



Worcestershire Associated
Masonic Lodges



GROUP 13
STOURBRIDGE



FOREWORD

Group 13 W.A.M.L. comprises 24 elected representatives (4 from each of the undermentioned six Craft Lodges meeting at the Talbot Hotel, Stourbridge).

Lodge of Stability No. 564

Godson Lodge No. 2385

Swinford Lodge No. 5729

St. Kenelm Lodge No. 6082

Old Edwardian Lodge of Stourbridge No. 6141

Lodge of St. Thomas No. 7940

It is felt by your Group Committee that the address given by the Presiding Officer at the First Annual Group 13 Festival, which took place on Friday, 27th February, 1976, would be of general interest to Stourbridge Freemasons.

**GROUP 13 W.A.M.L. FIRST ANNUAL FESTIVAL
HELD AT THE TALBOT HOTEL, STOURBRIDGE
27th FEBRUARY, 1976**

SUMMARY OF OPENING ADDRESS

by Presiding Officer, W.Bro. R. BENNETT, P.A.G.D.C.

After extending a welcome to all Group Participants, their Visitors, and to the Guest Speaker, (W.Bro. R. H. Hall, P.P.G.Reg.), W.Bro. Bennett continued.—

I thought this might be an occasion for all of us to reflect on the very ancient connection that Stourbridge has had with early organised Freemasonry. Some of us know that so far back as 1733 there was a Lodge meeting in this very Hotel. It apparently had no name, but is merely recorded as No. 119, later as 104, and then as No. 62, until the year 1769, when it was erased. However, in 1768, another Athol or Ancient Lodge was formed, which indeed may have had the effect of ousting the then existing Lodge. It doesn't seem to have survived for long; it again had no name, but was No. 154, and the Lodge appears to have moved off the scene, and to have become re-established at (of all places) Whitehaven.

However, proceeding onward, another Lodge appeared in Stourbridge in the year 1770. It was the Lodge of Hope No. 372. This does not seem to have met at the Talbot Hotel, for it is recorded as meeting at the Three Tuns Inn in 1775; moved to the Crown Inn in 1793; moved to the Star Inn in 1801, and back again to the Crown in 1802. The Lodge worked under various numbers, and lasted until 1828, when it was finally erased. Then ensued a gap of some 20 years, during which time no doubt Stourbridge Masons had to pursue their interests in the localities of Dudley, Halesowen, Kidderminster, etc.

Those who have been privileged to read the history of "The Lodge of Stability No. 564 1849-1949", by W. Bro. A. Grove, do not find it difficult to realise that the district of Stourbridge must have been a centre of Masonic activities even earlier than the proven records available tell us.

In those early days, Masons were invariably Professional men or Master Craftsmen who had the time and facilities to travel many miles to meet their Masonic Brothers and practise the art of Masonry both in and out of Lodge. We may well conclude from other Masonic records that Lodges often met early in the day, and went on for long periods. "Calling Off and On" was regularly practised; no doubt to meet the demand their enthusiasm had for taking a day off from business, in times when the working day was of unlimited hours of toil. Speculating in our thoughts of two and a half centuries ago, we may well conclude that Masonic Lodges and Craft Guilds existed in and around Stourbridge, divorced from any organised higher authority.

When I was a boy at Stourbridge Grammar School, about 1908, there was an old pub; the Vine, adjoining. It has long been closed, and I think it was acquired by the School, and merged into their property. There is an etched illustration of the Vine, as it was in the old days, in Albert Grove's History of the Lodge of Stability No. 564. In 1849, a body of local Freemasons decided to constitute a fresh Lodge, under the name Stability No. 824, (re-numbered in 1863 as 564). Its meeting place, for some reason was at the Vine, but it didn't remain there for long. It moved off, and settled in at the Talbot Hotel, where for the next 90 years it reigned solitary and supreme as the only Stourbridge Lodge. The first Master of The Lodge of Stability, W.Bro. Charles Curran, was a Master Glazier living in and doing business in Digbeth, Birmingham. Quite a journey in those days from Birmingham to Stourbridge, which would of course most likely be by horse drawn vehicle.

From 1939 onwards, there was a remarkable accession to the masonic strength of Stourbridge. One after another, came Swinford 5729, St. Kenelm 6082, Old Edwardian Lodge of Stourbridge 6141, Lodge of St. Thomas 7940, and more recently Godson No. 2385, who came from Oldbury to reside with us. (A Lodge who have their antiquity dating from 1890 to now add to ours).

Happily we in Stourbridge are rightly proud of "The Lodge of Stability" for holding Masonry together for so long a period, and giving our several newer Lodges a strong background of history and tradition to emulate.

