

History of the Royal Navy Lodge (Kent) No. 429

The notes from which this WEB page has been compiled were originally prepared as the basis of a lecture which was given in the Royal Navy Lodge.

It is difficult to trace with certainty the actual date of the introduction of Freemasonry into Ramsgate, but existing records show that a lodge (No.242) was founded on the 8th March, 1754, & met at the Swan Hotel. In 1755 it became No.180, but was erased on the 27th January, 1768. Another lodge "The Argyle lodge (named in 1818 was founded on the 27th August, 1800, in the 91 st Regiment at Cape Town, South Africa. Apparently the regiment was afterwards stationed in Ramsgate, & meetings were held here in 1818 This military lodge was erased 5th March, 1828. Jacob's Lodge (No. 570) was founded on the 3rd September, 1798, met at the Royal Oak 1n, Harbour Street, Ramsgate, & was erased 5th December, 1827, though it is not to be found in the list of lodges after 1821.

Local tradition states that our lodge was originally formed by members of H.M. Navy & that meetings were held on board a warship stationed in the Downs, but no proof of this has been found in any of the existing records. The confusion appears to have arisen from the fact that a lodge called 1he Royal Navy Lodge was formerly held at Deal. Its record was as follows:-

The Three Kings, Beach Street, Deal, 1762
The East India Arms, Beach Street, Deal 1765
The Three Kings' Inn , Beach Street, Deal, 1783
The Royal Exchange Inn, Beach Street, Deal 1799
The Lodge Room, Beach Street, Deal, 1813.
The Walmer Castle Inn, High Street, Deal, 1804.
The Black Bull Inn, High Street, Deal, 1808
The Royal Oak, Oak Street, Deal, 1809.

A book containing the minutes of this lodge (No. 157) is at present included in the treasures of the Royal Navy Lodge, Ramsgate, & gives particulars of meetings held at Deal from 1809 to 1817. The last initiate was registered at Grade Lodge, 13th October, 1810, after which date no more returns were made & erasure took place 4th December, 1822, the warrant was surrendered & is preserved among the archives of Grand lodge.

This minute book states that meetings were held regularly from 1809 to 1817 & the usual Business was carried on. On the 1st October, 1816, a special summons was issued to ensure general attendance at the next meeting, but, though it was stated that matters of great importance were to be discussed, no information of its nature can be obtained. On 11th January, 1817, however, it is recorded that:-"The W.M. handsomely explained why we should not communicate with Grand Lodge but it is yet to be explained (? discussed) by the brethren." The lodge again met on the 24th January, 1817, & closed this time in mirth & harmony at 10 o'clock. There are no further records until 1827 when a meeting was held at the Royal Exchange, Deal, & the W.M. congratulated the brethren on the pleasing prospect of the Royal Navy Lodge once more arriving to the degree of eminence & respectability it originally held. " The W.M. then recommended to the officers & brethren a strict attendance to the duties of the Lodge so that good order & harmony might prevail, which should ever exist in a mason's lodge." Another break then occurs & no more information regarding the activities of that lodge can be obtained. The lists of its members does not contain the names of the founders of the present Royal Navy Lodge & there is a difference in the working of the two lodges. No reference is made in our minutes to suggest a relationship with any previous lodge & therefore the only connection between the two is the name "Royal Navy" & the inclusion of their old minute book among our treasures.

Our Lodge, No 621 (now 429) was founded 12th October 1835. The original petition for its formation was signed by:-

John Dear	Ramsgate,	M.	lodge No.191
Caleb Barton Jones "	Ramsgate,	S.W.	lodge No 2141.C
Horace Frisby	Margate,		lodge No 207
William Fish	Ramsgate		lodge No 29
JohnLeffen	Ramsgate		lodge No 183
William Collard	Ramsgate		lodge No 44
John Collins	Ramsgate	J.W.	lodge No 214 I.C.
Charles Curwood	Ramsgate		lodge No 469

Its first meeting was held at the Cinque Port Arms, Ramsgate, 4th November, 1835. It is stated in the minutes that "the warrant for opening the above was received from the Gr& Lodge London, 5th November, 1835, but having a dispensation sent for the purpose of opening the lodge (the Duke of Sussex not having signed the warrant) seven brethren opened the lodge on the 4th November, 1835."

