

THE EMPIRE SENTINELS

**An Address by Bro. Frank Bottrill, MM, Associate Member.
Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No.305 – 6 May 2002.**

Who among us can claim to being a Boy Scout at some time in their lives? I can, but that was over 25 years ago.

In January of this year I attended the 16th New Zealand Scout Jamboree as part of the General Staff and it was there I was introduced to the Masonic Scouters' Association. All you needed to attend a meeting was your regalia and a scout uniform, neither of which I had because my outfit was a red T-shirt and Staff Scarf.

One of the people I ran into at the Jamboree was Brother Ron Zeilstra from Wairoa, who organized a Scout Uniform for me, so on the 3rd of January 23 Masons boarded a bus to Barton Street in Hamilton where the Lodge Tawhiri No 166 hosted one of the first Masonic meetings of the year.

The Lodge was opened in due form, suspended and then handed over to WBro. Warwick Bell (visiting from Wellington), for the purposes of demonstrating an Empire Sentinel Working.

What is an Empire Sentinel Working?

The Empire Sentinels system of boy training has a distinctive Masonic flavour, although extensive research by Masonic Scouters has not been able to prove that Lieut. Col. David Cossgrove (who developed the Scheme) was ever in the Craft. After Lord Baden-Powell had commenced the Scout Movement in England, Lt.Col. Cossgrove, being inspired with the ideal of training youth in character and leadership, formed the first New Zealand Troop in the little Canterbury hamlet of Tuahiwi in 1908, and in the following January held the first camp with 30 lads.

At the earnest wish of the Chief Scout (B.P.), Major Cossgrove, as he was then, thoroughly launched the Boy Scout scheme in New Zealand and by the end of 1909 had enrolled upwards of 500 patrols. Christchurch, Otago, Nelson, Wellington, Wanganui, South Canterbury, Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Westland, Southland, and Marlborough saw the enrolment of Troops in that order. In January 1912 Col. Cossgrove started on his scheme of training for the juniors and the inauguration of the "Bull Pups" was an outstanding success. Later he started his scheme for retraining those lads who had reached the age when they could no longer be Boy Scouts. This was the inception of the Empire Sentinels.

The system of Army Drill instilled discipline to men and boys during the war years and it was only natural that the first Scoutmasters used the same methods to obtain the same results. The patrols were commanded by Sergeants and Corporals. In his foreword to the Empire Sentinels Handbook, Lt.Col. Cossgrove states.... "Through lack of training, many Scoutmasters devote their time to training the boy in drill... Scouting games and handicraft, though excellent in themselves do not touch the chief aims of the movement - definite training in honouring God as the great ruling force in the Universe. Loyalty to King and Country, patriotism, self sacrifice, if necessary, in service to others... At 15 or 16 years of age, boys are sceptical of everything. They want to find out things for themselves. As manhood develops they want to assert their physical strength, their moral courage and their disregard of all restraint of authority...." Lt.Col. Cossgrove goes on to say that although sceptical of everything, these boys are eager to learn and keen to put their knowledge into practice.

His scheme retains the "**mystic ceremony of initiation**" which fascinates old and young alike and also maintains the high ideals that Lord Baden-Powell states, so that the most wayward boy must feel impressed and encouraged to emulate in religion, patriotism and chivalry, the knighthood of the past century. At this point we start the apparent comparison of the scheme with that of the Craft.

In the scheme, there **are three degrees of efficiency**, each based on the Scout Promise and a certain proficiency in other pursuits.

The first is based on religious duty, with proof of the **ability to work**.

The second is of patriotism and good citizenship and **better work**.

The third is on self-sacrifice **in service to others**, and the ability to perform still **better work**.

Lt.Col. Cossgrove finishes his forward with the recommendation that the Scout Officers should assist in forming "Watch Towers" in their Districts and help in the conducting of meetings until the ritual has been mastered and the scheme is well and truly launched. The organization shall be known as the "Empire Sentinels" and the building in which the meetings are held shall be called "The Watch Tower".

The Officers shall be: a Chief Sentinel, a Sentinel of the South, a Sentinel of the East, a Sentinel of the West, an Inner Guard, an Outer Guard, a Senior Watchman, a Junior Watchman, a Scribe, and a Padre.

Workings.

From the Handbook, it appears that the Tower is opened in the Third Watch, then dropped to the 2nd or 1st as required. Procedures for the opening are similar to each other with the numeral being altered. Visitors for the 2nd or 1st Watches are admitted before each Watch is commenced but provision is made to admit 3rd Watch visitors during the opening ceremony. Sentinels enter using the password, saluting, then being seated, but a visiting Chief Sentinel is escorted up the centre of the building with the Watchman's poles forming an archway over his head as he proceeds.

There are a number of "properties" for each Watch, such as coloured masks, ribbons, etc. Blue is the colour for the 1st, Red for the 2nd and White for the 3rd. The Officers wear white continually. Halters and blindfolds are used and the "Alarm" appears to be the same knocks as the Watch in which the Tower is working. The ritual also mentions the saying "So Mote It Be". There are 4 principal officers the Tower ceremonies, compared with the 3 principal officers in the Craft; therefore the position of the Chief Sentinel is in the North. The lights are lowered and the symbols of office are illuminated in each Watch. For the 1st and 2nd, just prior to going to the West, the 3rd from the beginning.

Do not we, who are members of the Craft, have cause for reflection?

Masonic Scouters.

Although there are no official connections between Freemasonry and Scouting, it is not surprising that in the similarities in guiding principles between them, there are many informal links and common members.

It has become traditional, both in New Zealand and overseas, to recognize these links with a Masonic meeting at the time of each Scout Jamboree.

It must be reiterated that there are no official records indicating that Lt.Col. Cossgrove was ever a Freemason even though extensive research has been performed. The closest we have got to this is the rumour that a Master Mason's apron was thrown into the grave with him upon his burial. But this has not been substantiated.

The similarities between the workings of the Empire Sentinels and the Craft cannot be denied and research continues to this day.