

THE NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

freemen

MAGAZINE



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EDITORIAL

We very much hope you enjoy this issue where we have a lot to celebrate, such as a wide number of successful collaborations and projects and hopefully, seeing the gradual end of a longer than expected global pandemic.

Pandemic restrictions have taken their toll on all businesses; ours is no exception, but solid teamwork aided by digital communication systems means we have been able to keep all projects on track. In this issue, we continue to keep you posted on some of the work streams. We soon hope to open up communication channels and get more Freemen involved in running the business – there are great opportunities for using the skills you already have, learn some new ones or just maybe beef up (see what I did there?) your CV, so watch out for more information.



This really is an awesome organisation, if you value our Freemen heritage as you should, get involved and help where you can.

Once again, sincere thanks to all contributors of this Magazine; our amazing Editorial Team and Freemen everywhere who have sent stories, ideas and photos. 

www.freemenofnewcastle.org

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Since the first coronavirus lockdown thousands of people have benefited from the open space of the Town Moors for exercise, all helping with the wellbeing and mental health of the users of the Moors, which has delighted us all. Unfortunately as lockdown eased in 2021 there has been some unsavoury behaviour by a large number of people congregating, drinking, lighting bonfires, and as a consequence leaving considerable litter and more worryingly, broken glass bottles making removal very difficult. Our staff worked hard to clear the mess. We are also grateful to local residents who spent hours walking the areas collecting the rubbish left behind by the revellers.

The damage caused by the bonfires will take a while to recover, fires which were fuelled by the tearing down of our wooden fences, which had been repaired in readiness for the return of the cattle; one section being smashed and burned two days after being repaired. We are

assessing all options in collaboration with Northumbria Police to combat this most concerning bout of vandalism.

The Town Moor grazing season commences annually on 31st March and runs until 31st October. The weeks leading up to the start of grazing are a particularly busy time for our staff; preparation tasks include turning on water and checking the 11 water troughs, checking all 60 pedestrian gates and boundary fences.



Chairman, David Wilson



We are extremely fortunate to have our Town Moor Superintendent, Kevin Batey, who has worked with graziers and cattle on our behalf for 35 years. Kevin has accrued a vast amount of knowledge, which he uses to plan our grazing strategy and the purchase of the Town Moor Herd. Like all those in the farming community, every day is a working day and he and Lewis travelled to view and purchase 25 cattle at a large livestock farm on Good Friday while many of us enjoyed a day off to spend with the family.

It is credit to him that his cattle grazing strategy is now being copied by other established graziers.

Environmental and Biodiversity concerns are at the forefront of many peoples' minds these days, along with the many pressure groups who focus on their particular area of interest.

The Freeman of Newcastle in partnership with the City Council, take their Eco-responsibilities very seriously and with



every pressure group having their own beliefs, concerns and agenda it can be quite a challenge.

It is often said the Freeman were one of the first environmental organisations, looking after the Town Moors and preserving the environment for the benefit of the residents of Newcastle by protecting the open space from the many pressures placed on it. These efforts were even recognised in an act of parliament, the Newcastle upon Tyne Town Moor Act 1988 which enshrines in law the responsibilities of the City Council and ourselves.

In partnership with the City Council, we have embarked on an ambitious project to increase the tree population on Town Moor land. This is no easy task with many existing trees nearing the end of their natural life cycle which will require replacing in addition to our new tree strategy. Recently, we worked with the charity 'Walking with the Wounded' which saw 100s of trees planted on Nuns Moor opposite the Barracks, with many other areas identified for planting - watch this space!



Lewis & Kevin with Ian Ireland

We take a close account of seasonal changes regarding the impact on biodiversity and wildlife and how we can best protect the environment which includes hedge cutting at a time of zero impact. We also try to protect the ground nesting birds by our signage warning dog walkers that dogs must be kept on a lead, although enforcement is problematic even though there are signs on every Town Moor entry gate.

Many bird species benefit from the grassland of the Town Moors, in particular because of the natural length of the turf which is rarely ever cut and is at an optimal height by the grazing of the cattle. Without the beasts we would have to be continually cutting the grass to prevent the Moors being overgrown. Town Moor perimeter verge cutting is being considerably reduced by only cutting within a metre of the path allowing more wildflowers to flourish to help increase the population of beneficial insects.

We are also in the process of arranging a nesting box project for the many copses on the various Moors. To encourage the future generation, we are engaging with children to build and sight the boxes. If you are interested in joining this initiative contact us at **admin@freemenofnewcastle.org**


In terms of managing and administering the business, we have created project planning templates which allow us to better organise and prioritise the workload and optimise the skills we have available.



We have also used technology to keep all Stewards Committee informed of events in “real-time” This has significantly improved our internal communications and has enabled sharper reaction times to issues that arise unexpectedly. We now plan to work on a Communication Strategy that both informs and involves all Freemen.

In April, we sent a letter of condolence on behalf of all of the Freemen of Newcastle to Her Majesty the Queen on the death of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh.



We believe the Freemen of Newcastle can be proud of the work we have continued over generations to preserve the Town Moors as a place for air and exercise and a haven for the environment and biodiversity, each generational ethos being to leave the Moors better than the last by preservation and improvement. 



KINGS MEADOWS



Once upon a time, you could drink, party and bet on horses right in the middle of the Tyne.

Today, the North East's most famous river runs largely uninterrupted from its sources in Northumberland and Scotland to the sea.

But until the late 19th Century, the river's progress was impeded by a large island - not far from where the Metrocentre now stands.