Meetings were held bimonthly & on the 14th November 1838 "it was unanimously decided to remove to the King's Head Inn for the better of the lodge" The alternative did not take place till the 13th February 1841, & after four months another change was made to the Royal Hotel. In 1841 the provincial Gr& Lodge was held in Ramsgate.

Programme:-

Monday, 28th June, 1841.

Provincial Grand Lodge opened at 10.30 am.

Lodge for procession opened at 11am

Procession to Church 1

From Church the procession returned to the lodge Room

Prov. Grand Church closed in due form & solemn prayer at 3 o'clock after which the brethren sat down to a sumptuous dinner provided by Bro. Hiscock (Treasurer). After several songs were sung. The brethren kept it up till 11 o'clock & the greatest harmony prevailed" After the lodge was closed on the 2nd February, 1842, "Bro Hiscock informed the brethren that he could no longer accommodate them as their lodge room was taken from them & converted into a billiard room." Another change was necessary & the first meeting in March 1845 took place at the Castle Tavern. Only one was held there & the second meeting of that month was called at the Woodman Inn, Hardres Street. After the usual summer adjournment, from June till November, it appeared that the brethren did not approve of Masonic business being conducted at this inn for insufficient members were present to open the lodge which should have been decided to remove to the Trafalgar Inn, where two meetings were held. These arrangements were also unsatisfactory & a month later the brethren returned to the Castle Tavern. Two emergency meetings were then called at the Rose Inn, Broadstairs, & in 1846 another was summoned to consider "the propriety of removing the lodge for the better welfare of the craft" It was then decided to meet at the freemasons' Tavern where the ceremonies were performed & the business was transacted for a period of six years. This was the longest stay the lodge had made during its lifetime, but further troubles were ahead & 1853 proved to be a very unsettled year. It was resolved to move to 23, High Street & the June meeting took place at the Shipwrights' Arms. On the 5th September the following circular was sent to the brethren:-

Sir & Bro., the meetings of the Royal Navy Lodge, No. 621, at its usual place (Freemasons' Arms) having become impracticable & improper, I, pursuant to the Book of Constitutions, page 94, hereby appoint a meeting to be held at the Shipwrights' Arms Inn, on Monday, 12th September, at 8 p.m. when I shall consult the brethren whether a permanent removal may be expedient & to what place.

(signed) G. Williams W.M.

It was resolved to remove to the Royal Hotel & meetings to be held on the first Wednesday in April. The lodge was apparently over its difficulties for it remained at this hotel from 1853 to 1911. Much information regarding the activities of the lodge during the later years of its stay at the Royal hotel can be obtained from several of the P.M.s, who are willing to testify to the happy & comfortable evening spent there.

As time progresses new ideas develop & Freemasonry in Ramsgate became more flourishing. Other lodges had been founded & it was thought that a real Masonic home worthy of the order was necessary the initiative was taken by a body of Masons who formed the Lewises' Corporation & a building, now known as the Masonic Temple, St Luke's Avenue was purchased. The Royal Navy lodge was invited to participate in the use of this building & W. Bro. W.J. Dudley, W.M., W. Bro. F. Fletcher, I.P.M., W. Bro. S. Ievene, P.M. W. Bro. F. Nixion, P.M., were successful in completing the necessary arrangements. This was accomplished in 1912, & since that date the Royal Navy lodge Meetings have been held in the Masonic Temple.

The record of the Royal Navy Lodge since its formation is one of which it may be proud & every brother may justly feel that it is an honour to be a member of the oldest existing In Ramsgate. For the first twenty-eight years (1835-1863) its number was 621 & the following letter shows the reason for the change.

(Copy of letter from Grand lodge, 6th July, 1863).

The Grand lodge having resolved that the number of all lodges on the register shall be brought forward in regular succession by filling up those numbers which have become vacant either by voluntary surrender of warrants or by erasure of lodges, which has hitherto been known & distinguished as No. 621, will henceforth stand in the register of Grand Lodge No. 429 & the latter number you are to refer to in all returns & communication to Grand lodge. by order, W. Gray Clarke, G.S. Freemasons' Hall, London.

