

The history of the first 100 years of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076



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The start for this new lodge with such high hopes was not auspicious. The first meeting was attended by five members only, and so no work was done. The next two, with one or two visitors, mustered fifteen and sixteen respectively. They had no equipment and little money, but by the third meeting, in September 1886, they had obtained and were able to wear their own officers' collars rather than borrow, and over the next two years there were gifts of essential equipment. The wife of the Senior Warden, Harry Rylands, died in her first childbirth in August 1886 and Rylands was so distressed he felt he could not become Master, and so in September, Sir Charles Warren was re-elected to serve a second year, although his duties might prevent his regular attendance. Two new members were elected in June 1886, but one of these did not take up the offer; in 1887 one newly elected member and also Rev. A. F. A. Woodford died. Woodford was much older than the other founders and had considerable experience, both of life and of masonry, and was regarded by all as the leader and doyen of this new little group, particularly as circumstances prevented the first Master from taking a prominent part. His death disheartened many. Both W. J. Hughan and William Simpson have gone on record as to their forebodings that this venture would go the way of all those earlier attempts to form a similar society.

An Outer Circle

It was decided to change the meeting dates, as those fixed originally seemed inconvenient to many, and qualifications and guidelines were laid down for the acceptance of new full members. These guidelines required that a proposed member should have an established reputation in the literary or art fields or, if this was lacking, that he should offer a paper to be read in lodge and which was considered his 'masterpiece'. They also formed, as early as during the first year, a literary society in association with the lodge, which they called the Outer or Correspondence Circle. After earlier discussion, the formal resolution was passed at the 2 December 1886 meeting. After a slow start, this proved very popular, particularly in far-away places, world wide. The lodge was rewarded by gradually increasing attendances at its meetings; in the twenties until 1892 but quickly into the fifties and, by 1897, often over a

hundred. The Grand Secretary, Shadwell Clerke, who had consecrated the lodge, made a point of attending every installation meeting of the lodge right up to his death, and he brought with him a small party of Grand Officers. This sort of support must have been very heartening in those early years.

There was no shortage of people willing to involve themselves in the new lodge as full members and by 1891, in spite of the losses, there was a total of thirty-one. All the founders except for Woodford were under fifty, but several of the newly admitted members were of a greater age. Between 1891 and 1894, six such members were lost; in the following seven years, completing the first fifteen of the lodge's existence, eleven were elected, but a total of nine died. The full membership at that time was twenty-eight and the maximum laid down was never in danger of being reached (nor has it since). It is likely that some were invited to join purely from the point of view of prestige and gave little support, either by literary contribution or attendance. Even Sir Walter Besant, the first Treasurer, who held the office for fifteen years, attended only thrice and made no contribution by paper or comment, while some others never attended nor contributed. There were regularly only between eight and twelve full members at lodge meetings.

The lodge very quickly developed a strongly international flavour. In September 1890 an Emergency meeting was held to welcome the Grand Master of Pennsylvania, Past Grand Masters of Louisiana and Canada in Ontario, and the District Grand Master of Malta, all members of the Correspondence Circle; two of them addressed the lodge. A number of members had travelled extensively, notably Besant, Simpson, Whytehead, Finlayson, Purdon Clarke, Klein, Ninnis, Armitage and Le Strange, while those in the services had seen many years overseas, Gould, Irwin, Warren (sometime District G.M., Eastern Archipeligo) and Markham (who had been District G.M., Malta)—and all after they had been initiated into masonry. Some lived abroad when members, Whymper in India, as did Malden when elected, Burford-Hancock in Gibraltar, Malczovich in Hungary, Robertson in Toronto. Chetwode Crawley, and later, Berry lived in Ireland and Macbean in Glasgow. There was interest outside of London, and it was perhaps Hughan's influence and example which brought several with Torquay connections, for Westcott, Lane and Crowe had all lived there. Whytehead, Ramsden Riley, Watson and Shackles all lived in Yorkshire, Kelly and Thorpe in Leicester, Le Strange in Norfolk, and Paul Rylands on Merseyside. This set a pattern which has continued through the existence of the lodge.

