

OXFORDSHIRE WEEKLY NEWS, JUNE 2. 1920.

SPELSBURY WAR MEMORIAL HALL.

FOUNDATION-STONE LAID WITH MASONIC HONOURS

On Thursday last the foundation-stone of the War Memorial Hall at Spelsbury, which is being erected in the village to commemorate those men of the parish who made the great sacrifice in the war, and also for the benefit of the returned soldiers and residents generally, was laid with full Masonic honours in the presence of a large and representative company. The Vicar of Spelsbury (Rev. T.C. Tanner), through whose efforts and interest the carrying out of the scheme is in no small measure due, holds an office in the Bowyer Lodge, No 1036. Chipping Norton, and considerable assistance has been rendered to the project by his Masonic brethren.

The Lodge was opened in the Schoolroom at three o'clock and a procession was formed, which proceeded to the site of the hall, preceded by the Tyler, Bro. F.H. Moore, the Junior Deacon, Bro. E. Greenshields. and the Senior Deacon, Bro. C.A. Birts, followed by the brethren in double column. Then came the Treasurer, Bro. Col. F.W. Schofield, C.M.G., carrying a vessel to be deposited with the stone, the Secretary, Bro. W.N. Rowell, three Past Master, Bros. H. Hartley, C.J.D. Johnson, and A.E. Banbury, carrying corn, wine and oil, the Architect, Bro. Parker Pearson, with the plans, the T.P.M., Bro. J. Head and the Chaplain, Bro. Rev. E. Llewellyn Weight, who bore an a cushion a volume of the Sacred Law, surmounted with a square and compass. Then the Junior Warden, Bro. R.N. Rowell, carrying the plumb-rule, the Worshipful Master, Bro. Dr. L.R. King, with the square, and the Senior Warden, Bro. T.C. Tanner, with the level. There were also present: Bros. J.W. Jeffries (almoner). H.W. Ludwig (organist). J.W. Harris (master of ceremonies). F.G. Goddard (I.G.), A. Webb., T.H. Parsons. J.W. Bayliss (stewards), G. Fawdry (P.M.). W. Henman, J.H. McLaughlin. C. Gear, J.F. Barlow, T.B. Lyle, T.G. Davis, G.B. Sparkes, P.J. Heath, T.P. Field, T.H. Mayo, Burnett Yelf, M. Foster Charlton, A.J. Bolwell, N. Spatcher and the following members of other Lodges: Bros. F.W. Goldsworthy, T.D. Hughes, F. Fardon, S. Henman. B.J.W. Grieve, E.W. Orchard, P.H. Crozier. J.W. Hucking, J. Woolcock, W.R. Thomas, T.W. Hawes, G. Dance and J. Pow.

The Rev. T.C. TANNER said he would like to crave their indulgence to say a few words, not only to the Masons, but also to others who had come to honour them with their presence that day. He would like to say a few words about the origin of the Memorial Hall. Looking back on the great war of 1914-1918, they were appalled by the world's sufferings, and the relief which peace brought to all its inhabitants could not be described in any words of his. Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire it was asked on all hands what could be done; how they could commemorate their gallant dead, and show their thankfulness for the return of their gallant heroes. There were two main lines on which these objects were carried out. Wherever they might go they would find the former were commemorated in their places of worship, and the latter by some work of beauty,

utility or benevolence, to commemorate the victory of our gallant men had won. He would like to say, not for the benefit of Spelsbury people, but for the information of the visitors, that the population of the village was 438, and of that number no less than 67 served in the army or the navy. Some of them gained distinctions. They could lay to the credit of Spelsbury; two Distinguished Service Orders, two Military Crosses, one Distinguished Service Medal and two Military Medals. Nor should he forget to mention the two ladies from their parish who went to serve in the Scottish Women's Hospital Unit in Serbia. Of those who served from their village nine died gloriously for our liberties, and it was determined, without debate, to enrich their church with a tablet bearing the names of those who fell in the service of their King and Country. It would not be out of place on such an occasion to mention their names, and with the mention to request that for a moment they should keep a reverent silence. They were Lt.-Col. H.M. Dillon, D.S.O., Sergt. A.J. Cross, D.C.M., Sergt. B.G. Sturdy, Driver E.R. Benfield. Privates A. Cooper, A. Harling, F.E. Mitchell and S.S. Sturdy. They in Spelsbury felt that something more should be done for those who, out of war's alarms, had been happily restored to their midst. The matter was considered and it was borne upon their minds that one alleviation which our heroes had amidst the hardships of campaigning lay in the comradeship they found. Now their scattered parishes had no provision for social intercourse. It was practically impossible in Spelsbury, so they determined to build this social hall for the benefit of the returned soldiers and also the parishioners generally. That was a resolution readily made, but not so easily carried out. However, perseverance had triumphed so far, and they now stood on the site where he trusted very shortly a centre of fellowship might arise. But much lay between the resolution to provide the centre of social intercourse and the ceremony that day. While the parishioners of Spelsbury rightly felt at the inception of the project that nothing was too good for those who hazarded their lives for their liberties, yet good will was not sufficient to guarantee the building of this hall. When subscriptions had been collected and he believed there was not a household in the parish but had given something to the fund and the site was presented for the purpose, it seemed as if they must be content with a wooden or iron building. In one way and another they had secured £446, yet they knew that would not go very far. It was here that Freemasonry came to his help. He had the honour of being the Senior Warden of the Bowyer Lodge, and among the friendships he had made at that Lodge there was that of Bro. Parker Pearson, the architect. As they met together they talked about the project, and the suggestion of building with concrete material was made, and it was because of that information, so kindly by Bro. Parker Pearson, that this material was decided upon. He visited Spelsbury and inspected the site, approved of the gravel which was obtained locally, and prepared the plan for the building, and had ever since continued to advise the building committee on all points where advice was needed. The building committee were further fortunate in being lent a concrete block-making machine by Mr F. Chamberlain, engineer of the Oxford Canal Navigation Company and Mr Chamberlain also very kindly came to Spelsbury and instructed them in the method of block-making. Mr Chamberlain he regretted to say, was not a

