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**FEBRUARY 2019 TRANSACTIONS**  
**of**  
**Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No. 305**  
**Consecrated 1933**

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## **A Lodge Meeting held in King Solomon's Temple**

**An Address given by Bro Frank Bottrill, SW, to the  
Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305**

**On Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1917 a meeting of thirty-six Freemasons, representing thirty-four lodges, was held in the open air on a hill slope near to Gaza, Palestine. They had gathered in response to a word-of-mouth notice that had been circulating among the troops. It was in the afternoon daylight (1400 hrs), so it was necessary to appoint guards to prevent enemy interruptions. Here the use of a Tyler was put into serious practice, with the place of symbolism being taken by reality and the traditional sword replaced with the rifle.

Those present unanimously agreed to form an association known as the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Masonic Association and adopted without dissention the proposed Constitution. The Mastermind behind this initiative was Brigadier General Meldrum (a Past Master of Lodge Rangatira No 71) ably assisted by Lt Col J N McCarroll. From the very start, when these two freemasons planned the association, it is clear that they had a motivation which was simultaneously Masonic as well as personal. They intended to achieve something unique, something never before done in the entire history of Freemasonry, whether such history was seven hundred or seven thousand years old and that the Association was the vehicle created to achieve this goal.

### **The Journey Begins**

The planning for the journey to King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem had begun twelve months earlier when the NZEF were making progress through the Sinai Peninsular in the course of the War. The goal was to assemble in King Solomon's Temple and this was a goal promised to every member of the NZEF Masonic Association serving in Palestine.

A Masonic meeting under serious war conditions was difficult to say the least, especially as the terrain was totally unfamiliar, there were basically no facilities and the conditions in the desert were both unfriendly and savage. To convene a meeting in due form required the group to acquire aprons and gavels. The most likely source for such items was Jerusalem which was in enemy hands.

Apart from the fact that the intention to hold the meeting in King Solomon's Temple itself posed additional problems, in

that, according to history, the temple had been destroyed in AD 70, rebuilt twice, before finally a Muslim Mosque - the Dome of the Rock - had been built on the site. It was not only in Turkish hands but was strictly off limits; firstly by the military and secondly by the Muslims, who had forbidden entry for Christians and non-Muslims.

But the GAOTU certainly works in mysterious ways. Despite the rigours and dangers of war in the desert (the association lost only two members killed in action) and as the hostilities continued, General Allembe eventually reached Jerusalem, walking into the Holy City on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1917, signaling the end of four centuries of Turkish rule. Thus one of the major difficulties facing the NZEF Masonic Association was removed. Jerusalem was no longer in enemy hands.

The members of the association were of course scattered all over Palestine, but towards the end of this journey, on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1918, and only one mile from Jericho, a quick meeting was held at 1500 hrs at which a plan was devised to achieve the objective they had set for themselves one year before.

### **King Solomon's Temple**

King Solomon's Temple stood at the northern part of Mount Moriah facing east. It towered over its surroundings; a monument to the constructive genius of man and a witness to the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. However, the reality was that it had been destroyed first in AD70; Zerubbabel thereafter built his temple on the same site, which was also destroyed and subsequently rebuilt by Herod, which in turn met the same fate. Over the Byzantine period, it may seem horrendous but it is a fact of history that the site became a dumping ground for waste. This waste was cleared by the Caliph Omar who then built upon it a small mosque. Even today the site is more commonly known as the Mosque of Omar, when in fact the official title is The Dome of The Rock.

The Dome of the Rock, which is the oldest Muslim building which has survived basically intact in its original form and which after Mecca is the most important Muslim site in the world, was built by the Caliph, Abd al Malik and completed in 691 AD

### **The Meeting**

The NZEF Association brethren used white handkerchiefs for

aprons but the gavels to be used at the meeting proved to be something of an enigma. From the Minutes of the meetings, supported by subsequent reports written many years later, it is shown that "a set of three gavels was ordered". In keeping with the symbolism in which Freemasonry is steeped, the gavels ordered were to be made from three different woods, each having a symbolic significance, namely acacia, olive and cedar wood from the forests of Lebanon.

Despite the decision having been made at Thursday's meeting to make the trip to Jerusalem, permission to do so was only given on the following evening. Although the number of brethren who made this historic journey varies, depending on which report one reads, there is a picture taken outside the Dome of the Rock of thirty-one soldiers, so it is safe to conclude that number of brethren mustered in Jericho on that Saturday morning to make the twenty mile trip to Jerusalem.

Sometime between 1400 and 1500 hours, on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1918, the thirty-one Freemasons, all members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Masonic Association, assembled outside the Mosque. This awesome site was the destination of this group of Freemasons on that history-making day all those years ago. The Dome of the Rock is not built on the exact spot where King Solomon's Temple stood but it does dominate the overall site.

For such a meeting to happen required the intervention of the GAOTU and, amazingly enough, such a miracle was about to happen. They were given an audience with the Imam in charge of the Dome itself. Discussions were held with this sheik during which "he proved himself to be on the square". There is no doubt that the sheik in charge of the Dome was in fact a Freemason himself! In fact, the sheik also acted as one of the two outer guards (Tyler's) for the meeting. This of course makes sense as such a large meeting of non-Muslims held on forbidden ground must have attracted a great deal of undesirable attention.

### **Where to meet?**

A huge rock, according to all traditional accounts, formed part of King Solomon's Temple, being in the courtyard before the porch. Underneath this great stone is a cavern which most indicate formed part of the cellars beneath the temple and if any spot on the entire site could be considered as part of the temple, this was definitely the place! With the help of the sheik, the brethren entered this cavern. It is emphasized that this meeting took place in the cavern below

the sacrificial rock which formed part of King Solomon's Temple. The darkness was lit by candles, also purchased that morning, and a Lodge meeting was held. The "lodge" was opened in the first degree at 1515 hrs with twenty-seven craft lodges were represented.

Brig Meldrum, in his capacity as Worshipful Master, remarked upon the uniqueness of the occasion and "to the new page added to Masonic history"; stating that the members of the Association were honoured to be able to meet in harmony and peace on that spot "adorned and hallowed by the three Ancient Grand Masters". The meeting lasted only fifteen minutes as, apparently, the Sheik had indicated that longer might create problems.

Based upon a paper prepared by WBro Keith Stockley, Masonic Education Officer, NSW, Australia