The Lodge and its Meetings

Those living at a distance could not attend regularly but when genuinely interested they did send written comments; some sent papers which were read for them. From the start it was the custom, as it still is, for advance proof copies of papers to be available so that such comments could be sent. The

practice of setting out exhibits started in the early 1890s, but not with items connected with the paper being read, but rather interesting items brought by those attending. On a number of occasions two separate papers were read in one evening, many by non-members, surprisingly few of whom ever seemed to have been considered for full membership. From early days the practice of sending a St. John's card (on 27 December) was started, and this practice, with all the names of the Correspondence Circle members, was carried on for many years. The early ones were designed by William Simpson, who was a gifted and experienced artist. At first dinners after lodge meetings were held at the *Freemasons' Tavern*, but in 1891 it was decided to change the venue for the banquet to the Holborn Restaurant. The early dinners had often been less than successful, and records show that difficulties arose (as they perennially seem to do) from not knowing how many were staying to dinner. Until 1895 regalia was always worn at dinner; this required the obtaining of a dispensation. After 1895 dining in regalia was only on Installation nights; this practice continued for many years. In 1894 a *Converzazione* (in regalia) was held at the Holborn Restaurant. From 1889 an annual summer outing was held, usually to a City with some interest in the architectural or archaeological field, and this continued until 1939. From the second year it had been the custom to present a signed and mounted copy of the resolution of thanks and congratulation to each succeeding Master on his leaving the Chair; from 1896 a Past Master's jewel which had been specially designed was also presented. From 1888 there had been a special lodge jewel; this may have been the equivalent of a founders' jewel as one with Sir Charles Warren's name on it recently came to light.

The code of the authentic school and the theory of the development of Freemasonry as stemming from the use of the Old Charges united a group of the early members, although the side issues related to this main theme often gave rise to differences of opinion. Hughan was the undoubted leading and even extreme thinker in this authentic approach. Woodford, Irwin, Westcott and possibly also Besant, Whytehead and Macbean, were more interested in identifying different aspects of occult practice with Freemasonry, but made little written contribution to the *Transactions* in this connection. When Woodford died suddenly, one might have supposed that the other members would look to Gould or Hughan. Hughan was unable to come often to London for any active management participation, not only because of his own chronic ill health, but also because of the invalid state of his wife. He provided a constant stream of papers and comments, but that was the extent to which he was able to take part. Gould was very good in giving papers and was always among the first with keen comments and strong views in all discussions. There was something from Gould in every volume of *Transactions* up to 1903, but it is clear from his own recurring financial problems, which were periodically brought to the attention of the lodge, that his

capacity did not lie in organisation. The lodge might well have gone the way of the so many other attempts had the choice of secretary not fallen on George William Speth. Speth was a man of independent means who lived at Margate, in Kent. He delivered several good papers to the lodge and always had useful comments in discussion, but his real strength was a tremendous organising ability which he allied to a commitment to this lodge which is difficult to appreciate. The creation in 1886 of a literary society in connection with the lodge, an 'Outer Circle' of those interested, the Correspondence Circle, was his idea. The publicising of the project was his and its execution and success entirely his. By the end of 1887 there were 179 members of the Correspondence Circle, and by the beginning of 1901, the number was nearly 3,000, spread world wide, in fact there were many more distant than home members and they showed their interest. It was the instigation and success of this scheme which saved Quatuor Coronati Lodge from going the way of earlier attempts at such a masonic society. From 1888 the liaison with these distant members was through voluntary local secretaries.

AQC.

It had always been the intention that the *Transactions* of the lodge should be as widely published as possible. The creation of the Correspondence Circle made publication in volume form more necessary. On Speth, the secretary, fell the duty of editing the *Transactions*, and after the first publication, covering the period to the end of 1888 (Volume I), there was a yearly book, which Speth saw through his local printers. The secretarial work quickly became very heavy and there were a considerable number of financial transactions. In those days it was no part of a lodge Treasurer's duties to collect money and keep books; his function, as a person of substance, was the actual custody of the lodge funds, even though quite early on the lodge had, unusually, opened a Bank account. The bookkeeping and recording function fell on the secretary who quickly needed assistance. Speth's daughter did all the accounting and he also had to employ a clerk. Quite early on the lodge made a small payment to its secretary; by 1890 he received £100 a year, and by 1900, £250 a year, out of which he paid for the assistance he required. Perhaps the biggest imposition of all on Speth was the formation of a lodge library. When such a scheme was suggested soon after the lodge started, gifts, both of books and money, flowed in and continued to do so, until by the late 1890s there were some 2,000 volumes. Although there had been talk of the lodge securing premises, nothing had happened and the members seemed disinclined to make a firm decision. It was decided to publish a series of reprints (*QCA*) and it fell to the secretary to see these through the press. He had to store at home, not only the unsold copies of *QCA*, but also the stock of copies of the increasing number of volumes of the *Transactions* and the large library. The office of secretary had not only become a full time occupation,

with a staff, but, being a man of some personality, although very quiet in speech, he naturally exercised great influence on the way in which the lodge was directed.

