

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

by Bro. Alaric.W. Wood, P.G.W., P.M.

[Ed. We acknowledge with gratitude, receipt of the following paper from the long serving secretary of United Masters' Lodge of Masonic Research No. 167 G.L.N.Z. at Auckland N.Z.

Bro. Wood delivered this paper at the April 27th meeting of the Lodge and the subsequent written and verbal discussion on his paper at the May 25th meeting.

He was granted by unanimous vote and acclamation, honorary membership of his Lodge at the most recent meeting on 22nd June. It is possible that we will see a new Secretary taking over in the near future.]

My first attempt (apart from my Inaugural Address) at a paper for United Masters was a lighthearted piece entitled *Builders and Building (Transactions Vol. 27P. 251)* and I felt I had to apologize for presenting such a paper to a learned society. This is probably my swan song and it is perhaps appropriate that again I have to apologize. For this is not a learned paper full of facts, figures and verifiable statements. It is rather the random and possibly senile musings of an old man. It is derived from a lifetime of reading and discussion and I have long since forgotten most of the sources. I apologize in advance to anyone who thinks I have stolen his thunder without acknowledgment.

The paper was prompted by the number of lodges which have engaged in exercises in 'Looking at Ourselves'. Some have been kind enough to show me the results and I have been struck by the fact that they all appear to be cosmetic. They look at How. How we do things and how we can do them better. I do not think those are the right questions. I believe we should be asking *What* and *Whether*, What are we trying to do and whether we are delivering on our promises.

All such questions are raised because of our concern over falling numbers. I believe the whole membership question has been almost hopelessly compromised by a persistent myth. It was restated in a recent issue of *The Masonic Square (A Blast from the Antipodes by Bro. Peter J. King, December 2004 at P. 17)* where the author referred rather disparagingly to 'mates from the trenches'. This, of course, refers to the belief that the increase in membership post war was due to returned men missing the male companionship of the Forces and seeking to regain it in Freemasonry. As our Master pointed out in his Inaugural Address, (Vol. 36 No. 1 at P. 6) this is inherently unlikely. Likely or not, it is not supported by the figures.

In June 1986 W. Bro. Alan Busfield, as he then was, presented a paper entitled *The Final Forty years of the Craft. (Transactions Vol. 26)* On page 243 he graphed the rise and fall of membership. The trend line shows that between the early 1900s and the mid sixties membership grew in almost a straight line. From now on I will arbitrarily refer to 1900 and 1965, though those dates are not exact: From 1965, then, membership dropped in a manner which almost exactly mirrored the trend line of the increase. There is a glitch in the line for the years of the depression and the war, for obvious reasons. In the depression men were too poor and during the war many of them were not here. However, immediately after the war the climb resumes at the same rate. It seems to me that if the myth were true then the rate ought to be steeper and it isn't. This implies that after the war men joined for the same reasons, whatever they may have been, which led them to join pre depression. The only rational alternative seems to be that Freemasonry actually peaked in the early thirties, which just happened to be at the beginning of the depression, and the increase post war of returned men just happened to be at the same rate. That is possible, but as Aristotle would say it is an improbable possible.

Why, then, did membership start to drop after 1965? I am going to suggest a number of possible reasons which you may or may not accept. if you don't, think of better ones.

1. By its nature, Freemasonry will only appeal to a proportion of the population. Between 1900 and 1965 the population grew. I have no statistical information to justify this statement, but I believe that the proportion of the population belonging to the Craft in 1965 was probably higher than in 1900. If this is so then we had probably taken in people who had nothing to offer to Freemasonry and whom Freemasonry had nothing to offer. Naturally, they left and we need to bear in mind that if we lose rabbit for that reason we have also lost rabbit's friends and relations. If Freemasonry is mentioned, he inevitably says 'Oh, I tried that years ago and there is nothing in it.' End of story.

2. After the war, the recreational opportunities available to ordinary people increased considerably. This meant that we faced much more competition for the available recreational time and dollar. I do not think we handled the competition well. Actually, I don't think we handled it at all. Instead we adopted the characteristic pose of the freemason - body bent double and head firmly in the sand, a position that many masons still maintain.

