



Durham City Freemen



Yearbook 2016

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Foreword

Eric Bulmer Interim Chairman of Wardens



First, may I begin by wishing you a happy and peaceful New Year.

As interim Chairman of the Wardens it is my privilege to provide some reflections on last years work and activity of the Freemen.

Although I was only appointed Warden of the Plumbers' Company in May 2013, I have strong family ties with the Freemen of Durham City and I am the fourth generation of Bulmer to be admitted to the Freemen; a line that extends to my great, great grandfather, Frederick Bulmer, who was admitted to the Company of Joiners by servitude in January 1851, and continues with the admission of my son Sean and daughter Jane in 2015. Sean is a partner in a City of London law firm and Jane is a lawyer in the United Nation Secretariat for Climate Change.

I am Durham born and bred and served my apprenticeship as a painter and decorator with P.L. Smith and Co Ltd of Elvet Bridge in the late 1950s where I developed an interest in gilding and signwriting. I later went on to teach my craft in a number of Further Education Colleges, eventually retiring 26 years later as Head of Faculty for Construction and Engineering at Newcastle College in 1996. When I'm not cycling my interests include gardening, local history and watercolour painting.

2015 will go down as a year of change for the Freemen of Durham City.

There have been significant changes in personnel in key positions. In particular, we said goodbye to Roger Norris, who retired as a Trustee and the Chairman of the Trustees, and John Heslop, who stood down as a Warden of the Curriers Company and the Chairman of the Wardens. Both Roger and John have served the Freemen over a number of years with distinction and leave the Freemen in an extremely healthy and stable condition with an enhanced and positive profile within the City and beyond. A more comprehensive tribute is set out in the pages that follow.

Roger has been succeeded as Chairman of the Trustees by Norman Hart and Iain Wilmhurst has been elected as the new Warden of the Curriers' Company. I am sure you will join me in congratulating Norman and Iain and wish them well in their new posts. Profiles for both Norman and Iain can be found in the pages that follow.

In terms of developing our charitable work, 2015 was also a watershed year. I am delighted to report that the Charitable Trust has been established. It became active in April and is now responsible for the distribution of funds to those projects or individuals from within the community that have met the necessary criteria for support.

The members of the Charitable Trust are:

John Heslop (Freeman) Chairman
Joe McElwee (Freeman)
Stewart Atkin (Trustee)
Alan Ribchester (Trustee)

Another major development has been the launch of the website for the Freemen at durhamcityfreemen.org. The website is now firmly established and provides online members with an up to date information service. If you've not already have a chance to look at the new website I would encourage you to do so. Freemen news and events are posted on the website within hours of being received by John Booth the Website Manager. Many thanks to John for providing an excellent service.

As the website now provides members with instant access to news and information about the Freemen, we have renamed the Newsletter, from 2016 it will be called the Yearbook. This reflects its new focus on highlighting the activities of the Freemen over the previous year, changes in its personnel and organisation, as well as providing information of the current membership.

The Annual Dinner was once again successful. This was due to the combined efforts of John Heslop and Bob Elliott. Our thanks go to John and Bob for ensuring this annual event continues to thrive.

I'm pleased to note that the membership of the Freemen continues to grow. Among the 6 members sworn in this year, we welcomed 18 year old Beth Elliot, the youngest member of our organisation, as well as 90 year old Anne Pearson, possibly the oldest member to have been sworn in. Also, in May 2015 Doris McElwee was sworn in to become the first Lady Freeman and she was followed in August by Rita Brown and together they join a small but select band of Gentlemen Freemen.

On a sadder note, I'm sorry to inform you of the passing of our oldest member Norman Donkin MBE who died on October 22nd aged 96. Norman who was a member of the Joiners' Company became a Gentleman Freeman in 2001. At his funeral the Mayor's Bodyguard together with Wardens from the Freemen formed a Guard of Honour.

I would like to thank Jan Blakey who, in her capacity as Mayor, officiated at her first Guild Day in August (Lammas) and again at the following Martinmas Guild Day in November. I look forward to working with Jan in 2016.

Finally, 2015 saw the retirement of the Dean of Durham Cathedral, the Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove. We wish Michael, who has worked closely with us on a number of projects, a restful and happy retirement. Michael has been succeeded by the Venerable Andrew Tremlett the former Canon of Westminster and we wish him well in his new role.

Looking forward, I see more exciting challenges for the year ahead. When I became the Warden of the Plumbers' Company in 2013, I set out my vision to develop opportunities for greater participation by its members so as to give them a more meaningful experience and a deeper understanding of what it means to be part of the heritage of the City. During my tenure as interim Chairman of the Wardens, I hope to be able to develop this theme further.

To this end, I'm pleased to report that the Wardens, at their last meeting, have outlined a number of organisational changes to further enhance opportunities for members to become involved in the work of the Freemen, which are detailed in this Yearbook. I look forward to those changes being implemented in 2016.

All in all, 2015 has been a year that has seen change in a number of significant areas. I see 2016 as being another exciting year as the Freemen continues to develop and adapt to new challenges. I hope you enjoy reading about the Freemens' activities for 2015 and the changes envisaged for 2016. I would encourage both long established and new members to become more involved in our activities in 2016.

A Message from the Worshipful Mayor of Durham County Councillor Jan Blakey



It has been a busy civic year so far and I envisage the remainder of my time in office to be just as hectic.

I must offer my sincere thanks to Mr John Heslop for his help and guidance in all areas concerning the Durham City Freemen, especially during the Guild meetings. John's hard work and enthusiasm will be a big miss but I am sure that the Trustees and Wardens will push on and I look forward to working with many of you over the coming months.

The Annual Dinner in October was another great success and your generous donation to my charity appeal was very much appreciated.

It is pleasing to see the membership continuing to grow and long may that continue.

May you all have a happy and healthy 2016.

Councillor Jan and Mr Alan Blakey
The Right Worshipful Mayor of Durham and Consort

Diary Dates for 2016

Guild Days

Guild Hall

(Commencing at 11.00 am)

The meetings are always on a Monday and begin at 11.00 am 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.

8th February 2016 (Candlemas)

16th May 2016 (May Day)

8th August 2016 (Lammas)

14th November 2016 (Martinmas)

Meetings of Wardens

Guild Hall

(Commencing at 1.00 pm)

Wardens meet together in advance of their meetings with Trustees in order to discuss agenda items and other business. The meetings are held in the Guild Hall commencing at 1.00 pm and Chaired by the Interim Chairman of the Wardens, Eric Bulmer

22nd January 2016

20th May 2016

23rd September 2016

2nd December 2016

Meetings of Trustees and Wardens - Guild Hall

(Commencing 2.00 pm)

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 pm and Chaired by the Chairman of the Trustees, Norman Hart.

22nd January 2016

20th May 2016

23rd September 2016

2nd December 2016

Member meetings

Guild Hall

(Commencing at 6.00 pm)

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 pm

14th January 2016

12th May 2016

15th September 2016

24th November 2016

Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner of the Freemen will be held in the Town Hall on 15th October 2016.

