



GILD OF FREEMEN
OF THE CITY OF LEICESTER



Gildhall News



*Lynn Roffee and Malcolm Ballard with the Lord Mayor
at September's Making Free Ceremony*



THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL
OF THE
LEICESTER GILD OF FREEMEN



Number 100

November 2023

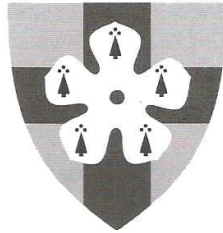


Gild members at the Civic Service at St Mary de Castro



Board of Deputies AGM, 2023

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

OFFICERS 2023–2024
Master: M. Ballard
Deputy Master: L. A. Roffee
Clerk: (VACANT)
Chamberlain: (VACANT)

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

GILDHALL NEWS

November 2023

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Editor's Comments

*No spring nor summer beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one autumnal face.*

John Donne



Well, we've got a very special edition for you this time – it being the 100th Gildhall News in its current format – and there's a lot to report, so grab a cuppa, put your feet up and get your reading glasses on! (After all, what else is there to do on these cold, grey miserable autumnal days!)

Gild members have been involved in various activities, including the Lord Mayor's Civic Service, a Fish & Chip Supper and Afternoon Tea in the Community Centre at the Holt. The Board continues with its maintenance work around the Holt, having installed several new benches and had an old one restored, and Dan, the new handyman has been working his magic throughout. Residents and Board members also held a Macmillan Coffee and Cake event. Both the Gild and the Board have also been involved in this year's Making Free Ceremonies.

It's always great to receive contributions from Freemen, and this edition in particular has a wealth of interesting articles – Bob Langton, Mick Ayres, John Tolton, Derek Austin, the Lord Mayor's Office, Lynn Roffee (even yours truly!). Thanks everyone, it's very much appreciated. If you'd like to share your memories or something about your family history, we'd love to hear from you – so please put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard. My contact details are on page 25.

Val Moore

Report by Malcolm Ballard, Master of the Gild



Hello everyone. This is the Hundredth edition of the Gildhall News and I am proud to be the Master of the Gild, what an honour it is.

Now that Autumn is here we are leaving behind the warm sunshine and will probably spend more time at home now.

On the third of September, along with other Gild and robed members we went to St Mary de Castro church for the Lord Mayor's Civic Service.

On the 16th September we held our Fish & Chip Supper at the community Centre at The Holt. Mary and I organized it for the residents, their families, friends and all other Freemen. This was a most enjoyable time for all. We had a game of Bingo, a very 'long' quiz and lots of delicious food and a raffle.

On the 27th September I attended the Town Hall for an induction of thirteen new Freemen by the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Dr Susan Barton.

On 25th October, again at the Town Hall we had another induction of thirteen more new Freemen by the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Dr Susan Barton.



Afternoon Tea at the Holt

On Thursday 26th October Mary and myself hosted Afternoon Tea (vintage style) in the community centre at the Holt for the residents, all Freemen, families and friends.

During November we are hoping to do a minibus tour to a local garden centre to see the Christmas Decorations etc., and hopefully stop for a cup of tea and maybe even cake! Date & cost to be arranged.

On the 18th December we will hold a Carol Service at St Andrews Church, Aylestone at 7 PM, followed by refreshments of Mulled Wine and

Mince pies in the Community Centre.

At a date to be finalized we are hoping to hold a Banquet at Devonshire Place in June 2024.

We currently need a Clerk to attend to all the administrative duties for the Gild. It will involve taking and distributing messages etc. between dignitaries, other Guilds and the current Master. We also need a Chamberlain to oversee the finances and help to organize events, trips etc for us all. If you feel you could help out in any way or would be interested in joining the Gild please get in touch with me, or let Adam or Sharon in the office know.

This will be the last Gildhall News prior to Christmas and I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas and a very Happy New Year with family and friends.

*Malcolm Ballard
Master of The Guild*

Report by Chair of the Board, Lynn Roffee



It is a great honour to contribute to the 100th edition of the Gildhall News (GHN). I would like to express, on behalf of the Board of Deputies, our gratitude to everyone who has worked on the production of and contributed to the Gildhall News over the years. Everyone volunteers their time – so a special thanks to Val and Alistair for compiling the GHN and to Brian for taking photos at Making Free Ceremonies and other events.

Many of you visiting the Holt will have seen some of the benches replaced by new environmentally friendly ones and the bench that was given as a gift for Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee in 1977 has been renovated. Planning is

under way for various maintenance works to be carried out in the Spring across the site.

The Board is currently in discussions with Resident John Tolton, Past Master of the Gild, Past Chairman of the Board who is both Freeman and Gild Archivist. John has been researching Leicester Freeman for a long time and has collected a lot of information which is to be put into a book. See the next edition of GHN for further information.