The Lodge Committee

In time some members felt that the secretary's influence was too great and that there was some danger of his becoming too autocratic in his dealing with the lodge affairs. Although there was provision in the by-laws for a lodge committee, meetings had very rarely been held. In 1896 several members asked for a committee meeting to discuss some aspects of the lodge—the reference of certain matters to the permanent committee and an agreement to hold committee meetings before each lodge meeting; dining arrangements and consideration of whether they could be bettered; printing for the lodge and who should take decisions; and the question of audit. From that time regular committee meetings were held and are recorded, and the lodge became a rather more democratic institution.

Finance was always a major consideration and in the very early days there was some difficulty in keeping within bounds. With the formation of a Correspondence Circle with its subscriptions and with publications of different sorts the accounts quickly became very complex, but the lodge never actually came anywhere near to bankruptcy. There were four consecutive years of losses recorded from 1892, but the most pessimistic attitude seems to have been taken in working this out. The complexity of the accounts, which related mainly to Correspondence Circle business, probably influenced the committee's decision to employ a professional auditor. Mr. Alfred S. Gedge was appointed in 1897; his successors in business still carry out the audit of the Correspondence Circle. Speth's biggest problem from the beginning was the collection of subscriptions from the Correspondence Circle members; the payment of the subscription entitled them to a copy of the *Transactions*. Debts also arose in respect of books (*QCA*) sold and delivered. By the mid-1890s, arrears and debts amounted to nearly £400 and a special drive had to be mounted to try and reduce them. The outbreak of the South African war in 1899 made the position worse, for it affected new members joining, the numbers attending meetings, but above all, the subscription position. There were many Circle members in South Africa, and it was not possible to contact over a hundred of them; the arrears total at the end of 1900 was over £700. Such was the financial stability achieved in the lodge by this time, that this position could be faced and ultimately got over.

By the turn of the century, Speth was getting concerned about the position in which he was being placed by the continued prevarication about obtaining premises which would house the library and other books and provide a small working office. Speth's situation changed by his deciding to move house from Margate to Edward Road, Bromley, much nearer to London, but no more

convenient with the storage and office problem with which he was faced. He clearly became very exasperated indeed at the negating of yet one more specific proposal and he recorded his feelings in the minute book in March 1901. On 19 April of that year Speth died very suddenly from a heart attack at the early age of 53. This came as a tremendous shock to the members and they went to lengths in mourning him which they had not done for any of the other nearly twenty members who had died. They cancelled all but formal business for the next lodge meeting, when the lodge was heavily draped in mourning and long tributes were paid to him. He had begun in course of arranging the outing for that summer, another duty which had fallen on him from the start, but this was cancelled as a token of remembrance. Before the next lodge meeting, Sir Walter Besant died. He had been the only Treasurer; his duties were not heavy and it was decided not to fill the office until the next installation meeting (Hamon Le Strange was elected). This was the end of an era for the lodge and things would never be quite the same again; the members realised this.

Temporary Arrangements

There had to be a lodge secretary and no full member was willing or felt able to accept the post. Harry Rylands finally offered to undertake the duties on a very temporary basis until some more permanent arrangement could be made. The office and the library remained at the house of Speth's family in Bromley and his elder daughter continued to deal with the money side. A memorial fund for Speth raised over £300 and a monument was made, the substantial balance being given to Mrs. Speth and her two daughters.

In the middle of 1903 major progress was made, for premises were secured at 61 Lincolns Inn Fields to house the library, and William John Songhurst had been found to act as assistant secretary and librarian. Songhurst was 43 and a qualified company secretary, but not at the time of his appointment a member even of the Correspondence Circle. Miss Speth continued to keep the accounts at Bromley and Rylands remained as secretary, although he was obviously having difficulties and there were murmurings about making a more permanent arrangement. He had on more than one occasion to remind the committee that there was no reserve of papers for reading, while the membership of the Correspondence Circle began to be affected. Towards the end of 1904 the full members began to take notice at last and they formed sub-committees, on new members, and on the post of secretary, as a result of which Rylands was persuaded to stay on for at least another year. The financial situation, while not alarming, had shown some deterioration, for there was now rent to pay in addition to salaries (for which Rylands received a round sum and employed the staff himself), while the costs of fitting up the Lincolns Inn rooms and moving the books had had an affect. The arrears position, £800 at the end of 1904, had also worsened.