3. There was a considerable change in the housing situation. Before the war many young people, when they grew up and left home, settled somewhere near their old home town. In this way they preserved the delicate network of relationships and interests of their youth. Post war this was often not possible. There was a serious housing shortage and the State Advances Corporation, which was the only practicable source of finance for most first home buyers, lent only to returned servicemen and a few privileged Civil Servants on transfer. When the flood of rehab loans dried up the Government imposed a policy of lending only on new houses. In most cases this meant that first home buyers had to look to the latest group housing development, which could be and often was on the other side of town.

Most of such developments were virtual deserts -no trees, enough topsoil to grow three blades of grass, limited shopping facilities, poor or non-existent public transport, no haven of older people and no recreational facilities.

Of necessity, a new home owner had to look locally for friendships and interests. Freemasonry was unlikely to be either available or a priority if it was.

4. In Auckland at least, there were considerable population changes. When I was a child in the twenties and early thirties, Auckland had a population of about 80,000 which included some of the inner suburbs like Remuera and Mt. Eden. I grew up in Otahuhu which had a population of about 6,000. **(Ed. Greater Auckland's population has grown from about 200,000 to 1.3 million from 1930 to 2006)** I cannot say that we knew everyone but we certainly had at least a nodding acquaintance with a large number. We knew who played Rugby, who played League, who belonged to the local boat club and who was a mason. We were accustomed to seeing men walking up the street in evening dress carrying their little bags. Many of them were respected citizens like Mr. Bunn the baker who had been twice mayor and took a keen and often financial interest in all the local activities. He was respectable and consequently Freemasonry was respectable too.

Population growth, population scattering and the increasing use of cars changed that. If Mr. Bunn still went to lodge he probably drove there and only the immediate neighbours were aware of his membership. To some extent we ceased to be visible and out of sight is out of mind. In addition it made us fair game to all the second rate journalists who have made fortunes out of non existent mysteries and conspiracies.

5. To some extent I believe that social habits have changed. Before the war many women left work when they married and became full time wives and mothers. Married couples tended to have separate outside interests. A wife might take an interest in her husband's football club. She was equally likely to take an interest in the local kindergarten, St. John Ambulance, church, school, Women's Institute or Mothers Union. All voluntary organizations deplore the loss of this highly competent and skilled labour force.

Today I am told that married couples tend to hunt in couples and share their recreational interests. If that is so, an organization that only caters for half the couple is unlikely to be on the top of the list of priorities.

I mentioned the increased competition in the fifties and sixties. Service Clubs were probably one of our major competitors. Rotary is the only one of which I have personal experience. It was formed in America with the aim of raising the standard of business ethics, using the four way test, which many Rotarians displayed prominently in their offices. Rotary had several advantages. It had a definite and well publicized aim, all members were allocated to a committee and so were involved, the committees met regularly, usually in a member's home so that wives and partners were involved and all Clubs had some sort of community service project. When the Otahuhu club was founded it took on the job of building and organizing a Community Centre, which we needed badly as an American kindly burnt down our town hall during the occupation. This project involved all members and was a great bonding exercise as well as a wonderful piece of publicity. When the Community Centre was up and running future Presidents had to think up other projects. I am a bit cynical and I often felt that the success of a project was judged, not so much by what it achieved, as by the amount of the members' time it wasted, but it was still a bonding exercise and good publicity.

I have only second hand knowledge of the Junior Chamber of Commerce as my partner in the fifties was a member. As I understand it, the aim of the JCs was training young men in leadership. It appeared to offer training in serious hard drinking as well but maybe that was an optional extra. I am sure that other service clubs had equally well defined objects.

This brings me to the title of this address. What is Freemasonry? What is the product we are trying to sell to prospective members? If you ask the average member what Freemasonry is he will, if he can remember the answer, respond from the test questions: *'A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'.*

I do not think that is very helpful. The answer contains three statements and in my opinion two of them are false and one is also misleading. The word 'peculiar' has changed its meaning since the ritual was developed. Then it meant 'belonging especially or even exclusively to someone or something'. Today it means odd or unusual. I imagine that it had the old meaning to my grandfather, though he may have been aware of the modern sense. If so, he would almost certainly have characterized it as 'part of the slipshod speech of the modern young'. I imagine that both meanings were understood by my father, though he may have had a slight inclination to the modern one. To me the sense 'odd or unusual' is the primary sense, but if the context is inappropriate then I can change to the old meaning, I may say with an almost audible click. I suspect that many of our candidates only know the modern meaning and probably wonder why they should be expected to be interested in an odd or unusual system of ethics.

