

The History of Nyanza Lodge

The Lodge of Unanimity No. 524 was instituted at Ilminster in 1788 but owing to lack of support was moved to Taunton on 18th September 1797, with 16 members.

In October 1867, Nyanza Lodge was instituted and met in the Commercial School Rooms (our present premises) for just over a year. The Dispensation was dated 24th December, 1867 and the first meeting held on Friday, 27th December, at 9 a.m. when five candidates were proposed for Initiation and four masons as joining members. On 6th January 1868, the five were initiated and the four joining members approved and admitted.

The Consecration and Installation of the first Worshipful Master, John Knott, was on Friday, 10th January 1868. The brethren attended a banquet at 3 p.m., in their Masonic clothing, at the Crown Inn. We are told that all ended in harmony and goodwill

Four days after the Consecration and Installation meeting. i.e. on 14th January, another meeting was held and the following items of expenditure were approved for payment:

Mitchell's bill for	Wine	4. 19. 6
Seward's bill for	Banquet	5. 14. 4
Parson's bill for	Pedestal covers, etc.	11. 0
Way's bill for	Use of Chairs	3. 6
Wakeley's bill for	Carpentry	8. 6
Stephen's bill for	Biscuits	1. 0
Minson's bill for	Oil and Corn	1. 0
Perry's bill for	Hire of Glassware	1. 3
Mitchell's bill for	½ doz. Sherry	18. 0

As these items were for the Consecration and Installation meeting, the 50 who attended the actual meeting and the 32 who sat down to the Banquet must have done themselves well.

The Lodge was named Nyanza after the Lake Victoria Nyanza in Africa in honour of the local explorer, Captain John Hanning Speke, who had discovered the source of the River Nile some years before. It would appear that neither he nor any members of his family had any connection otherwise with the Lodge.

A letter dated 31st March 1868, was received from Grand Lodge severely reprimanding the members of Nyanza for holding the meetings of 27th December and 6th January before the Lodge was consecrated, contrary to the Book of Constitutions. The Grand Master, however, decided to deal leniently this time as no doubt the members of the Lodge were misled by the Provincial Grand Secretary who had obtained the Dispensation.

The Lodge was transferred to The Royal George Assembly Rooms where the furniture was housed in a room to which the servants had access and it deteriorated rapidly. Members of the Lodge objected to the furniture being open to the gaze of the outside world, so Brother Chapple offered to house it as the George Hotel wanted £4 per year for the use of a room which could be locked.

At the Lodge meeting of 11th February 1868, the following payments were approved:

To Bryant for a hassock	11. 6
To Stevens for pedestals	6. 3. 6
To Hellier for platforms	4. 6. 6

The following November the three Tracing Boards were painted and presented by

Brother J. C. Sharp (then S.W.) and in the February Brother Bragge painted the name of the Lodge on the case. The cost of this was not to exceed 15/-.

On 12th April 1870, WBro Knott, the Secretary, received a copy of the Warrant issued to Ilminster in 1788 from the W.M. of the Taunton Lodge. It was agreed that an engraving of it on parchment should be made and Brother Bragge's offer to carry out the work was gratefully accepted. It was framed and hangs on the wall to the right of the Worshipful Master's chair. It was originally issued by Thomas Dunckerly, a natural son of George II, then Provincial Grand Master of Somerset, and is in the full wording of the Grand Lodge model. The name is given as Unanimity No. 524, which is now known as 'Unanimity and Sincerity, No. 261 Taunton. A letter of thanks for the copy was sent to the Worshipful Master of the Taunton Lodge.

An offer from the George Hotel to let a room for the furniture for 25/- a year was accepted.

In September 1870, WBro Knott presented the Lodge with a Volume of the Sacred Law.

On April 14th, 1884, a resolution was passed to move the Lodge to a room in North Street. Authority for this was granted and in February 1886, the lease was agreed and the new premises occupied. A Secretary's table was given by Brother Warren in March, 1887, and a balloting screen in the following September.