Peter Staines with his barrel organ

On 25th September the Residents hosted the *Macmillan Coffee and Cake* event at their weekly coffee morning. There was a wonderful selection of delicious homemade cakes to choose from – in fact it was hard not to try another slice of different cake! All for a good cause! There was entertainment too! – Resident Peter Staines demonstrated the barrel organ that he had made from pieces of wood and several people had the opportunity to try their hand at playing the organ. Thank you to everyone who went to the trouble of baking cakes and to those attending and

supporting the event. A big thank you to Peter for that lovely surprise. A total of £86.10 was raised. Hopefully we can bring this back as an annual event – so put the 23rd September 2024 in your diary now.

I was delighted to attend, with Deputy Lucy Manship, two Making Free Ceremonies this autumn and to welcome the new Freeman of the City of Leicester to our community. It is vital that we all encourage eligible family members to take their Freedom to ensure the future of the Charity and thus The Holt. The Member and Civic Support Office at Leicester City Council deal with the applications process for those wishing to take their freedom and manage the Making Free ceremony held at the Town Hall. You are welcome to contact Adam and Sharon at Freeman's Holt for advice.

If you are interested in joining the Board of Deputies (Trustees) and getting involved with the management of the charity – then a warm welcome awaits you! The Board comprises people from many backgrounds who have a wide range of skills, knowledge, and experience. However, it is also a place to learn new skills too – like managing budgets, gaining confidence in speaking skills and much more. Everyone brings something different to the table as well as bringing fresh ideas – what is important is commitment. So, if you have a few hours free each month and would like to know more about what is involved please contact me, Adam or Sharon for further information.

The next Board Meeting will be held on Wednesday 6th December and takes place in the Community Centre at Freeman's Holt, starting at 19:30. All Freeman are most welcome and encouraged to attend.

Save the Date - Garden Party 2024, Sunday 9th June

Preparations are underway for the next Garden Party. It promises to be a wonderful event for the whole family, one not to miss. The nominated charity will be LOROS. Invitations will be sent to you in the February 2024 edition of the Gildhall News.

Bungalow Vacancies

We currently have one standard bungalow vacant. The monthly maintenance contribution for this is £166.36.

Please contact the office if you would like to view this bungalow and/or obtain more information about living at Freeman's Holt. Adam and Sharon are more than happy to answer any queries you may have.

Below are some photos of No. 9:



This is the last GHN before Christmas and, whilst it seems early to be mentioning Christmas it is the last opportunity to mention it before the New Year.

On behalf of the Board of Deputies, Adam, Sharon, and myself, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and for those not celebrating the season may I wish you Happy Holidays.

The forthcoming Christmas celebrations for Residents at Freeman's Holt includes a lunch outing to Kilworth Springs Golf Club and a visit from the Southfields Brass Band.

*Lynn Roffee
Chair of the Board*

Programme of Future Events

Board Meeting, Wednesday 6th December, Freeman's Holt, Community Centre at 19:30.

Southfields Concert Band, Thursday 14th December around The Holt (weather permitting) starting at 8pm and afterwards inside the community centre.

Annual Pantomime, Friday 15th December, all tickets now sold, so if you still want to attend then contact the Little Theatre direct.

Annual Freeman's Carol Service, Monday 18th December at 7pm, St Andrews Church, Aylestone, followed by refreshments of Mulled Wine and Mince Pies in the Community Centre at the Holt. **Cars should be parked at the Holt.**

Next year's Calendar

Garden Party, Sunday 9th June 2024 at Freeman's Holt. Invitations will be sent to you in the February 2024 edition of the Gildhall News.

Gild Annual Banquet June 2024 in Devonshire Place —date to be finalized.

Contributions to Gildhall News

439 Years of Langton Freeman of Leicester

The October Making Free Ceremony marked a special occasion in the history of the Langton family's association with the Freeman of Leicester. On that occasion I proudly saw my two grandsons James and Matthew made Freeman, joining me and their father Nicholas. My daughter Julie had already been made a Freeman in 2014, soon after women were admitted.



The Langton family in 2023

I decided to look into the family archives and rediscovered the family tree of Langton Freeman, which goes back to 1584. I have a continuous link from then until the present day. The occupations of the Langtons are really quite interesting. The first to be recorded was Bryan, a glover, followed by his son Robert, a Fellmonger – a dealer in hides and leather, particularly sheep skins. One of his two sons, Thomas, followed his father into the profession, as did their sons Robert and Hennell in 1671. The family carried on the tradition beyond

1720 with another son named Hennell, but then professions changed.

Subsequent generations from Robert in 1739 – 1995 were wool combers whose job was to disentangle wool in preparation for spinning. Whilst Samuel and Robert (1779) were wool combers, three other brothers and their sister Mary were framework knitters. There was a significant change in Langton professions from 1822, when Thomas became a hairdresser, his brother William was a corporal in the Marines, and another brother, Robert, a Cordwainer – someone who makes shoes – different from a cobbler who repaired them.

In 1865 there was a further change with Samuel, a lithograph printer (as was my father's brother Bob in 1935) and another Samuel by another brother, a plumber. At the turn of the century professions changed again to secretary (highly unusual in 1912), engineer, (my grandfather Harold), carpenter, and painter. My father (a broker's clerk) was admitted as a Freeman in 1934, followed by his brother Robert (a printer) in 1935 and younger brother Roland (sergeant, Royal Artillery) in 1941. One interesting fact is that my Grandfather Harold only became a Freeman in 1941 – on the same occasion as his son Roland, but seven years after my father became a Freeman.