If a candidate is sufficiently well read to know the old meaning, he is probably also aware that the statement is false because the morality we teach is not 'peculiar' to us. Here I join issue with our Master. In his Inaugural Address he suggested that what was peculiar to us was the way in which we taught our system of morals. I cannot agree that the wording lends itself to that meaning. I suggest that the plain meaning of the words 'a peculiar system of morality' is a set of moral and ethical standards which belong particularly or exclusively to freemasons and this is simply not true. The system of ethics we teach is the same system as has been preached and taught by every religion and every ethical teacher since men first began to think about ethics and if that were not so we should not be teaching it.

I accept that we teach using symbols but I deny that our teaching is veiled in allegory. An allegory is a story which has a second hidden meaning. The best example is John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress, where the story of Christian's journey is an allegory of the journey of men through life. I do not think there is anything allegorical about the first and second degrees. The legend of the third degree is a myth but it is not an allegory. However, others have differed from me over this and even I have been known to be wrong.

Most masons, if driven from the test questions, will say that Freemasonry is intended to make good men better. It's a bit vague but I will accept it for the purposes of the argument. If that is what we are for, then two things follow. We must be sure that we only accept good men and we must give considerable attention to making them better.

The first is a delicate matter and I need to tread warily. The first question we usually ask the intended candidate is 'Do you believe in a Supreme Being?'

I have some doubts as to whether we are clear in our own minds what we are asking him. I am quite sure that the candidate does not usually understand what we are asking. I think most people, if challenged, will say that they believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. That is not the same as believing *in* a Supreme Being. Here I have to get involved in semantics and the best illustration should be simpler. I believe that a system called Communism exists. I know that there is apolitical and economic theory called Communism and that some people believe we should organize our state and our economy according to that system. I do not believe *in* Communism. I do not accept the presuppositions on which Karl Marx and his successors based their theories, I do not accept the conclusions he drew from those presuppositions, even if they were correct, and I do not think that a state or an economy can in fact be organized according to those conclusions.

I think that if we affirm a belief in a Supreme Being we ought to accept and try to follow the precepts laid down in whatever Volume we believe contains the revelation of His will and His dealings with men. I have serious doubts whether Freemasonry has much to offer a man who cannot make that affirmation. Unless, of course, we believe that Freemasonry is simply a social organization, a meeting, as the Master said, for a sausage roll and a can of Lion Red. If that is what we think then we are wasting our time, because there are many easier and cheaper ways of getting a social life.

On the second question I have no doubts whatever. Most lodges do nothing whatever to make the candidate better. I can already hear the squalls of protest. 'Look at the Ritual', they say, 'Look at the sublime teachings it contains. How can you say that?' I will yield to no one in my love of the Ritual. I knew quite a bit about it before I joined, the Ritual was one of the reasons *why* I joined and it has been an enduring joy to me for more than fifty years. But it is not a teaching medium.

That point was made very clear by Bro. George Draffen of Newington, M.B.E., R.W. Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Scotland and later their Librarian, in his Prestonian Lecture in 1956 (*The collected Prestonian Lectures 1925 -1960*). The Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, 1967, page 413. At page 415 he says:

"It is no part of the function of ritual to act as a medium of instruction. The function of ritual is to enshrine the teachings or dogma of the society to which it applies, in such a way as to be recognizable only to the initiated. It provides the neophyte with the background or framework upon which he must build the superstructure."

Ritual is intended to remind the initiate of what he has already been taught and it presupposes that he has been brought to light (initiation) by a long course of teaching and study.

For the following two paragraphs I am indebted to an author who published a paper in one of the Australian Research lodges. I cannot remember the author, the name of the paper or the lodge and I apologize for quoting without due attribution.

The author points out that in the early 1700s lodges were small, probably no more than twelve or thirteen people, the number that fitted comfortably into a room in an Inn or Coffee House. They would have worked an initiation (in their terms 'a making') no more than once every year or two and they did not necessarily admit the newly made mason as a member of their lodge. The ritual they used at every meeting was a short series of questions and answers which later developed into the Catechetical Lectures, known to some of us in the version worked by the Emulation Lodge of Improvement in London.

