

The Diary of an EMA Visit to Cardiff April 2015

Friday 24th April

Our home for the event was the Marriot in Cardiff centre which those travelling by car duly found after many wanderings up and down confusing one way systems and dug up roads which baffled the satnav.

John and Pam Sharratt welcomed us with beaming smiles of infectious enthusiasm, daffodils, welsh cakes and a fully itemised agenda for the weekend.

The hotel welcome was not quite so good as all rooms were initially without hot water. So after a freezing rub down all changed for the evening and set off with 70 fellow EMA'ers for the Cardiff Castle Apartments & Banquet.

What a fantastic evening was had. The apartments were sumptuous and our tour guide was hugely knowledgeable and smiley. Amongst many interesting facts he revealed that the castle was owned by him and all the citizens of Cardiff in perpetuity as a gift from its patron Lord Bruges, and was thus kept out of the clutches of councillors and politicians. We were then sent down into the undercroft bar for a glass of mead before being shown to our tables by our Master of Ceremonies and his gang of entertainers.

The banquet was a traditional welsh dinner interspersed with great entertainment and accompanied by wine on the house. This included John Sharratt being asked to impersonate an angry goat (or maybe rutting stag – Ed) and new member Dave Tickner who was happy to accept his unexpected initiation of being asked to perform like a happy dog. This he did with aplomb even taking time to cock his leg on the goat!

Saturday 25th

All arose and were refreshed with lashings of hot water! And after a substantial and hearty breakfast, the menfolk did their duty by attending the EMA AGM in the Richard St Clare room.

The formal minutes are available under separate cover.

Those who then ventured out to sample the local ale (Brains) were disappointed to be served with plastic glasses. Unfortunately it was match day at the nearby Millennium Stadium and all alcohol on such days across town has to be served this way. The apologetic smiley barman at The Old Market Tavern explained that mass protests of such measures on rugby days being unnecessary had been made, football being another matter. The authorities have ignored such logic as they do not wish to be considered discriminatory! (Politically correct tosh exists here too then – Ed)

The brethren then gathered suitably clothed in the foyer at 15.30 and boarded the coach for Bristol. On arriving the coach seemed to lose his undercarriage as he scraped around a steep corner to the Park St entrance but we kept moving.

The masonic centre of Park Street is splendid. Over tea and biscuits one of the senior Bristol brethren welcomed us and reminded us that we would be asked for the password by the Inner Guard and would not be admitted without it. We then toured in two groups one being led by Tyler

Tim. He colourfully explained that the building has 3 tylers to serve the plethora of craft, chapter and assorted lodges unique to Bristol (eg Camp Baldwin). They are Tyler Tony, Tyler Tim and a third who, although called Gary, has been designated the title Tyler T.I.T as he is tyler in training and this preserves the alliteration!

(Whilst touring I asked two senior brethren at separate times, who shall remain nameless, what the password is. As it turned out my educated guess was correct but as this is Bristol and they delight n being different I thought I should make sure. One looked at me with a blank stare and said 'Open Sesame', another said 'there is no password to enter the lodge'. They later did gain entry so I guess they deserve full marks for exhibiting such excellency of secrecy – Ed)

This building houses all the lodges of Bristol Province although there are some outliers closely associated with Bristol Province. The province boundary is the original Bristol city boundary as defined in the early 18th century.

There are a number of lodge rooms and dining rooms plus a cellar bar and robing rooms. Most rooms are festooned with ornate and beautifully illustrated honours boards covering all past masters since the mid 18th century.

Everything has been recreated faithfully following a calamitous fire to the premises in modern times.

At Lodge Room Number 1 – the most splendidly appointed lodge room in the building – we were also shown the ante room which housed a portrait of the original Tyler – Robert Cameron (Bob). Whenever the building is opened the Tyler's first duty is to go to Bob and switch the light on to wake him up and say 'Good Morning Bob'. Likewise just before the building is closed the Tyler must switch off the light and say 'Good Night Bob'.

