

**MAYOR'S BANQUET - GUILDHALL
FRIDAY 6TH JULY 2007**

**MAYOR'S RESPONSE TO TOAST OF MAYOR AND COUNCIL
PROPOSED BY DAVID HALLMARK**

High Sherriff, Mayors and Chairmen of Worcestershire Councils, Mayors of Hereford, Gloucester and Tewkesbury, Guests, Friends, Council Members, I will endeavour not to detain you too long this evening with my response and if there is any off-table betting on the length of my speech then I can save some of you a bit of money and tell you it will last precisely [] minutes and [] seconds!

Clearly this is a significant occasion for me personally and I would like to thank each and every one of you for sharing it with me. It's not every evening that Carol and I sit down to dinner with 150 plus people as our guests but I can tell you that unlike most evenings I shan't be doing the washing up or even the cooking!

We talk about an inaugural banquet as if it's the start of the mayoral year but of course I am already 51 days into my term of office. So it follows there's only 314 days left to make an impact and do everything I would like as well as simply enjoying the experience which quite literally is a once in a lifetime event.

One formality that falls to me tonight is to thank certain people for having arranged this banquet tonight. Like many things, events do not simply happen by pressing a button but by the hard work of individuals. Rather than do this at the end and with the risk of forgetting to mention them let me do so now.

First and foremost I would like to thank my PA Susan who perhaps a bit worried that she would end up with the washing up left after the Pimms had been served. Only here for the Pimms is how I have teased her! But it is Susan who in her efficient and orderly manner has coordinated tonight's proceedings and made it an organisational success.

Next I ought to thank the caterers Plyvine for their cuisine and their prompt service tonight. I must thank particularly their manager Lisa with whom

Susan and I spent hours beforehand sorting out various menu options, prices and timings for tonight.

Next to a group of people who have not been in the Guildhall tonight but whose indelible mark is available for us all to see. They are the flower arrangement ladies – eleven of them who have spent several hours today and yesterday getting prepared and with whom Susan and I spent quite some time deciding what colours would go best and in what arrangement. I now know the difference between a gerbera and an australis and what on earth is tinting? Being Mayor is quite an education

Finally to Carol who has patiently supported me not just tonight or indeed for these weeks I have been Mayor but over several years when I have been just a little preoccupied with Guildhall business such that it really has been a second home at times.

I next ought to say something about the two guest speakers I have asked to support me tonight. They are known to me for different reasons, one Council related, the other more personal and employment related. They both share some characteristics and that is they are both doers and optimists people who see the glass half full rather than half empty and people who believe that for every problem there is a solution even if hidden from sight. I think those are great qualities to have and which I try to emulate because as Mayor it is vital to convey a positive message to those in our City and beyond.

Michael Clarke who we shall hear later has a formidable reputation in the academic and local government fields, not because of any bookish approach but rather to his practical commitment to guide and to widen the horizons of local authorities not least those of Worcester and Worcestershire whose Strategic partnership he has chaired for several years. More recently he has committed himself to chairing Visit Worcester the organisation about which we shall hear more later and which I have always seen as being a key and significant player for the future in Worcester. It's one of those quirky coincidences that Carol and Michael Clarke's son Tom both happen to work for the same company BG and on the same floor of their offices in Reading. It's a small world

David Hallmark is noted for championing causes. He has gained many accolades from grateful clients not just locally but abroad as well where he has many connections in the field of human rights. He is the driving force behind so many projects linked to sport in Worcester – rugby, rowing and football all spring to mind. He is though immensely partisan when it comes to the success of Worcester and over the 16 years that I have known him and for the 12 years I have been on this Council, he has never been short of ideas for improving the City both economically, culturally, socially. I still regard his organisation of the Big Event in 2004 as being a high point in Worcester's recent cultural past and his role in the recent Elgar celebrations is one that has created a big success for our City and deservedly so. His recent OBE Award was therefore richly deserved. Thank you David for so effectively summarising my life and inevitably managing to include details I had forgotten – some deliberately.

I am a great believer in the notion that satisfaction and the feel good factor are not just measurable in terms of cars on the driveway or how often ones wheelie bin is collected but by pride in the local environment and pride in one's City. Whilst we have done and are doing more on the renaissance of Worcester particularly with the input and drive of the UoW campus development and the leading edge joint library in the city centre, there is still much more that could be done to instil true civic pride. I pay tribute to those in the Civic Society and like minded organisations but there is a great opportunity for the newly created Visit Worcester to promote Worcester both inwardly to its own citizens as well as outwardly to visitors from throughout the UK and further afield.

Worcester as we know is steeped in history and tradition but there is one particular aspect which deserves greater prominence and is currently understated. Within the core of the City we have been blessed with some wonderful churches each of them individual in architectural terms and each reflecting the age in which they were built. They have been and can become once again more important statements in Worcester's life as a vibrant city. This does not mean and that they should necessarily be churches in the traditional sense with resident choir and congregation but their physical presence needs to be emboldened. We should embrace them as old friends who contribute greatly to our built environment and our sense of history and culture.

