

The Inaugural RW Bro Ken Wells Commemorative Address

In my address this evening I will attempt to give a brief overview of the history of Freemasonry in Queensland up to the formation of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland in 1921 and some thoughts on what the future may hold for our wonderful Institution.

However, before delivering my address this evening I would like express my gratitude to Baron Barnett Lodge for great honour they have bestowed upon me by inviting me to present this the Inaugural RW Bro Ken Wells Commemorative Address.

I wish to acknowledge the presence this evening of RW Bro Wells.

Unfortunately RW Bro Wells could not be with us this evening.

RW Bro Kenneth George William Wells PDGM was born on 16/11/1924. He was initiated into Remembrance Lodge No.362 on 13/02/53 and passed and raised during that year. He was a Foundation member of Zillmere Lodge No.468 which was consecrated on 20/2/58 and was installed as Worshipful Master of that Lodge on the 2/9/1961. RW Bro Wells was installed a Master of his Mother Lodge on 19/5/79.

He had a distinguished career as a Grand Officer; serving as a Grand Steward in 1968 and then as Senior Grand Deacon, Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies, Assistant Grand Superintendent of Workings and finally was invested as Junior Grand Warden in 1977. Ken was conferred the rank of Past Assistant Grand Master by MW Bro "Bill" Morgan in 1982 and this was elevated to Past Deputy Grand Master by MW Bro "Bill" Roache in 1994.

RW Bro Wells affiliated with Baron Barnett Lodge on 3/4/74 and has served as Secretary for thirty-four years. While he was a good ritualist, it is obvious to all that his true passion for Freemasonry laid in Masonic Research and Education. He was a Member of the Board of General Purposes for 1978 to 1984 and Chair of the Education Committee from 1977 to 1979. He has twice been asked to deliver the Kellerman Lecture by the Australian and New Zealand Masonic Research Council. RW Bro Wells was presented with his Fifty Year Jewel on 13/6/2003.

From this brief overview of RW Bro Wells' contribution to Freemasonry in general and to Masonic Research and Education in particular it is easy to understand why Baron Barnett Lodge has initiated this Commemorative Address and why I am so honoured to deliver the Inaugural Address. By its' actions the Lodge has bestowed a richly deserved honour on this highly respected and distinguished Freemason.

While the following overview will not do justice to the subject I trust that it will whet your appetite to read the 150 year history being prepared to be printed in conjunction with the 150 year anniversary of the foundation of North Australian Lodge No. 1.

As early as 1802 it is recorded that Masonic meetings were held on HM Ships Buffalo and Glutton in Port Jackson. The early meetings which were held on both land and sea were conducted under travelling warrants held by Ships and Military regiments. However, it is generally accepted that the birth of Australian Freemasonry was in 1820 when the Australian Social Lodge No.260(IC) was founded. It is now known as lodge Antiquity No.1 on the Register of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the ACT.

Lodges holding warrants from all three of the Homeland Grand Lodges (Irish, Scottish and English) were founded over the next 68 years. It was during this period; on 23rd February 1855 at the first meeting of Cambrian Lodge of Australia No 656(EC) that Mr. James Watkin Jackson was proposed for initiation into Freemasonry. Four years later Bro Jackson was to become the Foundation Worshipful Master of North Australian Lodge. The United Grand Lodge of New South Wales was founded in 1888.

Thus it was on 13th July 1859 that North Australian Lodge No 1089EC was founded under a Dispensation granted by the Provincial Grand Lodge of New South Wales (EC). Under the dispensation the Lodge Bro

Jackson became Worshipful Master and invested the Officers. It was not until 26th October 1959 that, at an Emergent Meeting of the Lodge, Bro. James Watkin Jackson was installed as Foundation Worshipful Master of the Lodge. At this Meeting a Bible, bearing an inscribed gold plate, was presented to the Lodge by Bro Ratcliffe Pring. This Bible is still used today by the Lodge at Installations and Initiations.

Thus Freemasonry in Queensland was born.

In its first year of existence North Australian Lodge met thirty times and initiated thirty two candidates. Wor Bro Jackson moved to Warwick and passed to the Grand Lodge Above at a very early age. North Australian Lodge, assisted by the Brethren of Warwick, still tend to his final resting place. At the meeting in February 1861 Bro Augustus Charles Gregory was proposed as a joining member. A little over a year later on 28th December 1862 W Bro Gregory was appointed Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Queensland (EC). This title was changed to District Grand Master in 1867. Sir Augustus Charles Gregory was to remain at helm of Queensland Freemasonry until 1905; a period of forty three years.

In 1865 the Honorable Bro Maurice Charles O'Connell was elected Provincial Grand Master (IC) of the Provincial Grand Lodge in the colony of Queensland.

