

**New Things Learned:  
An Overview of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry**

Presented to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research  
by Bro. Kenneth Littley, Nanaimo Lodge No. 110  
October 18, 2005

**The Problem Defined**

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Brother Sir Walter Besant and eight others co-founded the Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research, No. 2076, in London. Besant himself apparently made known that he was not enthusiastic for the rites and ceremonies of Freemasonry. Instead, he was able to see beyond those trappings to visualize Freemasonry as a great potential force for social and religious improvement in the world at large. His ideal was that the work of the Quatuor Coronati would help in this vision. His concern was based upon his sense that the great defect of Freemasonry was a general lack of understanding of its origins. I suggest that this would include a lack of understanding of the original philosophy of Freemasonry.<sup>1</sup>

Forty years later in 1929, W. Bro. Gilbert Daynes, wrote an education article for his lodge, in which he endeavoured to show how early Freemasons actually changed social conditions in their time. His article is a subdued appeal for brothers of his time to research Freemasonry and write about its positive influence upon their society.<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect it is easy to see that the desires of both men fell upon the ears of only their lodge brothers, thus remaining within the confines of the Craft, which did not respond in the manner intended. In fact, in a talk given to Lodge Chimera 160 in Arrezzo, Italy, in 2000, W. Bro. John Wade, a member of the Sheffield Masonic Study Circle, said this:

**“The Craft is perceived by many non-Masonic scholars, and, indeed, by many of its own scholars, as being obsessed by its origins. I think this is very understandable, but it must not be allowed to stifle the very important work which needs to be done on so many aspects of Freemasonry.”**

Brother Wade went further and stated that Masonic scholars had, “*[...] failed to relate their research to broader intellectual themes, thereby diminishing the academic value of their researches to historians.*”

Forty years after Daynes, in 1969, an eminent Oxford Historian, Dr. John M. Roberts published an article in the *English Historical Review*, entitled *Freemasonry-the Possibilities of a Neglected Topic*.<sup>3</sup> Roberts’ thesis was that Freemasonry was one of the social movements of British origin which has had the biggest international impact, but which has also been ignored by scholars of history in Britain. In contrast, Freemasonry in France and Holland has been well investigated, as it has also in the United States of America. For decades Professor Roberts had encouraged his fellow historians to take a scholarly look at the contributions made by Freemasonry to modern Civilization, but particularly to the cultural life in Great Britain, which we all realize impacted the world as one of the great world powers of history.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Freemasonry and the Problem of Britain.** Andrew Prescott, PhD. <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~crt/pdf/inaugural.pdf> This is the inaugural lecture to mark the launch of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry at the University of Sheffield, 05, March, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> **Freemasonry and Social England in the Eighteenth Century,** W. Bro. Gilbert W. Daynes. Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research. 1929. <http://www.linshaw.com/omtp/vol10no1.html>

<sup>3</sup> The article may be accessed from the website of the English Historical Review for a small access fee.

Why have not scholars from outside the Craft paid more attention to the contributions of Freemasonry to modern Civilization? A number of reasons may be put forward. Historians have suggested that it is partly because the “enormous literature produced by Masonic scholars is both baffling and confusing.”<sup>4</sup> The eminent Scottish Historian Professor David Stevenson notes how one could spend a lifetime reading the sheer nonsense written by Masonic authors of past generations and how this has led to the disillusionment of regular historians. How much excitement can be generated for a pure historian (as opposed to a Masonic historian) when Masonic Journals and websites contain such typical titles as “Passing the Veils”, or “The Mystery of the Winding Staircase”?

The Masonic record over the past centuries is replete with articles which deal, over and over, with the same slim evidence of origins and with discussions of ritual. Professor Andrew Prescott, director of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry writes of this obsession with origins being like everyone gnawing the same bone over generations; of it being like the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy; Who wrote the plays, Shakespeare or Bacon? In the end however, whoever wrote the plays, whatever the true origins of Freemasonry, is altogether meaningless. The plays retain their unique qualities and Freemasons of today must deal with the Freemasonry of today, and with its increasing irrelevance to the world. It is the PHILOSOPHY of Freemasonry that is most important, and how that philosophy has impacted world Civilizations, and probably should continue to do so.

