

Ross Masonic Club



Supporting Local Freemasons

The Craftsmen

Week Commencing 7th September 2020

Issue Number Twenty Three

Welcome to the twenty third edition of the Ross Masonic Club Weekly Round-Up.

A great big thank you to all of our contributors to this issue. There are some articles which must have taken a lot of time and effort to send in which is most appreciated. I hope that it has been therapeutic to write as much as it will be enjoyable to read! This newsletter is after all a team effort.

This week we begin what we hope will be a new ongoing feature called 'When I Were A Lad'. Please send in a picture of you as a child with some publishable words or a childhood tale.

Other items in this issue. We remind you of Dennis' question for 'Would I Know, Did I Know'. Patrick and Harry continue the story of their varied careers. We also have a couple of short articles sent in by Geraint on the history in Ross in Wye and Nigel tells us about his wood turning.

All thoughts and suggestions for future articles welcomed.

Please keep your input coming with, once again, a special thank you to all those that contributed.

Keep safe Brethren and keep in contact.



Keeping in Contact and Staying Sharp



Facebook

We have set up a Facebook Group for Ross Masonic Club. We currently have 28 members across the Lodges and Chapter. Any members of Lodges or Chapter that meet at Ross Masonic Hall are welcome to join in.

More opportunities to Zoom together



If you have not previously joined in, we now have a meeting that starts earlier on a Friday at 7:30pm as well as the 8:45pm meeting for the 9 o'clock toast.

You can come and go during these times as you please.

It's simple to setup and Billy can help with support if you need it.

Last week we were joined by the PGM / MEGS and the DPGM with a bumper attendance from the Brethren and Companions.

We will be back to our normal 7:30pm kick off next Friday.



Would I know the answer? / Did I know the answer?

Don't forget the question in last week's issue from Dennis:

'What is the significance of the Rough and Smooth Ashlars and what do they symbolise?'

You can always check your thoughts by visiting 'Solomon' of course! <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

By Dennis Roberts - Group Leader Information and Guidance Group e-mail: roberts.greeba@btinternet.com

'When I Were A Lad'

A new feature which we hope we can run over a few weeks

Please send in your pictures of you as a child and tell us what has changed over the years. Either a scanned image or take a picture of the photo with your phone and send it in with a few words of description. Just for a laugh - nothing too serious!



Andrew and a monkey
Andrew is the one on the left

This is me (i'm the one on the left) November 1968 in Selfridges store Oxford Street London. I would have been 3 years old.

Every year my mum would take me to see Father Christmas, a very elaborate affair in those days but I mainly remember queuing for what seemed like hours.

To keep the children amused there were various sideshows en-route. In 1968 this obviously involved a poor monkey and yes, it is real and I can't promise any monkeys were not harmed in the process, even if that was just mentally.

I have a slightly apprehensive look. I am not sure about the monkey as I don't speak monkey, but he appears to not be particularly enthused with the process. No doubt I was the umpteenth child he'd had awkwardly holding him that day.

Over time the scars healed and I think we both had an enjoyable Christmas apart. I cannot remember if the present at the end of the journey was worth it for either of us.

Unfortunately the monkey and I lost touch over the years.

It may not be widely known that years ago Ross had its own racecourse, where official races under National Hunt rules were staged, i.e. the equivalent of racecourses such as Hereford and Chepstow today.

The course was at Moor Meadow, which is the flood meadow between the A40 and the River Wye, which one passes immediately after leaving Wilton on the way to Monmouth.

The course was roughly circular within the "U" shape the river makes at this point. A contemporary commentator notes, "The going in bad weather is very heavy".

Passing the flooded fields in winter, one thinks that "choppy" might be a better description of the going! At least the course was all grass, whereas other racecourses at that time sometimes incorporated stretches of plough.

There is a report of steeplechasing at Ross in 1836, making it one of the earliest established venues for jump racing. However, use of the course seems to have been intermittent, perhaps because of its liability to flooding.

The Craftsmen Newsletter

Ross Races Revisited

Words and Image contributed by Geraint Bevan



There were races between 1897 and 1905, and then a revival in 1921 and 1922 but the 29th September of that year saw the last ever fixture, although the site was subsequently used for trotting races.

The standard of racing and the prize money seem to have been on the low side - in 1921 each race was worth £58 to the winner - but the fixtures did attract some famous racing names.

One was a gentleman who rejoiced in the name of The Hon. Aubrey Craven Theophilus Robin Hood Hastings.

He trained four Grand National winners, riding one of them himself. At a 1902 Ross meeting he won two races with the same horse, winning a hurdle race and then an hour later a steeplechase. Racehorses were evidently bred to be tough in those days.

