

A SHORT HISTORY OF ST. ALPHEGE LODGE

St. Alphege Lodge, the third daughter Lodge of St. Pauls No. 43, was consecrated at Solihull on the 10th of October 1873 by Colonel John Machen, Deputy Provincial Grand Master of Warwickshire, supported by a goodly number of Provincial Grand Lodge Officers including Bishop Hamilton Baynes who delivered the oration. It was named after St. Alphege, the Saxon Bishop, who was martyred by the Danes on the banks of the Thames estuary in the year 1012. His church is the Parish Church of Solihull, where the Lodge could be said to have received its infant nurture and where during the 750th Anniversary celebrations the Master of St. Alphege Lodge, Brother D.M. Hickman, read the lesson.

There were ten founder members, of whom curiously enough only three attained the Master's Chair. In fact in 1876 Brother H. Sanderson was elected Worshipful Master for a second time when the Senior Warden fell a victim to a resolution for his exclusion. The founder members were in addition to a "gentleman", a chemist, a commercial traveller, a licensed victualler, two accountants, a leather merchant and an auctioneer.

cont.....

-2-

Brother H. Sanderson subsequently became the only brother in the annals of the Lodge to serve four terms as Master, being elected again in 1885 and 1888.

These early days were troubled times for St. Alphege Lodge, and its difficulties showed in the frequency of resignations, as in the oft repeated records of financial crisis. Elected candidates sometimes failed to present themselves, and this defection provoked the members to pass a resolution requiring a cash deposit from every proposer which became forfeit on the withdrawal of the candidate. The finances of the Lodge were not improved by the activities of the 1889 Secretary who, having visited Brazil and sent back a highly critical account of the conduct of Freemasons in that country, profited from his experience by appropriating the Lodge funds in his year of Office. His misdemeanour received the appropriate masonic penalty of expulsion, which was recorded in the Lodge minutes and the Worshipful Master headed a special whip-round to meet the deficiency of £80 which in those days was a tidy sum.

Contribution may appropriately be paid to Brother J. Hallman who supervised the furnishing and fitting out of the Lodge and its foundation at a cost of £170, but realising three years later ~~and~~ the inability of the Lodge to reimburse him, made the Lodge a gift of its furniture.

cont.....

In its early years, the Lodge was held at the George Hotel in Solihull, a fact which, in those far off pre-motor car days, was a stern test of the enthusiasm and assiduity of the Brethren. Most of them had to travel from Birmingham, and the summonses bore a note of the convenient train times. As the Lodge grew in numbers, in spite of the high wastage previously referred to, double initiations were frequent, and meetings were held throughout the year. Promotion was rapid and seniority gave place to merit and suitability for office, an example of adherence to Masonic precept which might well be emulated in the present day. A Brother J. Boston was initiated in February 1876 and became Master in 1879, but his predecessor Brother D. Allsop had an even more rapid rise, having been admitted in March 1876, became Senior Warden in 1877, and Master in 1878. Brother Allsop became a great worker for the Lodge and occupied various offices over the years. He appears for a term as Senior Deacon in 1885, and fifteen years later with unabated energy he became Secretary for a further ten years, although at that time wearing the badge of P.P.A.G.D.C. Brother Boston became treasurer in the same year and held this office and others over many years.

cont.....

Copyright Worcester and Museum Trust

In the context of long service the present day holds no better example than the Phillips family. Ephraim Phillips was initiated in 1896, his sons Alfred and Howard appear in the list of Past Masters against the years 1930 and 1931, and were tremendous examples of Masonic stature over four decades. The third generation is now ably represented by Brother Douglas Phillips who was Worshipful Master in 1964.

In 1900 Provincial Grand Lodge were the guests of St. Alphege for their annual general meeting at Solihull, an attendance of 164 being recorded. About this time there was a growing trend of opinion that Solihull was not the most convenient venue for meetings. For a year twice monthly meetings were held at the George Hotel in Birmingham, in addition to the ordinary Lodge meetings, and it was at one of these that the St. Alphege Lodge of Instruction came into being. The dissatisfaction with the George Hotel facilities persisted and a sub-committee was formed to find methods to improve the situation. In 1912 it was proposed to spend £500 in improving the accommodation at Solihull, but this policy lost favour and was discarded in ^{face} ~~face~~ of an opposition movement to transfer the Lodge to the Severn Street Temple.

cont.....

