



May Day

Issue 9

May 2025

This newsletter is to keep member's up to date with what is happening within the Durham City Freemen. This Newsletter has been delayed due to complications caused by the rules of the County Council Elections.

Guild News

The May Day Guild Day was held on the 14th April 2025 in The Story at Mount Oswald.

First Calls

Susannah Steenkamp (Barbers) to be admitted via Patrimony
Christopher Atkinson (Cordwainers) to be admitted via Servitude
Gary Wilkinson (Joiners) to be admitted via Servitude

Second Calls

Daryl Metcalf (Cordwainers) to be admitted via Patrimony

Third Calls

Thomas Kitson (Curriers) to be admitted via Patrimony

Diary Dates For 2025

Members BBQ 21st June
Wardens and Deputies Meeting 3rd July
Lamas Guild Day 5th August

The management committee for the Freemen is set below.

Chair; Garry Dunnill. Deputy Chair; Neil Graham. Secretary; Bryan Proud

Wardens:

Bryan Proud	Barbers Company.
Mac Williams	Butchers Company.
Alan Metcalf	Cordwainers Company
Iain Wilmshurst	Curriers Company.
Dave Howard	Drapers Company.
Ann Thurlow	Joiners Company.
Neil Graham	Masons Company.
Garry Dunnill	Plumbers Company.

Deputy Wardens:

Vacant	Barbers Company
Vincent Syson	Butchers Company.
Vacant	Cordwainers Company
Vacant	Curriers Company
Trevor Carter	Drapers Company
David Neale	Joiners Company
Alan Richardson	Masons Company
Arthur Lockyear	Plumbers Company

Chair Report

I would like to welcome the Mayor Liz Brown to our Guild Day along with new members. This will be the last Guild Day that Liz will attend, and we thank her for her support.

I am sorry to have to report the death of Anne Pearson. Anne regularly attended our Guild days along with her son Malcom. Her celebration of life was at the crematorium and was attended by me, Bryan Proud and Eric Bulmer.

It has been a quiet few months since our last Guild Day on the 3rd February.

As stated at the last Guild Day we have had to cancel the annual dinner due to lack of interest, however we are currently organising a BBQ at Durham Rugby Club for members, family and friends on the 21st June. Keep an eye out for information on how to obtain tickets and hope that this will be a success, after all the hard work that Vincent, Dave and Neil have done.

We have made more donations through the charitable trust to, St Cuthberts Hospice and Northumbrian Blood Bikers. Details of both are on our web sites.

Bryan and I were privileged to be able to have a look into the Town Hall, it is coming along well with, new roof lights in the Crush Hall, the floor in the main hall sanded and stained and the plaques from the end wall have been removed and cleaned. It is already looking good and think everyone will be impressed.

We are still in discussion with the council regarding insurance of the Freeman's silver and how it is going to be displayed, basically we are keeping the same cabinets with new background wallpaper and enhanced lighting.



Town Hall Closure

With the closure of the Town Hall several of our meetings have had to be moved to a new location. The May Guild Day was moved to The Story at Mount Oswald. The Wardens and Deputies meetings have been moved to The Story building at Mount Oswald. We hope the next Lamas Day will be in our home at the Guild Hall.



A FLASH IN TIME CAPTURES FAMILY'S

GROWING LINKS TO THE FREEMEN

PHOTOGRAPHER Geoff Kitson had to be quick on his feet to capture a unique three-generational family picture when his grandson Tom was sworn in as a Durham City Freeman.



Getting Tom, wife Sheila, son Leighton, daughter Alison, son-in-law Adam and brother Steve, as well as himself into the frame, posed few problems for a man used to arranging line-ups in front of his lens. But he needed to call on time-lapse equipment to give the seconds needed to dodge from behind the camera and position himself in the limelight alongside his nearest and dearest.

Twenty-year-old Tom, currently reading astrophysics at the University of Edinburgh, is a former pupil of Framwellgate School Durham.

