

Visit to Arras France 2018

Bro. Duncan Mulholland, RWM led a deputation of eight Brethren from Lodge St. Bryde No. 579 to France on Friday 3rd. August to Monday 6th. August. The purpose of the visit was to pay our respects at the Arras Memorial where Bro. Stuart Jack, P.M. had identified that two Lodge St. Bryde Brethren were commemorated at the Memorial, having been posted as missing in action in World War 1. The Brethren conducted a Service at the Memorial as our Brethren have no known grave. Bro. Stuart Jack read a resume of their Lodge and Military record and Bros. James Muircroft and Andrew Nisbet also paid tribute before Bro. Duncan Mulholland laid a wreath on behalf of the Lodge. It seemed incredible that with about 10,000 names on the Memorial our two Brethren are recorded only about three feet apart. Initiated in the same Lodge, died in the same field !

Today we are here to commemorate two of the 5 Brethren from the Lodge who were killed at the First and Third battles of Arras during World War one. The first battle of Arras which began on the 9th of April 1917 is particularly important to Scotland as it was this battle, here at Arras that had the highest concentration of Scottish troops fighting in a World War 1 battle. Around one third of the 159,000 Allied casualties were Scottish.

I would like to talk briefly of two who were members of Lodge St Bryde 579 in Uddingston.

Ord Meikle

Member 749. Initiated 12th May 1915 at the age of 32

Residing at Depot, Gourock he lists his occupation as a soldier.

Proposed by John Junor DM

Seconded by George Wallace Secretary

EA Degree- 12th May 1915 by 579

FC Degree- 8th September 1915 by 579

MM Degree- 22nd September 1915 by 948

Mark Degree- From the Lodge minutes from the 26th April 1916 we read 'A letter was read from the secretary of Lodge Firth of Clyde No. 626 stating that Bro Ord Meikle of 579 had received his Mark degree at the hands of Lodge 626 on 21st March 1916.

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James Fisher

Member 770. Initiated 22nd March 1916 at the age of 21

Residing at North Lodge, Viewpark he worked as a Farm Servant.

EA Degree- 22nd March 1916 by Bro. J. Nimmo 579

FC Degree- 12th April 1916 by Bro. T. Robertson PM 579

MM Degree- 26th April 1916 by Bro. J. Patrick PM 579

Mark Degree- 27th April 1916 a special meeting conducted the night after his MM degree

His Proposer was his Brother Thomas H. Fisher and his Secunder was Bro. Charles Ellis JD

Ord Meilke was born in Edinburgh in 1884 and from the 1901 census at the age of 17 we know that he was a member of the Boy Royal Scots Fusiliers. In the 1901 census he also lists that he is staying in Maryhill, Glasgow. We are unclear as to why Ord joined Lodge St Bryde as he resided at Fort Matilda in Gourrock with his wife and young family. His three children were named Henry, Ethel and Grace. One clue is that possibly he was a close friend of John Junor as John proposed him into the Lodge. Similar to Ord, John was also a member of the armed forces although they were in different regiments.

At the time of his Initiation into the Lodge, Ord was an experienced soldier and had the task of training new recruits which in 1915 would have been in large quantity and his training at Fort Matilda was vital to his Regiment. He received his first degree in May 1915 the last meeting before the recess and along with three other candidates the degree was carried out by the office bearers and brethren of the Lodge. The meetings at this time were held in the Royal buildings at Uddingston cross and today if you look closely you can still see the text Royal buildings written in the sand stone above Tortellanos chip shop. Ord was passed and raised in September and interestingly he received his Mark degree closer to his home in Gourrock by Lodge Firth of Clyde No. 626.

Sometime in 1916 Ord was sent to France along with the regiment he had served for so long the Royal Scots Fusiliers. With him only being granted leave from France on a rare occasion and for a short period of time Ord decided that in order to see his family he would move them to Feltham in West London as it would allow him to spend all his leave with his family.