Our lodge has become very popular in the district & proof of this is furnished by the fact that a steady growth is recorded in its numbers. In 1841 there were 28 subscribing officers & brethren & in 1928 the number had increased to 202. One pleasing feature is that the foundation on which it was built, was so solid in form that it has only been found necessary to alter a few details of procedure & the minutes prove that a real Masonic spirit has actuated its members. There have been difficulties, but not of a serious nature, & owing to the good fellowship of the brethren, these have been surmounted in a manner acceptable to the majority of the brethren. From the beginning of its life the same method of Election of Master has been observed & the same qualifications have been required. One small obstacle arose on this question, & the following incident, though regrettable, may prove useful because it shows the power of a lodge to deal with a brother who does not observe his Masonic obligations.

At an election two officers were nominated & the ballot resulted in an equal number of votes for each candidate. One of them withdrew, but another was nominated in his place & a second ballot was therefore necessary. The result was that the original candidate (the S.W.) was defeated & a P.M. was elected. The disappointed brother then acted in a manner unworthy of a Mason & was, with the approbation of the Provo G.M., expelled from the lodge.

(Copy of letter from W.M. & Brethren of the Royal Navy lodge to the Provo G.M.) Sir & Bro., A person named joined this lodge when it was first established, served the office of S.W. & stood the ballot for the Chair, but was rejected by the brethren. He has since acted contrary to the rules of the Craft by exposing the business of the lodge to those unacquainted with the noble order, & aiming at the determination of expelling him & wish to have your opinion if I should be right in doing so. A respectable person wishing to come forward was deterred for a period by his insinuations & stating that we were not authorised to hold a lodge & other vile & UN-Masonic language. The whole lodge is willing to mouth for the truth of this statement. Not wishing to act prematurely, I thought it prudent to ask your advice on this subject. (Signed) W.M. & Wardens.

Reply

I have laid your letter of the 23rd of last month before the Provo Grand Master & I am directed by him to say that you certainly have a motion to that effect & erasing his name from the list of members.

(Signed) Provo Grand Sec.

Other disciplinary measures were at times necessary, for a few years later it is recorded that an officer resigned & made various complaints. These were investigated & he was thrice formally admonished by the W.M. One case is recorded of a brother refusing to take the Chair after election & a dispensation being obtained, another Master was chosen to fill the office.

A copy of the by-laws, dated 1846, has recently been presented to the lodge & is interesting, for it points out the continuity of the workings from the early days to the present.

BY-LAWS

Resolved.

That the former by-laws be, & are hereby repealed, & that the following be substituted in their stead, & become in future the by-laws of this lodge.

Article 1

That the Brethren do meet on the second Wednesday in the month, at seven o'clock in the evening precisely, by summons, which shall express the particulars of all matters to be brought before the Lodge.

Article 2

That the Worshipful Master, Treasurer, & the Tyler, be annually elected by ballot at the regular Lodge Meeting in December.

Article 3

That the Master Elect shall be installed the following lodge night in January, according to ancient form, when he shall invest the Treasurer, & appoint & invest the Senior & Junior Wardens, Secretary, Senior & Junior Deacons, & Inner Guard.

Article 4

That if any of the presiding & assisting Officers of the Lodge do not attend their receptive duties within fifteen minutes of the precise time expressed in the summons or depute a proper substitute to attend at the time stated & officiate for them, the Officers so absent shall each forfeit sixpence to the general fund of the lodge.

Article 5

That a candidate for initiation or a Brother for joining this Lodge be proposed in form agreeable to the Book of Constitutions Articles 1 & 3, folio 89; & if upon the Ballot not more than three "Nay" be against his admission, he shall be declared elected & eligible. The Brother proposing a candidate for initiations, shall, at the time of proposition, deposit the sum of One Guinea, but if not elected the deposit money to be returned to him.

Article 6

That unless the Candidate so elected attend initiation within three months after ballot has been declared in his favour (without sufficient cause he assigned for his non-attendance) the Election shall become void, & the deposit money forfeited to the general fund of the lodge.

Article 7

That the fees payable upon initiation be Four Pounds which includes the registering fee & certificate; & the joining fee of every Brother be (including the registering fee), Five Shillings.

