



City of Durham Freemen

Newsletter 2014



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Foreword

Happy New Year. I hope that the last year has been kind to you and that 2014 is a joy for you, your families and your friends.



Each year I sit before my blank screen and wonder whether I will be able to put together a journal that will interest and inform Freemen wherever you are. Fingers crossed - here we go.

I am happy to report that our membership continues to grow. At the end of 2013 we had 213 Freemen in membership more or less equally divided by those who live in-district and those who live beyond. It is also a pleasure to report that our female membership continues to grow and now represents more than 20% of our overall numbers.

I mentioned last year that we were working with our partner, Durham County Council to define and clarify our shared interest in the area of the City known as The

Sands. This took longer to secure than we anticipated but due to the sterling efforts of Philip Wills, our Clerk and Receiver, we have now reached a clear and satisfactory resolution to that issue. We look forward to moving on to work in harmony and partnership with the County Council in the months and years to come.

Our sponsorship of Peter Bennett in his joinery apprenticeship with the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral continues to please all concerned. A short report of Peter's progress can be found in the pages that follow. We were also able to help Fifth Durham Scouts in their mini-bus appeal and to once again present a cheque at our dinner to the Worshipful Mayor of the Durham City in support of the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

The Sands has been the site for a number of community activities over the year including the annual Easter Fair which is mounted by Jamie Clark of the Masons' Company. The Sands was also a site for the first time for one of the many installations which went to make up this year's powerful Lumiere Festival which brought record crowds to the City once more.



(Lumiere installation "Fete" by Ron Haselden at the Sands)

The Freemen of England and Wales continues to flourish as a support organisation for Guilds across the land. A strong link exists between FEW and the Freemen of Durham.

My thanks go to two retiring Wardens. John Atkinson (Masons) and Harry Robson (Plumbers) have taken the decision to stand down from their roles. They have been replaced by Bob Elliott and Eric Bulmer respectively. Eric and Bob introduce themselves later in the journal.

Bob Elliott has also taken on the role of Membership Secretary. He is joined in establishing a new role by Kathleen Vasey (Drapers) who has offered to explore ways in which she might be able to assist in links with members. Both will be helped greatly in their work if members who have e-mail addresses could forward them to Bob or Kathleen. If you simply send an e-mail with your name and Company they will be able to create an e-mail database which will save hours of time.

Bob Elliott:
e-mail: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com
Kathleen Vasey:
e-mail: kathleenvasey@aol.com

For the first time in recent memory the Freemen were privileged to be asked to provide one of the lessons at the annual Carol Service at the Cathedral. My thanks go to Eric Bulmer who took on that responsibility on our behalf.

Finally I draw attention to my “Looking to the Future” article which I hope you will agree shows that through inclusion the City of Durham Freemen are growing in substance, relevance and purpose.

John Heslop, Chairman of the Wardens,
Warden of the Company of Curriers
Tel: 0191 386 8264 | Mob: 07792 655 031
e-mail: hezza@talktalk.net

Diary Dates for 2014

Guild Days

(Commencing at 11.00 a.m.)

The meetings are always on a Monday and begin at 11.00 a.m. Guild Days are presided over by the Worshipful Mayor of the City of Durham. All Freemen, their families and the general public are most welcome. Calls for new members and subsequent inauguration take place on Guild Days.

- 3 February 2014 (Candlemas)
- 12 May 2014 (May Day)
- 11 August 2014 (Lammas)
- 3 November 2014 (Martinmas)

Meetings of Wardens

(Commencing at 1.00 p.m.)

Wardens meet together in advance of their meetings with Trustees (see below) in order to discuss agenda items and other business. The meetings are held in the Guild Hall commencing at 1.00 p.m. and Chaired by the Chairman of the Wardens, John Heslop

- 24 January 2014
- 2 May 2014
- 26 September 2014
- 5 December 2014

Meetings of Trustees and Wardens

(Commencing at 2.00 p.m.)

Trustees and Wardens meet four times a year. These meetings are also held in the Guild Hall and traditionally take place on a Friday commencing at 2.00 p.m. and Chaired by the Chairman of the Trustees, Roger Norris.

- 24 January 2014
- 2 May 2014
- 26 September 2014
- 5 December 2014

Member meetings

(Commencing at 6.00 p.m.)

