

P.1/H3

A LADY FREEMASON.

P.1/H3

The Honourable Elizabeth St Ledger was the only female ever initiated into the Ancient Mystery of Freemasonry.

How she obtained this honour we shall presently see. Lord Doneraile, Miss St Ledger's father, a very zealous Mason, held a warrant, and occasionally opened Lodge at Doneraile House, his sons and some intimate friends assisting, and it is said that never were the Masonic duties more rigidly performed than by them.

Previous to the initiation of a gentleman in Lodge No.44 about 1735, Miss St Ledger, who was a young girl, happened to be in an apartment adjoining the room generally used as a lodge room. This room at the time, was undergoing some alterations, amongst other things the wall was considerably reduced in one part.

The young lady having heard the voices of the Freemasons, and prompted by the curiosity natural to all, to see this mystery, so long and so secretly locked up from public view, being giddy and thoughtless, determined to satisfy her curiosity, made her arrangements accordingly and with a pair of scissors removed a portion of a brick from the wall and placed herself so as to command a full view of everything which occurred in the next room, so placed, she witnessed the first and second degrees, which was the extent of the proceedings of the Lodge on that night.

P.1/H3

Becoming aware from what she heard, that the Brethren were about to separate, for the first time she felt trembling and alive to the awkwardness and danger of her situation, began to consider how she could retire without observation.

She became nervous and agitated and nearly fainted but so far recovered herself as to be fully aware of the necessity of withdrawing as quickly as possible; in the act of doing so, she, being in the dark, stumbled against and overthrew something, said to be a chair or other ornamental piece of furniture; the crash was heard and the T... who was on the lobby or landing on which the doors both of the Lodge room and that where the Hon' Miss St Ledger was, gave the alarm, thrust open the door and with a light in one hand and his long unsheathed sword in the other, appeared now to the terrified and fainting young lady.

He was soon joined by the members of the Lodge present, and in the first paroxysm of their rage her death was resolved on, but from the moving supplication of her younger Brother, her life was saved, on condition of her going through the whole of the solemn ceremony she had unlawfully witnessed.

This she consented to, and they conducted the beautiful and terrified young lady through these trials

which are sometimes more than enough for masculine resolution little thinking they were taking into the bosom of their craft, a member who would afterwards reflect a lustre on the annals of Masonry.

The Lady was cousin to General Anthony St Ledger Governor of St Lucia, who instituted the interesting and the celebrated Doncaster St Ledger Stakes.

Miss St Ledger married Richard Aldworth, Esq. of Newmarket. Whenever a benefit was given at the Theatres in Dublin or Cork for the "Masonic Female Orphan Asylum" she walked at the head of the Freemasons, with her apron and other insignia of Freemasonry, and sat in the front row of the stage box.

The house was always crowded on these occasions. Her portrait is in the Lodge room of almost every Lodge in Ireland.

This is one of the exceptions to the rule that Ladies cannot become Freemasons.

She, however, remained true to her obligations and was a sincere friend to the Craft up to the time of her death.

She was born the Hon' Miss Elizabeth St Ledger about 1713 and was the youngest child and only daughter of the first Viscount Doneraile, and during the whole of her long life, she was a pattern of benevolent virtue, she died in 1773.

Amidst the obscurities and contradictions of the Aldworth story, three things emerge as certain, (1) That her portrait in Masonic clothing is still extant, (2) That her apron and jewels are still preserved by the family, and (3) That her name appears among the subscribers to Dassigny's work on the decay of Freemasonry in Ireland, published in 1774.

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Where is Dovercote House?

This document was given to me by a Brother Freemason at a Lodge
in Dundee, Scotland in December 1939.
J.H.H.