Patrick Eyre continues to recount his career moves. *There's more than one way to earn a living Part 7*

For those of you who read this stuff, I intended to talk about the concrete conveyor and the sales drive connected to it. However, I have got ahead of myself and so far I have managed to keep things in order and as such I will come to the conveyor situation later, if I may.

General sales were continuing to improve on all the German company's products in Hatfield and this helped my confidence in the way I could deal with my customers - potential or otherwise. In other words the freedom of few financial restraints on how I dealt with each individual client. If I felt that it would improve the chance of me doing a deal with perhaps a repeat order I could invite him to visit the factories in Germany or France without having to clear it first with my MD. It would entail a return flight from say, Heathrow to Stuttgart, hotel accommodation etc. and car hire. Not cheap but I always had the benefit of a very generous expense account.

There were several occasions when a trip to a building site on the other side of the channel to show a customer first hand a machine actually working would warrant hiring a light aircraft. We would fly from a small airfield near Denham which had a customs post.

It would be in a twin engine six/four seater Beechcraft. A local plant hire company had three such aircraft, which they hired out quite cheaply, and depending on the customer I would sometimes suggest this mode of getting there and back in a day as it saved the company money. I did encourage it in fact as it meant I would be sleeping in my own bed that night, instead of a hotel.

This bed was back in Maidenhead in the Thames Valley, where I married and had my children and I always thought of it as home. My MD had agreed to pay for the move from Matlock as it was nearer the office.



The Beechcraft was a very comfortable aircraft which could land almost anywhere. There would always be a senior executive from the factory to meet us on landing, to drive us to where we needed to be, and always kindly paid for the lunch!!

I was covering most of the UK in my efforts to increase sales on both concrete truck mixers and ready-mixed plants and had obtained an order for a very large plant as well as six truck mixers in Glasgow. The fact that we had a depot near Edinburgh had helped secure the deal and I was driven to cover as much of Scotland as possible. In this regard I had much success and secured sales in places such as Fort William and as far north as Inverness. On the North West coast a batching plant paid for by the EU, to build a bridge across a river to replace a ferry.

Following some research into the Irish market I knew there would be some untapped business opportunities there and thought it a good move to appoint a suitable agent for my products in the country's ready/mixed market, if I could find such a person or organisation to make this possible. I made contact with a gentleman owning a small company re-blading and repairing concrete truck mixers located in County Antrim, and agreed to meet him at Belfast airport. In those days it was known as Aldergrove and much different to what it is today.

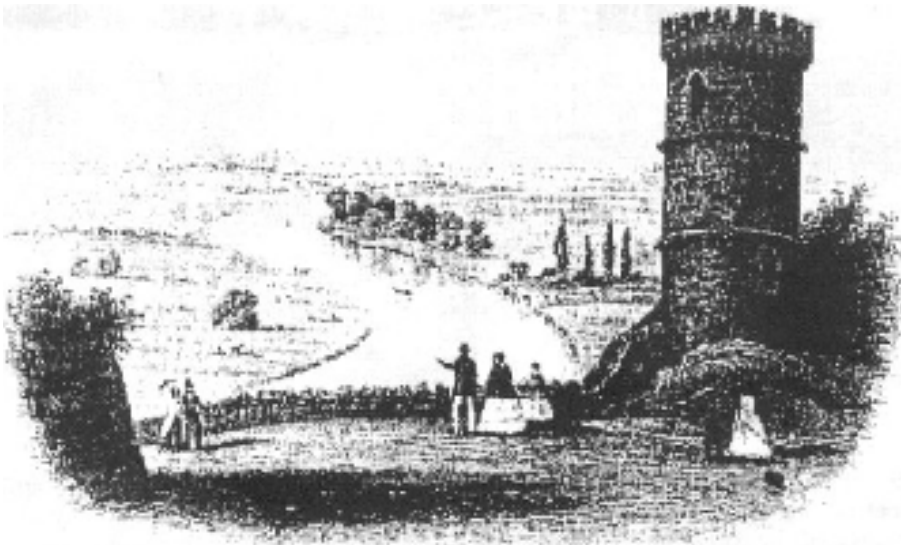
British Airways operated a shuttle service from Heathrow to Belfast and catching the first flight out, and walking through the aircraft door the first person I saw was the Reverend Ian Paisley.

Sitting next to him probably his minder, certainly got all my thoughts racing.

