

BRO. FREDERICK RAWLINGS AND HIS BROTHERLY PAST

The Minutes of interest this year were taken at a Meeting at the Old Ship Hotel in Rochford on 9th April 1918 but, before I read those Minutes, I felt I should explain why they caught my attention.

A good number of the local Luncheon Club are members of Lodges meeting in Rochford – in fact, most of them are members of this Lodge.

And on 21st June, the Rochford Luncheon Club visited Canterbury as arranged by W.Bro. Dad.

Thanks to the assistance of W.Bro. Derek Childs, Secretary of this Hall, the Masonic element of the Club were invited to the Canterbury Masonic Museum.

When our coach dropped us near the end of the High Street, W.Bros. Robert Whittingham and Chris Clark led the way down the High Street – as Grand Officers are apt to do – towards the Masonic Centre. Eventually we arrived at a blue door with a Square and Compass device mounted on it. W.Bro. Robert leant against the door – and disappeared from view – to an enormous clamour of alarm bells. Unfortunately, he had chosen the wrong door – and, as it transpired, a door which should have been locked shut. The amazingly loud burglar alarm caused a large space to form around us as the good people of Canterbury gave us a very wide berth.

After we had secured the door – and found the right door – we were shown around an impressive display of banners, jewels, regalia and artefacts collected from Lodges from the whole of the South of England. It was quite an amazing collection and the main display included a number of realistic mannequin models set out in an eighteenth century setting of a Masonic Meeting in a pub, including one character with a thin wig playing a piano forte for the assembled Brethren.

One of the jewels on display was a Centenary Jewel from the Lodge of True Friendship No.160 alongside a Centenary Jewel from the Lodge of True Friendship No.218 of Calcutta which was formed in 1797 (now known to have existed from 1773 to 1793 and lain dormant from 1794 to 1797), and exchanged its warrant from the Grand Lodge of Bengal for a warrant from the United Grand Lodge of England when the British Army returned from India.

W.Bro. Chris Clark was the first to notice a First World War document issued in the name of the Lodge of True Friendship No.160 (of which we do not have a copy) to Bro. Frederick C. Rawlings.

It was signed by the WM at the time W.Bro. A.J. Green and, therefore, must have been issued in 1916. The Pass was counter-signed by W.Bro. Peyton, the Secretary of the day.

Bro. Rawlings did not become WM of the Lodge and I cannot tell when he was initiated as the Minute Book from 1893 to 1916 is missing from our collection. However, I read through the first dozen or so pages of the 1917 Minute Book looking for Bro. Rawlings' name – keeping in mind that this was the time when the Lodge had a Grand Lodge Officer by the name of Rolling, a Bro. Golding and three Bro's Powling and the Minutes were written in copper plate handwriting.

It was interesting to note that, at this time, we Initiated Brethren from Prittlewell, Kent and Bedford as well as a number of serving officers from Rochford Aerodrome including:

1. Sgt. Major Snook of the Royal Flying Corps based at Rochford who was to become a famous name in the Lodge;
2. Sgt. Major Weston of the Royal Flying Corps at Rochford Aerodrome;
3. A Corporal from the Cyclists Battalion of the Essex Regiment;
4. A Lieutenant from the Royal Engineers;
5. An air mechanic from the RAF;
6. The Tramways Superintendent from Westcliff Tram Shed.

And we were regularly visited by Brethren from:

Priory, Nore, Canute, Trinity, St. Clements, St. Andrews, Albert Lucking and GoodFellowship of Chelmsford – much the same as today.

I felt that there was a good chance of finding Bro. Rawlings name as he is not listed at St. Andrew's Church on their First World War Memorial Roll.

And I am glad to say that in November 1917 his name appears in the list of Officers of the Lodge as a Steward and he was able to attend on two further occasions before the end of the War.

The Pass is printed in French, Italian, Arabic and German as well as English and reads as follows:

The True Friendship Lodge No.160, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of England and with the approval of the Most Worshipful Grand Master, has issued this card to Bro. Rawlings, a member thereof whose signature is appended.

The above named Lodge presents and vouches for the Brother to whom this card is issued as a worthy Master Mason – and – so commends him for brotherly care and lawful aid – to any Mason who may find him in distress or need – incidental to his service as a British Soldier – with the assurance that any courtesies so extended will be deeply appreciated and reciprocated should the occasion arise.

And

This card is to be returned to the Secretary as soon as peace has been declared – which it apparently was not!

At the Meeting of the Lodge held in January 1918 – which Brother Rawlings was able to attend – it was announced by the Secretary that a request had been made by the King via the Grand Secretary For the abandonment of the Fourth Degree in the interests of the Economy of Food

The Fourth Degree, of course, refers to the Festive Board.

