

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



Colin Dyer

VI

There had been slow change in several directions through the 1960s and the pattern was to continue in the early 1970s. Along with continuing increase in Circle membership—over 12,500 in 1974—costs continued to mount and in 1971 and 1972 the lodge was barely paying its way. In addition to this, problems continually arose over the production of the *Transactions* and a change of printer was made, to Burgess and Son of Abingdon, for Volume 85 (for 1972) published in November 1973. A big increase in the cost of postage led to two meeting summonses being sent in the same envelope, and later, to only two despatches of summonses to cover the whole year. With the production of the Concise Index, space was saved in the *Transactions* by not publishing the whole list of earlier contents. Further alterations to the premises were made, partly giving more room to S.R.I.A. but also bringing more space into productive use. With the election of eight new members by early 1975, the full membership had been brought up to twenty-six and this level was maintained. In spite of warnings on the financial future, there was still a great reluctance to increase Circle subscriptions, even though the value of the £ had altered considerably since the level of £2 was fixed in 1960.

The year 1973 was a very testing time for the lodge and, although there was never any suggestion that it should be wound up as had happened in the 1952 crisis, in many respects the problems which arose were of a much more serious nature. Two matters started almost simultaneously. Harry Carr suggested that the lodge might publish, as a book edited by him, the Questions and Answers included in the lodge summonses over the last twelve years. This revived earlier comment that there might be different opinions on some and, in view of the status which Carr's position gave, several members registered the view, which was agreed by a majority, that without the inclusion of other comments or some serious editing, such a book (later issued as *The Freemason at Work*) could not be handled by the lodge. At the same time discussions had been originated by Eric Ward on the control of the business aspect of the lodge, particularly as Carr, who was the only permanent officer in control, was now over seventy. Ward wished to have a small sub-committee appointed so that some members of the lodge might, on a more permanent basis, deal with the formulation of publishing and financial policy with responsibility to the main committee,

which, in any case, consisted of all the full members. This main committee was at present presided over by the Master, who changed yearly, and policy decisions were taken by a majority of those, normally about ten, who were able to attend a particular meeting. Ward's proposals went so far as to suggest that the post of lodge secretary/editor was too onerous for one person and consideration should be given to dividing the duties. Such proposals were welcomed by some but strongly opposed by others, so that on two features at the same time there was division among the full members of the lodge. However, it was agreed to form a small working party to examine the lodge business situation. These two events occurred at the January and March meetings and at the June meeting it was reported that Grand Lodge would seek a new lease arrangement to take the place of the lodge's current yearly tenancy and that there would be a substantial rent increase (£7,500 a year was ultimately asked for, against the £1,200 being paid at the time). The year 1973 was momentous.

The first of the problems to require solution was that of the commercial activities of the lodge, for the working party reported in June that it required confirmation of the masonic legality of the present position of the lodge before proceeding further. Since 1952 the secretary had been in receipt of an 'honorarium' which over the years of increasing responsibility had tended to become a salary, although, as it might be shown to be much less than such a manager might command in the open market, the situation had been accepted. However, the secretary now had a personal assistant in the direct employ of the lodge who was likely to be elected Master of the lodge for the coming year. The Grand Secretary's advice was that this might be acceptable if the accounts of the Correspondence Circle were separate from those of the lodge. This was not so as the Circle was treated as an integral part of the lodge organisation. As a result it was decided immediately to set up as soon as possible a separate organisation, probably a company limited by guarantee, to take over the business and commercial interests of the lodge and of which all members of the Correspondence Circle would be (non voting) members and which would employ all staff.

The second problem reached a climax at the very next meeting, in September 1973, when the members meeting in committee were faced with Harry Carr's resignation as secretary. He had indicated that if the committee would modify its attitude to his proposed book, he would be prepared to continue as secretary until November 1974, when it had been his intention to retire, at the end of Roy Wells's term as Master. The committee decided to accept Carr's resignation and that Wells should act as editor for the next *Transactions* and Cyril Batham should be secretary for one year until Wells was through the chair.

As if sufficient had not already plagued this unhappy year, the lodge was approached by the Customs and Excise with a request that VAT should be paid on the subscriptions to the lodge—backdated to the beginning of VAT. John Lindsay handled a long enquiry from Customs and Excise and finally succeeded

in convincing them that the subscription, so called, was in fact an advance payment for a copy of the *Transactions* (books being exempt from VAT) and that the entry fee entitled the new member to an immediate copy and so was a book purchase also. The scare passed. The lodge was also warned of a substantial increase in paper and labour costs in the printing industry which would affect the cost of future Volumes.

