

## **WALoR 1983 TRANSACTIONS Vol.33 No.01**

### **THE 1983 ROBIN HEWITT MEMORIAL LECTURE**



**OUR OWN FREEMASONRY  
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I cannot stress too strongly my appreciation of the invitation of the Lodge of Research to present the 'Robin Hewitt Memorial Lecture' for 1983 and I tender my sincere thanks.

Freemasonry, as an Ancient Society, can be traced to very early times by writers such as Dr. Albert Churchward who traces its origin to the Writings on the Walls of Ancient Egypt, indeed it is because of the multifarious expositions written over the centuries by eminent Freemasons that Lodges such as the Lodge of Research have been founded in an endeavour to satisfy the enquiring mind of the Masonic Scholar.

These writings of Masonic Scholars have continued to stimulate the inquisitive Masonic mind over the centuries, and long may they continue; however the most important area of Freemasonry, as it concerns us, is 'Our Own Freemasonry' - Speculative Freemasonry as it has existed during our lives, the immediate past and the foreseeable future.

A great number of the Craft of today first saw the light of masonry around the 1930s which time was known as the World Depression. The downturn of world economic conditions halted world progress for several years and naturally the progress of our Freemasonry could not escape its disastrous effect. It suffered proportionally as the numbers of initiates and members fell dramatically.

The Depression also had a disastrous effect on the finances of Lodges due to the high percentage of resignations and exclusions. Notwithstanding the depressed economy 1931 was the only year which resulted in a nett decrease in membership and, although for a few years the increases in total membership were small, Freemasonry due mainly to the dedication of its members held its head high, gradually weathered the storm and at all times maintained a very high standard ceremonially within the Temple, at the Festive Board and within the structure of the State of Western Australia.

With the exception of 1940, membership was comparatively stable until the World War 11 surge commenced in 1943. It is worthy of note that this upsurge took place exactly one hundred years after Freemasonry was established in Western Australia by The Lodge of St. John.

The sixteen years that followed can be remembered as the period when Lodges climbed to their peak. There was an abundance of candidates, ceremonies were maintained at a very high standard and Festive Boards were well organised. The tables were well appointed and supplied with knife and fork meals, the Junior Warden always arranged for guest artists and at Installation and December meetings an orchestra supplied good and bright music.

This created an atmosphere compelling the individual to look forward with excitement towards attending his own Lodge and Festive Board also to accept invitations, freely given to visit other Lodges. It was an uplifting happy exciting experience to be a Freemason in Western Australia.

There is an apt saying 'Life was not meant to be easy' and the years that followed demonstrated this to all Lodges, indeed to all organisations, which we refer to generally as service organisations, with the advent in Western Australia of Television.

The drawing power of Television became apparent very quickly and was intensified by a very successful Commonwealth Games held at Perth in 1962. I have no knowledge of the number of sets acquired by metropolitan dwellers especially for viewing the Games. It is of course pure conjecture whether this was the real reason for the commencement of a gradual decline in membership but it is factual that this was the period when the downward trend commenced.

It must be remembered we were still clinging to the old practice of hiding our light under a bushel, brethren had been taught never to disclose their affiliation with the Order and never to discuss it either at home or with those unaffiliated with the craft, in fact so many sons of Freemasons grew up wondering why dad did not invite them to enter the Craft - they were never asked or told they would not be asked,

Fortunately this attitude altered through the change of thought of leaders during the 1960s and 1970s when brethren were encouraged, to 'roll up the blinds' so that others could see the fine qualities of' Freemasonry, what good it was doing. Families and non-masons were invited to functions, encouraged to enter and see the Temples and were informed in respect of the real purpose of Speculative Freemasonry.

Grand Lodge had already embarked on the establishment of Freemasons' Cottage Homes, authority for which was given at April Communication in 1962, in an effort to assist the brethren within our Constitution (I shall refer to these projects later) and which it was anticipated would also enhance our public image.

Changes in Freemasonry's Current operations and activities are not restricted to care of the aged through provision of appropriate housing in Cottages, Masonic Hostels and Nursing Homes. Care of youth is also a very real concern as is evidenced in the Freemasons' Scholarship awards.

A Freemasons' Scholarship Scheme, begun in a small way in 1955, offered opportunity for able students in needy families to complete the full secondary school course long before such assistance was provided by the Federal Government. The Scheme has burgeoned in recent years and in 1982 offered very real assistance - 2 only Scholarships each of \$1000.00, 3 only each \$500.00 from the PREE bequest, 8 only each \$500.00 from the Robert Russell Memorial Fund and 12 only each \$500.00 Post Secondary from the Widows Orphans and Aged Freemasons Fund. These grants were excellent, however the Board of Benevolence has now taken a major step forward in this area and in 1983 will provide forty five scholarships to the total value of \$22,500.00. When added to those provided in 1982 worth \$13,500.00 Grand Lodge will have awarded seventy scholarships valued at \$360,000.00 during these two years, The Scholarships granted for 1983 are 10 only Renewals and 9 new from the Pree Bequest, 4 Renewals and 5 new from the Robert Russell Memorial Fund and 3 Renewals and 5 new from the W.O. & A.F. Fund each for \$500.00. Five applications were not approved.