Wardens and Trustees

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.

Eric Bulmer (Chairman)
Plumbers' Company (0191 378 0554)

Alan Dufton
Barbers' Company (07896 065 860)

John Stout
Butchers' Company (0191 386 6517)

Joe McElwee
Cordwainers' Company (0191 373 4394)

Stuart Magee
Drapers' Company

Robert Brown
Joiners' Company (0191 377 2271)

Bob Elliott
Masons' Company (0191 383 0934)

Iain Wilmshurst
Curriers' Company
Email: iain.wilmhurst@durhamcathedral.co.uk

Trustees

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

Chairman:
N.T. Hart Esq. (0191 384 0840)

Clerk and Receiver:
P. Wills Esq. (01388 603 073)

Treasurer:
S. Atkin Esq. (0191 523 8918)

P. Bramwell Esq. (0191 386 8066)

P. Conway Esq. OBE (0191 386 8216)

G. Oliver Esq. (0191 386 7471)

M. Proud Esq. (0191 386 7615)

A Ribchester Esq MBE (0191 386 4664)

Membership Secretary

Robert Elliott (0191 383 0934)
Email: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com

Communication Secretary

Kathleen Vasey (0191 386 8000)
Email: kathleenvasey@aol.com

New Chairman of Trustees



Image courtesy of Tom Banks

One of Durham City's best known and widely respected lawyers has agreed to take on the role of chairman of the freemen's trustees.

Solicitor Norman Hart succeeds Roger Norris, Durham's Cathedral former deputy librarian, who stepped down in the summer after 20 years in the chair.

Seventy-one-year-old Mr Hart was, until he retired two years ago, a partner in the firm of BHP Law where he spent most of his working life.

The son of a GP, he was born in Salford and arrived in Durham in 1948 after spending the previous two years in Dumfriesshire. He attended Durham Chorister School as a day-boy and switched to Durham School at the age of 13, where he followed his many sporting interests.

He went on to study at Durham University's St Cuthbert's Society and left with a BA. It was while at university that he first took an interest in the law - benefiting from the encouragement of one of his tutors, Dr Leo Blair, a barrister whose son Tony went on to become Prime Minister.

On leaving university he became an articled clerk with a Darlington firm of solicitors and after qualifying he joined L.J. Heron and Company, later to become Burt, Hart and Pratt and now known as BHP Law.

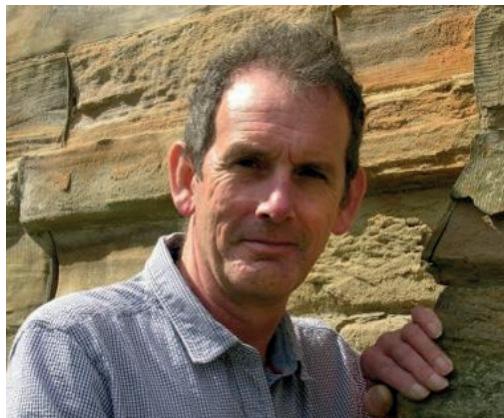
During his long legal career Mr Hart was appointed Durham's Deputy Coroner, for ten years working in support of the firm's then senior partner, Lance Heron, who filled the lead role.

He has been vice chairman of Finchale Training College for many years, has been a trustee of the Durham Union Society, has sat on two health service trusts, as well as on the Abbeyfield Society and has been a Rotarian for many years.

His wife Jennifer, a doctor, worked at Dryburn and Chester-le-Street Hospitals and the couple, who live in Durham, have two daughters and four grandchildren.

Gardening remains a keen interest but five years ago he finally surrendered his interest in motor sport when he sold his rare 1936 MG racing car. It was not licensed for the road and he drove it at Brooklands and Croft when occasion allowed. Earlier this year it featured at the Goodwood Festival and before that had appeared on television, in one of the Father Brown series.

New Curriers Company Warden



Following the retirement of John Heslop after ten hard working years of service as Warden of the Company of Curriers and Chairman of the Wardens a vacancy arose for a Warden of the Curriers.

Iain Wilmshurst expressed an interest and he was duly elected unopposed.

Iain was educated at Whinney Hill Secondary School from 1969 until 1974. In June 1974 he joined the staff of Durham Cathedral as an apprentice stonemason. He served under Edward Hughes who was one of the best masons at the cathedral at the time. He was an indentured apprentice signing up at the then Diocese Office in the basement of No 12 The College. He was a Lord Crew Apprentice being one of the last to be employed at the Cathedral.

Over the four years of his apprenticeship he was slowly given his own work to do, at first with other masons to gain experience, and eventually set to work on his own projects. He worked his way up from being the youngest craftsman until in 1994 he became the Cathedral safety representative. In the same year he was made chargehand mason and ran projects as leader of a team. He was then appointed Cathedral Yard Foreman a role which included helping the Clerk of Works. When the Clerk of Works, Bob Matthews, took early retirement due to ill health Iain was offered the job on a full time basis which he duly accepted. He was then appointed Works Manager at the Cathedral, a position which he holds at the present time. Iain says that this is a job which he could have only dreamed of when he first joined as an apprentice.

When Iain completed his apprenticeship he did not appreciate that this qualified him to become a Freeman. However, in 2004 he was contacted by Roger Norris, the then Chairman of Trustees, who suggested that he should apply. This he duly did and joined the Curriers' under John Heslop who he has now succeeded as Warden.

Iain and his wife Jaquie have three daughters all of whom are currently in the process of becoming Freemen and thus establishing a family tradition.

Retiring Chairman of the Trustees



Trustees' chairman Roger Norris, whose energy, enthusiasm and leadership are credited with contributing to the revitalisation of the fortunes of Durham's freemen, has stepped down after two decades at the helm. Roger, then deputy librarian at Durham Cathedral, was invited to become a trustee in 1988 and took over chairmanship in 1995.

Numbers of admitted freemen, both men and women, now stand at a modern-day record of more than 230 and rising.

Roger remains modest about the part he has played, instead citing the energy and foresight of his good friend Tom Heron, late chairman of the wardens, the expertise of successive treasurers Mike McMinn and Stuart Atkin and the hard work of trustees and wardens. Their combined efforts have, especially in recent years, allowed them to make significant contributions to charitable projects within the city, reflecting their historic aspirations to craftsmanship.

When he arrived in the city in 1966, to take up his new post at the cathedral, he concedes his detailed knowledge of the wider city's history was limited. It was his appointment as honorary secretary of the City of Durham Trust the following year that provided an in-depth insight into the preservation and conservation projects of the period.

"There were a lot of things going on at the time, especially as regards planning, which provided a great introduction to Durham," he added.

Three years after taking on the chairmanship of the trustees he was sworn into the Cordwainers' Company as a Gentleman Freeman. This was especially appropriate given the craft was linked to early book binding in which Roger had a keen professional interest.

