

On the occasion of the 65th Anniversary meeting, millennium 2000
W. Bro. David West - Secretary, St Laurence Lodge, No 5511

WM (salute). We have heard the reading of two sets of minutes today already but I could not resist reading just a very short abstract from yet another:

“The few Lodges at London, finding themselves neglected by Sir Christopher Wren, though fit to cement under a Grand Master as the centre of union and harmony They and some old Brothers met at the ... Apple Tree (Tavern), and *having put into the chair the oldest Mason* ... they constituted themselves a Grand Lodge ...”

This, of course, is the record of the founding of Grand Lodge in 1717. I thought it appropriate that we are putting into the chair, our oldest Mason, yourself, WM. May I express the pleasure of the Lodge at seeing you back in that chair in which you were first installed 35 years ago.

WM and Brethren, some of this brief address is taken from that invaluable little book, *Provincial Grand Lodge of Essex, 1776-1976*, by W. Bro. Keith S. Buck, PAGDC, PPGW. Other information has been taken from our Lodge history, of which copies are available for Brethren at the Secretary's table - for a small donation to charity.

Bro. Buck writes that the first recorded Lodge in Essex was that meeting at the Three Cups in Colchester whose first meeting was on November 25, 1735, some 18 years after the foundation of the Premier Grand Lodge and almost 260 years ago today. At that time it was number 141 on the list of Lodges in England - that is to say, there were only 140 other Lodges in England at that time - in fact rather less, some older Lodges having already been erased. In 1752, this original Lodge moved to the Angel Inn in Colchester and by 1757 had named itself the Angel Lodge, a name that it still bears, with its current number of 51, the oldest Lodge in Essex. Early Lodges were warranted in *Braintree* - at the Horn Inn as number 156 - in *Romford* at the King's Head in the Market Place as number 182 and in *Chelmsford*. The latter Lodge was known as the Lodge of Perfect Friendship no 308 and had titled members. In 1764, the St Nicholas Lodge, No 317 was founded in *Harwich* and in 1772, the Lodge of Freedom No 430 at *Maldon*. The Lodge in was erased but the other four survived through to 1776 when that great Mason, Thomas Dunkerley became the first Provincial Grand Master of Essex.

Dunkerley was an illegitimate (or 'natural') son of George II, a fact that he learned only from his mother's dying confession. Prior to this discovery, he had served as Gunner and Teacher of Mathematics in the Navy and was present at the siege and capture of Quebec in 1759. His friends brought his parentage to the notice of George III who granted Dunkerley a generous pension for life. Dunkerley was made a mason in 1754 in Portsmouth and to say the least, had an energetic and glorious Masonic career. He became Provincial Grand Master of Hampshire in 1767, and then added the Provinces of Essex, Dorset, Gloucestershire Somerset, the Isle of Wight, Bristol and finally in 1790, Herefordshire. At one time he was Provincial Grand Master of 8 provinces and an exceptionally active Provincial Grand Master at that. He was made Past Senior Grand Warden in 1786 and was also Grand Superintendent of an amazing 18 provinces in the Royal Arch. Just to cap it all, he was the first Grand Master of the Knights Templar.

The growth of Masonry in Essex, despite Dunkerley's efforts was at best stuttering. Lodges were erased as local enthusiasms waned, and new ones warranted where possible. This pattern continued until the end of the 18th century. To take an example, during the period 1776-1785, Dunkerley created the Lodge of Unity, No 496 in *Colchester* and the Social Lodge No 505 in *Braintree*, itself a short-lived lodge but one described as being:

‘of brilliance and distinction which enrolled under its banner the rank and opulence of North Essex and the Stour Valley’.

In addition, pre-figuring another Lodge more famous to us, The Well-Disposed Lodge, No 76 had migrated from Bishopsgate Street to *Waltham Abbey*. However, the Lodge of Perfect

Friendship at Chelmsford and the St Nicholas Lodge at Harwich were erased but so that the Province, despite the new Lodges, had increased to only five Lodges in total.

Perhaps this stuttering growth should not surprise us, given the small population of Essex and the difficulties of travel at that time. The total population of England and Wales in 1760 was about 7 million. Today it is over 50 million. London, in the time of King George III covered an area no larger than Whitechapel in the East to Hyde Park Corner in the West and just South of the River to Old Street in the North. The population was about 675,000. Chelmsford, now the County Town of Essex had about 2,500 people. The coach took ten hours to get from London to Colchester, the time that it takes today to fly from London to Cape Town and Colchester was a relatively important place being the centre of the Essex wool trade. However, it had a population of only 9,000. Since there were few people in Essex and these thinly spread Lodges would have survived on the basis of a small number of local enthusiasts. Candidates would have been few and far between and succession must have often been difficult.

