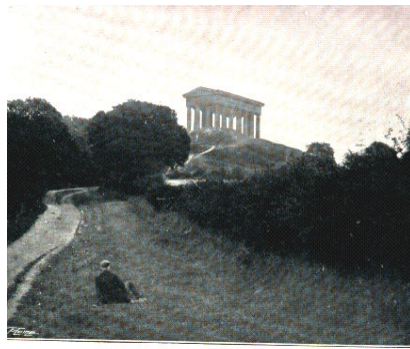


Our Masonic History

John George Lambton and Penshaw Monument



PENSHAW MONUMENT



JOHN GEORGE, FIRST EARL OF DURHAM, G.C.B.

Penshaw Monument is a landmark known to all of us and it is often viewed with interest by visitors to the region. Its position on a hill top is a guide to how close we are to home. How many of us, however, know its history especially the Masonic significance of the monument? It is of course a memorial to the Earl of Durham, John George Lambton (pictured top-right).

He was created Baron Durham in January 1828 and was advanced to the Viscountcy of Lambton and Earldom of Durham in March 1833, becoming the first Earl of Durham. He had a most distinguished diplomatic career and was nicknamed "Radical Jack". He was once Governor-General of Canada. In 1838 consequence of the rebellion of the Canadians, he was appointed to this post and was sent to Canada to put things in order. The steps he took were, however, disavowed by the Government at home. He promptly returned to Britain and drew up the famous "Durham Report" that laid the foundation-stone of the present-day Canada.

Lambton was Provincial Grand Master of Durham and Northumberland from 1818 and became Pro Grand Master of England in 1839 remaining so until his death.

He was a good friend of the Duke of Sussex, whom he entertained at Lambton Park in 1822 when the Duke attended the Provincial Grand Lodge. He entertained him again in 1839 when the Duke laid the foundation stone of the Athenaeum in Sunderland. In 1834 the Lodges of the Province presented Lambton with a Masonic Jewel and Address and he entertained 140 brethren to a banquet at Lambton Castle. He died on the Isle of Wight in 1840.

Shortly after his death, it was decided to mark the memory of Lambton by building Penshaw Monument.

The monument scheme was launched and within a very short time £,3000 was raised locally. This was enhanced by national contributions. The Marquess of Londonderry presented Penshaw Hill as a suitable site for the memorial and it was decided to erect a Grecian temple from a design of a Newcastle-upon-Tyne firm called Green. The task of erecting the memorial temple was given to a Sunderland man called Pratt.

The foundation stone was laid on August 28th 1844. A minute book of this period records that the Earl of Zetland, who had succeeded the Duke of Sussex as Grand Master, "held a Grand Lodge Meeting in a booth specially erected for the occasion, from whence the procession made its way up the winding road to the temple, where the foundation stone was laid by the Earl, with customary Masonic honours in the presence of about thirty thousand spectators." The brethren then returned to the booth where the Grand Master closed the Lodge and complimented the Brethren upon the occasion.

In connection with the Penshaw Monument ceremony there is an ambiguous minute dated 4th September 1844 which reads:- "Brother Turner stood charged with lending a Cowan an apron by which he gained admittance in the Grand Lodge at Penshaw, when Bro. Spark put a motion to the chair, were the Brethren of an opinion that Brother Turner supplied the apron to the intruder knowing that he was not a mason. The Worshipful Master put it to a show of hands, when it was universal in his favour." This suggests that Brother Turner was exonerated.

The temple is of the Doric order and the proportions are based on the Temple of Theseus, but the dimensions are exactly double. The temple is open to the sky at the top and has 6ft-6in columns all round, raised from the ground on a stylobate that is 6ft. High in two divisions or steps of 3ft each. The arrangement of the columns is based on the Temple of Diana at Ephesus having one less on the flanks than twice the number on the end, the total length being 100 ft and width 53 ft. The monument's height is 70 ft at one end and 65 ft at the other, due to the sloping ground.

There are 18 columns in all, four at each end and seven at the sides (the corner ones being counted twice). One of the columns is hollow and has a staircase (a winding staircases!) by which it was possible to reach the top, but this is now sealed up. I believe this was after a young man fell from the top during the 1920s/1930s?

A local myth is that the statue of Londonderry in the market place of Durham City was to have been placed on the top. The temple is exactly as it was designed.

B.Hope