

## THE SOUTHCHURCH MASONIC STUDY CIRCLE

*'Spreading light and lustre to all within its circle'*

Fred L. Pick who in 1939 was the Master and President of; The Manchester Lodge and Association for Masonic Research No. 5502, Master of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in 1943 and co-author with Norman Knight in 1953 of: *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*, in his work on the history of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research made the following opening quote:

*'Our object is not so much to get more men into Masonry as to get more Masonry into men.'*

When this remarked was made in the early 1950s, there had been a steady increase in numbers coming into Freemasonry, we no longer have this luxury of a constantly rising membership, but we must, nevertheless, remember that Freemasonry is not 'just the carrying through of ceremonial work until it becomes the be-all and end-all of a Lodge's existence.'

The Mentoring Scheme, which is underway in the Province of Essex, will go a long way to fill this vacuum. 'The Mentor needs be an experienced Brother who has good understanding of Freemasonry in all its aspects', cannot reasonably be expected to know all the history of the Craft. The explanations of what we do and why do them, will hopefully, lead a Brother to ask more about Freemasonry in greater detail. This is where we have a wealth of information garnered by early Masonic students.

In open Lodge, this information, or education, can be disseminated via the 'Orator Scheme'. The Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge in December 2007 saw the launch of this project. '...the scheme involves the delivery of a series of orations on Freemasonry...'

As early as 1886, The Quatuor Coronati Lodge was formed. The Leicester Lodge of Research was created in 1892. The Manchester Association followed in 1909 and their Lodge consecrated in 1934. Other Association and Installed Masters' Lodges grew rapidly. Our own Essex Masters' Lodge No. 3256, celebrated its Centenary in 2007. Earlier, in 1974, after responding to a plea; '*...to carry out Research and Lectures...*' (which was contained in the Warrant at the Consecration of The Southchurch Hall Lodge No. 8005)...Southchurch Masonic Study Circle came in being.

That plea stated; *'to carry out research and lectures in an area very happily and thickly populated by Masons, who are looking for something different and at the same time, to try and amass some history of Masonry in Southend and indeed Essex.'*

We have, as a Study Circle, being doing just that for over 30 years.

But Study Circles have been around in one form or another, for a very long time.

*'An hour shall be set apart to talk Masonry'*- such were the terms of a resolution passed by the Antient Society of Freemasons in the City of York in the year 1725, when it was determined; *'That every first Wednesday in the month a Lodge shall be held at the house of a Brother according as their turn shall fall out.'* From which regulation of nearly three hundred years ago it is evident that the Freemasons of York appreciated the value of Masonic instruction as distinct from the mechanical repetition of the ceremonies.'

We in the Study Circle take a similar view in respect of instruction, or education, as we prefer to call it, to that of the ritualistic aspect of Masonry.

We also follow the format of meeting regularly, not ...*'every first Wednesday in the month...'* but in our case in the months of; March, May, September and December. The *'house of a Brother'* in our case is Saxon Hall, the home of Freemasonry in Southend and with grateful thanks to the generosity of the Board of Directors, as well and we...*'talk Masonry.'*

The Talks given are either by one of our members or by a specially invited Speaker.

At our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, Yasha Beresiner was the guest Speaker. Recently, Susan Snell, Archivist and Records Manager at Great Queen Street, made her first visit to a Study Circle and presented a Talk concerning the preservation of records and other Lodge ephemera. Our December Meeting is traditionally a Cheese and Wine Evening. At the last December Meeting, our Deputy Provincial Grand Master, V.W. Bro. Peter Holland entertained us with a Talk on, *'The Festive Board'*.

If your Lodge ever finds itself requiring the services of a Speaker, why not fulfil that request yourself? By presenting a Paper within the Study Circle, you will find you have an audience that will always give you a favourable reception and an honest critique of your work. It will give you the experience of delivering a Talk, where advice and guidance of your work will help you edit it, if it needs it, and ensures that the information it contains is as accurate as possible. If you have a topic or an object, that interests you, then why not come along and share it with us?

Our aim in the Study Circle is that of Masonic education, but achieved in a relaxed atmosphere, among like-minded Brethren. We try to; 'to inculcate the desire amongst brethren to get and be willing to give more Masonic knowledge to satisfy that desire to some extent by showing how a modest Masonic knowledge can be obtained or given, and to encourage the more enthusiastic Mason to seek further enlightenment'. It's as simple as that. We don't wear regalia and we don't have a raffle or even scratch cards! Our 'regalia' is smart casual wear.

Apart from the usual business of any Meeting; Minutes etc, we have a very popular agenda item, entitled: *Objects of Masonic Interest*. This takes the format of a member, or guest, bringing along an item, which they either know something about and wish to share that information with the group, or their knowledge of the artefact is scarce or non-existent and they would like to know something about it. It could be anything from a Masonic postage stamp to a Masonic carriage clock.

We are not a bunch of 'intellectual heavy-weights', but enthusiastic Masons, who are enthusiastic about their Masonry! Why not come to a Meeting, you don't have to join, but we are sure you will want to and for the 'princely sum' of £3.00 per annum, it represents superb value. Better still, if your level of involvement is one of being part of an audience and no more, then that is fine as well, just so long as you derive something from it and tell others, of course.

In the interim have a look at our Web Site, which can be accessed via the Search Engine Google, just type in, surprisingly, Southchurch Masonic Study Circle! The Web Page is full of useful links and information and is very easy to navigate. Or contact the Secretary. (details at the end of the article).

The giving and getting of Masonic knowledge, education, if you will, is nothing new, this is evident from a copy of the Old Charges dated around 1650, which states; '*then let the person that is to be made a Mason choose out of the Lodge any one Mason who is to instruct him in those secrets which must never be committed to writing: which Mason he must call his tutor...*'

The Southchurch Masonic Study Circle is following in the footsteps of very worthy and distinguished Brethren, in continuing this tradition of Masonic education, but it needs you. National numbers are shrinking at a rate of approximately 2-3% per annum and in the past ten years the rate of initiations has fallen by around 30% from 12, 000 to 8,400, so education has never been more important or needed, to help encourage the new members; by giving them a new direction within the Craft other

than just the ritual, but also to persuade more men to join our ranks, by extolling the virtues of our proud and long history.

The Southchurch Masonic Study Circle has one aim.

*'Our object is to get more men into Masonry and more Masonry into men.'*

(With apologies to Bro. Pick!)

**W/Bro. Pierre Waddoups.** PProv.AGDC  
DC and Preceptor, Basildon Lodge No.7798.

Secretary. **Southchurch Masonic Study Circle.**  
[Pwaddoups7798@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Pwaddoups7798@yahoo.co.uk)

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