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‘THE GRAND LODGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FREEMASONS 1904 - 1910. THE FORMATIVE YEARS’

THE 2005 ROBIN HEWITT MEMORIAL LECTURE

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PRE-HISTORY

Brethren, to set the scene for this paper *“The Grand Lodge of Western Australian Freemasons 1904-1910 The Formative Years”*, one must appreciate that Freemasonry in Western Australia was present in the form of Freemasons as early as 1829 when Governor Stirling and a number of early settlers, some of whom had been Freemasons in Britain, brought the Craft to the new settlement.

By 1841 meetings held at Government House under the Chairmanship of the Governor John Hutt himself, an enthusiastic Freemason, saw a petition to form a lodge dispatched to the Grand Lodge of England. On the 4th April 1843, the petition having been granted, the Lodge of St. John was consecrated under the English Constitution. It remained so until 1900 when it became a foundation member lodge of the new Western Australian Constitution, the Lodge of St. John No.1.

Incidentally, the Lodge of St. John, by unanimous resolution in its 60th Anniversary year of 1903, offered its entire property including furniture and fittings to the Grand Lodge of Western Australia for the sum of £.9,000 which in effect covered the outstanding mortgage of £.8,000 and £.1,000 to establish a benevolent fund. The property was valued at over £.20,000. Needless to say the offer was accepted by the Grand Lodge

After 1843 the formation of Lodges was quite slow for a short while and it was not until the “gold rush” following the discovery of gold both in the Northwest at Roebourne in 1882 and the Eastern Goldfields (Meekatharra, Wiluna, Coolgardie, Southern Cross, Kalgoorlie) in the late 1880’s that the population, and hence Freemasonry, boomed.

In 1888 a District Grand Lodge of Western Australia-English Constitution was established and in 1896 a District Grand Lodge of Western Australia-Scottish Constitution was also commissioned. The growth of lodges under the Scottish Constitution was quite spectacular with no fewer than 39 lodges being consecrated from 1896 to 1904, a space of just eight years.

In 1900 on the 27th February with the consent of the Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Western Australia was inaugurated. At that time there were 35 English, 23 Scottish and 2 Irish lodges, sixty all told, of which 33 united in forming the Western Australian Constitution. The 33 lodges had a combined membership of 2,000 brethren.

The male population of Western Australia at this time was around 110,000, a lot of whom were living on the goldfields. By 1904, the number of Lodges under the banner of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia had increased to 67 with an average membership of 50 persons per lodge; highly satisfactory figures.

The first Grand Master of the Western Australian Constitution in 1900 was Sir Gerard Smith K.C.M.G. the Governor of the State who had also been the District Grand Master of the District Grand Lodge of Western Australia-English Constitution. Unfortunately he only lasted in office until the 19th April 1900 when his term as Governor concluded and he returned to England. The position of Grand Master was occupied by R.W.Bro. John Winthrop Hackett, Pro Grand Master for one year, before becoming Grand Master for the subsequent three years; 1901-1904.

THE SCOTTISH CONFLICT

The growth of Freemasonry particularly in those very early years undoubtedly set the scene for some keen rivalry between the English and Scottish Constitutions. Lodges were being created at a pace and, as mentioned previously, by the time of the inauguration on 22nd February 1900 of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia there were 60 Lodges in existence.

Initial attempts were made to establish a United Grand Lodge of Western Australia. These attempts failed as the Grand Lodge of Scotland prohibited its subordinates in Western Australia from uniting in the formation of such a Grand Lodge and even from discussing the question whether in lodge or out of it under threat of '*Masonic Penalty*'.

In October 1901 the Grand Lodge of Scotland declared that the Grand Lodge of Western Australia had been '*irregularly formed*' and refused to recognise it. This was despite the fact that they were the only Grand Lodge to do so and recognition from other Grand Lodges throughout the world continued to be received.