Brethren, do you know of any organisation that would better or even equal this assistance to the educational facilities of the youth of the community. Surely this is a 'service' of the highest order. I trust the Board of General Purpose will ensure that the General Public will be made patently aware of these contributions of Benevolence.

Moreover, there have been significant changes within the framework of Freemasonry with benefits accruing to Private Lodges and their members. The formation (June 1966) and the successful operation of the Present and Past Grand Officers Association established a happy monthly meeting ground for many Past Masters who hold Grand Rank.

The introduction of 50 Year Jewel Award (February 1967) has meant that our brethren, senior in age and irrespective of rank, can have their years of loyal and dedicated service and support, recognised in an appropriate way.

The change over to the Grand Lodge premises in Terrace Road (December 1966) afforded a long delayed opportunity to establish a functional Grand Lodge Library and Museum. Many brethren have contributed to the successful establishment of these necessary adjuncts, and notably this Lodge - The Lodge of Research - which handed over its quite considerable Library collection. Regrettably, as yet, the well stocked Library has failed to attract sufficient attention by users.

Recognition of the significant steps taken by Entered Apprentices and an attempt, early in their Masonic career, to help them appreciate the nature of the fraternity they had joined led to the inauguration of the Entered Apprentices' Hour (March 1971). In a simple function, held monthly for ten years in the late afternoon, and since then, quarterly in the evening with wives attending, Entered Apprentices have been welcomed into the Masonic fellowship, given the opportunity of meeting and chatting with the Grand Master and, Senior Officers and helped to understand the tenets and traditions~,, of Freemasonry Universal.

A fuller appreciation of Freemasonry's Charitable and Benevolent activities and responsibilities, has been promoted by the appointment of a Grand Almoner (April 1973) and special recognition of splendid service records through the Grand Master's Order of Service Award (April 1973) has secured for even the most humble Master Mason an overdue form of commendation.

The failure of independently produced Masonic Journals - there once were two in circulation, the W.A. Freemason and the W.A. Craftsman left Freemasons without a source of current Masonic information. After a short delay, occasioned by apathy on the part of Lodge Members, Grand Lodge assumed responsibility for the publication of a quarterly magazine, The Western Mason, from 1977 onwards. This publication has gone some way towards remedying the lack of current and topical Masonic news. Regrettably again it must be noted that the measure of support has been limited, hence any much needed expansion of the Journal has so far been rendered impracticable.

There should be added to this list of changes - all of which are intended to benefit individual members of the Craft - the conscious efforts of the Grand Master and Deputy Grand Master in office in recent decades to maintain a heavy programme of visits to Private Lodges, to support social activities such as Masonic Balls and other District functions, and to promote Jurisdiction-wide or District-wide efforts in the Social Service field. Nor should one overlook the time, thought and effort that goes into Exemplification activities by the Grand Inspector of Workings, his Deputy and the team of District Grand Inspectors of Workings. It was indeed a rare event before the middle sixties for Grand Officers to work an Exemplification - Nowadays it has become a routine practice to help the brethren in this way, irrespective of whether the need is in the metropolitan area or the country districts, near or far.

Our Masonic Order has developed more and more towards a Service organisation, whether we like to refer to it as such, matters little; we must look facts in the face. With a total of not less than 427 in our well established cottages including Mt. Lawley (approx. 214) Coolbellup (32), Orelia (34), Geraldton (12), Albany (12), Busselton(12), Esperance (21), and Kalgoorlie (12), The Hostel and Nursing Home at Lynwood (105).

Tenders will shortly be called for the first fifteen of a thirty six Unit and Social Centre complex at Bunbury, and plans are under consideration for additional accommodation at Busselton, including the possibility of a number of Resident Funded Units. An application has already been lodged with the appropriate authorities to permit the establishment of a sixty bed Hostel and sixty bed Nursing Home on this site. Negotiations appear to be nearing a favourable conclusion in connection with

the proposed complex at Dianella, where we anticipate constructing in excess of one hundred units together with a Social Centre for the use of the elderly folk of that Village.

The Grand Lodge has purchased four hectares of prime residential land in the suburb of Kingsley which is only 22 kilometers from the centre of Perth, where the first stage of 20 to 30 Units should be commenced shortly. This complex when completed will approximate thirty two, two-bedroom units, which could be Resident Funded, twenty four single-bedroom units together with a sixty bed Hostel and a sixty bed Nursing Home once the license is available. This we anticipate in the foreseeable future. All of these establishments with in excess of 25% of the present and future residents, not related to any Freemason. Surely this cannot be referred to as other than a 'Service' to the community.

