

An overview of the history that lead to the formation of the Grand Lodge of South Africa.

This short paper is prepared for presentation as “review of general interest” at Lyceum Lodge of Research. I have taken published work, primarily the website introduction to the Grand Lodge of South Africa, which in itself is a compilation of published work, and a presentation delivered by RW Bro John Smith AGM at the Grand Lodge Annual Meeting in Cape Town 2013. Additional information was extracted from “The Freemasons of South Africa” by Dr AA Cooper.

IN THE BEGINNING.

The Cape of Good Hope was opened up by the Dutch East India Company as a trading station to supply fresh produce to their ships en-route to the East Indies. Freemasonry in the Netherlands, founded in 1756 by a Charter from the Grand Lodge of England, was expanding rapidly. With many of the Masters of the ships being Freemasons, it was natural for a Lodge to be founded at this halfway station under the banner of the Grand East of the Netherlands (G.E.N.).

The G.E.N. soon realised the opportunity for expansion into the areas overseas dominated by the Company and in 1771, Brother Abraham van der Weijde, the captain of a sailing vessel plying between Holland and the East Indies, was appointed Deputy Grand Master Abroad. He was given the necessary authority to found Lodges, subject only to the subsequent ratification by Grand East of the Netherlands.

He arrived at the Cape on the 24th April 1772 and called a meeting of known Brethren. Ten Brethren responded and a meeting was held under his chairmanship. Ten days later he issued a warrant for the founding of Lodge De Goede Hoop (Lodge Good Hope) as Lodge No. 12 on the register of the G.E.N. with Abraham Chiron as its Charter Master.

This was subsequently ratified on 1st September 1772. The Lodge laboured diligently and conferred some 400 degrees over the first 9 years of its existence.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS EQUALITY.

The social and religious situation in the Cape at that time was not conducive to the sustainability of the Lodge for the long term. The Lodge depended mainly for its existence on seafaring visitors and failed to guarantee its future by attracting the local residents of the Cape as members.

This was mainly due to the prevailing social and religious attitudes prevailing in Cape society, which consisted primarily of two broad classes of citizen. Firstly the Company official and, secondly, the free burgher. Due to a Company policy, Company servants, were effectively owned by the Company and were not permitted to function independently until they were released from

their contracts. Only after which, were they allowed to settle in the Cape and become land owners.

Furthermore, the Masonic philosophy of equality in the Lodge violated the social structure, where the difference in rank between Company Officials and free burgher was rigidly enforced. Religious interference was also widespread with local potential members being subjected by the clergy of the time to extreme pressures through their families.

RECESS.

In 1780, war broke out between Holland and England who were two of the greatest maritime nations at the time. The hostilities disrupted the activities of the Dutch East India Company and, as a result, ships stopped calling at the Cape. This cut off the lifeblood to the Lodge as it had insufficient local members to continue.

The lack of self sustainability caused the Lodge to go into recess in 1781.

The recess lasted for 9 years, during which, trade recommenced as the Company sought to re-establish itself and re-open its lucrative trade routes.

SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVED.

The Lodge re-opened and focussed on its increasing its local membership. By 1794, prominent persons in the Company had been attracted as members. One of which was Johannes Andries Truter, who would later become Chief Justice of the Cape. The admission of more influential persons offered some protection from the Company's policies and the pulpit. Where previously, the members had been of a transient nature; more and more initiates were locally born and primarily resident in the Cape. This offered the desired stability.

Since its revival, Lodge De Goede Hoop has remained active for over 200 years and is Lodge No 1 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of South Africa. It has also been instrumental in the establishment of Lodges under the jurisdiction of other Grand Lodges active in South Africa.

THE DUTCH WELCOME THE BRITISH.

Because of the wars between Holland, France and Spain on the one hand and England on the other hand, various occupation forces were entrenched at the Cape and the influx of Freemasons from overseas Lodges had a definite effect on the local Freemasonry.

