

Brief History of Lodge of Merit Presented by WBro Alan Breeze

The Lodge of Merit warrant was granted in January 1840 and the consecration was held in June that same year.

To put this in to a historical perspective 1840 was when...

- Queen Victoria married Prince Albert
- New Zealand became a British Colony and...
- The foundation stone for the Palace of Westminster was laid.

It was also to be a seminal year for everyone here today.

In March 1840 the Duke of Sussex: the Grand Master, issued a patent that appointed Rt. Hon. Charles Gordon, Earl of Aboyne, the Provincial Grand Master for the new Province of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire.

The Province as we know it today was formed.

At that time Northamptonshire had 4 Lodges: Pomfret, St. Peters, Fidelity and Perseverance. Huntingdonshire brought with it the Socrates Lodge No.511.

The new Province, at its inception, had 5 lodges and was soon to add another.

In June 1840 the Lodge of Merit was consecrated in Northampton. Pomfret had submitted the successful petition and is therefore our mother lodge. It was the first Lodge consecrated in the new Province and under the new Provincial Grand Master.

It could be justly claimed that today is a double celebration for it is the 175th Anniversary of this Lodge and of this Province.

The inaugural Provincial Grand Lodge meeting was held in May 1842 with all 6 lodges attending. It's a testimony to all 6 that they have continued to meet right up to the present day.

However the future of the Lodge of Merit was not going to be without its setbacks.

There were initiates in just 5 of its first 14 years. By 1855 there were only 7 subscribing members.

It became clear that, at that time, Northampton could not support two Lodges.

Oundle masons were without a lodge and were looking for a warrant. In the end the Lodge's move from Northampton was swift and amicable.

The necessary Grand Lodge permissions were given and on 29th January 1856 the Lodge of Merit No.687 held its first meeting at the Talbot Inn in Oundle.

During 1863 the last 'closing up' and re-numbering of lodges took place, Merit changing in that process from No.687 to the now familiar No.466.

Sadly, 9 years after the warrant arrived in Oundle membership was static at just 16. There had been 7 initiates in the first 2 years but only 2 in the following 7. The end came when two of the stalwart brethren moved away from the area.

As was the case in Northampton, it became clear that, at that time, Oundle was unable to support a lodge.

Stamford masons had been without a lodge since the Lodge of Good Intent No.87 had its warrant rescinded 38 years previously and the opportunity to cede the warrant from Oundle must have been very appealing. Again the move was swift and amicable.

As before the necessary permissions were given and on 13th March 1865 the Lodge of Merit No. 466, 25 years after its consecration, held its first meeting in Stamford at the George Hotel with a lot of help from St.Peters Lodge.

Perhaps mindful of the experiences in Northampton and Oundle the growth in membership during this first year was frenetic.

There were 5 initiates at the first meeting. Thereafter meetings were held whenever deemed necessary – sometimes twice a month.

Within 9 months of arriving in Stamford 19 initiations had taken place and 13 joining members enrolled.

Total membership had grown from the original 13 to 35.

The Lodge celebrated its centenary on 24th June 1940. A hallmarked centenary jewel was cast. It can only be imagined how hard it was to procure the precious metal needed in those dark days of World War 2.

When the Air Ministry requisitioned the Stamford Hotel thoughts turned, not for the first time, to finding a permanent home for the Lodge. Alas no suitable premises could be found.

After the war the Lodge of Merit continued to prosper but the Stamford Hotel no longer proved suitable. The stairs to the top of the building proved too challenging for some elderly Brethren!

In 1972 the Lodge moved temporarily to the old school rooms in Austin Street and remained there for four years.

Then the old Bluecoat School in Scotgate was put up for sale in 1975.

W.Bro. Roger Browne heard about the sale and went ‘hot-foot’ to view it. He bought it on the spot.

He then called the Brethren together to tell them that he had acquired the Bluecoat School for £15,000. Another £5,000 was spent on refurbishment.

The money was raised by contributions from its members and no mortgage was required! The Lodge of Merit moved into their refurbished and adapted premises in 1976 and it remains there still.

It is a fitting testimony to W.Bro. Roger's vision that today the Stamford Masonic Centre has been valued in excess of £1 million.

For the first time in its long history the Lodge of Merit could feel secure and the move to its own premises hailed a new period of masonic expansion in Stamford.

In 1978 the Lodge of Merit petitioned for the warrant that led to the consecration of the Vale of Welland Lodge No.8845.

It did the same again in 1989 and the Burghley Lodge No.9364 was consecrated in 1990.

It is with great pleasure that we welcome members of Pomfret Lodge, St Peters Lodge, Vale of Welland Lodge and Burghley Lodge here today. We thank them for being part of our long history.

We also thank all of the visiting Brethren who have joined us on our special birthday.

Today the Lodge of Merit is a thriving Lodge with 54 subscribing members.

We celebrate the men of energy and vision that have shaped its progress over the past 175 years.

We also celebrate our home for the past 150 years. It is fitting today that we make a donation to the Stamford Mayoral Charities that will benefit the people and town of Stamford.

The current members hold the future of this Lodge in trust for the present. They can only try to continue the good work of those honourable Masons and build on that legacy in the years to come.

That concludes this brief history of the Lodge of Merit No. 466. Thank you for listening.