Lodge Room Number 1 has an adjoining chapel. This is used at Installation when instead of all those being below the rank of installed master, they remain and the Installed Masters take the candidate into the chapel for the inner workings.

We were then shown their dedicated Chapter room, which also has an ante room used for a part of the Exaltation ceremony unique to Bristol known as the ceremony of the veils.

The lodge of St Nicholas 4561 was close tyled at 18.30 with some 120 brethren present, 40 being from EMA and we were privileged to witness the Bristol workings of the raising of Brother Clacker. Wonderful theatrical and word perfect stuff!

And then to the bar for a snifter before dinner . At around 21.00 we were summonsed to dinner by the distant sound of a bass drum beating. As we climbed the stairs to the dining room the sound of further drums was heard and all were accompanied into the dining room by 5 traditional Scottish drummers.

The festive board was splendid and was heralded as a St George's day dinner – a traditional roast beef dinner. We were somewhat cosy as even the largest dining room could only just accommodate our number. Brother Sharratt responded splendidly on all our behalves to complement one and all on a magnificent and memorable evening. (and gained two new recruits as a result – Ed)

We departed Park Street at 23.00 in pouring rain and arrived back at base at midnight but with a slight delay short of the hotel to wait for the many drunken semi naked tottering revellers who were arguing over the limited availability of taxis.

Meanwhile the ladies had dined at Viva Brazil. After the moreish Caipirinha cocktail they were served a range of 14 meats or fish and an endless supply of sumptuous salads accompanied by lashings of wine. One particular off piste activity was helping a young bride groom on his stag night to avoid severe penalties. Beyond the fact he had been forced to dine attired in a red dress he was being forced to ask strangers to supply him with make up. Incredibly the only assistance our ladies were able to give was applying lipstick to his eyes.

Sunday 26th

After thinking about it the day decided to grant us fair, but a tad chilly, weather for our trip to the bay area. A short Hop On Hop Off bus ride got us to a tour of the Senedd and was then followed by split shift road train tour to the Barrage. The road train tour guide was a cheery sort and after various explanatory comments regarding the construction and opening of the Barrage in 1999 announced that he would play us some appropriate music to complete the tour. Obviously (?) he chose Abba, and explained that this was because Aber means river-mouth and the Barrage is at the mouth of the Taff and the Ely. (Shome mishtake shurely? – Ed)

The rest of the day was spent at leisure as we awaited the grand finale gala dinner. Some chose to grab a beer, served in glass this time, at The Goat Major and The Owain Glyndwr.

At 19.00 the masses gathered in the Dylan Thomas room to share some bubbly and all declared being ready to eat as we found our seats from the meticulous table plan.

There then followed a delicious dinner of pate, salmon, and sticky toffee pudding during which many impromptu declarations were made from each table to take wine. Most were in justworthy praise and recognition of 'Dave' (actually his name is John – Ed) and Pam's organisational skills and choices of activities but the best was proposed by Brother Tom Samwell who expressed his disappointment that this was the last night !

Just before the dancing commenced Speaker Ian Benton rose to give formal thanks and then stunned Maria Jones and Duncan Nield whose wedding is scheduled for June this year. Duncan had earlier made discrete enquiries of the Secretary as to whether it would be possible to borrow the EMA Quaich for the wedding. What he did not expect was that this cheeky request would be met with a generous gift of a Quaich, courtesy of David Parkhill, suitably engraved ! Totally thrown off balance Duncan managed to splutter thanks and a promise to update everyone in Murcia in October (He was then duly chastised at his table for not declaring that in return for the gift everyone had not thereby been invited to the wedding ! – Ed)

Much dancing then took place accompanied by the musical trio Mid Life Crisis and proceedings drew to a close around midnight.

Monday 27th April

EMA Cardiff 2015

After a final breakfast most prepared to leave as a most memorable and best attended EMA visit drew to a close. Innumerable plaudits are due to the first class meticulous organisation of Pam and John Sharratt. Many thanks indeed. Onwards to Murcia (Please be sure to contact Bob Cooper as soon as possible)

(Author and editor - Duncan Nield, Assistant Secretary, 28th April 2015)