John reflected on the fifty years service to the Gild by saying when you enjoy doing something time passes by very quickly. Mick reflected on the lasting friendships he had made by meeting Freemen of other cities over the years.





*Mick Ayres;
Maggie Corley,
Lord Mayor's Consort;
Teresa Aldred,
The Lord Mayor;
and John Tolton*



*Lorna Kirk, Maggie Corley, Jean and Mick Ayres, Teresa Aldred, John
and Josie Tolton and Lynn Roffee*

Lynn Roffee

Other Memorable Gild Events Include...

The Return of the King!

Robed Leicester Gild of Freemen were invited, by Leicester City Council, to join the Lord Mayor of Leicester, the late John Thomas and Lady Mayoress Maggie Corley at Bow Bridge to await the arrival of Richard III's coffin, (which had been taken on a public cortège) at Bow Bridge on 22nd March 2015.



Robed Leicester Gild of Freemen await the arrival of Richard III's coffin

The cortège crossed Bow Bridge reversing his 1485 journey when his dead body was brought back over the same bridge. Freemen then walked behind the cortège up to St. Nicholas's Church, the parish church closest to the site of the Old Bow Bridge. Freemen, along with others, were seated in the church and awaited for the coffin to be brought in.



*Freemen walked behind the cortège up to
St. Nicholas's Church*

It was an unforgettable moment for those present and Freemen were almost within touching distance of the coffin. A short service of prayers and reflection was held and soil from places that had been significant in Richard's life were blessed (York, Fotheringhay and Leicester).

After the service, Freemen lined up outside the church whilst the coffin was placed on a horse drawn hearse. Apart from the clicking of constant of cameras by the press, you could have heard a pin drop. The coffin was taken to the Guildhall and then formally handed over to the Dean of Leicester. It was then carried to Leicester Cathedral when it lay in repose for three days.

Lynn Roffee

The Service of Reveal...

On 27th March 2015 the Gild were also invited to attend the special Service of Reveal at Leicester Cathedral, where Richard III's new tombstone was revealed. It was another special moment in this historical event.



...and let's not forget that other special event—the Gild's 40th Anniversary in 2016



Lynn Roffee

End of an Era?

News from the Freemen of England & Wales Association (FEW)

Just as 2025 is recorded as the final year of the Leicester Gild of Freemen, Coventry Freemen's Guild too are dealing with the end of an era – as the small undercroft in Coventry's St Mary's Guildhall occupied by the Guild since the 1950's [see photo of Guild Court in residence] has been re-purposed by Coventry Council as just another additional tea room. Accordingly, artefacts like Guild shields and items from visiting Guilds are now being returned to originating Guilds.



*Left -
Coventry's
Guild Court in
residence
Below – Adam
receiving the
limited edition
framed print
of Leicester
Guildhall*

The second photo shows Adam receiving the limited edition framed print of Leicester Guildhall, and Leicester Gild shield, for possible display in the Holt's Community Room. A supply of FEW leaflets has also been left with Adam, so that Leicester Freemen can consider individual FEW membership to keep in touch with other Freemen, and receive invitations to their events in England & Wales.



Note also the revised FEW website on <https://www.freemen-few.org.uk> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/FreemenofEnglandWales>



Derek Austin

Six Freemen Remembered

Visitors to the Community Centre at The Holt (formerly the Board Room) will have noted the commemorative board listing the Chairmen of the Charity since 1899. To bring these names to life, I have conducted rigorous research using public records to uncover the stories of these Freemen.

For this edition, I have specifically selected six men, five of whom possessed middle names. This allowed for a precise process of verification - using three points of data to cross-reference and verify that the information gathered belonged to the correct individual. This methodology ensures a high level of historical accuracy. While the archives vary for each man, the following profiles offer a verified and fascinating glimpse into the lives of those who led our Charity.