And it is interesting to note

That our Minutes record that the message was received in absolute silence.

So.....The Minutes of 9th April 1918.....

The Meeting of the Lodge of True Friendship No.160 of ancient, free and accepted Masons held at the Old Ship Hotel in Rochford on April 9th 1918.

Officers Present.

Twelve Officers are listed, amongst them Bro. Lewis Utton who was the Senior Warden at the time and, when he became Master in 1918, Initiated seventeen candidates who clubbed together to buy him his silver collar jewel – the silver collar jewel presented to us last year by the visiting Brother from Leicester, Derek Swinfield.

This list also includes W.Bro. Tommy Histed – the ADC – who was Headmaster at the Rochford School.

The only Steward that evening was Bro. Frederick Rawlings.

Past Masters in attendance included W.Bro. Iles of Brandreth and Iles, the Solicitors in Southend. He went on to assist in the founding of a Lodge at Southend.

Amongst the Brethren present was Bro. Graham Wiseman, the son of the famous Oyster man (or smuggler) of Rochford.

There was only one visitor that day, Bro. Grimwade of St. Andrews Lodge No.1817.

The Lodge was opened in due form and the dispensation concerning the Master's son was read.

(This dispensation indicates that Lewis Dobson, the son of Jonas Dobson, a driver in the Royal Free Artillery and motor engineer by trade, was about to be sent to France and wished to join the Lodge before his posting but was a minor, being only twenty years old.)

I will read the written proposal at the end of the Minutes as it will be of interest to those Brethren from StrongMan Lodge No.45 who are attending the Honorary Artillery Company next month.

The Minutes of the last Lodge held on 12th March were read, confirmed and signed and apologies were received from Bro. Emery.

The ballot was taken for John Thomas Fayle age 39, Tramway Superintendent of Westcliff of Sea.

Proposed by the WM and seconded by Bro. Perry. This proved unanimous (presumably in his favour).

A special dispensation was then read authorising the acceptance into Free Masonry – subject to Ballot - of Mr Lewis Dobson age twenty years, he being a minor.

The Ballot was then taken for Mr Dobson who was proposed by letter. This proved unanimous.

A Ballot proved unanimous in favour of Mr John Steward age 64, Oyster Merchant of Southend – proposed by the Master and seconded by the Secretary.

Mr John Thomas Fayle was then duly initiated into the secrets and mysteries of the First Degree.

The WM then read a letter of resignation (there are no clues as to who this may have been).

The Secretary read a letter from the Grand Secretary regarding the Letchworth Memorial and it was agreed to take the voice of the Lodge upon this matter at some future date.

Bro. Wiseman proposed and W.Bro. Golding seconded as a candidate for Free Masonry, Mr William Cottage, age 60, a licensed Victualler of Paglesham.

Bro. Davey proposed and Bro. Page seconded as a candidate for Free Masonry Mr Henry John Phillips age 24 of Prittlewell, an Aviation Mechanic with the (newly formed) RAF.

Bro. Wiseman proposed and W.Bro. Golding seconded, as a candidate for Free Masonry, Mr Arthur Eric Wiseman, a Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, age 25 residing in Paglesham.

The Broken Column realised the sum of 11s 6d.

The Lodge was then closed with solemn prayer and adjourned.

Signed Jonas Dobson, Worshipful Master

The written proposal for Free Masonry in those days, Brethren, was usually made on a pre-printed form but Rule 185 of the Book of Constitutions allowed for a proposal by letter in view of the pressures caused by the war. (THIS IS NOW COVERED BY RULE 160.)

And this proposal reads as follows:

To the Worshipful Master of the Lodge of True Friendship No.160.

Worshipful Sir,

Acting under the emergency privileges granted to us, we beg to propose by letter, as a candidate for Free Masonry

Mr Lewis Dobson

A driver with the Honourable Artillery Company, France, aged twenty.

The cause of the emergency being that this gentleman is expected to obtain his Commission shortly and his length of stay in England will naturally be limited.

We further beg that the Ballot be taken and, if elected, he should be Initiated the same evening.

We have the honour to remain

Yours fraternally

Jonas Dobson, Proposer

R.H. Peyton, Seconder

It is interesting to note, Brethren, that only a few years after this period of intense recruitment, this Lodge had in excess of 150 members of whom only TWENTY ONE or so were Past Masters and the Installation Meeting in November 1922 was held at the Victoria Hotel in Southend as it was one of the few local Meeting Halls able to take the 65 members and 63 visitors in attendance.

And long may it continue!