For the past 40 years he has been a member of the Durham Diocesan Committee for the Care of Churches and holds the vice-chairmanship, as well holding similar positions with the Durham Victoria County History Trust and the Northumbria Historic Churches Trust.

He has also been chairman of Durham Council of Churches and president of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland.

Our grateful thanks go to Roger for his dedicated service over the past two decades and offer him every best wish for the future.

John Heslop

Retiring Chairman of the Curriers Company and Wardens



Hello and happy New Year. I hope that 2016 brings happiness and peace to you and those for whom you care.

It seems unusual to start the year without the responsibility of preparing and circulating the Annual Handbook of which this page is part. Many thanks to Bob Elliott (Warden of the Masons' Company and Membership Secretary) and John Booth (Website and Facebook Page Manager) for taking on that task.

I became Chairman of the Wardens on 5th December 2005. It was perhaps fitting therefore that my last duty was to Chair a meeting of the Wardens on 4th December 2015, marking exactly 10 years in office.

When I became Warden I was acutely conscious of the traditions and history of Durham City Freemen and somewhat in awe that I had assumed a significant role in the stewardship of that heritage. Our past is rich and impressive. It is essential that we do not lose sight of that and treat it with the respect and care that it undoubtedly deserves.

I was also aware however that to survive and thrive, any organisation needs to build upon its past to secure a present and a future. I made it a priority that Durham City Freemen should have relevance, substance and purpose. I hope that evidence of that can be indicated by:

- the admission of women into the Freedom
- the establishment of regular community funding and a Charitable Trust
- the establishment of quarterly members' meetings which allow Freemen the opportunity to become aware of the affairs of the organisation and contribute to them
- the establishment of Lady Freemen to complement our tradition of appointing Gentlemen Freemen
- a high public profile for the ceremonials and activities of the Freemen in the press, and media
- a report to members through an annual newsletter/handbook
- the establishment of a fully functioning Website
- the involvement of the Freemen in Social Networking through a Facebook page
- a strong link with and contribution to the Freemen of England and Wales
- links with other Guilds and Freemen Associations across the country
- a more corporate approach to the management of Freemen's affairs.
- strong links with Durham Cathedral
- burgeoning links with Durham University

It would be remiss of me if I did not stress that none of this would have been possible without the support of our Trustees and in particular our former Chairman of Trustees, Roger Norris, our Clerk and Receiver Philip Wills and the two Treasurers who have held office during my tenure, Mike McMinn and Stewart Atkin.

I believe that through the initiatives we have established we now have a prestigious past and a significant present in which we can justifiably take great pride. The future can be constructed on a firm foundation. I wish those who build it all of the support and good fortune that I have been blessed with over the past ten years.

I wish the Wardens, the Trustees and all of the Freemen of Durham City every success in maintaining, sustaining and advancing our proud and historic organisation.

First Lady Freeman - Doris McElwee



A woman, who has played a key supporting role behind the scenes for more than a decade, made history when she became Durham's first Lady Freeman.

Grandmother Doris McElwee was officially sworn-in at the May Day Guild Day, joining the eight men who make up the small but select band of Gentlemen Freemen.

Fittingly, it was 79-year-old husband Joe who officially welcomed Mrs McElwee into the Cordwainers' Company where he is warden.

Chairman of the Wardens, John Heslop, commended Mrs McElwee's unstinting support both for husband and the 230 freemen and women who make up the eight surviving companies.

He said: "Doris religiously attends every guild day, every annual dinner and, for the last ten years, has accompanied Joe to the annual general meeting of the Freemen of England and Wales at venues across the country.

"She has also devoted considerable effort to welcoming to the city representatives of other freemen's organisations, not only from across the north, but from as far afield as London.

Mrs McElwee worked for nearly 23 years in one of the city's major stores before her retirement in 1992.

She devotes her spare time to working as a senior steward at Durham Cathedral and, in her quieter moments, enjoys knitting.

Lady Freeman Rita Brown



A great grandmother, who has given behind-the-scenes support to Durham's freemen for more than quarter of a century, was honoured at a ceremony in the city's town hall.

Seventy-five-year-old Rita Brown, was sworn into the Joiners' Company as a Lady Freeman, joining her two children and five grandsons who have already been awarded the freedom.

While Rita's children and grandchildren all joined the joiners' company through the traditional route - qualifying as the sons and daughter of a freeman - she is only the second woman to be invited to become a Lady Freeman, a distinction shared with seven Gentlemen Freemen.

Rita has attended all the freemen's official public functions for the past 25 years, most with her husband Jim and a habit she continued after his sudden death nearly eight years ago.

Jim spent five years in the RAF and worked as a driver for various companies until disability forced him to retire. He joined the freemen in 1957, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He was elected Warden of the Joiners' Company in 1986, the same year his son Robert joined. He succeeded his dad as warden following Jim's death in 2008.

John Heslop, chairman of the wardens of the freemen's eight surviving guilds, said: "Rita's association with the freemen has been both enthusiastic and valued.

"She has maintained and encouraged her family's century-old links and religiously attended our guild days, annual dinners and other public functions we have been involved in. We would have been very much the poorer without her support."

New Members 2015

Candlemass Guild Day - 2nd February 2015

Beth Elliott - Company of Masons



May Guild Day - 2nd May 2015

*Doris McElwee
Company of Cordwainers*



*Barry Shotton
Company of Plumbers*



Lamas Guild Day - 10th August 2015

Rita Brown
Company of Joiners

Helen Gent
Company of Plumbers



Martinmass Guild Day - 2nd November

Margaret Davis - Company of Plumbers
Elizabeth- Cain - Company of Plumbers
Anne Pearson - Company of Plumbers



Current Membership at December 2015

Durham City Freemen - Numbers as at 01.01.2016

COMPANY	IN-DISTRICT	EX-DISTRICT	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
Barbers	8	22	24	6	30
Butchers	9	7	15	1	16
Cordwainers	9	9	16	2	18
Curriers	11	18	22	7	29
Drapers	16	36	30	22	52
Joiners	24	13	29	8	37
Masons	15	14	23	6	29
Plumbers	16	13	18	11	29
TOTAL	108	132	177	63	240

Barbers Company

Anderson	Mark John	M.J.	Mr	Handy	Joyce	J.	Ms
Anderson	Peter Stewart	P.S.	Mr	Kahane	Ahuvia	A.	Professor
Anderson	Laurie	L.	Mr	Kitson	Geoffrey	G.	Mr
Anderson	Roland	R.	Mr	Milbourne	Philip John	P.J.	Mr
Anderson	Jeffrey Rowland	J.R.	Mr	Milbourne	Richard James	R.J.	Mr
Atkinson	David	D.T.	Mr	Nightingale	Craig	C.	Mr
Atkinson	Carl Alan	C.A.	Mr	Nightingale	Gavin	G.	Mr
Atkinson	Kieran Andrew	K.A.	Mr	Nightingale	John	J.	Mr
Atkinson	Alan	A.	Mr	Nightingale	Judith	J.	Ms
Calvert-Lee	Thomas	T.	Mr	Snowdon	Frederick John	F.J.	Mr
Calvert-Lee	Rupert Guy	R.G.	Mr	Stonebridge	Arthur	A.	Mr
Calvert-Lee	Giles Lindsey	G.L.	Mr	Weightman	Una Dawn	U.D.	Mrs
Coxon	Kevin Lee	K.L.	Mr	Wills LLM	Philip	P.	Mr
Dufton	Alan	A.	Mr	Faulkner	Kay	K.	Mrs
Dunn	Dennis	D.	Mr	Brolls	Hilary	H.	Mrs

