

## The Challenge of Change

by R.W. Bro. Peter J. Hansen PJGW<sup>1</sup>

*Presented at a Masonic Conference conducted by Millennium Masonic Lodge No.534<sup>2</sup> UGLQ<sup>3</sup> at the Southport Masonic Centre<sup>4</sup> Queensland, Australia on Saturday, 20th August, 2005.*

*The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect current administrative policy or future planning strategies within any Grand Lodge jurisdiction.*

Brethren, the purpose of my paper today is to encourage you to think. To think about the future of freemasonry, your own place within the fraternity, the well-being of your lodge and those brethren within your own sphere of influence, and what you, personally, should be prepared to do to ensure the future viability of the fraternity in Queensland. I'm going to highlight some of the bigger issues while other speakers later in the conference will provide excellent information on how to make your individual lodge prosper and grow in this changing world.

I shouldn't have to say it but please understand this particular point quite clearly. This paper is not a finger-pointing exercise. It is a serious attempt to lay on the table issues, I believe need addressing for the future good of the fraternity.

Simply 'shooting the messenger' is no way to deal with any freemason who is prepared to stand up, say I believe we have some problems, and attempt to do something about those problems.

Without any shadow of doubt, the greatest challenge facing the Freemasons of Queensland today is declining membership and what measures need to be introduced to stop the bleeding of numbers'. It is the major issue we can no longer avoid addressing.

Let's look at some statistical information about membership:

- Masonic membership in Queensland has been in decline for 45 years
- The current rate of decline is approximately 2 per day.
- Three out of four new freemasons leave within 5 years.
- Two thirds of membership loss is by resignation or 'strike-off' for nonpayment of dues. The average retention rate of masons in Queensland is also 5 years.<sup>5</sup>
- The present percentage of freemasons in the male population of Queensland is at a record low level.<sup>6</sup>

Some may find this information all rather hard to believe. It's certainly not an issue which is discussed in polite Masonic company but Brethren, it should be; and often. You don't need to be a mathematician to realize that at the current rate of decline, within a few short years, existing Masonic lodges in many parts of Queensland are going to be nothing more than a memory.

This leads me to the theme of my paper, the challenge of change.

I believe Freemasonry in Queensland has to reinvent itself to meet the challenges of the society today. Just how far the reform process is taken will determine our chances of firstly survival, and secondly growth out to the year 2050 and beyond.

There should no longer be room at the main table for those who firmly hold the belief that everything is just fine and that lower numbers is simply a function of modern society. After all the argument goes, isn't the same thing happening to the major religions and service clubs, etc? I find this line of reasoning quite ironic. Freemasonry is not a religion so why do we use religious institutions for comparison purposes? Neither is Freemasonry a service club and anyone who can't tell the difference needs to re-evaluate their continuing membership. The "it's someone else's fault" defence to declining membership is a total cop-out and as

indefensible as the "if I look the other way, maybe it will all go away" approach to dealing with issues related to falling membership.

It may also come as a surprise to many freemasons in Queensland if a wider cast of the net is made in making an examination of the present state of membership of all 150+ Grand Lodges throughout the world today. The figures provide us with some interesting statistical information. Freemasonry is in serious decline in Australia and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America.

In most of the rest of the Masonic world, however, there is no decline, membership is growing. In many jurisdictions the growth is slow but nevertheless there is growth, not decay.

It is somewhat ironic that the jurisdictions suffering numerically are also the ones where membership of Freemasonry is most easily obtained. In most of the Masonic world becoming a Master Mason takes from three to five years. The requirement to learn, and prove one's readiness to progress is paramount and without adequate proof of proficiency there is no advancement. The concept of making a Master Mason in a few short months as is the case here, or in a USA based One Day Course, is practically unknown outside Anglo-Saxon based jurisdictions.

I guess you can now start to see a pattern emerging. The question therefore is no longer "Why do we need to change" but "What do we need to change" and "Where do we start?"