Under the British occupation in 1795, military Lodges attached to British regiments arrived at the Cape, bringing with them, a renewed interest in the Craft. Other immigrant Freemasons formed "Lodges" and Lodge de Goede Hoop allowed them to use their facilities. Nothing comes for free and the restriction was imposed that these Lodges could not perform initiations or confer degrees. These Lodges functioned as irregular Lodges as they had no warrants. One of these irregular Lodges, called *Het St. Jan de Goede*

Verwachting was eventually granted a warrant in 1800 by the G.E.N. The name was changed during ratification to *Lodge St. Jan de Goede Trouw*. Later on, the prefix *St. Jan* was dropped and this Lodge now labours as *Lodge de Goede Trouw*, No 2 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of South Africa.

Further impetus was given to Freemasonry by the subsequent return to the Batavian Republic in 1802 and with the arrival of Abraham Jacob de Mist, a Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands and the Commissioner General for the Cape. His first priority was to re-establish the Dutch presence in the Cape and Freemasonry was one of the important avenues he used. In 1803, he consecrated Lodge de Goede Hoop's building in Cape Town. This building had been designed by Louis Thibault, built by Hermann Schutte and decorated by Anton Anreith, all members of the Lodge. This magnificent building is still in use today and has been designated a National Landmark..

The second British occupation of the Cape took place in 1806. The Commander in Chief, Sir David Baird, was an ardent Mason and the local Deputy Grand Master National saw him as an ally and welcomed him into *Lodge De Goede Hoop*.

ENGLISH, FRENCH, SCOTTISH, IRISH AND PRINCE HALL LODGES ARE FORMED.

The influx of English speaking members into *Lodges de Goede Hoop and de Goede Trouw* brought tensions and the inevitable split took place. English speaking members broke away in 1811 and petitioned the Grand Lodge of England to form the first English speaking Lodge at the Cape: *British Lodge*. This was the first permanent Lodge under the Grand Lodge of England.

The cordial relationship that existed between the Masons in the Cape was manifested when the then Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands, Johannes Andreas Truter, as the highest ranked Freemason in the Cape, was invited to officiate at the consecration of the *British Lodge*. He was duly installed as the first Presiding Master of *British Lodge* in the de Goede Hoop building.

For many years thereafter, the annual installation ceremonies for the Presiding Master and their Officers of both of these Lodges were held as close as possible to the feast of St. John the Baptist, the Patron Saint of Freemasons.

During 1824, the Grand Lodge of France, irregular according to the Grand Lodge of England, granted a charter to its only Lodge in Cape Town, *Lodge L'Esperance*. This Lodge continued to be active until it was incorporated into the GLSA in 1961.

During 1860, the first Lodge under the Grand Lodge of Scotland was consecrated in the de Goede Hoop Temple by Sir Christoffel Brand. This was "*Lodge Southern Cross*".

In 1863, a provincial structure for the Grand Lodge of the Nederlandic Constitution in Cape Town was established under the name of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Southern Africa. This already recognised the expansion prospects for the Order.

The relative prosperity in the 1850's in the Cape had resulted in the influx of British settlers. This led to the development of the Eastern coast and of the Natal Colony as well as the revitalisation of the Craft. As English Freemasonry spread to the Eastern parts, Dutch Freemasonry moved into the hinterland as far as the newly formed Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Here again, the use of the English language in the Dutch Lodges created problems and this resulted in the formation of separate Lodges under the English and Scottish Constitutions.

The first Lodge under the Irish Constitution, Lodge Abercorn, was formed in 1896 followed by St Patrick's Lodge in 1897.

During the early part of the 20th Century, Lodge Perseverance in the Cape and Lodge Phoenix in Kimberly were consecrated by charters from The Prince Hall jurisdiction of Pennsylvania. In 1977 these Lodges were transferred and re-consecrated under the GLSA. Lodge Phoenix subsequently closed, but Lodge Perseverance lived up to its name and has a proud history of fighting, with great success for the right of equality amongst Freemasons during the Apartheid days. It remains active today.

There were now six Constitutions, four "regular" and "two irregular", at labour in Southern Africa.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

The Freemasons of the Cape were active and visible during the 19th century and really did make a difference in their community. These are some of the more notable.

During 1813, members of Lodge de Goede Hoop established an education fund and assisted in starting the first Dutch medium school in Cape Town.

During 1828, Truter was instrumental in the establishment of the first English medium school in Cape Town, *the South African College*. This later was expanded and became the University of Cape Town.