The lodge was forced to make a decision on its future arrangements by notice received from Miss Speth that the family would be leaving their Bromley house and that she could no longer do any work for the lodge. At the same meeting the exasperation of some of the members was shown by Gould submitting a resolution to the effect that more businesslike methods should be introduced in the management. Songhurst has proved himself as assistant secretary and had shown interest in the masonic research aspect of the lodge. It was therefore arranged that he would deliver a paper to the lodge and then be proposed as a full member. Songhurst was duly elected on 2 March 1906 and on 4 May 1906 he was appointed secretary. Miss Speth came into the London premises for three months to ensure a proper handover of the financial records and twenty years after the formation of the lodge it was firmly established with a headquarters in London in Lincolns Inn Fields and with a reasonably competent secretary, who was to remain in that office until 1928. After this twenty years existence, six of the original nine formal founders were still alive, but Harry Rylands was the only one who retained a close connection, and contributed regularly to the *Transactions*, but he had many other interests, even in the historical field. Hughan still contributed from afar; Gould moved to Woking and became less involved; Warren, Pratt and Paul Rylands were by now nominal members only. Of the thirteen earliest joining members, only Westcott, more and more involved in mystical affairs, and Chetwode Crawley, by correspondence from Dublin, remained active. The last six years had been difficult indeed, with the side effects of the South African war, the death of Speth, and the period of unsatisfactory arrangements, until matters were brought into reasonable order in 1906. The torch had been passed into new, but willing hands.

Little hiccups would naturally be expected at a time of major change and under the new management a Finance Committee was appointed. Harry Rylands later revealed in a letter than, in addition to enabling the financial affairs of the lodge to be dealt with more expeditiously than at lodge meetings, this committee was also formed to deal with yet more financial problems of R. F. Gould, in which he involved the lodge. Some attention was required to the financial aspects, for the final move to London of the rest of the organisation had not been completed without special costs being involved; there was now a rent liability of £189 a year; and the annual payment to the new secretary to provide all the clerical services was fixed at £375. No doubt the need to watch the money side accounted for the lodge's first formal association with S.R.I.A., who made an arrangement to hold meetings in the library premises.

Members and Meetings

Edward Armitage, having reached Senior Warden, decided he was unable to give the necessary attendance for his being Master (and this applied for

several years after) and so Hamon Le Strange, the Treasurer, became Master for 1906–7 and Harry Rylands was elected Treasurer for the year. There were financial problems over the next few years although the new management succeeded in reducing the amount of subscriptions in arrears, and the size of the Correspondence Circle started to rise again—from about 2,850, at which level it had remained from 1899 to 1905, to about 3,300 in 1907, at which level it also remained stationary for some years. In 1908 the new honour of London Rank was introduced and the lodge was invited to submit a name. Few were eligible but S. T. Klein was appointed on the nomination of the lodge.

An interesting meeting was held by the lodge on 14th July 1908 for the entertaining of those, particularly the Bishops, attending the Pan-Anglican conference in London. This attracted an attendance of 229 and the Grand Master, HRH the Duke of Connaught, attended by the Pro Grand Master, the Deputy Grand Master and the Grand Secretary, honoured the meeting with his presence, and all the Bishops there were presented to him. As a result both the Grand Master and, later, the Grand Secretary, Sir Edward Letchworth, became honorary members of the lodge.

More Premises Problems

In January 1909 the members received the conflicting news that the library now had 10,000 units but that the L.C.C., the landlords, had arranged to dispose of 61, Lincolns Inn Fields and the lodge must vacate on 25 March. This information was accompanied by a financial report that the lodge had continued to make a yearly loss. The lodge was fortunate to secure a lease of reasonably suitable and convenient premises in the short time available and a move was made on 25 March 1909 to the upper part of 52, Great Queen Street, virtually adjacent to Freemasons' Hall. Again there were heavy removal costs to be borne, over £200. But one important improvement was made in these new premises, a telephone was installed. The move, from an expense point of view, was greatly assisted by the services, freely given, in the matter, by W. Wonnacott, an architect, and J. P. Simpson, a solicitor, and both full members.

Contributions

Despite the influence of the Old Charges on the formation of the lodge, the papers delivered and other contributions to the *Transactions* are in no way dominated in this early period by that subject. The matters treated range across the spectrum of masonic interest and probe into some very odd corners of masonry. Apart from those already mentioned who contributed, Edward Conder and Fred Crowe each produced several papers while eight contributions came from Wilhelm Begemann, who never became a member. Not every member or even every Master contributed, and the practice of an

inaugural address had not yet become established, although a few Masters had given a talk on the night they were installed.

