

THE PROVINCIAL GRAND CONCLAVE OF WEST YORKSHIRE

OBSERVATIONS on the FIRST TWENTY YEARS.

INTRODUCTION.

Brethren, those of you who have witnessed previous addresses I have made will realise I do not find it easy to limit my observations to the facts of history, or the interpreted research of more learned brethren than myself, but have an uncontrollable urge to pass on opinions on also the present and future.

When V.Wy.Bro. George Bastow PGV contacted me in early January to see if I would be attending Westwood Conclave No 276 on 23rd February and if so could I give a talk on OSM I of course said yes, not knowing if we would have snow or what I would talk about. After all I had already some previous talks I and other distinguished brethren have delivered and I had time to consider my options, I could even practise my address for Saturdays Provincial Meeting, or I could spend the next hour telling you why you should be joining the Scarlet Cord. However within days V.Wy.Bro. Peter Wright PGV was on the phone wanting to know the title of my address and we agreed on that which you see on your summons, therefore the die was cast.

I then came across a partially written address I had prepared shortly before my appointment as Deputy Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler when as SR of West Yorkshire Past Supreme Rulers Conclave No 429 entitled “The Provincial Grand Conclave of West Yorkshire – Observations on its first Ten Years” an address I had shelved due to the lack of content, but what about now in our 21st year would the first 20 years be of more significance?

Time does not allow a detailed review of the History since the formation of the Province of Yorkshire nor do I mean to deliver an authoritative history, but today I simply want to share some of my personal observations on the events since the constitution of the Province of West Yorkshire on the 31st March 1995 and possibly sow some seeds as to what the future may hold.

BACKGROUND.

The Province of Yorkshire had been constituted on the 19th September 1969 at the Cairns Hotel, Harrogate by the Most Worthy Grand Supreme Ruler Lt. Col. J.W.Chitty MBE when the Rev Allick Ibbotson was installed as Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler. This was the third Province to be constituted in the first year of the tenure of M.Wy.Bro. Chitty as GSR and consisted of 6 Conclaves. In 1974 William Westwood Ballardie was installed as Prov. GSR and he appointed one Maurice Bendig as Prov. Grand Recorder. In 1982 Maurice was installed as the third and last PrGSR for Yorkshire.

During the first 21 years of the Province of Yorkshire the Province grew to 11 Conclaves and in the early 90's speculation grew as to plans to split the Province. At the meeting of Pr.Grand Conclave on Friday 11th March 1994 the R.Wy.Pr.GSR Maurice Bendig announced that the M.Wy. Grand Supreme Ruler had decided that the principle of dividing the Province on the Craft lines is the right approach – and in supporting the decision expressed his belief that this would be for the good of the Order also, enabling it, with the right Leadership, to grow in strength.

That final year proved to be a busy year with the Consecration of Phoenix Conclave No. 391 and Brough Conclave No 394 both in the same week in September 1994.

CONSTITUTION.

The Province of West Yorkshire was Constituted on Friday 31st March 1995 by the M.Wy GSR Col. Geoffrey Seymour Hamilton Dicker, C.B.E.' T.D.; D.L. at The Masonic Hall, Castle Grove, Headingley when R.Wy. Bro. Maurice Bendig PrGSR for Yorkshire was appointed, obligated, invested and Installed as PrGSR of West Yorkshire a day on which Maurice joked he had gone from the most senior to the most junior of the presiding PrGSR's.

The transition from Yorkshire to West Yorkshire was much easier than that for our friends in North & East Yorkshire. Primarily due to West Yorkshire having 9 Conclaves to N&E's 4, but also many of the principal officers of Yorkshire continued as Principal Officers in West Yorkshire and I am also pleased that many did not take the opportunity of easing the burden in travelling but continued to support conclaves in both provinces and many continuing with dual membership of both provinces.

TWENTY YEARS ON

So brethren later this week we will hold the 21st Annual Meeting of The Provincial Grand Conclave of West Yorkshire, a Province which has had so much enjoyment for so many, but also a Province which has seen change sometimes thrust upon it by the will of the Almighty Friend of All Friends.

