

Elaine Marshall: Honorary Guild Burgess 2012

In Preston Guild week, September 2012 Elaine Marshall was made an Honorary Guild Burgess. A burgess is a registered member of the Guild Merchant whose history goes back to 1179. Originally, anybody who wanted to trade in Preston was required to be a member of the Guild Merchant. A Guild Court was held to admit people to the Guild, in 1542 it was agreed that this would take place every 20 years – a tradition still in place today. Only the Second World War has interrupted Preston Guild, when it was postponed to 1952.

When Free Trade was introduced in the 18th Century, the need for a Guild and the rights of the burgesses were abolished but by then the Guild had become a great social occasion and so the people of Preston decided to continue to celebrate their Guild. In 1992 history was made as daughters of existing burgesses were admitted to the Guild for the first time, numbering 274 out of a total of 808.

In 2012, for the first time, the Council asked members of the public to nominate people to become an Honorary Burgess based on who they thought should be honoured for their contribution to life in Preston. The 20 people chosen from the nominees received the honour at the Adjourned Guild Court on the morning of Saturday 8 September 2012 in the Guild Hall. This traditional ceremony was witnessed by their families and friends. Honorary Burgesses can also pass their burgess status down to their sons and daughters. These new families will make the 2012 Guild Roll a more representative picture of Preston today - helping to bring a tradition that started over 800 years ago into the 21st century.

<http://www.prestonguild2012.com/?OBH=987>

Transcription of interview

EM = Elaine Marshall

CS = Clinton Smith (Chair of Preston Black History Group)

CB = Christopher Balcon

CS: Can you tell us your name please?

EM: Elaine Marshall.

CS: And how long have you lived in Preston?

EM: 57 . . . 58 years.

CS: In this house?

EM: No, I lived in St Mary's St when I came to Preston – off New Hall lane at the top end.

CS: And how long have you lived in this house

EM: 40 years.

CS: Which part of the West Indies do you originate from?

EM: Well, I was born in Tobago but I went to school in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The two islands are sister islands.

CS: You are the first member of Preston's African Caribbean community to achieve the status of Honorary Guild Burgess – can you tell us how you were informed about this nomination?

EM: Well . . . it came as a surprise to me 'cos I didn't know anything . . . what was going on. So . . . it took a bit out of me to get there, you know?

CS: And do you know who actually nominated you?

EM: I believe it's Sahara in Preston because there's a place that I've always been and always will be at Sahara in Preston.

CB: What was your role at Sahara?

EM: Well there were a lot of people used to come in there – they had a lot of problems. Sahara was a resting place for them.

You can see they have grief in them.

CB: So you comfort them?

EM: Yes . . . and help them.
CS: So it's a refuge centre for women?
CB: And you used to cook for them?
EM: Yes.
CS: How did you find out about your nomination?
EM: Well I had a letter written to me and asked me if I would like to attend the Guild, you know, and I get this letter and I gotta sign it to say if I would accept being there – which I did.

“When the letter came we sat down and read it fifteen times – we looked up what’s a Burgess and realised what a serious thing it is” Christopher Balcon

“Invitations came for all the functions and from the Guild Mayor – dinners, events, awards – it was lovely” Elaine Marshall

CS: You mentioned the Guild, prior to this event did you know much about Preston Guild? Had you taken part in the Guild previously?
EM: I was here for the last Guild before this one and we had the Caribbean Carnival, we all enjoyed ourselves and make the best of it.
CS: How much did you know about the Guild Burgesses?
EM: Nothing what-so-ever! I didn't know anything about it. But as everything else . . . I followed everybody that was there, and make myself known.

“She could invite nine people to see her receive this award – it was a long list and a headache to get it down to nine!” Christopher Balcon

“I invited Clinton to the ceremony because of his contribution to the community” Elaine Marshall
“Very much appreciated” Clinton Smith

CS: I'm assuming that now you know quite a bit more about being a Guild Burgess?
EM: Yes . . . yes, try to.

“Elaine has nominated her nephew, David Ferguson, to continue the family line as Guild Burgess. In 2032 he and his family will continue this 1100 year old tradition” Christopher Balcon

CS: Can you share with us some of the emotions that you went through from that initial notification that you had been nominated – through to the official invitation to become a Burgess – through to the day when the actual ceremony took place. What were some of the emotions that you went through?
EM: I was thinking who I am and all where I came from. What have I done to be here . . . to be in something like this. Maybe I've done something that I didn't know that I did and they were happy with it . . . whatever it was.

“In the Guild this year is the first time that they have honoured a woman – not only is Aunty Elaine the first African Caribbean person, she is one of the first women that was nominated as well”
Christopher Balcon

CS: So in terms of life after your admission to being an Honorary Guild Burgess – What next?
EM: Heaven Knows . . . sky's the limit.
CS: Elaine Marshall, I think most of the community, the African Caribbean community in Preston will be extremely proud of your achievement, the recognition as a groundbreaker for that. I think you're on a pedestal that most people will simply look to admire.
Thank you for taking the time to share some of your memories with us.
EM: Thank you.