Members

In 1908 the old *Freemasons' Tavern* had been substantially refurbished and had reopened under the name of the Connaught Rooms, and in 1910 the committee asked that enquiries be made regarding changing the dining venue to there from the Holborn Restaurant. Satisfactory arrangements having been made, the lodge dined for the first time at the Connaught Rooms on 7 October 1910. Henry Sadler was elected as Master at that meeting and the Grand Secretary came in November to instal him. Sadler did not see the next installation for he was one of a number who died in the next two or three years. Witham M. Bywater died in March 1911, aged 86; in May 1911 William James Hughan died, aged 70; Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke died in the same month, aged 65; Sadler died in October, aged 71. In 1912 E. J. Castle and E. L. Hawkins both died in April. Castle was 70, but Hawkins, who had rejoined in 1906 after having been a member for a short time in 1886-87, was but 62 and at the time was Senior Warden. The Junior Warden not being willing to be Master a year early, Edward Armitage, whose work had earlier prevented his having enough time for the office, became Master in 1913. The spate of deaths in 1911 naturally caused a search for new members and a number of names were considered. It is interesting to note that Rev. J. T. Lawrence, who had published several books on the symbolic and spiritual side of Freemasonry, was not considered suitable. During this few years the sub-committee considered over forty names and over a dozen were put forward to the full committee after inquiry. Four were invited to join in 1912 (of whom one declined) and two more in 1914. It would seem that the membership had tended to become on average older than in previous times but, whatever the reason, there was a reduction in the number of full members usually present at lodge meetings, from 1908 until the outbreak of war in 1914 there were often as few as seven and seldom over ten. In the same period the committee minutes refer on several occasions to the difficulty in obtaining suitable papers for presentation in lodge and as a result, several were of a 'pot-boiling' nature. There are also some extremely valuable and important papers in *AQCs* for those years. The Lodge was managing comfortably financially, without increasing very much the number of subscribers to the Correspondence Circle, while there was to have been a restart to producing more of the series of *QCA* reprints, but the outbreak of war in 1914 prevented it. F. J. W. Crowe decided to dispose of his very considerable and valuable collection of certificates in 1911 and offered them to the lodge for £1,500. This was quite beyond the financial capacity of the lodge, but they were later acquired by Grand Lodge. In spite of the general financial situation, the Inland Revenue finally caught up with the lodge in

1914 and demanded £1 12s. 6d. for Corporation Duty. The minutes record a reaction bordering on outrage, but war having just broken out, it was decided that it would not be patriotic to argue and the amount was paid.

The Problems of Wartime

The war naturally brought new problems. First, it was necessary to exclude from the annual St. John's Card list of Correspondence Circle members, all of a Constitution in an enemy country. This affected one full member, L. A. de Malczovitch, of Hungary, and an honorary member, Prince Leopold of Prussia. The lodge had many Correspondence Circle members all over Europe and communication with all was difficult and with quite a number, impossible. On 26 March 1915 R. F. Gould died, one of the best known figures not only in English but in world Freemasonry, at the age of 79 and almost sixty years after his initiation. His financial problems had been shared by the lodge and its members over a number of years and such provision as had been made for him ceased on his death. The attitude and demands of his widow immediately after his death may provide some key to his own problems, and after much negotiation a suitable provision was provided through Grand Lodge, to which the lodge subscribed.

Songhurst, the secretary, remained conscious of the period of the lease of the premises in 52 Great Queen Street. From the state of property in that street it might have been doubtful whether there would be a renewal available in 1917 when the lease expired. In 1914 Grand Lodge bought 55-56 Great Queen Street, the front part of which was especially suitable for the lodge. Application was made for a tenancy, but Grand Lodge decided to demolish the building. In 1915, 27 Great Queen Street, a complete house, became vacant and after some negotiation the lodge secured from the owners, the Leschallas Estate, a lease for fourteen years at a rent of £100 for the first seven years and £110 for the remainder. In spite of a bad financial result for 1915, the move went ahead and was completed by March 1916, and the lodge was safe until 1930 at the least. The old premises had to be disposed of for the remainder of the lease and this was done, but disaster resulted as the sub-tenant illegally further sublet without authority, and a severe fire badly damaged the premises. Fortunately the landlord's insurance covered the damage, but the lodge had to find the rent for the balance of the term.