

Centenary History Speech

Paddock Wood Lodge No 4291 was consecrated at 4 pm on Saturday, 5th November 1921, at the Paddock Wood Parochial Church Hall by the Rt W. Prov. Grand Master, Colonel Fiennes Cornwallis.

Officers of the new Lodge purchased their own collars of office and presented them to the Lodge and the necessary furniture was purchased on behalf of the brethren by Bro. Breeze.

Paddock Wood being at the centre of the hop growing district of Mid Kent, it was agreed that the Lodge Crest should be the square and compasses supporting the white Rampant Horse of Kent with the Invicta and surrounded by a bunch of hops.

The first regular meeting took place on 14th December 1921, when the enthusiasm of the founders and first joining members was evidenced by the furniture and ornaments they presented to the new Lodge, most of which are still in use today.

The Lodge Banner in use until today was presented to the Lodge at the Installation meeting in June 1923, by Bro John Hunt on behalf of his wife, in grateful thanks that their only son, Bro John Leslie Percival Hunt, the first initiate, had returned safely having served throughout the First World War.

The Paddock Wood Masonic Hall foundation stone was laid by the P.G. M. on 9th February 1925. The Hall was funded by the purchase of shares and debentures by the Lodge members and W. Bro. Podmore agreed to make up any shortfall in the funding required.

**The Hall was intended to serve three purposes,
A home for Masonic activities in Paddock Wood.
A village Hall for dances, concerts, meetings etc. and
Accommodation for a licensed Men's Club, which they still occupy to this day.**

Bro. Alfred Harland was the 4th Master of the Lodge and set a record in his year. He initiated 18 candidates in 9 pairs, performed 4 ceremonies of Raising and 3 of Passing and required 4 Emergency Meetings to do so. He was proud that at one regular meeting he performed the complete ceremonies of the three degrees!

During the war the Queen Victoria Rifles were stationed in Paddock Wood. On arrival they went to see the Chief Air Raid Warden, Bro Harland, to commandeer the Masonic Hall. Bro Harland objected and the same day was visited by their commanding officer. When Bro Harland explained why the C.O. replied, "I quite understand, I'm a Mason myself". An invitation was extended to him and any other Masons in the QVR to attend the Lodge and use the club, which was accepted. The Q.V. R. were drafted to France a short time later and put up a heroic defence of Calais and resistance to the Germans' advance along the coast road, which enabled the evacuation of Dunkirk to be completed. Practically all of the Q.V.R. were killed or taken prisoner. In October 1977, members of the Q.V.R. Lodge visited Paddock Wood Lodge to commemorate their war years and were very warmly welcomed.

In April 1977 the Deputy Grand Master the Rt Worshipful Fiennes Cornwallis O.B.E., D.L. (a member of our Lodge and eventually Pro Grand Master), visited the Lodge with the Dep Grand D.C. W. Bro J.G. Ross Guy.

On 14th March 1979, the Provincial Grand Master, Lord Stanley Cornwallis attended the Lodge with his D.C., unannounced and gave the reason for his attendance that he wanted to celebrate his birthday and we were the nearest Lodge meeting that night.

For many years the Lodge was known as the Walkers' Lodge as there were 4 brothers who followed their father into the Lodge. All four served as Master and gained Provincial Honours, and one was awarded Grand Lodge Honours. Every one of the brothers was a Lodge member for at least 60 years and there were Walkers in the Lodge from 1922 until 1989.

In 2017 a Masonic demonstration team from Virginia, U.S.A. gave a demonstration of their workings and in 2019 brethren from our Lodge, Stanley Wykeham and Lodges in West Kent returned the visit, performing demonstrations of English workings in Lodges around Virginia. They were privileged to be shown various historical objects while visiting George Washington's mother lodge, including his masonic apron and bible.

At its peak Paddock Wood Lodge had over 100 members and on occasions attendance reached over 140, however over the last 20 plus years numbers steadily waned.

Many of us were guilty of complacency. A few members took positive action to turn the tide. Key among those were W. Brothers Mark Flisher of Paddock Wood and Peter Hayler of Stanley Wykeham. Between them they arranged Hall and Lodge open days and went to local functions in Paddock Wood and the surrounding villages distributing leaflets and proclaiming the benefits of Freemasonry. Simultaneously, Mark was looking at Hall improvements to make it a better hiring prospect. It is largely due to him that the Hall and bar area improvements you see today were instigated, financed by loans from Province but repaid by the hard work of Mark and Peter in their fundraising activities.

White table evenings were arranged by our Lodge, with speakers talking on Non Masonic subjects, in an attempt to attract prospective new members. This and other means attracted a number of joining members but few Initiates.

Bro. Guy Coggles arrival in the Lodge brought a fresh approach and he and W. Bro Flisher utilised social media in their efforts to attract new candidates. We have had some success and we have potential candidates yet to be interviewed.

We have joined with Stanley Wykeham and Bradley Lodges, combining our efforts to recruit new members. We are actively consulting younger members to gain fresh viewpoints and ideas. We are in discussions with Province and the Hall committee on ways to improve our Hall web site and refine our recruiting plans. The whole Lodge, indeed, the whole Masonic Centre, is behind this initiative

and are determined to make it work for the benefit of all our Masonic brethren meeting at this Centre.

Our Centenary was 5th November 2021, and we intend to be here for many years to come.