

RIDING OF THE BOUNDS

Dear Fellow Freeman,

The annual Riding of the Bounds has traditionally been held on the first day of May. For many years the event was organised by the Council and the Guild. A few years ago, the Council handed over their part of the organisation to the Berwick Riders Association whose Committee has since run the event very successfully. They have elected to ride the Bounds on the first Bank Holiday Saturday in the month. Every seven or so years, the two dates shall fall as being one and the same. The basic rationale behind the Association's choice of date has been to encourage more participation, particularly by those who are working, or in education, during the week. There can be no denying that this strategy has been highly successful, raising awareness and interest in this important historic event.

Traditionally, Freemen and their families have driven around the Bounds by bus, followed by a meal. Until the change of date, they therefore were able to see, and join with, the horses, rambler and many others observing the tradition. Since the change, the Freemen have been alone in going around on the first day of May. The argument in favour of continuing this practice is essentially two-fold. Firstly, the Bounds are essentially the province of the Freemen and their Estate. Secondly, any such change of date may be regarded as breaking with tradition.

There is, therefore, now a need for the membership of the Guild to reach a decision as to how to proceed. There are strongly held views on both sides of the debate which are well understood and respected. It is essential that we arrive at a collective democratic decision, having given the matter the thought and consideration that it merits. It is intended that a final decision be ratified at this year's AGM in November. Meantime, there is no change and we are going around on the first of May this year. Between now and November, we need to seek the views of the membership as widely and effectively as possible, hence this item being published both in this Newsletter and also on the website.

It should be noted that Officers of the Guild have met with the Riders Association Committee on several occasions and have developed a good working relationship with them. Last year, Freemen joined the procession of horses from the Barracks to the Guildhall and, later in the day, were present when the Riders returned there. This practice shall be repeated this year on the fourth day of May. Moreover, it has further been agreed that, in those years when the date is one and the same, the Freemen shall have ample time to take lunch together in the Hall before the space is re-set for the arrival of the Riders later in the afternoon.

My purpose in writing is therefore to ask you to please ensure that your opinion upon this important matter is heard. I have a clear personal view but it would be entirely inappropriate for me to divulge it in advance of such a consultation. We need to hear from both resident and non-resident Freemen. If you are going to be able to be present on the first day of May this year, please let Arthur Herriott know of your view on the day. If you are going to be able to be present on the fourth this year, then please speak with myself (I cannot make the first owing to working abroad at that time). If you are not going to be able to be present on either date, or are reading this on the website from afar, then do please intimate your opinion by posting a message on the website which, incidentally, as hopefully you are already aware, has recently been extensively revamped.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to seeing many of you soon.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Michael W Herriott
Chairman