Another problem, as expressed by W. Bro. Wade, has been “*a lack of good critical bibliographies and guides to research resources.*” Realistically, brothers, there can be no need for bibliographies and resource guides if the subject materials are not available. Two cases in point:

In 1976 a book was published in England entitled *Religions and Voluntary Organizations in Crisis*. This was a study of the social life of the town of Reading between 1890 and 1914. Author Stephen Yeo describes how

*“a Congregationalist minister in the 1960’s, showing me the photographs of deacons, etc., on the wall of the vestry of his chapel, told me that I could not really understand late 19<sup>th</sup>-century chapel life without knowing about the masons.”*

Yeo went to the local Masonic Hall, but was not allowed to examine the records held there. Thus, the record of Freemasonic influence on social life in Reading was omitted from his book.<sup>5</sup>

At around the same time Professor Margaret Jacob, from the University of California, Berkeley, was doing research for a book subsequently published in 1981 under the title *Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*. Here is a critique of Jacob’s work by Dr. Prescott;

*“the importance of Professor Jacob’s achievement cannot be overstated. The Enlightenment is one of the most important of the various cultural strands which make up modern Freemasonry. Professor Jacob has put Freemasonry back at the heart of the Enlightenment, and has helped Freemasons understand their Enlightenment inheritance. However, the most sobering aspect of Professor Jacob’s study is hidden away in the introduction (p. xvii). When Professor Jacob started her research, the Library and Museum of the United Grand Lodge of England, the most important collection of Masonic books in the world, was closed to non-masons and she was not permitted to use its collections. She was forced instead to use the (also remarkable) library of the Grand East of the Netherlands, but this means that her book does not take account of some relevant material in London, such as transcripts of minutes of the Old King’s Arms Lodge, No. 28, describing the Newtonian lectures and demonstrations held by the lodge. [...] it seems tragic that Professor Jacob was ever denied access to this collection, and English masons should resolve that such a situation will never occur again.”<sup>6</sup>*

---

<sup>4</sup> Freemasonry and the Problem of Britain: ¶ 12

<sup>5</sup> *The Study of Freemasonry as a New Academic Discipline*. Andrew Prescott, PhD. Published in *Vrijmetserarij in Nederlands*, Ed. A. Kroon, (Leiden:OVN,2003,pp.r-31. <http://www.shef.ac.uk/%/7Ecrf/>.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.cornerstonesociety.com/Insight/Books/bookreview3.html>

These past few minutes should have made you quite aware, brothers, that **Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry was hiding its light under a bushel !** and while that light was being hidden from the world, who, do you think, had the field of Masonic exposition all to themselves? It was the anti-Masonic factions who disseminated deception and ignorance, which, in its wisdom, Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry saw fit not to answer publicly. Is it any wonder that Freemasonry has had to carry such a 'bad rap' over the years?

### **The Problem Resolved**

Take heart, brothers, things have changed! Recently the pleas of Besant, Daynes, Roberts, and many others have fallen upon the ears of the enlightened, and the result has been the establishment of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry, by the University of Sheffield, in the academic year 2000-2001.

The University of Sheffield is one of the top 10 universities in Great Britain, and is amongst the top five for its research programs. The Centre for Research into Freemasonry has become a part of the University's Humanities Research Institute, which has research partnership arrangements with other world-class universities, including our own Simon Fraser University. With the opening of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry, the Library and Museum of Freemasonry is now open to all scholars, and its catalogue is burgeoning.

The Centre was originally funded by the United Grand Lodge of England, the Province of Yorkshire West Riding, and Lord Northampton<sup>7</sup>, the newly-established Pro Grand Master, combining for 250 thousand pounds over three years. Since 2003 the UGLE has been joined by the Supreme Grand Chapter to continue funding, which is administered by a specially-established Trust, with a representative from Freemasonry and from the University, as well as other independent members. Although Freemasonry provides the funding, wise heads have decided that there is to be no Masonic involvement in either appointments to the staff or in setting the research agenda of the Centre.

The Centre's aim is to put research into Freemasonry squarely into the Academic Community of Historical research in Britain, with the agenda appraised and assessed by an advisory committee of distinguished academics from both Sheffield University and other academic institutions. In addition, as W. Bro. Wade told his Italian audience, the Centre will:

- Demonstrate the richness of the resources that are available.
- Provide bibliographies and guides to manuscript resources.
- Look at the modern history of Freemasonry.
- Build links with continental and American scholars.
- Relate the research to mainstream academic themes.

