

Freemasonry and the White House

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Hardly a nightly News programme passes without there being footage of the White House in Washington D.C. Usually it is film footage of a speech or press conference conducted at some interior or exterior location within the ground of the White House; or as a back-drop to a “live” report from some Washington based news correspondent. I wonder how many brethren viewing those images each evening know that the White House was built by a team of Scottish stonemason-Freemasons.

After the eventual site and plans for this building was decided upon a foundation stone was laid in 1792 with full masonic ceremony. This “House” had to have a stately presence befitting its first intended occupant (i.e. George Washington), so it was decided it should be built of stone. History has not left us a clear picture of how it came to be that the builders of the President’s house were seven Scottish stonemasons from the Edinburgh Lodge of Journeymen Masons No.8.



The seven Scottish Freemasons/Stonemasons were James Traquair, Alexander Crawford, James McIntosh, Alexander Scott, James White, George Walker and George Thomson. Unfortunately, as soon as the Scotsmen set to work on the construction of the President’s House they were given a group of “cowans”, some of whom were slaves, to train as stonemasons. So naturally the masons downed tools and went on strike as these trainees were not Freemasons and some were not even free; because for these Scottish brethren there was no distinction between stonemasonry and Freemasonry.

As Bro Bob Cooper (Librarian & Curator of G.L.S.) states “...this must go down as the most unusual labour dispute in history, whereby the cause of the dispute could not be explained and therefore no negotiations could take place...”

Eventually our Scottish brethren decided the best course of action was to form a Lodge and admit free men as Freemasons, and then they could teach and train these apprentices in stonemasonry. This they did, and although the President’s House was set alight by the British in 1814 the structure remained sound and was at that time painted white to cover over the burn marks on the stonework.

So today the handy-work of these Scottish Freemasons still stands, and is a constant daily reminder to us all of Freemasonry’s rich and vibrant history.