Following the inauguration of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia on 27th February 1900, the Grand Lodge of Scotland via its District Grand Lodge continued to issue charters for the establishment of 8 Scottish Constitution lodges to which the Grand Lodge of Western Australia took umbrage seeing itself as the Sovereign Grand Lodge and would not permit its lodges to recognise or have fraternal relations. The exact resolutions carried were as follows:

- 1) That the formation of lodges by the Grand Lodge of Scotland in this State since 27th February 1900 (the date of the establishment of this Grand Lodge), is hereby declared to be an invasion of the Masonic territory of Western Australia.*
- 2) That brethren owing allegiance to this Grand Lodge be directed not to visit these newly-established lodges.*
- 3) That the Masters of lodges in this jurisdiction be "directed not to receive as a visitor any brother claiming admission as a member of one of these newly-established lodges.*

There was no thought of not recognising pre-existing Lodges, only those latterly established. In turn the District Grand Lodge broke off fraternal relations with all lodges meeting under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia. Relations had deteriorated to an all-time low. The debate raged on with individuals and individual lodges suffering as a consequence.

In March 1903 the Scottish Lodge Thistle No.889 transferred its allegiance to the Western Australian Constitution. 50 of 55 members signed the petition. Nevertheless three brethren of the five decided to contest the transfer in the law courts which was most soundly criticised by all and sundry. An injunction was issued which forbade the new Lodge Thistle W.A.C. and the old Lodge Thistle S.C. from using the furniture or assets of the said Lodge.

In May 1903 one of the 'new' Scottish lodges, Lodge Northam No.915 S.C. complained to the District Grand Committee of the District Grand Lodge of the Scottish Constitution of being refused entry on an official visit to Lodge Avon W.A.C. which was acting under instruction from the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia. This was the incident among others which led the District Grand Lodge Scottish Constitution to debate their ceasing of Masonic relations with Western Australia Constitution which came into effect in August 1903 and so the opinions still raged back and forth.

Early in the piece the Depute District Grand Master S.C. R.W.Bro. J.S. Battye and the Substitute District Grand Master S.C. R.W.Bro. Maughan both resigned and joined Lodges under the W.A.C. In March 1904 the Editor of the Western Australian Freemason wrote: "*It is almost with apologies to our readers that we once again attempt to add another contribution to the already overwhelming flood of argument which continues to gather force and volume, let loose against the rocks upon which the Masonic peace of the State has been wrecked. We are almost afraid to try*

to stem the force of the waves of discord in an attempt to rescue the ship of Masonry from her present unfortunate position, but it is with a keen desire to assist in affording some aid to the best interests of Freemasonry that we are prompted to again voyage on the tempestuous sea of discussion."

And then the article followed. I have found that this flowery prose was the norm in those days. By October 1904, after much heartache and soul searching, the District Grand Lodge Scottish Constitution proposed that if the Western Australian Constitution would recognise those Scottish Lodges created between 27th February 1900 and 28th October 1904 it would recommend to the Grand Lodge of Scotland that it afford full territorial recognition of Grand Lodge of Western Australia.

This proposal was not supported by those Scottish lodges on the Goldfields and of course may still not be acceptable to the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The proposal was declined by the Western Australian Constitution but it provided that if the Grand Lodge of Scotland first provided territorial recognition then the power would be left with the Grand Master to remove the non-recognition imposed on those eight Scottish lodges.

In April 1905 word was received that the Grand Lodge of Scotland continued to deny recognition of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia as a sovereign body and still the turmoil raged. As reported in the Western Australian Freemason in October 1905, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, at its communication on 3rd August 1905, unanimously agreed to a petition from Scottish Masons on the Goldfields to establish a District Grand Lodge in the Goldfields District of Western Australia.

On the 28th December 1905 at the annual communication of the District Grand Lodge of Western Australia Scottish Constitution, the Pro Grand Master Bro.Dr.J.M.Y.Stewart announced his intention to resign his office and that he would return his commission to the Grand Lodge of Scotland by the next outgoing mail.