To accomplish these goals the Centre regularly runs active programs of lectures, seminars, and conferences, and has developed its own large-scale research projects. Bibliographies and manuscript guides are now accessible on the Centre's website, as are many articles on research results produced by the Director of the Centre, Dr. Andrew Prescott. I encourage all of you here today to access and read these articles. They will begin to bring new Masonic light to you and, I am certain, will develop in you, as students of research, a thirst for new knowledge and understanding of our Craft.

The man chosen to be the first Director of the Centre for Research into Freemasonry, Dr. Andrew Prescott, was seconded from the British Library, where he had been Curator of Manuscripts since 1979. In this capacity he had planned and supervised the move of the Manuscript Collection from the British Museum site to the Library's new location at St. Pancras. I remind you that many of these manuscripts are ancient, fragile, priceless documents of British historical significance, many of them original. Dr. Prescott

---

<sup>7</sup> You may access a very compelling article by Lord Northampton on the website of the Cornerstone Society. The title is: "Whither Directing Our Course?" This article should be required reading for all Freemasons.

is acknowledged as one of the country's leading experts in the application of new technologies to Humanities Research, particularly computers.

He is not a Freemason.

In my opinion this is a positive factor, as he will be able to look at the materials available with the eye of a pure historian, using his trained sense of historical relativism to get the message straight, without bias, leaving nothing out, telling it like it is! Indeed, his written output to date has manifested these desired characteristics and is well worth accessing. His output over the first three years has been outstanding in both quantity and quality. Since the onset he has delivered over sixty talks and presentations to showcase the institute and the new research. His audiences have been as varied as local Masonic lodges and international scholars in conference. He expresses excitement about how historians have accepted his presentations and have seen the potential in a study of freemasonry. For these scholars the opportunity for first-time research and treatise writing is very great and very exciting. Papers are now being published in the usual Masonic journals, but also in specialist scholarly journals, which are, of course, peer reviewed and outside the confines of the Craft.

Now that the Centre for Research into Freemasonry is "off the ground" so to speak, with funding resourced, research projects under way, and writing being completed and presented, it has become the time to think more closely about the future. As the Centre is part of an Institute in a university, the next phase must be to organize teaching activities at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

A major aim of the Centre is to work with the History Department to develop an MA in Historical Research with special modules focused on the history of Freemasonry. When it is developed, it will be the first course of its kind anywhere in the world. The plan is eventually to make courses available to students in other parts of the world, using internet resources and tools like CD Rom, DVD, telephone and video conferencing, and other tried resources. Short courses leading to diplomas will be developed, including a course on writing a lodge history which is now accessible. Dr. Prescott has been aiming to have the first Masters courses in place for this scholastic year. Online courses will probably not be ready for another year or so.

A particularly exciting development for the Centre, one which shows how seriously the Centre has been accepted, is the establishment of two studentships, which will pay the fees of two postgraduate students. These have been funded, with great generosity, by the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy, and by the magazine Freemasonry Today.

Another exciting development is the proposal for a building to house the Centre for Research into Freemasonry, and to give it a physical presence it presently does not have in its fourth-floor location. The plan is for a lecture theatre, seminar room, library, and a space for visiting Masonic scholars.

Brothers, we must appreciate the extremely important implications for the future of Freemasonry in making it a subject for study in a university, where it is going to be researched by men and woman mainly under the age of 30.

I submit to you that academia is where we should be focusing our local interest; particularly in the two universities in BC which have classical Liberal Studies programs at the undergraduate and graduate level; the same classical liberal arts and sciences to which we pay lip-service in our second and third degrees; grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. My personal experience has been that an undergraduate degree in Liberal Studies serves to make the student far more world-aware than a degree in any other discipline. A Liberal Studies program, more than any other, can serve to awaken the sleeping giant of the human intellect.

The two universities in our province, Malaspina, and Simon Fraser, are doing Masonic work and probably don't realize it. We should be having input by offering specific and meaningful scholarships for students wanting to enroll in these programs, as these persons could very well become future Masons, male or female.

What have scholars in Sheffield, and around the world, been researching about Freemasonry? The possibilities and the realities are very exciting. Historians generally like dates, times, places, people, and events, and these are available, but there is much more. There are Masonic records that include information on Royalty, politicians, and governments in Britain. There are social networks that are being assessed; interesting social relationships established between aristocracy and commoner. What might be the contributing factors to such unusual relationships?

