



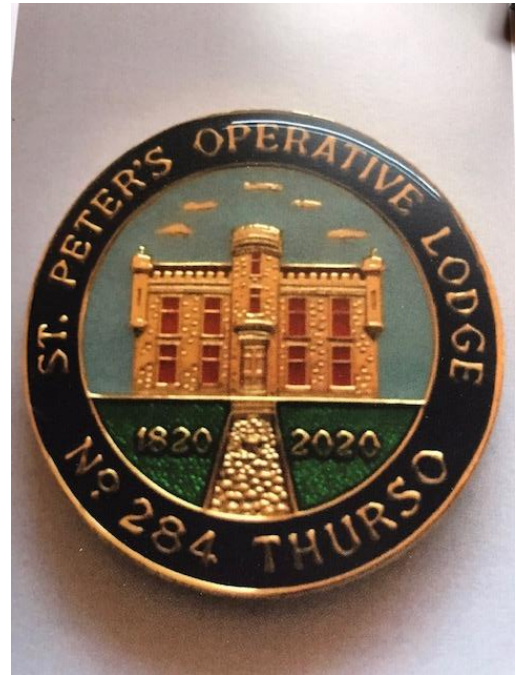
Fraternal Greetings from Scotland, Ireland and England

Masonic activity ground to a halt for all Lodges in Scotland on 16 March 2020, due to the severe coronavirus restrictions imposed by the Scottish Government. Even when the regulations were eased a bit, the Grand Master Mason of Scotland maintained the restrictions for some length of time, over concern for older members.

So, the first Masonic meeting that I attended in 15 months was when I happened to be back in Indiana in June on the week of Lodge Vitruvian's summer meeting. Having not been back to the USA in over two years, it was certainly good to see some familiar faces and it felt wonderful to be so warmly welcomed back into the fold. A fairly simple meeting, followed by dinner and social gathering at a local establishment, made for a great evening.

In October, the largest of the four lodges near our home in Caithness, in northern Scotland, finally opened, having invested about \$6000 in a new ventilation system to meet the current requirements. The other three lodges are too small to be in a position to do so.

The Lodge which opened is St. Peter's Operative Lodge, in Thurso. They were finally able to celebrate their 200th anniversary, and rededication ceremony, conducted by the Grand Master Mason of Scotland. As an officer of one of the other local Lodges, I was fortunate to have an invitation and thoroughly enjoyed the unique and very symbolic ritual associated with such a rededication in their iconic building.



I had always wondered why the Thurso Lodge was called St Peter's Operative Lodge, when in today's world we think of ourselves as speculative, rather than operative, Masons. Well, now I know the story. Prior to 1820, the Lodge in Thurso was St. John's Lodge, and it was made up primarily of the Lairds, the Landowners, and the Lawyers. While it was possible to apply for membership if you were not of the gentry, if you were allowed in, you would have no chance of being allowed any actual role in the Lodge. When hard times fell upon the area, the "common" members of the Lodge, who were primarily artisans and craftsmen, tried to initiate a benevolent fund for those suffering hardship. The idea was summarily rejected by the leaders of St John's Lodge. Soon after that, the dis-satisfied members voted to start their own Lodge, and named it as an "operative" lodge based on the fact that those forming it were the actual artisans and craftsmen who would have formed a traditional Operative Lodge. St John's is long gone, but St Peter's Operative is now in its 201st year.

Some of you may remember a Masonic research paper that I wrote and the lecture that I presented at several central Indiana Lodges about a unique Masonic Monument hidden away in the Appalachian Mountains off the Blue Ridge Parkway. Well, after hearing it at a European Masonic Association meeting, some brethren from Chough Lodge, in London, invited me to present the lecture at their December meeting, to be held in Freemason's Hall, the home of the United Grand Lodge of England. That was an opportunity that I absolutely could not pass up.