Contrary to a commonly held belief, the meetings were not booze parties. Ale would have been on the table because everyone drank ale as a matter of course. On special occasions there may have been a bowl of punch. They sang songs (and in those days most people could sing and play), they drank toasts but the primary purpose of the meeting was education and self improvement. They would have listened to papers, and discussed topics of interest, always excluding religion and politics, because those were touchy and dangerous subjects. A few of them may have dined after the meeting but probably most went home to mother.

The catechetical system continued for most of the 1700's. It is probable that by 1800 a few lodges were working a narrative ritual' such as we use and this was the form adopted after the Union in 1813.

There were two advantages to the old system. Everyone took part and there was time and a place for discussion. Today the charge after passing tells the candidate:

"As a Craftsman, in our private assemblies, you may offer your opinions on such subjects as are introduced in the lecture, under the superintendence of an experienced Master, who will guard the Landmarks against encroachment. By this privilege you may improve your intellectual powers..."

These words are taken almost verbatim from Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*. In his day they made sense. As the questions and answers went round the table the young mason could ask questions and hope to be instructed by 'an experienced Master.' Today the words are completely meaningless because he never will be instructed and will probably never have any opportunity to ask questions, even if the lodge has a member who could answer them.

I believe this matters and I will offer three examples. In the early nineties, as a preliminary to its *Renewal Plan*, Grand Lodge paid a large sum to a public relations firm to seek out lapsed masons and ask them why they left. The enquiry showed that many masons resigned within ten years of joining (today it would be more like five) and the usual reason given was 'boredom and disillusionment.' In other words, the contents of the package did not live up to the advertising. Just before the Review Committee began its work, leading up to the restructure of the Craft in New Zealand, the Grand Lodge of Scotland set up a working party to look at the state of the Craft. They found, amongst other things, that many masons were dissatisfied and bored with a sequence of 1,2,3, - 1,2,3. - 1,2,3, -Installation. Several Grand Lodges in Australia have come up with similar

findings. Finally, a number of lodges here have found younger members asking bluntly 'Is that all there is?' often with a suggestion that if it is all there is, their membership will come to an early close.

I will pause here for a collective groan from my audience while I mount the Wood hobby horse. Freemasonry was exported to the Continent before 1800 and took with it at least some of the aims of lodges in the 1700s. They are much more selective in their choice of candidates. At the least they will expect a prospective member to, explain his ideas of the Craft and what he hopes to get from it. Some lodges will ask for a written paragraph or two which will be read in lodge. If the applicant does not satisfy them, they don't admit him. He will be expected to pledge a regular attendance, both at lodge meetings and training sessions. If he fails to honour that pledge his career will be 'nasty, brutish and short'. In other words he will never pass the apprentice grade. They are not degree making machines. If they have a degree to work, they call a meeting for the purpose and do nothing else. If they have business to discuss they call a meeting for that purpose and do nothing else. Most of their meetings are devoted to education and self improvement. Before a candidate moves to a higher degree he will have gone through an intensive course of instruction, and he will be expected to demonstrate a sound knowledge of the meaning and aims of one degree before he will pass to the next. If he fails, he won't take the next step.

I am not going to say that Freemasonry is at the crossroads. If that is so then either we have taken root or the crossroads move. It seems to me preferable to say that Freemasonry can follow one of two paths. We can continue as a degree making concern. In that case I think that we will appeal to a group of men which is perhaps smaller than we expect. It will be limited to people who enjoy hearing and delivering ritual and ask nothing more. There is nothing wrong with that but in honesty we must tell enquirers that there is nothing more.

On the other path we will go back to our roots, a popular concept today, usually for the wrong reasons. In that case we will require more of our candidates and ourselves, more time, perhaps and certainly more of our minds, but we will be able to say to our enquirers 'Yes, we use ritual but there is something more.' I think we will still be a smaller percentage of the population than we were in 1965, but perhaps more useful.

Brethren, what is Freemasonry? You choose.