Henry Hart (1844–1912) - Chairman during 1900

Henry was a house furnisher and cabinet maker and lived at 68 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. He was married twice and had several children. The 1881 Census records him employing five men and two boys. According to the Leicester Mercury's article reporting on his funeral, Henry was said to have "left behind the memory of a good citizen, a loyal churchman (he worshipped at St George's Church for a number of years), a good parent, a man of refinement and culture; he delighted to talk over Leicester's by-gone days and its old architectural features".

Thomas Higginson Stringer (1867–1913) - Chairman during 1901

Thomas and his older brother, Edward Lewin, a painter, were born in Greenwich, London. The family moved to Leicester and lived at 8 Newark Street according to the 1871 Census, and then the 1881 Census shows them living at 10 Chancery Street, Leicester.

The 1901 Census shows Thomas working as a sewing machine shop keeper at 81 Hinckley Road, Leicester. By the time the 1911 Census was taken, Thomas was a sewing machine dealer and living with his wife, Emily, at Dunton Bassett. There were no children mentioned in any of the censuses.

Thomas's younger brother, William Henry Stringer, was a gas fitter who went to work with him. Thomas and William were inventors of a

machine for attaching buttons, buckles, and similar ornaments to boots, shoes, gaiters and kindred articles. As Leicester was once known for the manufacture of boots and shoes, this invention would have been highly valued here and around the world.

The global impact of their work is evidenced by their successful application to the United States Patent Office, filed on 29 November 1907 and granted on 11 May 1909. For the engineers amongst our readers, the invention was officially classified under *B27F7/28 – Stapling Machines without provision for bending the ends of staples on the work with means for forming the staples in the machine*. At the time of its registration, it was formally recognised as a "new and useful machine."

Arthur William Townsend (1860–1920) - Chairman during 1909

Arthur was a butcher by occupation. He came from a large family and was the third living son of William, a mechanic. According to several censuses, he had a number of siblings. In 1878, Arthur was the manager at the Co-operative Meat Store in Oak Street, Leicester. The 1901 Census showed him as a meat salesman. He lived at Cromwell, Letchworth Road, Leicester. Wright's Directory of 1906 shows him living at 2 Tudor Road, Leicester.

Harry Hyde Newton (1866–1938) - Chairman during 1911

Harry was a bachelor and lived with his sister, Maud Holyoake Newton, at 2 Avon Street, Leicester. He was an old Wyggestonian, being transferred from the Old Leicester Grammar School when the former school opened. Harry had worked as a 1st Accounts Assistant in the accounts department of the City Corporation's Gas Department. He had been a co-opted member of the Assessment Appeals Committee of the Rates Department.

He had been involved in church activities for many years, having been a chorister at St Matthew's Church, then later associated with St Peter's Church, Highfields, where he was a sidesman and a Sunday School official. Harry had been a member of the English Church Union and the Church of England's Men's Society. When he retired, Harry travelled abroad as a tourist according to ships' manifests. He was 73 when he died at Faire Hospital, Leicester.

Edward Ambrose Bellman (1857–1930) - Chairman during 1914

Edward was a travelling salesman working in the cigar industry and then later in the brewery industry, working for the All Saints Brewery. This was based in High Cross Street, Leicester, and was located next to All Saints Church. You might recall a few years ago that the empty brewery premises, located next to All Saints Church, were burnt down. Edward was still working there at the age of 66 when the 1921 Census was taken. He married Eleanor Osborne and, according to the censuses, they didn't have any children.

James Alfred Yates (1881–1965) - Chairman during 1925/26

While historical records for some past Chairmen are brief, the life of James Alfred Yates is remarkably well-documented. His frequent interactions with the press and the legal system left a significant trail of public records, allowing for a much more detailed exploration of his character, his business ventures, and his strong personal convictions.

James, a hosiery and glove manufacturer, was the son of Alfred and Mary Stewart Yates, who also had four daughters. He joined Alfred Yates and Co. Ltd at the age of 21, where his father was a partner with John Hubbard, a former Lord Mayor of Leicester. Their offices were in Millstone Lane, Leicester.

James retired from the company at the age of 75. He had married Edith in 1905 and, according to census records, they do not appear to have had any children. Sadly, James died two months after celebrating his diamond wedding anniversary.

