

SOCRATES LODGE BI-CENTENARY 1823 - 2023

Socrates Lodge was constituted on 3rd September, 1823 and on 2nd October, 1823 the brethren having assembled at The Fountain Inn, Huntingdon, under the warrant issued by the Grand Lodge of England, Socrates Lodge, Number 779 was formed by Bro. Peter Gilkes, a member of the Board of General Purposes and Finance, and afterwards Preceptor of the Emulation Lodge of Improvement.

Four of the founder members included two surgeons, two innkeepers, a banker, a tailor, a nurseryman and a merchant. We may have received our name because two of the founders were members of the Lodge of the school of Plato No. 549. Plato was influenced by Socrates and he took over his philosophical school when he died and although there is no written evidence to substantiate the origin of our name this is the only connection that can be found.

On the 21st October, 1823 after its inauguration it was decided that meetings would be held at The George Hotel, Huntingdon and the first meeting there was held on 9th December, 1823.

On 10th March, 1829, the Lodge was transferred to Court Hall (now Town Hall) in the Market Square, which is where it remained until 18th October, 1842.

A further change found the Lodge meetings being held at The Institution, High Street, Huntingdon from 15th November 1842 until 21st September, 1869, when it was decided to resume meetings at The George Hotel.

On 14th July, 1914, it was necessary by reason of the occupation by the military of the Lodge room at the George Hotel, to obtain a dispensation to return to the Town Hall. Six meetings were held there before the Lodge returned to the George Hotel on 16th February, 1915. It continued to meet at The George Hotel until 21st March 1922, when it again transferred to the Town Hall.

It was not until 20th March, 1934 that Socrates Lodge met in their own premises known as The Priory, High Street, Huntingdon, having been acquired and purchased for £1150, altered and improved to suit masonic requirements and controlled by The Masonic Hall Limited. This position continued up to 5th

May, 1942 when The Priory was the subject of military occupation and meetings again reverted to the George Hotel, on 15th September, 1942.

Following the cessation of hostilities, the venue for Lodge meetings returned to The Priory on 18th September, 1945 and remained so until the Installation meeting of 19th January, 2016, when newer premises having been acquired and altered for masonic requirements at Priory House, 5, Sovereign Court, Huntingdon, and has remained so to this date. During the intervening period between sale of the old premises and the purchase and refurbishment of the new premises, meetings were held with the kind permission of the St Ives Lodges at The Quay, St. Ives. The first Worshipful Master installed at the new premises being W. Bro. John Benson, our then current Group Grand Lodge Officer.

The new Lodge premises were dedicated by the Provincial Grand Master Worshipful Brother Max Bayes on Saturday 23rd April, 2016.

Of the officers invested on 3rd October, 1823, Bro. P. T. Gardner was Master of the lodge on two occasions being 1823 and 1826. Bro. R. Fox having been invested as Senior Warden was in fact Master of the lodge no less than five times between 1824 and 1842.

Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire were united as one province in 1841. The first Provincial Grand Master being a member of Socrates Lodge, he being the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Aboyne; later the 10th Marquis of Huntley and as Lord Strathavon was W. M. of Socrates Lodge in 1832 and again the following year.

The 7th Duke of Manchester was W.M. of Socrates Lodge in 1861 and was installed as Provincial Grand Master at Huntingdon in 1864.

The number of the Lodge as shown on the warrant is 779, but this was altered to 511 in January, 1833 and subsequently altered to 373 in July, 1863. Only Pomfret Lodge, Northampton, No. 360 is numerically older in this Province.

Socrates Lodge is the Mother Lodge of Euston Lodge, St. Ivo Lodge, Samuel Pepys Lodge, and Meridian Lodge,. It is also the grandmother lodge of Old Kimboltonians Lodge, Toseland Lodge, Ailwyn Lodge, Sothius Lodge and Hinchingsbrooke Lodge.

As part of the Socrates Lodge centenary celebrations a Thanksgiving Service was held at St. Mary's Parish Church, Huntingdon on 3rd October, 1923 and was followed by a meeting in the Town Hall. The Rt. W. Provincial Grand Master, the Rt. Hon. Lord Lilford, Pro. Grand. Warden attended and presided over part of the proceedings. The Deputy Prov. Grand Master W. Bro. Thomas Horton, Prov. Grand Deacon also attended, together with many Grand Lodge and Provincial Grand Lodge officers.

From 1829 to 1872 the Secretary had been empowered with slight variations to buy biscuits and wine for those attending the Lodge. From 1872 a charge of nine old pence for supper after the Lodge meeting was agreed.

In 1903 at the November meeting, attention was drawn to the fact that three of the members present had held office as Mayor of Huntingdon.

Following the appeal by the United Grand Lodge for contributions to a fitting memorial to those Freemasons who had sacrificed their lives in the Great War of 1914 to 1918, Socrates Lodge by resolution on 17th March, 1925 guaranteed a contribution of 7 and a half guineas per member. This entitled the Lodge to become a Hall Stone Lodge and the Jewel, on a collarette, has been passed to succeeding Worshipful Masters on their installation since 1938. Reference to this Jewel is made when the collarette is placed around the neck of the W. M. at installations.

In February 1966, the Lodge subscribed the sum of 100 guineas to the United Grand Lodge of England towards the 250th anniversary fund. This subscription entitled them to receive a commemorative jewel which was fixed to the W. M's. collar and was first worn in Lodge in October, 1966.

Socrates Lodge has always carried out its obligations in respect of the masonic charities, the first reference being in 1824 when a charity allocation of £5 was made to a widow of a member.

At the inception of the Lodge, the initiation fee was three pounds plus half a guinea registration fee and the annual subscription was £1,.

W. Bro. G. M. Fox who was one of the first initiates of Socrates Lodge served the lodge as secretary for 30 years and on his death, it was decided that the lodge should be responsible for the erection of a memorial to his memory. In April, 1862 a design for such a memorial was approved by the lodge at a cost of

£40 (in excess of £3,000 today). This memorial is in the old Huntingdon cemetery and is not only a memorial to W. Bro. Fox but also to Freemasonry in general.

Bro. Pocock was installed as W. M. of Socrates Lodge in 1836 and to prove he was a good ritualist he gave the explanation of the First Degree tracing board. He then opened the lodge in the second degree and gave an explanation of the Second Degree tracing board, an explanation of the origins and advantages of geometry, the four periods of the creation, the illustration of the seven liberal arts and sciences and the rise in the order of architecture.

During 2020, the country, indeed the world suffered a pandemic of coronavirus, known as Covid 19. Freemasonry in general throughout the country was suspended and unfortunately Socrates Lodge suffered the passing to the Grand Lodge above of W. Bro. John Benson, our Group Senior Grand Lodge Officer, on 31st March, 2020 and also W. Bro. Claud Evans on 27th January, 2021. The cause of their deaths was attributed to Covid 19. Due to the lockdown policy at the time, very few mourners were permitted to attend their funerals.