

FREEMASONRY TODAY

The Province of Cambridgeshire Masonic Library and Museum

Yasha Beresiner Attends the Official Opening



The magnificent Cheshunt College in Bateman Street, Cambridge, now the Province of Cambridgeshire Masonic Headquarters

Our visit to The Province of Cambridgeshire Masonic Library and Museum was opportune and historic. Rodney J Wolverson the Provincial Grand Master formally launched the new Museum with a personal presentation handed to the Chairman of the Library and Museum, Jack D Cole.



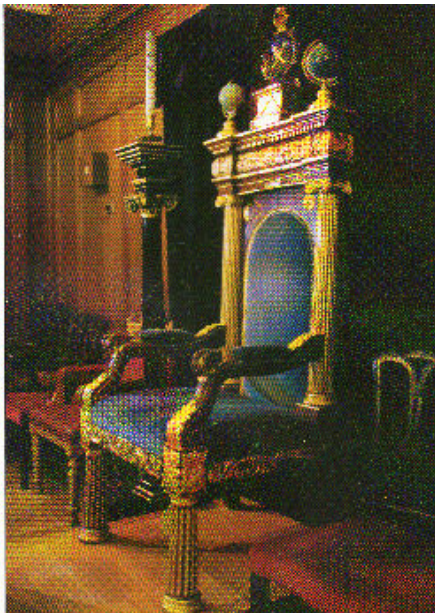
In 1980 the Council Management decided to form a Library and Museum. A considerable collection of books was amassed and recorded and regular purchases of books were made. It was only last September, with the completion of the refurbishment of the Library room and the appointment of Bob and Margaret McCarthy as joint librarians that a true element of professionalism became apparent.

It is surprising, and there seems to be no clear answer, as to why such a distinguished academic Province, that celebrated its bicentenary in 1996, should not have had a full Library and Museum established many decades ago. The possible answer may lie in the prominence of the Isaac Newton University Lodge, No. 859, since its foundation in 1861. Senior to the only other University Lodge, the Alma Mater, No. 1492, the Isaac Newton is one of just 28 Lodges in the Province. For the best part of a century (from 1891 to 1967) the Lodge owned its own Masonic Hall in Corn Exchange Street, whilst the remainder of the City Lodges met at the Lion Hotel, in Petty Cury and later at the Dorothy Café in Sidney Street.

The end of the war gave Cambridge Masons the opportunity to combine forces and a Masonic Hall Company Ltd was formed in 1959. In October 1967, after considerable difficulties, broken promises, with the agreed partnership and financial backing of the Isaac Newton Lodge, the splendid and magnificent freehold property which was only completed after the First World War and known as Cheshunt College, was acquired for £225,000.

Fittingly, Isaac Newton University Lodge was the first to hold a regular meeting at the new Temple in the Cambridge Masonic Hall, Bateman Street.

In the impressive first floor main temple, large and heavy wooden beams support the semi-circular ceiling. Isaac Newton's prominence was overt all around us. Much of the Lodge's furniture and all of the property, its chairs and artefacts, were transferred to the new Temple and are enjoyed today by the Craft and orders beyond the Craft, which meet in Cambridge. The large and heavy gilt Master's 'Throne' flanked by a celestial and terrestrial globe has a pair of the six matching candlesticks with the similarly decorated Wardens' 'thrones'.



They were presented to the Isaac Newton Lodge in 1894. They have been recently refurbished and maintain all their original splendour. The pedestals in the Temple are the property of the Cantabrigia Lodge, No. 3532, whilst the large and heavy Secretary's desk, with its Treasurer's key hanging at the front, belongs to the Scientific Lodge No 88, the oldest Lodge in the Province, warranted in 1754.

In the corridor separating this from another temple is a pair of heavily and beautifully decorated placards, painted in classical style. They are of an unusual shape with an extended 'handle' at the top; the first lists the Masters of the Lodge of Three Grand Principles, No. 441, from the date of constitution in 1836 – the three Grand Principles being 'brotherly love, relief and truth' and the second is dedicated to the First Principals of the attached Chapter of Fidelity warranted in 1872.