Kings Meadows (also known as The Kings Meadows, King's Meadow Island or Kingsmeadow Island), once covered around 30 acres in the middle of the water.

A long, flat island, it became a popular venue for regattas and horse racing, as well as the location of a pub, The Countess of Coventry.

Lying between Dunston, on one bank, and Elswick, on the other, the island was technically part of what was then Northumberland.

Cattle grazed on the land and when regattas or horse racing took place, revellers could reach the place by ferry.

For hundreds of years, coal had been brought down the Tyne, past the island and according to the Freeman of Newcastle, in 1290 the coal trade in the area was important enough for local burgesses to demand a monopoly from King Edward I on coal exporting to thwart their rivals in North Shields.

The demand for coal skyrocketed in the 19th century as the industrial revolution drove a new need for the fuel.


Navigation of the Tyne for the many boats lugging coal from fields in Durham and Northumberland become difficult, and in 1850 the Tyne Improvement Commission was launched, to maintain the river and the Port of Tyne.

The Commission undertook a huge programme of dredging, removing silt from the river to make it easier for ships and barges to pass, deepening the river and constructing docks.



And they also removed the Kings Meadows.

Whilst it meant removing the island, the dredging did reveal some fascinating insights into the history of the area. In 1884 a Bronze Age dagger and a spear head from the same period were dredged from the River Tyne on the North side of the island, and now reside in the British Museum.

The island, along with a few nearby smaller islands, were erased from existence, and almost entirely from memory, by the Commission in the late 1880s. 

THE SALLYPORT TOWER

ANCESTRAL HOME OF THE SHIPWRIGHTS

The Sallyport or Wall Knoll Tower is on the east side of Newcastle city centre on Tower Street, just north of City Road. It was one of seventeen towers that were part of Newcastle's walls and is one of the six that have survived.

Newcastle's walls were built in the late 13th and early 14th centuries after the town was given permission in 1265 to collect a murage tax to fund construction. Every city and large town needed walls; there were constant battles and skirmishes between various English factions and, although the Scots weren't a particular problem in 1265, they soon were again. And limiting access to the town through gates in walls meant that the authorities could keep an eye on comings and goings and insist on payment of taxes on goods.

The walls were up to twenty-five feet high and seven to ten feet wide and surrounded by a large ditch. Towers were initially look-out points. The Sallyport Tower was so called because militia men could sally out of its gate to fend off anyone attacking the town.

Many of the town's towers were allocated to Freeman's Companies and the Shipwrights occupied the Sallyport from around 1638. Their meetings, which were more frequent than they are now, were held there. The top storey was damaged in the siege of 1644 and in 1716, the Shipwrights who were basically carpenters built a new storey on the top of the building. This had four turrets and was in the form of a lantern or lantern

As the Shipwrights' authority declined and numbers of members fell, they couldn't afford to maintain the Tower even though parts of it were let. It was in a state of disrepair and Shipwrights' meetings were being held in the




Guildhall. In 1955 the City Council acquired the Shipwrights' interest in the building for £300 and later spent around £10,000 restoring it. The Shipwrights again held their meetings in the Tower from 1970 to 1979 then returned to the Guildhall.



The photo of people on the stairs was taken in 1976 and shows the Shipwrights who attended the Head Meeting where Ian Miller was elected Senior Steward.

The tower became a Grade 1 listed building in 1971 along with the rest of the walls. Over the years parts of the building have had a variety of occupants including a slipper factory and a Sunday school. In recent years, the Council has had no real use for it and it was vacant for some time. In 2016 it was acquired by Kevin Radcliffe a photographer who has converted it into a gallery, photographic studios and what the Chronicle described as a luxury events venue. It is known as the Secret Tower on-line & is usually a popular venue for weddings.

Sadly, the Shipwrights can't afford luxury events and possibly never could. We were hoping to arrange a visit in 2020 and possibly re-stage the photo with current Shipwrights but then the pandemic struck.

The Historic England website tells you how you can arrange a visit and the building is open to the public on Heritage Open Days. But best of all it is good to see it playing a part in the life of Newcastle again. 

STEWARDS COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE

by Phil Powell (Masons)



The Stewards Committee of the Freemen of the City of Newcastle manage the affairs of the charity, on behalf of the Guild, primarily in line with the Freeman of England guidance, Charities Commission and the Town Moor Act 1988. However historically little information in relation to process and practice has been shared with the wider group of company stewards.

The Committee wish to provide greater transparency in order that a greater understanding can be gained as part of a succession planning process. This is particularly important as we move out of the pandemic which has restricted many facets of all our lives and look to a gradual return to business as usual.

The Committee currently has 10 members, which include the officers, Chair, Vice Chair and Honorary Treasurer, the Town Moor Superintendent also attends as a non-voting member. Governance around the Committee allows a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 12 members, as such there is potential to add further members. Two meetings are held per month, a formal


committee meeting on the first Wednesday of the month and a catch-up mid-way through the month. At present these are both undertaken via a digital platform, as Covid restrictions are further relaxed these meetings will return to the previously established face to face format.