Butchers Company

Atkinson	Neil Wesencraft	N.W.	Mr	Forster	Jonathan Paul	J.P.	Mr
Bancroft	David George	D.G.	Mr	Giddings	Saul	S.	Mr
Chapman	Michael Andrew	M.A.	Mr	Howard	David Richard	D.R.	Mr
Chapman	Robin	R.	Mr	Laws	Steven	S.	Mr
Dodds	Kevin Barry	K.B.	Mr	Milbourne	Malcolm	M.	Mr
Forster	Guy	G.	Mr	Patterson	Thomas William	T.W.	Mr
Forster	Stephen James	S.J.	Mr	Pickering	George Robert	G.R.	Mr
Forster	Heather	H.	Ms	Stout	John Reginald	J.R.	Mr

Cordwainers Company

Davidson	Sidney	S.	Mr	Joicey	Barry	B.	Mr
Davidson		P.I.	Mr	Lumley	David Martin	D.M.	Mr
Davidson	Richard Peter	R.P.	Mr	McElwee	John Denby	J.D.	Mr
Firmin	Carl Granville	C.G.	Mr	McElwee	Joe	J.D.	Mr
Greenwell DL CBE	Arthur Jeffrey	A.J.	Mr	McElwee	Doris	D.	Mrs
Heron	Mark Annesley	M.H.	Mr	Norris	Roger	R.	Mr
Heron	David	D.	Canon	Shotton	Barry	B.	Mr
Heron	Peter	P.	Mr	Wright	Rebecca Hanah	R.H.	Miss
Hope	Andrew	A.	Mr	Wright	Stuart	S.	Mr

Curriers Company

Charney	John	J.	Mr	Howarth	Michael David	M.D.	Mr
Charney	Barbara	B.	Ms	Jones	Derek Newton	D.N.	Mr
Clark	William Henry	W.H.	Mr	Kitson	Leighton	L.	Mr
Crawford	Ron	R.	Mr	Luther	Richard	R.	Mr
Crawford	Karen	K.	Ms	Marsden	James Robert	J.R.	Mr
Crawford	Charlotte	C.	Ms	Marsden	James Harris	J.H.	Mr
Graham	Neil William	N.W.	Mr	Marsden	Nicola Hazel	N.H.	Miss
Hall	Adrian Matthew Edward	A.M.E.	Mr	McDonough	Adam	A.	Mr
Hall	Charles Jonathon Peter	C.J.P.	Mr	Provett	Laura	L.	Ms
Hall	Oliver Timothy Luke	O.T.L.	Mr	Ridley	Stuart George	S.G.	Mr
Heslop	Kris	K.	Mr	Torben Lee	Archibald Charles	A.C.	Mr
Heslop	Sandra	S.	Ms	Wilmshurst	Iain Stuart	I.S.	Mr
Heslop	John	J.	Mr	Wilson	Michael Colin	M.C.	Mr

Masons Company

Atkinson	John	J.	Mr	Elliott	Graeme	G.	Mr
Browell	Duncan James	D.J.	Mr	Elliott	Andrew James	A.J.	Mr
Browell	Martin Elliott	M.E.	Mr	Granlund	Alan Campbell	A.C.	Mr
Clark	James	J.	Mr	Hotchkiss	Connie	C.	Mrs
Clark	Cyril Douglas	C.D.	Mr	Jones	John Richard	J.R.	Mr
Clark	Peter	P	Mr	Mallen	Ann	A.	Mrs
Cooper	George Richard	G.R.	Mr	Nicholson	Paul Douglas	P.D.	Sir
Dent	Norman	N.	Mr	Renwick	Beverley	B.	Ms
Dent	Royston Norman	R.N.	Mr	Tindale	Peter	P.	Mr
Elliott	John	J.	Mr	Tindale	Peter John Henry	P.J.H.	Mr
Elliott	Robert Ainsley	R.A.	Mr	Vickers	Beverley	B.	Ms
Elliott	Michael	M.	Mr	Wesencraft	John	J	Mr
Elliott	Robert Lennox	R.L.	Mr	Wesencraft	Amy	A.	Ms
Elliott	Peter Stanley	P.S.	Mr	Young	Gordon Frank	G.F.	Mr
Elliott	Elizabeth Grace	E.G.	Miss				

Drapers Company

Adamson	David Ivor	D.I.	Mr	Milbourne	Alexander	A.	Mr
Allison	Sandra Anne	S.A.	Miss	Milbourne	Stephanie Helen	S.H.	Ms
Allison	John Stuart	J.S.	Mr	Milbourne	Rodney James	R.J.	Mr
Allison	Malcolm Nigel	M.N.	Mr	Milbourne	Andrew John	A.J.	Mr
Allison	John Gordon	J.G.	Mr	Nattrass	Sarah Elizabeth	S.E.	Mrs
Allison	Peter David	P.D.	Mr	Samuel	Tom	T.	Mr
Angus	Pamela	P.	Ms	Samuel	Barbara Anne	B.A.	Ms
Arkley	Gillian Roberta	G.R.	Mrs	Scott	Charlotte Anne	C.H.	Miss
Brookes	Gillian	G.	Ms	Scott	Vanessa Laura	V.L.	Miss
Calvert-Lee	Benjamin Thomas	B.T.	Mr	Scott	Barbara Jean	B.J.	Ms
Crofton	Ted	E.	Rev	Smith	Adele	A.	Ms
Davidson	Vera	V.	Mrs	Snowball	Dorothy Margaret	D.M.	Rev
Hayes	Mary	M.	Ms	Vasey	David	D.J.	Mr
Heslop	Victoria Jane	V.J.	Mrs	Vasey	Andrew David	A.D.	Mr
Jackson	Richard	R.	Mr	Vasey	John Frederick	J.F.	Mr
Jackson	Catriona Margery	C.M.	Ms	Vasey	Kathleen	K.	Ms
Kothari	Ingrid Allison	I.A.	Mrs	Vest	Joanne	J.	Miss
Lee	Jonathan Mark	J.M.	Mr	Vest	Alan Cruddass	A.C.	Mr
Lyle	Susan	S.	Ms	Vest	David Charles	D.C.	Mr
Mackay	June	J.	Ms	Vest	Gary	G.	Mr
Magee	Andrew Fawcett	A.F.	Mr	Vest	Paul Robert	P.R.	Mr
Magee	James Fawcett	J.F.	Mr	Vest	Richard	R.	Mr
Magee	Stuart John	S.J.	Mr	Vest	Robert Cruddass	R.C.	Mr
Middleton	Alan	A.	Mr	Vest	William Henry	W.H.	Mr
Milbourne	Michael Stewart	M.S.	Mr	Watson	Judith Gwen	J.W.	Mrs
Milbourne	David Michael	D.M.	Mr	Wilson	Thomas Dobson	T.D.	Mr