Discussion on the paper 'What is Freemasonry?'
by Bro. A.W. Wood

In opening the discussion, the Master Wor. Bro. Jeffrey Allan said:

Bro. Wood's paper demonstrates that one doesn't have to be a statistician to be able to grasp the reality around us. At the time I was initiated into the Craft Bro. Wood had already spent three decades observing both the successes and failures of Freemasonry.

The distinction made in the paper between efficiency and effectiveness i.e. 'doing things right' as opposed to 'doing the right things' is critical. As pointed out, many former members left because they became bored with the '1,2,3...1,2,3_1,2,3, Installation' routine and yet many lodges solely devote their time to doing this better. That is to say they are striving to get better at driving their members out.

While a significant effort and cost was entailed in understanding why members left, a more productive understanding would be why our new members are joining. By understanding this we can adapt our strategies to meeting those needs.

While there are many issues raised within Bro. Wood's paper I would like to emphasize this one element. Bro. W. Stemper (*Royal Arch Mason* - Spring 1980, New York) observed:

"This type of young person is both less likely to conform to that stereotype most Masonic leaders have of eligible younger members, and more likely to challenge the preconceptions and stereotypes of the various Masonic establishments. While most likely to be 'gentle' in their critiques, they are still prone to candour and frankness about differences between Masonic ideal and practice. As a result, they are not likely to be entirely 'comfortable' with inefficient and poor lodge leadership and management."

Nevertheless, this same young person is a prime candidate for Freemasonry and one which the Craft would do well to understand and attract to the Fraternity.

'The single most important characteristic of this person's approach to the Fraternity should be clearly and amply stated: it would be existential. The younger philosophically and materially minded man of today would tend to see Freemasonry as an option for authentic human existence - as a form and approach to leading a life that sought a centre within itself, and did not depend upon external authority or convention.'

Freemasonry of the 1700s would have met the criteria of the last paragraph with ease, as Bro. Wood has noted. Today we are failing to provide the guidance for the young mason to achieve this existential goal and it may well be that our avoidance of discussion of religion has been extended to spirituality as well.

Bro. Stemper makes a profound observation which in part offers an answer to the question 'What is Freemasonry?' by stating:

"Freemasonry, in brief, was never intended to be anything other than a profound quest by man for participation in the nature and purpose of God and the Universe. As a unique layering of human aspiration for ultimate meaning and moral behaviour in the process of that aspiration, it combines four strata of symbolism, ceremonial, and spiritual insight, all of which point to one essential, ancient insight - that is that humankind is at one, spiritually and materially with the ultimate nature of reality and of all creation."

Bro. Alex Davidson said: Perhaps I should not be on my feet, because I agree with almost everything Bro. Wood has written. In his paper he has raised much of value to assist our understanding of what Freemasonry is here and now, compared with what it is in Europe and what it was in its formative century. However, to avoid being labelled as no more than a member of Bro. Wood's clique, I could perhaps raise a couple of quibbles and qualifications.

I was born in 1945 and grew up in Papatoetoe, neighbouring town to Bro. Wood's Otahuhu. I think in his section on post war housing policy, he has missed the growth in State Housing until 1950, and the dramatic explosion of Group Housing from 1953 onwards. My cohort married very young, younger than any other New Zealand generation, mainly to get a home through a combination of capitalization of the Family Benefit for a housing deposit, a 3% mortgage from State Advances and a new Group House.

Papatoetoe grew rapidly from a sleepy farming community to a mass of new housing estates. This, as he notes, was the beginning of the end of fixed communities, and mobility has grown ever since. City and suburban lodges ceased to be community lodges. For example, The Lodge of the Liberal Arts No. 500 meets at Ellerslie, but of its fifty members, not one lives in Ellerslie. We now change houses (and localities) several times in our lives. Yet most lodges still behave as if they were part of a fixed community.

More importantly, he notes the enormous cultural shift in the post-war period. The 1950s have been called 'the decade of the housewife' by the sociologists. This was the culmination of the pre-war culture of separate roles for men and women. The woman stayed at home and managed the household. The man went to work, and socialized with other men in the pubs and clubs. This tradition of the two separate spheres began to break down in the 1960s.

Socialization in couples was the invention of my generation, strengthened as women were forced out of the homes and into paid employment, strengthened by the demand of women for equality with men, strengthened by the geographic mobility I have already mentioned, strengthened by the decline in child-bearing. In short, there has been a huge cultural shift.