The meeting was then closed, the whole proceedings having occupied only some twenty minutes. The prevailing view at that time was that the resignation had undoubtedly been prompted by the decision of the Grand Lodge of Scotland to allow a new District Grand Lodge to be created on the Goldfields thus reducing the number of Scottish Constitution Lodges under his control.

In March 1906, The Western Australian Freemason records in an extract of the minutes of the Grand Committee of the Grand Lodge of Scotland that acting on the receipt of "*certain communications*" (not being the resignation of the District Grand Master) it felt that the circumstances required instant supervision. They therefore withdrew the commission of Dr. Stewart and nominated Bro.J.M.Lapsley P.D.D.G.M. as his successor. Bro. James McFarlane Lapsley was duly installed as District Grand Master of the Coastal District of Western Australia Scottish Constitution. R.W. Bro. Dr. J.M.Y.Stewart on the other hand became a member of Military Lodge No.15. W.A.C.

On the 23rd April 1906 Lodge Royal Stuart No.893 S.C. transferred its allegiance to the Western Australian Constitution. Lodge Fingal No.920 S.C. surrendered its warrant and petitioned the Grand Lodge of Western Australia for the issue of a new charter, the eleventh Scottish Lodge to do so. It became Fingal Lodge No.79 W.A.C. on the 10th May 1906. In October 1906 Breadalbane Lodge No.905 S.C. transferred allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Western Australia and became Breadalbane Lodge No.80 W.A.C. on the Goldfields, the 12th Scottish Constitution Lodge to do so.

Things must have been getting desperate for at the annual meeting of the Coastal District Grand Lodge on the 7th January 1907, following a plebiscite of 15 lodges in favour and one against, the resolution of 1903 severing fraternal relations with the Western Australian Constitution was rescinded. The District Grand Master expressed the hope that the Western Australian Grand Lodge would withdraw its circular forbidding intercourse with those members of Scottish Lodges erected subsequent to the formation of the Western Australian constitution.

This was not to be, as the Grand Lodge of Scotland still refused to recognise the Grand Lodge of Western Australia as a sovereign body.

In June 1907 the Lodge Duke of Rothesay No.904 S.C. transferred allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Western Australia and became No.83 W.A.C. Also in June, Lodge North Fremantle No.858 S.C. transferred allegiance and became No.84 W.A.C. the 14th lodge to transfer. During late 1907 and early 1908, two important visitors from Western Australia to the United Kingdom were M.W.Bro.

J.W. Hackett P.G.M. and V.W.Bro. J.D. Stevenson Grand Secretary. Their visits were made for separate reasons but their influence was inestimable. Both men had been through the trials and tribulation of eight years of unsettled times often braced with hostility.

By dint of their persuasion a settlement was reached and in the Western Australian Freemason of April 15th 1908 the full detail of the "Articles of Recognition" were published. These Articles were fully debated by the Board of General Purposes and recommended for adoption at the Communication of the 23rd April 1908 and carried.

So ended almost a decade of history of the Scottish conflict. On 23rd July 1908, at the Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia, the Scottish District Grand Master R.W.Bro. J.M. Lapsley and his officers paid the first official visit to the Grand Lodge of Western Australia during the eight years it had been established.

The Pro Grand Master M.W. Bro. Newton James Moore, Premier of Western Australia, stated that he had the greatest possible pleasure in extending a hearty welcome to him.

He felt that their presence was an evidence of their desire to bury all the disagreeable incidents of the past and to inaugurate a movement which he hoped would culminate in the utmost good feeling between all Freemasons and so advance the true interest of the craft in Western Australia. And so brethren it was to be. From my reading I would say that this conflict was the single biggest factor influencing Freemasonry in those early years.

THE GRAND LODGE OF QUEENSLAND.

The Grand Lodge of Queensland was formed/established from the 25th April 1904. At the time of this formation only 39 lodges (25 from the Irish Constitution and 14 from the Scottish Constitution) formed the new Grand Lodge of Queensland's member lodges. This was from a total of 140 lodges in Queensland at that time.

