

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

650 Fisgard St, Victoria, B.C. Canada

THREE LODGES OF ENGLISH FREEMASONRY

**Presented to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research on April 17, 2007
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This evening, brethren, I would like to share with you my recollection of my first visit to three English lodges of Freemasonry. It was my fortune to accompany a group of twelve Masons and their ladies on a fraternal trip to Britain. Although I had attended all the lodges in Victoria Districts 1 and 21 that practice Emulation ritual, I had never been to a lodge meeting in England. What would the meeting be like? How would I be greeted? What surprises would there be?

After flying to Heathrow and then being driven by coach to York, the day arrived for my first English lodge meeting. We set out for Pocklington, a town of five thousand located about twelve miles from York. Our coach parked near the Beacon Lodge hall. As we signed the porch book we were warmly greeted by the Worshipful Master, a giant of a man who stood over six foot six. Then each of us was escorted to a preparation or dressing room by a brother of Beacon Lodge who acted as a personal host. Following this, my host led me downstairs to the bar where a fine selection was offered. I chose a bitter.

Our group of visiting brethren was made up of ten Canadian and two American Masons. It included two Past Grand Masters, one Deputy Grand Master, four Right Worshipful Brothers, two Very Worshipful Brothers, two Worshipful Masters and one Master Mason. It was in this order that the North America brethren were admitted individually into Beacon Lodge No. 4362. So as a Past Master I had a long long time to wait – and a long long time to think. Unfortunately the muffled sounds from the lodge room were unintelligible. What were they doing in there? Why on earth were they taking so long? Were they examining each entrant? What are the working tools in the Emulation ritual? Am I finally going to ride that goat?

At the door the impeccable Director of Ceremonies motioned to me and we proceeded across the dimly lit lodge room at a pace similar to that used in a military funeral. I eventually got into step as we floated across the floor of the fortunately small room. At last we arrived at a vacant seat, at which point I was introduced to the brethren assembled, at first as Brother then as Worshipful Brother Smith when the Director of Ceremonies noticed my Past Master's Jewel.

We received an enlightening talk entitled "Symbolism in the First Degree" and witnessed two ballots for initiation. The Canadian Past Grand Master spoke very effectively for our group and the officers of Beacon Lodge executed their tasks with precision and with great

dignity. As a Director of Ceremonies in my mother lodge, I was particularly impressed by the mode of exiting the lodge room at closing time.

As we headed down to the banquet room my host tactfully brought up the subject of finances. Having been forewarned, I had a five pound note for the meal and an additional five pound donation for drinks. This donated money would go to a charity as I was a guest of Beacon Lodge.

Although the lodge had eight Stewards, the serving at the festive board was done by hired staff. However, the Stewards oversaw the banquet tables including filling frequent requests for beverages. I should point out that these English brethren seemed to drink considerably more than us but they do not drink and drive. Transportation arrangements are made well before their banquet. It was when one of these drinks arrived that I had to face an unexpected challenge.

My host, a Past Master of Beacon Lodge, had ordered a pint of bitter for me. When the Steward returned, he passed me a can of Young's Strong Export Bitter. While continuing to talk with my host, I pulled the tab. SWISH went the beer! It seemed to explode in all directions. Quickly I covered the disorderly can, rapidly lowered it to the floor, and continued the informal talk. Out of nowhere two Stewards appeared with towels, one to cover and remove the unruly bitter and the other to dry a damp but undaunted Mason from British Columbia.

Having passed this trial with flying if not soggy colours, my host and his nearby brethren seemed somewhat embarrassed and treated me even more kindly. In fact, they ordered a most scrumptious cheese board with many excellent cheeses which we all enjoyed.

Because of the warm yet proper manner in which I was welcomed, the brethren of Beacon Lodge No. 4362 will always hold a very special place in my memory.

OUR WELCOME AT MINSTER LODGE NO. 4663

While on a Masonic tour of Britain, our group of ten British Columbian and two Washington State brethren spent a number of delightful days in York. The area within the ancient walls is a maze of streets, lanes and pedestrian walks that curve here and there, so we decided to take three taxis to the lodge near York Minster.

Our welcome to Minister Lodge No. 4663 started in the car park where the Director of Ceremonies met our group, then ushered us into the hall. The lodge room was beautifully decorated with ancient Egyptian and Babylonian drawings further adorned with appropriate Masonic sayings beneath the illustrations.