As arranged at the exit of the terminal I was greeted by the gentleman I was supposed to meet holding up a plaque with my name on it. When we settled into his car he reminded me to put my seat belt on, and when I questioned why he was not wearing his he remarked he was 'carrying'. On the exit road out of the airport were several severe speed bumps and close by armed soldiers behind sandbags. Reaching the polled exit my driver was challenged by armed police. My driver we will call him 'Michael' wound down his window and said 'Councillor Michael Mc'Iver and I'm carrying' before reaching into his pocket for his ID. They replied with 'Have a good day sir'. I have no wish to dwell on this but in the following days it happened so many times, and it's exactly how it was out there and had a significant effect on how I would conduct my future plans for Northern Ireland.

Michael then went on to explain he was a County Councillor who was licensed to carry a side arm for his own and family's protection. My secretary had booked me into a hotel but he insisted I should stay in his home which turned out to be a large house' part of which was the local post office, and close to a petrol station which he also owned. Most of his grown up family lived in the village and they all joined us for the evening meal. Before we all sat down his eldest daughter removed her father's jacket, and hung it along with his shoulder harness and pistol on a hook behind the door. To be perfectly honest I was not phased by this rather bizarre procedure. Having served with the infantry in peacekeeping operations I was quite used to carrying a gun myself. They were such nice and friendly people and I took to them straight away. Before and after dinner we had much to talk about and I was left with the impression he was a man I could trust and do business with.

The Gazebo Tower - an extract from the Ross-on-Wye & District Civic Society newsletter Spring 2001, sourced by Geraint Bevan



Gazebo Tower, Steel Engraving Circa 1852

One of the most striking features in Ross is now known as the Gazebo Tower, and in 2001 was up for sale for a guide line price of £40,000. In the sale particulars it is described as “a Grade II listed building constructed in 1833 as a viewing tower for the popular tourist market town.” The tower is built of red sandstone and contains three floors approached by vertical ladders leading to a viewing platform at the top.

During the 1830s Ross became ‘thoroughly and expensively medievalised’ continuing John Kyrle’s ‘public-mindedness’ in beautifying the town and surrounding landscape. These developments were carried out by the Town Improvement Commissioners and the Turnpike Trustees who succeeded in transforming the western approach

into Ross when the new Wilton Road and the road up to Barrett’s Royal Hotel were carved out of the sandstone cliff. Presumably the surplus stone was used to construct the mock-gothic stone walls with arrow slits and oriels terminating in the Gazebo Tower.

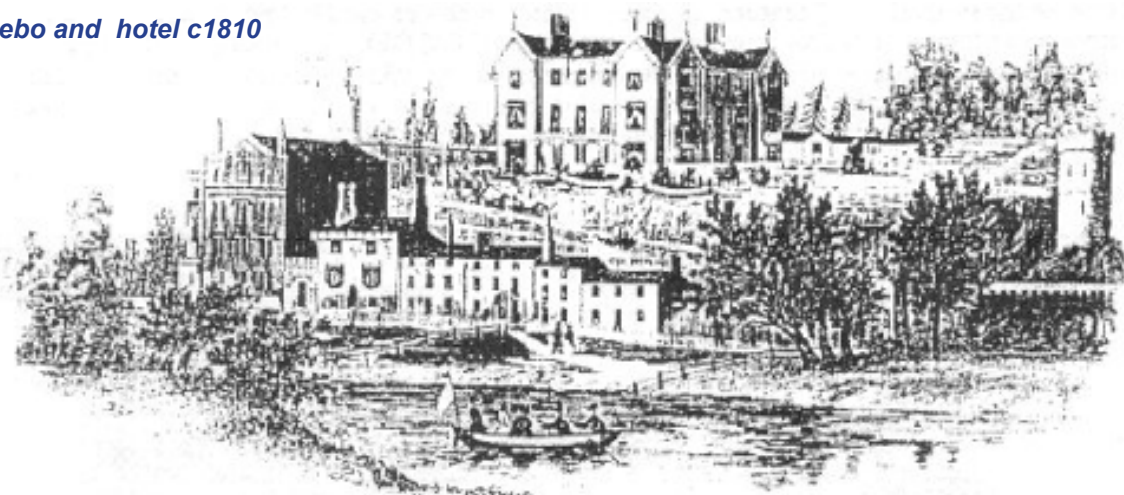
There is pictorial and documentary evidence of two other towers built at this period, one below the Royal Hotel and the other opposite Swan House. It is interesting to consider whether these three 19th century towers had any connection with three towers that stood on Bishop’s Court in 1696. They were sufficiently important to have keys and be kept in repair during John Kyrle’s lifetime.