How has Freemasonry addressed social change? The simple answer is that it hasn't. Thanks partly to the high average age of its membership, it believes the dual sphere model of social life still applies. Neat little tea parties are arranged for 'the ladies', while men do serious things. Then it wonders why it can't attract or retain young men.

Bro. Wood suggests that by 1800 'a few lodges were working a narrative ritual'. However, the narrative element entered degree workings much earlier. To the best of our knowledge only two degrees were usually worked in 1723, although some lodges may have had three as early as 1711. The third was generally established by 1750. The old first degree consisted of much of our first and some of our second, and the old second formed part of the later first and third, without the Hiram legend, however. In the 1720s the Hiram Degree (now a major part of our third) began to appear, although it could have been composed around 1710, and earlier versions may have centred around other characters, such as Noah. It was widely

adopted around 1732. Our modern second degree has become rather a thin ceremony, as its original version lost important sections to the modern first and third.

I would like to go further in discussing Bro. Wood's analysis of the content of Freemasonry, the nub of 'what it is', but I fear I have used my time already. Perhaps I can return to that when he gives us his next paper, which I hope will not be too long delayed.

Bro. Kershaw said: As ever, Bro. Wood's paper was a delight to read, with all his facts and statements logically spread out before us.

I feel he has omitted one of the main reasons why membership dropped off in Freemasonry and elsewhere in 1965. I refer to Television. It should be put at No. 1 on his list. Prior to this the only evening entertainment in the average house was the radio. If one wanted further diversion one had to leave the house and go to the cinema, concert, sport or whatever. With the advent of television one could stay in and be entertained with something new every hour or half-hour. You didn't even have to talk to your wife if you didn't want to as it was an inhibitor of conversation!! In short you did not have to leave the house any more.;

The author does not seem to like civil servants. I was one for many years and knew of one of my colleagues who lived in Wellington and was called in to Head Office at lunch time on Friday and was told to report for duty in Lyttlelton (permanently) on Monday morning. Maybe a little help with housing would be appropriate in those circumstances.

I do remember the group housing developments the author mentions. When I lived in Linden, a Wellington one was constructed in a valley near Porirua several miles from us. It had no public hall, meeting place, cinema, shopping centre, etc. for the population. It was indeed a virtual desert. In those days the official stance was that if you wanted a local amenity you got going, raised money and built it yourself. There was a small church there which had a meeting hall and it was there that Lodge Porirua set themselves up. I remember that all their gear was under the stage and had to be brought out and put away at each meeting. Also one had to strike down the lodge room and then set up the refectory before it could be used, then put all that away too. What would one say to that today? Wouldn't do much for membership now.

One wonders at the Author's thoughts on ritual. Surely the average brother hearing it will set himself to thinking about it. What does it mean? What is it trying to say? What lessons can I learn from it? The last sentence of his quote (by Bro. George Draffen) sums it up:- *'It provides the neophyte with the background or, framework upon which he must build the superstructure.'* One must agree that little or nothing is done to support him, but if he has a sufficiently enquiring mind he will build on that background by himself.

In his closing paragraph, the author says:- *'On the other path we will go back to our roots, a popular concept today, usually for the wrong reasons.'* What does he mean by this?

Personally I would like the opportunity to have table lodges, education and the general discussions he mentions allowed back into mainstream Freemasonry. Unfortunately I fear the 'status quo' will prevail and the hierarchy, pomp and circumstance, 'us and them' mentality will prevail. Would that Bro. Wood's final suggestion could come to pass; it would set us up for the 21st Century. An entertaining paper with thoughts for all of us to consider.

Bro. Wilkening , J.W., said: I found Bro. Wood's address like a breath of fresh air blowing through the staid institution of Freemasonry. Here we have a brother, who has given years of unstinting service to Freemasonry at present.

I can only hope that those who heard or read his address will take on board some of his suggestions and findings. Thus we might be better enabled to inspire our new candidates, so that they in turn will carry forward the ideals of Freemasonry into the future.

I wish Bro. Wood all the best in his retirement.