Well 1995 was certainly a year to set standards, during year one much continued as before with the brethren joining in the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Chantry Conclave No.94 at Wakefield. In May the PrGSR led a deputation of his officers on a cross border visit to Roses in Concord Conclave No. 185 in the Province of East Lancs to mark the collaboration of members of the two Provinces in forming this Conclave 30 years earlier, and in December the PrGSR and his deputy were the only two visitors from outside the Province attending the Consecration of the Barnard Castle Conclave No. 410 in the then North East Province, where I was the Founding Counsellor.

The first meeting of Prov. Grand Conclave was held at Harrogate on 30th March 1996 in a week when the news was full of the dangers of Beef due to Mad Cows Disease, what could one expect to be served in West Yorkshire than Roast Beef & Yorkshire Puds.

In 1997 we returned to Castle Grove, Headingley venue of the constitution meeting on the 8th March, this was followed shortly afterwards on 14th May by a meeting of petitioners desirous of forming a Past Supreme Rulers Conclave.

The West Yorkshire Past Supreme Rulers Conclave No. 429 became the first new Conclave to be formed in West Yorkshire on Wednesday 23rd July 1997, which apart from it being the first new Conclave in the Province was also notable for two other things. Firstly as the Pr.GSR R.Wy. Bro. Maurice Bendig was designated the first SR and many of his Provincial Officers were Founders, the Consecration was performed by the Deputy Prov.GSR Roger Keith Cooke supported by a team of Past Prov. Officers ably led by Trevor Lancaster Hughes as Consecrating D.C. Secondly the 23rd July was one of the hottest days of the year and the Ceremony was conducted in shirt sleeve order.

In March 1998 the Pr. Grand Conclave Meeting was held at Cockerham Lane, Barnsley this was the first occasion when the meeting was preceded by a meeting of WYPSR's Conclave, a meeting graced with the presence of the M.Wy.GSR Peter Glyn Williams who delivered the address.

Regrettably that was to be the last occasion when R.Wy.Bro. Maurice Bendig would preside as PrGSR having taken the decision to step down to care for his seriously ill wife, an end to over 16 years service to that office.

On Friday 10th July 1998 Provincial Grand Conclave was opened at Tapton Hall, Sheffield by V.Wy. Bro. Christopher Kenneth Faulkner, Past Deputy Pr.GSR for Yorkshire at which meeting the M.Wy.Bro. Peter Glyn Williams GSR appointed, obligated, invested and Installed Wy.Bro. Roger Keith Cooke PAGReg. as the second Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler for West Yorkshire.

R.Wy.Bro. Cooke then appointed and Installed Wy.Bro. James Henry Harris as Deputy Prov.Grand Supreme Ruler.

Under Roger Cooke the Province continued to grow in harmony, with brethren joining in goodly numbers and also an encouragement to open more Conclaves in areas of the Province considered to be lacking in presence.

In 1999 the Annual meeting was held at Spring Bank Place, Bradford, in 2000 at Blenheim House, Batley at which meeting Wy.Bro. Trevor Hughes was appointed Pr.G.Chancellor the first change to this office since the constitution. On Monday 17th July 2000 the White Rose Conclave No.449 was consecrated at Westbourne House, Otley, the 2nd consecration for West Yorkshire.

In 2001 the Annual Meeting was held at Morley Masonic Hall, a day to be much remembered. The meeting included the appointment and Installation of Wy.Bro. Stewart Glasgow Carley PAGDC as Deputy Prov. GSR a move so popular that not only were places at the Festive Board restricted, but the assembly of brethren in the Temple included much use of the dining chairs from downstairs, and a personal nightmare for the then Asst Pr.GDC.

On Thursday 26th July 2001 Roses Conclave No. 459 was consecrated at The Masonic Hall, Barnoldswick, this the third consecration for West Yorkshire and due to it's proximity with the Lancashire border a meeting where the company of R.Wy.Bro. Geoffrey Litherland PrGSR (East Lancs) and many of his brethren was enjoyed and was in some ways reminiscent of earlier gatherings at Roses in Concord Conclave.