In another topic, Lord Carnarvon once said, “Where the flag goes, there goes Freemasonry to consolidate the Empire.” Have you ever thought of Freemasonry as a consolidator of Empire? Just think of this; it was in the mixed-race lodges that a venue was provided in which colonizer and colonized were able to mix, and so Brother Rudyard Kipling wrote, “There ain’t such things as infidels among the brethren black and brown,” about his lodge in Lahore.

As for other areas of research here are some of the titles from the last two conferences held in Sheffield.

In 2002, the first conference ran under the theme of “Fraternal Organizations and the structuring of Gender Roles in Europe 1300-2000.” Here are some of the titles:

- *Men and Women in the English Gild Returns of 1389.*
- *The Triumph of Isabella, or, The Archduchess and the Parrot.*
- *Celebrating the Phallus in Scotland. The Beggar’s Benison, 1732-1836.*
- *Fraternal Association and the Problem of Masculine Consumption.*
- *“Not a Religion”: Masculinity, Republicanism and the Masonic Third Degree.*
- *The New Order.*
- *Associations for the Prosecution of Felons – A confraternity born out of Necessity.*
- *Women’s Involvement with International Freemasonry in the Twentieth Century.*

Presenters at this conference were both men and women, both independent and associated scholars, coming from:

United Grand Lodge of England  
University of Sheffield  
UCLA,  
University of Lund, Sweden,  
University of Leeds,  
St. Martin’s College,  
Ulster Folk Museum  
Order of Women Freemasons  
Southern Illinois University  
University of St. Andrews  
Wake Forest University.

The second conference was held in Sheffield in November of 2004, and was held under the theme: We Band of Brothers: Freemasonry in Radical and Social Movements, 1700-2000.

Some of the titles are:

- *Fraternal membership of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century labour leaders in the United State.* Eugene Palwiuk, Edmonton.
- *Freemasonry and the British Labour Party: The New Welcome Lodge.* John Hamill, UGLE
- *Les franc-maçons français face a la culture revolutionnaire (1750-1848)* Eric Saunier, University du Havre.
- *Freemasonry and Progressive Movements from Napoleon to the Third Republic.* Raymond Salzmann, Grand Orient de France and Grande Loge de France.
- *Freemasonry and socialism in Spain.* Jose Ferrer Benimeli, Universidad de Zaragoza.

- *Freemasonry and Suffrage: the manifestation of social conscience.* Ann Pilcher Dayton, University of Sheffield.
- *Making Good Men Better: Freemasonry, identity and community in rural central Canada: 1871-1905.* Gregory Klages, York University, Toronto.
- *Freemasonry and the creation of Brazil as a Nation State;* Roderick Barman, UBC
- *Theological Lying and Religious Radicalism in Anderson's Constitutions.* Pauline Chakmakjian, University College London.

It is easy to see, brothers, that the possibilities for meaningful research are far-ranging and important. Freemasonry has been implicated in nearly every aspect of history in the Western world, but that has never been adequately presented. It will now, and we need to keep on top of it, or we will find ourselves sinking more and more into that mass of irrelevance we are living in at present. You may access many new research projects by judicious use of your mouse, and I strongly encourage you to do so.

What about Freemasonry in this new century? One of the aims of the Centre, as iterated by W. Bro Wade is to examine the modern history of Freemasonry. Tacit in that is the understanding that every day is a new one in that modern history.

Since Sept 11, 2001 the world as we knew it has changed. If there was any innocence left prior to that there surely is none, now. Are we, as Freemasons, aware of what is happening in today's world that could affect Freemasonry either positively or negatively? Are there changes needed in Freemasonry in order for it to survive? Will there be a meaningful Masonic brotherhood for our progeny?

There are bad things happening, or which could very conceivably happen, to hurt our brotherhood today. Dr. Prescott has noted evidence that, for him, gives hints that, "Whatever the upshot, reactions to Freemasonry will be of new significance, especially in light of the Sept. 11 events. He notes that, "Within days of the attacks in New York, website postings attributed the attacks to the *illuminati*, drawing parallels between the twin towers and the Masonic columns, Jachin and Boaz." He writes that attacks on Freemasonry form a part of the extreme Muslim denunciation of western values, linking Freemasonry to dajjal, the anti-christ. (They also apply that term to President Bush!)