Member meetings are for Freemen who want to have greater awareness of the organisation and play a more active part in its affairs. The meetings are held in the Guild Hall on a Thursday beginning at 6.00 p.m.

- 16 January 2014
- 24 April 2014
- 11 September 2014
- 27 November 2014

Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner of the Freemen will be held in the Town Hall on 4 October 2014.

Wardens & Trustees

on the 1st January 2014

Wardens

If you have any comments, observations or suggestions relating to any aspect of the work and organisation of Durham City Freemen please make contact with the Warden of your Company who will ensure that the issue is addressed.

John Heslop (Chairman)
Curriers' Company (0191 386 8264)

David Atkinson
Barbers' Company (0191 3750 855)

John Stout
Butchers' Company (0191 386 6517)

Joe McElwee
Cordwainers' Company (0191 373 4394)

Vera Davidson
Drapers' Company (0191 386 4653)

Robert Brown
Joiners' Company (0191 377 2271)

Eric Bulmer
Plumbers' Company (0191 378 0554)

Bob Elliott
Masons' Company (0191 383 0934)

Trustees

The activity and business of Durham City Freemen is overseen by the Trustees.

Chairman:

R. C. Norris Esq.

Clerk and Receiver:

P. Wills Esq.

Treasurer:

S. Atkin Esq.

P. Bramwell Esq.

P. Conway Esq. OBE

N. T. Hart Esq.

G. Oliver Esq.

M. Proud Esq.

A Ribchester Esq MBE

Membership Secretary

Robert Elliott (0191 383 0934)

e-mail: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com

Communication Secretary *(Provisional title)*

Kathleen Vasey (0191 386 8000)

e-mail: kathleenvasey@aol.com

New Faces

Eric Bulmer

Eric Bulmer was appointed Warden of the Plumbers' Company at the May Day Guild Day 2013. Eric carries on the good work undertaken by Harry Robson who served as Warden for several years. I welcome the opportunity to formally thank Harry for his contribution and wish him well for the future.

Although Eric became a Freeman only recently he has strong family ties with the Freemen of Durham City and is the fourth generation of Bulmer to be admitted to the Freedom; a line that extends to his great, great grandfather, Frederick Bulmer who was admitted to the Company of Joiners by servitude in January 1851.

Eric is Durham born and bred and served his apprenticeship as a painter and decorator with P.L. Smith and Co Ltd of Elvet Bridge in the late 1950s where he developed an interest in gilding and sign-writing. He later went on to teach his craft in a number of Further Education Colleges, eventually retiring 26 years later as head of faculty for Construction and Engineering at Newcastle College.

Eric is keen to develop opportunities for greater participation by members of his Company to take a more active role in the Plumbers' Company. He hopes that this will give them a more meaningful experience and a greater understanding of what it means to be part of the heritage of Durham City.

Eric will welcome suggestions from all members to assist in achieving this goal.



(Eric Bulmer takes over from Harry Robson as Warden of the Company of Plumbers)

Bob Elliott

Robert Elliott will be appointed as Warden of the Mason's Company at the Candlemas Guild Day replacing John Atkinson who retired at the end of 2013. A tribute to John written by Roger Norris, Chairman of the Trustees, appears elsewhere in this publication.

Bob was admitted as a Freeman in the Mason's Company in 1965 and has recently been acting as Membership Secretary. His family have lived in Gilesgate since at least 1801 and membership of the Freemen probably goes back to the mid-1800s. He was born and educated in Durham attending the Blue Coat and Johnston Grammar Schools. He spent his working life as an electrical engineer with the North Eastern Electricity Board and its successors, commencing by serving three years of a five year apprenticeship in the City. In the late 1960s he was in charge of the project for the replacement of many of the high voltage mains and reconstruction of most of the substations in the City eventually becoming a Senior Engineer in the North Tyne Region.

For his final five years before retirement he was employed as Contracts Manager for the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency negotiating contracts for the purchase of nuclear and renewable electricity on behalf of the twelve regional electricity companies. He is keen to maintain the traditions of the guilds and would appreciate any comments or suggestions in relation to the Mason's Company or the Freemen in general.



(Bob Elliott - please send your e-mail address to him: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com)

Kathleen Vasey

Kathleen was sworn in to the Drapers Guild on 5 November 2012. She was born in Durham as part of a family of four. Two of her brothers became Freemen in the 1970s but at that time women could not access the Freedom in Durham. Kathleen has no further information about her family and their history with the Freemen and is looking forward to researching this part of her family history.

