

Halifax and the Head of John the Baptist

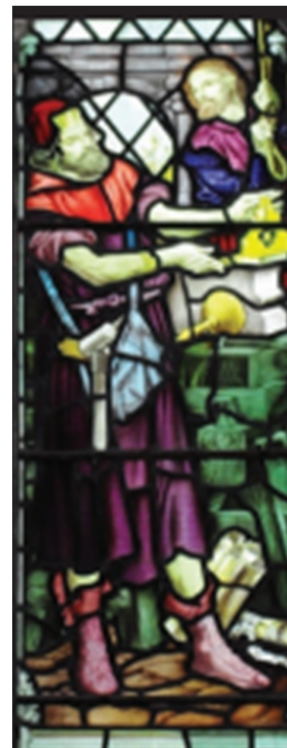
Conflicting stories surround the origin of the name of Halifax, one story says that the name derives from 'Holy Face', meaning that of John The Baptist.

In medieval times it was rumoured that the Knights Templar, a Holy order, had possession of the head of John The Baptist and records from the early 1300s made reference to some form of head being worshiped by the Knights. In 1314 King Philip IV of France crushed the Knights and after he destroyed their order, they hid religious treasures around the world, including the head of John The Baptist which was said to be buried in the grounds of the Halifax Parish Church which was dedicated to John The Baptist but how or why did the Knights put it there?



Although they were deeply religious men It is probable that the philanthropists responsible for the development of Victorian Halifax were also Freemasons or affiliated to them. For example, there is a plaque on the plinth of the statue of Colonel Edward Akroyd outside All Souls' Church in Haley Hill, Halifax, depicting the laying of the church foundation stone in 1856.

On the left there is a Freemason, whose patron saint was also John The Baptist. On the 25th of April, 1856 the Lodge of Probity No 61 along with visitors from fifteen other Lodges, was opened in the 2nd Degree at The Old Cock Inn, Halifax and the Brethren then walked through the town in Masonic dress to All Souls' Church in Haley Hill.



After returning to The Old Cock Inn and closing the Lodge 52, brethren enjoyed a banquet provided by Colonel Akroyd.

Masonic symbolism is clearly displayed in a set of three windows in All Souls' Church which were donated by Colonel Akroyd's nephew, Herbert Akroyd Stuart .



In fact, the tower of Halifax Town Hall has a similar design to the Masons' pyramid.

There has been a suggestion that the head of John The Baptist was at the Mason's lodge and would be brought out at meetings on special occasions.

One such occasion was In 1856, possibly the aforementioned event, when a group of merchants from Bradford's Little Germany came to visit the lodge. They were from a similar order in Munster.

Later one man broke the rules in a drunken conversation and said that what he saw on the alter next to the candles was a skull wrapped in the Halifax coat of arms.

Did the Germans have their eyes on it almost a century before the Second World War and was it placed in the grounds of the Parish Church to protect it from any further plots to steal it?



**During the Second World War
German Prisoners Of War worked
in the Halifax Clay Pits.**

**One story from the Halifax
Courier told of a captured
German officer who escaped
from one of the camps and
was on the run for two days.**

**He was eventually arrested in
the grounds of the Halifax Parish
Church, now the Minster.**

**With him, he had a shovel and
an old sack. They took him back
to the police station but he
refused to speak to anyone
about what he had been doing or
where he had been hiding for the
last two days.**

**A German interpreter was sent
from the camp but he would not
tell him anything. The interpreter
told the police that this man was
a very important officer and that
they had better keep hold of
him. He had a dueling scar on his
face that he had received whilst
at his University.**



**The police sent him back to the POW camp where none of the other
prisoners would speak of him and seemed to be frightened of
something. One prisoner shouted out that he had come for the head
but was quickly pushed into the background. Within two weeks the
officer had mysteriously disappeared, never to be seen again.**



In 1945, when the American army ransacked Hitler's bunker, they found stolen art and religious objects from around the world. Even though the officers tried to stop the troops from looting the artifacts, the soldiers saw them as fair pickings, taking many home with them.

One item listed in a ledger was a wooden box containing parts of a skull wrapped in a blue and yellow check cloth but this went missing along with other things and has never been seen again.

Interestingly, the backdrop of John The Baptist's head on the Halifax Coat of Arms is blue and yellow checks.

This offering as to the town name's origin seems to have been lost in time, much like the object itself.

Howard Priestley