Bro. Wyatt said: Bro. Wood, in his opening paragraph, states that this paper is probably his swan song. Let's hope it is not, as I feel we could do with a lot more of his 'senile musings'. He clearly gives us five possible reasons why membership has dropped over the last forty years. All of them a clear analysis of the social conditions of the last half of the 20th century; and how they affected Freemasonry. Now it is up to Freemasonry to adapt to the present 21st century, and build on the strengths our organization has. He is

clearly of the mind that we must interest our members with more than degree work, and I do believe that several lodges are interesting their members with other educational and enjoyable meetings. I also think that where members have another common interest, it helps to create a greater friendship and binds members together.

I also feel that our system of Grand Lodge operations is not conducive to or as appropriate as it may have been fifty years ago. We must have Grand Lodge as an administrative body, (boards, etc.) but I feel taking a lesser part in installations would give the lodge members (especially past masters) more interest in their lodge and a night they could participate in.

Bro. Wood suggests we can follow one of two paths, but I think in all realness he knows that both paths will be trod in the future, and we can only hope that enough lodges will find the mix of meetings that their brethren enjoy, so that they can retain members and see their lodges prosper.

Bro. Vialoux said: In my travels I have seen several new members who have come to Freemasonry after careful investigation on the internet. Presumably they feel that it has something of value to offer them and, apparently, it is the ritual aspect that appeals.

In reply, Bro. Wood said: I thank all the brethren who have taken the trouble to comment on my paper and I appreciate their constructive suggestions. I must say that I expected a much more hostile attitude and have been agreeably surprised at the generous reception.

Our Master has added some useful suggestions and I am grateful that he has refrained from taking issue with me on some statements I made with which I know he disagrees.

To Bro. Davidson, I agree that I omitted State Housing, largely because my experience in Otahuhu led me to feel that very few people were able to access State rental accommodation post war. Those who did tended to be widows and solo mothers in whose thoughts Freemasonry was unlikely to bulk large. However, if I am wrong in that, I agree that the same difficulties would have been experienced as I mentioned in connection with group housing.

I do not wish to enter into discussion with Bro. Davidson on 18th century ritual. I am not an expert in that field. However, in defence of my suggestion that the narrative ritual was not generally used, I refer to *Three Distinct Knocks* of 1769. It consists of a series of questions and answers very similar to those in use today in Emulation. The ritual portions explained in the course of the answers do not contain any long charges such as we have today and it seems to me that, as was the ease in the *Edinburgh Register House Ms.*, the instruction was contained in the catechism, not in any long explanation. If that is not so then I hope we may hear from someone better skilled in old rituals than I am.

To Bro. Kershaw, it is true that I did not mention TV as a cause of our losses. I agree that television has affected many organizations. However , I think too heavy a reliance on TV as an excuse is about on a par with the myth of 'mates from the trenches' . in spite of TV, people still go out to concerts, cinemas, sporting events and social occasions. Some of us also talk to our wives. However, people do not go out to lodge and I think that requires more explanation than TV.

I did not intend any reflection on Civil Servants. I mentioned them because it was a fact that some Civil Servants received State Advances loans and it would have been a misstatement to say that loans were restricted entirely to returned servicemen. I did not use 'privileged' pejoratively. It was used as a qualifier because my experience indicated that not all Civil Servants on transfer were eligible for loans. What the internal criteria were I am unable to say. Bro. Kershaw's friend may have qualified. More probably, he did not.

As usual, Bro. Kershaw has picked up on my habit of occasionally wandering into flights of fancy. I feel that 'returning to ones roots' is, at least occasionally, an excuse to opt out of present difficulties and take refuge in what is felt to be an easier or better past.

I agree that an intelligent and enquiring candidate will try to search out the meaning and teaching of the ritual. Experience seems to me to suggest that either we do not take in many intelligent and enquiring candidates, or they find the search heavy going and give it up. I feel that we should not leave it to the candidate to educate himself. If we have admitted him we ought to assist him to get the most he can out of

the Craft. It is possible to educate oneself to the point of passing exams and even obtaining a degree without the assistance of teachers, but I feel that there are easier ways.

Bro. Vialoux has more opportunities than I do to assess the new intake. He says that a number come in after diligent search on the internet and apparently are looking for ritual. If that proves to be the case I will be very pleased but I think I am unlikely to live long enough to find out. The proof will be that they are still members ten years hence.
