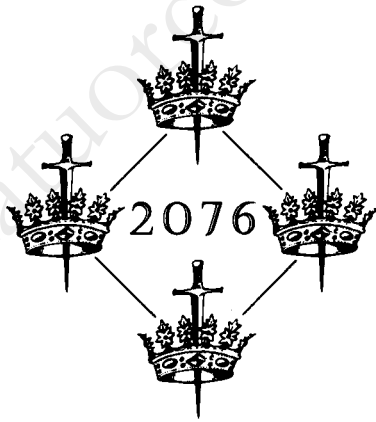


The history of the first 100 years of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076



Colin Dyer

III

The year 1916 was in several ways a watershed in the existence of the lodge. The death of Gould was in itself a landmark, while the move into 27, Great Queen Street, where the lodge was to be housed for more than the next sixty years, represented the beginning of a new era. More important still for the lodge was the tightening of conditions and controls due to the continuation of the war. Although none of the full members was young enough for active service in the war, most of them had additional work as a result of it, leaving them with less time for lodge affairs. Shortages began to have an effect and this occurred in connection with the production of the *Transactions*, for not only was this sort of work of low priority for the printers, but it was difficult to obtain adequate supplies of paper. Such paper as was obtainable had nearly doubled in price compared with pre-war and this caused further delays in producing the Volumes as the increased costs were payable out of subscriptions paid at the old rate some time before, so that, as the full volume was usually published in three parts, funds ran out before it was completed and its production had to await the arrival of fresh funds. The cost of the 1918 *Transactions* was £1,018 and the minutes of May 1919 record that the 'dates of issue of the Transactions is so uncertain'. No attempt to economise on space had been made before this and it was commented that one particular article took over a hundred pages of one Volume, but from this time, restriction was placed on the length of published papers, the overall size of the Volume, and the weight of the paper used, while there was no longer a full list of Correspondence Circle members in the St. John's card—and ultimately the St. John's card itself was abandoned.

Numbers present at meetings held up surprisingly well during the whole war period, averaging around fifty until after the Armistice at the end of 1918, the lowest being thirty-nine. Even in 1917 it was resolved to continue to dine in evening dress for the two important festivals, 24 June, St. John's day, and 8 November, the feast of the Quatuor Coronati and the installation meeting. In common with other costs, meal prices increased, the charge in 1917 at the Connaught Rooms going up from four shillings to five shillings a head for dinner in a private room. The committee were afraid of frightening people away if they charged too much and so it was agreed to give up the private room and dine at a large table in the public restaurant, thus keeping the dinner charge

at an unchanged level. Even this price was increased before the end of the war to five shillings (25p). In 1919 with the war over and more people being able to stay to the dinner, the committee remarked on the 'inconvenience of dining in the public grill room' and made enquiries about reverting to having the meal in a private room. The charge for this was six shillings a head, but the committee decided in June 1919 to give the arrangement a trial and see what effect it had. The next meeting was in October 1919, and after the summonses had been sent out, the Connaught Rooms again put up the price, this time to 7s. 6d. (37½p). The management agreed to hold the old price for this one meeting but unfortunately attendance was affected by a strike and the Connaught Rooms put a table in the public room. This proved to be prudent for only twenty-five attended the meeting and all did not dine, but the committee were incensed at being charged six shillings for this occasion. All was amicably settled and after this attendances at meetings, and consequently at dinner too, increased substantially, the meeting attendance several times being over a hundred.

R. H. Baxter, who lived in Rochdale, had become a full member of the lodge in 1916, at which time he was working on a short history of Quatuor Coronati Lodge. This was completed in 1917 but was published through the Manchester Association for Masonic Research, although the lodge undertook to circulate particulars. At this time the lodge was publishing nothing except its *Transactions*.

The Immediate Post War Period

In the few years after the war, the need for economy and control of expense continued, and in 1921, when the matter was yet again before the committee, Songhurst, the secretary, suggested that the telephone, such a proud addition to the office facilities ten years before, should be discontinued 'because of increased charges and the small number of calls'. His suggestion was not accepted but in June 1922 he reported that he had had the telephone removed as it was 'of little use and he had to make constant complaints in regard to charges for calls'. This flying in the face of progress did not last very long.