There is a very helpful publication available entitled "Why Men Leave Masonry."

The publication resulted from an extensive survey of former freemasons in South Australia in 1995/1996. It clearly sets out the reasons freemasons gave for leaving the fraternity. The major finding was that almost half of all problems identified were in dealings with Grand Lodge. The difference between South Australia and Queensland is only geography and I believe that if a similar survey was conducted in this State a similar result would be obtained. The areas which in my opinion need reform are as follows:

### **1. Within Grand Lodge:**

(a) ***Structural reform*** to allow for two-way communication from lodge to Grand Lodge including reintroduction of direct lodge representation at Board level. At the present time Lodges have no direct access to the Board of General Purposes. Some years ago the Grand Superintendent of Workings lost his place in a reduction of Board numbers. While there may be other ways of overcoming this problem,

I believe there needs to be clearly defined two-way communication up and down the chain of command.

I'm deliberately not saying anything further in this area as the fraternity now has a new Board President with clearly defined reform agenda and he should be given every opportunity and means of support to implement his program.

(b) ***Introduction of a State wide postal voting system.***

A state wide postal voting system should be introduced for the following matters coming before Grand Lodge:

- (i) Election of all Grand Officers (Grand Master to Grand Tyler).
- (ii) Election of all members to Boards - General Purposes & Benevolence.
- (iii) Proposed changes to the Book of Constitutions.

It's not only the country brethren who suffer a sense of disconnectedness and isolation when you don't have any input into the decision making process, but also capital city brethren who for many reasons are unable to attend Quarterly Communications. Introduction of this system will give all freemasons in Queensland a sense of ownership. Bringing the voting process to lodges and making lodges throughout the State the place where some of the decision making takes place, will, I believe, encourage lodges to be more actively involved in the workings and future direction of the Grand Lodge.

(c) ***Remodel the system for conferral of Past Grand Rank.***

The present system should be scrapped completely. There is nothing which more motivates certain masons as the never ceasing quest for greater and greater Grand Rank. The present system is delightfully old

fashioned, encourages favouritism and patronage, requires the supply of information which cannot be accurately tested and subjected to an assessment procedure which is secret.

The present system encourages freemasons to be guarded about what is said for fear of upsetting someone who may be able to influence a future Grand Rank application.

While it cannot be denied that many freemasons are hard working and rightfully deserving of recognition there are many others who seem to be of the opinion that Grand Rank will appear at 10 years a Past Master and thereafter every four or five years an upgrade should come with the ration pack. The only way to change entrenched attitudes is to completely replace the present system.

#### **A new system for conferred Grand Rank.**

1. Each year an assessment is made about the number of conferred Grand Ranks to be awarded in the following year. The number of each of the Grand Ranks is calculated by the Grand Master in consultation with the Board of General Purposes using a predetermined formula based on a declining membership base.
2. The conferred ranks available are then advertised on the Grand Lodge web-site and applications are invited from all freemasons who may consider themselves eligible.
3. Note that it's the individual freemason who makes the decision for himself and not groups of selected Past Masters or anyone else in lodges who makes the application decision.
4. Each applicant can apply for any rank.
5. An assessment panel (I'm suggesting a panel drawn, one each, from the regions of Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast, Darling Downs, Brisbane and Gold Coast) will examine *all* applications against a predetermined set of criteria and make recommendations through the Board of General Purposes to the Grand Master for approval.
6. Each stage of the process should be open to review and assessment.
7. It is acknowledged that in the first few years of such a scheme, many will try and bite off more than they can chew but a few rejection slips will soon make everyone aware that there are more deserving brethren. This is the way of promotion in the real world today and our system should reflect best business practice.

#### **(d) *Scrap AGSWks and replace with a District/Regional Manager.***

The inspectorial and reporting function as it now exists should be abolished. When I became an AGSWks in 1995 I was told that my function was to act as a conduit between the Lodges and Grand Lodge.