To help to achieve that outcome I want though to talk about a new theme to put Worcester on the map both nationally and indeed internationally and at the same time develop skills and interest for our own citizens particularly the young.

Some years ago when David Wareing and I were attending one of those LGA conferences in Harrogate and we were talking about what could set Worcester apart from other cities, I mentioned an idle thought that had occurred to me. That was to make Worcester a city that was noted for its bells and for its bell ringing. In comparison with many European towns and cities, most places in England including Worcester lacked that extra quality they seemed to possess. I think that many people young and old have a great affinity with the sound of bells they need not just ring on Sundays or for weddings, they can be a regular and audible event which give pleasure to many and recreate that sense of history and tradition that we often grumble has been lost in the world of 2007.

It struck me that we had precisely that potential here in Worcester. The more I have looked into the subject the more that appears to be so. It's commonly said that we do not appreciate our home grown history as much as people from abroad and hence when talking to tourists who visit the Guildhall some of them young students from abroad they seem to know more about Charles I and Oliver Cromwell than we do in Worcester. In similar vein I must admit that my own knowledge of bell ringing and the potential we have here in Worcester was very limited.

Within the bell ringing community Worcester cathedral is reckoned to have the finest set of bells in the country though again that is rarely acknowledged in the wider world. They are in fact the fifth heaviest set of bells in the world and they present a technical challenge to those who ring them. It was fitting incidentally that last year Worcester was the location for the national bell ringing championships won by St Paul's that have recently been featured on the BBC4 documentary presented by Marcus Brigstock. I would like that to become an annual event so that Worcester became the acknowledged centre of excellence in the training of bell ringers and could host a top class competition each year. That in turn would draw in the visitors and would in turn help to place Worcester on the map so that people would rightly think there was more to Worcester than just sauce and porcelain.

Perhaps it would be useful to summarise a little detail.

The three functioning bell towers are:

The Cathedral which I have mentioned;

All Saints where there are 12 bells which were rehung and restored in 1975 and where two important world records have been staged in 1983 where the peals lasted for over 13 hours

St Swithun's which were rehung in 1973 and are the oldest peal of six bells with three being cast in the 1420s here in Worcester and the other three in 1654 shortly after the Civil War.

But four of Worcester's bell towers have lost their bells in the past 140 years. Those are:

St Andrew where only the tenor bell remains which is used as an hour bell and to announce Council meetings;

St Nicholas which still has within it a historic Georgian peal of bells which are structurally reasonably sound though somewhat derelict;

St Helens where the bells were removed in the early 1950s and

Old St Martins about which I want to talk later;

I want to publicise the fact that a small group of dedicated Worcester bell enthusiasts are intent on projects to revamp and resurrect some of these redundant peals. I want to support them.

The first project is to create Teaching Centre for bell ringing based at Worcester cathedral and backed by Bishop Perowne College and the Kings School. It should become a national centre of excellence. We need new recruits to carry on the tradition of bell ringing and we can help to achieve this by having literally a set of dumb bells which simulate the real thing. You might say why not use the cathedral bells themselves but the amount of time per pupil would be limited; they are heavy and not the best bells to teach on and not least can you imagine the irritation caused to neighbours and the complaints that would flood into the Council!

Instead with the help of modern technology dumb bells which have some weight can be housed in a cage within the tower and cleverly electronic sensors on them can send a signal to a computer which generates the sound of a real bell. Significantly no one can hear the sound except the bell ringers themselves as they are linked by headphones to the computer so they can hear their own peals

The second project is to install a peal of eight bells in Old St Martins in the Cornmarket. The bells there have been silent for 100 years so arguably people can be forgiven for not knowing the church is there as it has no audible presence. Significantly a lot of technical work has been done and plans are in place to restore the peal. There are sponsors and firm pledges to fund five of the eight bells but, and this is the purpose of this speech tonight, more sponsors are needed for the last three bells. I hope that local businesses or local people who feel they would like to make a real and literally audible contribution to City life would make that donation and treat it as an investment which could be with us for years to come. The target is to get them ringing by Christmas.

Indeed my target would be to make this Christmas a time when we could have quite celebration in Worcester when we could simultaneously have bells ringing at the Cathedral, All Saints, St Swithuns, Old St Martins as well as the solitary bell at St Andrews and we can build on that for the future.

Never quite satisfied there is a follow-up project that is also by no means impossible to achieve and that is to get the bells at St Nicholas ringing again. It was great that 10 or so years ago what was a derelict and abandoned church received a new lease of life in the form of the RSVP pub which presently is undergoing some refurbishment and change of branding. The potential exists of those bells too to be rung and how fantastic that would be to have bells ringing in the Cross right in the centre of Worcester.

Ladies and gentlemen my message tonight is I want to have visitors come in their droves to this City I have adopted as my own Let's say tonight on behalf of the City of Worcester we can give these projects the green light. Let's get Worcester ringing!

Thank you all.