The current Committee members have a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge and all have specific areas of interest in which they lead, ably supported by a number of sub-groups formed to complete identified tasks. The scope of activities includes management in a number of areas: upkeep and maintenance of the Moors, cattle, allotments, finance - including asset and investment management, charitable grants, agricultural staff, public events both regular and ad-hoc, property and leases, legal issues, internal and external governance, project planning to name but a few. All contributing to strategic development and communications strategies. This entails engaging with a staggering number of stakeholders, which include Newcastle City Council, in its many and diverse divisions,

The Charity Commission, Newcastle University, The Northern Showman's Guild, Newcastle United Football Club, The Great Run Company, Samuel Phillips Solicitors, Joseph Miller & Co Accountants, cattle dealers, graziers, allotment committees, various media outlets, a number of local interest organisations and numerous providers of goods and services as well as the general public. Although the Committee report back on all relevant activities and issues to Guild at our three Guild Meetings it is fair to say that there is a huge amount of work going on at all times to maintain and develop the charity, most of it unseen by Freeman in our companies. On a personal note; I joined the Committee in 2015 and was surprised and encouraged at the range of activities undertaken and

the opportunities these presented for Committee members new and established to actively engage in both the operational and strategic management of the charity.

The Committee is keen to ensure that the pre-requisite skills are in place to move the charity forward and wish to engage with Freeman from all companies who feel they may be in position to offer input into workstreams whether that be as an elected Committee member or on the basis of time limited secondment in a designated area. The formal election of the Stewards Committee takes place at Michaelmas Guild, if you wish to discuss committee membership in further detail please do not hesitate to contact us at

admin@freemenofnewcastle.org 

THE FREEMEN'S HUT



In 1938, Stewards of the Freeman of Newcastle were a very genteel group. Here they are, all suited and booted about to enjoy a strawberry tea in the Freeman's Hut on Grandstand Road. The Freeman's Hut was built for the visit of Queen Victoria to the Great Exhibition to house a toilet in case she needed to use it as she toured the Moors. It was locally known as Queen Victoria's netty!

CYCLING ON THE MOOR WITH CHI ONWURAH MP



Chi Onwurah MP with Vice Chairman Nick Atkinson

Chi Onwurah, Member of Parliament for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and Shadow Digital Minister is a regular cyclist on the Town Moor. Vice Chairman, Nick Atkinson met up with her to find out why she values the Town Moor so much...

"The Town Moor is such a fantastic asset for Newcastle and indeed Tyneside. The Pandemic has shown us that having this here for running, walking, cycling is so important for our wellbeing. We are so lucky to have opportunities for fresh air right in the heart of our City. I'm delighted to hear from the Freeman about what they are doing to preserve this amazing space and to safeguard the biodiversity it offers.




Fifty-seven species of birds are living and singing on the Moors and for me, the day the cows come back is a signal of hope for the future without a Pandemic.

Climate change and the pandemic have demonstrated that we need to be living closer and in co-operation with our natural environment and the Town Moor is such an exemplar of that. There is such a lot that other cities can learn and I'm grateful to the Freeman for helping to preserve such an important part of our heritage."

Chi also paid tribute to Councillor Nigel Todd who sadly passed earlier this year, saying "Nigel, who represented Elswick, Wingrove and Arthur's



Hill, was proud to be the Councillor for the Town Moor for many years. He was a strong champion of open spaces." We add our sincere condolences to his family, friends and colleagues. 

A PRICELESS PARCHMENT

BY ROBERT CARLTON GLASS (TANNERS)

When I was enrolled as a member of the Tanners Guild in 1967 (back in the early days when the ceremony took place at Newcastle Civic Centre), I was surprised to learn that the final stage of the ceremony involved me travelling to a location on Westgate Road to sign an ancient Tanners scroll. I distinctly remember the fragile looking scroll being carried out with the utmost of care by an anxious looking bearer who was wearing a pair of pristine white cotton gloves.

Upon closer inspection, I located the faded, yet still legible signatures of the company founders from 1532 and was astounded that such a scroll has survived the centuries and had remained in such a well-preserved state. It seemed ironic when I later learnt this priceless parchment with its significant historic value, was rumoured to have been casually stored for many years under a bed next to a chamber pot and perilously close to a coal fire!


Despite my growing sense of intrigue with the scroll, my time spent in its presence was sadly short and sweet; I located my father's signature and also my grandfather's dating back to 1911, but any sighting of signatures from older generations was thwarted by my father James Glass, who was impatiently looking over my shoulder, eager for the ink to dry so his first born son could be declared a fully-fledged Freeman of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Turn the clock forward 43 years and I was delighted that my path once again crossed with the mysterious scroll which unlike myself, had not aged one bit! As part of their swearing in ceremony, I proudly watched my two daughters follow in my footsteps and sign their respective names on the



Claire Thompson signing the Tanners scroll in 2010

ancient parchment. I noticed however, that to allow for the changes in legislation, the scroll itself had been modified to accommodate the signature of the daughters of Freeman. After centuries of each enrolment following a standard format within the scroll, a calligrapher had been appointed to add a new section which included all the male hereditary members of the guild. Below that heading, the daughters of Freeman would sign their married names (where applicable) and beside that, (in brackets) would be two letters of their maiden name which would clearly denote which hereditary family they belonged to.

Having been sent many years ago to London to be professionally cleaned from all the dust and dirt the scroll had accumulated from its less than ideal storage location, the Tanners scroll is now carefully stored in the Newcastle city archives on Blandford Street – a place much more befitting such an ancient artefact. To my knowledge, this priceless parchment is the only document in existence that immortalises the rich history of the Tanners and beautifully links it to the present for future generations to cherish. 

HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY CHRISTINA USHER



Born Christina Fraser on 3rd May 1921 she married James Robert Usher (Cordwainer) on 28th April 1944; they were happily married for 73 years until James passed on 15th December 2017.



James and Karen in 1959

James and Christina are both WWII veterans; James was a Royal Navy engineer at the torpedo factory in Alexandria Scotland, and Christina also served in the Royal Navy as a lead WREN. [f](#)

James headed out to Canada arriving in Halifax on January 8th, 1951 onboard the Ascania.