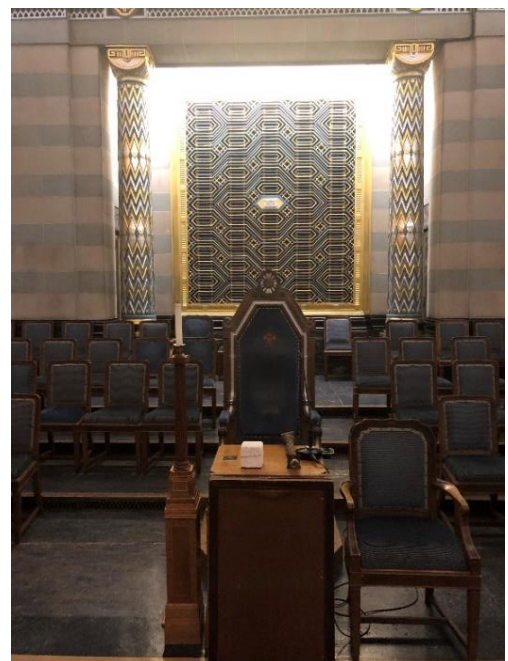
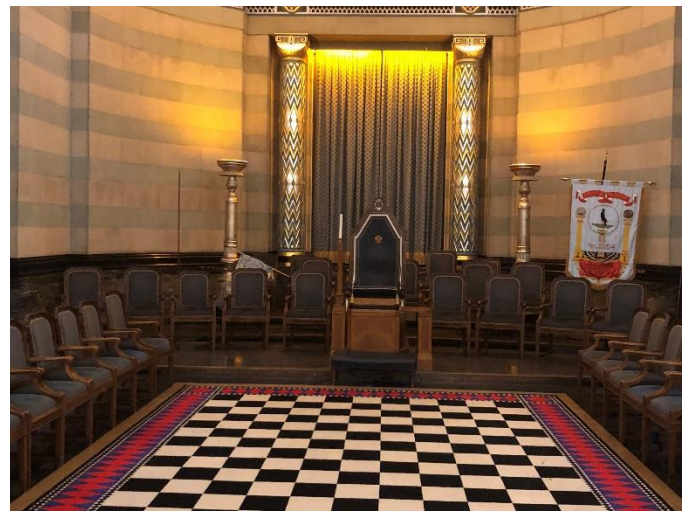
Below is the Chough Lodge banner. Their emblem is a chough, which is a black song bird, chosen because the Lodge was originally a choral group.



London's Freemason's Hall, built in 1927, is huge, as you can tell in this picture of the main entrance.



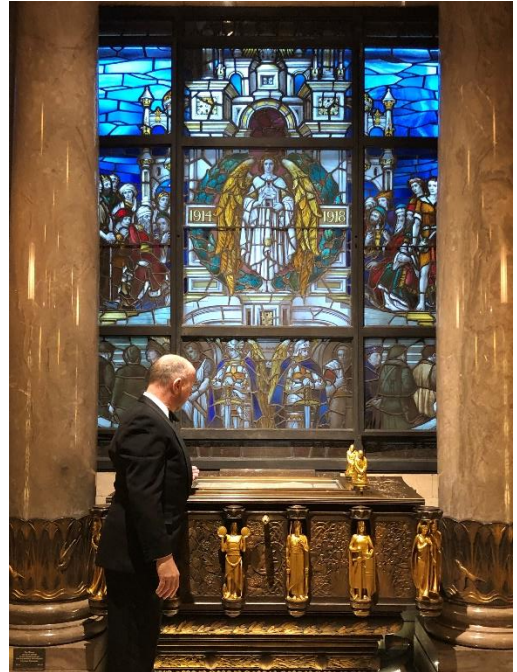
There are 20 Lodge rooms in the building, this is the one our meeting was held in, known as the Egyptian Room. The arched ceiling was amazing, and following that are photos of the East and South.



I got to see two of the other rooms, and as you can see, they are each unique and beautiful.



There is a glorious alter containing a book with the names of all of the Brothers who gave their lives in the World Wars. You can mechanically turn the pages and find your lost Masonic relatives.



There may be 20 Lodge rooms....but that does not include the incredible Grand Temple, which can seat over 2000 brethren. These are the doors to the temple, each of which weigh over a ton. They are so well hung, that you can push them open with the mere touch of a finger.