Some assistance in the direction of economy was given as a result of the departure in 1920 of William Wynn Westcott to live in South Africa. His moving caused problems for the S.R.I.A., the library of which was kept at Westcott's house. An arrangement was come to with the Society for small alterations to be made at 27, Great Queen Street so that a room could be set aside as a library and reading room, and in return the lodge was paid £40 a year.

Trouble with the Grand Lodge of Scotland

In 1921 Rev. W. E. Fleming of Kilskeery, County Tyrone, in Ireland, presented to the lodge an old Warrant, formerly that of Lodge No. 80, Fort George 31st Regiment, chartered in 1760 by the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the lodge having been struck off the Scottish register in 1852. The *Masonic Record*

published an article on it and as a consequence the Grand Lodge of Scotland demanded the return of them to the Warrant under their by-laws, as their property. The lodge wished to retain this interesting document among its treasures and so pleaded that as neither Quatuor Coronati Lodge nor the donor of the Warrant, Rev. Fleming, were sited within the bounds of the Scottish Constitution, the Laws of that Constitution did not apply to them. The Grand Lodge of Scotland viewed the matter quite differently but possession in this case was nine points of the law, and the document was kept.

The lodge did occasionally find itself in difficulty over gifts and bequests and in one case the executors held a different view from the lodge as to what was masonic, and sold some of the effects. In another case £1,000 was left on Trust for the income to be devoted to masonic research. The lodge was advised that the bequest might be invalid in view of the rule against perpetuities and a settlement was reached with the residuary legatees by which the lodge received an unconditional payment of £500 in full settlement.

More Problems with Premises

At the end of 1924, with the lease of 27, Great Queen Street held from the Leschallas Estate still having over five years to run, it was reported that an offer had been made to purchase the property by an outside interest. This might mean that the lodge would have to vacate the premises in 1930 and again look for a home. A figure of £3,200 was mentioned as being a likely value and the lodge determined to try to buy the premises if at all possible. Enquiry elicited that both numbers 27 and 29, Great Queen Street were to be sold as one lot at a figure of about £7,000. While the lodge would be unable and probably unwilling to buy both houses, it was understood that Grand Lodge at that time was looking for additional premises convenient to Freemasons' Hall, and an approach was made to the Grand Secretary to see if Grand Lodge might be interested in number 29. This proved to be the case and the lodge was authorised to continue negotiations for both houses—the tacit understanding being that Grand Lodge would take number 29 and Quatuor Coronati number 27. The bid being successful, the matter was put into the hands of the solicitors to Grand Lodge for completion. It was with a sense of shock and surprise that the members of the lodge found that Grand Lodge had taken the title to both houses. Songhurst protested, but to no avail. Grand Lodge then suggested that the existing lease, not due to expire until 1930 and at £110 a year, should be surrendered and a new fourteen year lease taken at £150 per annum. The sense of shock already felt was increased by a demand that £500 should be spent by the lodge to put the premises in good order before the lease was granted. Songhurst again protested on the grounds that the house had not been put in good order in 1916 when the present lease started. He had more success here and the new fourteen year lease was accepted.

Correspondence Circle Membership

Naturally, in addition to inability to communicate properly in war time with all members of the Correspondence Circle, recruitment to it was also affected. Where in the early 1900s often over four hundred had joined in a year and from 1908 to 1914 it was always between two and three hundred, the war years averaged around 150. After the war recruitment returned to the two to three hundred level every year but this hardly made up the losses during the war. Natural wastage accounted for many, of course, but the continuing problem of subscription collection from such a widespread group of persons meant that many had to be crossed off each year because of non-payment. The total had dropped below 3,000 during the war and by 1925 had only recovered to 3,035, about the same as at the turn of the century, and this in spite of determined efforts by the secretary to improve matters.

Summer Outings

Before the war these had been a feature of the lodge year with, usually, a week-end visit to a centre of interest and meeting local masons. In 1920 it was decided to hold a summer outing, to Bristol. This was successful and so the function became a fixture in the Master's calendar, he being usually supported by a party of seventy or so from London. It was arranged to go to Sheffield in 1921 but the visit had to be abandoned because of travel difficulties arising from the Coal Strike, but the invitation was repeated in 1922 and a successful visit held. There was some competition in provincial centres to host these visits and the committee often had difficulty in deciding which to take in a particular year. Bath was visited in 1923, Birmingham in 1924 and Weymouth in 1925. On this last occasion the members were shown the *Williams-Arden MS*, giving valuable notes on the work of the Lodge of Reconciliation, but they did not recognise it for what it was. Later visits were to York, Oxford, Exeter, Leeds, Edinburgh, Norwich, Cheltenham, East Kent and Durham, all at the invitation of local masonic dignitaries. In 1931 a day trip to Rochester was also undertaken.