A set of candlesticks was bought from Lodge funds in December 1889, and the following February Brother Schenck offered £15 towards an organ. This was gratefully accepted and it was agreed to take the rest of the price from Lodge funds.

On 1st March 1892, the Worshipful Master Elect, Brother Stringfellow, gave the banner. On inspection, it can be seen that it depicts the source of the River Nile where it flows out of Lake Victoria Nyanza and where early on the morning of 30th July 1858, Speke first saw the blue waters. He was greatly impressed and added: "The pleasure of the view vanished in the presence of those more intense and exciting emotions which were called up by the consideration of the commercial and geographical importance of the prospect before me. "This land, for centuries, had tantalised the curiosity of the civilised world and of all the mysteries which the earth had kept from the inquisitiveness of man, none had been so engrossing or fired his imagination as the mystery which shrouded the interior of Africa.

So, the name of our Lodge, in which we may be justly proud, and all that the word implies, the survival of man in fulfilling his treasured ambition, should spur us on to dedicate ourselves to that high purpose, make us Speke's worthy followers and help us to further the spirit of our Motto, " Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth."

On 12th March 1895, it was agreed to hold the Lodge on the second Tuesdays of the month. Collar fees or "fees of honour" were also instituted at this time.

The Lodge Charter was granted on 14th December 1897 and entrusted to the care of WBro Grabham. In the following April, the emblems on the Deacon's wand were given by Brother Connor, the Tyler. The Worshipful Master's chair the dais, the carpet in the East and two other chairs were given by several brethren (names unknown). On 9th January 1900, the knockers on the Lodge door were purchased. In April 1902, Col. Paull gave a cushion for the Volume of Sacred Law and WBro Broad the shields of honour to date.

In 1904 Col. Paull, now Worshipful Master for the third time, gave a carpet and in October 1905, Brother Templeman gave a kneeling stool. In November Dr. Maidlow gave some new gavels. The cushion for the W.M.'s chair was given by Brother Sweetland in December 1909.

On 13th May, 1913, our present Lodge premises were purchased for £150 from WBro Parrett and a tender of £110 for alterations by Mr. A. Poole was accepted.

It was found that these premises were those consecrated and dedicated in January 1868. The balance of the money required for the purchase was loaned free of interest by some of the members and gifts of fittings were made. WBro Parrett gave the square and compasses.

On 9th September 1913, the move from North Street to Court Barton was completed.

In May 1919, the D.C.'s chair was presented to the Lodge by relatives of the late WBro Grabham. This had been made by his father, a well-known local craftsman.

The first mention of the 1914/18 War was in December 1914, when it was stated that Col. Paull was shortly leaving for India. WBro Duke also served in India.

In May 1917, to mark the Jubilee of the Lodge, £105 was subscribed to Masonic Charities.

On 11th March 1919, Brother E. A. Marshalsea, on behalf of the junior members, presented the Oak Pillars and Globes to commemorate the end of the war. The Worshipful Master of that time, WBro Whitmey, said "They would stand for ever as a handsome ornament in our Lodge and a reminder of the critical period of history through which our country had victoriously passed."

In March 1921, new pedestals for the W.M. and Wardens were presented by Brothers R.P. Wheadon, senior and junior, and F.W. Wheadon. In the same year, the panels in the west window were given by WBro's Purnell and Parrett, who gave one each, the other by WBro's E.A. Marshalsea, Humphry and Brother Oswald. A year later WBro Parrett gave a coloured engraving of the three degrees and Brother Read made the knocking blocks.

The embroidery work on the fall of the cushion on the W.M.'s pedestal was done by Miss E.B. Paull, the Colonel's sister.

In September 1924, the Worshipful Master suggested that evening dress be worn at regular Lodge meetings and this became the practice, especially for Installations and Initiations, until the outbreak of the Second World War. Provincial Grand Lodge was held at Ilminster on 24th May, 1928, in the newly completed Grammar School gymnasium.