Tragically on the 28th of March 1918 Ord was killed whilst fighting with his regiment at the third battle of Arras. His name is remembered on two known memorials dedicated to those serving in WW1. The first being here at the Arras memorial close to where he was serving and unfortunately fell. He is also named on the Feltham war memorial in West London and I have been fortunate enough to pay my respects there. He was aged 34 when he died, and he left behind a wife and three children.

James Fisher; From the 1901 census of Scotland the Fisher family is residing at Westburn Farm, Ploughmans House in Cambuslang. The head of the family is James Fisher Snr who at the age of 48 was born in Ireland in the year 1853. His wife Grace was from Cambuslang and was born in 1860. In the year 1901 James and Grace had a family of 5 children. Thomas born in 1885, Daniel born in 1891, James born in 1893, Christina born in 1900 and another son only newly born at the time of the census and being so new to the World he did not even have a name as yet. James Fisher did not only share his father's name, but he also kept family traditions going by being employed in the farming industry as a farm servant. Possibly learning the trade from one of his fathers' close friends or work companions at North Lodge in Viewpark. Sometime after the 1901 census the Fisher family moved to 8 Crofthead Street in Uddingston. His oldest brother Thomas resided at the new family address and when Thomas joined the lodge at the age of 26 in the year 1912 he was working as an Aerated Water Salesman. There is no record of Thomas serving during WW1. James Fisher was proposed into the Lodge by his brother on the 23rd of February 1916 and was quickly passed and raised before receiving his Mark degree at a special meeting called the evening after he received his MM degree. In early January 1917, a letter of correspondence was read to the Lodge from James Fisher now on active service and thanking the Brethren of the lodge for the kind gift received by parcel.

Serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers he was sent to France in late 1916. His service number was 40744. On the 23rd of April 1917 whilst serving with his regiment in the battle of Arras he was killed. The following extract reports the engagement.

'On the 23rd, too, the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers were engaged with the rest of the Thirtieth Division in an attack on the high ground overlooking Cherisy in the Sensee Valley. The battalion advanced at 4.45am on a two-company front and was immediately caught and checked by a terrific machine-gun barrage. At 6am the enemy counter-attacked but was held; at 6 pm. The 21st brigade attempted to repeat the mornings attack, but it too suffered disaster; at nine p.m. the survivors of the Scots Fusiliers were withdrawn to reserve position. The day depleted the battalion by more than one half. The commanding officer- Lieut.-Colonel M.E McConaghey fell, and with him Second Lieutenants J. Spears, J. McLeod, T. Leishman, H.F Smith and J.C Cameron, and 55 other ranks; 4 officers and 195 men wounded; 4 officers and 209 men missing.'

A tragic day for the Regiment and the Fisher family, and one can only assume that James was one of the missing never to be found as he has no known grave. He is remembered on the Arras memorial.

Daniel Fisher the Brother of both Thomas and James was also killed during WW1. His service number was 38308 and he was serving with the 10th/11th battalion of the Highland Light Infantry when he was killed on the 1st of August 1917. Daniel at the time of his death was married to Elizabeth Wilson Fisher and he had moved back to the Cambuslang area residing at 22 Main Street, Cambuslang. He is remembered with honour on the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres. Both James and Daniel are also remembered on the communion table in Uddingston Old Parish church

*I am proud that we have travelled here today to remember and learn what happened here at Arras. When visiting our Brethren whether it be at Hazebrouck, Beersheba in what is now Israel or today here in Arras I often wonder how many people if anyone has come to places like this to pay respects to those who were Brethren of the lodge to us but to others they were Fathers, Brothers and Sons. Are we the first? It is sad that both these men have no known grave, but it does make me proud that we have made the effort to come here and to never forget. We can only imagine what these men went through and what they witnessed in horrendous circumstances. Visiting places like this always makes me realise how fortunate we are in these times of peace. **Stuart Jack, P.M.***