I was admitted in 1964, having just started a career on the Leicester Mercury as a journalist. I went on to have a career in journalism in Fleet Street. My cousin David was admitted in 1969 and he went on to have a distinguished career in the world of patents in Canada and beyond. My son Nicholas, then a student, became a Freeman in 1988, followed by my daughter Julie in 2014 after a change that allowed women to become Freemen.

One note of interest: I recollect that my uncle Roland Langton got heavily involved with the affairs of the Leicester Freemen in the late fifties at a time when they were looking at making better use of their land assets. I believe he was involved in the Aylestone bungalows project alongside the River Soar, following the sale of land close to the Tigers Welford Road ground. My grandmother Alice, my mother Norah, and father's brother Bob were all residents at Freemen's Holt for a number of years. My mother fondly remembers Mick and Maureen who were extremely helpful in keeping an eye on her. I was particularly grateful, as I was living in Hong Kong at the time, and later in Northumberland and Oxfordshire.

Bob Langton

Why I became a Freeman, by Mick Ayres



This had been an Ayres family tradition going back hundreds of years, so it was no surprise to me that my father, Maurice, took me to Leicester Town Hall as soon as I reached my 21st birthday, the date was the 17th of June 1959. The Lord Mayor, Bertram Powell, took my Oath. He knew nothing about Freemen and the Town Clerk had to explain to him what being a Freeman meant to me and the City of Leicester.

In 1976, I took my father to a board meeting at the Holt, after one of the meetings Roland Langton gave a talk about Leicester Freemen forming a Gild. From that night I became one of the founding members of the Gild and I continue to

be a member today. We all made a donation so that we could buy writing paper, envelopes and stamps. This meant we could circulate to all the Freeman of Leicester to inform them of our first meeting which was held at the Empire public house in Fosse Road. Harry Ward the Master of the Freeman of England gave a talk on the advantage of forming a Gild. This meant we could now organize our social events and coach outings without asking the Board for permission.

I then became the first Chamberlain to the Gild. When the late Roger Allen joined the Gild, he took over as Chamberlain, I remained a member of the Gild Court helping to arrange coach outings and social events. I then became Master in 2005.

In 2007, Leicester Freeman celebrated their 900-year anniversary weekend. The same weekend we invited the Freeman of England and Wales to join in our celebration. We also hosted the Freeman of England and Wales in 1981 and again 1993. I became a member of the Freeman of England in 1983. I also represented the Gild on the Freeman of England and Wales Committee. I travelled all around the country to different towns where Freeman are admitted like Berwick-upon-Tweed, Durham, Hale and Haverfordwest to name just a few. I enjoyed the time I was doing it as I was meeting different people and making new friends.

In 1976 I was invited to join the Board of Leicester Freeman's Deputies, serving on the Welfare and Pensions Committee and the Finance Committee. I then became Chairman of Welfare and Pensions Committee. I served as Chairman to the Board of Leicester Freeman's Deputies in 1983 and 1984 and again in 1999 and 2000. I served on the Board until 2007.

When Jean and I moved into Freeman's Holt in 2009, it was the best move we ever made, and we do not regret it. The Holt is a thriving community and a friendly place to live. We have a coffee morning every Monday, we have film shows once a month in the winter and have bingo and quiz nights. It is also a very safe and secure place to live.

If you are thinking of moving to Freeman's Holt, it is not an old folks home, so make your mind up and do it in your late 60th or early 70th year while you are still young enough to join in the activities.

Mick Ayres

Living at Freeman's Holt



I have had an association with the Freeman's Estate of one sort or another ever since it was being built in the latter part of the 1960's, but it was not until later years did I ever consider that I would be living there. We actually moved into our bungalow in March 2012 just a couple of days after returning from a holiday in Malta, and as a consequence of the rapid decision to move into the bungalow at short notice we had no furniture on the day we moved. The bed from the old house in Oadby came with us, but we had made a conscience decision to have all new furniture for the lounge and dining room, it was like starting all over again. As seats and a

table, we managed with folding garden furniture, but the inconvenience was well worth it just for the move down the Holt.

For those of you not familiar with the development at Freeman's Holt it is an idyllic estate of 36 bungalows set in open spaced grounds, overseen by an estate manager based in a house converted into an office downstairs, and bedrooms on the first floor for visitors. Between the bungalows and Middleton Street there are a small number of allotments, some of which are worked by residents of the bungalows, including me.

Of all the moves that I have made over the years, and there has been a fair few, this is by far the best move that I have made. It has the advantage of relatively low-cost living in secure surroundings, and if anything goes wrong in the bungalow one just phones the Estate Manager and asks for it to be fixed. No looking through the yellow pages hoping to find a reliable plumber who is not too busy, and doesn't suck through his teeth and tell you the job is going to be complicated.