Inside, the room is just amazing. Here is a picture of the East, followed by two pictures of the four mosaic panels in the ceiling made of an incredible number of tiny mosaic pieces.



This ceiling mosaic is of Euclid and Pythagoras. There is also one of Solomon and Hiram.



This mosaic is very English, and is of Saint George and the Dragon. The fourth mosaic is of Helios, the Sun God driving his chariot across the heavens to mark the sun at its meridian.



I should say a bit about the Lodge meeting. As befitting a Lodge which began as a choral group, there was much organ music and singing, which I have found

to be present in many UK Lodges. To give you a flavor, here is the opening hymn:

*Hail, Eternal, By whose aid,
All created things are made;
Heaven and earth, Thy vast design;
Hear us, Architect Divine.
May our work, begun in Thee,
Ever blest with order be,
And may we, when labors cease,
Part in harmony and peace.
By Thy glorious Majesty,
By the Trust we place in Thee,
By the badge and mystic sign,
Ear us Architect Divine.*

And the closing hymn:

*Now the evening shadows closing,
Wan from toil to peaceful rest;
Mystic arts and rites reposing,
Sacred in each faithful breast.
God of Light, whose work unceasing.
Doth to all Thy works extend;
Crown our Order with Thy blessing,
Build, sustain us to the end.
Humbly now we bow before Thee,
Grateful for Thy aid Devine;
Everlasting power and glory,
Mighty Architect, be Thine.*

After the completion of the meeting, the ladies were invited into the Lodge room to hear my presentation and after that to sing Christmas Carols. Then we adjourned to a restaurant next door for what the Lodge calls a "White Table" which was a three course meal with both brethren and their ladies. I have heard this same thing referred to elsewhere in the UK as a Festive Board or a Ladies Evening.

My hosts for the London meeting also toured me around the county of Kent. Rochester was one town that we visited. It has been kept in a very Victorian style, including the bridge over the River Medway.

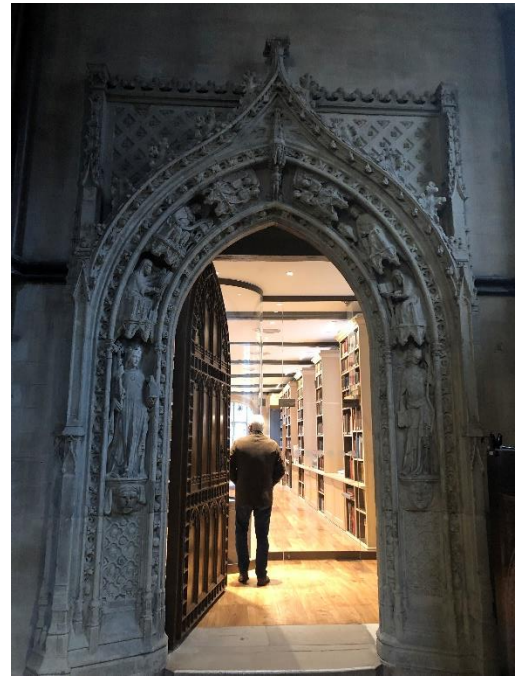


The buildings in the old part of town definitely harken back to the time when Charles Dickens lived nearby.



There is a century-old Catalpa tree right outside the cathedral, which was founded by the Normans in the year 604. Pictures of the cathedral follow.





Across the street, Rochester Castle, dating from the 12th century is the best preserved Norman castle in Britain.



Rochester served as an inspiration for a number of locations in Charles Dickens' novels. This building was the Nun's House in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.



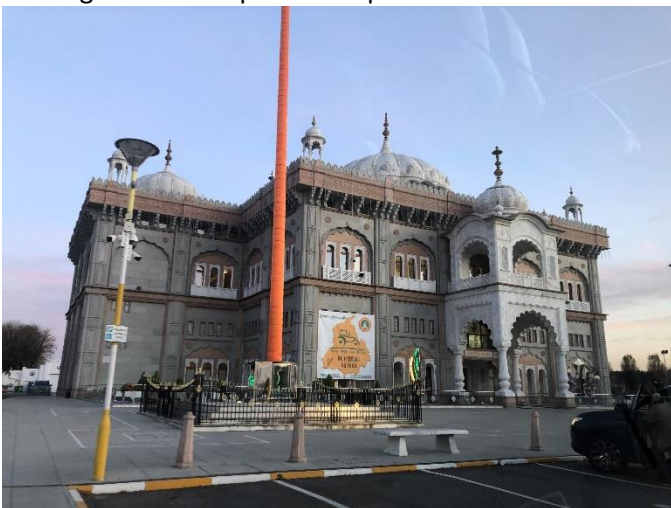
The Chapter Doorway, dating from 1350, leads to a library containing some incredible old manuscripts



