



The Guildhall was perfect for a socially distanced wedding

A new chapter *in our story*

For Carolyn (nee Kirkpatrick) and Phillip Heslop, 2020 will be a year to remember for something happier than a pandemic – they tied the knot at The Guildhall in Bury St Edmunds

WORDS: Carolyn Heslop ♦ PHOTOS: Ellie Gillard Photography



The wedding bubble captured in the perfect photo setting in the sensory garden

I knew as soon as we stepped into The Guildhall it was where we should have our wedding. High ceilings, rustic wooden floorboards, a balcony entwined with ivy and a stage to stand on as we said our vows (the amateur dramatist in me was delighted). It had everything we needed.

Phillip and I originally planned a 2021 wedding, choosing July for the warm weather. We sent out save the dates, inviting around 58 guests across both our family and friendship groups. However, as things with Covid-19 progressed, it became harder to plan and arrange suppliers. No one could be sure what the restrictions

would mean for their business, so we were up in the air on pretty much every aspect of planning, from catering to decorations.

Then, other things began to impact our wedding plans. Phillip runs a cinema, which had to be closed, then put into hibernation until March 2021, meaning finances got a little tricky. His mum isn't well, then my mum got sick too. To top it off, I had

“We plan to come back to The Guildhall in 2021 for a party to celebrate our wedding and Phillip’s 40th birthday”

sold my house in February, but the buyer pulled out in August, so our move to Bury St Edmunds had to be put on hold. It all felt a bit doom and gloom. A wedding looked like a bridge too far.

Both Phillip and I are quick decision makers, if a little different in our approach. I am all about ‘going with your gut’, while Phillip is the logical brains behind our schemes. We were so keen to be married and do something joyous in this year of everything not going quite to plan that we decided to pull it all forward, to December 2020.

I called Jill at The Guildhall, because we knew it was the venue

for us, whatever the season.

We asked when the soonest date was that we could say “I do”, having already given notice (something Phillip thought I was mad for doing so early, but ultimately paid dividends). December 12 was free, and I will admit that imagining 12.12.20 monogrammed onto anything that would stand still in my life helped with our decision.

It is no mean feat to plan a wedding for any number of guests. Don't be fooled by those that tell you it's easier with a smaller guest list, because if you're anything like me, you'll just give yourself more work by crafting personalised items for everyone. Our theme was ‘stories’ because I am obsessed with books, and Phillip plays video games but loves the character and world-building aspects most. This meant each guest got a Penguin Classic book with a dedication inside.

Timing was tight, so calling in favours was necessary. Luckily, I have many disgustingly talented friends who are also the kindest people, so we had custom masks, cakes for each guest to take home with them, and even a stunning flower arch to say our vows under, all provided



Carolyn chose a story theme for the day, this quote from Jane Eyre embroidered into her veil



Carolyn and Phillip said their vows under a stunning flower arch

well within our deadline.

With the restrictions changing rather regularly, we decided pretty soon after our initial choice for a December wedding to only have family at our reception. The limit on guests was 15 (including bride and groom), but we had only seven of us for a meal at The Weeping Willow in Barrow.

The Guildhall was perfect for a socially distanced wedding. The Georgian Courtroom is large enough to spread out chairs and we even used the balcony to place a friend who had only



Guests received Penguin Classics as favours

recently come out of shielding, so she felt more comfortable.

Decorating the venue with books and dried flowers made it feel truly magical and so many of our guests said how beautiful the building is. There are gardens for outdoor photos, and we had some taken in the walled sensory garden, which smells divine all year round.

We plan to come back to The Guildhall in 2021 for a party to celebrate our wedding and Phillip's 40th birthday. We loved everything about the venue and it will always have a special place in our hearts as it's where we promised to spend the rest of our lives together.

I spied a grand piano in the Regency Banqueting Hall, opposite The Courtroom, which we could certainly put to use. Hopefully, this time around we can make the most of the kitchens for storing drinks and party food, not to mention those beautiful wooden floors for some dancing. ♦

For more information about weddings at The Guildhall, visit burystedmundsguildhall.org.uk

“The venue will always have a special place in our hearts”



Carolyn and Phillip can look back on 2020 for something other than a pandemic