Copyright Worcester and Museum Trust

The immediate consequence of this was the resignation of nine brethren. An alternative proposition in 1905 that the Lodge should meet at the Y.M.C.A. (at that time in Needless Alley) not surprisingly did not come to fruition! At this period the summer meetings were discontinued and the September to May pattern emerged which persisted into the 1960's. After five years as tenants of Atholl Lodge in Severn Street, St. Alphege removed to the Acorn Hotel in Temple Street, where the Connaught Rooms accommodated several Birmingham Lodges. The Acorn was subsequently renamed the Imperial, and the Lodge remained there happily until the Broad Street Temple was built in the 1930's, although for a period of a year the banquet following meetings was removed to the Lamp Tavern in Bull Street. Enjoyment of the new temple was however short-lived, as St. Alphege Lodge had to move out in the early part of the second world war to make way for the Ministry of Food, and with its fellow tenants moved to the Edgbaston Assembly Rooms, where it remained until moving to its present home.

Mention has been made of the inauguration of the St. Alphege Lodge of Instruction, and so long has it flourished that some of the present membership may very well live to see it also celebrating its centenary.

cont.....

Its first Secretary was a Brother H. Pitts and he has been followed by a long list of devoted brethren. Although not limited to members of St. Alphege, within present memory its preceptors have come from the ranks of Lodge Past Masters noted for their abilities and sticklers for the strict ritual with perhaps only one or two small departures from the orthodox which have by now become a tradition of the Lodge. The preceptors have acquired a wide reputation throughout the Province for their annual presentation of the Lodge of Instruction Festival at which they present a programme of lesser known and often fascinating facets of masonic lore which by many authorities has been called unique.

The Lodge has greatly benefited by the continued support of its Past Masters of which there are at present 20 including 15 holders of Provincial honours. Since 1909 the March meeting has been taken over by the Past Masters, and has become known as Past Masters Night. There is no lack of competition for an opportunity for showing the younger generation what masonry is all about. Only one Brother of St. Alphege, within the knowledge of the compiler of these notes, has been honoured with Grand Lodge rank. This being the late Alfred Flavell who was promoted in 1933, and there is still with us at least one Brother who was present on the occasion of the presentation to him by the Lodge of his Grand Lodge regalia,

cont.....

the expense of which was shared by Benevolent Lodge, the chair of which he had occupied ten years after being Master of St. Alphege.

In the field of masonic charity St. Alphege has an exemplary record, and has the right to bear on its stationery the honours of all four masonic charitable causes.

Of daughter Lodges St. Alphege has two, Machen Lodge No. 1782 in 1878 and Benevolence Lodge No. 4035 in 1919. One grand daughter Lodge, that of Equity No. 5554 was sponsored by Benevolence in 1935. The entire founder membership of Benevolence consisted of Brethren of St. Alphege.

Lest the reader of this narrative gain an impression of a history of unremarkable and monotonous existence, let him be assured that the brethren of St. Alphege are not insensitive to the slight relief provided by the occasional unexpected incident. Within the recollection of the writer an initiation has been enlivened by an obligation on the Lodge Clock which extended to 120 chimes. This was caused by the attachment (inadvertent?) of a heavy key to the cord of the sounding mechanism. More recently the same clock could only manage eleven strokes while the Brethren waited with baited breath for the twelfth which never came.

cont.....

On another occasion the Brethren were hard put to contain their merriment when the Secretary who had evidently been lavishly entertained en route for the Lodge, was unable to find his spectacles. He gallantly and jovially refused all offers of assistance and spent twenty-five minutes over reading the minutes. On another occasion a very senior Past Master arrived late at the Lodge, entered to greet the Worshipful Master left handed, and with a salute in a superior degree at that! But the palm for unconscious humour must surely be awarded to that Brother, who being questioned as to his proficiency in a former degree asserted that "Masonry was a system of morality veiled in AYLESBURY!"

In the field of entertainment St. Alphege sets a high standard with its Ladies Evenings and Old English Nights, the latter being held at Christmas. In May the Annual Lodge of Instruction Festival attracts a large and appreciative gathering of freemasons. All these events bring substantial benefits to masonic charities and great satisfaction to a succession of industrious Almoners.

These notes would be incomplete without mention of the St. Alphege Royal Arch Chapter. This was formed in 1919 and still flourishes, supported by a strong leavening of Brethren from other Lodges.

cont.....

In the preparation of these notes we have tried not to let ^{them} it develop into a long list of dates and names. In an account of the life of a masonic Lodge dramatic happenings are few and far between. The edifice rises stone by stone but there is no final completion; members come and go to be replaced by others who carry on their work with the same spirit of earnestness. We hope what we have written has proved of some interest to our readers, and that they have enjoyed assisting at the celebration of 100 years of honest endeavour, in the cause of *Freemasonry*.

-END-

Copyright Worcestershire Masonic
Library and Museum Trust