Joiners Company

Brown	Mark Andrew Charles	M.A.C.	Mr	Milbourne	Stephanie Helen	S.H.	Ms
Brown	Jonathan James Edward	J.J.E.	Mr	Milbourne	Rodney James	R.J.	Mr
Brown	Darren Ridley	D.R.	Mr	Fenwick	Alexander Luke	A.L.	Mr
Brown	Robert Ridley	R.R.	Mr	Ford	Alan	A.E.	Mr
Brown	Adam Ridley	A.R.	Mr	Ford	Reegan	R.J.	Mr
Brown	Dean Ridley	D.R.	Mr	Ford	Stuart	S.W.	Mr
Brown	Rita	R.	Mrs	Ford	William	W.E.	Mr
Bryden	Irene May	I.M.	Ms	Ford	Theresa Anne	T.A.	Mrs
Bryden	Robert Arthur	R.A.	Mr	Gilroy	Peter Andrew	P.A.	Mr
Clarkson	Robert	R.	Mr	Gilroy	Clifford Richard	C.R.	Mr
Clarkson	Christopher Paul	C.P.	Mr	Hesp	Eric	E.	Mr
Clarkson	Ronald	R.	Mr	Jopling	Trevor	T.	Mr
Clarkson	Steven	S.	Mr	Morris	Edward James Bowring	E.J.B.	Mr
Clarkson	Andrew Robert	A.R.	Mr	Morris OBE	Roger John Bowring	R.J.B.	Dr
Clarkson	Nigel David	N.D.	Mr	Neale	David Charles	D.C.	Mr
Dawson	Peter Robert	P.R.	Mr	Neale	Michael Paul	M.P.	Mr
Donkin	Joan Elizabeth	J.	Rev	Neale	Steven Thomas Edwin	S.T.E.	Mr
Fenwick	Christopher	C.	Mr	Swan	Lynne	L.	Ms
Fenwick	Amalia Jane	A.J.	Ms	Thurlow	Ann	A.	Ms
Milbourne	Alexander	A.	Mr	Wigham	Claire	C.	Ms

Plumbers Company

Abson	Philip	P.	Mr	Head	David Colin	D.C.	Mr
Allan	Patricia	P.	Ms	Heron	Clive Emmerson	C.E.	Mr
Billsborrow	Patricia	P.	Rev	Heron	Adam Mark	A.M.	Mr
Booth	John	J.	Mr	Heron	Leslie	L.	Mr
Brass	Andrew	A.	Mr	Inglis	Sydney	S.	Mr
Brown	Alison Jane	A.J.	Mrs	Johnson	Peter Alan	P.A.	Mr
Bulmer	Jane	J.	Miss	McDonough	Alison	A.	Ms
Bulmer	Sean	S.	Mr	Pearson	Anne	A.	Mrs
Bulmer	Eric	E.	Mr	Robson	Harry	H.	Mr
Cain	Elizabeth Ann	E.A.	Mrs	Todd	David William	D.W.	Mr
Cunliffe	Lisa	L.	Mrs	Watson	Haydon	H.	Mr
Davis	Margaret Ruth	M.R.	Mrs	Willey	Brian Fawcett	B.F.	Mr
Dunhill	Garry	G.	Mr	Wortley	Katherine	K.	Ms
Dunhill	Keith	K	Mr	Wortley	Melvin	M.	Mr
Gent	Helen	H.B.	Mrs				

Applications for Membership Received During 2015

At the Lammas and Martinmas Guild Day, First and Second Calls were made without objection for:

Hilda Barbara Kingston	Company of Drapers
Leah Felicity Freeland	Company of Drapers

A Third and Final Call will be made at the Candlemas Guild Day on 8th February 2016 for Hilda Barbara Kingston. Subject to there being no objections raised she will then be granted the Freedom.

The Third Call for Leah Felicity Freeland will be made at the Lammas Guild Day on 8th August 2016 at her request.

Applications have also been received from the following for whom First Calls have not yet been arranged:

Dr Peter Minto	Company of Cordwainers
Jack Denby McElwee	Company of Cordwainers
Davey John McElwee	Company of Cordwainers
Fiona Louise Wilmshurst	Company of Curriers
Holly Alison Olivia Wilmshurst	Company of Curriers
Rebekah Anne Wilmshurst	Company of Curriers

Deceased Members

Sadly we have been notified of the following members who have died in 2015.

Charles Vasey	Company of Drapers
John Vasey	Company of Drapers
Cyril Wesencraft	Company of Butchers
Norman Donkin MBE	Company of Joiners Gentleman Freeman

Obituary for Albert Edward (Norman) Donkin MBE



Albert Edward Donkin, who was always known as Norman has died aged 96. He was born in Gilesgate and moved to Crossgate when he was about 6 years old. He attended the Blue Coat School and excelled in sport, particularly football. His interest in football continued into adult life where he played in goal for Durham City and was watched by scouts from a number of top clubs. He could have made a professional career in football if it had not been for the war, where he served in the 35th Tank Brigade and was part of the Expeditionary force that was eventually evacuated from Dunkirk. He also saw active service in North Africa where he was besieged at Tobruk and eventually took part in the D-Day landing.

He served his time as a carpenter with George Snowball, whose workshops were situated in Reform Place in the City. After the war, Norman continued to work as a carpenter and joiner with Bell and Ridely in Durham

Norman married Ada Kitson and they had one daughter, Joan.

The church was an important part of Norman's life. He had been a member of the St. Margaret's congregation for 90 years where he was a churchwarden and served on the Parochial Church Council on many occasions. His association with the church started at Sunday School and later within the Church Lads Brigade, under the leadership of Mr. Battensby. He fought avidly for women's ordination and was proud when his daughter Rev. Joan Donkin was the first woman priest to celebrate communion at St Margarets.

In recognition of his long service with the Church Lads Brigade, he was made a Mayors Bodyguard in 1963, where he became its longest serving member when he retired after 45 years and on his retirement he was made an Honorary Member. He was also an active member of the Forces Club in Durham. Norman was awarded a MBE in 2001 for his service to the City of Durham, in particular in recognition of his long service as a Mayoral Bodyguard. In the same year, Norman was also sworn in as a Gentlemen Freemen and member of the Joiners Guild.

Norman lived a rich life in the service of others; he was a generous, kind and intelligent man always with a smile and alert to the very last. He will be sorely missed and the Freemen offer our deepest condolences to his family and friends.

