



# OPENING DOORS

Newsletter of the York Mansion House Restoration Project



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## Welcome to the seventh edition of 'Opening Doors'.

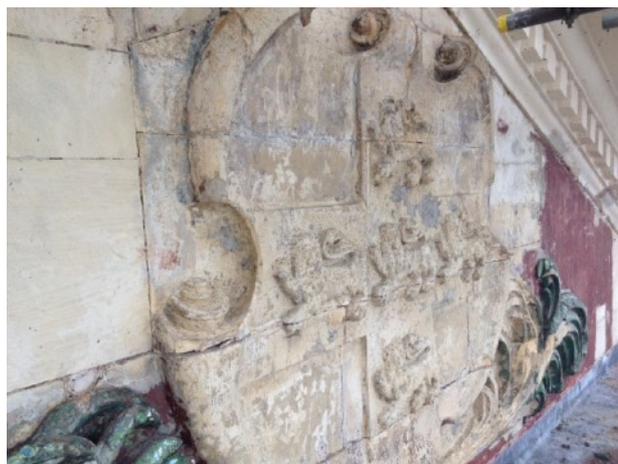
This is our first newsletter since former contractors William Anelay unfortunately went into administration. Happily, the project is back on track with new contractors William Birch & Sons Ltd. This edition will bring you up-to-date on construction work both outside and inside the Mansion House, plans for the display of the civic collection and the latest education activities.



## Construction Work Update

Facades, the company working to clean and re-paint the exterior, have been back on site since October 2016. They have been busy stripping layers of old paint from the front of the house, in particular the crest, revealing the construction of the stonework beneath.

The contractor selected to complete the interior work, William Birch & Sons, formally took over the site on 3 January 2017. Founded in York in 1874, they already have a historical connection to the Mansion House. The father and grandfather of the current Chairman both served as Lord Mayor and lived in the house during their terms of office: William Henry Birch in 1921-22 and Jack Birch in 1975-76.



Work is currently ongoing to re-lay the floors on the third storey and repair plasterwork in the State Room, a delicate operation that involves fixing a layer of mesh to the damaged sections, over which new plaster can be laid. The two rooms that will become the silver galleries have been stripped out ready for painting, while in the basement a new kitchen range will be built in situ over the next few weeks.

Outside, a temporary roof has been constructed 10 feet above the actual roof, to enable lead and tiles to be replaced and plant installed. The hoardings have been painted in the same brick and stone colours that will be used for the façade on completion.

The work should be completed in June, ready for cases, exhibits and furniture to be installed in preparation for a late summer re-opening.

## **Exhibition Plans**

Lots of progress has been made with our plans to exhibit and interpret the Mansion House collections, developing innovative and creative methods to help visitors understand the Mansion House in its historical and cultural context.

Specialist mount makers and case suppliers are drawing up detailed specifications to present the gold and silver collection as if it is in use, rather than as a set of static objects. We are also working with PEEL Interactive on a series of six films highlighting key objects in the silver galleries, as well as further films about the areas surrounding the house.

The Mace and state swords will be photographed to provide large digital close up images of the decoration that is often hard to see with the naked eye.

We are currently trialling, via a phone app, an audio tour guide with pictures, which is being developed by audio visual company Acoustiguide. The finished guide will be available to all Mansion House visitors, to enhance their experience as they walk around the house.

And finally, plans are afoot for some filming with Annie Gray, renowned author and TV and radio presenter, whose book *The Greedy Queen: Eating with Victoria* comes out May. Annie will be filmed preparing some of the recipes which would have been eaten in the Mansion House in the 18th century. This film will form part of the new 18th century kitchen interactive displays.

## **Finds Corner - our cat goes to the vet, and more...**

Back in August, we reported on the mummified cat discovered under floorboards on the third floor. The cat was later handed over to York Archaeological Trust for further study and conservation.

In December he (or she) made a special trip to Tower Vets on Fulford Road to be x-rayed - certainly the oldest patient ever to visit the surgery! It was hoped to reveal more information about the age of the cat and perhaps the cause of death, helping to shed further light on the theory that the body was a ritual deposit.

