



Newsletter No. 56

March 2014

Freemasonry Past and Present

At our last meeting, Peter Galt gave a talk on Freemasonry. There are one hundred and thirty six Masonic lodges in Devon; St John the Baptist Lodge in Exeter has been meeting every month for over three hundred years!

Peter began by talking about his own involvement in the society, from his initiation in 1967 through to his present position as Deputy Provincial Grand Master. He then explained how Freemasonry began and talked about how the society has changed over time. Finally, there was an opportunity to discuss Freemasonry today and to ask questions.

The roots of Freemasonry go back in time to when great cathedrals and edifices were being built. Stonemasons travelled the country seeking work; in order to preserve their skills and identity they formed lodges. Peter explained that every stone in a cathedral will bear the mark of the stonemason who built it, and they can sometimes still be seen to this day.

He described Freemasonry as 'a society of men, from all walks of life, who are concerned with moral and spiritual values'. Being a man of good repute and believing in a supreme being are essential qualities for admission, as is being put forward by a current member.

Peter was keen to emphasize that Freemasonry is neither a secret society nor a religion. Whilst a series of private, ritualistic dramas are part of the meetings, these are allegorical and based on the old customs and tools of the stonemasons. For example handshakes originate from the progress an individual had made in the three stages of becoming a stonemason (apprentice > fellow craftsman > master mason).

Peter also explained that before the Second World War Freemasons had a high profile in the community and paraded in regalia, laid foundation stones etc. When Hitler came to power he included Freemasons in his persecution and therefore, fearing that England could be invaded, the Freemasons went to ground. Members sometimes wore small Forget-me-not badges to identify themselves, but the society never resurfaced as it had been before, and the

image of secrecy appeared. Since 2002 efforts have been made to invite the public into lodges or to give talks about Freemasonry, in the hope that myths and misconceptions might be addressed.

Peter finished his talk by explaining how important charity is to the Freemasons, with members donating money to 'The Grand Charity', individual members who fall upon hard times and various other causes, including helping to purchase new chairs for Exeter cathedral. He concluded with a poem found underneath the wallpaper of an old Masonic building:

*I was born in antiquity, in the ancient days when men first dreamed of God.
I have been tried through the ages, and found true.
The crossroads of the world bear the imprint of my feet,
and the cathedrals of all nations mark the skill of my hands.
I strive for beauty and for symmetry.
In my heart is wisdom and strength and courage for those who ask.
Upon my altars is the Book of Holy Writ,
and my prayers are to the One Omnipotent God.
My sons work and pray together, without rank or discord,
in the public mart and in the inner chamber.
By signs and symbols I teach the lessons of life and of death
and the relationship of man with God and of man with man.
My arms are widespread to receive those of lawful age and good report
who seek me of their own free will.
I accept them and teach them to use my tools in the building of men,
and thereafter, find direction in their own quest for perfection
so much desired and so difficult to attain.
I lift up the fallen and shelter the sick.
I hark to the orphans' cry, the widows tears, the pain of the old and destitute.
I am not church, nor party, nor school,
yet my sons bear a full share of responsibility to God,
to country, to neighbour and themselves.
They are freemen, tenacious of their liberties and alert to lurking danger.
At the end I commit them as each one undertakes the journey
beyond the vale into the glory of everlasting life.
I ponder the sands within the glass
and think how small is a single life in the eternal universe.
Always have I taught immortality,
and even as I raise men from darkness into light,
I am a way of life.
I am Freemasonry.*

Ray V. Denslow

Heavitree: Did you know...?

HORSE TROUGH: The road through Heavitree was for many years the main Exeter to London road, and so would have been busy with horse coaches travelling great distances, as well as the more local traffic. Horse troughs of course existed throughout the country when horse travel was commonplace. As this was gradually replaced by petrol and diesel engines many have been removed completely, whilst a sprinkling exist quite widely, most having been used in more recent times as flowerbeds, in a variety of states of upkeep.

There is a trough outside Ducke's Almshouses on Fore Street at the Butts Road/Whipton Lane junction, which is one of about six still in existence in Exeter. The following paragraph (from the "Discovering Exeter" series) explains: "Ducke's Almshouses were rebuilt in the 1850s on the site of the original houses granted to the parish by Richard Ducke in 1603. They were due for demolition in the early 1980s but were saved as a result of action by Exeter Civic Society and others. The horse trough in front of the Almshouses was presented to the parish in 1876 in memory of Dr. Erasmus M Miles, MD."

There is also an inscription on the horse trough that reads "This trough is erected to continue to commemorate the kindness of the late Erasmus Madox Miles, 9th November MDCCCLXXV" (see Jonathan's photos on the website)

The only additional information Jonathan can find is that he was born in 1800 in Kent and lived in Devonshire. He must have died in 1875 (MDCCCLXXV) judging from the inscription on the trough. Perhaps we should erect a sign "Last horse trough before the M5"! (J.W)

RARE POST-BOX: The Postbox at the top of Perryam Crescent in Wonford is an Edward VIII type, of which there are only about one hundred and fifty in Britain, so it is very rare. (L.C)

Upcoming History Society Events:

Tuesday 18th March - Rifford Room, 7:30pm
Lawrence Hunt will be talking about 'Whimsical Buildings'

Wednesday 11th June - Rifford Room, 7:30pm
Subject TBC

Wednesday 10th September - Rifford Room, 7:30pm
Annual General Meeting

Members' Evening - Date TBC

At the AGM in September it was suggested that at one of the meetings during the coming year, possibly the next AGM, instead of an outside speaker,

members could talk about subjects which they thought would be of general interest. These could be areas they have been investigating or they have just happened to come across, and would be able to talk about for 10 - 15 minutes.

If you have a subject that you could talk about in this way will please let Hilda Mitchelmore know (Tel. 01392 279104).

Non History Society Events:

Sunday 6th April, 2pm - Friends of Higher Cemetery - 'In Death Divided'
Roger Thorne will talk about non-conformist burials and how they were treated differently to those of the Church of England.

Thursday 10th April, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'Colin Vosper on Harry Hems'. Harry Hems Centre, Longbrook Street, Exeter

Thursday 8th May, 6.30pm - Friends of Higher Cemetery - Bird Walk: Local bird enthusiast George Barbour will lead a walk around the cemetery and tell us about its birdlife. Bring binoculars if you have a pair.

Thursday 12 June, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'The Exeter Woollen Industry in 17th & 18th Centuries'. Tuckers Hall, Fore Street, Exeter

If you know of any events that you think members might appreciate, please email me and I will include them in this section.

Website:

Our website is now up and running and can be accessed at:

www.heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk

Jonathan has already had one enquiry via the site. It will be a real asset to the society as it develops further.

Newsletter by email and submissions:

If you are willing to receive future newsletters by email will you please email me to let me know. This will help us to reduce the cost of producing and distributing the newsletter.

You may use the same email address to send me items for inclusion in the newsletter. Alternatively, I don't mind typing up information if you prefer to hand-write it and send it to the address below.

This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society.

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