To return to those very old Lodges to which I referred in my opening remarks; it is sad to reflect that they have left very few records for posterity. The standard of literacy in those days was not all that could be desired. Lodges were subject to authority of one Grand Lodge or another, or none. Small wonder that among all the quarrelling, the ancient records are so sparse. Perhaps this scarcity of records may have been deliberate for the purpose of confidentiality and secrecy; for in those days, few if any printed or written versions of even the Ancient Charges could be found for Masons' own learning. Learning was done by memorizing the spoken word, and certainly this would be the case with the early Masons of Stourbridge.

The Union of the Grand Lodges in 1813 was a momentous event, but many years were to pass before the United Grand Lodge of England could claim a final position of authority and governance of the Craft.

We all know that, as constituted today, Grand Lodge exercises its control over the Craft by powers delegated to the Masonic Provinces. In a similar manner, the Provincial Grand Lodges afford guidance and support to all the Private Lodges within their ambit. We, as Worcestershire Private Lodges, have always been subject to the direction of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire.

In this Province, some 40 years ago, it became evident that there existed an unfortunate void in the matter of contacts between members of the Private Lodges and

Provincial Grand Lodge. The situation was becoming aggravated, too, by the continuing increase in the number of new Lodges in the Province. It was therefore, (most wisely as it turned out) decided to establish a Liaison Body, representative of all the Worcestershire Lodges, the function of which would be to channel ideas, attitudes, and suggestions from the Private Lodges, for the attention and consideration of Provincial Grand Lodge. This Body was constituted under the style of the WORCESTERSHIRE ASSOCIATED MASONIC LODGES, and would work as a Committee. Quite obviously, a committee comprising one representative from each Lodge would be too cumbersome to be workable. The Province was therefore divided up into geographical areas, within each of which were half a dozen or so neighbouring Lodges. These areas became designated as "GROUPS", and today there are 13 of them. WE IN THE STOURBRIDGE AREA ARE GROUP 13. The Groups meet twice annually, being composed of four representatives from each Participating Lodge. Their functions are laid down in the W.A.M.L. Constitution, printed in the Year Book, so I will not detail them unnecessarily. Suffice it to say that each Group appoints two delegates annually, to attend the Central Meeting of W.A.M.L., which also meets twice a year, and transmits reports of all matters of interest and importance arising in Private Lodges, direct to the Provincial Grand Secretary.

At this Festival Meeting, it is only right that I should tell you that our Group 13 delegates have consistently attended the W.A.M.L. Central Committee. We have

been among the most active of the Groups in raising points for consideration, and we are held in high esteem. Let me tell you of some of the matters in which we have concerned ourselves over the past years:—

We have:—

Secured from Grand Lodge, the honour of the Prestonian Lecture.

Twice been successful in putting forward nominations for the Office of Provincial Grand Treasurer.

Undertaken the complete arrangements for the hosting of the Annual Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge.

Acted as host Group on occasion at this Hotel, for the bi-ennial meetings of the W.A.M.L. Central Committee.

Arranged inter-lodge visits to the Worcs. Library & Museum.

Offered suggestions to the Year Book Editors.

Arranged transport, etc. on an inter-lodge basis, for the visit to London on the occasion of the 1969 Boys' Festival.

Formulated suggestions to Grand Lodge, in connection with the Bagnall Report on the Masonic Charities. Etc., etc.

I am very proud to recall that, after many years of connection with Worcestershire Associated Masonic Lodges, I was elected as the W.A.M.L. President for the

year 1951. I have managed to attend most of their bi-ennial meetings ever since, though in an ex-officio capacity, as our elected delegates are unfailing in their regular attendance.

I ought to say just one more thing. Never let yourselves forget that we have another vitally inter-lodge Committee in Stourbridge — **THE STOURBRIDGE MASONIC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**, which is the central body handling (on behalf of all the participating Lodges), the masonic contractual arrangements we have with the Hotel, in regard to rentals, catering, etc., and the Insurance of all Masonic property. This is the **BUSINESS COMMITTEE**.

Our Group 13 W.A.M.L. Committee does not touch these business matters. We look forward to, and welcome suggestions and comments falling within the "Objects and Constitution" of W.A.M.L. as laid down in the Year Book — even from the very newest member of any of our constituent Lodges. These, channelled through Lodge appointed representatives, are duly considered, and if thought fit, are transmitted to the W.A.M.L. Central Committee for further action, where appropriate.

And as a result of our past regular deliberations, I am happy to say that it is manifest that we have cultivated a close fraternal masonic contact within and among all the Stourbridge Lodges. The existence of this is most highly appreciated, and is evidenced by the very large and enthusiastic gathering here on this Festival Evening.

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