The Minutes of Lodge St. Andrews (SC) of 8th March 1865 record the intention to form a Masonic Province in Queensland. The exact date of the establishment of the Provincial Grand Lodge cannot be confirmed but is believed to be 17th April 1866. Bro. W M Boyce was duly and regularly constituted RW Provincial Grand Master of the Province of Queensland under the Scottish Constitution.

Thus Queensland had Provincial Grand Lodges under all three Homeland Grand Lodges.

Land in Albert Street was granted by the Queensland government for the purpose of building of a Masonic Hall in March 1865. By 1885 Freemasonry had outgrown the Albert Street premises and land was purchased in Alice Street and the Foundation Stone of a new Masonic Hall was laid in due form by the District Grand Master (EC), RW Bro the Hon A C Gregory CMG MLC, in conjunction with RW Bro Mylne, Deputy District Grand Master (SC) and RW Bro Theodore O Unmack, Provincial Grand Master (IC).

The first meeting in the new building was held on 1st. December 1886 and was dedicated at a later date. The principal address at the dedication was delivered by W Bro Barron L Barnett, Deputy District Grand Master.

W Bro Barnett presented the State Sword which he had bought from England to District Grand Lodge. This sheathed sword is still carried today by the Grand Sword Bearer at the Communications of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland.

Very interesting reading is contained in the book to be released in conjunction with the 150 Year Celebrations with respect to the events leading up to the formation of the Grand Lodge of Antient Free and Accepted Masons of Queensland on 25th April 1904, the Queensland Grand Lodge on 30th April, 1920 and ultimately the United Grand Lodge of Queensland on 21st April, 1921. What a coincident that the Grand Lodge of Queensland was founded on 25th April; the date on which we now remember the fallen at Anzac Cove and indeed of all the wars in which Australia has been involved. It is also the date on which MW Bro Justice Charles Stumm GM laid the Foundation Stone of this Ann Street Memorial Masonic Centre in 1928.

This Grand Lodge of Queensland was formed by all but one of the Lodges under the Irish Constitution and to quote "a substantial portion of Scottish Lodges of Queensland". The Queensland Grand Lodge was formed as a "stepping stone" to the formation of this United Grand Lodge of Queensland.

The United Grand Lodge of Queensland was formed by the unity of the Grand Lodge of Queensland and the Queensland Grand Lodge. MW Bro Alexander Corrie was installed as the first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland. His photograph hangs next to the current Grand Master to the right

of the door to the Grand Master's Office. MW Bro David Benjamin was appointed Deputy Grand Master and MW Bro R N F Quinn was appointed Assistant Grand Master. MW Bro Quinn was later to serve this Grand Lodge as Grand Master or Pro Grand Master for a term of seventeen years.

I will leave the history of Queensland Freemasonry at this point in time. The fragmentation that had preceded 1921 had been finally been put to rest and the Craft continued to prosper in Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

I wish to now address the present, the future and expound some thoughts for the way ahead.

The strong comradeship developed while enduring the horrors of conflict during the Second World War resulted in an unprecedented number of men joining our Fraternity. This could be called the "golden age of Freemasonry". Lodges were almost overrun by candidates. Many Lodges worked double degrees. As our numbers increased so did the number of Lodges.

It has been my long held contention that many of these Lodges were formed by Brethren for the wrong reasons. Because of the large membership of lodges it naturally took many years to progress through the Offices of the Lodge. Many large lodges decided to sponsor new Lodges in an attempt to assist more Brethren attain the Chair of King Solomon.

Since 1960 of all the new Lodges consecrated in this jurisdiction almost 30% have been Daylight Lodges; this is to allow many of our more elderly Brethren to continue to enjoy their Love of Freemasonry. Over 50% of the remainder have surrendered their warrants.

Total membership in Queensland stands at only 25% of our peak numbers. While in NSW & ACT the loss is even greater; their membership is now only 12% of their high. However, the most alarming statistic is the average age of our membership. Brethren, I am still one of the younger members of our Fraternity. I hold hope that with the assistance of the G.A.O.T.U. and the increasing number of young men offering themselves as candidates for Freemasonry this is one stat that I will be able to correct.

So, Brethren, were did we go wrong?

Our forefathers were so secretive about the Craft, so busy doing degree workings in their Lodges and in general just being good Freemasons and being Happy and Communicating Happiness that they forgot to look to the future. I am not being critical of them. They were "good blokes". However, all was going so well that it was felt that there was no need to promote the Craft or for it to become more transparent. There was a commonly held idea that we could not speak about Freemasonry. To our detriment this belief is still held by some of our elderly Brethren.