There is this myth, and I have heard it times, that you have to be old to live at the Holt, (I was 69 when my wife and I moved down here), but that depends on what you consider old. Sadly, there have been those who have left it until late in life before moving, and when they did make it, the benefit of being here was short lived. Everyone living here is young at heart. Not so many years ago there was a group all celebrating their 80th birthdays, and they enjoyed a week in Paris as a birthday treat.

Before moving down here I had been active on the Board of Deputies and on the Gild Court. I joined the Board in 1971 and finally retired in 2011, and during that time served twice as Chairman of the Board, and as chairman of all the committees except what was then called the Pensions Committee. In 1975 I, along with seven other freemen, formed a sub-committee with the idea of creating the Gild of Freeman, the creation of which took place in January 1976. I retired from the Gild Court in 2015, (or thereabouts), and during that time served as Master of the Gild on two occasions.

Perhaps the highlight of my time as Master was attending as a guest at the banquets of other freemen, particularly Chester, Coventry and York, and found the freemen of those cities extremely hospitable, and have made many friends there.

*John Tolton
A resident*

Being a Freelady of Leicester

As editor of the Gildhall News I'm in the fortunate position of being able to read in advance the articles sent in. Apart from making great reading, they are also a tool for recording history for future generations, and have prompted me to write my own piece about my claim to freedom and subsequently how it feels to be a resident at the Holt.

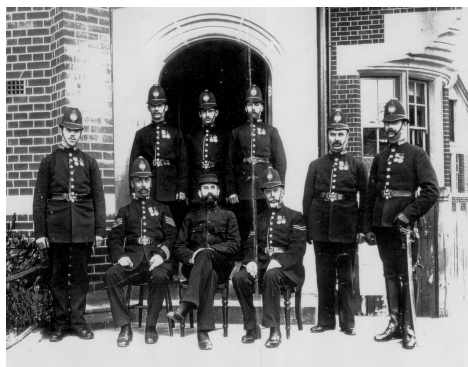
I decided to take up my freedom after my brother, Jim, passed away unexpectedly 10 years ago. He'd been thinking about applying to be a Freeman but never quite got round to it, and so in his honour, I proudly became a Freeman of Leicester in January 2015. Even now I often find myself thanking Jim for telling

me what he'd discovered about our family history and how he was getting on with his quest to claim his freedom. Anyway, Jim sparked my interest in our family background and it turns out that our great great grandfather, John Moore, sparked it all off when he was granted his freedom of the City in 1800 after serving an apprenticeship as a cordwainer (shoe maker).

Of particular interest, a couple of generations down the line, one of John's grandsons (my great grandfather - another John by the way!) became a police Sergeant in Middlesex.

Here's a quote from an online website:

"John Moore was born at Melton Mowbray in 1857 and lived at 'The Generous Briton' Public House in King Street. In 1881 he was living at the Metropolitan Police Station in Middlesex where he was serving as a Police Constable. In 1901 he was a Police Station Sergeant at Pinner Middlesex..."



Left: John Moore in uniform, second from the left, seated. **Right:** John Moore with his family. (My grandfather, George, is the little boy on the right.)

At some point the family moved back to Leicester, though I'm not sure when and where to. What I do know is that later on one of John's sons, George (my grandfather) lived in Braunstone with his wife and their children.

Life at the Holt

We've been living here for just over six months now and are pretty much settled – there's a few bits and bobs we still need to sort out, ie moving furniture around, which pictures to hang where etc, but we're getting there. Prior to moving in, the Charity provided us with a new kitchen and they had the place freshly decorated throughout. It was up to us to provide the carpets and curtains, and any further decorating is also our responsibility.

It's very quiet here – we wake up to the sound of birds and faint chimes from the nearby church bells. When we're outside, or if a window or door is open, depending on which way the wind's blowing, we can sometimes hear a slight murmur from traffic, or children playing locally. Having said all that, one morn-

ing not long after we first moved in, all of a sudden there was such a loud banging overhead we thought the roof was caving in. The pair of us jumped up in alarm shouting 'what the hell...!'. Looking out of the window we saw the culprit was a man running around on the roof cleaning the gutters!

There's plenty to keep us occupied, whether around the estate or further afield. We've seen a variety of wildlife, including birds, ducks and a fox. There are events at the community centre, which also houses books, DVDs and jigsaws for residents to borrow. Next spring we're hoping to get a small plot on the allotment so we can grow our own fruit and vegetables - and keep ourselves active. The local area has plenty of shops and other facilities, and Aylestone Meadows is on our doorstep. On a couple of occasions we've walked through the Meadows to Fosse Park and back - it's a long trek but we rewarded ourselves with half a pint in the village pub on our return!

I've met most of our fellow residents and they've all been friendly and welcoming, though respectful of others' privacy. They're a mixed bunch - some quietly reserved, others quite chatty and the rest are anywhere in between. Quite a few of us go to the residents' coffee morning once a week, where we share stories, concerns and laughs.

Life seems easier somehow – much of the maintenance of the property is taken care of by the Charity, so we don't have to worry about those big problems, such as a leaky roof or the boiler packing up. Indeed, a month or so ago we decided to check the central heating prior to the arrival of colder weather and one of the radiators wasn't working even when the hubby tried to bleed it. So we contacted Adam in the office, who got the plumber out and it was fixed within a day or two - all included in the rent. The grounds are well maintained - once a week, at least during the summer, the ground maintenance team come to mow the lawns, trim the hedges, blow away the leaves and generally keep everything neat and tidy. Our external windows are cleaned once a month, the gutters cleaned annually and our fences have recently been freshly painted.