Christina and their two sons, Brian and Gordon, followed him out in 1952.

Daughter Karen (now Gemmill) was the first of the Usher family to be born in Canada.

Son, Gordon Fraser Usher, was sworn in as a Freeman and a Cordwainer whilst daughter Karen patiently waited for the day women were allowed to be sworn in. She told us "I was always bugging my Dad asking if there was any news on a date. I was so eager to be sworn in and it finally came true on March 24th, ten years ago!"



Christina and James with daughter Karen and Grandson David



COWS DON'T KNOW WHEN IT'S A BANK HOLIDAY!

On Saturday May 1st, just as Kevin, our Town Moor Superintendent was packing his Factor 50, about to embark on a well-earned holiday, he was called to Nuns Moor North to investigate a reported incident of cows standing knee deep in slurry.



Kevin and the team, together with Stewards Committee member Chris Atkinson found a serious leak from one of the water troughs. To exacerbate the problem, some of the

cattle had trampled the pipes behind the trough in their attempt to avoid the deep slurry and we had one cow escape.

Kevin, Chris and the team restored order, removed the slurry and filled with stone and gravel as a temporary measure, allowing water levels to drop until a more permanent solution was put in place. Vice Chair Nick Atkinson attended and reported the incident to the Stewards Committee, ensuring rapid escalation to a more permanent solution.

There's never a dull moment... 

125 YEARS OF THE NEWCASTLE DOG AND CAT SHELTER

Starting a new job in the middle of a pandemic is most definitely not for the faint-hearted; especially when that job is in the notoriously challenging Charity sector, but that's exactly what Chris Bray, newly appointed Chief Executive of the Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter did in January this year!

The Dog and Cat shelter on Clarendon Road is on Town Moor land, so not only are they our neighbours, they're also one of our tenants.



Chris manages the two Newcastle sites (Clarendon Road and Benton North Farm) and never thought he would ever have a job where a pocketful of sugar lumps for Snowy the donkey was a vital job requirement!

2020 was a tumultuous year for the Shelter, not least because of the catastrophic effect of Covid-19 on the Charity sector, but they were also driven into a complete organisation re-structure. Describing their new CEO, the team said "Chris has brought a bright, fresh outlook, a kind and considerate leadership style and a fierce ambition that has re-lit the fire in us all. As we celebrate our 125th birthday, and thanks to Chris's faith and trust, there's no better time to show the world what we're made of"

Chris invited Stewards Committee along for a chat and to discuss his ambitious and adventurous plans for the future of the shelter. He introduced us to the fabulous Ashley and Liam who gave us the tour and explained how they look

after the animals in their care. It's clear they love what they do, and they told us "This is so much more than a job, it's not unusual for us to take our work home emotionally and physically"


Liam and Ashley know every animal; their needs, quirks and characteristics and can recognise an individual dog simply from their barking.

St Mary Magdalene & Holy Jesus Trust are teaming up with Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter to bring the joy that contact with animals brings to those who are maybe not in a position to own a pet themselves.

Interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of stress and anxiety and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood. Some



residents may want to take a dog for a short walk in the grounds, giving them both air and exercise. An extra spin -off is that the dogs and cats get a few extra cuddles and maybe even some treats!

We hope to explore ways that we can work with Chris and the team and will keep you posted. In the meantime, check out their Facebook page to see their progress and ways you may be able to help. 

www.facebook.com/newcastledogandcatshelter
www.dogandcatshelter.com





SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

As planned, on 31st March, we welcomed the first cows onto the Town Moor. The weather was exceptionally changeable this Spring, so the Town Moor herd spent their first few days in the smaller paddock at Moor Bank.

Machinery arrived to start the Town Moor demarcation fence line on 5th February, heavy snow on the 8th slowed our progress but we were well prepared in time for the returning cattle. It's disappointing that many of the newly installed fences were vandalised, with the obvious dangers this presented to cattle, pedestrians and our staff. This has been reported to the City Council and to Northumbria police and we are working together to prevent this anti-social behaviour.

Collaborating with Newcastle City Council, we have restored the original footpath on Nuns Moor Central. The original path was 2.5mtrs wide but encroachment of the grass




over the decades reduced it to 1.2mtrs. The team carried out an inspection and restored the path to its original 2.5mtrs and installed new entrance gates.





In line with Forestry Commission guidelines we began a programme of thinning out to promote healthy growth and remove damaged and diseased trees in the wooded areas.

You will remember the significant work to rectify the derelict allotment site at Nuns Moor South. We are happy to report the site, now seeded for future grazing, has had its first cut of the season and it looks amazing. We'll leave it to stand, roll it to promote better root growth, then it will be topped and rolled over the coming season to achieve a better sward. 





BRINGING BLUE HOUSE BACK TO LIFE

Blue House has to be one of the most easily recognisable houses in Newcastle; sat in a prominent position on the corner of Grandstand Road and The Great North Road on a roundabout that has borne its name for as long as anyone can remember.

There is surprisingly little information available about the history of this iconic building. The house, which is not listed, is such a well-known landmark in the City, it has its own entry in the A-Z.

Originally there were four Blue Houses, this one on the roundabout on the junction of

Grandstand Road, Moor Bank Lodge on Clarendon Road (home of the Town Moor Superintendent and Freemen Headquarters), West House on Barrack Road and finally Blue House on Ponteland Road which was sadly demolished as it was isolated and subject to vandalism. A low bank marks the course of the wall around the property which is visible as a rectangular platform.