On 13 November 1976, the Leicester Mercury reported that James had left £1,000 in trust "to help victims of cruel robberies committed by public bodies under Acts of Parliament, ordering clearance areas, and compulsory purchase orders at miserably low valuations ruining these honest citizens". An executor was quoted as saying "this was something Mr Yates felt pretty strongly about, but we have taken counsel's opinion and find his scheme would have been completely inoperable at any time under any circumstances".

One was left to wonder how James came about his view of "cruel robberies". In 1956, James was awarded £67 in compensation by the Lands Tribunal in London following the compulsory acquisition by Leicester Corporation of two cottages in a slum clearance area. He had appealed fol-

lowing the compulsory acquisition of 51 and 53 Benford Street, Leicester, and the right of way over the vacant land site of demolished houses, 47 and 49 Benford Street, Leicester. The cottages were demolished under the Lewis Street Slum Clearance Scheme. James was demanding £1,000 in compensation but failed and also had to pay the Corporation's legal fees.

The compensation payment of £67 was based on an estimate of 10 shillings a square yard for 133 square yards. The City's Deputy Town Clerk, R. E. Woodward, stated that "the Corporation has acted strictly in accordance with law and the claimant's rights were properly respected. The Corporation is, by law, only entitled to pay site value compensation".

James responded by accusing the Corporation of confiscating his property and called it "another Crichel Down Affair" (a 1954 British political scandal). The Tribunal Chairman told James, "This is not the place to air a grievance. This is a judicial, not an administrative court".

To the reader, this case might seem to be the catalyst for the £1,000 left in trust. However, further research shows that James's clash with the Council over property issues may have started some decades earlier. In the 1930s, James appealed against a decision made by Castle Donington Rural Council over three cottages he owned in Plummer Lane. After five and a half hours of evidence and submissions by barristers representing him and the Council, Judge Galbraith announced that he would inspect the property himself.

The Council's position was that the three cottages (two of which were now made into one) were uninhabitable and unfit for human habitation and not capable of repair at a reasonable cost. The Council contended that the cottages were unfit for human habitation on the date the order was made. Since then, work had been carried out which made it difficult to show what condition they were in when the order was made.

James at this time owned between 100 and 150 houses across the city and county and regularly bought and undertook repairs as necessary. After visiting the cottages, Judge Galbraith upheld James's appeal. The Leicester Mercury reported the Judge was satisfied improvements made them fit for human habitation, saying, "I must add, that what I found on my examination makes me – to put it mildly – surprised at some of the things stated in the Council's report, which though I feel sure were unintentional, were calculated to produce a wholly erroneous impression of the state of the condition of the property".

So, on the balance of probabilities, this may have been the start of James's idea to put money into what would be an unworkable trust fund.

These six men, though separated from us by over a century, each contributed to the foundations of the Charity we know today. By looking beyond the names on the board at The Holt, we find a rich tapestry of local industry, invention, and personal conviction. It is my hope that these stories provide a deeper connection to our shared history and remind us that every name on that list represents a life of service and a story worth telling.



James Alfred Yates

This photo was published in the Leicester Mercury on 27th April 1965 and obtained via the British Newspaper library.

Lynn Roffee

Remembrance Sunday 2025

Ten robed Freemen attended the Remembrance Service at the Arch of Remembrance on Sunday, 9th November 2025 at Victoria Park, Leicester.

The Arch is a memorial to the 12,000 Leicester and Leicestershire men who lost their lives during the First World War. The Arch was unveiled on 4th July 1925 before a crowd of 30,000 people. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the memorial was unveiled by two local widows who, between them, had lost seven sons.

A number of men had served in the Leicestershire Regiment, as well as many other Regiments and services including the Royal Navy / Royal Naval Air Service / Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force. This would have included Leicester Freemen or sons of Freemen.





Remembrance Sunday 2025



*A Christmas social evening at the Holt with a visit from Southfield's Concert Brass Band
December 2025*