

Thomson Family, Eyemouth and Freemasonry

Origins

This story starts its journey some 71 years ago when my mum's family, her parents and two elder brothers would travel South down the East Coast of Scotland to go on their annual holiday to the small fishing village of Eyemouth.

At the age of 5, my mum would spend either one week or two weeks under canvas with her family. In the beginning their family were one of three families camping under canvas and about 12 caravans in the farmer's field.

This field was shared by George the bull, who was more like a pet and never bothered anyone on the campsite other than to be fussed like a pet dog.

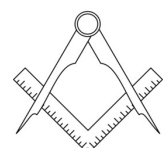
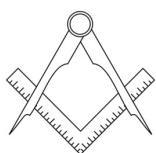
Moving on some 12 years when our mum turned 17 in early May, she soon met our dad in the same month and by July of the same year, our dad was invited to go on the family holiday to Eyemouth.

By this time, our mum's family had left the canvas behind and resided in a caravan with my dad taking up lodging in the local bed and breakfast.

Our parents soon got married and in October 1969 I was born followed by David in December 1971.

It wasn't long until our parents introduced my brother and I to Eyemouth along with our pet dog, Major, who along with us would be in the sea water and playing on the beach from morning until night or, when the tides came in.

As my brother and I got older and we had kids of our own, they too were introduced to Eyemouth on numerous day trips. Our kids are now the fourth generation to go to Eyemouth and play on the beach where David and I would play, and my mum and her brothers would play when they were kids.



Background on Eyemouth

The historic town of Eyemouth, 5 miles north of the border with England, boasts a natural harbour and fine coastal scenery.

Fishing at Eyemouth dates back to the 13th century and the harbour is still active with its colourful fleet. Like other coastal communities in the 18th century, smuggling was rife amidst the clusters of houses, narrow wynds, caves and underground tunnels. The solitary mansion of Gunsreen House on the south side of the harbour was at the centre of this illicit trade in wine, spirits, tea and tobacco. It has been a visitor attraction since 2009.

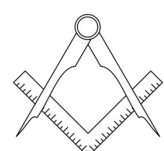
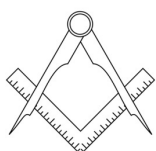
In the 19th century the industry flourished on the basis of haddock and herring fishing, but the port suffered a devastating blow on the 14th of October 1881. A storm wrecked the fishing fleet and 189 fishermen, 129 from Eyemouth alone, were drowned, many within sight of the shore. The local museum illustrates the town's history, with a 15-ft tapestry commemorating the disaster.

Highlights of the town's calendar are the Herring Queen Festival in July and the Lifeboat Weekend in August. The popular Berwickshire Coastal Path passes through Eyemouth en-route from Berwick to St Abbs.

The Harbour



If you want to find out more about this fishing village, visit <https://www.visitscotland.com/info/towns-villages/eyemouth-p242461>



Masonic Lodge at Eyemouth

The masonic lodge at Eyemouth is St Ebbe No70. The lodge foundation stone was laid on the 2nd of May 1758 and the consecration of the temple on 15th October 1759.

An Ancient Scottish Lodge Lodge St. Ebbe No. 70, Mother Lodge which is in the Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lothian and Berwickshire on the Roll of the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

When my brother and I were kids in the 70's and early 80's, we would still go on holiday to Eyemouth and in the evening, we would walk the dog around the village and harbour and even up onto the cliffs and campsite.

Some nights whilst out walking, we would get a bag of chips from the chip shop, wrapped in newspaper, full of salt and vinegar and sit on the seats just outside the lodge entrance. On occasion, my brother and I would ask about the masons and my dad would reply and say..... one day you may walk through the door of a masonic lodge like the one at St.Ebbe and become a mason.

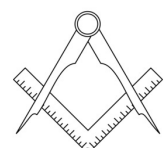
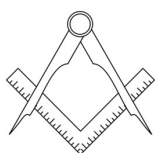
Our dad would point at the door and in a metaphorical sense, not that door but one closer to home where there was a masonic lodge.



The lodge sits on an appropriate road designated by the sign above.

The lodge door our dad would point to whilst we were eating our chips.

As kids, our heads are full of adventure and with not a care in the world, we would never give this matter a second thought until both my brother and I were older.



Joining the Craft

Now living in Shotts, an ex-mining town situated between Glasgow and Edinburgh, the time had come to approach my dad about becoming a freemason. As my dad's mother lodge was Bothwell Brig 1229 meeting in Hamilton, it was logistically unfeasible for me to join his lodge as I was 18 and still in my apprenticeship and no transport of my own.

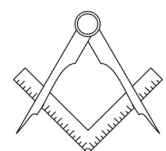
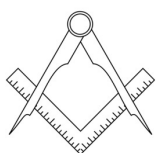
As my dad had frequented Lodge St John Shotts 471 on several occasions when his shift as a Police Sergeant allowed, the stage was set for me to join.

The usual protocols were met, interviews undertaken and by the second Thursday in November 1988, I was made a master mason.

By early 1998, several master masons were inducted as mark master masons under the charter of the lodge and Grand Lodge of Scotland.