Not much is known about the original Blue House on The Great North Road, but it was rebuilt by the Wardens and Freemen of Newcastle in 1896 – we know that because there's a plaque on the wall that says so!

As far as we know, the house was named Blue House because of the blue slates on the roof, which have long since been replaced. It is now more commonly known as Blue House because the paintwork has been blue for at least the last 100 years.



It is possible that the house was once a double toll booth for traders entering the City from the North/South and from the East/West. It most certainly at some point took on a dual purpose as a toll booth on one side and a dwelling for stockmen employed by the Freeman of the City on the other.

Tolls discontinued in 1910, and at a Stewards Committee held on 11th March 1910, the Freeman authorised the use of Blue House as a police house. Chairman Mr. Walker and the Chief Constable agreed a rent of £16 per year and the tenancy began on 1st August 1910 occupied by PC A21 Charles Ladds and becoming known as the North Boundary Outpost.



In July 1924 PC Ladds appeared before the police Watch Committee charged with neglect of duty for failing to assist an unconscious person lying on the Town Moor and was ordered to revert to "ordinary duty"

This implies that he lived at Blue House at least up to that point, but a report by local history enthusiast Eric Gaffing in 2011, states that Blue House continued to be a police house "until the war." We're just not sure which war!

More recently, Blue House was home to agricultural workers employed by the Freeman and in 2005, the 2 separate dwellings were converted to 1 house. In 2010, Stewards Committee member Chris Atkinson (Ropemakers) led a project to give Blue House a "facelift" (Freemen Magazine Issue 10)

The building has stood empty for a number of years now; being used mainly for storage. Newcastle City Council had ambitious plans to demolish the Blue House and re-configure the road to address claims that the area is an accident black spot, and congestion and air quality problems. The Authority's 2016 plans to build a new 'mega roundabout' on the Town Moor were abandoned after extensive protests, then Covid-19 restrictions in 2020 meant that any plans for the roundabout were placed firmly on a back burner.

In February this year, our Chairman David Wilson set up a Working Group to explore and analyse restoration options. Chris Atkinson has once again brought his substantial construction industry expertise to the table and it's fair to say that this project was something of a "Pandoras Box" which threw several challenges at the group.

A number of options were identified, analysed, costed and presented to Stewards Committee. In April, the Committee agreed an option to refurbish Blue House to its former glory and offer it on the market as a commercial let; we are delighted to report interest in the property has far exceeded expectations.

Work began in May and is scheduled to finish by August. This will see a significant and very worthy investment by the Freeman of Newcastle, bringing the Blue House back to life and ensuring its future as an iconic local landmark for more years to come. 📍



Chris Atkinson at Blue House

A YEAR IN LOCKDOWN

When we published Issue 27 in March 2020, we never dreamt that lockdown restrictions would last over a year. Here, we take a look at what that meant for three Freeman, all with very different circumstances.



Ruth, Jim and Helen before Covid

Ruth White (Cordwainers) is a sprightly 92-year-old living independently in a retirement bungalow. Age and various illnesses such as COPD placed Ruth in the “Exceptionally clinically vulnerable” category meaning pretty much a year in isolation.

“Lockdown” she told us “has been a mixed blessing. During the first lockdown, I saw no-one except my daughter Helen (Cordwainers, Hostmen, Stewards Committee), and that was from the garden

gate. She would leave my shopping at the back door and retreat to the gate where we would have a chat. Luckily, the weather was very kind so I'd put a chair at the back door and (as I'm quite deaf) we'd shout at each other for a while. Although we spoke on the phone every day I never even got to hold her hand for three months.

I was already able to use technology a little bit – Helen bought me a Nintendo Wii for Christmas a few years ago so I used the time to perfect my golf swing, tennis volleys and even smashed ten pin bowling from the comfort of my chair. By the end of the first lockdown, I could have given Roger Federer a run for his money! I was also able to use Facebook to “chat” with my brother Jim (a former Senior Steward of the Cordwainers) He lives in Buckinghamshire – a good job really as we spectacularly disagree about pretty much everything; our kids say it's like Beirut when we get together and Facebook gives us a whole new way to have a good old fashioned “healthy debate!”

The next lockdown was better. Helen and I became a “Bubble.” Occasionally, we would go out in the

car for an ice cream or to just watch the world go by in some remote place. We're lucky enough to live by the sea, so we were able to stay well away from other people and we'd spend hours chatting, watching for birds, seals and dolphins along our beautiful coastline.

After lockdown 2 and during Lockdown 3, I was encouraged to step out for exercise so we would go shopping once a week. I love the cleaning stations at supermarkets and offered to clean the trolleys but got whisked away and strongly admonished for standing too close to other people (what is this strange new world?) I was exempt from wearing a mask but really felt I should; unfortunately, every time I put one on, my glasses steamed up. Helen didn't think it was remotely funny when I crashed into things, flailing my arms around – she hasn't inherited my sense of drama I'm afraid!

I keep forgetting my mask but as chief dog-sitter, I always have poo bags in my pockets, so when I forgot my mask, I once attached poo bag handles to my ears. Breathing with a plastic bag on your face and a debilitating lung condition is pretty tricky and Helen suggested I take it off when (apparently) I was starting to turn blue.

I stood on my doorstep and clapped, waved at my neighbours and marvelled at Captain Tom – a man of my generation – who showed us that absolutely everyone can make a positive contribution to society. So, by Lockdown 3, I had knitted hundreds of twiddle mitts for Alzheimer patients, made dozens of baby hats and boots for the premature baby unit; I learned how to "upcycle" furniture and

now have my own electric drill, staple gun and sander. I can play bingo, do jigsaws, play quizzes and irritate my brother – all on my shiny new phone. And although I accidentally bought a portable washing machine when I tried to Skype Jim, I've come through ok.



