

Milton Lodge No 1144  
Oration for the Dedication of a New Banner

Thursday 11th April 2019

Worshipful Master, Assistant Provincial Grand Master, Distinguished Brethren and Brethren all.

What a great pleasure it is to be with you this evening and what an honour and a privilege indeed to be allowed to accompany you APGM.

I am particularly grateful to my colleague W. Bro Richard Hawkins, the Provincial Chaplain for his advice and help with preparing this oration, for it was he who visited you in November 2017 on the occasion of your 150th anniversary.

May I take a moment to express my sincere thanks to those brethren of Milton Lodge for inviting me here this evening and allowing me to share in this momentous occasion.

In compiling this oration I was struck by the connection between John Milton's epic poem "Paradise Lost", which takes up over 10 volumes, and the name of this magnificent Lodge. In reading W. Bro Richard Hawkins oration from November 2017 he refers to the history written by W. Bro Booker for your centenary in 1967 where he concludes that the Lodge was named Milton to coincide with the bicentenary of Milton writing Paradise Lost.

Milton's seminal work deals with the fall of the first recorded humans Adam and Eve from their Garden of Eden home down into the real world, filled with misery, pain and the loss of immortality. Eve is told she will now suffer the pain and travails of birth and Adam will have to till the land if he is to eat.

One can only guess at the torment this fall from Grace must have caused the young couple.

There is an obvious Masonic connection and those of us who are in the RA will instantly recall the words in the signs when the person delivering that marvellous explanation in explaining one of the signs he talks about the sword of human justice "cutting off the head from the body" just as the Book of Genesis relates how the young couple were prevented from returning to the Garden of Eden by a cherub branding a flaming sword which was designed to prevent their return to their rightful and intended abode.

John Milton was born in 1604 into a middle class family went up to Cambridge as a young man and graduated BA and entered a life of writing, he lived, of course through the terrible and dangerous period of the Civil War and his work was published after Oliver Cromwell was replaced by King Charles II. His epic poem can be seen as metaphor for the war and the Commonwealth period and the Restoration of the monarchy which succeeded it.

In rather the same way that Shakespeare writing in turbulent times was careful to praise the Tudor sovereign and also deal with the Civil War especially in Richard III which tells of the fall of the house of York and the rise of the first Tudor King, Henry VII, likewise fearful of offending the new James I of England Shakespeare wrote tellingly in Macbeth, aka the “Scottish Play, “of Banquo, James the VI of Scotland and James I of England’s ancestor in glowing terms and makes him a heroic figure.

Another Milton, is an epic poem by William Blake, written and illustrated between 1804 and 1810. Its hero is John Milton, who returns from Heaven and unites with Blake to explore the relationship between living writers and their predecessors, and to undergo a mystical journey to correct his own spiritual errors.

Milton was Blake's longest published poem and was printed in Blake's characteristic combination of etched text and illustration supplemented by watercolour.

### William Blake's Milton: The "Grandest Poem" Ever Written

Poet and painter William Blake (1757-1827), who experienced visions as a youth, placed himself with John Milton in a line of extraordinarily imaginative poets. Best known for his Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Blake was also a masterful illustrator of several of Milton's works, including Paradise Lost. Yet his interpretations of Milton the man and Milton the artist do not stop there. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), he offered a heavily symbolic reading of Paradise Lost, proposed as a fable for the war between reason and desire.

Not for the first or last time in literature has a fictional work mirrored life. How does all this impinge on the life and history of this marvellous lodge whose new banner we are honoured to be consecrating tonight. One can only surmise what the founding fathers of the Lodge were thinking when they named the lodge after possibly one of England’s greatest poets and writers.

Did they have a special reason back in 1867 to found a lodge and give as its name Milton apart from the reason provided by W. Bro Booker.

We are slap in the Victorian era. This was a period when the Empire was at its height, India had been opened a century earlier, the Suez Canal was a twinkle in somebody's eye and the East India Company, who acted as a quasi-government abroad ruled the Far and Near East with a rod of iron. Fortunes were made and lost and Britain's influence spread far and wide over the four corners of the globe.

Rather like masonry itself which as we are told in the first degree ceremony, in the North East corner "that masonry is universally spread over the four quarters of the globe" so John Milton works echo that period of frenzied activity.

There is a phrase in scripture a commentary on the writings which reads "May there be peace within your wall, serenity within your palaces. For the sake of your brethren and comrades I shall speak peace in your midst. The Almighty will bless His nation with peace.

"This was promulgated to express the devotion to increase the harmony in the universe between man and his maker. How like masonry where ritual and fraternal camaraderie is supposed to reign. This Lodge has a wonderful and varied history full of extraordinary men from all walks of life who have loyally served this lodge with honour, generosity and distinction. You have been exemplary in your donations to charity over the decades and may that sense of generosity prevail.

We can only hope that this magnificent lodge will be able to celebrate its bicentary and those masons who follow us will stay true to the tenets of the founding fathers, that your successors will gather together under this magnificent banner and celebrate their masonry in the manner that the founders and their descendants would want them to behave.

W. Bro Russell Conn Prov AGChap