During 1826, Joseph de Lima, a member of de Goede Hoop, started to publish a Dutch non political, non religious weekly newspaper called de Verzamelaar. In 1832, he published almanacs which featured details of Masonic and social events at the Cape.

During 1830, the Freemasons from the Netherlandic, English and French Constitutions featured prominently in the laying of the foundation stone of St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town.

During 1859, the Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey, assisted by the then Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands, Sir Christoffel Brand, along with members of the Netherlandic and English Lodges at the Cape, laid the foundation stone of the Somerset Hospital in Cape Town with full Masonic honours.

In 1860, Freemasons participated in the laying of the foundation stones of the breakwater and the Sailors Home in Cape Town. At these ceremonies, HRH Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria, officiated.

The outbreak of the Second War of Independence (2nd Boer War) in 1899 led to a general decline in Masonic activity for the next three years. The tragedy was that Freemasons were again fighting each other. Notable characters were Generals, Botha, Cronje, Joubert and Viljoen on the Boer side and Lord Roberts and Generals Kitchener and Warren on the British side.

Many political commentators have suggested that our principles as Freemasons were able to assist in healing the wounds caused by the Boer War. They allowed a Boer General, Louis Botha, to become the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

During 1914, Cornelius Langenhoven, a member of the English Congo Lodge in Oudsthoorn, proposed that Afrikaans should replace Dutch as the medium of education in schools. In 1918, he wrote *Die stem van Suid-Africa*. This poem was, of course, later put to music and became the national anthem from 1957 until 1994.

PROPOSALS TO FORM A UNITED GRAND LODGE

As early as 1870 there were calls for a United Grand Lodge to be formed, under which, all Masons would be able to find a home. This meeting was held in Lodge Harmony at Richmond in the Cape.

In 1892 there was a similar move when 500 Masons gathered in Kimberley for that purpose. The proposal to form a United Grand Lodge was defeated by a small majority.

A further attempt was made in 1955, when a meeting, held in Bloemfontein, representing 510 Lodges with a total membership of over 31000 Masons, concluded that there "*was no general desire to establish such a body*".

The reality on the ground was that the six Constitutions, worked together in great harmony and many Masons, then as now, held cross constitutional membership. Some Temples were jointly owned by Lodges of different Constitutions and many Benevolent Funds were jointly run. One of these, The Transvaal Inter-constitutional Masonic Charity is over 100 years old and has always lived up to its name. With such harmony in the Craft, why was it necessary to lose the individuality?

Whilst the general situation had understandably deteriorated during the Anglo-Boer War, there are many tales of Masons from opposite sides remembering their Masonic oath and saving their Brethren, even making every effort to spare the Temples from destruction. In the late 1950's, the continued upsurge of Afrikanerdom and the growing campaign for a South African Republic, subsequently achieved on 31st May 1961, the striving for a South African Grand Lodge was yet again gaining momentum.

THE GRAND LODGE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA IS FORMED

The failure of making any progress in the formation of a United Grand Lodge caused some Brethren of the Nederlandic Constitution to break away from the G.E.N. and form an entirely South African "Grand Lodge", under the title of the "South African Order of Freemasons". Its first President, Officers

and Brethren were invested on 13 March 1952. Its formation was irregular, because official protocols and procedures were not followed and, consequently, the four regular Constitutions operating in South Africa forbade their members to attend the meetings of the new Order.

The movement struggled on with its one Lodge until the formation of the Grand Lodge of Southern Africa in 1961. It then dissolved and its 61 remaining members signed an oath of allegiance to the newly formed Grand Lodge.

It is ironical that the formation of a "South African" Grand Lodge, after all the efforts which had failed locally, is actually attributable to events in the Masonic Grand Lodges in Europe, 6000 miles away.

It must be recalled that, during the Nazi occupation of Europe, Freemasonry was virtually destroyed. Freemasonry in Holland essentially ceased to exist and this resulted in members of the South African component of the G.E.N. being able to assist in the re-establishing of the Grand East of the Netherlands after the war. Grand Lodges all over Europe were starting to re-emerge and the problem arose over which Grand Lodges should be recognised as "regular". The Luxemburg Convention was an attempt to resolve this issue.