By May 1974 the new company, Q.C. Correspondence Circle Limited, had been formed with all the full members of the lodge as full voting members of the company, and with Eric Ward, Harry Carr, Cyril Batham, Roy Wells, Terence Haunch and Colin Dyer as the equivalent of directors but called a Council. It was arranged that the company should take over responsibility for the business aspects, including the production of *Transactions*, from 1 November 1974. The terms of a new lease were also agreed, for seven years at £6,500 a year and responsibility for inside repairs, the lease to be in the name of the new company. This still left some grey areas to be cleared in relation to the division of responsibility and assets between the lodge and the company and there was much more difference of opinion on this score than on the original obvious need to form the company. There was, however, at this stage, no alternative to raising the subscription for members of the Correspondence Circle and the nettle was well and truly grasped by doubling it to £4. There was some foreboding as to resignations and the change did have a marked effect, but numbers held up at over 11,500, although there was a lot of trouble with changes of bankers' orders.

The winter of 1974-75 was a clearing up period, a process which was sharpened by finding that the last year of trading in the lodge name had produced a loss of over £11,000. This involved making a number of small changes for saving and to competitive estimates for printing the *Transactions*. When Jackson was installed as Master in November 1974, Wells became secretary, and Hewitt seeking to give up as Treasurer, Batham was elected in his place. It was further agreed that the lodge meet five times a year instead of six, the January and March meetings being combined into one in February, while the June and November meetings were to be held on the fourth and second Thursdays in those months, respectively. There was some feeling about moving from the precise saints' days, but some pressure from the Grand Tyler because of difficulty in fitting in floating meetings contributed to the decision.

Although the separation of the lodge and the business side had been regarded as inevitable, there was some real feeling that those actually in charge of the new company might seek to exclude some members of the lodge, now and in the future, from any say in the control and consequently, although the company needed working capital and the accumulation of funds in the lodge had come mainly from the Correspondence Circle, there was reluctance to agree to any final placing of lodge assets in the control of the company. It was only after considerable discussion that agreement was reached to transfer to

the company all the assets of the lodge, except for £1,000, the lodge library and the Norman B. Spencer prize fund investment. A formal agreement to this effect, permitting the transfer to be done in stages, was signed on 17 October 1975. The round of change was not yet complete for, following illness in the middle of 1975, Roy Wells felt he must give up as secretary and as editor and he retired from those duties in November 1975, having edited two Volumes of the *Transactions*. When Harry Carr had retired and Wells took over, Cyril Batham had rearranged his commitments to permit him to be employed as personal assistant to Wells and he was now appointed as secretary of the lodge, and by the company as editor of the *Transactions* and in full charge of the office. At this time there was again pressure to contain expenses and Batham agreed to undertake the duties without a full time employed personal assistant. In the middle of 1976, John Lindsay, who had been office manager for eleven years (and assistant for four years before that) retired.

Membership and Meetings

The Correspondence Circle subscription was held at the new figure for five years although the last few years of the 1970s witnessed some of the worst inflation of the century, with three consecutive years of prices rising by over 20 per cent. The small losses in membership occasioned by the increase were soon regained and within a few years the numbers again exceeded the 12,500 mark. However the numbers attending meetings tended to decrease slightly and were on average about eighty to ninety. The question was again raised in 1976 of holding occasional meetings at Provincial centres, and mainly through the enthusiasm for such a project of Will Read, it was arranged that the June meeting in 1977 should be at York. This was held at York Racecourse, in the Gimcrack and Tattersall Rooms, with willing and essential assistance from local members of the Correspondence Circle and especially from York Lodge, No. 236. It was very successful and filled to the capacity planned, 408 attending the meeting, while nearly 300 dined together afterwards. This successful effort prompted Will Read to attempt to organise others and equally successful meetings were held in Exeter in 1980, Manchester in 1982 and in Birmingham in 1985. Local co-operation in all cases was essential and was freely given, while the 1980 Exeter meeting owed much to Frederick Smyth, the Master at the time.

The Full Membership

The full members were at pains to ensure that their numbers were kept up and, particularly in the later part of the period, a number of 'distant' members were elected, thus giving much wider scope for information and comment in the research carried out in the lodge. There were two main themes which emerged in the last twenty years before the centenary, the earlier being an increased

study of William Preston's lectures, started by Alex Horne and Percy James, the other being further resistance to the tacitly accepted theory of a hundred years earlier that we are all descended in some curious way from the builders in stone of the middle ages. Knoop and Poole had disagreed earlier, not on whether this was so, but how, but several alternative theories were now put forward—and as vigorously combated. When Batham became secretary, Wells succeeded him as Treasurer for a few years, after which Read was elected to that office. In 1982 it was realised that the continued auditing of the lodge accounts by professional auditors was contrary to the *Book of Constitutions*, and standard practice was reverted to. Dyer became Treasurer in 1983.

