

THE FIRST TEN YEARS.

As we all well know Cecil John Rhodes was the responsible for many things in this land of ours, but one of particular interest for us to-night is the fact that Rhodesia Lodge 2479 E.C. interested himself in the provision of the first Temple, and in turn and from the information which is available, it may be claimed that Rhodesia owes its name to the Lodge which first designated itself so, at a preliminary Lodge meeting held on 3rd October 0 1891.

It was on the 20th September 1891 that the first meeting of Masons was convened - to appoint the sub committee, it was the work of this committee to wait upon the officials of the British South Africa Company and to apply for four stands for the purpose of erecting a Masonic Lodge.

The minutes of a meeting on the 3rd October 1891 show that 14 Brethren attended including Bro Hugo am Ende, who proposed that the lodge be named RHODESIA. A draft of the Bye Laws of the Lodge was approved and co-operation of the Sister Constitution Lodges was invited. It would seem in Jan 1892 difficulty was experienced in some B.B. getting clearance so that the application to Grand Lodge for a Charter could be properly supported. At one meeting only 5 brethren had their papers in order so business was postponed for another three months, whilst plans went ahead for the building of the Temple. At a meeting in April of the same year 1892 it is recorded that Cecil John Rhodes would present the furniture. In October ten members were present at a meeting each subscribed 5/- for a minute book and towards current expences, a minute book appears to have been purchased for 15/- but its fate is unknown.

For the first six months of 1893 no record is available for /or of any business transacted. It would appear the first Charter was lost in with other mails in a flooded river, the new Charter was eventually received dated 3rd July 1893 and was addressed to Bro Rev Geo. H. Eva Lodge 2479 - the first intimation of the number of the Lodge in the registrar of the Grand Lodge of England. Thus it was over 2 years since Bro am Ende first set ~~forth~~ ~~movements~~ afoot to establish the Lodge. The Charter is signed by H.R.H. Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII.

The next six months records tenders for the Temple, the raising of mortgages, the provision of a canvas roof, as there was no wood in the town. the clearing of vegetation and the provision of fencing. The first Temple it seems, has now been completed, the main structure was of brick wallsm with dagga plaster, brick floor and limbo ceiling. The Matabele Rebellion no doubt interfere interferred to some extent with regular Lodge meetings. A Bro Kennedy apparantly returned from the front early in 1894, and at a meeting announced his departure to England on furlough, and gave an undertaking that he would call on the Grand Lodge Secretary and explain that the reason for the Lodge was not concenrated was due maily to the unsettled conditions in Mashonaland. In December 1894 it was decided to consecrate the Lodge this being on a Sunday morning at 11oclock One letter records "I regret that Sunday should be chosen for this purpose and do protest that Freemasonry should set itself up as a rival to the Church. The writer adds "I am glad to say that I am not alone in holding this opinion, and that other B.B. will protest by being absent from the meeting."

At long last the Dedication ceremony was held Saturday 12th January 1895, the record in its preamble reads " After an unavoidable delay of n nearly two years chiefly owing to circumstances which have influenced the whole of the territories, some 26 men of the Masonic fraternity met to be present etc. The first regular meeting of the Rhodesian Lodge 2479 was held immediately afterwards. The Charter was read and no other business was transacted.

The success of the Lodge ~~wand~~ its regular working seems to be now to be well established, at its second meeting 15 candidates were duly elected for initiation. Salisbury as it was in 1895 had little to offer, and they made an offer for the use of the Temple building for £100 including a retiring room for one night each month for twelve months provided the same be floored . lighting. and made fit for dancing. This was approved for the said dances on nights which there was no Masonic Meeting. A reference to mail delays seems worthy of mention an invitation to an Installation ceremony in S.A. was received in Feb. 1895 took 25 days to travel from Salisbury. Probably several of the Ox trails were impassable owing to the rains.

Some reference to lighting, in a letter to the Secretary (the candles which arrived safely from Jo. burg so promptly forwarded for which a Postal Order for 38/- is enclosed. One wonders whether this outlay was for lighting the Lodge or the dance floor requirements.

