



## NUGGET

### Bro. Sir Alexander Fleming

**Summary:** Alexander Fleming – Bacteriologist of the modern age.



Professor Alexander Fleming  
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*'For all that Sir Alexander has done to alleviate pain and suffering... the world owes a debt of gratitude difficult to estimate.'*  
Harry S. Truman - 1945

Alexander Fleming was born in the town of Darvel in Ayrshire on 6th August 1881, the seventh of eight children. His father died when he was only seven, and at the age of 13 he was sent to London to live with an older brother, Thomas, who had become a physician there. He continued his education at the Regent Street Polytechnic School, and in 1897, at age 16, he became a clerk with an American shipping company in London.

In 1901, he enrolled in St. Mary's Hospital Medical School and upon graduation, joined the bacteriological department of that same hospital where he was to remain for the rest of his days.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Fleming served as a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps, drafted to serve in a wound research laboratory in France. He noted that in almost all wound cases, the damage done by a bullet or shrapnel was not nearly as fatal as the subsequent infection caused by dirt, debris, bits of uniform, and the insanitary conditions around the wound. Gangrene and infection were the cause of more battle deaths than the wounds themselves. Fleming was aware that the body's immune system was able to overcome most of the day-to-day ailments and infections which have plagued mankind. He also knew that there were other, more serious, diseases which had no built-in defences, but could be overcome by inoculation and vaccination, though for some, there was yet no cure. He was determined to devote his life to finding a solution to what he considered a major threat to mankind. On his return from France, Fleming returned to St. Mary's Hospital, and persisted in his research with ever-increasing dedication. It was not until 1928 that, partly by chance, he finally achieved a breakthrough. Having cultured a growth of staphylococcus bacteria, he went away on a two-week holiday. Upon his return, he discovered a growth of mould on the culture plate, which had halted the growth of the bacteria. Fleming was able to isolate, study, and identify the mould as of the genus *Penicillium*, (*P. chrysogenum*, formerly known as *P. notatum*) which he named penicillin. However, the subsequent production of penicillin was extremely limited, and not available to the general public. The onset

of World War II changed everything,<sup>1</sup> and by D-Day, penicillin's use among the wounded was widespread and preserved the lives of untold numbers. Penicillin was not just a treatment of infectious war wounds, but a new cure for many other scourges of humanity; probably the greatest single medical advance in history.

Alexander Fleming's altruistic ideals were of the highest, and he never received a penny for his discovery, and never wanted one. He was knighted in recognition for his work in 1944, and received The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1945, which he shared with Howard Florey and Ernst Chain. These same ideals led to him embracing the tenets of Freemasonry. During his years as a medical student at St. Mary's, he became a Freemason<sup>2</sup> and, eventually an active participant in several London Lodges, serving as Master, Secretary and Treasurer.<sup>3</sup> By now his Masonic dedication had come to the attention of the Grand Lodge of England, and he was elected Senior Grand Deacon in 1942, and Past Junior Grand Warden in 1948.<sup>4</sup> His fraternal dedication was also recognised by Freemasonry outside Britain, and in 1953, he received the Distinguished Service Citation of the Grand Lodge of New York.

Much has been made not only of 'Person of the Century', but also of 'Person of the Millennium'. Fleming's name can legitimately be considered for either or both; for by his efforts, dedication and ideals the world has become his beneficiary. He died from a heart attack on March 11th, 1955, at the age of 73. He was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral where he joined the ranks of those who belong to the ages. He had been a dedicated Freemason for 50 years and has forever earned his place beside the immortals of history.

## References

1. A team of scientists at the University of Oxford, specifically Ernst Chain, Howard Florey, et al, were able to accomplish the mass-production of penicillin, with funds from the U.S. and British governments.
2. <https://www.ugle.org.uk/about-freemasonry/famous-masons/23-sir-alexander-fleming>
3. This including the London Scottish Rifles Lodge No. 2310 (Alexander Fleming joined the London Scottish Rifles Regiment in 1900 and remained a member for the next 14 years). He subsequently became Master of Sancta Maria Lodge No. 2682 in 1925 and, later served as its Secretary. In 1935, he became Master of Misericordia Lodge No. 3286, later serving as its Treasurer.
4. Grand Lodge honours were conferred by the M.W., His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, K.G., Grand Master, at his Installation, by George VI, held at the Royal Albert Hall on March 23rd 1948.
5. Harper, Paul, Famous Freemasons - A Prologue, <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2084>



## Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

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