



GILD OF FREEMEN
OF THE CITY OF LEICESTER



Gildhall News



*Julian West from Australia is made free via
'Zoom' at Town Hall — oh, how times change!*



THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL
OF THE
LEICESTER GILD OF FREEMEN



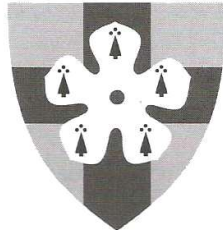
Number 108

November 2025



John Tolton presents a copy of his book to the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Teresa Aldred at the Town Hall. John – you did us proud!

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Patron: Colonel Robert Martin OBE DL
President: The Lord Mayor of Leicester

OFFICERS 2024–2025

Master: M. Ballard
Deputy Master: L. A. Roffee
Clerk: (VACANT)
Chamberlain: (VACANT)

WARDENS

N. Cave,
J. D. Lewitt,
S. Freeman,
K. Mardon (co-opted) & Jean Mardon

GILDHALL NEWS
November 2025

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Editor's Comments

"Politicians and diapers need to be changed on a regular basis, for exactly the same reason."

—Mark Twain



Doesn't time fly? Already we're all bracing ourselves for that cold, wet and windy weather ahead, and yet at times I still feel inclined to put on a T-shirt – it's that time of the year when it's hard to know what to wear!

As ever, the Board have been busily maintaining Freeman's Holt and have been involved in a variety of events, including a MacMillan Coffee Morning held with residents at the community centre at Freeman's Holt, another 'zoom' Making Free Cere-

mony and their Annual Dinner.

Some residents have also been taking part in a variety of activities, including Tai Chi, Sit Fit, craft mornings, a bingo night, breakfasts and fish and chip suppers, and there's a trip to a Christmas Market and a Christmas lunch in the planning.

In the next edition of Gildhall News, which (at the time of writing) may well be the last in this current format, we're hoping to produce a special 'bumper' newsletter dedicated to what would have been the Gild's 50th year. So if you have any Gild-related photos or comments you'd like to send us for consideration, we'd be happy to include them if we have the space – please note the deadline for contributions is Friday 9th January. My contact details are on page 16.

Val Moore

Report by Chair of the Board, Lynn Roffee



I hope this edition of the Gildhall News finds you well and in good health.

August Survey Responses

In August, we sent you a survey regarding bungalow vacancies at the Holt. We would like to send a big "Thank You" to everyone who responded and made suggestions. All the responses have been collated, and Deputies have begun discussing the suggestions made. Please feel free to contact the office anytime if you have any further suggestions.

Board Annual Dinner

The Board's Annual Dinner was held again at the Taste Restaurant at Leicester College Freeman's Park Campus on 9th October. It was wonderful to be able to support the students in their studies. The food was delicious, well-presented and the service was fantastic. The restaurant is open to the public and we would highly recommend it. During the evening, I was able to thank the Deputies for their service and thank their spouses/partners for their support, which is hugely appreciated as well as Team Holt – Adam, Paul and Sarah for their valuable support to the Board, Residents and the wider freemen community. Val Moore and Alastair Hepburn were invited in recognition of their services in producing the Gildhall News, and John and Josie Tolton in recognition of John gifting his research of Leicester Freeman to the Charity.

Annual Report & Accounts 2024

The Annual Report & Accounts for 2024 for the Leicester Freeman's Estate charity have now been completed. They are available for anyone to download and view on the Charity Commission website:

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search>

(Then enter 'Leicester Freeman's Estate' in the search box).

We usually have the report ready by March/April but unfortunately, we were informed at very short notice this year that our previous accountant could no longer provide this service for us. Berry Accountants, based in Market Harborough, were appointed to carry out the audit.

The Freeman of Leicester – A Short History, John Tolton

The book written by John Tolton went on sale in August. I'm sure everyone who has read the book will agree it is a fascinating account of the history of the Freeman of Leicester, and they are now far more knowledgeable about this subject. We held a cheese and wine evening to launch the book in August. John's family, residents and Deputies all crammed into the Community Centre for a lovely evening.

Also in August, we were honored to see John present a copy of his book to the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Teresa Aldred at the Town Hall. John – you did us proud!

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 in the UK.

What more could a Freeman want for Christmas?!

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.

Facebook Group

Thank you to the 126 people who have joined the new Facebook group to date. We hope you find the group to be interesting, informative and useful. We are still in the early stages so please bear with us. We hope the group can be a place for Freeman to connect with each other, please don't be shy!

The group is open to Freeman and their spouses, widows and widowers. Please feel free to join if you have not done so already.

