

Book Review

by Tony Pope



Freemasonry Upstaged: Masonic stage presentations

Peter Verrall

Editor: David Ganon

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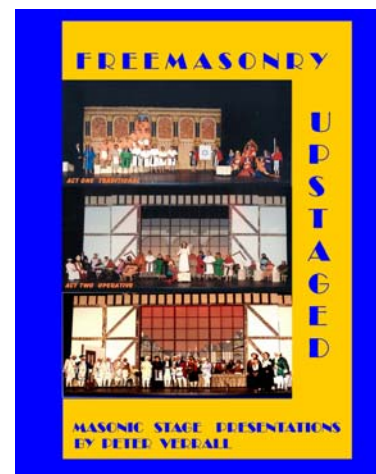
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Peter Verrall, architect, author, thespian and Freemason (the foundation Master of a New Zealand research lodge, a Kellerman Lecturer for Western Australia, and a past president of ANZMRC) has spent a considerable part of his 'Masonic' time in the production of Masonic stage presentations. He had some involvement in amateur theatricals at school in England and later in New Zealand, but it was after his move to Western Australia in 1990 that his muse really came to the fore. By 1993 he had revised Jack Glenie's script of 'The exemplification of the First Degree as worked in 1760' and presented it in a lecture theatre to an audience of 300 Freemasons.

This was followed in 1995 by 'The Canadian York Rite Third Degree' (previously presented in New Zealand), and in 1996 an ambitious four-act 'The Four Faces of Freemasonry: a Masonic pageant'. Inspired by F J Cooper's 'Hiramic Monologue' as revised by Wallace McLeod, in 1997 Bro Verrall wrote two additional monologues, 'York Minster and the Quarries' and 'The First Grand Lodge', and in 1998 added a fourth, 'Robbie Burns'. These four were combined as 'Ringing in the past' and have been presented on at least a dozen occasions. In 1999 he introduced 'A Dialogue between Simon a town Mason and Philip a travelling Mason', based on an eponymous publication dated around 1740.

To celebrate the centenary of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia, he wrote and produced 'Freemasonry the never-ending story', set in a television studio, using satellite communication with time-travelling ability, enabling interviews with Solomon, Aethelstan, Elias Ashmole, Elizabeth Aldworth, Anthony Sayer, Casanova, Burns, Kipling, Houdini, Kingsford-Smith and others. Next year (2001) he produced 'This is your life' to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Western Australian Lodge of Research. In 2007 he presented 'A Table Lodge in 1760', based on a revised script of the 1993 production, and in 2010, while on a lecture tour of New Zealand, he performed a version of the 'Hiramic Monologue' at various refectories.

The author asserts that amateur dramatics have been associated with Freemasonry since the Middle Ages, from the morality plays of the guilds, including the masons, via the rituals of speculative Freemasonry, to present day plays such as his own. He provides a fascinating record of the lavishly costumed plays written, produced and often directed by himself, and presented (mostly) by members of the Western Australian Lodge of Research over the past two decades. He supplies the full script of each play, prefaced by historical notes on its preparation and presentation, and an introduction to many of the players and others involved.

The text is woven around more than 200 diagrams and colour photographs, making this an attractive coffee-table book as well as a valuable historical record of the activities of the Western Australian Lodge of Research. It is a 'good read', and a useful DIY manual for others of similar inclination.