Phil Powell (Masons)

Phil Powell (Masons and Stewards Committee) is the Directorate Manager for Cancer Services and Clinical Haematology at Newcastle Hospitals. Here, he explains a year in lockdown for our fabulous frontline services

When Newcastle Hospitals admitted the first two Covid-19 patients in the country to the Royal Victoria Infirmary on 31st January 2020 there was uncertainty, concern and fear as to what the impact of the virus would be, would it be contained within our Infectious Diseases Unit, as had been the case with a number of previous highly infectious viral outbreaks, or would it require a re-evaluation of priorities and

a redirection of resources? Now over a year later, as the national vaccination programme takes a grip and we finally start to move away from what was an unprecedented period, we can look back and reflect on what those effects truly were; and it is a rollercoaster of emotion and experience both inside and outside of the hospital environment.

It became evident very early in the pandemic that the virus would require management on a hospital-wide and indeed a region-wide scale. The numbers of inpatients during the first wave increased from the initial early admissions in February to over 100 cases in early April and to a peak of 154 in mid-April, the RVI and Freeman Hospitals became very different places to work. Elective programmes for planned procedures were suspended, wards at RVI became Covid patient only wards with the displaced non-Covid patients moved to Freeman hospital for continuation of their care. The focus became the provision of emergency care for Covid and non-Covid patients and the staff responded magnificently to the changing emphasis and demands. The weekly applause on the doorsteps was a source of pride for all healthcare staff and especially for the true heroes of the last 12 month those doctors, nurses, therapists and specialists working day in and day out with patients, ensuring that patient care was prioritised at all times. The numbers of Covid cases reduced as we moved into the summer months and for a period from the start of June through to early September the numbers of Covid patients in the hospital were in single figures,

elective programmes were re-started and semblance of normality returned.

The second wave of the pandemic saw patient numbers increase during September and October to over 100 in early November and although numbers slightly reduced in December a surge in cases in the immediate post-Christmas period saw a wave two peak of 168 Covid patients in the hospital in late January. Once more, Newcastle hospitals prioritised emergency care over planned non-urgent surgical operations. Regionally and nationally, the healthcare system struggled with capacity, Newcastle Hospitals acted as the regional hub for the North East and North Cumbria accepting patients from all across the area where other Hospital Trusts simply had no further capacity. The position escalated again when the RVI started to accept national Intensive Care patient transfers from London Trusts and then in larger numbers from Birmingham Trusts where systems were at their limit. As we moved through February and then more notably into March the pressure on the system reduced and the RVI and Freeman were able to restart their elective programmes and begin to address the unavoidable waiting lists which had developed during the previous 12 months.

It has been 12 months like no other in the NHS history, but as we move forward, Newcastle Hospitals and their amazing staff can be justifiably proud of what they achieved, and due to constant review and identified learning is in a better place to address such a situation should it present itself again.



Paige Whiteside

1 6-year old Paige Whiteside, great granddaughter of Smiths Company Steward Doreen Fagan had a different lockdown experience, juggling a massive change in her circumstances with home-schooling challenges

“I found lockdown stressful. I had to move countries because of my parents splitting up, to top it off, I have a younger sister who annoys the living daylight out of me...but I suppose she’s alright and keeps me going!

I had to start a new school half way through Year 11, which is the hardest school year you have to go through. I’ve missed a lot of school because of lockdown and the house move and I felt at a disadvantage with my education – especially revision for my upcoming exams.

Because I moved schools, I had to make new friends and meet loads of new people. Luckily, I met a lovely group of girls who welcomed me into their group and they have helped me so much since I moved back to the UK.

Good things came out of lockdown – for starters, I haven’t got Covid! I got to spend more time with my Mum and my sister, creating lots of new memories”.

Lockdown was a good time to reflect and look back on the year we had and how lucky we were to have the things we had – and most importantly the people we had by our side through it all. 🍷



Great Grandma Doreen


COMPANY MEMBERSHIPS

At one time, after being sworn free by the Lord Mayor, you would then go through the procedure of joining your “parent” Company, if eligible. If your father had not joined the company, you could not join either. Usually, an admission fee was involved and the taking of an oath of allegiance or secrecy, whilst other companies accept you without any formality.

The list below shows those sworn-in by the Lord Mayor up to that particular year, not necessarily members of the company. Sometimes when a census was done, the company did not respond, hence the asterisk.

The acceptance of daughters in 2010 brought about a large increase in members, many of whom have been very active. In cases where a Company has a small membership, they can call a Head Meeting of members and declare the Company open, then it can accept Freemen from other Companies. This was done recently by the Skinners and Glovers very successfully.

It’s rather sad to note that the Fullers and Dyers and Sailmakers Companies no longer have any members.

The table does not take account of the numbers of Freemen in more than one Company and of course, the pandemic has meant that little or no swearing in has taken place in 2020/21. 