In his endeavour to further the formation of Grand Lodges, the Grand Master of the G.E.N., MW Bro Davidson, proposed to recognise certain Grand Orients, particularly the Grand Lodge of France, which did not comply with the ancient landmarks as laid down by the Luxemburg Convention.

The two most important landmarks being, the belief in a living God and the presence of an open holy book during the labours of a Lodge. This resulted in a dispute with the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland, who subsequently threatened to withdraw recognition from the G.E.N.

This would have had serious effects on the G.E.N. Lodges in South Africa, who were in close co-operation with the Lodges under the Home Constitutions. Surprisingly, it appears that the leaders of the Nederlandic Lodges in South Africa were not aware of these consequences, as their Grand Master had failed to inform them of the situation.

When a break in the relationship between the G.E.N. and the three Home Grand Lodges became imminent, the English Grand Secretary, J W Stubbs, advised his Districts in South Africa of the situation. The English District then advised the local members of the G.E.N. that they could become 'irregular'. This caused a major consternation because, as already stated, there was a great measure of co-operation between the Lodges of the four Constitutions inasmuch as many of the Masonic Benevolent Funds and Temples had joint ownerships. Brethren had dual memberships.

Colonel Colin Graham Botha, who was at the time Deputy Grand Master National in South Africa, wrote a letter to the Grand Master, M. W. Brother Davidson, expressing his concern. Coincidentally, the Grand Master of the G.E.N. had written to him on the same day advising that it would probably be better for the local Brethren to form an independent Grand Lodge of Southern Africa.

A delegation, comprising of Graham Botha, de Wet and E Conradie, went to Holland to meet the Grand Master in an attempt to resolve the situation and seek clarity on the future. They were told that, due to the entrenched position of

principle held by the G.E.N., it would be judicious to form their own Grand Lodge. Graham Botha then went to the Grand Secretaries of England, Ireland and Scotland to discuss the matter and gained the impression that the idea of a Southern African “*Grand Lodge*” would be “sympathetically” received in the event of the rupture of the relations between the Home Grand Lodges and the G.E.N. Graham Botha returned to South Africa and immediately set about creating the Grand Lodge of Southern Africa (GLSA). This upset the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland as they had not finalised their issues with the G.E.N. and so, in their opinion, the creation of the GLSA was premature and indeed, may not even be necessary.

Graham Botha enlisted the help of TN Cranstoun-Day, a senior English Mason of DGM rank and expert in jurisprudence, to help him put together the declaration and constitution of the new Grand Lodge. In January 1961, Graham Botha informed the Sister Constitutions about the new Grand Lodge and asked if they had any objections. He stated that it was to be comprised of Lodges from the G.E.N. only and not a “United Grand Lodge at present”.

On 6 February 1961, a meeting of the four Constitutions took place, under the chairmanship of Cranstoun-Day, and the formation of the “*Grand Lodge of Southern Africa*” was approved on the basis that it would be equal to the Home Constitutions in every way and that the right of the Home Constitutions to initiate, award degrees and consecrate Lodges would not be affected. In effect, it merely replaced the offshore governing body, the G.E.N., with a local equivalent.

South Africa was to remain an open territory.

The Home Grand Lodges approved and the “Grand Lodge of Southern Africa” was consecrated on 22 April 1961 with Colonel Graham Botha as the first Grand Master.

Why the rush? The official reason was so as not to clash with the celebrations for the inauguration of the Republic of South Africa on 31st May 1961. However, in June 1961, the G.E.N. under its new Grand Master, MW Bro. M ten Cate announced that they no longer recognised the Grand Lodge of France, and thus, ended the impasse with the Home Constitutions.

During the voting of the G.E.N. Lodges in Southern Africa, one Lodge in South Africa elected to remain with the G.E.N., “Eendrag Maak Mag” (Unity is Strength), while the seven Lodges in (the then) Rhodesia also remained with the G.E.N. In 1981 it was accepted that the Grand Lodge would have no jurisdiction outside the boundaries of the Republic of South Africa and, with the consent of the three Home Grand Lodges, the name was changed to: “*The Grand Lodge of South Africa*”.

In Cape Town 2011, the Grand Lodge celebrated its Jubilee at a meeting attended by 35 Sister Grand Lodges.

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