After leaving Whinney Hill School and New College Durham, Kathleen worked in both the private and public sector as a secretary and personal assistant. She was involved in setting up the first Nike UK Office in Durham and went on to work in their Apparel Division in the European Headquarters in Holland. More recently she has been working for Durham University, managing the admissions entries at St Mary's College. Kathleen is looking forward to learning more about the history of the Freemen and exploring how she might develop a role which would help with the establishment of a more comprehensive membership data-base and enhanced communication with members.



(Kathleen Vasey - please send your e-mail address to her: kathleenvasey@aol.com)

Membership Information

New Freemen admitted to the Freedom during 2013

On the first day of January 2014 there were 213 Freemen of the City of Durham more or less equally divided between those who are in-district and those who are ex-district members. 23 new members were sworn in during the year. Of these 14 are women who we were able to accept into the Freedom for the first time during 2012.

The following applicants had their Third and Final Calls during 2013 and were made Freemen of the City of Durham.

Candlemas Guild Day - 4 February 2013

Heather Forster	Company of Butchers
Jonathon Forster	Company of Butchers
Susan Lyle	Company of Drapers
June MacKay	Company of Drapers
Rev Joan Donkin	Company of Joiners
Eric Bulmer	Company of Plumbers

May Day Guild Day - 13 May 2013

Alexander Fenwick	Company of Joiners
Amalia Fenwick	Company of Joiners



(John Heslop, Deputy Mayor-Amanda Hopgood with new Freemen Alexander and Amalia Fenwick)

Lammas Guild Day - 13 August 2013

David Adamson	Company of Drapers
Gillian Arkley	Company of Drapers
Ingrid Kothari	Company of Drapers
Charlotte Scott	Company of Drapers
Vanessa Scott	Company of Drapers
Joanne Vest	Company of Drapers
Judith Watson	Company of Drapers



(Charlotte and Vanessa Scott with Sharon Spence from Durham County Council Councillor Pauline Charlton)

Martinmas Guild Day - 4 November 2013

Mark Anderson	Company of Barbers
Peter Anderson	Company of Barbers
Craig Nightingale	Company of Barbers
Gavin Nightingale	Company of Barbers
Rebecca Wright	Company of Cordwainers
Sandra Allison	Company of Drapers
Victoria Healy	Company of Drapers
Sarah Natrass	Company of Drapers



(Clare Greenlay from Durham County Council, Councillor Pauline Charlton and Sarah Natrass)

Applications for membership received during 2013

At the Martinmas Guild Day a First Call was made without objection for:

Connie Hotchkiss Company of Masons

A Second Call for this applicant will be made at the Candlemas Guild Day on 3 February 2014. Third and Final Calls will be made at the May Day Guild Day on 13 May 2014. Subject to there being no objections raised she will then be granted the Freedom.

First and second Calls were made without objection during 2012 for:

Tony Raybole Company of Cordwainers

Because of other commitments this application is held in abeyance. Third and Final Call will be made in due course. Subject to there being no objections raised he will then be granted the Freedom.

At the time of writing a further 8 applications have been received and should move through to First Call at the Candlemas Guild Day on 4 February 2014. Enquiries are also in progress for a further 6 applicants.

Freemen - Numbers as at 31.12.13.

In-District Members	Men	Women	Total
Barbers	8		8
Butchers	9		9
Cordwainers	8		8
Curriers	9		9
Drapers	17	4	21
Joiners	19	4	23
Masons	13	1	14
Plumbers	12	2	14
Total	95	11	106

Ex-District Members	Men	Women	Total
Barbers	16	3	19
Butchers	6	1	7
Cordwainers	7	1	8
Curriers	12	6	18
Drapers	17	15	32
Joiners	5	3	8
Masons	7	2	9
Plumbers	4	2	6
Total	74	33	107

Grand Total	169	44	213
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If you know of any Freemen who do not receive this Newsletter can you please let us know in order that we can keep our membership data-base up to date.