As well as cultivating an interest in music and photography he has also followed the family tradition of supporting Sunderland and joins his dad into the Curriers' Company.

Tom said: "I know what it means to my granddad to have served his apprenticeship in Durham and to be a member of the Freemen.

"That's why I am proud to follow in his footsteps and those of my family in being sworn into the Freemen myself.

Geoff, a retired artisan plumber, whose hand-crafted lead guttering and drainage systems grace a wide range of city buildings - including the cathedral and castle – qualified to join the Plumber's Company on completion of his apprenticeship.

His interest in photography started at the age of eight, sparked by the Christmas gift of a camera, bought by his father in India where he had been working for a year as a National Coal Board adviser on the establishment of a coke works.

His younger brother Stephen also qualified for membership when he too completed his plumbing training, while Leighton, a journalism graduate from Teesside University, worked for the Sunderland Echo and Northern Echo before joining the staff of Durham University where he is a member of the external communications team.

Sheila, a former hospital sister and an emergency nurse practitioner in the city was installed as a Lady Freeman two years ago - recognition of her academic work with the Freeman's local history group and the support given to her husband's extensive contribution to the Freeman as official photographer.

Sheila retired after 43 years with the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust – at one point leading a regional group of colleagues in a national research project on behalf of the Royal College of Nursing. She was also awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree by Teesside University.

Geoff's years of work as the Freeman's official photographer – have produced hundreds of images, many appearing on the organisation's website and supporting associated literature, as well as featuring in regional and national newspapers and other publications.

Two other family members, brother-in-law Melvin Wortley and niece Katherine Wortley, extend the family's current modern-day links to the Freeman.

Additionally, Geoff's uncle, Norman Donkin, a member of the Joiners' Company, was honoured with a British Empire Medal in the late 1990s, a tribute to his long-standing membership of the Mayor's Bodyguard. The official presentation was performed by the then Lord Lieutenant of Durham, Sir Paul Nicholson, who in an unrelated ceremony in 2003, was himself admitted to the Mason's Company as a Gentleman Freeman.

In keeping with long-standing tradition, the April ceremony was presided over by the city's mayor, County Councillor Mrs. Liz Brown.



Management Vacancies

The Wardens and Deputies are always on the lookout for capable Freeman to come and help with the management of the guild. The usual starting point is a deputy where you will get to understand how the guild is managed. The time commitment is about 4 meetings per year. The meetings are scheduled to last from 6.00 until 7.30 on a Thursday night usually in the Guild Hall.

We currently have three Deputy Warden vacancies: Barbers, Cordwainers and Curriers. You do not have to belong to one of the companies to apply as they open to all. Training will be given once you have been elected.

Come and help us move the Freeman into the future, we are hoping to enhance the Apprentice Award Scheme and to increase member involvement in the organisation. If you are interested, then please get in touch via the secretary.



Masons Booklet

Dr Alan Richardson, Deputy Warden of the Masons' company, has now completed the seventh Company History Booklet in the series. This has been posted to all Masons and is now available to all Freemen. Should you wish one to be sent to you then please let me know and I will pop one in the post for you.



Freemen Family and Friends Barbeque

All freemen should by now have received an email regarding the Freemen Family and Friends Barbeque event. The Wardens and Deputies of Durham City Freemen are delighted to announce that we will be hosting a BBQ at Durham City Rugby Club on Saturday June 21st for Freemen, their friends and families. The rugby club have provided an excellent menu for just £14 per head to include a burger, sausage and chicken breast served with; bread bun, mixed salad and potatoes. The upstairs bar will be available for our exclusive use between 2pm and 8pm with the BBQ food being served at approximately 3pm.

This really will be an unmissable event and an excellent opportunity to build on old friendships as well as forge new ones. We hope for the Great British weather to be kind to us however indoor space will be available if needs be.

The deadline for booking tickets will be WEDNESDAY JUNE 12TH.

If you wish to purchase tickets, then please contact Vincent Syson at organist90@gmail.com



Vincent Syson Piper Extraordinaire

Vincent Syson our Deputy Butcher gave a talk and demonstration of the Northumbrian pipes at the Guild Day.