Norman Donkin, Gentleman Freeman and Mayoral Bodyguard Born 16th December 1918 died 22nd October 2015.

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 Freemen of the City of Durham.

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

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.

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.

Hereditary Freedom

He or she is the son or daughter of a Freeman of the City of Durham.

Customary Freedom

Men and women who have attained the age of 18 years who are not otherwise qualified in accordance with the 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 Bob Elliott
147 Gilesgate
Durham
DH1 1QQ

Tel: 0191 383 0934

Email: robert.elliott934@btinternet.com

Chairman of the Trustees Report



Image courtesy of Tom Banks

Well, the unthinkable has occurred and to prove that lightning can strike twice in the same place, a second unthinkable has occurred.

I am, of course, referring to the retirements of not only our Chairman of Trustees, the irreplaceable Roger Norris, who served for approximately 20 years, but the equally irreplaceable John Heslop who served as Chairman of the Wardens for about 10 years.

One problem that Roger did leave behind was that there was no provision for his replacement and no-one could really remember how he was appointed in the first place.

It was therefore left to Malcolm Proud as the longest serving Trustee to come up with an answer and Malcolm has formulated an excellent plan for the future.

Basically this is that there will be a Vice Chairman, that tenure of office will be limited to 3 years with the option to be appointed for a further term, that both Chairman and Vice Chairman would be appointed from the existing Trustees and finally that the number of Trustees might be increased.

As a result of this procedure the writer has been appointed as Chairman and Malcolm Proud has agreed to become Vice Chairman and, so far, one additional Trustee has been appointed, namely Phil Dyer, who is a retired Solicitor and also a Durham Cathedral Steward.

In his last report at the beginning of this year, Roger reported that a Charitable Trust was being formed, principally by Trustees Stewart Atkin, Alan Ribchester and our Clerk and Receiver, Philip Wills. I am pleased to report that this procedure has now been completed and this will substantially reduce our liability to corporation tax thereby ensuring that we can provide support for continuing activities that the Freemen would wish to assist.

There are one or two other matters to report.

As ever, the County Council are procrastinating in the rent review for the Sands Car Park. Hopefully however our Clerk Philip Wills, with the able assistance of our Surveyor Andrew Toes, this could be resolved in the not too distant future.

Also dealing with the Sands, an end to free fishing on a stretch of the River Wear has been ordered to combat what conservationists have condemned as "salmon and sea trout poaching on an industrial scale ". This has the support of the Freeman, the Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council and the Environmental Agency, but it is feared it will not be well received by some local anglers who have been used to fish the particular stretch over the years. We will just have to wait and see how this works out.

Very briefly, on the Charitable Trust it was resolved that John Mc Elwee be appointed as a Trustee to replace Roger and Alan Ribchester would become a signatory.

Our Annual Dinner was held as usual in the Town Hall on the 3rd October, it was well attended and our guest speaker was the Chief Constable of Durham, Mike Barton, who gave a very interesting and thought provoking talk.

Finally, on behalf of all the Trustees and, I am sure, also the Wardens, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Roger Norris and John Heslop for all they have done for the Freeman of Durham over the years.

Charitable Trust

During the year, Durham City Freemen have been able to establish a Charitable Trust.

For many years we have funded community projects and local charities from our surplus funds. We were conscious however that any surplus we generated over any financial year was subject to Corporation Tax, which meant that we were paying 21% of our surplus in tax rather than having this at our disposal for community giving.

We are delighted that due to the hard work of Alan Ribchester, Stewart Atkin and Philip Wills we have now been able to establish the Durham City Freemen Charitable Trust. This makes it possible for the Freemen to transfer any surplus funds at the end of a financial year into this fund which can then be used in their entirety for funding worthy causes. The Trust has four Trustees who are responsible for all aspects of its administration.

A condition laid down by the Charity Commission is that all Charitable Trusts must be "free-standing" enterprises, independent of all other organisations. In our case this means that although our Charitable Trust exists exclusively to facilitate support of community activity by the Freemen, it has to be administered by specific Trustees who are independent of the Freemen. We were very aware that this could result in the Freemen losing control over the public image it projects through its charitable work. The Trustees decided that this might best be addressed by ensuring that at least half of the Trustees should be current Durham City Freemen and that the Chair of the Trustees - who has a casting vote - must be a Durham City Freeman.

The makeup of the Trustees is now:

John Heslop (Chairman)	- Chairman of the Wardens of DCF*
Joe McElwee	- Warden of the Cordwainers' Company
Stewart Atkin	- Treasurer of DCF
Alan Ribchester	- Trustee of DCF

(*John Heslop continues to be a Trustee but has now stood down from the role of Chairman of the Wardens. The Trustees are seeking to appoint a further Trustee who will be a Durham City Freeman and who will be actively engaged in the management of DCF and able to ensure that DCF's interests are protected within the Trust)

We are confident that the Charitable Trust will be the most efficient way of ensuring that the assets of Durham City Freemen are utilised for the good of the local community now and at all times in the future.

To date this year the Freemen have supported Trinity School (through the Mayor of Durham City Charity Appeal), Durham Community Association, the Nepal Earthquake Appeal and Save the Children for Syrian refugees. We have also made our final financial contribution to the sponsorship of Peter Bennet's joinery apprenticeship with the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral. We look forward to Peter exercising his right to become a Freeman of the City in the coming year.

There are other exciting projects currently under discussion which will be reported on the website www.durhamcityfreemen.org as they come to fruition.

Treasurers Report



Last year I reported the decision to create a charitable trust through which our community giving would be channeled. I am pleased to report that The Charity Commission gave their approval last January. I must record my thanks to the Trustees and Wardens for their careful crafting of the objectives and to Ribchester and Co., Chartered Accountants, for handling communications with the Commission at no cost to the Freemen. The immediate impact was a reduction in tax payable by the Freemen from over £1,100 the year before to less than £100 this year.

The charity trustees have already made some distributions and as I write they are looking at ways to support a further trade apprenticeship in the city. Freemen are encouraged to suggest appropriate beneficiaries through their Wardens for consideration by the charity trustees.

Investments continue to generate income in excess of 4.5% and thanks to the broad spread of risk the recent uncertainty in world stock markets has had a limited impact on us. Almost half of the portfolio is in UK Bonds, about one third in UK equities and less than 15% in overseas markets. Your trustees continue to work closely with the portfolio manager to get the best returns with a cautious low risk approach.

The Way Forward



In response to the recent changes in the Chairmanship of the Wardens and the need to initially stabilize the current position of the Freemen and then move forward, the Wardens have agreed to a number of aims and proposals to address the issues.

Aims:

- To encourage new and existing members, particularly those recently admitted to take a more active role to support change and development that will carry the organisation into the future.
- To examine the current organisational structure of the Freemen and make appropriate changes to ensure that it is capable of sustaining a vibrant management team to stabilise its current position and to deliver the development/changes as they occur.