Library

Returning to the ground floor dedicated Library room, we discovered that The Council Management, consisting of a Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Secretary and one representative from each Lodge plus Chairmen of sub-committees, is independent of Provincial Grand

Lodge and responsible for all aspects of activities that are carried out within the Masonic Hall premises. In 1998 Jack Cole, a member of the Library Committee, was asked to act as Chairman of the Library and Museum and three years ago he appointed Margaret and Bob as joint librarians to take the library forward.

Margaret, a qualified professional Librarian and Bob, a well experienced Freemason, first began to sort the group of existing books, transactions and magazines.

Some striking volumes are available in the library. The standard reference works, such as the volumes of the Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, Gould's History of Freemasonry, various encyclopaedias, Harry Carr's useful volumes, Bernard Jones, Colin Dyer and others.

There is also a starting collection of 19th century volumes: a good copy, all be it the 17th edition, of William Preston's (1742- 1818) classical Illustrations of Masonry, William Hutchinson's (1732-1814) nineteenth century edition of Spirit of Masonry, several editions of Richard Carlile's (1790-1843) illustrated exposures The Manual of Freemasonry published soon after the Union and a striking copy, the earliest book extant in the library, the 1797 edition of John Robinson's (1739-1805) famous Proofs Of a Conspiracy. This book caused considerable controversy when it was published, provoking the intervention of Lord Moira himself. It proved to be anti-Masonic in content, in spite of the prominent author, a professor of Philosophy and secretary of the Edinburgh Royal Society, claiming to be a Freemason.

The Library is open at the same times as access is permitted to the Masonic Hall. Brethren who wish to borrow a book fill in a form and 'sign out' again when the book is returned.

The Museum

The Library and Museum Committee have been eagerly awaiting the launch of the Museum, for which purpose a room on the ground floor has now been allocated and awaits furnishing. There has always been material in the possession of the Library committee dispersed through the building, which will eventually be displayed in the new Provincial Museum room.

Not least among the interesting objects are the four glass items presented by the Provincial Grand Master. They consist of a handsome Georgian Decanter 200mm in height, dated c1820-40 with its original top intact. It is beautifully decorated with acid edged depictions of familiar Masonic emblems. A heavy 19th century drinking glass, about 100mm in diameter, has a pair of dice imbedded into the base, purportedly to keep Brethren without a drink entertained while they await the services of a steward. The last of the glass items are a pair of delicate Victorian glass rammers dated between 1830-1840. All these items were the property of Dr H. E. Nourse, Provincial Grand Master 1969-1979 and stepfather of the present Provincial Grand Master.

A small group of additional artefacts, several pieces of pottery, some early aprons, clay pipes and more are on display in a cabinet in the second Temple on the first floor.

Two important items in particular are worthy of note and make a natural extension to the library. The first is a manuscript Royal Arch certificate, just outside the entrance to the library, is in the hand of and signed by William Finch, whose Masonic career and influence in the early 1800s was an embarrassment to Grand Lodge. He was a genuine Masonic educator though financially motivated and offered masonic degrees and his services for sale by way of pamphlets he distributed to Lodges.

In 1806 Grand Lodge decreed that Finch had violated Grand Lodge regulations. An accusation that Finch defended in a leaflet, challenging Grand Lodge's decision and side-stepping the censure by offering his lectures and other documents, in manuscript.

The second, equally curious framed poster is a classic theatre poster publicising the Theatre Royal, Cambridge and the last ten nights of the play Money to be preceded by a

Grand Masonic Night in the presence of the Worshipful Masters and Brethren of the Town Lodges of Freemasons of Cambridge on Monday 30th September 1872.

These nineteenth century posters were the most overt manifestation of Masonic support of the arts.

Margaret, like Bob, is a Freemason. She was initiated in 1988 in the Order of Women Freemasons that celebrates its centenary this year. She is a Past Master and holds Provincial Grand Rank. Bob, initiated in the Province in 1976 and now living in Northampton, is a Past Master of two Lodges.

For more details and donations contact Bob and Margaret McCarthy at Freemasons' Hall, Bateman Street, Cambridge CB2 1NA Tel: 01223 361 386 or directly on 01933 626725

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