Freemason, but he was the son of a mason, and although not a mason himself, he inherited the true Masonic spirit. The actual work of making the blocks was performed by three ex-soldiers, all of whom had seen much service overseas, and a fourth had assisted in laying the concrete foundation. The handling of material was gratuitously performed by the farmers. He was requesting the Worshipful Master, on behalf of the building committee of the hall, to lay the foundation stone, because to him, as chairman of that committee, so much assistance had been forthcoming from Bowyer Lodge. He had already referred to the valuable assistance of Bro. Parker Pearson, and he would also like to say that the handsome entrance doors, which would in due course be placed at the east end of the building, were the generous gift of Bro. McLaughlin, the foundation-stone, the gift of Bro. Alfred Groves, the brass plate with the inscription the gift of their Worshipful Bro. Secretary Mr. W.N. Rowell, to whom they were also indebted for the organisation of the meeting. The roll of honour, deposited within the recess beneath the foundation-stone was the gift of Bro. Foster Charlton. These were some of the specific instances of help that had been forthcoming to this enterprise from his brethren in Freemasonry. When he remembered how there were some people who said of this ambitious building that the committee were "biting off more hat they could chew" and there were times when they felt this might unhappily be true – there came to him the encouragement in form of moral support which Freemasonry generally, and the Bowyer Lodge in particular, brought to him. These things although known to the Worshipful Master before he heard them on that occasion, may not have been known to the visiting brethren, who were honouring them with their presence; they almost certainly were unknown to many of the assembled company who were not masons. This must be his excuse for speaking at so great a length. In the name of the memorial hall committee he begged to thank all helpers, Masonic and otherwise, and the Worshipful Master for coming there that day to lay the stone, on which foundation he would predict there would rise a superstructure perfect in all its parts and honourable to the builders.

The WORSHIPFUL MASTER then addressed the gathering in the following terms: Men and brethren here assembled to behold this ceremony, be it know to you that we be true and lawful Freemasons, the successors of those ancient brethren of our craft who from time immemorial have been engaged throughout the civilised world in the erection of stately and superb edifices to the glory of God and for the service of mankind. From these ancient brethren have been handed down from generation to generation certain secrets by which Freemasons are known to each other and distinguished from the rest of the world. These secrets are lawful and honourable and are in no way incompatible with our civil, moral or religious duties, and as we have received them from our predecessors in the Order, so we hand them down, pure and unimpaired to those who succeed us. Our Order has always been distinguished for loyalty to the Crown, for obedience to the laws and institutions of the country in which we reside, for good citizenship, for goodwill to all mankind, and especially for the most excellent gift of charity. By the exercise of these qualities we have in all ages enjoyed such distinction, that princes and nobles of high degree have been

members of our Order, have patronised our mysteries and joined our assemblies. Under such powerful protection, and by the fidelity and zeal of its members, Freemasonry has endured through the ages, and has been enabled to survive the wreck of might empires and to resist the destroying hand of time. We have met her to-day, in the presence of this assembly, to lay the foundation-stone of this building which is about to be erected to the honour and glory of the Most High, and in humble dependence upon His blessing. As Freemasons, our first and paramount duty in all our undertakings is to invoke the blessing from the Great Architect of the Universe upon that which we are about to do, and I therefore call upon you to give attention to the Chaplain and to unite in prayer to Him from whom alone cometh every good and every perfect gift.

The Chaplain having offered prayer, the WORSHIPFUL MASTER declared it to be his will and pleasure that the stone should be laid, and requested the Secretary to read the inscription on the plate, which is as follows: "This stone was laid with Masonic honours by the Worshipful Master of the Bowyer Lodge. No. 1036, Chipping Norton, on May 27, 1920. – L.R. King, W.M.; Rev. T.C. Tanner, S.W and Vicar; R. Norman Rowell, J.W.; G Parker Pearson, S.D., architect." In a cavity in the stone which was afterwards to be sealed and cemented, the Treasurer deposited a bottle, the contents of which were as follows: Copy of the public bill announcing the day's proceedings, the Lodge summons convening the meeting, programme of the day's proceedings, copy of the previous day's local paper ("The Oxfordshire Weekly News"), new coins from the Bank of England coined this year, from a shilling down to a farthing, the names of those who served in the Great War from the parish and the roll of honour of the fallen, and also the ground plan of the intended building. The Worshipful Master then laid the stone, which was first of all proved by the Wardens by the application of the plumb rule and level, and finally tested by the Master and found to be plumb level and square, and that the craftsmen had laboured skilfully."

The CHAPLAIN then delivered an oration and at the close presented the gavel to the W.M.

The remainder of the ceremonial was then proceeded with. The architect presented the plane to the W.M. who inspected and returned them. Receiving corn from the P.M., the W.M scattered it on the stone as a symbol of plenty and abundance. This was followed by wine, the symbol of joy and cheerfulness, and oil, the sacred emblem of charity, the W.M. exhorting "the all-bounteous Creator of the Universe to shower down His choicest blessings upon this Spelsbury War Memorial Hall and grant a full supply of the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy."

A collection on behalf of the funds was taken during the singing of the hymn, "O valiant hearts." and, after the singing of the National Anthem, the Chaplain pronounced the Benediction. The procession was re-formed, and the Masonic brethren returned to the schoolroom, where the Lodge was closed.

After the ceremony, the visitors were entertained to tea at the Vicarage.