We'll be forever grateful to the past Freemen of Leicester for their legacy and having the foresight to build these smashing homes, and of course we're also grateful to the Board of Deputies for the work they do to maintain the place. We feel incredibly lucky and are happy here – as hubby points out in the words of Bob Hoskins, 'I can honestly say I've never been happier. I'm walking around thinking any minute now, 25 tons of horses**t is going to fall on my head'!

Val Moore

The Birth of the Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester

I was sworn in as a freeman in June 1964 before the Lord Mayor Councillor Archibald Kimberlin and I knew very little about freemen, in fact I only knew two other freemen at that time, my father and his first cousin. So much for my worldly knowledge.

In 1964 there were a number of differences from today's ceremonies:

- Attending the ceremony before the Lord Mayor would be the applicant freeman and his sponsor, usually his father.
- The minimum age of the applicant would be 21.

- Freedom could only be gained through the father, providing that the father was a freeman before the son was born.
- Daughters were excluded from the freedom.

There were no mass swearing in ceremonies, there was no collective group of freemen responsible for freemen's affairs apart from the Board of Deputies and their role was to take care of the freemen's estate and not to act as a social club for the freemen at large. It was not out of choice, the legislation governing freemen's affairs prevented it.

Not so long after becoming a freeman I moved away from Leicester and worked in various places and finally settled in Chester working for Cheshire County Council in a location grandly titled Backford Hall. After I had been at Backford for about 18 months I was approached by someone to buy a raffle ticket, so I naturally asked what it was for only to discover that the sponsor for the ticket was the Freemen and Guilds of the City of Chester. My worldly knowledge did not include knowing about the existence of freemen in other towns or cities. After some lengthy conversation with my would-be vendor of raffle tickets I discovered that there were, indeed, freemen in towns and cities up and down the country and that there was even a collective body known as the Freemen of England. My curiosity was awakened.

In 1971 I returned to Leicester and later that same year I joined the Board of Deputies only to discover that I was not alone in my curiosity about freemen in other towns and cities. The Board had been approached by the Freemen of England but because of legislation governing the activities of the Board it was felt inappropriate to get involved. There were a few of us on the Board who felt that freemen at large were being excluded from the chance to meet each other socially and that a solution should be found. A year or so later, in 1973 I think, two freemen from the Freemen of England visited Leicester to discuss the benefits of joining the umbrella body and how other towns with freemen created their own guilds. After the Board meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 1975 an open discussion was held to examine the feasibility of reviving the medieval Guild of Merchants as the Guild of Freemen of Leicester.

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

The working party met the following week on Tuesday 9th December to formulate a general policy of the Gild and the first item was the election of a chairman, treasurer and secretary.

Chairman/treasurer – Roland Langton
Secretary – Geoffrey Agar

It was agreed that the title of the Gild should be “Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester.”

The committee agreed that the initial aims of the Gild should be:

1. To provide a meeting place for freemen of the Gild.
2. To establish contact with Freemen of Leicester wherever they may reside.
3. To establish contact with freemen in other towns and cities.
4. To make it known who the freemen are.
5. The re-establishment of Ancient Rights and Privileges.
6. To encourage eligible young men to take up the freedom.

The committee also agreed that the initial membership fee should be £1 per annum, subject to review.

A public notice was placed in the Leicester Mercury inviting all freemen, wherever resident, to an exploratory meeting to be held at the Freemen’s Holt on Tuesday the 13th January 1976.

The meeting opened at 7.30 and there were 62 freemen, and that number included the committee, in attendance. Roland Langton welcomed all freemen present and introduced the committee who had volunteered their services in the revival of the Gild of Freemen of Leicester. He gave a potted history of the Gild since its Charter granted by Robert, Count of Meulan, in 1107 granting the Merchants of Leicester the right to form a Gild of Merchants, and how by the 16th century they became known as freemen. Roland continued by listing the aims of the Gild as agreed at the first committee meeting and how it was up to the freemen at large to make it work.

Forty-seven freemen paid their pound subscription and joined the fledgling gild to be known as The Gild of Freemen of the City of Leicester. And that is how it all started.

I have just described the events that led to the creation of the Gild on the 13th January 1976, but that was not the only significant change to the affairs of the freemen in that year. Legal opinion had been sought from Charles Sparrow Q.C. about the eligibility of those wishing to take up their freedom which at the time involved the father being a freeman before the applicant’s son was born. The opinion was that in the present society it was reasonable to expect that the son could be born before the father was 21 (the earliest age that a father could become a freeman) and that the male entitlement should include any direct male descendent. As a result of the City Attorney conceding the opinion to be correct there were over 50 new applications for freemen duly sworn in that year.