Membership Criteria

Any man or woman who has attained the age of 18 years and has any of the qualifications set out below is eligible to be admitted to the Freedom of the City of Durham:

The qualifications for eligibility for Freedom of the city of Durham are:

- (a) **Guild Servitude;** completed service in an apprenticeship of at least three years duration in a recognised trade, or equivalent trained employment status deemed satisfactory to the Wardens of the Durham City Freemen, with an employer who is a Freeman of the City of Durham;
- (b) **Durham Servitude;** completed service in an apprenticeship of at least three years duration in a recognised trade, or equivalent trained employment status deemed satisfactory to the Wardens of the Durham City Freemen, in one or more trades within the Durham city boundary.
- (c) **Hereditary Freedom;** he or she is the son or daughter of a Freeman of the City of Durham;
- (d) **Customary Freedom;** men and women who have attained the age of 18 years who are not otherwise qualified in accordance with 2(a), (b) or (c) above may be admitted as Freemen in accordance with ancient local custom or practice subject to the approval of the Wardens.

All claims to Freedom of the city should be supported by sufficient documentary evidence of entitlement to be submitted for consideration by the Wardens of the Guilds meeting collectively. Following due consideration, the decision of the Wardens in respect of any claim to Freedom of the City shall be final.

The Honorary Freedom conferred by the former Durham City Council or by Durham County Council is distinct and separate from the Freedom granted through the eligibility outlined above and the approval of the Wardens. The rights duties and powers of the Durham City Freemen shall continue in accordance with the provisions of the Durham City Council Act 1985 and associated customary practice.



Applicants for the Freedom should make initial contact with the Membership Secretary:

Mr R Elliott (0191 383 0934)
147, Gilesgate, Durham DH1 1QQ
e-mail: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com

Annual Dinner

The 70 who attended (and we hope, enjoyed) the Durham Freemen Annual Dinner in the Town Hall on 26th October 2013, included our Right Worshipful Mayor, Councillor Pauline Charlton with her Consort Susie Charlton, and Jeffrey Greenwell, DL, Gentleman Freeman of the Durham Cordwainers (admitted 11 May 1992), together with very welcome visitors from the Corporations and Guilds of Stirling, Coventry, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, York and London. Our Honoured Guest Speaker, Freeman of the Durham Joiners, the reverend Joan Donkin, Priest of the Lutheran Church in Sweden serving the lively Skerike-Gideonbergs Church at Vasteras, spoke wittily of her sense of mission from her Durham upbringing, her teacher-training in Liverpool, her voluntary work in Papua New Guinea, her experience of missionary work in India and her ordination as deacon to work in Sweden from 1997 onwards. The Durham Freemen were able to make a contribution of £800 to the Mayor's Charitable Appeal for the Treetops Ward (amazingly treating over 5,500 children aged from birth to 16 years old each year) based at the University Hospital of North Durham (formerly Dryburn Hospital) during the evening. The 2014 Freemen Dinner is on Saturday 4th October. We look forward to seeing you then.

Roger Norris - Chairman of Trustees



The Revd Joan Donkin



Annual Distribution

The mechanism for payment of the annual distribution to members has been discussed many times by Wardens and Trustees. At the Members' Meeting on 12 September the views of members were sought in order that a more satisfactory arrangement might be put in place.

The areas of discussion were:

1. Level of distribution - Members advised that the distribution should be determined through a formula based on annual balance between income and expenditure and numbers of beneficiaries.
2. Dates of eligibility - Members felt that this should be left as it is, acknowledging that some new members could wait for 21 months before receiving their first distribution.
3. In/ex district - Members did not have a problem with the distinction between in/ex district entitlement but felt that clarification of the in-district boundary would be helpful.

4. Arrangements for payment. Discussion included:

- Entitlement of in-district members.
- Avoiding discrimination against Freemen with entitlement who work and cannot attend Guild Days to receive payment.
- How payment should be made (currently through Warden).
- Tax declaration to protect the Freemen as an organisation.
- Possible options:
 - a) Receive payment from the Warden at the Guild Day.
 - b) Receive payment from the Warden by mutually agreed arrangement.
 - c) Receive payment from the Warden at the next scheduled meeting of members

The views of the members were discussed by Wardens and subsequently by Wardens and Trustees at their respective meetings on 27 September 2013. It was agreed that John Heslop (Chairman of the Wardens) and Stewart Atkin (Treasurer) would review the arrangements for the annual distribution in the light of the observations made.