As a church organist for more than 20 years, folk music was a very distant thought for me; however, being a proud northeast lad, it should have been very little surprise that the two would eventually come together.... In a way!

I was delighted when Garry asked me to speak at this Guild day and there is much to be said about this iconic instrument and symbol of our northeastern identity, but I won't keep you long!

The Northumbrian pipes are made of 4 key elements;

- The bellows - used to supply air
- The bag - used to hold air and act as a pressure regulator
- The drones - used to create a pleasant harmony
- The chanter - used for playing the tune

The main defining feature of the Northumbrian pipes is the closed end of the chanter. All fingers down produce no sound at all and we lift one finger off at a time to create that iconic staccato sound. A degree of slurring is possible, but it's generally considered uncouth and improper by purists... you'll be thankfully to know I'm not one of those! All other bagpipes have an open-ended chanter and are played by lifting multiple fingers from the chanter. Part of the challenge with playing the Northumbrian pipes is maintaining a steady pressure. Too little and the pipes don't sound, too much and they go out of tune and eventually the reeds shut off.



The earliest reference to an instrument of this type comes from 1695 and describes a bellows blown bagpipe with three drones and a chanter with a one octave of G to G, each note being sounded by uncovering a single hole. For many years, tunes written for the pipes followed this idea and I will now play three of those such tunes, Hesleyside Reel, Winster Gallop and Because He Was a Bonny Lad.

As music evolved, so did the repertoire to the point where pipers were desperate to play tunes written by fiddle players who had far more range than G to G. In fact, they had that, everything in between and extra on the top and bottom! Pipe makers had to think fast and gradually keys began to appear on the chanter. The 'standard' pipe chanter has 7 keys, and this was the accepted norm for a good while before more and more keys crept onto the chanter. This set has 12 keys but sets with up to 17 are not uncommon.

I will play three hornpipes which will demonstrate the extended range of the chanter, the middle tune makes a particular feature of the highest note available, and the final tune is somewhat of a target for the learner piper as it uses all the keys on a standard 7 key chanter.

Redesdale Hornpipe, Bielbies Hornpipe, Rowley Burn Hornpipe. One of the foremost exponents of the Northumbrian Pipes, in the early days was a chap called Jimmy Allen, the man with the golden pipes. Indeed, it is a shame that we're not in the guild hall as, in 1803 Jimmys fate was sealed in that very room. One of the original border gypsies, born sometime in the 1720's, young Jimmy was no stranger to the long arm of the law. A talented musician with wit and panache aplenty, he was used to charming his way out of a sticky situation. This was mostly successful until one day in Gateshead, where he found himself out of luck. He was arrested for horse stealing and brought to the guildhall to face trial. He was sentenced to death however; he was granted a pardon by king George III on condition he be transported to the new overseas colony of Botany Bay in Australia. Jimmy was sent to the house of correction under Elvet Bridge to await his fate. On the 15th of February 1810, a petition was raised requesting King George to grant a free pardon to the piper. Due to the king's ill health, there was a delay in the pardon being signed but eventually this was completed by the Prince Regent and instructions were sent to free the imprisoned man. The pardon arrived at the jail on November 17th, 1810, exactly four days too late for poor Jimmy, who had died on the 13th.

The City of Durham has immortalised his memory in the form of a nightclub however, we as Northumbrian Pipers have immortalised his memory in a wonderful pipe tune appropriately called, Jimmy Allen. To close, I'll play this tune followed by some toe tapping favourites to send us on our way. Tunes; Jimmy Allen, Keel Row, Bobby Shafto, Keep yer feet still Geordie Hinny.



Any comments on the format, content, and any future ideas you may have for content please get in touch via secretary@durhamcityfreemen.org

This newsletter has been sent to those members who have supplied their e-mail address; however, it is available to view on the website. If you no longer want to receive this newsletter then please contact the Secretary to have your address removed.