Lodge Economics

It is clear that the 1914-18 war had had some effect on the lodge but it still appeared to be paying its way although, largely because of the war, the *Transactions* were always at least a year behind. The fall in numbers in the Correspondence Circle worried the secretary but soon after the end of the war, with no crisis seemingly in sight, an air of complacency descended on the lodge, both in respect of finance and Circle membership, and over full membership.

The financial accounts as published were really the accounts of the Correspondence Circle, for the items referring to the administration of the lodge, purely as such, were few and small, and the lodge balance was usually under £50. The Circle accounts, prepared by the professional auditor and incorporating the lodge items, were presented in a complex manner, virtually unintelligi-

ble even to the initiated. Correspondence Circle members were, if they so wished, permitted to pay a life subscription, and there were usually between four and five hundred on the books who had done so. These subscriptions were maintained in a Life Members's Account and only released as income on the death of the member. The annual subscriptions of Circle members were first applied to a Reserve Fund to pay for the estimated cost of the Volume applying to the year of the subscription and only any surplus treated as income. This was well in conditions of stable prices and money values, and when there was no delay in the preparation of the annual Volume of *Transactions*. As a consequence, the annual accounts began to show considerable losses for, in addition to rising prices, loss of Circle membership and substantial uncollectable arrears meant reduced income. While there was a cash balance and money coming in every year which met what was spent, no one worried, and by the end of 1927 the deficit on Profit and Loss Account was almost £4,000 even after taking the earlier legacy of £500 as income and setting it against the loss, while the *Transactions* were two years behind.

At this point W. J. Williams, a solicitor who had only been elected to full membership during the year, wrote to the Master, for submission to the Audit Committee, a letter pointing out the false impression the accounts gave and also pointing out that the lodge finances were not in good shape if it was committed to printing *Transactions* for the years for which subscriptions had been paid. The members took a good deal of convincing that all was not well but declined to alter the form of the accounts as Williams suggested. Fortunately the main point was grasped by the Master of that year, Dr. George Norman of Bath, and the March 1928 committee meeting had before it alternative proposals.

The three courses of action proposed, which could be considered as alternatives although a combination of two or all was possible, were: (i) to increase the subscription to the Correspondence Circle from the 10s. 6d. (52½p) level it had been from the start to £1; (ii) to increase the membership with a target of 4,000 in mind, by asking every member to introduce a new one; and (iii) to promote a voluntary Publications Fund to relieve the immediate situation. The committee were wary about any increase in subscriptions for fear of being faced with wholesale resignation. The last suggestion, (iii), was the Master's own and he was prepared to promote it strongly within the membership of both Circles. It was decided to circularise all the Correspondence Circle members setting out the three courses of action and asking for comments. Naturally, there were a number of replies critical of a rise in subscription; the committee were quick to decide that no action should be taken in that direction. The appeal to find new members did have some immediate effect and the total membership rose to 3,307 by the end of 1928. It increased in the following year to almost 3,500 but other circumstances caused it to fall again after that and the hoped-for 4,000 level was never reached at this time.

The Publications Fund, which it was hoped might quickly raise £1,500, started hopefully and went over £1,000 by June 1929. Donations then started to fall off, but the total of £1,250 raised by the initial effort, even though the target was not reached in the short term, was a very great help in the lodge situation at that time. This Fund was kept in being and there were material donations right through the 1930s. The extra money available in 1929 enabled the *Transactions* to be brought more up to date. The committee continued to have the financial position constantly under review; life membership was discontinued from 1930 and all new members (and some of the old, voluntarily) paid an annual subscription, while the needs of the lodge were urged in regular circulars. On the form of accounting used these efforts did not necessarily produce trading surpluses and the debit on Profit and Loss account continued to increase.

The timing of the fund raising effort was unfortunate through no fault of the lodge committee, for the general financial crisis of 1929 and the depressed conditions, nationally and internationally, which followed it had a material effect on the lodge affairs. Membership of the Correspondence Circle began to fall and the resulting cash difficulties meant that, once again, the publication of the *Transactions* gradually fell behind. The lodge continued to operate but if it had been a company it would undoubtedly have been insolvent.