Article 8

That the monthly subscriptions of every member be One Shilling & Two Pence, which includes Gr& Lodge Dues, & be paid one quarter in advance & no member shall have a right to vote, or be eligible to fill any office, who has not paid his Monthly subscriptions & that if any Member's Subscription remain Six Months unpaid, he shall be liable to have his name erased from the list of Members, upon giving him one month's notice in writing to that effect

Article 9

That the Visiting Fee be One Shilling & Sixpence & the Banquet Visiting Fee be in equal proportions one with another, according to the Bill rendered for such refreshments called for by the stewards, & co.

Article 10

That the Treasurer do receive all Moines collected, (except the Grand Lodge Fees & Dues, which the Master is to receive), & do pay the house bill & other incidental charges every lodge night, under the direction of the Worshipful Master, enter the same in a proper book, & that his accounts be audited immediately after the Festival, by a committee appointed by the 13th Article, & that he do pay over the balance of cash in his hands to the new Treasurer on the regular Lodge Meeting in January.

Article 11

That the duty of the secretary be to make minutes of all proceeding in the lodge, & enter them clearly in another Book, to fill up all summonses for Lodge Meetings, agreeable to the 1st Article; to keep a Book with the accurate description of every Brother, in conformity with the 5th Article, folio 58, in Book of constitutions; to collect all Monet & draw out a statement of accounts to be audited.

Article 12

That the Worshipful Master do call the monthly Evening Bill for Refreshment at eleven o'clock, & any things more had in after that time be not allowed at the expense of the Lodge.

Article 13

That a Committee consisting of the presiding Officers of the lodge, with all Past Masters, Masters, Treasurer, & the Secretary, do meet to audit the General Accounts, of which due notice shall be given them, & the Worshipful Master shall report the state thereof, (with the names of the Members who have not paid up their subscription) on the regular lodge Meeting in the first night after the same. That five, at least, of the Committee do form a Quorum. On Non-attendance forfeit 2nd to the Lodge.

Article 14

That any member wishing to make any alterations in the By-laws, shall give notice in writing to the Worshipful Master, with the particulars of his intended alteration.

Article 15

That an Inventory be made of the Furniture & jewels belonging to the Lodge, & placed in the hands of the Worshipful Master upon the day of his Installation, who is responsible for them. & that they be insured in the name of the Worshipful Master for the time being, in the same of £100, (One hundred pounds,) in trust for the benefit of the lodge.

Article 16

That if any dispute or difference arise between any of the Members, the Members aggrieved shall give notice of his complaint in writing to the Worshipful Master, who is to communicate the same at the first Lodge night, when it shall be referred to a committee appointed by ballot, (to avoid discussing the subject on the stated Lodge Meeting), & they are to report their opinion at a subsequent Lodge.

Article 17

That these By-Laws be signed by each Members, upon his admission; that they be printed with a list of the members.

Having perused the By-laws to be adapted for the Royal Naval Lodge, No. 621, to be held at the free mason's Tavern, Ramsgate, I hereby certify my approval of the same, as also the removal of the lodge to the house above named. JOSEPH ASHLEY, D.P.G. Master, Province of Kent Chatham, 12th Nov., 1846

These By-laws were applied & it is recorded that in 1854 the guinea deposit (Rule V.) was forfeited because the candidate did not present himself for initiation. Evidently the offices were regular & punctual in their attendance for the funds of the lodge were not large. Tradition states that in addition to the funds of the lodge were not large. Tradition states that in addition to the penalties for non-attendance & unpunctuality fines were also inflicted for swearing, but not succeed in placing the lodge in a flourishing financial position. Although funds were low it is pleasing to read that the brethren were certainly of true Masonic disposition for they were very generous to appeals made for assistance &, in addition to various sums voted from the lodge funds, they often raised subscriptions among themselves to aid a distressed brother.

One of the members held a prisoner in Dover Castle (it is reported for smuggling) sent word that he was in distress. The members agreed to a voluntary levy of 1/- per week in order to assist him. In 1848 another brother was similarly detained in the castle & the sum of one guinea was sent to him. Tradition adds that arrangements were also made for a regular supply of tobacco & other comforts to be conveyed to them during their terms of imprisonment. A brother mason from Faversham also made an appeal for help & the brethren showed that their charity was not confined to members of the Royal Navy lodge. These, of course, are only a few cases, but the records give abundant proof that liberal assistance was always forthcoming when it was genuinely required. The annual subscription was formally eighteen shillings, the joining fee ten shillings & the initiation fee four guineas. In 1853 it was found necessary to raise the last named to five guineas. Meetings were held on the first & third Wednesday in the month & in 1882 it was resolved to hold one meeting per month- first Wednesday.