In order to achieve these aims it is proposed that;

- a) The roles of the Wardens and the Chairman of the Wardens are clearly defined.
- b) Tenure of appointment for the roles of Wardens and Chairman of the Wardens to be introduced to assist in the continuity of drive and creativity necessary to ensure a bright future for the organization
- c) Expand the current Communication Group (formally the Website Working Group) to accommodate future development projects and social activities. It is envisaged that this group will become the 'engine room' for change and development and will form an integral part of the management structure in the future.

I invite any member who would like to be actively involved and to become part of this group to contact;

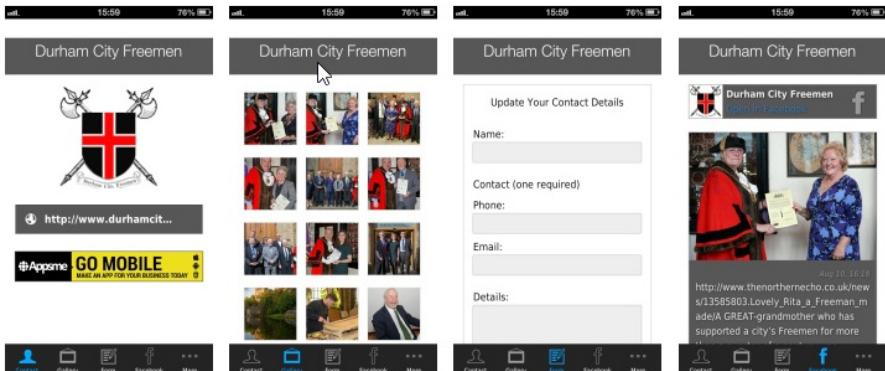
Eric Bulmer
Interim Chairman of the Wardens
Warden of the Plumbers' Company

Tel: 0191 378 0554 • **Mobile:** 07894 064 057
Email: eckabulmer@gmail.com

Website Report

Following an initial development period in late 2014 to establish design, layout and functionality, the Durham City Freeman website went live in early 2015.

Developed on a content management system by John Booth primarily to improve communication links and share information by offering up to date information and news articles for members. The site is proving to be increasingly popular with over 25,000 hits from over 20 countries since it was launched, taking Durham City Freemen into the Digital Age.



www.durhamcityfreemen.org

The website can be accessed not only from your home computer or laptop but also from the Freeman App which can be downloaded to smart phones from the sites homepage, this allows members to access current information and an opportunity to update contact details remotely from any digital device.

If you have any interesting facts or information regarding Durham City Freemen you would like to share please contact John Booth the website manager at booth.john@btinternet.com who will be happy to publish articles on the website.

The website can also be accessed from the Freeman app which can be downloaded to smart phones from the sites homepage, this allows members to access current information and an offers an opportunity to update contact details remotely from any device.

Durham City Freeman Photographer

Images displayed on the website are courtesy of Geoff Kitson the official Durham City Freeman Photographer. These are small compressed images suitable for viewing on web pages. If you require larger images suitable for printing they can be obtained by contacting Geoff by email at geoffkitson8@yahoo.co.uk.

Community Activity



Apprentice joiner sponsorship comes to an end at Durham Cathedral

In 2012 Durham City Freemen worked with the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral to establish the sponsorship of a craft apprentice. The Dean and Chapter selected Peter Bennett from West Rainton and apprenticed him as a trainee Joiner. Peter began work on 26th March 2012.

Peter Bennett has just been employed full time as a joiner by Durham Cathedral having undertaken a three year-long apprenticeship with the Cathedral's works yard team.

Peter said: "I was doing joinery at New College Durham when I heard about the apprenticeship at Durham Cathedral, so I applied and was so pleased to be offered the place. I started on 26th March 2012 while continuing to study for my joinery qualification at college."

Under the watchful supervision of Bob Matthews and Iain Wilmshurst, Peter began putting his training into practice on the job, carrying out tasks in general maintenance and repair at the Cathedral and its properties as well as building a brand new gate for the riverbanks from scratch. He qualified as a Level 3 Advanced Apprentice in Bench Joinery and was also awarded 'Apprentice of the Year' for joinery - from New College Durham.

Works Yard Manager, Iain Wilmshurst, who oversees the work of all the Cathedral tradesmen, said: "Peter was a very dedicated apprentice and worked really hard at everything we asked him to do. He also had an understanding and respect of the history and heritage of our Cathedral and properties and all of those things combined made him the perfect choice to become a full-time member of our team - we were delighted to offer him a job."

And the job isn't the only offer that Peter was made, the Durham City Freemen are also offering Peter the chance to become a Freeman now that he has qualified. Joe McElwee from the DCF said: "We were delighted to be able to fund the apprenticeship post at Durham Cathedral and because Peter has served his apprenticeship within the city walls, he is also eligible to become a Durham City Freeman."

Peter said: "I'm so grateful to the Freemen for providing me with the opportunity to train as an apprentice because without it I would have been another of the many qualified joiners still looking for work."

Calendar of Involvements During 2015

- 20th January:** Chairman of Wardens invited to Bede Rotary Club lunch.
- 6th February:** Chairman of Trustees and Chairman of Wardens met Director of Sport and Culture for Durham County Council.
- 11th April:** Chairman of Wardens invited to toast City of Durham at Mayor's Civic Dinner.
- 14th May:** Women Freemen attended Mayor's Civic Reception in the Town Hall.
- 4th August:** Warden of Plumbers Company represented Durham City Freemen at presentation of Queens Award for Voluntary Service to Durham City Pointers.
- 20th September:** Freemen recognised for their support of Durham Cathedral through inclusion in the Liber Vitae (Book of Life) at Durham Cathedral.
- 11th September:** Chairman of Wardens and Warden of Cordwainers' Company represented Durham City Freemen at AGM of Freemen of England and Wales in Berwick upon Tweed as part of Berwick's 900 year centenary.
- 27th September:** Freemen invited to be represented at special Cathedral Evensong to mark the retirement of Michael Sadgrove, Dean of Durham.
- 29th September:** Warden of Masons' Company represented Durham City Freemen at ceremony naming a Virgin Train in honour of Michael Sadgrove, Dean of Durham
- 22nd November:** Commemoration of Founders and Benefactors held in Durham Cathedral.
- 12th December:** Durham Cathedral Choir Christmas Concert.
- 22nd December:** Festival of Nine lessons and Carols held in Durham Cathedral.

Mayor of Durham's Reception

The Freemen ladies were invited to the Right Worshipful the Mayor of Durham, Councillor John Robinson's Reception on Thursday, 14th May 2015 in the Town Hall together with Councillors, Justice's of the Peace, Durham City Pointers and friends to celebrate the Mayor's year. The evening commenced with an address by the Mayor welcoming everyone and thanking them for their assistance in making his year memorable.

We were then entertained by the youngsters of the Youth Connection Theatre Company who sang a medley of songs from well known film and stage productions. They were excellent and so talented. We were very well served with cheese and biscuits, many of them local cheeses, and refreshments. We were also invited to explore parts of the Town Hall which are not normally open to see. Fascinating! Our evening was splendid and it was really nice to meet other Freemen ladies.