Bro. Dunkerley died in 1795 at the age of 71 in the early part of the war against France. His successor, George Downing, found himself, in 1798 presiding over 6 Lodges, just one more than Dunkerley, 10 years earlier. The Lodges were:

- The newest, the Prestonian Lodge of Perfect Friendship 560 at *Grays*.
- Angel - still going strong at *Colchester*
- Friendship at *Ilford*
- Good-will at *Braintree*
- Good Fellowship at *Chelmsford*
- Well-Disposed at which, as I have mentioned, had moved from London to *Waltham Abbey*. It later moved back.

However, there were more Lodges actually active in Essex for, during the period of the Napoleonic war, Essex was host to a number of Military Lodges, Lodges that belonged to regiments and moved about with them.

The next Provincial Grand Master was William Wix in 1801, whose initial act becomes the first significant point of this history this afternoon. He sanctioned the transfer of another London Lodge to Essex, this time to Rochford. This was the Lodge of True Friendship, then number 210 and now number 160. The Lodge had been warranted on 4 December 1766, some ten years before Thomas Dunkerley had become Provincial Grand Master of Essex. After several moves eastwards it met at the George Inn, Stratford Broadway in 1800. Here it fell into difficulties and some Brethren anxious to establish a Lodge in Rochford acquired the Lodge, purchasing its regalia and furniture for £20.00 and settling its debts with Grand Lodge. This is made clear in The Lodge minutes for 1801, which I have had the honour of reading.

It appears to be an unusual story. However, during this period, the war against France, the Unlawful Societies Act effectively prevented the creation of new Lodges and, particularly in the Grand Lodge of the Antients, it was common enough for the warrants of defunct Lodges to be sold to Brethren seeking to establish new Lodges. The story is particularly interesting in that the Lodge of True Friendship was a Moderns Lodge and so this may be an isolated incidence of similar activity by the Premier Grand Lodge.

Whether this is so or not, The Lodge of True Friendship prospered in Rochford, survived the decline of Masonry through to 1832 - by when there were only four Lodges in Essex - and became eventually the reason why we are all here today. The Lodge of True Friendship is the Essex Lodge from which we originally stem - the start of our Provincial family tree. This historic Lodge celebrated its bi-centenary as long ago as 1966 and, after the Angel Lodge which is the only survivor from the earliest times, it is the oldest in Essex.

Worshipful Master, (salute) I am delighted to inform you that with have with us this afternoon, the Master of The Lodge of True Friendship, accompanied, and very suitably on this family occasion, by the Lodge Secretary, the father of the Master. In passing,

Worshipful Master, may I note that the current Master is the fifth generation of his family to be a member of the Lodge of True Friendship and the fourth generation to be Master?

The Lodge has recently made an exciting discovery, very relevant to our meeting today, which I will leave to their Master to impart. He will also have some significant people to introduce. Perhaps WM, you would like me to invite the Master and Secretary of the Lodge of True Friendship to stand as valued guests so that we may welcome them personally and hear their news?

Thank you WM. (salute) As I have said, by 1832, there were only four Lodges in Essex, a decline from the 15 that there had been at the time of the Union between the Moderns and the Antients in 1813. Essex lost two-thirds of its Lodges - exactly the same proportion lost by English Masonry in general which declined from 647 to 424 Lodges, no less than 157 of those Lodges being lost in the five years after 1827. The decline of Masonry was further hastened in Essex by a period of mis-management, or better put 'non-management', of the Province for there was no Provincial Grand Master from 1823 to 1836. It seemed that England had lost interest in Masonry.

We can be very grateful to a small number of enthusiastic Masons at this time, who set out to preserve Lodges in danger and to preserve Essex Masonry as a whole. One of these Masons, as Bro. Buck tells us, was a Brightlingsea shopkeeper, James Webb, reputedly the ugliest man in the town, who was initiated in the Angel Lodge in Colchester in 1834. At the age of 45, he is said to have walked to Colchester and back for Lodge meetings, a round trip of 20 miles.