Before 1847 it was the custom to charge a fee of one shilling or one shilling & sixpence to brethren visiting from another lodge was an arduous task for travelling was difficult. As railway communications became more general an increase in the number of visitors naturally followed, & in order to encourage this spirit of brotherly love was decided that "In view of the increased facility of communication by rail between the towns of Margate & Ramsgate, by rail, & with a view to the promotion of the welfare of the Craft in both places by an increased & friendly intercourse the brethren of the Isle of Thanet, no visiting fees be demanded or taken from any of the brethren belonging to the Margate Lodge, no. 149, who may henceforth favour us with their presence."

A similar resolution was passed at Margate & two years later visiting fees were entirely abolished, although the annual subscription was small the Secretaries were compelled occasionally to report that the dues were not, in every instance, paid promptly. The method of dealing with defaulters was somewhat drastic. A list of those members who were more than four quarters in arrears, was prepared & read out in open lodge. These brethren were then suspended & after a short period were, if payment had not been made, erased from the list of members. In these days, unfortunately, erasures are sometimes necessary, but they are not performed as publicly as they were in the past.

Three instances are mentioned (1847, 1860, 1863,) where persons under the age of twenty-one years have been initiated into the lodge. This is possible under dispensation from Prov. Grand Master & can only be obtained in very special circumstances.

On various occasions United Grand Lodge has found it necessary to circularise the various lodges on the subject of admitting unqualified members, & warning them of the penalties to which they are liable if they even had communications of Masonic nature with persons who belong to irregular lodges. The following is a copy of a circular letter received by the W.M. from the Freemasons' hall, London, 2nd July 1859.

Worshipful Master,

I am directed to inform you that there are several lodges at Smyrna, which have formed in an irregular manner, & which are not in possession of warrants emanating from duly constituted authority. From information laid before Grand Lodge it appears that during the late war with Russia (Crimean War) an officer in one of our H.M. regiments, who was said to have been in possession of a warrant formerly belonging to an Irish Lodge, initiated several persons at Smyrna, & that having initiated a certain number, he formed them into three lodges, which three lodges then assumed the title of "The Grand Lodge of Turkey". It appears that several persons, who have

thus been joining members of lodges held under the Grand Lodge of England, & in a few instances, have been received.

The letter then cautions all lodges against admitting visitors, who are not properly vouched for, unless they can fulfil the regulations given in the Book of Constitutions, in reference to visitors.

Another warning was given in 1867 & these Grand Lodge points out that a simple knowledge of freemasonry is not sufficient. Strangers not vouched for must:

1. Show their Certificate from Grand Lodge.
2. Give proof of identification.

The Certificate or other voucher must be produced before any examination takes place. A further warning was issued in 1910 & there it was pointed out that a brother in India (not of a Ramsgate lodge) was suspended for visiting an irregular lodge.

Various gifts have been presented to the lodge by member & visitors.

1847 A perfect ashlar - Bro. J Mercer

1847 A volume of S.L - RW Prov Grand Master (Kent)

1859 Four Masonic glasses - Bro. R G Higgins

1861 Three ebony gavels, inlaid with ivory – Bro. F Snowden

1863 A rough ashlar (formerly belonging to St David's Lodge) - Bro R Cramp

1864 An antique & valuable Tracing Stone

1865 A new set of Tracing Boards - W.Bro T H Snowden

A valuable Masonic poignard - Bro H B Hammond

A silver plumb rule & steel chisel- Bro Bridge

1867 A star in the East - Bro J C Twyman

1875 Masonic books - Bro C Shaw

Print representing the Installation of H R H Prince of Wales as G M

1902 Ark- W.Bro F J Wraight & W.Bro G Miriams

Cushion - Bro Assiter

V S L - W.Bro C T Chapman

Gauntlets - W.Bro F J Comford

Souvenir, Clearance Certificate, London Bridge No. 6 (1783)

- W.Bro A F Howard PM, District G Supt. Works Nigeria.

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