The Office and the Company

The increased rent payable from 1973 and the high rate of inflation shortly after caused difficulties in many ways. S.R.I.A. because of increased costs decided to move out of their accommodation; it was resolved, therefore, to try to sublet the whole of the second floor, which would mean making some arrangement about the considerable proportion of the lodge library which was housed there. A critical survey of the whole library was carried out by Terence Haunch and John Hamill, and as a result a number of books of little interest masonically were disposed of. This enabled the remainder to be retained in the balance of the accommodation, while the sale provided a small income to the lodge. The second floor was let in 1978. Following the retirement of John Lindsay, attempts had been made, in the interests of controlling costs, to economise on staff. It proved, however, very difficult indeed to find suitable people to work for the company and the office was often inadequately staffed. Combined with the sharp fall in the standard of those employed, there was also a good deal of sickness affecting keeping up to date, a continuing increase in Correspondence Circle numbers, which went over 14,000 in 1981, and then, the ultimate death, following two heart attacks, of the office manager. There was, in the end, an almost complete breakdown of the lodge and company financial services.

This situation was not helped in any way when, at the expiry of the lease of 27, Great Queen Street in 1980 the asking rent for a renewal was over £18,000 a year. Ten years earlier, the lodge was paying £1,200. There had, necessarily, to be another major upheaval. There was a good deal of negotiation over rent and premises and, as an alternative, Grand Lodge offered accommodation in the lower ground floor of Freemasons' Hall. This scarcely provided space for the office personnel and equipment and, again, there was a good deal of hard bargaining over the rent for these premises. Agreement was ultimately reached and in March 1982 the company and the lodge moved, lock, stock and barrel, into 60, Great Queen Street. It was not ideal but it was workable and after a settling down period the company was able to consider a more permanent solution to the serious staff and administrative problems that faced it. There

were also major difficulties arising from this sudden contraction of available space, both in the area of the considerable stock of books and in the housing of the library, which was still of reasonable size. The library position was first dealt with by another drastic revision, leaving the office with only such books as might often be required for reference, placing the remainder either on permanent loan with the Library of Grand Lodge or, mainly in the case of duplicates, aside for ultimate sale. The move from number 27 had been quite costly but these sales, with the proceeds of those made at the earlier sorting, enabled the lodge to make a contribution to dilapidations and the moving costs. Later disposals of clearly unsaleable books from the stock held (mainly Volumes of *Transactions*) and some small structural alterations and changes of equipment, enabled the space available to be very reasonably used.

Grand Lodge had ordered a main frame computer for installation in 1983 with a view to placing all its records on it. In 1982, after the move, the company also began to consider computerising its membership records and, having found that a section of the Grand Lodge computer could be rented, proceeded on that basis. At the same time the company decided to look for an office manager of much higher status than had been the case for the last few years. After a false start, the Council engaged Charles Carter, who had been advising on the computerisation of the Correspondence Circle records, as manager of the company. With the appointment of a full time manager of the company, Cyril Batham was able to retire from executive responsibility for the running of the office. Computerisation and change of management, along with the other internal changes referred to, has enabled a new style of administration with a minimum of staff (now five, compared with nine in 1983), and a better service to local secretaries on whom so much depends.

Eric Ward had been chairman of the company from its inception but he gave up in 1980 and Colin Dyer took over for five years. With the virtual completion of the computer transfer, Neville Cryer became chairman. The question of the post of editor was also raised in view of the fact the Cyril Batham was now over seventy-five. It was arranged that Cryer and Batham would be joint editors for a year from November 1985 and that Cryer should take over after that. In view of this, Cryer ceased to be chairman and Harry Mendoza took on that post. From the middle of the 1970s there had been continual difficulty over getting the annual Volume out on time and often this had been several months late. Printing difficulties contributed largely to this and, with costs also in mind, the Council were continually looking at the problem and considering alternatives. Volumes 88 and 89 were printed by Alden Press, the next four again by Burgess's and, since Volume 94 (for 1981) by The Garden City Press of Letchworth. Subscriptions have had to keep pace with increased costs and the Correspondence Circle members were faced with increases in both 1981 and 1983. With the more readily accessible and up to date information available from the records following computerisation, a critical examination of the

membership has been possible with some pruning to ensure that all entries are truly 'live'. At the end of the one hundred years there were some 13,150 names listed in that most important aspect of the lodge, the Correspondence Circle.

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