The AGSWks position comes from a time when Masons attended Lodge on horseback, very few people owned a motor vehicle and the use of a telephone was reserved for the privileged few. A time when it was considered necessary to reinforce the set procedures of Grand Lodge. A time which is now long gone.

In a society renown for its rugged individualism, where governments encourage and educational institutions teach individual freedoms, self fulfilment based on merit and the pursuit of excellence, how can we in all honesty expect men to come to Lodge and readily and unquestioningly accept that every word, sign, step, movement and procedure must be identical with every other Lodge in the State.

It just does not work. We need to encourage men to come to lodge and enjoy themselves, to do their work well but do it the way they see the ceremonial interpreted. It is counter productive to pursue a one size fits all approach to regimentation of the ceremonial.

Having been in the UK in the past two months and visited many lodges, let me give you an example. Consider then the United Grand Lodge of England.

Lodges in the UGLE have about 6 different rituals they can choose from to work in their lodge and the UGLE has no particular interest in which one is chosen. There are no inspectors of lodges although each lodge does have a Grand Lodge Representative. The only role the GLR has is to ensure there are no breaches of the Book of Constitutions. He is not afforded any particular courtesies and has no right to speak in the

lodge or in any way to comment on the conduct of any lodge business or ceremonial performance. As the UGLE has been in operation since 1813 you could safely say the system works well.

What we need is from head office is support, not enforcement.

Future roles for a District/Regional manager include managing regional grand teams. As the membership continues to fall it is going to become increasingly uneconomic for grand teams to travel long distances from Brisbane.

I can see a situation where in the future the only ones travelling will be the GM, DGM and AGM, relying on local managers to supply all team members. The main Grand lodge team as it exists now will simply become the Brisbane based team, equal in standing with the teams in other major regional centres throughout the State. (This is part of a plan I have, that any brother desirous of obtaining Grand Rank must work for it. Conferred rank, under this scheme will become a very rare commodity).

Specialist teams of brethren will operate in districts/regions supporting lodges, upon request, in degree working, Masonic education, training for lodge officers.

District/Regional Managers will carry out some of the functions, in a fully computerized environment now done in the Grand Secretariat. The Grand Secretariat will be reduced to possibly the Grand Secretary and two other staff. The Grand Secretariat will no longer need extensive office space, nothing more than a small office possibly at Stones Corner Masonic Centre.

***(e) Fully computerize forms / correspondence from Grand Secretariat***

Grand Lodge is lagging so far behind best business practice in this regard.

Every form Grand Lodge possesses and every piece of correspondence generated by Grand Secretariat should be dealt with electronically. This really should have been attended to years ago.

***(f) Supply, free of charge, a Lodge Management Program to all lodges.***

An integral part of fully computerizing every aspect of Grand Lodge operation is to develop a software package for operating all aspects of a lodge. The software should be fully compatible and integrated into the Grand Lodge computer system. This will bring uniformity to the operational and financial management of the whole organization and once again lead to major cost savings.

The costs associated with the initial distribution of the program will soon be recouped by reduced wages outlays in the Grand Secretariat.

***(g) Sell off non performing/loss making assets including 311 Ann Street.***

It has concerned me for some time that large amounts of money have to be expended on 311 Ann Street to bring it up to standard with current State and Local Government Regulations. My simple question is WHY?

The building is seriously under utilized and has been for quite a few years generating a six figure dollar sum in losses. Why continue to put money into a loss making asset? The same goes for any of the assets of Grand Lodge. With fewer and fewer members to cover those losses, non performing assets need to be sold.

***(h) Completely revamp the Grand Lodge website. Include the following:***

- (i) Interactive, password protected, members section.***
- (ii) Comprehensive Educational materials for individuals and lodges.***
- (iii) The Book of Constitutions and all Grand Lodge memoranda, instruction / training bulletins etc.***

When making a comparison between the Grand Lodge web-site and any other Grand Lodge web-site in the world the only conclusion which can reasonably be drawn is that ours is not very good and far from user friendly. It is going to play a much greater part in the integration of all aspects of Grand Lodge activity in the future and to allow this to happen it needs a complete overhaul.