At the same time that the legal opinion was accepted by the City Attorney it was agreed that the legal age for becoming a freeman should be reduced to 18 from 21 and that the boundary, whereby freemen could receive benefit from the charity or become a member of the Board of Deputies, should be extended from the City boundary to include the whole of the county.

The newly formed Gild of Freemen grew from strength to strength in both

numbers and in activities. By the time of the next meeting held in May at the Empire Hotel on Fosse Road the membership had increased to 126 and at that meeting the Gild welcomed the founder of the Freeman of England, Mr Harry Ward, who gave a talk about the formation of the Freeman of England and about the reasons behind its conception. The legal opinion leading to freemen being sworn in through the direct male line missing out generations came via the Freeman of England. Of that number of 126, one lived in New Zealand and another in South Africa. Towards the end of the year the first General Meeting was held to formalise the Gild and its rules and to elect a Gild Court to replace the voluntary working committee. At that meeting the following Gildsmen were elected to serve on the Gild Court:

Master of the Gild	–	Mr R L Langton
Deputy Master	–	Mr H E Dudgeon
Clerk	–	Mr G R Agar
Chamberlain	–	Mr M E Ayres
Warden	–	Mr M H Ayres
Warden	–	Mr A Kellett
Warden	–	Mr P H Kellett
Warden	–	Mr D J Dalby
Warden	–	Mr A Chawner

1977 was the second year in the life of the Gild and changes were taking place. The Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Bert Baker, accepted our invitation to become the first President of the Gild during his term of office, an invitation that has continued with all successive Lord Mayors to this day. There were two social dances held that year, both at the Glen Hall on Hillsborough Road, to raise funds for the Gild but the highlight of the year was a visit to Chester at the invitation of the Chester Guild of Freeman. This event proved so popular that two coaches were necessary to take our members and their families. We were made extremely welcome by the Chester Freeman starting the day's programme with a reception in the Town Hall at the invitation of the Lord Mayor and her consort followed by lunch at the Guildhall just a short walk from the Town Hall. After lunch we had a choice of a guided walk around the city, a visit to Chester races, or just do as we please. By the time we returned to Leicester late in the evening we were all well and truly tired out but full of memories of the day and looking forward to a return invitation to the Chester Freeman to visit the Holt.

The following year, 1978, also proved to be an eventful year. Common Hall was held in January in the council chamber at the Town Hall presided over by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Bert Baker, who had kindly offered the council chamber for our use. Common Hall was the term used to describe the meetings of the Merchant Gild in medieval times and was adopted by the Gild of Freeman to describe our annual general meeting. Over 60 Gild members attended that very first Common Hall held at the Town Hall. At that meeting a sample of the proposed armorial bearings was presented to the Gild members for approval and was adopted which led to the production of ties, car badges and other items for sale.

The whole of the year was busy: a church service at the Cathedral attended by nearly 80 freemen and their families, another dance and social evening, a barbecue with a licensed bar at the Holt in Aylestone, and a trip to York at the invitation of the Freemen of York. Finally, a Christmas party for the children and grandchildren of the Gild members including a visit from Father Christmas with a present for every child, providing that they were well behaved. The last event was perhaps the most tiring of the year, but one that really brought members together.

Until 1978 prospective freemen had always attended as individuals before the Lord Mayor to be sworn in as a Freeman of Leicester, but because of the number of those wishing to take up the freedom the City Council suggested a more formal ceremony take place with a group of new freemen. On the 3rd November the first enrolment ceremony took place for 26 new freemen presided over by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Albert Watson, who some of you may remember was the Lord Mayor whose chosen charity was the purchase of a scanner for the Royal Infirmary. An appeal that caught the imagination of the whole population of Leicester and the county.

By the end of the decade, just four years after the Gild's conception, we had a thriving organisation providing a means by which freemen could meet each other socially and we had exceeded our expectations with regard to our association with the City Council. Without the hard work and effort of the members of the Gild Court none of this would have succeeded and it is gratifying to look back and see as a team what we achieved.

*John Tolton
Gild Archivist*

The Board v. The Gild

It is apparent that there is some confusion about the distinction between the Board of Deputies and the Gild Court. They are two totally separate and distinct bodies with different functions and their only common factor is that they both serve the freemen.

The Board of Deputies first appeared in 1804 as a consequence of a clause in the Enclosure Act of that year which required that the freemen elect a body to be known as the Board of Deputies to manage the estate acquired in the Act. The land in question being the Freemen's Common, the Freemen's Meadows, and the triangular parcel of land surrounded by Aylestone Road, Saffron Lane and the Wash Brook, known as the Bull Piece. Subsequent acts and time have seen changes to the Board but its function is still basically the same; to manage the estate of the freemen. Today, the estate consists only of the Freemen's Holt along with its 36 bungalows, office and the financial investments used to maintain the estate. All the activities of the Board are bound by the Charities (Leicester Freemen's Estate) Order 1977, a statutory instrument that came into operation on the 29th December 1977. There is no provision in the order for any social interaction between freemen.

The Gild of Freemen was formed in 1976 by a small group of freemen with the intention of providing a focal point for all Freemen of Leicester and with the

idea of raising the profile of this ancient body and gaining some recognition of their contribution to the history of Leicester. A history of the origins of the Gild can be found elsewhere in this copy of the Gildhall News.