In April 1895 is traced the first order to London for aprons, collars, envelopes, seals, music, carpets etc. to a total value of £80 " The carpet to be 30 feet by 15 feet 9 inches, to be packed in a tin lined case and to be forwarded via Beira, the rest to be made up in small parcels and forwarded per parcel post. In the year 1895 no fewer than 23 meetings were held, the versatility of the officers of the Lodge may be deduced from this record., and the number of candidates dealt with. Great credit must be given to those Pioneers in the Masonic Circle of Rhodesia for the unrest in the country and the insecurity of life and property cannot be more graphically illustrated than by a minute passed on the 9th Jan. 1896, recording a telegram sent to a British resident in Pretoria. "Can you inform us if our Master is amongst the dead with Jameson. (Dr Jameson's raid)

Cecil John Rhodes the founder of Rhodesia was initiated in Oxford but as far as can be traced, he took no active part in the working of Rhodesia Lodge. Transport difficulties apparently were not solely confined to the limits of Southern Africa, this is the era of the sailing ship, for although a minute records an organ for the Temple being ordered from London in 1895, it is read from a meeting in 1896 that the Tyler declined the cheque for £25 for fees voted him, and desired that in view of our having used the organ ~~xxx~~ belonging to the Wesleyan Chapel that the £5 to be applied and donated to the Church and the £20 remaining to be used for the new organ. Both were approved.

By Jan 1897 after some debate, it was decided to go ahead with the erection of a new Temple. Members were invited to subscribe for £3000 debentures at 10% interest. It may be assumed in 1898 the organ had arrived it seems it had been damaged in transit, the quality of the music was discussed at a meeting, and it was agreed that nothing could be done to improve it.

By April 1898 the contract had been placed for the building at a cost of £3260 and to be completed in four months, and the builder to be subject to a fine of £1 a day for any extra days taken. The foundation stone was laid and dedication was held on the 24th June 1898 with Masonic Honours, current newspapers, coins, swords and plan of the building were deposited with the stone. 3/I officers and B.B. attended. A good Ball was held in the evening. When the new Temple was nearing completion enthusiasm for detail was abundant. Chandeliers were ordered from C/Toni, complete with all fittings, with four arms, with extra lamps and wicks and globes. The Lodge was consolidating and plans were afoot for the formation of D.G. L. The Bulawayo Lodge was advancing its claim to its being sited there instead of Salisbury, in 1899 a Bro. claims having lost his G.L. Certificate which misfortune was due to having been destroyed by ants, and another incident records the destroying completed of a Bros. apron and other Lodge property by white ants in the Temple. At the consecration ceremony two B.B. were posted outside owing to the ventilators allowing more sound to travel outside than was good for the listeners who were present. As so often happens even in the early days Members were default in paying the usual subs, on one occasion those in default were given a deadline and those not paid would have their names posted on the board in the Lodge. This appears to have the right effect as no further mention is made.

Charity has and always will be close to our hearts, and so it was in the early days, In 1900 regular donations were made to the R.M. School for Girls and Boys , also in the same year many of the Brethren were asking for clearance certificates to go to the Boer War , at the same time the paintwork of the new Temple had suffered by the exposure to the sun, as were orders were given for "Painting" with two coats of paint, the side doors and windows, the front door to be grained in "First Class style". In the same year A Lodge of Instruction was formed and constituted , cultural advancement was also taken care of, Cinderella Dances , social parties and picnics were arranged , and plans were debated for the eventual establishment of a Rhodesian Masonic Education Fund, and the inauguration of the Lodge Library.

Well brethren, here was jst a little of the history of the first 10 years of early Masonery in Rhodesia, and I think it fair and true to say, the old chaps , pioneers each and every one left us much to be thankful for, they were truly great and went a long way to meet their obligation. "If in the length of my C.Toe. pleading no excuse except sickness or the pressing emergencg of my public or private avocation. To-day, I often wonder if we really take this as well as our prelesessors.

In conclusion let me say it was in 1893 hostilities broke out between the adminstration and Lobengula, which resulted in the death of that chief and the occupation and settlement of Matabeleland. In May 1895 the name "Rhodesia" was officially adopted to designate the combined territories i.e. Masbotaland and Matabeleland .

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