



Fraternal Greetings from Scotland

After seven years of living in the far north of the Scottish Highlands, while leading the engineering programs for the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), and experiencing an amazing Masonic journey, my time here is beginning to draw to a close. I have gone to 50% time for UHI, and I agreed only to responsibilities that I can complete on-line – allowing me to complete my job from either the home we bought seven years ago in Thurso, Caithness - or the home we still own in Brownsburg, Indiana. This allows us to spend more time with our children and grandchildren, all of whom fortunately still live in central Indiana. As it turns out, the School of Engineering and Technology at IUPUI (soon to be Purdue University at Indianapolis) has asked me to help them fill vacant slots this fall by teaching some classes. So, I will be back in Indiana for an extended period this fall from September through the Christmas holidays. I guess, it doesn't quite feel like I've reached retirement yet. My last season in Scotland has continued my Masonic adventure, so let me share some interesting bits with you.

For nearly 80 years, Lodge John O'Groat has conducted a Divine Service near Easter. The local pastor in Castletown, Caithness had always agreed to allow the brothers to parade from the lodge, to the church on a Sunday morning (in regalia) and sit together in the church during a regular service. However, the most recent pastor having retired, his replacement absolutely refused to let them participate in that fashion again. She seemed to feel that Freemasonry was contradictory to Christianity. This is not the first time that I have encountered misunderstandings about Freemasonry in Britain. There have been a number of times that I have heard or read of someone making allegations that the Masons are not to be trusted, and may have essentially taken over some organization (a business, a police force, even an army regiment) while operating behind the scenes as a "secret society." In some cases, there seems to be an actual fear that the brethren are undermining these organizations and protecting each other in nefarious activities.

I have mentioned in past newsletters that lodges are much less public here in the UK than they are in Indiana. They do not advertise their presence. Members are much less likely to mention in public that they are members. Their charitable activities – while

extensive - are much less obvious, because they do not talk about them. Speaking of which, the lodges of Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross joined in a fundraising bike ride around the North Coast 500 route to benefit Poppy Scotland, which supports former members of the military and their families in times of need. Below is a photo of the Worshipful Master of Lodge St. Fergus. In Wick, Caithness.



Fortunately, the retired pastor agreed to conduct the Divine Service, in the lodge building. So, the tradition continues in a slightly different form.



I have written in the past about my participation in the European Masonic Association (EMA), which is an organization of Masons from the UK and Europe, with meetings twice a year in various cities across the continent. This spring the meeting was in Stirling, Scotland and included a Third Degree conducted by Stirling Royal Arch Lodge (a blue lodge, despite the name). By the way, that term "blue lodge" derives from the fact that in the UK regular lodges have their own aprons, traditionally trimmed in blue) whereas ancillary degrees (e.g. Royal Arch, Cryptic Council, Royal Ark Mariner, AASR, etc) have their own distinctively different aprons. Having lived here and

joined or affiliated to these ancillaries, I now have a large collection of aprons in my closet.

The EMA brethren were also treated to a scenic cruise on Loch Lomond - one of the premier tourist sites in Scotland – and the source of a well known Scottish ballad, “The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond.” (*“You take the high road and I’ll take the low road and I’ll be in Scotland afore ye”*) the lyrics of which refer to two Scottish soldiers making their way home – one alive on the “high road” and one who was killed in battle, on the “low road”. (*“Where me and my true love will never meet again, on the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.”*). Bonnie, is a Scottish word for lovely - and lovely is what Loch Lomond was on our cruise.



There are a number of Masonic bodies in Scotland that you will not hear of in Indiana. Having associated to Lodge Latheron here in Caithness, I am eligible to join them. Most recently I joined a Cork Lodge which is connected to St. Peter’s Operative Lodge in Thurso, Caithness. “The Cork” only exists in costal towns of Scotland, and is associated with the strong maritime history of the coastal highlands and the Scottish islands (Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles).



The Cork is a “casual” degree, in that black suit and tie are not required as they are in all blue lodges and most ancillary bodies. And it is much more of a social organization, although it also serves as a significant fund-raising body for local charities. For example, each member is presented with their own

Masonic Cork, as shown here. If you encounter a member and demand to see their cork, and they cannot produce it, then there is a fine of £1 which goes into the fund. There are a number of other “fines” as well – all in fun and all to benefit charity.



Below is the logo for the newly formed lodge in Thurso, of which I am a founding member.



I am scheduled to be inducted into the Scottish Knights Templar this coming winter, which will essentially complete my journey through all of the Scottish degrees. But that may not happen, given my planned time in Indiana. I look forward to seeing some of you this fall when I am back. It will be interesting to see how long it takes me to be homesick for the Highlands.

“Did not strong connections draw me elsewhere, I believe Scotland would be the country I would choose to end my days in.” Bro. Benjamin Franklin