Macmillan Coffee Morning

A coffee morning was held on 22nd September in aid of the Macmillan Cancer Support charity. We would like to thank everyone who baked something, supported the event or donated. On the day £263.92 was raised and the Board agreed to round this up to £300. We were delighted to see some 'outside' Freeman at this event and they took the opportunity to view the vacant bungalows and see where the upcoming extended bungalows will be.

Making Free Ceremony

A making free ceremony was held on 22nd October where one man took his Freedom. The ceremony was held via Zoom as the gentleman, Julian West, lives in Australia. On behalf of the Board, I would like to welcome him as a new Freeman of the City of Leicester. Please encourage any of your eligible family members to take their Freedom. The Member and Civic Support Office deal with the Making Free process but you are welcome to contact our office for advice.

Bungalow Vacancies & Extensions

As you may already be aware, we have decided to extend two bungalows, No's 18 & 30. We are planning on starting the building work in spring 2026. If you would like more information about the extensions or would like to express an interest, please contact the office. For your information, 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:

Standard Bungalow – £180.00

Extended Bungalow – £250.00

Charitable Payments

We currently have two people who receive a monthly Charitable Payment. If you would like to apply for a Charitable Payment or want more information, please contact the office.

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.

Board Meeting – Wednesday 10th December, 19:30, Community Centre

The Board meetings are open to all Freeman; it would be great to see you there even if you have not attended before. You will be able to join us for a drink and mince pies after the meeting. Please contact the office if you would like to attend so we can inform you how to access the estate.

Christmas Social Evening – Thursday 18th December, 19:00, Community Centre

Sarah Allen, our Freeman's Engagement Officer, is organising a social evening for Christmas on 18th December. Join us for a quiz, drinks, mince pies, mulled wine and a visit from the Southfield's Concert Brass Band. Contact the office to book your place. Spaces are limited so please book early.

Christmas Lunch – Friday 19th December, 13:00, Community Centre

We usually take a trip to an outside venue for our residents Christmas Lunch, but this year following feedback from residents, we have decided to hold this event in our Community Centre. We have booked a professional caterer who will be providing a festive, two course menu for £34.50 per person. If you would like to join us, please contact our office and we can send the menu to you. Again, spaces are limited so please book early.

We would love to see you at both of these Christmas Events.

Whilst it is still only mid-October as I write this report, it is the last edition of the Gildhall News for 2025 and therefore the last opportunity to mention Christmas. May I, on behalf of the Board of Deputies, Adam, Paul and Sarah, wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and for those that do not celebrate the season, may I wish you Happy Holidays. It is a time to think of those who maybe alone, unwell or recently bereaved and if you are able to offer support and friendship know that you are *"a rainbow in someone's cloud"*.

Contact Details

Telephone – 0116 2834017

Email – office@leicesterfreemen.com

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

Website – www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk

kindest regards,
Lynn Roffee
Chair of the Board

Programme of Future Events

Board Meeting — Wednesday 10th December, 7.30pm,
Freemen's Holt Community Centre

Christmas Social Evening — Thursday 18th December, 7.00pm,
Freemen's Holt Community Centre

Christmas Lunch — Friday 19th December, 1.00pm,
Freemen's Holt Community Centre

Contributions to Gildhall News

The Demise of the Gild

At the last Board Meeting held in September it was announced that the Gild was being terminated due to lack of interest, a decision that did not

come as a total surprise. Both Mick Ayres and I were extremely disappointed at the outcome; we are the only surviving members of the original court when the Gild was formed just a few months short of 50 years ago. I can almost hear our departed colleagues wailing at the news of the Gild's demise. Although we were forewarned of the impending announcement our immediate emotion was anger. Anger that the situation had been allowed to arise and who to blame. However, the blame game is pointless; it has happened, and the important thing is how to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

It is not the role of the Board of Deputies to organize social functions for the freemen at large; they are Trustees to the Estate and their activities are governed by an Act of Parliament. Which was why the Gild was formed 50 years ago. The Master of the Gild, Malcolm Ballard, has worked tirelessly to maintain some semblance of life in the Gild, but he is too ill to do much to relieve the situation. We are all getting older and though the mind is willing, the body somehow lets us down. The Gild Court desperately needed younger, more active volunteers, and though the Gild Court had asked for volunteers in the Gildhall News, none were forthcoming.

Will the phoenix arise from the ashes?

There is no reason why at some time in the future a group of freemen cannot revive the Gild, even if under a different set of rules. Without a Gild there is a danger that the freemen will return to the days of individuals all going their own way. Fifty years ago a group of enthusiastic freemen created the Gild and it was met with huge approval by many freemen from around the world. It was particularly well received by overseas freemen keeping up to date with news from home. As a means of uniting freemen the Court organised outings, some so popular they required two coaches, social functions usually involving food and drink and entertaining speakers.