The Board of General Purposes is cognizant of the fact that when the present projects in the metropolitan area are completed, we shall have utilised almost all our available land. Therefore it will no doubt endeavour to acquire additional parcels as they become available, to enable Grand Lodge to fulfil its obligation of providing land on which the State Housing Commission will build Cottage Homes for aged persons, in accordance with our agreement which covered a period of twenty five years. Despite the dramatic increase in service to the community and all the changes this has involved, it is amazing that no increase in membership has been reflected. There is no doubt we talk Freemasonry more in our daily lives than ever before, little short of offering invitations to join, and yet the overall increase is not there. Why is it so?

Is the social standard of life today demanding so much more in monetary values from the individual? How much bearing does this really have on joining a Masonic Lodge? Do the amenities included in the new home today have such a bearing on the home budget? In many cases the wives of today continue to work to assist in combating inflation, perhaps it is not unreasonable that they object to the husband adding the financial burden in Masonry to the spiralling cost of living. Returning to June 1932 the annual subscription was a goodly percentage of the weekly wage. The subscription paid to Masonry was approximately 2pounds10 shillings per year and when related to the Metal Trades Industry adult weekly wage of that period of 4 pounds 16shillings represents 52% of one week's wages.

Let us now compare it to today's income. In June 1982 the Metal Industry adult weekly wage was \$267.80. Taking the average annual subscription in 1982 as approximately \$55.00, the payment is 20% of today's Metal Industry adult wage. Relating the percentages to which I have referred, should we in 1982/ 83 not be looking at approximately \$138.00 as our annual subscription. Do we realise how far below today's monetary values our annual subscriptions have fallen? Particularly when it has been suggested time and time again that Speculative Freemasonry was never intended to operate 'on the cheap'. Surely these figures provoke food for thought. In a modified sense Masonic membership is a luxury. No man should expend his money in this direction, if the necessities of life and his family commitments are such that his luxury cannot be afforded.

Looking further at the family priorities, and this question may raise the ire of many, do we intrude too much into the family life by the number of nights we spend in all branches of Masonry?. Do so many sons retreat from the thought of joining, because of dad's involvement or do married daughters withhold their agreement to their husband's inclinations towards Masonry for the same reason? Despite in each case their ready acknowledgement of its high moral teachings and standards. However, if we admit these problems beset 'Our Own Freemasonry' today, how can we call a halt to the drift in membership? The majority of brethren within the Lodges are still fired with the same enthusiasm as our predecessors. It is fair to say our Freemasonry is much more sophisticated as a service organisation than ever before, surely the attainments of today should attract new members in greater proportions.

We must therefore continue to project Freemasonry with all our enthusiasm within our power towards 'just, upright and free men, of mature age, sound judgment and strict morals', to their wives and families using every facility possible, including new Visual Aid Equipment which we anticipate will be available, to individuals, to groups, to ladies nights, to assemblies of masons and non-masons, stopping short of an open, direct invitation to join to ensure that a prospective member must come of his own free will and accord.

Having pursued this objective we must put our own house in order. We must ensure our ceremonies are faithfully and traditionally presented, that lectures are also well supported by attendance, that the times of tiling are varied in accordance with the amount of business and ceremonial on the agenda to allow visitors to be received at the anticipated time and with a reasonable period set aside for the Festive Board.

All Speakers should, if possible, be informed in advance of their anticipated involvement so as to allow time for forethought that they may be able to produce originality rather than repetition. The Junior Warden must be encouraged to produce good harmony rather than to rely solely on visitors who may be in attendance.

It is an interesting observation that no end of changes by Grand Lodge can, by themselves, reverse a trend. The enthusiasm of individual members and the vitality of the Private Lodges are essential for the progress and success of the Craft. Grand Lodge and its leaders can hope at best, to help kindle that enthusiasm and nurture that vitality.

When taking this stroll through 'Our Own Freemasonry' I have endeavoured to remind us of Masonry as we knew it during our early experience of the Craft - the problems which beset us with the passage of time and, notwithstanding those problems, the successes achieved in the present era. I trust this may assist the younger Freemason when cogitating on all I have said, in setting his sights on future Masonic horizons.

It must however be realised when looking forward that so much may depend on the changing social structure of society. Changes in the government of the Craft, may be necessary due to the changing laws and regulations of the country in which we live and these may be reflected in the future constitutions of the Craft. Notwithstanding what may happen in this direction, we are singularly blessed that the numbers of mature Freemasons moving towards leadership of the Craft have vision, energy and the inherent quality of wise counselling as component factors in their make-ups to ensure that the ancient landmarks and basic principles of the Craft are preserved and will be maintained.

In conclusion let me beg of you to always remember as a member of the Western Australian Constitution that this is 'Our Own Freemasonry' and it is, and always will be a great privilege to be numbered among its members. Let us continue to hold our heads up high, not to be too parochial and at all times remember the three Great Principles on which the Order was founded - Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth and think and act at all times for the good of the institution of Freemasonry

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