Company	1774	1958	1992	2019
Bakers & Brewers	43	4	4	8
Barber Surgeons	144	17	35	56
Bricklayers	60	*	55	110
Butchers	233	35	32	82
Colliers	9	2	31	25
Coopers	80	58	71	119
Cordwainers	115	94	60	145
Curriers	25	*	10	20
Fullers & Dyers	9	0	0	0
Goldsmiths	19	19	49	26
Hostmen	75	86	82	71
House Carpenters	80	*	36	179
Joiners	92	50	51	106
Masons	38	4	5	8
Masters & Mariners	200	10	62	128
Merchants	196	27	21	21
Millers	9	21	13	23
Plumbers	58	15	28	96
Ropemakers	73	*	26	59
Saddlers	27	7	2	11
Sailmakers	3	4	0	0
Scriveners	4	*	46	35
Shipwrights	141	8	43	155
Skinners & Glovers	39	3	5	22
Slaters & Tilers	21	26	8	48
Smiths	187	40	37	91
Tanners	56	63	75	141
Taylors	33	61	62	104
Upholsterers	31	*	13	51
Weavers	55	*	10	18
	2155	654	972	1958



Vice Chairman, Nick Atkinson joined volunteers from Armed Forces charity Walking With The Wounded (WWTW), Councillors Karen Kilgour, Ged Bell, and local MP Chi Onwurah to plant over 400 trees in Newcastle.

TREE PLANTING ON THE TOWN MOOR

Vice Chairman, Nick Atkinson joined volunteers from Armed Forces charity Walking With The Wounded (WWTW), Councillors Karen Kilgour, Ged Bell, and local MP Chi Onwurah to plant over 400 trees in Newcastle.

The saplings, donated by the Woodland Trust, are being planted as part of the WWTW's Growing Together project at four sites across the city including on the Town Moor opposite the former site of Fenham Barracks. The project is being spearheaded by OP-REGEN, WWTW's volunteering programme, which supports ex-servicemen and women who struggle to transition from the military back into civilian society.


When COVID restrictions allow, boards will be placed alongside the trees explaining what they are and why they have been planted. As the saplings take root and grow, they will form a lasting tribute to the work of WWTW and all those who serve in the armed forces.

Gemma McDonald from Walking With The Wounded said "We work with ex-military to support them to work towards independence and to re-enter into society.

The aim of OP-REGEN is to offer a platform to display the veteran's skills and show how they can contribute to their communities by helping to regenerate the areas in which they live. Growing Together is a project to plant trees across Newcastle to help create cleaner air and greener spaces.

We would like to thank the Woodland Trust for donating the trees, Newcastle City Council and the Freeman for all their support in delivering the project."

Nick added "As custodians of the Town Moor, the lungs of the city, we are proud to support Walking With the Wounded with the Growing Together project and pleased to work in partnership with Newcastle City Council in the planting of trees.

"This is all about giving back to the community and the project will benefit everyone; we hope everyone will respect the saplings and give them a chance to grow into mature trees that will add to the ecological diversity of the Town Moor". 





BOBBY SHAFTO

Most of us know the folk song/nursery rhyme Bobby Shafto's Gone to Sea and it is generally accepted as a North Eastern song. Those of you who weren't raised in these parts can find it on I-tunes and other providers.

So, what do we know about Bobby Shafto? Shafto or Shaftoe is a Northumbrian name. Shafto comes from an old English word first recorded in 1231 that meant a shaft shaped ridge of rock. There is a rock formation known as Shafto Craggs near Belsay and the surrounding area and its residents took the name.

The family from which Bobby is said to have sprung were the Ffolliots who were established at Shafto Craggs in the 14th century and unsurprisingly adopted the name Shafto. They moved up in the world in the 15th century when William Shafto married an heiress and moved to Bavington. They continued to flourish despite taking the losing side in the Jacobite rebellion and temporarily forfeiting some property as a result.

A number of family members held the office of High Sheriff of Northumberland (a role with a lot of power in those days) and also became MP for



Northumberland. Others moved to Newcastle where they were merchants, Freemen and on occasion Sheriff or Mayor.


The song was first published in 1806 but was widely known in the 18th century. According to the song, Bobby was bonny, had silver buckles so was presumably not poor, was bright and fair with golden hair and he was a bit of a lady's man. The person most generally believed to be Bobby Shafto was Robert Shafto (1732 -1797). His branch of the family had moved to Whitworth Hall near Spennymoor Co Durham. He was educated at Balliol College Oxford and inherited the family estate when his father John died in 1743. In 1760 he was elected as a Tory MP for Durham as his father had been before him. He used the nickname Bonny Bobby Shafto and the song when electioneering. The song is said to refer to his desertion of Bridget Belasaye of Brancepeth when he married an heiress, Anne Duncombe. Bridget is said to have died of a broken heart.

Thomas and George Allan who wrote about folk songs in the 19th century believed that Bobby was not the above but a relative, also Robert Shafto (1760 to 1781) who belonged to the Benwell branch of the family; Shaftos lived in Benwell Towers for many years and held various offices in Newcastle.

Iona and Peter Opie who were 20th century writers and experts on children's books and stories believed that the song was based on a character who lived in Co Wicklow in Ireland in the 18th century. North eastern experts point out that the music is Northumbrian and predates the song and all the suspects and of course, Shafto is a Northumbrian name.

There are doubts about all the candidates. We have no evidence that the first mentioned Robert went to sea and, although he may have travelled by boat when he visited Parliament, he certainly wasn't a professional seaman.

Whatever the truth, the Shaftos played a prominent role in Northumbrian and Newcastle life. A number of them represented the area in Parliament and they were happy to use a song for publicity that cast one of their family as a bit of a rogue.

The various estates are no longer owned by the family. Whitworth Hall is now a hotel having being rebuilt in 1900 following a fire. There is a Bobby Shafto Caravan Park on land once owned by the family at Beamish and still a Shafto Street in what is left of Scotswood. 