Are we safe here in Canada, in BC, in Victoria? Maybe, maybe not. But, are we prepared for any eventuality? Think of New Orleans. Do we, as a local organization, know where each other lives? Can we get to each other's homes quickly in times of emergency. Do we have some plan for evacuation of our brothers and their families in such times. Do we have plans where we can stick together simply because by our oaths we can trust one another: because we are brothers by spirit; because we have solemnly pledged to unite to defend one another in times of distress? My feet shall travel through difficulty and danger.....Do we, as a local organization, and as individuals, take our oaths seriously? You see, while the Centre for Research into Freemasonry is trying to make up for 300 years of neglect by fostering understanding of what Freemasonry really means, we are living in the aftermath of that neglect. The public doesn't know us as they should, and many people in the world, including particularly dangerous ones, equate us with all the old evil things of history, including, for instance, the Ku Klux Klan, the Illuminati, the One World government and all such things. Is it too late to reverse that image? If you think it is, then why are we here? Why do we not become a truly secret organization, and not just a poorly understood and hated organization with a few relatively unimportant secrets, which may be found on many websites.

My opinion is, and I am not alone in this, that we need to discuss getting back to the form of the ancient lodges, where the main reason for lodge meetings was the enlightened education that was being given, and for which many of our brothers risked their very lives, even in so-called enlightenment England. (*remember reference to Newtonian lectures*) The small item of Masonic Education must become the largest item on the agenda and it should be meaningful. Having educated ourselves, we then must seek

to educate others, bringing our history and values to the public, as is now being done by UGLE through the Centre for Research into Freemasonry.

I encourage you to look at three very important websites, brothers, for pertinent information from major Masonic figures. In addition to the Centre for Research into Freemasonry I direct you to The Canonbury Research Centre, the Masonic Restoration Foundation, and The Cornerstone Society. Web addresses are in the reference section at the end of your hardcopy of this presentation. In these sites you will discover some of the most encouraging aspects of what is happening in Freemasonry today. The surface is being skimmed.

**I also strongly encourage you to read Lord Northampton's article "Whither Directing Our Course"** <http://mastersjewel.com/masons/symbols/Cornerstone.html>. Keep your attention to these websites, brothers. Keep up with the material coming out and, when the time comes, enroll in the courses they will offer. In the meantime expand your personal study and research to relate your Masonic knowledge and experience to outside interdisciplinary themes. (We had a Social Credit Premier here in BC for over twenty years. His cabinets were largely composed of Masons. I have seen nothing written about this)

Dr. Prescott gets the last quote: "If we are at the beginning of a struggle to protect and restate the secular values of the Enlightenment, it is inevitable that the study of Freemasonry, so much bound up with the creations of those values, will become of new relevance."

Education, education, education.....

We must work to bring ourselves from irrelevance to new relevance. Only that way can Freemasonry survive after us.

#### **References:**

*The Study of Freemasonry as a New Academic Discipline*. Dr. Andrew Prescott. University of Sheffield. The article has been published in *Vrijmetserarij in Nederland*, A. Kroon, ed. (Leiden:OVN, 2003, r-31. This article may be found at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/%7Ecrf/>.

*English Historical Review* website <http://www.jstor.org/journals/00138266.html>

*Mythology of the Secret Societies*. John M. Roberts. Macmillan Pub. Col 1972. ISBN: 0684120043

*Freemasonry and Social England in the Eighteenth Century*. W. Bro. Gilbert Daynes. *Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research*. 1929. From the website One More Time Please. <http://www.linshaw.com/omtp/vol1Ono1.html>

*Freemasonry and the Problem of Britain*. Dr. Andrew Prescott. <http://www.shef.ac.uk/-crf/pdf/inaugural.pdf>

*Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*. Website <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/wadesheffield.html>

*United Grand Lodge of England* website: <http://www.grandlodge-england.org/news/research-prescott-080904.htm>

*University of Sheffield* website: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/about/>

*Humanities Research Institute*: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/hri/>

*Lanes Masonic Records*: [http://www.freemasonry.london.museum/Lane\\_v3/ui/frame.htm](http://www.freemasonry.london.museum/Lane_v3/ui/frame.htm)

the Canonbury Research Centre,  
[www.canonbury.ac.uk/](http://www.canonbury.ac.uk/)  
the Masonic Restoration Foundation  
[www.masonicrestoration.com/](http://www.masonicrestoration.com/)  
The Cornerstone Society  
[www.cornerstonesociety.com](http://www.cornerstonesociety.com)