The Members

Three new full members had been elected in 1916 bringing the total to thirty-four. Progression through the offices to Master continued in the usual way on the basis of seniority with but few incidents. Levander, who had been installed in November 1916, died the following month so that Wonnacott served for virtually two years. Watson, the Senior Warden in 1919, decided at the last minute that he could not undertake the 1920–21 Mastership; Herbert Bradley was elected but underwent a serious operation shortly after and his installation had to be postponed. Much later, George Daynes, installed in November 1930, died within two months.

There was a relationship between the supply of papers for presentation in lodge and the keeping up of the membership, for the ultimate test of suitability for full membership was often felt to be the contribution made to the lodge itself, whatever other published works the candidate might have achieved. War conditions made it more difficult for the secretary to obtain a supply of papers of suitable quality and, as a consequence, the total full membership began to drop. That very strong personality in English Freemasonry of this time, Sir Alfred Robbins, had been invited to join in 1918. He was a journalist with wide interests and a very energetic President of the Board of General Purposes, and among his wide interests were some historical aspects which led him to Quatuor Coronati, but he was unable to take a leading part. Preliminary selection was done by a small selection committee who considered all those who might have some claim to be invited to membership. This committee submitted names to

the full committee and if approved, these names were circulated to all full members, one objection meaning that the person concerned was not invited at that time. This tended to set an extremely high standard unlikely to be found in the conditions of war and its aftermath. Three full members died in 1918, including Hamon Le Strange, the Treasurer (Harry Rylands replaced him in that office). Two more died in 1919, two in 1921 and three more, including Harry Rylands, in 1922. In addition, there had been two resignations and a letter written to Goldney when he resigned in 1921 indicates the attitude of the full members towards membership: 'Our Inner Circle should include everyone who has made any real contribution to the scientific study of the Craft, and should continue to include them'.

The deaths in 1922 reduced the membership to twenty-four and it was not until May 30 in that year that the selection committee began to consider possible invitations to full membership. In 1922 they considered seventeen names, including that of J. S. M. Ward, whose masonic writings were not considered in line with the objects of the lodge, and George Estes of Portland, Oregon, who put himself forward on the basis of a book he proposed to publish on King Solomon's Temple. Five names were put forward by the selection committee but only three found favour with all the members, and they were elected in October 1922, restoring the full membership to twenty-seven at the end of the year. It is notable that on several occasions all of the recommendations of the selection committee were not fully acceptable, often on the score of insufficient evidence of suitability at that time or because of lack of previous interest in the work of the lodge. One name was twice subject to objection before final election, while Rudyard Kipling and Cordell Firebrace, the first appointment to the revived Prestonian Lectureship, never became members. There were occasions when the nominated person declined, but they were few.

With a lodge which had been in existence for forty years and more, it was only to be expected that there should be natural wastage which had to be replaced, but it is noticeable that through the 1920s, and indeed up to the middle of the 1939-45 war, the membership remained in the twenties; at the end of 1926 it was only twenty-four. Edward Armitage succeeded Rylands as Treasurer until his death in 1929. In May 1928 Songhurst asked to be relieved of the secretary's duties at the next installation and indicated that Lionel Vibert, who had retired to Bath when he came home from India, was prepared to move to London to take over the office. Songhurst's decision came only a few months after the appreciation, prompted by Williams, of the financial position of the lodge and he may have felt a measure of responsibility as he had been the executive secretary for twenty-two years. He was, however, at this time sixty-eight and had administered the lodge through most difficult times, if not with great force and leadership, at least with sagacity and singleness of mind when there was no obvious strong personality interested in directing affairs. The lodge presented him with a resolution of thanks and appreciation and, Armit-

age dying a few months later, Songhurst was elected Treasurer in his place. He had stated when he gave up the secretaryship that he felt that, freed from the cares of running the office, he might devote time to getting the publication side of the lodge into good order.

Publications

In 1927, led by E. H. Dring, there was a move to restart the sort of *QCA* publications which had had to be abandoned at the outbreak of war. This suggestion was received with enthusiasm but before any real progress could be made the realisation of the financial position of the lodge meant that no funds were available. However, later with the reasonable success of the Publications Fund it was decided to go ahead with the production of small pamphlets, such as a reprint of Speth's work on building rules and Poole's Prestonian Lecture on the Old Charges. These were produced in limited editions of five hundred and sold at 1s. 6d. (7½p).

