

WELLS CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ARCHIVES AND CIVIC ASSETS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER AT WELLS AT 6:00pm ON THURSDAY 20TH MARCH 2014

PRESENT: Cllrs: C Briton (Deputy Mayor); C Price; H Siggs.

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr N Kennedy, RFO S Luck; Archivist Dr J Wood.

13/41A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr T Butt Philip (The Mayor); Cllr M Brandon; T Robbins; Cllr D Unwin (Chairman); Mrs F White (Town Clerk).

In the absence of Cllr D Unwin, Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Siggs proposed that Cllr Briton take the chair, and this was seconded by Cllr Price.

13/42A DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST None.

13/43A MINUTES OF THE MEETING held on Thursday 17th October 2013 were proposed, seconded, approved and signed.

13/44A MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

None present.

13/45A REPORT FROM THE ARCHIVIST (attached)

The Archivist presented the report and answered questions. Following on the success of last year's event, the national "Explore Your Archive" campaign will run again this year. She showed councillors the four documents which have recently received conservation treatment from Mervyn Richens at Somerset Heritage Centre (listed in her report).

13/46A HERITAGE OPEN DAY Saturday 13th September

The Archivist announced that she is entering the Town Hall to take part on Saturday 13th September, when the whole Town Hall will be open. She requested volunteers and Cllrs Price, Kennedy and Briton offered to help. In response to a question as to whether there will again be a trail leaflet for all the Wells venues taking part in Heritage Open Days, she said she will find out from the Heritage Open Day Steering Committee.

13/47A HANGING OF PICTURES

There was discussion concerning whether the pictures of former Mayors might be hung and as to what pictures it might be appropriate to hang in the newly-converted former court. Cllr Price reported that he was unhappy that the Rail Wells painting was not hung securely; the RFO said it has been hung for the time being and has been insured. Cllr Briton proposed that he and the Archivist look at the picture-hanging list dating from 27/7/11 and at the paintings remaining downstairs in the Archives, in order that he can evaluate whether they are worthy of being hung. This was seconded by Cllr Siggs.

13/48A CIVIC REVIEW

Cllr Price reported back to committee on his part of the review. He recommended that the following clause on robes be taken out: "Persistent failure to provide such notification will result in the Councillor being requested to give up the privilege of wearing a red robe." This was seconded by Cllr Siggs. The latter proposed that copies of the Guild of Macebearers' handbook be purchased for the macebearers in order that they could maintain traditions, and Cllr Briton seconded this. Regarding awards, Cllr Price proposed adding that the recipient should not know about an award until they are asked whether they want it. This was seconded by Cllr Siggs.

13/49A COMMITTEE EXPENDITURE

The Responsible Financial Officer confirmed that money which is left in this year's committee budget will be carried across to next year's. The Archivist requested funding for the following and it was agreed: (i) Conservation work on all 31 charters which have not yet been remounted in their cases, using Melinex strips rather than thread (proposed by Cllr Siggs, seconded by Cllr Briton); (ii) Binding the City Council Minutes covering the years 1973-91 (proposed by Cllr Price, seconded by Cllr Briton); (iii) Purchasing a secure display case with special filters, as specified in a quotation from Luminati (proposed by Cllr Briton, seconded by Cllr Siggs); (iv) Purchasing a TFA digital thermo-hygrometer (proposed by Cllr Siggs, seconded by Cllr Price).

13/50A ANY OTHER MATTERS OF REPORT

Following a request by Cllr Price that twinning gifts be displayed more frequently, the Archivist agreed to include them in the Heritage Open Day displays. She requested permission to use the Junior Robes at the Family Event on 17th August and this was given.

13/51A DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 6pm Thursday 19th June 2014

Report from the Archivist

Town Hall Assets

The Archivist has arranged for valuations of the paintings and silver. These have been carried out and the results will arrive shortly.

The Civic Society is hosting part of a visit by eleven Italian tour operators organised by VisitSomerset, and the Archivist has arranged for the maces and staves to be on display in the Mayor's Parlour for a reception hosted by the Mayor on March 25th.

Conservation

Four documents have recently received conservation treatment from Mervyn Richens at Somerset Heritage Centre: the 1951 Grant of Arms, the 1974 Queen Elizabeth II charter, the City of Wells Roll of Recorders, and the 1836 Watch Committee poster.

Exhibitions

Exhibitions on the court, the Town Hall and the City charters were displayed in the Town Hall on March 15th for the official opening of the two newly redeveloped rooms created out of the former Court Room.

A further exhibition is being prepared by the Archivist. It will again be in the Town Hall and will be part of the 'Wells Remembers' initiative (which is being organised by Andrew Webb, Museum Trustee, and has secured HLF funding). This display will focus on Mayor George Wheeler, who was Mayor throughout the First World War, and two other men who served in the war and subsequently became Mayor: Henry Reakes (Mayor in 1921 and 1922) and John Hamilton (Mayor in 1932). It is also hoped to include details of civic activity during the war and documents concerning life on the Home Front.

Talks on the City Archives

On January 8th and 23rd, the Archivist gave talks entitled "An Introduction to Wells City Archives" to Wells Civic Society and the Westbury Society respectively. The former was reviewed favourably in the local press. This week, she will be talking about the City Archives to the Friends of Wells Cathedral, then on June 27th to the Volunteers of the Cathedral.

Explore Your Archive

The Archivist initiated and put together a contribution by Wells to the national "Explore Your Archive" campaign, which was designed to raise public awareness of archives and spearheaded by The National Archives. She organised the various archives of Wells to come together, for the first time, to present a programme of special events on three different sites in the City: the Museum, the Town Hall and the Cathedral.

The "*ArchI've Explored*" events in the new Gallery Bar at the Town Hall (on November 16th 2013) included special displays and the opportunity to 'Meet the Archivist'. The City Archivist was there all day to answer people's questions and chat about how to research family, house and local history. Family history researchers from the Somerset and Dorset Family History Society were also on hand to answer queries. Somerset Heritage Centre loaned one of the St Cuthbert's Parish Registers and this was exhibited.

A staggering number of visitors attended the events in Wells: over 300 at the Town Hall, 197 at the Cathedral Library, and nearly 100 at the Museum. There was also excellent coverage by local press both before and after the event, along with a local radio interview with the Archivist on the day itself.

Family event

The Archivist is on the organising committee for a children's event which is being organised for August 17th by Wells Civic Society. Resources from the City Archives will be used to support the event. It will probably be entitled 'Weird and Wonderful Wells', and the plan is to feature 'hairy histories and scary stories of the smallest city in England'.

Dr Julia Wood
18.03.2014