



Jubilee Masters Lodge No 2712
Consecrated 20th June 1898



Jubilee Masters Lodge – the early years 1898-1918

March 29, 2018

Well Brethren, I daresay you are thinking ‘why a talk at this meeting and why this subject’? I do hope at the end of this short talk your questions will have been answered!

This year marks the centenary of the end of the bloodiest conflict this country has ever known. Over ten million military personnel died in total during the five years 1914 to 1918, with around $\frac{3}{4}$ million from the UK. Some $3\frac{1}{2}$ thousand masons recognised by UGLE died and this building was built to their memory.

The centenary of the signing of the Armistice falls of course this year on November 11th, a Sunday. To mark this event, there will be a special meeting of military and related Lodges in Grand Lodge the day before. Jubilee Masters Lodge meets on the following Thursday, November 15th, and we will be hosting the Suffolk Stewards Demonstration team with their ceremony of ‘The Empty Chair’. This will be the third consecutive year that they will have performed this ceremony in this room, but it will be particularly poignant, not only because of the year but also because it will be the very last performance they will be giving. In addition, to those who have seen it before, you may be interested to know that we will be having a trumpeter to perform to add even more effect to what is a very moving ceremony.

Brethren, when I first saw the ceremony some two years ago it sparked a thought of whether there were any members of this Lodge who died during that war and I set about trying to find out. Of course, it wasn’t as easy as looking it up on the Roll of Honour as all the brethren would naturally be listed under their respective mother Lodges. However, I thought I would be able to find out from the Lodge minutes, but unfortunately, that proved a problem.

To those who have read the excellent history of the Lodge by Bryan Page, produced for our centenary in 1998, I apologise that this will not be new news, but those of you who are not aware, the early years of the Lodge are very interesting. The Lodge was originally planned to be called the Lodge of Installed Masters and the consecration was held up until the Grand Secretary agreed to the present name, and the initial requirement was that the Lodge was only open to brethren in the Chair of their Lodge at the time of joining! This rule was relaxed in 1901 to include Past Masters of London Lodges. However, the Founders and many of the early joiners were very high ranking brethren and it seemed that the Lodge Secretary deemed that the demise of only VW brethren and above worth recording! Certainly during the war, there was no record of any deaths of any of the 'rank and file' members, so it was back to the drawing board!

I then thought that I ought to be able to get a list of those who died in the relevant years from the Lodge's Annual Returns with their surnames, their initials and date of birth, perhaps deciding that if they were over say 50 years old it was unlikely that they died on the Front. I was again thwarted as the Annual Returns in those days were simply a list of surnames with no initials and no dates of birth. However, I did get a list of those members who had died and cross referenced them with both the Roll of Honour and the Library's Ancestry system but found no matches. I think we can reasonably assume brethren that probably no members of the Lodge died on the Front Line during the war, which is perhaps understandable given the Lodge's membership requirement and stature meant that most members would be similar to today's membership when perhaps most of us would say our fighting days are over! Of course, this does not mean that the members were not closely affected. One such example we heard about in the recent excellent talk by our Brother Secretary on one of the Lodge's members who was a Master during the War, R. W. Bro. Kynaston Studd, who lost his son at Ypres.

This may have been the end of matters, but I said that I read the minutes of the early years of the Lodge and found that there was an amazing story to tell.

The early days of the Lodge were particularly marked by the generosity of hospitality. Indeed from the earliest days, the June meeting was always a White Table meeting and each year a dispensation was sought for the brethren to dine with collars and jewels. Usually meetings started at six and the reception was at seven! The first meetings were held at the Hotel Cecil in the Strand, having been consecrated by the then GM, Edward, Prince of Wales and the subsequent meal consisted of 14 courses! The Lodge moved to FMH in 1911 and began dining at the Connaught Rooms. From its outset, the Lodge was particularly keen to welcome brethren from overseas. Indeed, in December 1909, the concluding portions of the Installation ceremony were given by members in German, French and Italian!

In June 1912, in the presence of the then ProGM, Lord Ampthill, the Lodge welcomed a delegation of three GMs from Berlin. Although there were eight GLs in Germany at the time, there were only four of any size – three based in Berlin and one in Hamburg.

The senior guest was the M.W. Bro. His Excellency Lieutenant-General Wegner, GM of the GM Lodge of the Three Globes, originated in 1740. They were greeted by the Pro GM in German stating that ‘we cherish the hope that this Masonic visit may do much to strengthen the ties of brotherhood which knit together the Freemasons of Germany and England, and may help in the still wider and nobler work of uniting in bonds of amity the two great Nations to which you and ourselves are proud to belong.’ Having received a similar reply from GM Bro. Wegner, the Pro GM went on to give a long address extolling the common Masonic links and issues faced by Freemasons in the two countries. The replying address by GM Bro. Wegner re-iterated the great links between the two countries – ‘this Belle Alliance’ --, quoting by example Blucher at Waterloo, concluding ‘Brother Masons, stand together and help, through the uniting power of the sublime Masonic idea, to knit closer the concord between the two nations of the same blood.’ All nine of the senior visitors were then immediately made Honorary Members of the Lodge and presented with the Jewel of the Lodge.

At the September meeting, a letter was read out from the Grand Secretary, on behalf of the GM, thanking the Lodge for hosting the German delegation and attached a letter from His Royal Highness Prince Frederic Leopold of Prussia thanking the Lodge for its generosity. The GM had also decided to promote the WM of the Lodge to SGD in recognition of the visit of the German Brethren.

At the June 1913 meeting, a lengthy report was received of a reciprocal visit by five members of the Lodge to Berlin the month before. In a letter of thanks to the host GLs, a letter was sent from the Lodge Secretary ending 'they earnestly trust that such International interchanges of friendship begun last year in London, and cemented this year in Berlin, may prove to be frequent and their beneficial influence perpetual.'

In May 1914, an Emergency Meeting was held in order to greet 31 members of Lodges from Berlin, as well as the GM of the GL of Hamburg. The Pro GM was again in attendance and welcomed the brethren. The Lodge WM stated that at the regular June meeting the GM of the GL of Hamburg would be proposed as an Honorary Member.

The September 1914 meeting makes no mention of the outbreak of the War, except that an intriguing minute under the Second Rising states that 'The WM explained the reasons why no proposition was made as to any grant being made from the Lodge funds to the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund or any other fund started in connection with the War.'

Regular donations were made at the December 1914 and subsequent to various War-related charities, but no mention is ever made of the links to German masonry. The most significant thing is that the Honorary Memberships on the many German masons before the War were never rescinded.

Brethren, in an age where we are swamped with news, 'fake' or otherwise, it is hard to comprehend how ignorant people were of the wider world just a century ago. Even if one compares the build up to the two world wars, they couldn't be more different. The Second World War could be said to have been inevitable after the punitive Treaty of Versailles and the Great Depression. People around the world saw and heard about the steady build up towards conflict, and even a 'piece of paper' didn't fool most of the population. In contrast, the run up to World War One was totally different. Nobody expected the Kaiser to go to war against his two cousins, and even if they did, most people, except Kitchener and other enlightened generals, believed that it would all be over in one big battle, a 'second Waterloo', and that everybody would be 'home for Christmas'. The reality and horrors of the Front Line were therefore even the more shocking and we will hear at our next meeting in June in a presentation by our WM excerpts from a mason's diary of some of his experiences during the war and I trust will be moved by its contents.

Thank you, Brethren.