However, what seems to have turned things around in Essex, at least, was the arrival of the railways, essentially between 1839 (Colchester) and 1856 (Southend). Bro. Buck says, *"Such was the effect of this period of evolution on Freemasonry that in many cases it could truly be said the coming of the railway brought a Lodge in its train."*

Eight years after the railway arrived in Southend, the first Lodge, native to that town, was warranted. Supported by the Lodge of True Friendship, the petition, written in bold copperplate on blue paper (*it is in the library at Great Queens Street where I have the pleasure of personally reading it*) is dated 28 January 1864 "for a Lodge to be held at the Ship Hotel in Southend." This was the Priory Lodge, No 1000, the first Lodge to be founded in Southend, nearly 100 years after its Mother Lodge was founded. Worshipful Master, (salute) I am delighted to inform you that with have with us this afternoon, the Master of The Priory Lodge, accompanied by the Lodge Secretary. Perhaps WM, you would like me to invite these equally valued guests to stand also so that we may welcome them personally?

Thank you WM. (salute) At this time, Upminster was a small hamlet of about 1200 people and the railway did not reach it until 1885. However, Grays was a larger and indeed older habitation which in 1871 had a population of 2800 - and the railway passed through Grays on the way to Southend from Fenchurch Street. Thus it was that in 1870, the Priory Lodge supported 5 farmers, 2 corn merchants, a clerk and a clerk in holy orders who wrote, on a large and most beautiful sheet of parchment, "... we pray for a warrant of constitution, empowering us to meet as a regular Lodge at the King's Arms Hotel, Grays, Essex." Thus it was that W. Bro. Henry Sandfield became the first Master of the Saint John's Lodge, No 1343.

Worshipful Master, (salute) I am delighted to inform you that with have with us this afternoon, the Master of the Saint John's Lodge, accompanied by the Lodge Secretary. Perhaps WM, you would like me to invite these worthy guests to stand so that we may welcome them personally?

Thank you WM. (salute) Grays continued to grow and by 1901 had a population of 13,500. Upminster was still tiny but was about to change. In fact from about 1905, when the Upminster Garden Suburb was commenced, Upminster must have looked something like a building site. During this period of rapid growth, another very significant event occurred - significant of course to its members but also particularly significant to us in St Laurence Lodge.

It was the birth of Mum! In 1909, the Ingrebourne Lodge, No 3345, was supported by the Saint John's Lodge and warranted '... to meet at the Old Roman Catholic Church Chapel, Upminster on the first Tuesday in January, February, October, November and December.'

WM, (salute) the history of the Ingrebourne Lodge says that the Chapel was pulled down but I have wondered whether it is not the Chapel that is being restored on the site of the Catholic School on the hill opposite the Windmill. However, since I am delighted to be able to inform you that with have with us this afternoon, the newly installed Master of the Ingrebourne Lodge, accompanied by the Lodge Assistant Secretary, no doubt they can enlighten us. Perhaps WM, you would like me to invite the representatives of our Mother Lodge to stand so that we may welcome them personally?

Thankyou WM (salute) Worshipful Master, the Brethren of St Laurence will know that each year we extend invitations to visit and dine to the Master and Secretary of four Lodges and that they reciprocate those courtesies to us. In one case the reason for this is clear. We visit and are visited by our Mother Lodge. However, the reasons for the closeness to the other three Lodges may not be so apparent to the Brethren. However, it is another example of 'family matters.'

The Abbots Hall Lodge, No. 6206 and the Engayne Lodge, No 6831 are in fact our sister Lodges, being the only other two Lodges derived from the Ingrebourne Lodge. The Upminster Hall Lodge No. 7573 is our daughter Lodge. St Laurence sponsored the application on behalf of Upminster Hall in 1957.

Worshipful Master, I am delighted to be able to inform you that we have with us today the Master and Secretary of the Engayne Lodge, the Master and Secretary of the Abbots Hall Lodge and the Secretary of the Upminster Lodge. While we glad to say are quite often honoured by visits from these Lodges, it is not often that we collect, so to speak, the full set of them! Perhaps WM you would like me to ask them to stand so that we may express our unique pleasure at their company on this family occasion?

WM, that brings us up to date. 60 years ago this year, the Ingrebourne Lodge supported W. Bro. Bob Harper and the rest of our founders in their successful application for a warrant which led to the consecration of St Laurence Lodge, No 5511 - on 12 January, 1935 in the Indian Temple at Great Queen's Street - some 169 years after the founding of the Lodge of True Friendship at the Crown and Thistle near Tower Hill and 202 years after the Strong Man Lodge began life in East Smithfield.

There is the theme for our meeting today, Brethren. We shall shortly hear from W. Bro. Cyril Self who was present at our consecration in 1935 and later the St Laurence Lodge demonstration team will perform parts of an initiation ceremony from 1766, the year of the foundation of The Lodge of True Friendship. Truly the brotherhood and warmth of Masonry spans the centuries.

WM (salute) I thank you and the Brethren for their patience and their attention.