That review concluded:

- i. The implications for a performance based formula are problematic and are akin to a dividend which for Corporation Tax reasons the Treasurer would wish to avoid. No payment would be made if a loss was recorded whilst a healthy surplus could attract a significant pay out. The cash logistics of the payment would be very complicated if the level of distribution was at a level which involved coins as well as notes. Continuation of a flat rate payment along with the income tax disclaimer was favoured.*
- ii. Current arrangements meant that a Freeman accepted into membership at the Candlemas Guild Day in February would not receive a Distribution payment for 21 months in November of the following year, as compared to someone who became a Freeman at the Martinmas Guild Day in November who would be eligible to receive payment within 12 months. Both time-scales were felt to be longer than they need to be.*

Timescales could be shortened with the cut off for eligibility being the Lammas (August) Guild Day and distribution remaining at Martinmas (November). The membership Secretary, Chair of Wardens and Treasurer would have ample time between the 2 dates to formulate and check the list of eligible Freeman. Although there would still be a disparity in waiting times for eligibility, the timescales would be reduced to between 3 - 11 months.

- iii. The distinction between in-district and ex-district Freeman was regarded as acceptable, legitimate and in line with many Guilds throughout the country. In-district members are those who live within the administrative boundaries of the former Durham City Council.*
- iv. After considerable discussion it was suggested that payments should continue to be made through the Wardens on and after the Martinmas (November) Guild Day. It is essential that the income tax waiver is signed (acting also as a receipt). The exchange of the distribution payment and the receipt of the waiver signed by the recipient is at the heart of the transaction. Each Warden may make arrangements convenient to themselves and individual members of their Company, so long as the waiver is obtained. Distributions not issued at the Martinmas Guild Day could be made on scheduled Members' Meeting days or by personal contact with Wardens. Any sums not collected by the date of the Trustees and Wardens first meeting in the following calendar year (usually late January) would be returned to the Treasurer as unclaimed.*

These recommendations were approved by Wardens and Trustees at their meeting on 6 December 2013.

Community Activity

Cathedral Apprenticeship

Gaye Kirby - Head of Development at Durham Cathedral writes:

I'm pleased to provide a short report on Peter Bennett, the Cathedral's Joinery Apprentice, kindly funded by the Durham City Freeman. Peter continues to make good progress in his second year at New College Durham. His tutors are particularly pleased with his attitude towards his studies. At the Cathedral, Peter has been working alongside Cathedral Joiners Tony Swallow and Terry Orton on general joinery repairs across the site, as well as a variety of specific projects.

Projects undertaken this year included renewing the shelving in the Chorister School Library which involved relocating and adapting shelving previously used in the Cathedral Shop. Peter has also been involved in making sample oak tables for the Cathedral restaurant. The restaurant is undergoing a significant refurbishment in early 2014 and Peter and the team will be making new tables to the approved design.

Away from the Cathedral precinct, Peter has undertaken refurbishment work at some of our investment properties which has included making sash windows and installing a new kitchen.

In 2014, as a member of the Joinery Team, Peter will have the opportunity to work on the Cathedral's major development project Open Treasure, which was recently awarded £3.9 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Peter and the team will be crafting new oak doors for the bookshelves around the perimeter of the Monks' Dormitory.

Over 50 pairs of doors will be made to help to protect the Cathedral's modern theological library collection which will be retained in the Dormitory following its transformation into a high quality exhibition space. It is also proposed that the Cathedral Joiners will make a number of items of oak furniture for the new Cathedral Library lending area.

As you'll see, Peter has been kept very busy and the Works Team are very pleased with his progress. Please do pass on our thanks to the Freeman for their continued support for Peter's apprenticeship.

Fifth Durham Scouts

In March, the 5th Durham City Scout Group was left stranded when their 15-seater minibus was gutted after a caravan parked nearby was deliberately set alight. The scouts' bus was in a line of vehicles left in a secure compound, but flames from the burning caravan spread and left the minibus a smouldering ruin. The blaze left the 100-strong group without transport at one the busiest times of their year.

On learning of the scouts' crisis, the City of Durham Freeman agreed to make a £2,000 donation. The money brought the scouts about halfway towards the £10,000 cost of a replacement vehicle. A new vehicle has now been secured and the scouts look forward to getting their activities back on track during 2014.