All the records of the past fifty years are stored in the archives and will be boxed for future reference if required by an upcoming Gild Court. As will be all the past copies of the Gildhall News from the very first issue to the present day. It is worth noting that the Board have no obligation to continue with the quarterly journal.

I wish the best of luck to any future aspiring Gild Court, in whatever format you choose.

John Tolton
October 2025

Best Wishes to the Gild from the Lord Mayor's Office

With reference to the closure of the Gild, Lynn Roffee has received the following email from the Lord Mayor's Office.

(Lynn rightly points out "Whilst it might be addressed to the three of us, it is also relevant to all past and more recent Gild members who have supported the Civic Office over the years.")

"Dear Lynn

Could you please pass the following to John Tolton and Mick Ayres on my behalf.

Dear Lynn, John and Mick

I wanted to write on behalf of the civic office to express our deep sadness at the closure of the Gild of Freeman. I know that collectively you have worked so hard with such enthusiasm to create a wonderful opportunity for fellow freemen to come together and socialise and for 49 years this has been an enormous success.

Regrettably, with the continuing changing environments we now face, we find so many organisations struggling to keep afloat as newer members are unwilling or unable to make the same commitments and what were once strong community assets, are sadly folding.

I imagine there will be a deep feeling of disappointment amongst you all, but please be assured that you have provided very valuable opportunities to so many over the years and I am certain you will share many happy memories.

From our perspective, it has always been an honour to have you involved at civic events and I very much hope you will continue to come along when you can. Working with you all, has been absolute pleasure and I thank you for your support, kindness and sincerity. I do, however, look forward to seeing you all again soon.

With all best wishes

LIZ"

Liz McKenzie
Member & Civic Support Manager
Leicester City Council
City Hall, 115 Charles Street, Leicester LE1 1FZ
Email: liz.mckenzie@leicester.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 454 6362 / Internal: 37 6362
Web: www.leicester.gov.uk

The Lime Tree Blues

Now here is a scene in Aylestone that does not bear much resemblance to today's outlook, only St Andrew's Church and the houses with the white stucco on the opposite side of Middleton Street are the same. Obscuring the view of the church from the camera is a tall lime tree which, sadly, is no more. This photograph, taken in 1958, shows the grandeur of the Holt, whose foundations still lie in the ground below the allotments on Freeman's Holt, much to the annoyance of some of the allotment holders.



Middleton Street, the Holt, St. Andrew's Church and the infamous lime tree

But of the sadly departed lime tree there lies a tale.

Adam, the estate manager, was out inspecting the grounds and while standing beside the lime tree heard a loud creaking sound, and turning to look for the source of the noise spied a large vertical split. His immediate thought was that this isn't very safe, so he contacted the grounds contractor who maintains the estate, but the groundsman could not attend until the following morning. The next course of action was to let the Board of Deputies know of the drama taking place at Freeman's Holt, so

he rang Lynn Roffee, the Chair of the Board, who suggested that the Fire Brigade might be the best people to contact.

By this time, it was obvious to Adam that the tree was in danger of falling, possibly across Middleton Street, so he called the Fire Brigade, who, unlike the Council, took the situation seriously. They came down and closed off the road to traffic, and this eventually grabbed the attention of the Council. After all, it was their road being closed. The Fire Brigade commended Adam for his bravery in remaining close to the tree, and it was then that waiting for the sky to fall on his head was perhaps not a good idea. All the residents whose bungalows were in striking distance of the ailing tree were told to find alternative accommodation for their own safety, and my wife and I took temporary residence in a hotel.

Like all trials in life, this one came to a satisfactory end. The Council cut down that part of the tree that was in danger of submitting to the force of gravity that evening, and the remainder of the lime tree was cut down the following day. All that remains is a huge tree stump, so if anyone is curious to know how old the tree was, they can come down and count the rings.



The Demise of the Infamous Lime Tree!

John Tolton

News from the Freeman of England and Wales Association (FEW)

I was pleased to attend the launch of the new book 'The Freeman of Leicester' by Past Master John Tolton in August, a concise summary of past and recent history. Sadly, less than a month later I was sorry to hear that the Gild was closing down – only a few months short of its 50th anniversary since being formed, and despite regular ceremonies admitting new Freeman. Only a few years ago as the South Midlands Area Warden with three Freeman's Guilds and three Courts Leet in my Area, I thought, to use a boxing analogy, that Leicester Gild 'punched above its weight' in organising events such as the national FEW AGM in Leicester in 2007 including a visit to the National Space Centre organised by the late Roger Allen, and also the two-coach trip to the Tower of London organised by Mick Ayres – who was the only Gild rep to send regular reports to the FEW Journal – as I had to draft the rest myself.