We lost a generation of Freemasons. How many men have you spoken with to be greeted with "my father was a Freemason"? The conversation usually continues along the line of "why have you never joined", "I was never asked".

If the implications to be drawn from this conversation were not so serious then it could almost be considered laughable. We are finding that some of our new members are grandsons of members. Since my Installation as Grand Master I have attended the Initiation of a father and son and also an occasion where the son conducted his father through the Ceremony of Initiation. This only enforces the contention of a lost generation of potential Freemasons.

So, Brethren, whither directing our course.

We must first address the principle of the chicken and the egg and which comes first. Today it appears that many are prepared to back the chicken and continually attempt to correct the errors of Grand Lodge. Brethren, we understand that Freemasonry commences at a Lodge level and it is on this foundation that we must begin to build a superstructure perfect in all its parts and honourable to the builder.

Many of you would have heard the address of the Assistant Grand Master Designate, RW Bro Greg Goding. Those of you who have not should do so.

I quote my Special envoy, "as a gardener would you plant your seedlings in a hard dry patch or would you firstly prepare the soil. Of course you would first prepare your garden".

So, let it be with Freemasonry. Let us prepare our Lodges for the reception of our seedlings, our candidates. We need to put our Lodges on Order.

I am sure you do not me to here go into detail on those points which are so strongly brought to our attention by RW Bro Goding. I am very happy to go into detail if anyone should wish.

We should be ready to explain Freemasonry to the members of the general community. Many of our detractors are ignorant of what Freemasonry stands for, the work it does in the general community and the principles on which it is founded. Because they do not the facts of our Institution they conclude it cannot be good.

The wearing of the S&C pin in our everyday life will often draw comment and thereby open the door for further discussion about Freemasonry. It is the most recognisable symbol of Freemasonry and we should use it to promote our Order. There are more Freemasons that members of Rotary and Loins combined. So why is it that I see more Rotary wheels than I do S&C. Are our members not proud enough to wear it or are we trying to perpetuate the mystic attached to Freemasonry. Whichever it is we are doing ourselves and our wonderful Institution a disservice.

Our overall numbers will continue to fall in the near future as many of our elderly Brethren who joined the Craft in such large numbers fifty and more years ago are called to the Grand Lodge Above. It is my opinion that our numbers will continue to fall for another ten years albeit at a much slower rate.

One pleasing statistic that can be found in Ann Street is that the number of Initiates in this Jurisdiction is on the rise

If I may be allowed to quote a past Treasurer and Prime Minister of Australia, "we are in a J curve".

One of the biggest problems facing our membership is the vastness of our State and as a consequence the long distances between many of our country towns. The population in many country towns is falling and as a consequence so is the membership of our Lodges. At the same time the membership is ageing. If a country Lodge surrenders its warrant there is a high probability that many members who would love to continue their membership will be unable to do so due to their age and the long distance of travel to the nearest Lodge. In the future this may prove to be the main cause of loss of membership.

We must recognise that all that join our Fraternity have different reasons for doing so. There are many who join for the companionship which our Fraternity offers and the social and charitable activities of the Institution. Not all Freemasons want to be rushed into office or be forced to deliver ritual. Not all Freemasons want more Masonic education than the Ritual provides them. Not all Freemasons want to feel pressured to visit. There are those who just want to go to Lodge once a month, to the Lodge practice meeting and join in the social program of the Lodge.

New members can be lost if they feel forced into office, visiting or be bombarded with Masonic educational material. Freemasonry is not and cannot be a "one size fits all" Fraternity. We must attempt to cater for the individual needs of our Membership. Every member must feel a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment after attending a Lodge meeting.

If we can provide each of our members what they are seeking from Freemasonry it is then, and only then, that he will be prepared to invite his friends to join Freemasonry and thus, by this action, assure the future our Institution. We must be prepared to allow our new members to draw on what they want from Freemasonry and not force on them what we believe is good for them.

I do not intend to list a page full of quotes of the beautiful words contained in our ritual which we should be ever mindful of and which we should try to include in our everyday life. However, I would urge you to "prove to the world the happy and beneficent influence of our ancient and Honourable Institution".

The challenge that has been delivered to us is; where will you plant your seedlings? Have you prepared your garden? Be sure to prepare well so that your garden will produce a prolific crop for the good of Freemasonry in particular and for the service of our Communities in general.

For weal or woe the future of this Institution has been placed firmly in our hands. We must not fail. Handled with love and care, I am confident that we can successfully deliver it to future generations.

Brethren, I trust that you will continue to enjoy your Freemasonry.

Be Happy and Communicate Happiness.

Graeme Ewin
Grand Master.