John Heslop explained: *“We were horrified to learn the good work of the 5th Durham Scouts was threatened by a mindless act of vandalism. We hope our support will help the scouts get back on the road to enjoy the summer and the activities that are so important to the youngsters.”*

Mike Hartley, who chairs the scouts’ group executive added: *“We are extremely grateful the Freeman have come to our aid at this difficult time. The loss of our minibus couldn’t have been more badly timed with summer camps and outdoor activities planned for our group of young people aged between six and 18. This donation is a fabulous start to our appeal and we hope we can quickly bridge the remaining funding gap and get our Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers back on the road again.”*



(Before and after)

Mayor’s Charity Appeal

For a number of years the Freeman have supported the charity appeal chosen by the Worshipful Mayor of the City. The Freeman presented Councillor Pauline Charlton with a Cheque for £800.00 to support her appeal for the Treetops Unit which is based in the children’s ward of the University Hospital of North Durham.



(The Worshipful Mayor of Durham City Councillor Pauline Charlton with her Consort and daughter, Susan)

West Rainton Mining Banner Project

Alison McDonough, a Freeman in the Plumbers' Company, is helping to keep our industrial heritage alive for future generations by leading a community history project to create a mining banner for her village. At the centre of the project are the children of West Rainton Primary School where Alison is Head Teacher. The children's involvement so far includes:

- a research group attending the Durham Miners' Gala to take photographs and report back to the school about the occasion;
- undertaking local history work to understand coal mining life including a school visit to Beamish Museum and interviewing former miners;
- taking part in a workshop with the banner artists (Bearpark Community Artists) where all the children in the school did some large pieces of art work to promote collaboration;
- involvement in a design session to create the children's side of the banner.

The project will culminate in the production of a mining banner to represent the village at the Durham Miners' Gala in July 2014.

West Rainton has a rich mining heritage with Adventure Colliery and Cocken Drift Mine being among its notable sites. Unfortunately their original banner was lost in the 1970s and they have been unrepresented at the Gala ever since.

A grant from the heritage Lottery Fund is enabling the banner to be produced by Bearpark Community Artists working closely with the school children. The banner, which is small enough to be carried by the children is double-sided with an image representing the past on one side and a more forward looking child-led image on the other side.

A big community celebration event is planned in West Rainton to unveil the banner before taking as many families as possible with the children to Durham for its first Gala and blessing at the Cathedral. Alison is also hoping to raise funds to commission a band to lead them in both events.

After years of dogged determination, Alison is about to see the project which was launched in 2012, finally become a reality.



(Alison McDonough with pupils from West Rainton Primary School)

Lumiere

The Freeman had the pleasure of co-operating with Artichoke of London and their representative Hannah Standen, in providing the westernmost square of The Sands as a site for **Fete**, a cheerful installation by Ron Hasleden who lives in France. This was part of the third Durham **Lumiere** Festival 14-17 November 2013. There were lights throughout the City which attracted thousands of enthralled visitors. Some will recollect the earliest incarnation of this, the Durham **Son et Lumiere** on Palace Green, in the early '60s.



*(Roger Norris,
Chairman of Trustees)*



(Stewart Atkin, Treasurer)

Finance

The Freeman are not emerging from the recession entirely unscathed. Our ability to enjoy a reasonable rate of return on the Freeman's reserve funds has been a continual challenge over the past 3 years or more. Quantitative Easing is not an expression which slips easily off the tongue. Indeed it has been behind my day to day problems in managing the funds and is the cause of much angst amongst those who rely on income from savings to make ends meet; pensioners in particular.

The impact of this policy is straightforward. The Bank of England has been lending billions to the banks to help the economy through a bad time. This money has been virtually interest free and as a result the banks have not had to pay savers a decent rate to use their money. The B o E has given them all they need. Borrowers were enjoying cheap money for loans and mortgages, but the poor savers and investors were left out in the cold.

During 2013 the Trustees and Wardens approved the reinvestment of some of the reserves and charged 3 of its number to liaise with financial experts in order to get the best return they could in line with their cautious approach. This process is almost complete. The result is that the Freeman are seeing a regular flow of income and a small amount of growth leading to an increase in reserves. Overall this has resulted in a significantly better rate of income than the banks had been prepared to offer.

Freemen of England and Wales (FEW)



(Attendees at the 2013 AGM of the Freemen of England and Wales)

I was sad to attend the funeral of Diane Healy during 2013. Diane was the wife of Stephen Healy, FEW Warden for the North. Both have been good friends of Durham City Freemen. Our condolences go out to Stephen and his family after a very sad year.

