Mr John Harcourt

Abbeyfield House

430 Lisburn Road

Belfast

BT9 6GN

29 June 2016

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter offering to donate the portrait of your aunt, Cllr. Florence Breakie to the Ulster Unionist Party for display in our group room in Belfast City Hall.

I have sent the following message to our councillors asking for their approval to accept your kind offer:

“You will see from the attached letter that former Councillor John Harcourt has kindly offered to donate a portrait in pastel by Raymond Piper of his aunt, Mrs Florence Breakie, for display in the Ulster Unionist Party group room. Her brother, Sir Robert John Harcourt, was Lord Mayor of Belfast for two years in 1955 and 1956 having been MP for Woodvale from 1950 to 1955.

The sitter, Councillor Mrs Florence E. Breakie OBE, JP was High Sheriff of Belfast in 1959 when the portrait was presented to her by her colleagues and friends in the City Council. She represented St Anne's Ward on Belfast Corporation from 1949 to 1961.

From 1954 to 1956, she was Chairman of the Library, Museums and Art Committee which ran the then Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery at Stranmillis Road. It was during her tenure that Stormont was invited to raise its status to the national museum of Northern Ireland. It therefore became the Ulster Museum in 1962.

She was instrumental in establishing the Ulster Transport Museum at the old Belfast and Co Down Railway Motor Shed at Queen's Quay in 1955, which later moved to Witham Street on the Newtownards Road. It ultimately became the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum on transfer to the Gallery at Cultra. She was also a founding member of the Ulster Folk Museum.

A long-time member of the Gas and Welfare Committee, Mrs Breakie was chair of St Anne's Women's Unionist Association and a member of the Ulster Unionist Council.

Although not the first female High Sheriff in Ireland (that was Alderman Julia McMordie in 1928 who was also an MP), Florence Breakie was probably the most high profile woman in Belfast politics until the 1960s. Sadly she and her efforts have been forgotten.

Her achievements are well worthy of recognition and we should take pride in them as a Party, proving that Unionism was in the vanguard when it came to female representation and advancement.

I am sure we will be pleased to accept the offer and if so would hope to have some sort of small ceremony at the time of the handover.

(John left Belfast Corporation in 1973 after over twenty years as a councillor from 1950 in protest at the Stormont government removing most of our powers in the local government changes of the time. He is currently President of the South Belfast UUA.)

I assume the answer from the councillors will be positive and shall make arrangements in due course for the handover. In the event of our group going out of existence I will advise City Hall officials that the portrait will become their responsibility and indeed property.

Many thanks again, and best wishes,

Jeff Dudgeon