

A Visit to the Freemason's Hall in London

by Wor.Bro. G. R. W. Neil

In early spring last year, we had occasion to visit the Grand Lodge hall in London. We had come down from Edinburgh by train the previous afternoon and had an abortive attempt at finding it. The next day we were better organised and found the building with difficulty.

It is a very large building in the style of the second decade of the last century. It has a type of tower reminiscent of the ones on old T&G buildings. Unfortunately, it is hemmed in by other buildings, which detracts from its imposing nature.

We entered by a side door (the main one is only opened on special occasions) and found ourselves in a spacious lobby. I approached the enquiry desk, stated my masonic connection and showed the masonic passport, given me here in Cairns. There were no problems and my wife was allowed to accompany me.

We were directed upstairs to the library to wait for a guide, and were amused to view the anti-masonic cartoons. I remember one of a mason being burnt at the stake by a Methodist minister in the church grounds. After seeing the cartoons we moved into the museum to await our guide.

We saw great and costly gifts given to brethren and from brethren to their lodges. We saw aprons, jewels and banners from many lodges and orders. We noticed that there is a fourth degree in the secret monitor, bestowed by the most worthy grand supreme ruler on deserving grand officers.

We saw Sir Winston Churchill's apron which folded into a case half the size of ours. Also noted were the makeshift furniture and regalia used when the lodge on the island of Jersey was liberated from the Germans (they had sacked it) and in war prisoner camps.

After a long wait our guide arrived. He was a retired solicitor but not a freemason and we were shown over the building. We saw the paintings of all the past grand masters, all in their regalia except one, who had converted to Roman Catholicism, was not permitted by his church to have his portrait painted in masonic regalia and appears in normal dress.

The video explains the building better than I can. There are many lodge rooms. A large area is devoted to a war memorial with the name of every British soldier killed in the first world war on a movable scroll. The whole building reminded me very much of that in Ann street, Brisbane, it also being built as a war memorial, in the same style of the same period but on a much smaller scale.

The staircases, lobbies, changing rooms and corridors were finished in marble and mosaics. The great brass doors to the main hall were impressive, being of brass cast with masonic and religious panels and weighing many tons but which can be moved with finger pressure.

The Grand Lodge room which is separated from the rest of the building by a space except at the portal to show that what happens there is separated from and not influenced by worldly considerations. The inside of the room beggars description with its mosaic work and magnificence. This building was built when masonry was at its zenith and in the capital of the greatest empire the world has known at the height of its glories and this magnificence is as should be.

We concluded the tour with a visit to the shop, where the 'Hiram Key' is openly on sale. We then browsed in a masonic suppliers shop across the street, and then found our way back to Trafalgar Square.

Gilbert Neil