Recent activities by other Guilds and Courts Leet in the South Midlands Area include:

Coventry Freeman's Guild

On 9th August at a Guild dinner we were pleased to welcome the new Lord Mayor of Coventry, Cllr Rachel Lancaster as Guild President for her year of office, and she was supportive of our efforts to ensure more Council job applicants take up the option on completing their apprenticeship to become Freeman and join the Guild. She also agreed that as many local nurse roles now need a degree, that this could be worth pursuing with the NHS Training Authority in order to qualify for the Freedom in due course.

Work continues on updating the Guild's website, to complement the Guild's publicity leaflet now in local libraries and museums, and also public facing Council Offices.

The Guild's Christmas Dinner will be on Saturday 13th December at the Hearsall Golf Club at 33 Beechwood Avenue in Coventry, CV5 6DF. There is a choice of menu, and we would welcome any Leicester Freeman to join us. Contact Guild Clerk Anthony Archer on anthon.aa@hotmail.com for more details before December 1st.

Northampton Freeman's Guild

The Guild continues to support the Town Council at regular events like Oak Apple Day and Remembrance Sunday parades. There is concern that facilities for Trustee meetings may be lost due to planned sales of parts of the Guildhall. Better news is that a lunch meeting is scheduled for 25th October – a welcome return to social activities since the Covid pandemic.

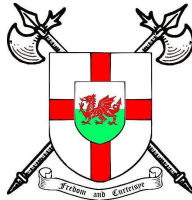
Henley-in-Arden Court Leet

Court appointed 'Brook Lookers' have the task of ensuring the River Alne boundaries are secure, and that the river's flow is unobstructed – this led to activity in July to uproot the invasive non-native plant Himalayan balsam that causes soil erosion and crowds out native species.

Warwick Court Leet

After the 12th June Charity Beer festival, the free August Warwick Classic Car Show in the Market Place attracted some notable cars for the many spectators. Court members received awards recently for their continued support of the medieval Lord Leicester Hospital, originally built as the Warwick Guildhall.

Derek Austin



Please note

The following forms of communication with **the Gild** are no longer in use:

Gild e-mail address: leicester_gild@outlook.com

Facebook: search for "Leicester Gild"

Therefore, please send any future enquiries regarding the Gild to the charity's email address: office@leicesterfreemen.com

Please be aware that the staff work for the charity and not the Gild, but staff will pass on any queries to the relevant person at the Gild.

This change is to aid communication with Freeman and have a central point of contact. If you have previously emailed the Gild and not had a response, please resend your query to the office.

Have you changed your address?

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

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

Telephone: **0116 283 4017**

E-mail: office@leicesterfreemen.com

Leicester Freeman website: www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk

***Copy for the next issue should reach the Editor
by Friday 9th January 2026***

Write with your suggestions and contributions to:

Val Moore
24 Freeman's Holt
Leicester
LE2 8NH

Telephone: **0116 429 3947**

E-mail: valmoore2@gmail.com

Apologies

We sincerely apologise to Jo Lewis for using an incorrect surname for her in the last edition — sorry for that Jo.

Jo kindly showed the Lord Mayor and other dignitaries around her bungalow in July.

The Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester

GILD PRODUCTS ORDER FORM

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------|
| 1. Tie- navy | at £10.00 each | = £..... |
| - green | at £10.00 each | = £..... |
| 2. Gild Scarf | at £15.00 each | = £..... |
| 3. Lapel Badge | at £2.50 each | = £..... |
| 4. Cufflinks | at £16.00 per pair | = £..... |
| 5. Gild Pens | at £3.00 each | = £..... |
| 6. Gown, made to measure,
(includes delivery) | price on request | = £..... |
| 7. Register of the Freemen of Leicester
1986–1996 | £2.50 each | = £..... |
| 8. Register of the Freemen of Leicester
1931–1985 | £3.50 each | = £..... |

plus postage* £3.20 second class
£3.95 first class

TOTAL = £.....

I enclose cheque for the above total, made payable to:
“Gild of Leicester Freemen”

NAME

ADDRESS

..... POST CODE

EMAIL ADDRESS

TELEPHONE:.....

Signed

Please post to the office at:

32 Freemen’s Holt, Old Church Street, Aylestone, Leicester LE2 8NH

Telephone: 0116 283 4017 or E-mail: office@leicesterfreemen.com

*Please note that any orders at and above £20 will need to be sent by recorded delivery at £7.25 (contact the office for further details)

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Hallway



Kitchen

*Here's a selection of
photos of one of the
newly renovated vacant
bungalows on the estate*



Lounge



Bedroom



Wet room



Members of the Board at their Annual Dinner October 2025