The Gildhall News

In order that the members of the Gild are kept informed of the activities, past and future, a quarterly newsletter is issued to all freemen regardless of whether they are members of the Gild or not and this edition is the 100th edition of that newsletter. This has not always been the case, the newsletter was originally issued only to Gild members, but the cost of printing was becoming a problem. It was agreed between the Board and the Gild that the Board would front the cost of printing, providing that the Board could use the letter to include its own news, and that the distribution was to include all freemen and widows of freemen.

Before the Gildhall News was introduced, the news was disseminated via a typewritten letter on A4 sheets typed by a member of the Gild Court and photo-copied for issue to members. (See page 24)

John Tolton
Gild Archivist

Freemen's Plaque

You may have noticed the small unpainted aluminium plaque, shaped in the form of the crest of Leicester Freemen, located on the wall on left-hand side of the entrance to the Community Centre.



Deputy Robert Staines, who out of the current Board members is the longest serving Deputy, made this plaque. Robert informed me he had attended a pattern making course at the former Charles Keene College in the mid 1990's and was keen to put his newly acquired practical skills to use. He made the pattern for the mould whilst attending the college. At the 1996 Garden Party, held at the Holt, Robert set up a portable furnace where he made and sold thirty-five

plaques and took them home to paint. Robert made a further fifty plaques which all subsequently sold. Robert kindly brought in the original mould together with the first plaque he made numbered 1 with his name written on the back as seen in the photos.

Unfortunately, no further plaques were made despite there being interest over the years – so if you have one treasure it. Keen to ensure the Freedom continues in his family, Robert’s three daughters took their freedom a few years ago.

L A Roffee

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

The FEW AGM was held by kind invitation of the Lincoln Freeman’s Guild in the Lincoln Hotel on 23rd September, and attracted almost 50 attendees. The previous 3 day AGM format was reduced to 2 days to save costs. Some long standing Executive Officers have now retired with health issues, and other roles shared. The Working Party reviewing the Constitution and other issues is proceeding. The first ever lady President, Charlotte Yeates of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Guild was elected, and she, like the Lincoln Guilds Secretary, stressed the value of Associate Guild members. The Durham City Freeman, in partnership with Durham University and local College, held their first Apprentice of the Year competition, the winners were judged ‘best in class’ across a range of craft skills, ranging from Digital Marketer to Stonemason.

Local news from the other Freeman’s Guilds and Court Leets in the FEW South Midlands Area includes:

Coventry Freeman’s Guild

The interguild skittles event planned for Barnacle Village Hall on 11th August was cancelled due to low numbers – attributed to a great desire by holiday makers to get away after the Covid pandemic lockdown years. In retrospect, perhaps a later month may be a better choice next year.

The ‘Heritage Open Day’ event on 17th September saw the Guild with a stand in the Drapers Hall, newly restored by the Historic Coventry Trust, and partially funded by the Princes Trust – and recently opened by King Charles III. The current Hall is the third on the site since 1637, and the previous Hall was demolished in 1829 due to dry rot. As city streets were narrow, and many buildings had protruding second and third floors to maximise space, conventional windows would not allow much light – so the major rooms are open to the roof mounted ‘lantern’ windows. A constant stream of visitors during the day showed there is plenty of interest in Heritage.

The Guild’s annual ‘Apprentice of the Year’ competition, which started in 2005, but interrupted by the Covid pandemic, had a presentation ceremony on 26th September. Winners in the Small/Medium and large firm categories were rewarded with a £1000 cash prize, with £100 to the other finalists – all funded by Guild sponsors.

Next Guild event is the Christmas Dinner on 8th December. With the costs

and limitations set by the new management at St Mary's Guildhall, the dinner will be held instead at the Hearsall Golf Club at 33 Beechcroft Avenue, Coventry, CV5 6DF, at £35 each. We would welcome other Guilds to join us.

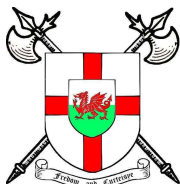
There will be a choice of three each of starter, main course and sweet. Contact Coventry Clerk Tony Archer on his e-mail: anthonaa@hotmail.com for further details and booking information.

Alcester Court Leet

The AGM & Elections were held on 5th October in the Town Hall. For only the second time in 20 years, the wheelchair bound Lord Hertford attended as Lord of the Manor. The first ever lady Low Bailiff was elected, and I sat with the first ever lady Low Bailiff of the Henley-in-Arden Court Leet on the guests' bench.

Calling Leicester Gild ladies!

Chester, Lincoln, London, and York have much benefitted from lady Guild members on their Courts; in fact at one stage all the Lincoln Gild Court had lady members. As you can see above, even the Courts Leet are welcoming ladies to senior roles. With some of the senior male Leicester Gild members having to retire for health reasons, we look forward to more ladies joining Lynn Roffee, Sue Freeman and Gildhall News editor Val Moore in helping the Gild progress in future years.