In those days, Lodge StJohn Stotts 471 would meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month but, the peculiar part is the fact that our Lodge would be invited out to other lodges to carry out the degree work on their candidate(s). In a single week, we could find ourselves carrying out a first, second and third degree.

As my brother David got older, the masonic bug got him as well and he joined Wilsontown Ironworks St Johns Lodge 236.



Natural progression in other orders in Scotland

The natural progression through the orders of freemasonry in Scotland is to join the Royal Arch after you have achieved master mason status and/or mark master mason status in a craft lodge.

When joining the Royal Arch, you affiliate to the mark master masons lodge under the warrant of that particular Royal Arch chapter and under the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland as long as you are and can prove you are a mark master mason.

The affiliation is a short degree followed by the first part of progression which is the excellent Masters.

Should you not possess your mark degree held under a craft lodge, the companions of the Royal Arch Chapter will open under the banner of a Mark Master Masons Lodge and confer the full Mark degree on the initiate.

When you progress through the various positions within the Royal Arch and reach the position of First Principal, before this part of the ceremony, the candidate is put through the full installation ceremony as an installed Mark Master and placed in the chair as the Mark Master of that Lodge under the warrant and charter of the Chapter and the Grand Chapter of Scotland.

This allows any first principal to don their past Mark Master Jewel and Royal Arch Regalia to any Mark Lodge throughout the world as an installed Mark Master.

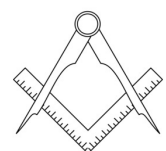
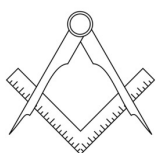
My brother and late father are installed Mark Masters in their own right under in St Cuthberts Mark Master Masons Lodge N0.192.

Freemasonry and Robbie Burns

During the last quarter of the 18th Century, Freemasonry was at the height of its popularity. To the Age of Enlightenment, its tenets seemed to promise brotherhood and intellectual equality. Scholars, philosophers, gentlemen, farmers and tradesmen were Masons in Scotland.

The famous Scottish Poet, Robert (Robbie) Burns was a Mason from 1781 until his death. He was initiated on 4th July 1781, in St David's Lodge, No, 174, Tarbolton. He was passed and raised in the same Lodge on 1st October 1781. Less than a year later, the old members of St James's Kilwinning Lodge — which had amalgamated with St David's — broke away, seized the effects of the St James's Lodge, and reopened it. Burns was among those concerned in the disruption who went over to St James's. He was elected Depute Master of St James's on 27th July 1784, a position he held for 4 years.

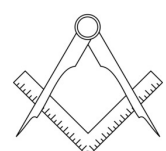
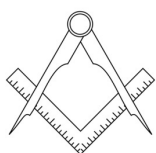
It was partly because of his Masonic connections that Burns was so widely received when he arrived in Edinburgh in 1786. For among his fellow masons in Ayrshire were Sir John Whiteford, James Dalrymple of Orangefield, Sheriff Wallace of Ayr, Gavin Hamilton, the Provost of Ayr, John Ballantine, Professor Dugald Stewart, Dr John Mackenzie of Mauchline, William Parker of Kilmarnock and many others; among the less exalted brothers were the tailor, Alexander Wood, James Humphrey the 'noisy polemic' and John Wilson, the schoolmaster.



When he reached the capital, Burns was made a member of Canongate Kilwinning Lodge No 2 Edinburgh. An apparently quite baseless tradition alleges that members also made him their Poet Laureate. Among the members of this Lodge were Lord Elcho, Lord Torphichen, the Earl of Eglinton, the Earl of Glencairn, Patrick Miller of Dalswinton, Lord Pitsligo, Alexander Cunningham, the lawyer, William Nicol the schoolmaster, William Creech the publisher, Henry Mackenzie the lawyer and author, and Alexander Nasmyth the painter.

Burns received honorary membership from Loudoun Kilwinning, at Newmilns, on 27th March 1786, and from St John's Kilwinning, Kilmarnock, on 26th October 1786. In company with Ainslie, Burns received the Royal Arch degree from Land of Cakes Royal Arch Chapter NO.15 held in the building of St Ebbe Lodge No 70, on 19th May 1787, at Eyemouth. On 27th December 1791, when he had moved to Dumfries, Burns became a member of St Andrew's Lodge No 179. He was elected Senior Warden in 1792. He last visited this lodge three months before his death.

Wherever you go in Scotland, most towns will have a plaque somewhere saying that Burns stopped there on one of his journeys, or that he is believed to have penned a poem or song within a certain hostelry. On 19th May 1787, Robert Burns and his good friend Robert Ainslie came to the Temple in Eyemouth and were made Royal Arch Masons. Confirmation of which is shown in the plaque below.



Through the door



So, although many masons have stepped through this door over the years, it was not until the early 2000's that my dad and I, under invitation, stepped through the door to visit companions of the Land of Cakes Royal Arch Chapter and witness degree work being carried out on the actual floor which Robbie Burns was initiated and he himself would stand and orate poetry and degree work.

