

ISSUE 11 – The War Years

Following the sad passing of the PGM RW Bro WT Page the choice of PGM fell upon VW Bro CD Eaton, whose Installation took place on 26 June 1934. His Installation took place at an especial meeting of the PGL held at Worcester at which the Pro Grand Master, MW Bro Rt. Hon. The Earl of Stradbroke presided. Following his Installation the new PGM Appointed and Installed VW Bro HV Stanton as DPGM. Alms collected at this meeting amounted to £7-1s-0p. It was interesting to note that among those present at this Installation was Bro GT Rackshaw, who was not only known to many of the present generation in Masonry but was the Father of Bro GE Rackshaw who became PGM in 1981 after being DPGM for 12 years. It was Bro GT Rackshaws first visit to a PGL meeting, he was a member of the Lechmere Lodge of MMM No59.

The new PGM first became a member of the Province when he became a joining member of Moseley Lodge No667 in 1928 and he became the first Master of St Laurence Lodge of MMM in July 1930.

The fiftieth Annual Meeting of PGL was held on 31 October 1934 at Dudley. The Provincial Secretary reported that the Mark Membership now stood at 280 and the RAM at 172. In June that year the Province qualified as a Keystone Province since each of the eight Mark Lodges possessed the Keystone Collarette and Jewel, thus enabling VW Bro HV Stanton to be invested with the Provincial Collarette and Jewel at the June meeting of Grand Lodge, which he attended whilst still functioning as DPGM in Charge. I wonder where this Collarette and Jewel are now, anybody know?

1935 saw a further increase in the number of Lodges in the Province with the Consecration of St. Laurence Lodge of RAM at the Masonic Hall, Northfield on Monday 09 September. The Consecration was carried out by the PGM assisted by the DPGM. W Bro AE Millward was Enthroned as the first WCN. The total number of Founders was eighteen.

At the fifty first annual meeting of PGL which was held at Stourport on 31 October VW Bro SS Somers called the attention of the Brethren to the fact that the RW PGM would be asked to preside at the 79th Annual Festival of the Mark Benevolent Fund to be held in 1937. In 1936 in order to help the funds towards the 1937 Festival, a Provincial Festival and Dance was held at the Botanical Gardens in Edgbaston, Birmingham. 160 Mark Masons and their Ladies attended. At this function the PGM handed out more than thirty badges and jewels to Stewards and Ladies. On behalf of the Brethren of the Province, the DPGM made a presentation of a coloured photograph of himself to the PGM together with an album containing facsimile signatures of every Brother in the Province who had subscribed, in making the presentation, which was intended to mark the occasion of the marriage of the RWPGM.

At the Fifty Third Annual Meeting of PGL there was a directive from GL informing the Secretaries of Mark Lodges that they no longer need to send returns to the Clerk of the Peace unless specifically asked to do so by the Local Authority. The Sedition Acts of 1799 and 1817 had the effect of banning the formation of secret societies. Freemasonry was exempted, providing Lodges registered the names of members annually with the Clerk of

the Peace. This easement was applied in a very capricious manor, for many authorities continued to insist on having this return made for many years after, Worcestershire County Council was one of them.

The Annual Festival over which the PGM presided raised the sum of £11,066-17s-9d (£759,000 in 2020). The contribution by Worcestershire was £2,826-13s-1d (£194,000). This amount was a signal achievement and constituted a record for any Province of a similar size.

In 1937 the PGM Installed W Bro Richard Mason Hadley JP Mayor of the Borough of Oldbury, PM of Athlumney Lodge No590 as DPGM following the retirement of VW Bro HV Stanton. At the fifty fourth Annual meeting of PGL a presentation was made to the PGM to mark the attainment of his 80th birthday. The presentation was made by W Bro LW Parkinson of Lechmere Lodge No59.

When war broke out on 03 September 1939, Grand Lodge had ordered the suspension of all Lodge meetings, sound familiar. Subsequently Emergency Regulations removed this ban and enabled Lodge to resume their work, although one or two had to abandon their first meetings of the year. The effect of the 'blackout' seems to have had an effect on the number of Brethren attending meetings, but some members showed a bold front and even increased their activities. One Lodge in particular, Godson, actually had to hold several Emergency Meetings to cope with the number of Candidates coming forward.

The actual number of Mark Masons in the Province at this time was now 292 and the RAM was at 176.

During 1940 the Province continued to expand with the Consecration of Eaton Mark Lodge No977 at Kings Heath on 15 June. The PGM expressed his gratification not only in the forming of a new Lodge but that the Lodge was named after him. (The Rymer Lodge of MMM No****??). It also coincided with the PGM's 50 years in Mark Masonry having been advanced in 1890. There were 72 Brethren at the Consecration of whom 20 Founders and it wasn't long before they became a Keystone Lodge.

Although the hostilities continued and there was widespread feeling that it would be all over in a few months, Brethren continued to attend their Mark Lodge and for the year 1940-1941 the figures stood at 333 Mark Masons and 186 RAM. The percentage of members attending their Lodges was an average of 53% with Perseverance Lodge proving to be best with the average of 63%.

The fifty-eighth meeting of PGL was held on 13 June 1942 with a total of 72 attending and 69 sitting down to dine. A donation of twenty guineas was made to the Worcestershire Masonic War Relief Fund out of the alms collected.

The fifty-ninth meeting of PGL held on Saturday 12 June 1943 was saddened by the announcement that HRH, the Duke of Kent had met his death on active service, thus entailing the loss to Mark Masonry of its former Grand Master, a further loss to Masonry in general.

During the period of the war, the PGM asked Lodges to have their warrants photographed and to deposit the originals at Provincial Grand Lodge at Worcester where they had a safe to keep such items. He informed the Lodges that a brother in Vernon Mark Lodge was prepared to do this work for them. Who was that then and where are those photographs now?

By the time of the next PGL meeting on 16 June 1945, hostilities in Europe had ceased. The Provincial Secretary was pleased to announce that the state of the Province was very healthy with 368 Mark Masons and 206 RAM. The PGM said he hoped to see new centres of interest in the Mark Degree, with new Lodges brought to life in Stourbridge, Evesham and Redditch, and hoped that the end of the hostilities would make this possible. Sadly, he was not to see this happen, although he did Consecrate a new RAM Lodge at Halesowen, the Perseverance Lodge of RAM No733.

During his lifetime RW Bro Eaton had been a collector of Masonic mementoes, and he left to this Province one of the finest collections of Centenary jeweks, some of which had not been properly authorised, but which were interesting none the less. There was one jewel missing, that of the Strong Man Lodge No45. If you want to see some of these jewels you can visit the museum at Worcester. You may want to contact W Bro Colin Young first to make sure it is opening.

The PGM's death was announced at the meeting of PGL held on 15 June 1946 at which VW Bro RM Hadley presided as DPGM in charge. The sad news was somewhat compensated by the announcement that attendances at Lodges during the year had increase to an average of 70% of the total membership.

W Bro Jeff Whiteley PGSD, DPGM.