The Grand Lodges of England and Scotland refused to recognise the new Grand Lodge of Queensland somewhat goaded by their respective District Grand Lodges in Queensland at that time. The exception was the Grand Lodge of Ireland which had endorsed the Grand Lodge of Queensland's establishment. Unfortunately some of the most prominent persons agitating for the formation of the Grand Lodge of Queensland were promptly suspended and some cases expelled without trial or process, veiled under such terms as disrespect to Grand Lodge or District Grand Lodge. Some of the suspended brethren were in fact officers of the newly created Grand Lodge.

In July 1904, the Grand Lodge of Western Australia had received an application for recognition from Queensland but initially deferred making any decision.

Recognition was subsequently granted in October 1904 following upon recognition by the Grand Lodge of N.S.W. being granted. On the 27th October 1904 the Grand Master of N.S.W. accompanied by his Deputy and seventeen Grand Officers journeyed to Brisbane and there installed R.W.Bro. George S. Hutton the previous District Grand Master of the Irish Constitution as the first Grand Master of Queensland. Soon after this the Grand Lodge of Scotland broke off friendly relations with N.S.W. Also the Grand Lodge of England came out with a statement that *"The Grand Lodge of N.S.W. had no sphere of influence in Queensland and therefore no right to interfere in anything regarding the establishment of an independent Grand Lodge in Queensland"*.

Two years later in November 1906 Lord Chelmsford the Governor of Queensland was to be installed as Grand Master of Queensland and M.W.Bro. Riley Grand Master of the Western Australian Constitution, was asked to be Installing Officer, which he accepted. A cablegram was received from the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of England saying that they hoped he would not go. He went anyway.

This did not endear him to the Grand Lodge of England. It took many months and the intervention, whilst in England of visits by the Past Grand Master M.W.Bro. J.W. Hackett and the Grand Secretary V.W.Bro. J.D. Stevenson to present cases on behalf of the Grand Master and this Grand Lodge that eventually won the day and Masonic harmony was restored, particularly for M.W.Bro. C.O.L. Riley G.M.

THE RITUAL

At the time of forming the Grand Lodge of Western Australia on the 27th February 1900, concern was expressed for the establishment of a uniform ritual under which the Western Australian Constitution could work.

In July 1900, the Board of General Purposes was requested to report to the next regular communication of Grand Lodge on the advisability of preparing an authorised ritual. After careful consideration the Board unanimously decided to recommend that the question of the ritual be deferred for six months. Nothing further happened until on the 4th February 1901 R.W.Bro.Rowe (Scottish Constitution) approached R.W.Bro.J.W.Hackett, as Pro Grand Master of the Western Australian Constitution, with the suggestion that a committee be appointed by each Constitution for the purpose of devising some means whereby union could be effected on a basis satisfactory to all parties.

One of the items listed for the Committee was *"that a ritual committee be formed by the united body -----."* With the deteriorating relationship nothing transpired from this direction, I am unsure of when the Rituals Committee was formed, but a reference in the Quarterly Communication in April 1903 refers to the Committee having met 15 times and having completed their labours according to the three degrees. Their work had been finished for some months, but owing to the pressure of work on the Grand Secretary the retyping of the ritual had not occurred.

The next reference is twelve months later when at the April 1904 Communication the Grand Master reported that when the work of the Annual Communication was completed, the ritual, which had been completed in the three degrees, would be submitted to General Committee. At the same Communication the Grand Secretary reported that the delay had indeed been unfortunate. The Constitutional variance had caused so much correspondence and occupied so much time that the ritual had not received the attention its importance demanded. He said, the ritual had been typed, revised twice and with one or two exceptions had been entirely agreed by the Committee.