Prestonian Lectures

When the Prestonian Lecture had been revived in 1924 with the accent not on Preston's lecture system as his Will had asked, but more in the field of papers of a general interest to the Craft, it was only natural that members of Quatuor Coronati should be very much among those suitable for appointment. All of those appointed from 1925 to 1929 were members of the lodge but the appointment for 1930 of Henry Cart de Lafontaine coincided with his 1929–30 Mastership of the lodge. Accordingly the lodge applied for an official delivery of the lecture to be given at the March meeting in 1930. A great occasion was made of this, the Pro Grand Master, Lord Amphyll, attending, a total of 305 being present. The March meeting in 1932 again hosted an official delivery of that year's lecture, by J. Heron Lepper, this time with 173 present. This lecture was unusual in that its nature, on the development of the ritual, made it impossible for it to be produced in pamphlet form.

More Membership Matters

Although the expense of the lodge itself was very small it was appreciated by 1930 that, with no change of full members' subscription for many years, the income was not meeting the ordinary lodge expenses. There was not the same feeling about increasing full members' subscriptions as there was about the Correspondence Circle and the new figure was two guineas (£2.10p) from 1930. On 2 October 1931 the lodge was able to hold its first meeting in the new Masonic Peace Memorial building and received a welcoming letter from the Grand Secretary to mark the occasion—which was also a letter of apology for the very unfinished state of the building. The effect of the economic depression was felt in the lodge by the early 1930s and the members were constantly concerned about the financial situation. A small investment in Consols had

been kept for some years, nominally as a fund to pay for the following year's *Transactions*, which in fact was financed out of normal cash flow as money became available. At the end of 1933 it was decided that some part of this investment must be realised to meet the 'deficiency in current liabilities'. Williams again raised his voice in protest at the lack of attention to our responsibilities and asked that it should be explained to the Correspondence Circle that:

. . . the income has for several years been seriously inadequate and that it would be necessary either to suffer the *Transactions* to get further and further in arrear or to publish only selections from the papers as read in the Lodge.

Such a course was unthinkable but a cautionary note was added to the annual report.

Jubilee

Among all these problems, the fact that the lodge was soon to become fifty years old was not lost sight of. It was, however, decided to regard the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the Warrant as the Jubilee date rather than that of the actual consecration, which had taken place over a year later. Accordingly, it was arranged to hold the celebration at the installation meeting on 8 November 1934. The members presented, in advance of this occasion, a formal Address to the Treasurer, William John Songhurst:

We, the members of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, filled with admiration and inspired by gratitude for the wonderful work you have done on behalf of the Lodge and in furthering its ideals, feel that it would be a most fitting means of celebrating the Lodge Jubilee if you would preside over the Lodge as its Master for the year, and in all brotherly affection we cordially and unanimously invite you to allow yourself to be elected to the Chair.

Songhurst was by now nearly seventy-five and the senior member of the lodge at the end of 1934. His long period as secretary had meant that he had never been placed in progression to the Mastership. The terms of the Address indicate the feelings of the members towards him as the genuine doyen of those engaged in masonic research and a true Father of the lodge. He had certainly been the sheet-anchor of the lodge through difficult times and for many years. Songhurst expressed some reluctance on account of age but did agree and was accordingly installed at the November meeting.

This Jubilee meeting was made a special occasion and there were 136 in attendance. There was no formal deputation from Grand Lodge but that made

little difference to the celebration. The members of the Correspondence Circle made a special presentation to Songhurst on that day of a silver cigarette case.

Papers and Articles

From 1916 the practice of a full inaugural address by the newly installed Master became the rule. There were exceptions, such as Bradley's operation which delayed the 1920 installation and the Silver Jubilee meeting when Songhurst went into the chair on a special occasion. Only two others are not recorded as having given such an address, Baxter and Williams, surprising in both cases as they were among the more regular contributors. Again, there is no dominant theme in the papers of this period, which is not surprising considering the difficulty often expressed by Songhurst in getting suitable papers at all. Tuckett, Hills, Wonnacott and Baxter were the mainstays of the times of the 1914–18 war and just after, with Williams, Telepneff and Vibart in the 1920s and 1930s.