Derek Austin

The Lord Mayors Office

As both the Charity and the Gild work closely with the Lord Mayor's Office it seemed appropriate for this 100th Edition to include something about the staff with whom we work closely. I invited Liz McKenzie, Priti Chauhan, and Christopher Rhodes to tell us a little about themselves: -

The Lord Mayor's Office at Leicester City Council manages the affairs of the Lord Mayor of Leicester and works closely with the Board Deputies and the Gild of Freemen largely with the enrolment of hereditary freemen to the city and also enjoy their ongoing valued support at civic events.

Led by team leader, Liz McKenzie, two of the team, Priti Chauhan and Christopher Rhodes, work predominantly on the civic work and bring many years' experience to the council.

Priti's parents were originally from India and came to the UK, settling in Leicester, where Priti was born. She has a younger brother and is happily married with a son, who will soon turn 18. She has worked in local government for



Liz McKenzie, Christopher Rhodes and Priti Chauhan

nearly 26 years, eight of those in the Civic Office, and really enjoys organising and hosting events on behalf of the office.

She enjoys cooking, crafting, and learning new crafts, having recently taken up knitting, and has just completed her first project – a baby blanket. She has a passion for travelling which has taken her to places such as the islands of the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and South Asia. She also has an enormous sense of fun and in 2021 did a skydive, raising nearly £2000 for the Parkinson's Charity.

Christopher also comes from Leicester and has spent many years running two businesses of his own - a vehicle body repair and refinishing garage and a chauffeured wedding car service. He joined the civic office as a Civic Attendant in 2007, chauffeuring the Lord Mayor to engagements, as well as being responsible for mace bearing and master of ceremonies duties at major civic events.

His work pattern is very irregular, being on hand to accompany the Lord Mayor at any time of day, including weekends, but when he isn't working, he enjoys field sports, including clay pigeon shooting, motorbiking, bird watching, gardening, and walking. He loves nature and the outdoors and even though he's super smart at work, he's really at home in his old jeans and wellies looking after his land.

Liz comes from Kent and despite moving to Leicestershire about 25 years ago, still hasn't managed to master the local accent. Although she started work in the fashion trade, after a few years she moved into an office administrative environment and joined the civic team in 2008. She started with the council as a temp on a 3-month contract and now works fulltime leading the Team! She

enjoys the variety at work and is particularly proud of her involvement with the re-interment of King Richard III and meeting Queen Elizabeth II at the Royal Maundy Service.

A bit of a perfectionist with a keen attention to detail, she has too many hobbies and little time to enjoy them, so there are a number of unfinished projects patiently waiting for when she retires!

Lynn Roffee

Maurice Hill, Gild Chamberlain for over twenty years, has now stepped down from the post. Thank you Maurice for your valued contributions over the years. The Gild now has two vacancies:

GILD VACANCIES

Chamberlain and Clerk for the Leicester Gild of Freemen

In the first instance, please contact Adam or Sharon in the office on Telephone: **0116 283 4017**

or E-mail: office@leicesterfreemen.com

They will arrange for someone to contact you to discuss the requirements

If you're looking for something unusual for a gift this Christmas, don't forget our Gild products!

For further details contact Sue Freeman

e-mail: suefreeman10@gmail.com

*Below is a copy of the first ever newsletter
issued to Gild members, in January 1976*

THE GILD OF FREEMEN OF THE CITY OF LEICESTER

3 Sackville Gardens,
Stoneygate,
Leicester.
LE2 3TH

To all members of the Gild,

29 Jan 76

You will recall that at our exploratory meeting held at the Freemen's Holt on Tuesday 13th January 1976 it was agreed that future meetings of the Gild should, whenever possible, be held on Tuesday evenings. I am 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 "Town Arms" Pocklington's Walk, 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 committee is sure that it can count on your full support for this, our first semi-social 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 'Holt' 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 Tuesday 27 Jan and the second notice is to appear on Tuesday 3rd of Feb. If you know of any Freemen of the City no matter 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 R AGAR
Secretary

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 12th January 2024***

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

Leicester Freeman website: www.leicesterfreemen.co.uk

Gild e-mail address: leicester_gild@outlook.com

Facebook: search for "Leicester Gild"

Making Free Ceremonies 2023:
List of newly-inducted Freemen of Leicester

Wednesday 27 September 2023

Bruce Charles Bramley
Hayley Dawn Coles
Claire Veronica Harrison
Robert David Harrison
Edward John Higginson
Charlotte Jane Newby
Samantha Louise Parker
Christopher Peter Smith
Joanne Patricia Nicola Smith
Michelle Susan Smith
Bryony Jean Walton
Alexander Frederick West
Austin James West

Wednesday 25 October 2023

Michelle Elizabeth Danielle
Karen Elizabeth Johnson
James Harry Langton
James Harry Langton
Matthew Robert Langton
Belinda Joanne McIntyre
Claire Louise Murphy
Niall Michael William Murphy
Paula Kathleen Palethorpe
Cara Nicole Rowe
Vanessa Elma Summers
Joanne Marie Townsend
Sally Ann Warrilow
Ian James Henry Weston



Making Free Ceremony, Wednesday 27 September 2023



Making Free Ceremony, Wednesday 25 October 2023