***(i) The provision of comprehensive Masonic educational services.*** Let me quote a small piece from a paper I delivered in February this year to the Education Committee of Grand Lodge:

*"The present state of organized Masonic education in Queensland is nothing to be proud of. Indeed, if you examine the rest of the Masonic world, you very quickly discover you would be hard pressed to find another jurisdiction which offers less educational support of its membership. While some may find this a fairly harsh assessment, it never-the-less appears to be the case. It is, however, difficult to engender a desire to engage in any form of Masonic learning when, for generations, successive administrators have determined that any form of structured Masonic education across the whole jurisdiction had no priority in their view of the future for Freemasonry.*

*What our history tells us quite clearly is that, almost without exception, every Freemason in Queensland today has had no formal Masonic education and that the brethren who have pursued their interests in a search of the principles, philosophy and history of this wonderful fraternity have done so on their own volition."*

On this point, the immediate Past President of the Board of General Purposes earlier this year said at an Education Committee meeting in the Boardroom at Grand Lodge that since the formation of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland in 1921 there had been no formal education of masons across the jurisdiction.

This sad state of affairs Brethren and R.W. Bro. Richard King will be speaking about this later in the conference.

**(j) *Publication of Minutes of meetings of Board of General Purposes***

There is a need for transparency in the working of our Board of Directors in fine with general community business standards. Again, the Grand Lodge web-site is the obvious place for the publication of Board proceedings.

**(k) *Introduction of Masonic Curriculum Vitae.***

All Freemasons applying for any office within Grand Lodge, the Grand Team, either Board or any Board committees will prepare and present as part of any application an up to date Masonic Curriculum Vitae detailing every aspect of their involvement with Freemasonry.

This is an important step in making the management of freemasonry in Queensland much more professional than it is today. This once again reflects existing society standards.

**(l) *Qualification for active Grand Office.***

Every Freemason desirous of applying to Grand Office should, as an absolute minimum standard, be able to fully understand the Third Degree Tracing Board and also know the Genuine Secrets of a Master Mason. What this in effect means that possessing but three degrees is insufficient for high office. To be considered qualified to be part of the ruling class within the fraternity surely comes with additional commitment and learning and fully understanding all aspects of the three craft degrees should be the minimum entry standard to Grand Office.

And finally brethren, I wanted to mention private Lodges. Private Lodges have to be given more flexibility to chart their own course. The United Grand Lodge of Queensland will prosper and grow because of the viability of individual private lodges and no other way.

We need to rethink the application of craft masonry and this is where lodges like Millennium Masonic Lodge, Camp Hill Lodge and Lamington Lodge are going to show the way to the future.

I believe it will not take a great number of brethren to make a difference, to get the ball rolling. The challenges in front of us today are huge but every day we procrastinate 2 more members leave and over time it makes the challenges so much more difficult to surmount.

I just wanted to leave you with a quote I can attribute to a freemason on the Sunshine Coast

"The night was calm — the music was good — some people were happy — as the Titanic sailed on through the night."

Brethren, we are all on that ship. We are going to change direction, aren't we? The challenge is how close to the iceberg are we going before we make the change in direction.

Personally, I don't believe *in* brinkmanship, it really needs to be now. Think about it and then do something about it yourself.

R.W. Bro. Peter J. Hansen PJGW

<sup>1</sup> **R.W. Bro Peter J. Hansen PJGW** was Initiated in Bartle Frere Lodge - No.254 (District Grand Lodge of Carpenteria), United Grand Lodge of Queensland on 9th December, 1970 at the age of 21.

On 5th February, 2000 he was Installed as Foundation Master of Millennium Masonic Lodge No.534, United Grand Lodge of Queensland. Now Lodge Secretary. He has a wide experience across, and active participation in, many Orders of Freemasonry. He is presently Master of Cooroora Lodge No.232, UGLQ for a fifth term (previously 1982 1993: 1994, 2003). He has written numerous papers on Freemasonry relating in particular to reform and the challenges facing Freemasonry in the future.