In 2002 the Annual Meeting was held at Tapton Hall, Sheffield and was honoured with the presence of R.Wy.Bro. Michael Guest DepGSR, who also that morning delivered an address to WYPSR's Conclave regarding some of the past rituals of the Order when attached to the Allied Masonic Degrees. That meeting also saw the appointment of the little known Thomas Henry Wise as Pr.G.Recorder, and "little known" is not something that can longer be said about Tom.

The Annual Meeting of 2003 was again arranged to be held at Tapton Hall and it was a meeting billed as one of the most exciting experiments for the Province. The Rt.Worthy Pr.GSR Roger Keith Cooke had invited the heads of the other Orders of Freemasonry to attend our assembly clothed in the regalia of their own Orders. Unfortunately due to his serious ill health Roger was unable to attend that meeting and his Deputy Stewart Glasgow Carley had to reluctantly preside over the meeting. Despite the PrGSR's absence the meeting was a great success with representation from the Order of the Temple, Royal & Select Masters, Red Cross of Constantine, HRAKTP, Royal Order of Scotland and also the presence of R.W.Bro. J.Trevor Broadley Pr.GM. who was presented with a cheque towards the 2007 Grand Charity Festival.

Sadly 5 days after that momentous meeting Roger Cooke lost his fight for life and was received into the Grand Conclave above. The brethren mourned his passing and celebrated his life at a service at St, Mary's Church, Tickhill where they were joined by the My Wy. GSR.

Provincial Grand Conclave was again held at Tapton Hall on Wednesday 23rd July 2003 when M.Wy.Bro. Peter Glyn Williams GSR appointed, obligated, invested and installed V.Wy.Bro. Stewart Glasgow Carley PGV as PrGSR. R.Wy.Bro. Carley then appointed and installed Wy.Bro. Robert Norton Wilkinson PGSwdB as his Deputy.

A week later the GSR again returned to the Province to present a Centenary warrant to Skyrack Conclave No. 32 at Castle Grove. Headingley.

In November 2003. the Supera Moras Conclave No. 49 better known today perhaps as the Internet Conclave and attached the Prov. Of East Lancs brought its meeting to Tapton Hall, a meeting so successful despite a certain Rugby World Cup Final it has repeated every November since.

2004 started off with a terrific boost for on Wednesday 21st January 2004 Lux Diei Conclave No.474 was consecrated, the first day light Conclave in the Province with the now very well known Thomas Henry Wise installed as the first SR. This act brought the Province of West Yorkshire to 13 (lucky for others?) which was good enough incentive for the PrGSR to encourage the brethren to find No. 14.

In 2004 the Province again met at Tapton Hall, in September of that year the R.Wy.Prov GSR and his Provincial Officers visited Phoenix Conclave No.391 on the occasion of their 10th Anniversary.

In 2005 Roses Conclave No 459 moved its meetings from the Masonic Hall, Barnoldswick to the Old Stone Trough, Kelbrook.

On Saturday 30th July 2005 Michael Guest was again to visit the Province for the last time in the capacity of DepGSR to attend the Centenary celebrations of Claro True Friendship Conclave No.4 and present the Centenary Warrant.

On Saturday 25th February 2006 at the Provincial Meeting I was delighted to be appointed, obligated, invested and installed as Deputy Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler and at the same time Wy. Bro. John Michael Beard succeeded Trevor Hughes as Provincial Grand Chancellor.

Later that year on Friday 27th October R Wy Bro. Brian Clifford Wareham DepGSR visited Odersfelt Conclave 35 to celebrate 100 years since the consecration of the Conclave.

In February 2007 the regular meeting of WYPSRs 429 met on the eve of the Provincial Meeting rather than the morning of it and resolved that all future meetings be held at Blenheim House, Batley due to the uncertainty of the future of Castleford Masonic Hall.

In March 2007 the regular meeting of Roses Conclave No 459 met by dispensation at the Masonic Hall, Kirkburton immediately following the meeting of Lux Diei Conclave No 474 at the same venue at that meeting 11 new Joining Members joined the conclave and it was resolved that all future meetings be held at the Masonic Hall, West Vale.

