

From Australia to Malmesbury: new mayor's journey to England's oldest borough

Few Mayors can claim they have lived in three capital cities, but Australian-born Cllr Robert Hastings – who has just become the new Mayor of Malmesbury – can do just that.

Although his boast is slightly tongue-in-cheek, because the three capitals are London, Colchester (the capital of Roman Britain), and, for the past five years, Malmesbury, which was the first capital of a unified England.

“I moved to Malmesbury between lockdowns. A contract role came up at Dyson, which became a permanent position, and I have been here ever since,” said Cllr Robert Hastings. “Living at Cross Hayes, next to the Town Hall, we saw the Mayor’s Ball advertised, went along, and I found myself persuaded to submit an application to fill the vacancy on the Council.”

Cllr Hastings, 65, was born in Australia, left in 1983 for a holiday, and 43 years later he is still here.

A retired business analyst and father of four, Robert says he is looking forward to his year as Mayor and will be accompanied by his partner, Barbara Firth, at the many civic events. Also supporting him will be Mayoral Cadet Rosa Clough, a Malmesbury School student, who took up the role last November. Cllr Karen Drake has become Deputy Mayor.

Both Cllr Hastings and Barbara, who works in education, are passionate advocates of Malmesbury. He’s a member of the U3A, Jackdaws Running Club, and walking groups. Barbara loves the many independent shops in Malmesbury.

As a councillor, Cllr Hastings has been Chair of the Town Hall Facilities Committee and a member of the Burial Committee. He’s proud of the successful changes that have taken place at the Town

Hall, including the theatre-style seating, and refurbishment of the Old School Room.

Each Mayor selects charities to support, and Cllr Hastings has chosen HEALS and Malmesbury Food Bank, both of which support families and individuals facing hardship. He is also supporting Malmesbury Abbey Music Society, to help their youth initiatives.

Barbara is involved with the English Speaking Union, an international charity dedicated to building communication skills and critical thinking among young people. The couple would like to see how they can bring this to the schools in Malmesbury.

Cllr Hastings said: “We’d like to see how this might fit in with our primary schools here, perhaps even organise a Mayor’s Cup.”

Last but not least, the new mayor hopes to organise a Mayor’s cricket match.

“It might be hard to fit into the calendar, but I love the idea of having a cricket match as a fundraiser. I’m no good at cricket myself – it was one of the reasons I had to leave Australia!”

Cllr Hastings will have a full programme of events during the year. One of his first will be launching Malmesbury in Bloom and the sunflower growing competition at the Market Cross on Saturday May 23. For more details of Town Council committee meetings and activities, visit <https://www.malmesbury.gov.uk/>.