

Lodge of Charity 2651



The Lodge was consecrated at the Masonic Hall, Bold Street, Warrington on Monday March 22 1897, W. Bro. J. Armstrong being its first Master. It was the sixth Lodge to be established in the town though only two, Lodge of Lights and Gilbert Greenall, remained in existence at that time. The Ceremony of Consecration was performed by W. Bro. W. Goodacre PGSB acting as Deputy for the Grand Master, HRH the Prince of Wales.

Its birth, however was not without its difficulties as Provincial Grand Lodge had refused its formation in 1893. Notwithstanding the opposition from a number of brethren from the 2 Lodges in the town, W. Bro. Pearson from the Lodge of Lights was instrumental in securing a third warrant and was invested as the Lodge's first Junior Warden at the inaugural meeting. At this meeting, 5 candidates were proposed including Mr. W H Woodcock who for many years was the Borough Treasurer and this link with the Lodge's Consecration was not broken until his death in 1956.

We can only conjecture how our Founders decided to call our Lodge, the Lodge of Charity, but it is reasonable to assume that their decision was based on the ritual where the practice of 'charity' is strongly recommended. Throughout our history the records of the Lodge's commitment to charity is evident and at the first meeting of the Lodge in 1897 the sum of £5.25 was donated to the Victoria Fund.

Meetings were held regularly from 1897 onwards and it is interesting to note that at one meeting 4 candidates were raised in one evening and at another early meeting the Lodge received a paper on Lady Masons. In March 1898, it was proposed that a supper be provided at the May meeting to which ladies could be invited at a cost not to exceed 3 shillings (15 pence).

Bro Rev. W. Bracecamp, who was serving as one of his Majesty's Chaplains, was granted special leave to attend the Lodge meeting on March 4 1915 to enable him to be installed as the Master of the Lodge.

The lease on the premises in Bold street expired in 1921 and meetings were held in the Cairo Street Schoolrooms from October that year until the site in Winmarleigh Street was opened in November 1933 following a tremendous fund-raising effort, at the time of the Great Depression, by all the brethren from the 3 Lodges plus Ashmole Lodge, our daughter lodge that was consecrated in June 1929. The Lodge of Charity met for the first time at Winmarleigh Street in October 1934.

The Second World War brought its problems though on a Saturday afternoon in 1943 an Emergency Meeting was held to initiate Mr G Robinson who was to become the Master of the Lodge in 1959.

The Office of Tyler became a progressive office in the Lodge in February 1951. In the 1950s we had visitors from the USAF base at Burtonwood and, on completion of their tour of duty, 2 visitors presented the Lodge with a suitably inscribed pair of Deacons' wands and these are still used today.

It was agreed in 1959 that the Lodge summons should bear a crest or emblem and, though this was originally printed in blue and gold, it is now only printed in blue to save printing costs.

A special meeting was held on May 4 1989 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee in Masonry of the late W. Bro. A. Walker PPrJGW, the first Brother to have served the Lodge for 50 years. Similar ceremonies were held on June 7 2001 and on November 3 2005 to celebrate 50 years in the Lodge of the late W. Bro. A. Jones PPrJGW and W. Bro. J. Manley PPrJGW respectively.

In May 1963 the bye-laws were changed to restrict meetings to October to May each year and to introduce the concept of a social board after each meeting. The Lodge Banner, which was produced by W. Bro.s H. Boscow and A. McWhirter, was dedicated in January 1986, at a special meeting chaired by W. Bro. B. Hargreaves and attended by the late W. Bro. A. Osbourne PSGD, Asst PrGM and members of the Provincial team.

Bro P. Gartside was installed as the 100th Worshipful Master on March 4 1997 and the Lodge officially celebrated its centenary, a month later, on April 3. The ceremony was conducted by Rt. W. PrGM Bro. K. Moxley, assisted by 13 members of the Provincial Team. At the end of the ceremony Bro. Gartside and the rest of the brethren of the Lodge of Charity were entitled to wear the Centenary Jewel.

We are not the only Lodge of Charity in Great Britain. There are actually 14 in total and each year a special meeting for all the 'Lodges of Charity' is held at a different venue and hosted by a different Lodge. On May 7 2005, with Special Dispensation from Provincial Grand Lodge, we acted as hosts for the second time (the previous occasion being in 1991). This meeting was attended by members of the Lodges of Charity from Shrewsbury, Plymouth, Farnworth, Kidderminster, Birmingham, Bradford, Nottingham and Belfast as well as W. Bro. A. Roughsedge PSGD, Asst. PGM, W. Bro. D. Rudd PSGD Asst. PGM and many visitors from the Warrington Group of Lodges and other Groups. At this meeting we were treated to a talk by an operative mason who worked as a leader of a team of stonemasons at Liverpool Cathedral. Very appropriately, at the Festive Board, everyone received, as a memento, a suitably engraved miniature ashlar, made by one of our members W. Bro. T Owen.

At the Regular Meeting of the Lodge on December 1 2005, W. Bro. J. Manley PPrJGW celebrated 50 years in Freemasonry in the presence of W. Bro. A. Roughsedge PSGD APGM in the Province of West Lancashire, W. Bro. H. D. Rudd PSGD, AGPM in the Prince of West Lancashire, other Grand and Provincial Offers and 23 Brethren of the Lodge of Charity.

On February 4 2010, the Lodge was honoured by a private visit of the presence of the Provincial Grand Master, RW P. J. Hosker PSGD. This was the first time that a PGM of the Province had visited the Lodge for a Regular Meeting and he witnessed the initiation ceremony of Bro S. Ainsworth.

The Lodge has always supported many charities, especially the Festivals, the most notable being the one in 1966, when we raised £2,651, equal to our Lodge number and the second highest in the Province. The Lodge supported the 2010 Festival and contributed in excess of £4,000 which made the Lodge a Grand Patron of the Festival and entitled to have this printed on its summons in perpetuity.

One unusual feature of the Lodge is that it has been teetotal with no alcoholic drinks being served at the Social Board other than at the Installation and Christmas meetings since its Consecration and this meant that when the New Licensing Laws were introduced in 1902, requiring all Lodges who served alcohol to register, the Lodge did not have to do so. The custom of serving wine and inviting our Ladies to dine at the Christmas meeting did not start until 1973.