In 1838, the Gazebo was referred to as ‘Mr. Collins Tower’. J. S. Collins worked as an attorney in Upper Church Street and served as a Town Commissioner and a Turnpike Trustee. When the Collins family sold ‘Palace Pound’ house with its “substantially-built Tower, Castellated Buildings, Parapets and Walls” in 1906 the Gazebo was called ‘Palace Pound Tower’. Around the same date it was also known as ‘Castle Tower’ or ‘Royal Tower’. By the 1950s the local historian Winifred Leeds called the Gazebo the ‘Round Tower’ and wrote “In the days of the Ross Volunteers it was known as the Armoury as their equipment was housed there. Of late it has been used as an Arts and Crafts shop and is in private hands, though there is every probability that it may soon be acquired by the Town Council and put into thorough repair.”

In 1959, it was the owner of Palace Pound Cottage who “gave the tower, together with some feet of land for access” to the Ross Town Council as she felt “the ownership and maintenance of the tower should be vested more appropriately in the community.” In the hands of the council the tower became known as the ‘Bishop’s Tower’ in tourist guides, and the tower continued to be used for arts and crafts exhibitions until around 1980.

Since then the Gazebo has remained empty but “major repairs were effected on the Tower by the Local Authority in the late 1990s.” The town now awaits a future sympathetic use for this famous landmark.

Gazebo and hotel c1810



Wood turning when I'm not mending bats!

By Nigel Donovan

Having grown up surrounded by wood, a joinery business and a shed full of building materials, it never occurred to me that there were people not surrounded with these things! It was no surprise that at school I excelled and loved "woodwork" and when not on the sports field, the woodwork shop was where I would be found. I studied the furniture industry at college and produced some beautiful pieces of furniture which are still in service today. That was all a long time ago, before I got onto life's merry go round of employment, with several different careers emerging as we went along.

Having started repairing cricket bats 5 or 6 years ago, this rekindled my love of working with wood and it was not long before I spotted a "returned" lathe at our local Mecca of woodworking equipment, Toolite in Mitcheldean. It was being offered at a ridiculously low price and I "couldn't not buy it". Anyone considering such a purchase should be made aware that the lathe itself is probably the cheapest part of the wood turning "jigsaw", it is the rest of the equipment that continues to drain the bank account.



We start with a "big lump" of wood (top left) then make it progressively smaller till it is the size we require.

Wood turning as an individual discipline is an incredibly therapeutic exercise, giving rapid reward for the relatively small amount of time it takes to convert a piece of wood into hopefully, something beautiful, useful and sometimes, even saleable. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the art of wood turning, you will all, at sometime in your life have made use of turned pieces of wood, from rolling pins (something your wife uses in the kitchen!) to chair legs, stair baluster spindles etc., the list is endless. Probably the most common turned items you will see are wooden bowls and vases, turned from lumps of solid wood generally known as "blanks". The blanks are usually prepared down to a manageable size, reasonably balanced so that when mounted on the lathe, they do not shake it apart!



Two lathes back to back

The lathe itself has a rigid bed which one on end has a motor mounted and the other a static centre, which adjusts to the length of the blank. The motor should have a variable speed which can be adjusted to accommodate the size of the wood mounted, the larger the piece, the slower the speed of rotation required. The wooden blank is then "shaved down" using different types of chisels and gouges which are used dependent on the direction you are working with the wood, either across or in the direction of the grain. The shape created is really just what you "see" unless, of course, you are working to a design or specification, this is what brings out the artist in you. Many hours of practice go into perfecting the skills, and an awful lot of sawdust and shavings can be created trying! Frequently, you will find something that started out as a foot long and four inches in diameter

can soon end up being three inches long and an inch across, this is called "learning"!

For my part, I really enjoy taking a "raw lump of tree" and converting it all the way through to a finished article, whatever it may be. The market for turning kits is huge and there are all sorts of accessories available to make such things as pens, clocks, bottle openers and stoppers. The finished items can be whatever you want them to be, but it is how you finish them off which is the make or break of a nice project. As much time can be spent finishing an item well as is spent making it.



My collection of turning chisels and gouges, they don't come cheap

If anyone would like an introductory lesson to wood turning and to have a go, please feel free to ask, I'm always happy to see people enjoying themselves (and drink beer with them). There is much more to follow this brief comment on wood turning, but that is for another day. To see some of the fruits of my labours, visit Facebook, Instagram or our Etsy shop @woodcraftbydonovan. Just search woodcraftbydonovan, drop me an email or give me a call if I can be of any help.