And this house, now operated as a private school, was Dickens' home.



I also toured the town of Gravesend, home to the largest Sikh temple in Europe.



Gravesend has many unique downtown structures.



Including St. George's church, the burial site of the famous Indian princess, Pocahontas, notable for her assistance to the first white settlers at Jamestown in the New World. A monument to her stands in the church yard.



Floating in the River Thames, was a very unique lighthouse ship, which could be sent out into the mouth of the river to mark shoals for incoming ships, when necessary.



Gravesend is positioned on the south bank of the Thames, nearer the mouth of the river. Thus, it is well positioned for a defensive fortress, to keep invading ships from sailing up the river to London. New Tavern Fort, was constructed for this purpose, and still stands alongside the river. A similar fortress once stood opposite, on the north side of the Thames, but has not been preserved.



Guns from the Napoleonic Wars up through World War 2 are still in position overlooking the river.



One last photo from my London Masonic trip, for any Harry Potter fans, is this one, found in Kings Cross Station when I got off my train.



The European Masonic Association, which had cancelled its last 3 scheduled meetings due to Covid, finally went ahead with a planned gathering in Northern Ireland. This afforded an opportunity to take the ferry over to Ireland and drive the beautiful north coast.



This including a stop at the Giant's Causeway, probably the most visited spot in Northern Ireland, and also at Mussleden Temple.



The EMA meetings were in the city with two names: Derry/Londonderry. Which name you use depends on which side of the Catholic/Protestant or Nationalist/Unionist debate you fall on. Visitors like us, are urged to call it by both names: Derry-Londonderry, so as not to offend anyone when we don't know their political or religious persuasion.

You probably recall that there was a time, not all that many years ago, when the two sides fought openly in the streets. That period of fighting and bloodshed, referred to in the UK as "The Troubles" only came to an end with the Good Friday Agreement signed

in 1998. But there are signs that the argument still lies close beneath the surface of Northern Ireland.



Although the Lodges of the city had not yet reopened, the EMA was able to conduct non-ritual meetings in the hotel, and I was asked once again to make a presentation on the Appalachian Masonic Monument.

There was also time to explore Derry-Londonderry which was historically a walled city and the walls still stand today, making it the only city of its kind in Europe with the walls still completely intact. In fact, the walls, built in 1613, were never breached. They stood firm through a siege in 1649 when Royalist supporters of King Charles tried to take the city from the Parliamentarian Army and again in 1689 when the army of overthrown King James II tried to take the city from supporters of the newly crowned king of England, William of Orange. The walls were again used by British troops during The Troubles in the 1970s-1990s to try to quell the violence between the two sides. The sheer thickness of the walls is one of the reasons they were never breached. In many places they are wider than the streets of the old city, as can be seen in this picture.



And cannon still indicate that this was a place of conflict through the years.



On one day we crossed the border into the Republic of Ireland and explored Donegal and the Grianan of Aileach, a Neolithic hill-fort dating back to about 1700 BC.



And the Round Tower at Antrim. Irish Round Towers are early mediaeval stone towers originally used as bell towers, although some may have been used for additional purposes. The one at Antrim

has an additional legend, which if I understand correctly, involved throwing suspected witches from the top of the tower. If you were a witch, you were able to fly to the nearby witch's stone and save yourself. If not, you fell to your death. But at least you weren't a witch!



If Covid remains under control, and travel is not restricted, I hope to be back in Indiana in February. If that happens, I sincerely hope to see some of my Indiana Masonic Brothers. Until, then, best wishes for Christmas and New Years.