In October 2009 R Wy Bro. Brian Clifford Wareham DepGSR returned to West Yorkshire in order to constitute and consecrate The Scarlet Cord Conclave of Yorkshire, West Riding No 538 at Blenheim House, Batley the 14th Conclave of the Province a Conclave which was only to meet once in February 2010 before being dissolved at the Inauguration Meeting of the Ancient and Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord when it was reformed as the Calder Vale Consistory No 19 T.I.

In December 2009 Phoenix Conclave No 391 resolved to move their meeting place from Cockerham Lane, Barnsley to Pontefract.

In November 2012 Grand Conclave celebrated 125 years of the Order of the Secret Monitor and at this meeting our very own R Wy Bro Maurice Bendig was presented with a 50 Years' Service Jewel.

On Saturday 23rd February 2013 our good friend Michael William Guest now M.Wy.GSR returned to our Provincial Meeting to appoint, obligate, invest and install myself as PrGSR in succession to R.Wy. Bro. Stewart Glasgow Carley who had retired from office after 10 years dedicated service and I in turn appointed, obligated, invested and installed Wy. Bro. John Marrison PGSwdB as Deputy PrGSR. At the luncheon which followed a cheque for £1000 was presented to VWBro Jack Piggot, DepPGM in favour of the 2017 RMBI Festival.

In 2013 V Wy Bro Denis Mills PAGDC was presented with a Jubilee Jewel and Certificate to mark his 50 years' service to OSM at Odersfelt Conclave No 35 by the PrGSR and later that year V Wy Bro Robert Bedlington was presented with a similar certificate by the DepPrGSR at his nursing home.

Also in 2013 Bishop Blaize Conclave No 48 moved its venue by a change in By-laws from the Midland Hotel, Bradford to the Masonic Hall, Swinton, Mexborough

In June 2013 yet another Conclave decided to move its meetings, this time Lux Diei 474 moving from Kirkburton to Pontefract, a short tenure before moving again to Castleford in 2015.

In July 2015 to celebrate their 25th anniversary Bawtry Conclave 354 celebrated with the dedication of a Conclave Banner by the PrGSR

In this time we have also provided great support to Grand Conclave with many of our members attaining active office of significance.

Grand Chancellor Maurice Bendig 2008-present

Deputy Grand Director of Ceremonies Gavin P Kaye 1996-98

Grand Visitors Trevor L Hughes 1999
Stewart G Carley 2001
Thomas H Wise 2008

Richard A Middleton 2010
Timothy J Crawshaw 2011
Stephen Rhodes 2012
James H Newman 2014

Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies John M Beard 2007

Grand Sword Bearer Dr Raymond C Johnson 2010

Grand Standard Bearer James H Newman 2009

THE FUTURE

What will the next 20 years hold, indeed what will the next 10?

Back in 1995 I could have not foreseen many of the significant events of the last 20 years, especially my appointment as PrGSR. I have had the privilege of being the only Provincial Grand Officer to have served continually since the constitution and also in Yorkshire before that and I hope one of our current team may get the chance to serve at least that long, however what will happen?

So much has changed.

When I joined we all travelled, in my first year we went to Driffield and Bedale, now we have better roads, less Geography and yet some members and SRs never visit another Conclave until they visit on a Provincial Visit on first being appointed to Provincial Rank.

When I was first a visiting deacon I would write to a brother in Jersey because a stamp was cheaper than a phone call and he would write back. Now we have mobiles and texts and emails and yet some VDs fail to keep in touch with their brethren.

We have held the Provincial Meeting at Tapton Hall, Sheffield since 2002, yet those premises have been reported to be in some difficulties with membership 33% of what it was then. It is a venue which is the envy of my fellow PrGSRs yet what are its future prospects.

And of course like the majority of you I joined freemasonry at a time when masons were committed. Committed to support, committed to take office, committed to learn ritual. Many Orders of Freemasonry struggle for candidates because of the falling numbers, especially those which require Royal Arch membership, yet we can admit any MM.

So brethren, if we practice what we preach, deliver good ritual, support our brethren via the VDs, visit and support one another, we can attract our friends from the Craft and we have as much if not more chance of surviving and even growing and having a successful and enjoyable future.