

## OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – April 2020

### 1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

Unfortunately, the Michael Fabricant and Arthur Price of England School Speaking Competition did not take place for the second year running. The Chairman, Michael Fabricant MP and Simon Price, from Arthur Price of England both agreed that too few schools had applied to hold a competition. This has been very disappointing for all those involved who had worked extremely hard to prepare for this event. Michael Fabricant MP has written to all local secondary schools asking for their thoughts and feedback on the future of this competition.

On Tuesday 25 February the traditional Pancake Races took place on Bore Street at 12 Noon. The weather was very wet but that did not spoil the occasion. Over 30 people took part in the Ladies, Men's, Under 10's and Mascot's Races. The winning prize sponsors included City Jewellers for the Mascot Race, Lunch at Loafers for the Ladies Race, The Entertainer for the Under 10's Race and The Horse & Jockey Pub for the Men's Race. After the races were completed and in keeping with tradition, the Civic party processed to the Market Square to officially open the Shrovetide Fair. Refreshments were then served in the Guildhall including the traditional Simnel Cake. Cllr Christopher Spruce gave a toast to "The Old Fair and Pancake Races".

On Sunday 15 March a Civic Sunday Service was held at The Methodist Church, Tamworth Street. The Mayor, Sheriff and Deputy Mayor attended with support from fellow Councillors and Friends of Lichfield City Council. Unfortunately, the Sheriff's Show otherwise known as The Friary School "Encore" event was sadly cancelled on Friday 20 March. The Coronavirus Pandemic had caused a low uptake in ticket sales and the headteacher made the decision to postpone the event until later in the year.

Earlier this month, Lichfield City Council made the decision to cancel the Mayor & Sheriff's Entertainment & Tea Party for the over 70's due to be held on Monday 30 March due to threat of the Coronavirus Pandemic combined with the vulnerable age group of those who would be attending.



In order to comply with Government guidelines regarding the Coronavirus pandemic all forthcoming civic events up until the end of April have unfortunately been cancelled. These include.

Thursday 23 April - St George's Court

Saturday 25 April - Mayor & Sheriff's Charity St George's Bonfire

All future civic events will be reviewed, and updates will be given based on the latest Government advice.

## **2. Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum: Jo Wilson, Museums and Heritage Officer**



Visitor figures at the Birthplace Museum in February were consistently high, with 1515 visitors in the month, a particularly busy school half term week and sold out family craft activity events. School visits were made by Rugby School, Lichfield Cathedral School and the Willows Primary School. Community engagement activities included an assembly at Bridgetown Primary School and a talk at Three Spires Care Home.

The Museum was delighted to be included at number two in Historic England's 'Top 10 Historic Bookshops' list for World Book Day.

Other work and events included: new displays and volunteer recruitment in preparation for the re-opening of the Guildhall Cells (now postponed); book conservator Arthur Green attended site for a day to repair several shelves of 18<sup>th</sup> century magazines; a new display of historic visitor books; hosting the Johnson Society's March 2<sup>nd</sup> Chair ceremony and supporting their social media launch; a new CCTV system was installed; MAA Penny Taylor attended a conference for emerging Museums professionals; interviews were carried out and a student was recruited to the Keele University Collaborative project, due to start in the autumn.

The last two months have also seen some challenges, beginning with a flood of the Museum basement at the end of February following unprecedented rainfall. The source was identified as a blocked foul pipe under a neighbouring property and the area is drying out ahead of repair to the wall affected. The present reporting period ended with the UK covid-19 pandemic. The Birthplace Museum closed to the public on Wednesday 18 March and cancelled all events and activities for the foreseeable future.

Since the temporary closure, the MAA has devised creative ways to increase our online audience by sharing some of our favourite objects from the collection. It has proven popular so far, with other groups and organisations engaging and over 1500 people following our Instagram and Twitter pages, drawing more attention to our online catalogue and continuing to communicate with our audience regularly during closure. The whole Museum team continue to work on projects at home, and we are keeping in touch with our wider community of groups and volunteers.

### 3. Open Spaces and Tree Management: Nick Burton, Open Spaces Officer

During March the Curborough brook at Netherstowe was cleared of plant debris and some silt.

Five 7.5-ton lorries took the waste to Ryman's Farm at Wall for turning into soil improver.

In addition, thinning of the trees on the south border of St. Michaels was completed with diseased trees removed, and specimen trees left.

At the City Council owned Greyfriars site, Lichfield District Council did an excellent job in removing debris left by drug users in the NW corner leaving it clear and safe. Five tubs of needles and paraphernalia were safely collected and disposed of.



A small Beech tree leaning towards the A51 from the Christchurch Cemetery extension was removed, and another two trees received a canopy reduction from the roadside removing the chance of a blocked road in any future gales.