Some bought in bowl blanks

Harry's in Hot Water! (Part V)

The further adventures of Harry Holwell

We left Jersey to commence our journey to the East. Our first port of call was to be Madeira. This was to refuel and spend a few days to take in the sights. This was the start of a voyage that would take us to the far side of the world and away from my wife. I didn't find this easy. Having spent a few days in Madeira we continued onto Bathurst in The Gambia. This was to carry out a survey on the approaches to Bathurst. This is one of the ways in which we spent our foreign aid budget and assisting past colonies and members of the Commonwealth.

We arrived in Bathurst, a place I had not been to before. It was a small holiday resort used mainly by Swedes. We were to spend six weeks here on the survey. We had also agreed to pinpoint and mark a sunken buoy in one of the approaches to Bathurst. We would have the same work routine. Out at dawn on Monday morning and back in at midday Saturday. Again we would launch our two launches each day for independent inshore surveys. On one of these days the diving team aboard took our equipment. We located the sunken buoy with our depth finder. We then dived on it to establish its closest point to the surface. We also attached a marker buoy to it so that others coming after us could recover it. One sad memory I have of Bathurst was that I lost a Rolex watch in its harbour. I was leaning on the guardrail and the strap clasp broke. The watch dropped over the side into the sea. We were alongside and there was a small pontoon between ship and shore. I obtained permission and dived to recover the watch. As soon as I got under the ship I realised my quest was in vain as there was a really strong current and also deep mud on the seabed. I did search but had no luck.

We finished the survey a set sail for our next port of call. This was Cape Town. We remained there for a few days and then sailed on to Mombasa. Another quick visit before going forward to our destination on the Seychelles.

We were to carry out the beginnings of a survey to the approaches to Port Victoria, Mahe, the main port of the island group.

The reason for this survey was that a couple of years before, a naval fleet auxiliary ship the RFA Ennerdale, a large dry goods ship. It had left Port Victoria, sailed about 8 miles out and then struck an underwater uncharted pinnacle. The ship sank some four hours later.

All the triangulation stations had been set up prior our arrival. We commenced our survey immediately. We quickly fell into our survey routine Monday through Saturday with our two launches out working daily. The Indian Ocean has a swell of long rolling waves for a good part of the year. It is not uncomfortable but you know you are at sea. We quickly fell into a routine. At the weekend we would go ashore. We had a doctor onboard and for a good part of our six month stay in the Seychelles he would stay ashore and work in the local hospital. We formed a relationship with people onshore and the local rugby team. We played the same team every Sunday morning with a ships team. It wasn't premier league but it was good fun.

Whilst we were surveying we split the full survey up into sections. It was a massive area to do and it was going to take us and HMS Bulldog a year to carry this out. Our first part was going to take six months. We would travel up and down lines out to the Continental Shelf where the sea would go from a couple of hundred feet deep to thousands of feet. The survey stopped at this point. We also found that on this shelf a large number of very large tuna fish gathered. We bought some large hooks, 6", with feathers ashore, put on a long wire trace and then onto some polypropylene rope we had onboard. We streamed this over the stern over a small boat's davit placed there.

As we got to this continental shelf turn around we would on most occasions catch a large 80 to 100 pound tuna fish. Bearing in mind we were travelling at about 5 knots. It would take four or five of us to haul them in. We filled our ships freezers with tuna.

One of the other perks of this location was that the Seychelles group consisted of more than 90 islands. A lot were uninhabited. At the weekends if not on duty we would head out to Beau Vallon beach. It was beautiful on the main island. This was before the main airport opened so there were not very many tourists there. We made the most of it. Some weekends we would sail to one of the islands, anchor off and then use the island for the weekend, barbecue, and have fun. During this survey we would also leave one man ashore on Mahe. We had an automatic tide reading station ashore. The one left ashore would stay in a local bed and breakfast, get the tide readings daily and pass the hourly readings to the ship each evening. Oh I forgot the ship also carried a short wheelbase Landrover. This was landed on the island and the man ashore was able to use it if he could drive.

Once every couple of weeks we would have a day's diving. We would take one of the launches, go off for the day and dive on all the shallow pinnacles or other points that been picked up on our survey to establish the shallowest point. On one of these dives we dived on the Ennerdale to do this. This was one of the most beautiful places to dive. Visibility generally was really good. There were lots of large fish including sharks to see. They would leave you alone and generally stay clear of you. We generally carried out our survey tasks 24hrs a day with the occasional break away to one of the islands. We looked forward to our weekends in Port Victoria and the Sunday rugby match. This is all for now till the next episode.

Next week - The rescue of a Chinese fishing crew.