



## **The Duke of Wellington, a Freemason**

WBro Lt Cdr Stephen Dudley LGR  
Wellington College, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Most Worshipful Pro Grand Master, Worshipful Master and distinguished brethren all, it is an honour to be asked to address you today, but also a challenge. Not only in this place and this year and this company. Father Tim's thought-provoking address in that splendid Chapel service and Col Orpen-Smellie's brilliant address on the Battle of Waterloo would be hard enough to follow without the additional knowledge that our guests are already attacking the champagne with the verve and effect of Soye's brigade at Hougemont. I must therefore remind you that you are all here of you *own free will and accord* (!).

I look forward over the festive board later to opening with you all the old controversies about Napoleon's health, Gneisenau's marching order and what on earth Grouchy was thinking of, let us, therefore, in the manner traditional among Masons, take the battle as read!

Our focus for the next few minutes is private (and in this memorial year of celebrations unique in the country) – to remember the Duke as a Mason: Shockingly, I must ask you to join me breaking one of those proofs of obedience with which we were charged at Initiation – by abstaining from every topic of political or religious discussion. But fear not, this will be firmly a UKIP and SNP-free zone. And, whilst we must nod in acknowledgement to the shade of Sir Robert Peel for the excitements and upsets of the party system at the recent Election, for which he must take the blame (or credit) it is the unpartisan rather than the Tory Duke that I wish to examine.

The Honorable Capt. Wesley was admitted a member of Lodge No. 494 held in Trim but now in Dublin on the seventh day of December 1790.

I was neither surprised nor disappointed to learn that Wellington never sat in the Chair of King Solomon: it became clear to me that he was so absorbed with doing as he put it, *"the business of the day in the day"* – indeed he tended to rise at 5 in peace and war saying - *"when it is time to turn over it is time to turn out"*, that he simply never had time. We are fortunate that with the speed of travel and modern communication we may have very busy lives, but are spared much of the inconvenience of living in the saddle with which our forefathers had to contend.

On 31 December 1852 the Freemasons' Quarterly Magazine and Review reported verbatim Lord Combermere's words, addressed to the Brethren in October that year:

*"Perhaps it is not generally known that the Duke of Wellington was a mason; he was made in Ireland; and often when in Spain, where Masonry was prohibited, in conversation, he regretted repeatedly how sorry he was his military duties had prevented him taking the active part his feelings dictated."*

His Benevolence is widely recorded. He kept sovereigns in a special purse to give to ex-servicemen (there were three in it when he died), and characteristically he took former Sergeant Townshend on, on the spur of the moment as head gardener at Walmer castle in Kent. When the former soldier protested that he knew nothing of gardening the Duke responded *"Neither do I, Neither do I"*

Despite being plagued with innumerable sittings for busts and portraits – over 100 artists - he eventually gave in to the brilliant but unhappy Benjamin Hayden, even inviting him to stay at Walmer for the purpose (Sir Thomas Lawrence was not invited to stay at Stratfield Saye). Although the result is striking (Wellington musing on the field of Waterloo – and worth looking up), I suspect the Duke was rather more swayed by the needs of Haydon's six children than the concept. On hearing of the artist's suicide, he sent a servant to retrieve his hat from the studio.

He introduced his friend Don Miguel Ricardo de Álava (who holds the distinction of having been present at Trafalgar, Vitoria and Waterloo - fighting against the British on the former and with them on the latter) to his banker with the words *"This is my friend, and as long as I*

*have any money with your house, let him have it to any amount he thinks proper to draw for”*

He re-invested much of the income from his estate in Hampshire in improving conditions for the tenants (including buying them each a patent stove), and he ceased protecting the game there, after a keeper was killed following a struggle with a poacher saying all the pheasants in the world were not worth a human life.

Towards the end of his life he was a great mentor and friend to the celebrated beauty and philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts, and although she proposed to him despite his being so many years his senior, they remained friends. After the death of his wife, Harriet, Charles Arbuthnot came and lived with the Duke, the two widowers united in their sadness at her loss.

Elizabeth Longford considered him cold and aloof – having experienced a distant father in his own youth. But if his son Lord Douro felt this it must have been mostly the problem of growing up in the shadow of greatness, knowing that he would one day succeed – as he put it *“the Duke of Wellington would be announced and only I would enter”* His many friendships, and extensive and warm correspondence show that the Duke was not aloof, but reserved and he treated the cheers and the hisses of the masses (with which he was never comfortable) just the same. When the throng lauded him it was *“For pity’s sake, people, let me get to my horse!”* when they barred his passage during the trial of Queen Caroline for adultery it demanding that he say God bless the queen – it was *“God Bless the queen – and may all your wives be like her!”* Indeed he greeted the breaking of the windows at Apsley House with the same reserve that he acknowledged the long ovation of the members of Oxford University when he was elected Chancellor – although he did fit iron shutters to Apsley House.