### 4. Markets Report: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer

Stall occupancy remained relatively consistent throughout the start of March with a slight increase in Tuesday markets at 78% with two Tuesday markets being cancelled due to Covid-19. Occupancy on Fridays is also increasing at 71% with one cancelled market and an increase to 92% on Saturday's markets. The Markets officer has continued to promote the Markets through the City Council's social media accounts in an effort to try and increase footfall and attract more traders.



Community day took place on 18 March, however due concerns around the Coronavirus most groups and charities chose not to attend the event. The Royal British Legion did attend and were accompanied by the Mayor and Sheriff, who together handed out self-isolating help cards to the General public which seemed fitting given the current circumstances.

In line with Government guidelines issued on 23 March all General Markets and the Producer's Market have now been cancelled until further notice. However, essential traders are permitted to stand so the fruit and vegetable stall along with the fresh fish



stall have been standing. Although the city centre is quiet, the traders report that there has been a steady flow of customers all adhering to social distancing. Notices have been posted around the market square to inform the general public and regular posts are placed on the City Councils' social media accounts to keep everyone informed.

## **5. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch-Burden, Twinning Officer**

The Limburg drama class will no longer participate in the Lichfield Mysteries in February as the evening has been cancelled.

A 17-year-old student, Nina Wagner, from the Limburg PPC School took part in an exchange week with the Lichfield King Edward VI School from 8 – 15 March. She had a fun packed week and “got on very well” with her new English friend.

Following on from last year's highly successful first visit of students from our twin town of Limburg to the Lichfield College, the exchange week was due to be repeated this year at the end of May. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, the trip was cancelled by the German county education authority. Fifteen students were to take part in lessons at the College and be accommodated by Lichfield host families.

In addition, the official unveiling of a permanent plaque and two peace trees outside the Limburg Cathedral has also been cancelled. The dedication and blessing on 26 April were to symbolise the peaceful friendship links between Lichfield and Limburg, poignantly timed ahead of VE day celebrations on 8 May.

Plans are in place to include artwork from Limburg artists at this year's Lichfield Art Fest on the last weekend in June. It demonstrates the Lichfield Art Society's longstanding involvement in Twinning.

There is an exciting opportunity for five young people (aged 12 – 16) and a supervisor to enjoy a fun sports week in our twin town of Limburg from 3 – 8 August 2020. There are different sports on offer each day, as well as trips around the local area. Accommodation in the local youth hostel is free; participants only pay for their travel and insurance.

Mayoral elections are due to take place in Ste. Foy this spring.

The planning for September's Twinning celebrations in Limburg are ongoing and it is assumed that they will be able to go ahead. Limburg Council have launched a photo competition with prizes up to 200 Euros to celebrate this special occasion.

## **6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer**

The latter part of February was very positive; in addition to regular bookings there was a craft fair, Lichfield Arts concert, several meetings and the Worshipful Company of Smiths Annual Feast.

Repairs and redecoration of the Main Hall started on 26 February and some regular hirers were re-located to Wade Street Church. Others arranged their own alternative venue. The

Ashmole Room was taken out of use and used to store furniture and equipment moved from the hall. Regular bookings continued in the other rooms in the building.

From 24 March, due to the Covid-19 virus, all immediate bookings have been postponed or cancelled during the lockdown/social isolation period. Many of the regular hirers had already taken the decision to cancel as their members fell within the vulnerable category. The Bookings Officer is currently liaising with four hirers who had Weddings booked in the next few months, most have re-booked similar dates in 2021. This work is ongoing as there is currently a ban on wedding ceremonies.

Bookings at Boley Park have also been cancelled or postponed.

## **7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas**

Following Terrain's visit in February all the City Council's Risk assessments have now been updated and made more robust, these include RA for specific Officer roles and also events. Terrain will return later in the year to carry out more training with City Council staff.

Phase 1 of the Guildhall refurbishment began on the 26 February. A large, three tier scaffold platform was erected allowing access to the highest points of the main hall. The decorating has now been completed and many of the oak panels have been refurbished. Whilst the scaffolding was in place the opportunity was taken to conduct a survey of the stained-glass window, happily the report concluded that no repair work was needed. The largest of the three Mayoral boards has also been removed and the names are currently being re-gilded.

Thankfully the Coronavirus pandemic has not halted progress and Phase 1 has now been completed. A selection of photographs of the work in progress can be seen overleaf. Thanks to Councillor Robert Yardley for providing this unique perspective of the Guildhall.

All the annual staff performance and development reviews have now been completed.

During these unprecedented times the Deputy Town Clerk has been working closely with the Town Clerk to implement the Government guidelines issued on 23 March. All Officers are now working from home and are in constant contact via email. Both Donegal House and the Guildhall remain closed until further notice.