Apparently, it was a great success and no doubt WBro Mermagen, the Head Master, had a great deal to do with this.

WBro Elsmore gave a new organ for which he was gratefully thanked on 8th September, 1931, when WBro Windmill played it for the first time.

In 1937 WBro Col. Paull completed his 50 years as a mason. The ability and keenness shewn in his Masonic work was an inspiring example to all.

The Second World War was now upon us and in February 1940, it was agreed at an emergency meeting to let the Lodge as an Evacuee School and in September it was temporarily closed. Meetings were held in June, July and August instead of November, December and January. A dispensation was granted on 28th May, 1940, and the Lodge opened again in February 1941, and continued to meet all through the War. Great credit must be given to the Tyler, Brother Paull, and his helpers for their work during that trying period in transforming the Lodge from a classroom to a Lodge Temple for each meeting. Masonic degrees were regularly performed and the work did not suffer during the period of hostilities. Naturally, owing to food rationing, after lodge activities were curtailed but on a few occasions the wives of some of the brethren saw to it that we had a little refreshment.

The Master in charge of the Evacuee School wrote us a very nice letter of thanks for the

use of the Lodge premises and wished us success and prosperity for the future.

After the Lodge meeting of 8th May, 1945, the brethren went upstairs to listen to a broadcast from the King to his people. It began: "To-day we give thanks for a great deliverance" and ended "In the hour of danger we humbly committed our cause into the hand of God and He has been our strength and shield. Let us thank Him for His mercies, and in this hour of victory, commit ourselves and our new task to the guidance of that strong hand."

A Thanksgiving Service was held under the auspices of Nyanza on Sunday, 16th December. The organist was WBro Sharpe, the address was given by WBro Ford, PGChaplain and the benediction by the Lodge Chaplain, Brother Hickman. It was very well attended and the sincerity, heartiness and inspiring nature of the service no doubt remained for a long time a pleasing memory to those who attended. "Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault the pealing anthem swells the note of praise."

We then reverted to our original months for meetings and during the recess of that year the Lodge was remodeled and redecorated.

This gave great pleasure and much satisfaction to all the brethren and thanks were expressed to WBro I. J. Morgan and Brothers A. T. Coombes and F. Harvey for their share in the work.

In March 1948, the Rough and Perfect Ashlars, wrought by Ilminster craftsmen, were presented by WBros Duke, Morgan and Hutchings and in May 1950, the Junior Lodge of Improvement gave the stand for the Tracing Boards.

In October 1951, the Library was started and several brethren gave books.

An Honorary Membership was conferred on WBro Parrett for his long and faithful service to the Lodge. He had served in many offices and will be particularly remembered for his years as D.C. He had been initiated in 1902 and when he died in 1965, had been connected with Freemasonry for 63 years.

A letter dated 9th January 1951, addressed to the Trustees of the Masonic Lodge, Ilminster, read: "Notice is hereby given that the building known as the Masonic Lodge, Court Barton, Ilminster, has been included in the list of buildings of historic interest in that area, compiled by the Minister of Town and Country Planning on 23rd September 1950."

On 11th November 1952, a letter from WBro Hamlow, Manchester, was read as follows: "The enclosed summons has come into my possession in rather unusual circumstances. Some 50 or 60 years ago my firm bought the Midland Hotel in the suburbs. Early this year we decided to redecorate and in the process, it was necessary to take down a large fixed mirror in the dining room. Among other documents we discovered this summons to a Brother Coombes. It had remained behind that mirror for almost 70 years and in view of the nature of the discovery I can do no better than return it home." The summons was dated 12th March 1883, the W.M. was WBro C. P. Chapple and the W.M. Elect, Brother G. James. The summons was framed and now hangs in the anteroom.