Another Masonic precept is that of duty – and if one had to pick only one word to describe his priority this would be it. When his Dispatches were published somebody deprecated that there was barely a mention of Glory, and yet duty was mentioned on every page. He responded that for the French soldier Glory was the aim, but for the British it was the result. He answered all his letters personally (even if he did rather take to prepared lithograph responses later on),

Most famously he put principle above prejudice and for the sake of the nation and despite his own religious beliefs pushed through Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Although strongly opposed to Reform – because his memories of the French revolution and distrust of the mob were so strong, he stepped aside in 1832 to allow Earl to Grey to form the government that eventually pushed the measure through. He was no fan of the worst abuses of the rotten boroughs and himself declined the offer of a pocket Borough. In an echo of our own time was the sort of people likely to represent the new constituencies (like Manchester) whose judgement he mistrusted. As he put it when he saw the new MPs “*You never saw so many shocking bad hats in your life!*”

When I spoke here on a previous occasion on the theme of Remembrance I draw an image from my own avocation – the sea. I suggested that we pass through life and leave a wake behind us – a glittering phosphorescent swathe. As my knowledge of the Craft and the world has grown, I now see that I was mistaken. We may pass through Time, but we are made a part of History.

Why are we Masons? As the world becomes more secular, and materialistic, we cling to the landmarks and virtues of an order that since time immemorial has taught us that men alone are nothing, except as part of a whole. One needs neither Minister nor Church nor Congregation to pray to our Divine Creator, but a Lodge cannot be holden, nor can any society exist, unless good men come together to work in harmony and unity to the design of the Great Architect. In this sense men are blocks whose value in the structure comes only when they are taking the weight and supporting one another. Blocks, not bricks – for despite recent evidence in public life of some being half-baked – we are first rough-hewn and then chiselled and shaped by education and endeavour until we are fitting for the hand of the more expert workman.

Rarely does one find oneself with the perfect visual aid pre-positioned (including the tracing boards!). I should like to draw your attention to the copy of Franz Winterhalter’s rather saccharine scene in the East.

Here we have a Picture of a Sovereign and two Field marshals and a (future) Grand Master (admittedly here in a state of darkness). Why is this picture important? It commemorates a

single day 1 May 1851 which sums up all that we have been discussing. Here is deaf old Duke uncharacteristically in Field Marshal's uniform, (He wore a plain blue coat at Waterloo) on his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday giving a present on his first birthday to his Godson Prince Arthur Duke of Connaught whilst an adoring Victoria and a dyspeptic Prince Albert look on. I must digress briefly about Winterhalter's picture – not only does it not do Prince Albert justice, but it later caused embarrassment when the Prince asked what had happened to the casket. Queen Victoria had to admit that the casket had been put in for aesthetic reasons because the practical duke had actually given a gold cup and toys for a first birthday. This neatly mirrors Wellington's demand that Sir Thomas Lawrence replace the watch in his portrait. *"I was not waiting for the Prussians to arrive – paint a telescope in my hand if you please"*. That picture (the original, not a copy) can be seen in Big School – the memorial to those OWs who gave their lives for their Country.

What I really wanted to point out RH corner is the Crystal Palace – that day saw the opening of the Great Exhibition. This was huge cultural as well as engineering achievement. It is characteristic of that positive, progressive, scientific and supremely confident approach to the future of the Victorian Age. The courage and conviction to work to make the world better. Indeed it is characteristic of Prince Albert too that the national memorial to the duke should not consist of scattered statues but this College: – an institution of learning and leadership.

The duke was a great innovator himself – not least in his invention of a boot, and innumerable raincoats and a sword umbrella. He was also refused entry to the exclusive Almack's Club because he was wearing trousers, and as he always preferred to shave himself, was also an early adopter of the safety razor. He was instrumental in the introduction of the Police – although Peel got the credit: we might otherwise have not "Bobbies" or "Peelers" but "Arthurs" or "Wellies"! Although initially sceptical about the thinness of the glass and famous for his proposed solution to the problem of sparrows, at the Crystal Palace, he became such a frequent visitor to the Exhibition that on one occasion he had to be rescued from the crush by the police when he himself attracted the interest of the crowds and became a virtual exhibit.

Wellington was a man firmly of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, was suspicious of change and reform, but remained so clear-eyed and calm in a political crisis as on the battlefield that his judgement

and honesty were respected by his opponents as well as his friends. When Queen Victoria went to pay her respects to his body lying in state in the Royal Hospital Chelsea, she was so overcome with grief that she couldn't cross the room.

It is Elizabeth Longford's contention that he did his best work in parliament, and not the battlefield, but it takes a man like Richard Holmes to bring this statement fully to life, because he had experience of battle and soldiers that Lady Longford never did, but with a beautiful serendipity and unknowingly, she called the second volume of her biography – Pillar of the state. How fitting for a Mason!

Next month the nation will celebrate the glorious achievement (and the terrible cost) of a battle that redefined Europe and the man who led a mishmash of allied forces to do it. In this place of brotherly love, quiet, and contemplation we remember the Duke not for the outward glories of the world but for those qualities of mind and character that set him apart as a man and a member of our ancient and honourable institution. To quote: *so that when anyone is said to be a member of it, the world may know that he is one to whom the burdened heart may pour forth its sorrow, to whom the distressed may prefer their suit, whose hand is guided by justice, and whose heart is expanded by benevolence.*

Brethren, please be upstanding. To order. Let us raise our thoughts and hearts to the Great Architect and ask...

*May we measure our actions by the rule of rectitude, square our conduct by the principles of morality, and guide our inclinations, and even our thoughts, within the compass of propriety. May we learn to be meek, humble and resigned; to be faithful to our God, our Country, and our Laws and in honouring the memory of our Brother Arthur ever follow his example and thus lay up a Crown of Joy and Rejoicing which will continue when time with us shall be no more.*

SMIB

Thank you.