Orinoco on The Town Moor

WOMBLING FREE(MEN)

by Tracy Kenny (Tanners)

Anyone who was a child of the 70s and 80s, is sure to remember the Wombles; perhaps you read the books, watched the TV programme or of course listened to 'The Wombling Song' on Top of the Pops, singing along to the catchy lyrics, 'underground, overground wombling free....'

For the benefit of those from a slightly younger generation, the wombles were little fictional characters, that lived underground on Wimbledon common and recycling litter that naughty humans left behind.

As a child of the 80s, I believe I owe my eco-warrior tendencies to the positive

influence set by the wombles during my informative years. The creator and children's author Elizabeth Beresford was simply ahead of her time when she dreamt up the concept in the late 1960s, 'making good use of the things that we find' now trends as #upcycling on social media and is essentially what we now refer to now as 'reuse, recycle, reduce' - three things that just came naturally to a womble all those years ago!


I'm a huge animal lover and it's a known fact that litter sadly causes so much unnecessary harm to our wildlife. I've seen a field mouse that had become trapped inside a plastic bottle and then

slowly drowned in the cider dregs, a bird tangled up in the straps of a disposable mask and a hedgehog that nearly suffocated with its little head stuck inside a crisp packet (it was found and rescued just in time by a fellow litter picker).

As well as running my own community litter group in my home town of Morpeth, I am a Keep Britain Tidy Ambassador and support their Great British Spring Clean campaign each year. So this year, with Covid-19 restrictions beginning to lift, I thought it would be good time to head over to the Town Moor for a spot of wombling!

I found all the items you would typically expect to see; large volumes of discarded plastic bottles, cigarette packets/butts, full doggy poo bags (a real pet peeve of mine!), aluminium cans, crisp packets and of course not forgetting the new breed of litter which is helping to deepen the national litter crisis – the dreaded disposal masks (over 50 of them!)

Litter picking is a strangely satisfying pastime, and the beauty of it is anyone can incorporate litter picking into their daily or weekly routines; such as whilst walking your dog, strolling from your car into work or along the route you take your child/grandchild to school. Even (safely) picking up one piece of litter a day can make a difference if this habit was adopted on mass. This simple action alone, takes away the pieces of litter that can be such death traps to innocent wildlife.

Of course making it socially unacceptable to drop litter in the first place is the ultimate goal, as you will have read earlier in this issue, anti-social behaviour and disrespecting the environment seem to be sadly commonplace at the moment. Society needs to take a leaf out of the wombles book and when visiting any area, leave nothing but footprints. But for now, local town moor volunteers and this wombling freeman will continue to battle on, doing our bit and setting a good example for others to follow. 



VISITOR'S TALES


For many years, Ian Miller was the Town Moor Money Charity Visitor, visiting recipients and organising coach trips and pantomime visits.

When I first visited Gladys, she was in a residential home where she had a bedroom but lived and slept in an armchair in a public area of the home. Apparently, she had experienced trouble at her previous home with teenagers knocking on her bedroom window at night and had got used to sleeping in an armchair. There were advantages living in her alcove on a public route, as she saw everyone and they saw her.

She had a vivid imagination and told fibs expertly. Once when I was visiting, I saw an air liner flying by with cabin lights on and asked Gladys if she had ever flown. At first she said "No" but that didn't sound interesting and she said "Oh yes I was on one once, in 1926 and it crashed!" I asked if she was hurt and was told "No, but I got two million pounds damages!" I expressed surprise at such a large sum and was told it was in the bank and I could have half!

I knew she was a widow and born in 1919, so seven years old for her highly profitable flight of fancy, but the home manager said that she had a son who didn't want anything to do with her. However, in my conversations with her I was told first that her husband and son were both lost at sea during the war, then on another visit that "the Chinaman from the downstairs flat killed her husband with a chopping axe!"

Once she was distressed saying that she had been to the toilet and missed the jelly baby man and I decided not to investigate this mystery. However, another day a little old man rushed in with a bulging Safeway carrier bag, took out a handful of jelly babies, gave them to her and hurried away! I declined the one she offered me, even though it was a black one.

Sadly, Gladys died and must have forgotten to mention my million pounds in her will. Several years later I was at a function where the lady sitting next to me said she knew me – from when I visited Gladys. Then I recognised her as the former home manager and we chatted about Gladys. She asked me if I knew what Gladys had in the large black sack beside her chair and I said that I assumed it was her clothes. She said I was correct but it also contained toilet rolls which Gladys collected from spare rolls that staff left on top of the cistern in each toilet. Apparently, the delivery of toilet rolls was once delayed because the van broke down and stock was low so the manager asked Gladys if she could let her have some toilet paper and Gladys delved into the sack, brought a roll out, drew out four sheets and asked if that would be enough! Yes, we both remembered Gladys! 

NOTICE BOARD



BEREAVEMENTS

On behalf of the Freemen of the City of Newcastle, we extend our sincerest condolences to the families of the following Brothers and Sisters

Peter Robinson
Smiths



Peter Davidson
Hostmen



Brian David Armstrong
Shipwrights



Phillip Hall
Masters and Mariners



William Nichols
Shipwrights



John W Dodgson
Coopers



Robert Atkinson
Ropemakers



Elizabeth Mary Taylor
Upholsterers



Lynn Alexander
Tanners



Arthur Wright
Cordwainers



Judith Thompson
Tanners



Lilian Dishman
Taylors



EVENTS

Whilst we are remaining cautious about organising events, these are our confirmed dates so far

Circus
11th - 27th June

**Armed Forces
Day Picnic**
27th June

Hoppings
19th – 30th
August

Mela
29th – 30th
August



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