

A 'SCOTTISH' SOJOURN!

In July 1978 W. Bro Alex Francis was Initiated in Lodge St John Crofthead Fauldhouse No. 374 (Scottish Constitution). Alex's father was an Initiate of the same Lodge and in 1964/5, was its Right Worshipful Master (how the WM is referred to under the Scottish constitution). Masonry is ingrained in the Francis family, with Alex's brother and his grandfather both having been Initiated in '374'. Alex's parents have since emigrated to Australia.

Alex progressed to the Third Degree but was obliged to follow his calling in the Armed Services and left his native Scotland. Upon retirement, he settled in Anglesey and became a joining member of Bonover Lodge No.8971. He progressed up the ladder of the Lodge, becoming its Master in May 2009. Despite a long absence from 'his native land', Alex had not however lost touch with his Masonic roots - and on the night of his Installation, 8 Brethren from Lodge of St John No.374 trekked down to Anglesey to support him. Our Scottish Brethren made an immediate impression - and *it became a long night for some!!*

In the heat of the moment many things are promised, on this occasion that there should be a 'return visit' by Anglesey Brethren. In March this year, after considerable liaison between Alex and W.Bro. Ian Russell (Secretary of the Lodge of St John 374), on Friday 26th March 28 Brethren from the North Wales Province/Cheshire made the journey north for a two night sojourn. These Brethren were led by W.Bro. Graeme Sutherland (Anglesey - Group 1 Chairman). They represented 8 North Wales Lodges and one Lodge from the Province of Cheshire. Our hosts were to be Bro. Alex Francis' 'mother Lodge'.

On our arrival on Friday afternoon an Official Reception awaited us. Light refreshments satisfied our appetites and quenched our thirst!! Having been 'fed and watered' - the liquid tasted somewhat familiar! - we were then 'bussed' to visit the nearby Kirknewton & Ratho Lodge No.85 - where we were made to feel most welcome. One interesting departure from the way we do things under our Constitution (identical on both evenings), was that the Right Worshipful Master left his Chair, and came onto the floor of the Lodge. He greeted each Visiting Brother by name - no mean feat since there must have been approximately 40 of us. This took time - since an hour later no real Labour had transpired!!! An enjoyable Second Degree ceremony followed. Another interesting feature was that the Senior Deacon transpired to be none other than the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of that Province - (he was not attired in his Provincial Regalia) - he also played a leading role in the 'Harmony' which followed. He conducted himself throughout and was very much regarded as, 'one of the boys'!. Light refreshments followed (with just a touch more 'liquidity'!) It was appreciated that we were 'bussed' back to our hotel!

A visit to Rosslyn Chapel had been arranged for Saturday morning - a free coach was provided by our hosts, several of them accompanied us to this well known location. (*Many will know of the historical connections between this venue and the **Knights Templars***). We learnt that visitor numbers at Rosslyn Chapel dramatically increased following Dan Brown's book, 'The Da Vinci Code'!! Our special guide, a very knowledgeable lady claimed to be ignorant about 'What you Masons get up to, at Lodge'!! She seemed somewhat better informed than many a practising Freemason! Under her guidance we enjoyed a very comprehensive and instructive tour.

During the afternoon we visited our hosts at their Lodge - Lodge of St John Crofthead Fauldhouse No.374. They had a special dispensation granted, enabling them to convene their meeting on a Saturday, '**In honour of our Welsh Guests**'!! Not surprisingly it was another very well attended meeting - with some 65 Brethren present. The Visitors totalled some 35/40 Brethren.

In addition to welcoming each individual Visitor, the RWM Tom Brown, on this occasion singled out for special mention Bro. Francis - highlighting his numerous family connections with the Lodge.

We then experienced a 'Scottish Third Degree' Ceremony - believe me, so very different from our own!! One other interesting feature, was that once the Ceremony was completed the Lodge was **closed in the Third Degree – (no reverting to the Second - First Degree!!).** **Actually Closed in the Third Degree!!!**

Whilst the room was being prepared for the after proceedings, Bro. Alex Francis examined the Lodge Honours Board highlighting his father's name as being the RWM in 1964/65.

We then had a most enjoyable meal. Unknown to both our hosts and our Organiser(!), our Group had secretly pre-arranged for a letter extending 'Fraternal Greetings' from Bro. Alex Francis' father's Lodge (in Australia) to be read. Not only did W. Bro. Francis (Senior) extend 'fraternal greetings to his Lodge', he also made mention that it was a delight to him that his son (Alex) was visiting his 'mother' Lodge. This was extremely well received by our hosts.

Following the reading of that letter, W. Bro. Cemlyn Williams assisted by Bro. Alex Francis conducted a brief 'mini ceremony', of making the RWM Tom Brown, an '*Honorary Welshman for the night*'!!. This was intended as a surprise, not only to the gathered assembly but also to the RWM. It consisted, amongst other aspects of robing the RWM in a Welsh Rugby shirt etc – (the format of this ceremony bore a striking resemblance to the ceremony of Initiation!!). The RWM – with great gusto – and to the obvious delight of all present, very much took on board the role of 'Candidate'! This light hearted departure was very much in keeping with the 'Harmony' and it went down particularly well.

I have already referred to the Scottish 'Harmony'. Their after proceedings are considerably more relaxed than that practised under our Constitution e.g. there are only three Toasts – (a) Loyal, (b) Toast to the Craft, and then immediately before the 'Harmony' is drawn to a close, (c) a Toast to the Visitors (the only one requiring a Response). The 'Harmony' consists of the DC declaring e.g. that "Bro. 'So and so' will now sing a song", thereafter, "Bro. 'So and so' will tell a story/joke", etc etc. A goodly number of Bre. are expected to participate – there is no element of embarrassment should a Bro. hit a wrong 'musical' note!. Two members of our Group undertook solo performances, namely W. Bro. Alan Thomas (Anglesey Lodge) who sang a couple of Buddy Holly songs, whilst W. Bro. Karl Williamson (Caerlleon Lodge, Cheshire) rendered a couple of John Denver numbers. Both Bre. performed well (both accomplished)!! Likewise The North Wales/Cheshire 'Choir' made a musical contribution! On both evenings, festivities came to a close with the North Wales Group on stage to sing 'Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau'.

Our Group made donation to charity totalling £300. This was presented to The Provincial Grand Master of Linlithgowshire's fund to be applied to a local Special School for Sick Children. In addition, each Lodge represented in our Group supplied a separate Raffle. The total amount raised on the evening amounted to some £900.

28 Brethren ventured North – I am relieved to announce that thankfully the same number returned!
Our gracious host's parting shot to us was

"HASTE YE BACK"

Our Celtic cousins can be assured - **'We will return'**
- but not before they visit us in May 2011.

Cemlyn Rees Williams.
PAGDC.