Initial results suggested that this was a young animal, aged at least one year but no older than six. The sex could not be determined and there was no obvious cause of death. The neck was bent back, partly due to the drying out process after death, but had not been broken.



So the mystery remains, but keep watching this space!

More recent finds have included a fine piece of 18th century plaster work discovered behind a shelf in the State Room, which proved popular when posted on Twitter. Graffiti continues to turn up on the walls of the second and third floor rooms as paper is stripped back; we'll bring you more on this in future editions.



## Education Activities

Gillian Waters, our Education and Learning Officer, has been busy developing material for the educational sessions that will be available to primary and secondary school groups visiting the Mansion House.

In addition, students from the University of York have been working under Gillian's guidance on a project to create two activities for children and family audiences:

- A 'whodunnit' activity for 9-13 year olds, based on the mummified cat and associated finds discovered during the renovation, with clues to help solve the mystery of the cat;
- An 'Escape from the Mansion House State Room' game for the whole family, with clues to identify the portrait that could incriminate those councillors with Jacobite sympathies, which must be hidden before the Duke of Cumberland arrives in York after fighting the Battle of Culloden.

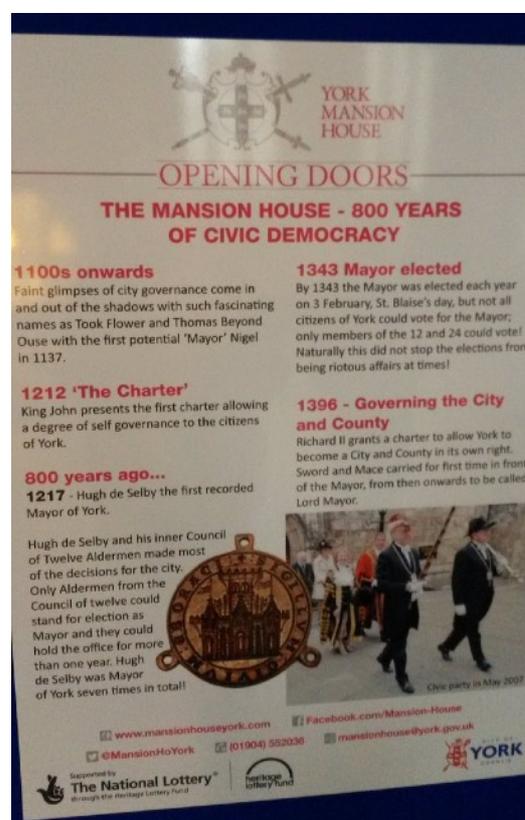
Both activities will be trialled at the Mansion House during the Festival of Ideas 2017, and source materials will be used for future events.

## Residents' Festival

Despite being closed to the public, the Mansion House still managed to participate in the annual Residents' Festival weekend in January, when York attractions throw open their doors to welcome residents free of charge.

We set up exhibition boards in the Guildhall, to inform people about both the hall and the Mansion House, and displayed some of our finds in the Mansion House gazebo. There were activities for children and Richard and Lianne from York Past and Present helped out yet again, giving tours of the Guildhall to help people understand the history of the building and its links to the Mansion House.

The weekend was a great success, with more than 800 visitors attending over the two days.





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### Historypin

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## Newsletters

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## Restoration Fund

The restoration fund was boosted over the Christmas period by the production of three new products:

- A children's book entitled 'Tomtes at the Mansion House', written and illustrated by our very own Sheriff's Lady, Brenda Tyler, who very kindly provided her services for free.

Proceeds will go initially to the Lord Mayor's Charities then, after the mayoral year ends in May, to the Restoration Fund.



- A new set of Christmas cards produced with the help of York Past and Present, who set up a photographic competition amongst their members. The winning photo was chosen by the Lord Mayor to be the official civic card for 2016, and offered for sale in aid of the Mansion House.
- A 2017 calendar created from the 12 best competition entries.

Donations to our Restoration Fund are always welcome and will help the project achieve even more. For further information, please email or call us.

