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## **THE FRENCH CONNECTION**

### **An Address by WBro Dan Staley, PDistGDC**

**Delivered on behalf of the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305  
To Lodge Turanganui No 1480, EC, in Gisborne  
Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

When considering a suitable topic to speak about today I was interested to choose a subject that had special significance to Gisborne Brethren. I realise that we are geographically isolated from the main centres of Freemasonry but this in no way makes our area lacking in special features. Gisborne combined lodges held the first Freemasons' lodge meeting of the present millennium in the world. We are also the only small centre that can boast having three different constitutions operating within our midst.

It is the second of these special features that led me to the topic I wish to introduce this afternoon.

We Freemasons in Gisborne consider ourselves fortunate, in that within our fair city we have lodges operating in three different constitutions. We look on this favourably because it does add variety to our involvement in the Craft. At each of our craft lodge's installation ceremonies we normally expect representatives from the English, Scottish and New Zealand Grand Lodges. Sometimes we are also favoured with visits from Irish Grand Lodge brethren. Our relations with brethren from the different constitutions are both fraternal and enjoyed by the Gisborne Masonic brethren in general.

My short talk today is entitled "The French Connection". I have decided upon this topic because I wonder just how close New Zealand was to having a fifth Grand Lodge operating within our shores.

If a small group of prominent Wellington Freemasons had managed to have their wishes adhered to, there would have been lodges operating under the French Grand Orient constitution from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There had been some French involvement in Freemasonry in New Zealand in the very early days of the colony, mainly involving members of the French Navy in their visits to the settlement at Akaroa. The attempt to introduce a French Grand Lodge was due to a Freemason who was also twice Prime Minister of New Zealand, first, for just twelve days in August 1884 and then later that same year, from September 3<sup>rd</sup> until 1887.

Our man, Sir Robert Stout, was born in Lerwick on the Shetland Isles in 1844. At the age of thirteen he was a pupil teacher and graduated to a full teacher at sixteen. In 1864 he left Scotland and arrived in New Zealand to teach at the Dunedin Grammar School. In 1871 he became a lawyer and three years later he entered politics as the member for Caversham.

When and where he was initiated into Freemasonry is not known by me but in 1880 he was appointed as a Past Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies in the English Constitution, and by 1889 he was the Deputy District Grand Master of Otago and Southland, English Constitution. He also belonged to an Irish Constitution lodge in Dunedin. In 1893 he wound up his law business in Dunedin and moved to settle permanently in Wellington.

Sir Robert Stout was involved with some of the early attempts to form a New Zealand Grand Lodge, where he advocated that there should be a Grand Lodge in the South Island and a further Grand Lodge in the North Inland. There is some speculation that when Sir Robert's suggestion was beaten in a ballot, he became disillusioned with the idea of a New Zealand Grand Lodge and began a series of actions that eventually ended his Masonic career.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1890, in Christchurch, the Grand Lodge of New Zealand was constituted. The opposition from the English Provincial and Scottish District Grand Masters did nothing to assist the brethren who were attempting to ease the setting up of this new Grand Lodge. Thankfully the Grand Lodges in Australia came to their assistance and recognised the new New Zealand Grand Lodge, but it was a further nine years before it was recognised by all the Grand Lodges in Britain.

At about the same time that moves were afoot to constitute a New Zealand Grand Lodge, Sir Robert Stout, John Balance (another man destined to become Prime Minister) and others, began communicating with the