At the July 1904 Communication the Grand Master, in commenting on the first ever report from the Grand Inspector of Workings, advised that the absence of a uniform standard of working made this scope of his work somewhat circumscribed. He hoped that it would not be much longer before the ritual would be available. The Grand Inspector in his report stated *"I have refrained from finding fault in this report of lodges because of the want of the ritual. I think it imperative that the ritual as revised should be printed and issued at once"*.

In October 1904 the Chairman of the Rituals Committee, who incidentally was the Grand Inspector of Working V.W.Bro.S.W. Roberts, advised that most satisfactory progress had been made during the quarter and the work would shortly be submitted to the General Committee for final approval.

In December 1904 the word was that the ritual would definitely see the light of day before the end of February 1905. Proof sheets were to hand and final approval was scheduled for 21st January 1905.

In January 1905, the Grand Master reported that the Ritual Committee had completed their labours but shortly would take in hand, the ceremony of installations, the consecration and dedication of a new lodge, the ceremony of laying a foundation stone, the ceremony of dedicating a building set apart for Masonic purposes and the funeral ceremony.

On the 28th April 1905 the Board had pleasure in reporting that the new ritual was being issued to Lodges as expeditiously as possible and it was hoped that within a month all would be supplied. In July 1905 the new Grand Inspector of Workings V.W.Bro.S.T.Evans, reported that the majority of lodges he had visited have shown that they were zealous in their work with respect to the new ritual

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WIDOWS, ORPHANS AND AGED FREEMASONS FUND

In January 1906 the Grand Lodge of Western Australia Freemasons was to consider a proposition for a scheme of Masonic benevolence to be known as the Widows, Orphans and Aged Freemasons Fund. It was to be established from contributions received from the Grand Lodge of Western Australia, subscriptions from Lodges and Chapters and donations from individuals and legacies.

The objects of the fund were to afford relief to Aged Freemasons or the widows of Freemasons; to make grants to assist in the education of the children of deceased Freemasons or to aid in their advancement in life. Initially the Management was to be undertaken by the Board of Benevolence but this was roundly criticised as not providing a continuity of membership. Eventually it was agreed that the fund should be managed by a special board comprising the Grand Master, the Deputy Grand Master, the Grand Chaplains, the Grand Treasurer, the President of the Board of Benevolence, the Grand Secretary and the elected members of the Board of Benevolence.

In July 1906 the West Australian Freemason ran an article seeking financial support for the establishment of this fund. The Board of General Purposes recommended the transfer of £250 from the Grand Lodge fund as an inaugural donation to the Widows, Orphans and Aged Freemasons Fund. The Board of Management suggested that each Lodge should appoint a Charity Steward with a duty to this particular cause. By January 1907, 29 lodges had appointed Charity Stewards. Also, a number of Lodges whilst not having appointed a Charity Steward, were nevertheless contributing to the fund. The balance of the fund was £300-12s-6d with the addition of the £250 still to come. By May 1907 the balance had risen to £1002-9s-8d and by April 1910 the fund had reached £3,133. The fund continues today.

At the date of the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia there were sixty lodges meeting under the three constitutions of England, Scotland and Ireland in Western Australia. Thirty three of these, mainly from the English Constitution, transferred to the Western Australian Constitution of the 27th February 1900. From 1900 to 1910, in addition to the 33 lodges at the start, a further 40 new lodges were consecrated and a further 16 lodges transferred their allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Western Australia.

The membership of the Western Australian Constitution of the 33 initial lodges was approximately 2,000 persons and by the close of 1910 the number was around 4,000. This doubling of the membership and more than doubling of the number of lodges that formed the Western Australian Constitution created a heavy load on a small but extremely active group of Freemasons. It is my view that Freemasonry in Western Australia is undoubtedly beholden to four gentlemen of that particular group of twelve or so Freemasons. These are M.W.Bro. J.W. Hackett, M.W.Bro. C.O.L. Riley, R.W.Bro. J.S. Battye and V.W.Bro. J.D. Stevenson.

These men performed the roles that created the history that was the formative years of Freemasonry in Western Australia.

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