He is also Secretary/Treasurer of the Sunshine Coast Masonic Study Circle. \*\*\*

*Contact the author* Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>2</sup> **Millennium Masonic Lodge No.534** meets at the Masonic Centre, Old Main Road, Maroochydore on the Fourth Wednesday of the months of March, May, July, September and November @ 6.00pm. The Installation Meeting is January @ 5\_30pm. Contact the Secretary: Email [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>3</sup> **The United Grand Lodge of Queensland** (Australia) was formed on 21st April, 1921. Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge are held on the First Wednesday, in March, June, September and December in the Masonic Memorial Centre, 311 Ann Street, Brisbane @ 7.30pm.

*Contact the Grand Secretary:* Email: [grandsec@freemasonsqld.org.au](mailto:grandsec@freemasonsqld.org.au)

<sup>4</sup> **Southport Masonic Centre.** The centre is located at 76 Nerang Street, Southport. *Contact the Centre:* Email: [swiftm@qld.chariotnet.au](mailto:swiftm@qld.chariotnet.au)

<sup>5</sup> **"Retention Rate"** from 'Freemasonry, an Endangered Species' by John Bolton (UK) and Kent Henderson (Victoria) published in London 1999. The authors examined the variation over time (1945 — 1995) of length of membership in Masonic lodges, i.e. the "retention rate." In 1945 the average mason retained his membership for 20 years. By 1995 the average was just 5 years. The statistical information was gathered from lodges in the UK and Australia and produced almost identical results. *Obtain a copy of 'Freemasonry, an Endangered Species':* [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>6</sup> **U.G.L.Q. Membership Fluctuations 1940 — 2000.** A graph published by the UGLQ in 1982. *Obtain a copy of the graph:* Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>7</sup> **Masonry Universal** by W. Bro. Kent Henderson PJGD of Victoria. The author has been tracking the population movements of masons around the world for many years. This book is presently No. 5 in the top ten best selling Masonic publications in the world. (USA list) *Contact the Author.* Email: [kenthen@optushome.com.au](mailto:kenthen@optushome.com.au)

<sup>8</sup> **"Why Men Leave Masonry"** by W. Bro. George Woolmer OAM. MEd, Grand Librarian, Grand Lodge of S.A. & N.T. The study was completed in 1996. *Obtain a copy of the Study:* Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>9</sup> **'Masonic Education in Queensland — 2005 & Beyond'** by R.W. Bro. Peter J. Hansen PJGW. *Obtain a copy of the paper* Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>10</sup> **"Masonic Homes Project for the Sunshine Coast rejected"** by W. Bro. Alton Kempster. *Obtain a copy of the letter* Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)

<sup>11</sup> **Bartle Frere Lodge No.254** meets at the Horace Russell Mayers Memorial Hall, Munro Street, Babinda on the Second Wednesday of each month (except January and May) at 7.30pm. The Installation Meeting is the Third Saturday of May @ 5.30pm. *Contact the Secretary:* R.W. Bro. Owen Lewis PJGW: Email: [owenl@austarnet.com.au](mailto:owenl@austarnet.com.au)

**Cooroora Lodge No.232** meets at the Masonic Centre, Station Street, Pomona on the Fourth Saturday of the months of January, March, May, July and November @ 7.30pm. The Installation Meeting is September @ 4pm. *Contact the Secretary:* W. Bro. Lee Mangan. Email: [tadal@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tadal@bigpond.net.au)

<sup>13</sup> **The Sunshine Coast Masonic Study Circle** meets at the Masonic Centre, Old Main Road, Maroochydore on the Second Monday of the months of February, April, June, August, October and December @ 9.30am. Dress standard is smart casual. No regalia required. *Contact the Secretary:* R.W Bro. Peter J. Hansen PJGW: Email: [freemason@internode.on.net](mailto:freemason@internode.on.net)