We were happy to receive several FEW guests at our annual Dinner in October including the newly installed President Gordon Varndell. Our Clerk and Receiver, Philip Wills is in frequent contact with officers of FEW to discuss common issues that concern not only the Durham Guild but many of our friends in Guilds elsewhere. In addition, I had a very fulfilling weekend in Oxford attending the AGM of FEW and taking the opportunity to revisit college memories from half a century ago.



(Preparing to Process through Oxford to the commemorative service in Baliol College - led by Oxford's Town Crier)

John Atkinson

A tribute by Roger Norris - Chairman of the Trustees



(John Atkinson)

John Atkinson is known to all as a welcoming spirit at Freeman Meetings, Guild Days and the Dinner. Although John had originally been admitted to the Company of Drapers, he agreed to become Warden of the Masons' Company in 1999 in succession to Donald Young. He has now retired as Warden from the end of 2013. The Atkinsons have been associated with the Drapers' Company at least since the early 19th century and John's Great Grandmother was a tailor in North Road.

John himself was born in Hallgarth Street, the son of the Winder-man in charge of the pit-head gear at Bowburn Colliery. He lived in Wylam Street and at 14 years old after leaving St Margaret's school he became an apprentice joiner at Bowburn Colliery (then owned by Dorman Long) dealing with shovels, shafts, doors and windows. He was time-served by the age of 21 in 1949 and left the colliery in 1962. Latterly he worked for the pre-1974 Durham City Council and then in the construction industry dealing with the civil engineering of reservoirs, bridges and schools. He returned to the service of Durham City in 1972 and became a foreman for housing maintenance from 1986 until retirement in 1992. John has lived in the family house at Tenter Terrace where he now practises his craft of joinery, producing splendid garden furniture. Freeman will recognize his workmanship in the oak Candlestick and Plate which usually feature at Guild Days. John loves photography and has generously provided super panoramic photos of the City to guests. Over the years he has built up an invaluable archive of pictures and films of Freeman activities, further evincing his loyalty and enthusiastic care for the good estate of the Freeman of Durham which he assures us will continue. Thank you John.

Looking to the Future

In last year's edition of this document I outlined my thoughts on the need for the Freeman of Durham City to evolve as an organisation. In particular I was keen to explore a more corporate management style in the hope that a more broadly based approach to our operation would help us to take stock, grow, become more inclusive and enhance our relevance in a 21st Century community.

I am happy to report a year on, that my ramblings struck a chord with a number of Freeman who not only identified with what I was saying, but were also willing to join forces in order to take that thinking forward.

In particular, I was delighted with the way Freeman who attend our quarterly Members' Meetings were happy to become involved with important issues and to share their thoughts and time to contribute to development. An illustration of this is the item elsewhere in this Newsletter concerning the Annual Distribution. This was an issue that needed tidying up. Freeman made it an important agenda item at the Members' Meeting in September and discussed elements of the procedures in some detail. As a consequence I was able to take valuable recommendations to the Wardens and Trustees who asked the Treasurer and me to formally review the situation. That review led to a revision of our procedures being established as policy for the future.

I think that is how we should be operating; consulting with Freeman, taking their views forward and translating those views into positive change. That, to me, is legitimate management and holds the potential to be a huge strength to us as we move on.

In that same article last year I highlighted the need that I felt we had for a Membership Secretary and for an officer who would disseminate information to all Freeman more regularly than this document can possibly hope to achieve. I was thrilled that Bob Elliott stepped forward and offered to take on the role of membership Secretary. He has taken to the task like a duck to water and I am indebted to him.

At the last Members' Meeting of 2013 Kathleen Vasey (Drapers) offered to explore the development of a role which would result in Freeman receiving information about our organisation more regularly. I greatly appreciate Kathleen's commitment and look forward to working with her in the evolution of what could become a centrally important function.

The work of both Bob and Kathleen will be assisted greatly if Freeman could pass to them e-mail addresses. This will take only a moment but will save hours. Please forward your name and Company in an e-mail to Bob or Kathleen and they will take the address from it to create an e-mail address book. It would also be very helpful if we could be notified of any Freeman who do not receive communication from us in order that we can keep our membership data-base up to date.

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