Kathleen Vasey

Freemen Social Activities - Annual Dinner 2015



Image courtesy of Tom Banks

Durham City Freemen held their Annual Dinner on 3 October. There were 60 guests which included local Freemen and their guests as well as others from around the country. We were also joined by friends from other Guilds and by representatives of the Freemen of England and Wales.



Image courtesy of Tom Banks

We were delighted to welcome the Worshipful Mayor of Durham City, Councillor Jan Blakey and her Consort and husband Alan Blakey. Our principal guests were Mike Barton, Chief Constable of Durham Police and his wife Maggie.

The evening began with a sherry reception after which there was a four course meal.

After the meal a Toast to the health of the guests was proposed by Norman Hart, the recently appointed Chairman of our Trustees. The Mayor was then presented with a cheque for £1000.00 as a donation to her Charity Appeal which this year is in support of Trinity School at Aykley Heads. The Mayor proposed a toast to the City of Durham.



Image courtesy of Tom Banks

We were then treated to a thought provoking talk from Mike Barton who outlined his ideas about policing in the 21st Century, touching on restorative justice and radical approaches for dealing with drug offenders.



The evening was closed by the presentation of flowers to the Mayor and Mrs Barton and commemorative tankards to Mike Barton and Alan Blakey.

Plumber's Company Visit to Little Newsham Forge



The Early Years

Little Newsham a small village near Staindrop has changed little in over a century. The Forge is over 200 years old but ceased being a 'Smithy' around 1920 and was then utilised by a local farm for a variety of purposes including that of the cowshed. That changed in 1974 when a 24-year-old Arts graduate called Brian Russell started the process of bringing the forge back to life.



Brian Russell a Durham lad, was born in Framwellgate Moor and attended the local primary school and then the Johnston Grammar School where he developed an interest in art and design. He continued his education by undertaking a degree course at Sunderland College of Art and Backhouse Park, where a technician (a former blacksmith) sowed the seeds that were to develop into an enthusiasm to work with metal and develop the skills of a blacksmith.

Leaving college with his Degree in Fine Art he set his sights on seeking an apprenticeship as a blacksmith, unfortunately at that time there were few blacksmiths operating and none were looking for apprentices.

During this time he sought employment and for 18 months drove a van for J M Luke, a long established Baker in Durham City. While he was working he still had the desire to learn as much as he could about working with metal and attended evening classes at both the Johnston School and St Leonard's School, all the time pestering The Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas for help in following his chosen craft. Eventually in 1974 they asked him if you would be interested in an old forge at Little Newsham and as they say the 'rest is history'. Over the years Brian has developed his skills and incorporated his undoubted talent in design to place himself at the forefront of his craft.

The Visit

Due to the nature of the environment, the size of the group was limited to six members and those taking part were Eric Bulmer, John Booth, Geoff Kitson, Mel Wortley, Joe McElwee and Roger Norris. On our arrival at the Forge we were made welcome by Brian who introduced us to his employee Tom Savage, a local young man from Stockton who was trained at Hereford College of Technology.

Brian gave us a brief history of the Forge and a summary of his development as a blacksmith which was followed by a tour of the building which housed a vast range of equipment. He then drew our attention to his current project, that of decorative railings and described their construction, highlighting that the vast amount of his work is completed without the aid of electric welding but relies on forging and riveting technique.

The Demonstration

Brian demonstrated to great effect the technique of hot punching a hole in a metal bar, which involved heating the bar until glowing yellow then he proceeded to hammer a slot punch through the metal, followed by a tapered steel drift to open out a square hole, re-heating the bar between operations. The heat generated was such that the chisel and drift had to be plunged into cold water at regular intervals.



He then went on to forge-weld two pieces of metal bar together. He started by heating up the ends of both pieces of steel that were to be joined until they were white hot. Then Brian and Tom each carried a bar to the pneumatic forging hammer, the bars were carefully overlapped, still white hot, and the hammer was brought down to weld the two pieces into one in a controlled manner sending a shower of sparks across the forge.

The newly forged joint was turned continually on the anvil as the hammer was repeatedly brought down to shape the bar, and to ensure that it maintained the same dimensions throughout its length. It was fascinating to see such physically demanding work and immense pressure subtly applied so not to distort the metal. It was surprising that during the whole process no spirit level was used and the 'square and levelling process' relied solely on hand and eye co-ordination.

What was truly amazing was that from a forge that was full of stock metal, industrial machines and hand tools would emerge beautiful and sensitively designed objects that would not have been out of place in the Art Nouveau period.

Tour of Commissions in situ

Having spent some time in the industrial atmosphere of a working forge, we were delighted when Brian suggested he accompanies us to see examples of his work in a garden a few miles away.

Prior to entering the garden we were directed to a beautiful panel of sculptured leaves that was so natural looking that we had to touch them to be convinced they were metal. On entering the garden we passed through elegantly designed gates with plants and flowers springing from the metal structure. Immediately inside the garden stood sculptured foxgloves plants bending and overlapping across an opening to form a natural archway.

The centrepiece of the garden was an amazing sculpture of a 7ft Agapanthus plant in stunning colour and complete in every detail, with the added bonus that it will be in flower all year and every year.

We bid farewell to Brian who had to return to the forge and work, while we headed off to Piercebridge for refreshments before heading off to Brancepeth.

St Brandon's Church Brancepeth

St Brandon's Church nestles in an idyllic setting in the shadow of Brancepeth Castle. It was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1998 but following a fundraising campaign and generous grants it was restored. Brian Russell was commissioned to undertake a number of projects within the restoration that included a delightful gate leading to the smaller churchyard, two large flower pedestals within the church and the wonderful screen separating Neville's Tomb from the main body of the church.



This major piece of sculpture was so large the only way it could be placed in situ was to completely remove the east window and thereby gain access to the church. I believe the screen although simple in concept is strikingly beautiful and appears to incorporate Neville's warrior past with a lattice framework being sensitively formed from stylised spears.



Throughout our visit Brian continually demonstrated his passion for the craft and had a clear view on design and the capacity to address the challenging characteristics of working with 'stock steel', turning concept into art.

A refreshing feature that was apparent during our visit was the friendship and cooperation that existed between craftsmen within his field, where learning and sharing skills/techniques from each other was common practice. This was clearly demonstrated in April when Brian hosted a competition for over 50 craftsmen who descended with their families upon the Forge and a marquee in an adjoining field at Little Newsham.

As a Freeman I was clearly delighted to see young people such as Tom involved in the craft. Tom is the latest in a long line of young people (over 60 during the past 30 years) who have benefited from working alongside Brian, developing skills and techniques that hopefully will sustain the craft in the future. This was the norm many years ago but is sadly missing in the majority of crafts today.



Our thanks go to Brian for making our visit enjoyable, thought provoking and restoring our faith in craftsmanship.

*Eric Bulmer
Warden Plumber's Company*