During the meeting, both Canadian and American brethren were individually presented to the lodge. We were treated to a lecture by W. Bro. Dr. Jones, a prominent speaker from

London. Later in the banquet room our group was seated among the English brethren, which gave us all an opportunity to socialize. In Minister Lodge a brother was assigned to look after you – to answer your questions, guide you about the hall, get you a drink – in other words to make you feel at home. My host was a Past Master who worked for the Ministry of Defense. Seated on my left was the guest lecturer. Both contributed to a very enjoyable evening.

Yes at Minister Lodge No. 4663 we were fraternally welcomed and thoughtfully looked after. What more can you ask for when you visit?

THE INSTALLATION AT ROYAL CUMBERLAND LODGE NO. 41

In closing I would like to describe my visit to the installation at Royal Cumberland Lodge No. 41.

We set out for the Masonic hall at Bath at three p.m. Little did I realize that it would be a marathon meeting. The twelve visiting Masons from Canada and the United States dressed in dark suits and carrying apron cases drew little attention as we wandered through the narrow streets of Bath searching for the Masonic hall located behind Marks and Spencer. More by accident than by plan, we reached our goal just before 3:30 p.m. Fortunately, one of our group knocked, opened the door, and discovered that we were at the right place, for there were no signs or symbols visible from the lane.

We were greeted by the Lodge Secretary and a number of Past Masters. Next we were taken on a tour of the ritually decorated lodge room and the very well endowed lodge museum. Royal Cumberland Lodge No. 41 is a bi-century lodge that first met on December 28, 1732. According to their letter head, “the lodge met at Brother Robinson’s, the Bear, in Bath, and regularly formed themselves.” Following this we were served coffee and tea in their banquet hall and introduced to more members.

After being ushered to our seats, the meeting started at 4:45 p.m. The Assistant Provincial Grand Master was received with proper pomp and ceremony. Our group was formally welcomed and M. W. Bro. Grant Wardlaw responded on our behalf. The business of the lodge was dealt with smoothly. Congratulations were offered to a Past Master who had recently become a Masonic Veteran, which is the English equivalent of a Mason with fifty years of service. Of interest, this brother was presented with a Golden Jubilee Certificate and a suitably inscribed firing glass at a special dinner. In return the honoured mason gave his lodge a loving cup.

At Royal Cumberland Lodge, the installation ceremony was much different from that practiced in British Columbia. They held no Board of Installed Masters as we know it. However the Master elect was duly installed in the East with all the required form, dignity and ceremony by the Assistant Provincial Grand Master for Somerset, W. Bro. Roger Clark.

Following a short break, the appointment and investiture of officers was held. Of note was their custom of naming the Past Master's Jewel after the previous bearer, now deceased. For example, W. Bro. Clack, the Immediate Past Master, received the Edmund White Past Master's Jewel.

The installation banquet started about 8:30 p.m. after the brethren had had an opportunity to use the impressive bar which offered a wide selection including beer, lager and ale on tap. The banquet hall was long and narrow and tastefully appointed with plaques, glass cases and other Masonic paraphernalia mounted on the walls.

The printed program for the installation banquet contained the menu, toast list, and roll of officers for the coming year. The toasts numbered over a dozen and six were responded to by distinguished brethren. The Provincial Grand Master for Somerset, R. W. Bro. Stanley Hopkins, was able to attend the banquet. In the responses, a great deal of emphasis was put upon local and provincial charities and the good work that these charities achieve. Bottles of wine were handy so that the brethren could charge their glasses when required. Because of the large number of toasts, I soon switched from a sweet German wine to a drier harsher wine so as not to imbibe too much. Why didn't I think of putting less in my glass?

At first the members of Royal Cumberland Lodge seemed very reserved but as we proceeded through the delicious dinner, the host brethren warmed - or had I become more relaxed? Two members were especially friendly: W. Bro. Sagar, who had written "An Account of the Royal Cumberland Lodge No. 41, 250th Anniversary" and W. Bro. Hall, who proposed a toast to the visiting brethren. These Past Masters politely, patiently, and thoughtfully answered my questions about their lodge and about Freemasonry in England. When we left the Masonic hall in Bath just before 11:00 p.m., the Tyler's Toast was still to be given.

In the installation banquet programme, it was stated that "The Worshipful Master, Officers and Brethren of the Lodge extend a very warm welcome to their guests with a sincere wish that they will share an enjoyable evening." Speaking for the visiting brethren from British Columbia and Washington State, we certainly did. The installation at Royal Cumberland Lodge No. 41 in Bath was truly an evening to remember.

For those of you that were initiated, passed and raised in Freemasonry in England, I hope that this talk has brought back fond recollections. For those of you that have never attended a lodge of the United Grand Lodge of England, I urge you to do so.