On 13th October, 1953, a supper was held in honour of WBro Reynolds, who for 16 years had served the Lodge faithfully as Secretary. He was presented with a garden chair, pipe and tobacco. To the sorrow of the brethren he did not enjoy his gifts for very long as he was called to the Grand Lodge above in the following year. His sons presented the garden chair to the Royal Masonic Hospital.

In March 1954, WBro Barratt made and presented a small table for the W.T.'s and WBro's Lyne and Freeman gave the two cushions for the chairs on either side of the W.M. and a wand for the A.D.C. in October 1956. The electric fire was presented by

Brothers Coombes and Scriven.

The practice of presenting Past Masters' jewels was started in March, 1958, and now each succeeding Worshipful Master receives one at the completion of his year of office.

During his year of office WBro Banks gave a cushion to be used for the presentation of the aprons and Working Tools.

In May 1962, WBro Carpenter received Grand Lodge honours and some of the brethren went to Grand Lodge for the ceremony.

At the December meeting the members of the Lodge of Instruction presented WBro Winters with a Past Master's collar and jewel as a token of their esteem and gratitude.

At the April meeting of the following year the Worshipful Master, on behalf of the members of the Lodge, presented a new Volume of the Sacred Law to WBro Jewel, Worshipful Master of Quest Lodge, Paignton. In accepting the gift, WBro Jewel said it would form a bond of friendship between the two Lodges which would persist for years to come.

WBro Coombes, the current Worshipful Master, carried out the improvement to the west window which delighted all the brethren who, for the first time for many years could see the full beauty of it.

A working party was formed to remodel and redecorate the room upstairs and such was the determination and goodwill of its members that it seemed in no time at all the job was completed and in February 1964, WBro Carpenter declared it officially open.

WBro Carpenter was called to rest on 16th October 1965. He had been our D.C. for some years and the Worshipful Master, WBro Edwards, paid him a stirring tribute at the November meeting. A memorial service was held at Ilminster Church which was full to overflowing. A Memorial Fund was instituted and the proceeds given to The Royal Masonic Hospital. This eventually reached a total of £75.

In September 1966, a letter was received from the executors of the late WBro Parrett stating that in his will the Lodge was to receive £100. It was agreed to add this to the Centenary Fund.

An interesting letter was received in December from the Secretary of Victoria Nyanza Lodge, Buganda, No. 3492. It enclosed a programme of the Nile Centenary Festival 1962 and extracts from it about the discovery of the Nile by Captain Speke were read. WBro Edwards presented a copy of a painting of part of Lake Nyanza to the Lodge and this now hangs in the room upstairs.

It was decided to purchase another organ. This was quickly done and installed and the brethren were able to listen and enjoy its beautiful tone the following month. In January 1967, the Secretary, on behalf of the Centenary Committee, gave estimates for proposed expenditure on repairs and replacements to the furnishings and fabric of the Lodge. These were agreed on and many offers of help were received. It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the payment of the new carpet by WBro's Amor and Coombes and Brothers Scriven and Reyland, the knockers by WBro's Banks, Tracing Board by WBro Britten, Globes by Brothers Gooch, Housego and Millsom and donations towards the organ by WBro's Windmill, Humphry, I. J. Morgan and Sandy and Brothers Stuckey, Reynold, Blandford and Hewitt. Many other brethren have also expressed a desire to help and to them also we offer our thanks.

Four of our present membership are Masonic veterans, having completed 50 years in our Order. WBro Bennett who became a joining member in 1923, and WBro's Windmill, Humphry and I. J. Morgan, who were initiated in Nyanza. To them we offer

our congratulations and hope that they will long be endowed with health to participate in our gatherings.

This, then, Brethren is our history. May we, for a moment, reflect on all those who have served under our banner. They, no doubt, received their own reward. Let us consider ourselves as custodians of a great heritage and endeavor to hand on to our successors an even greater one, enriched by our work and devotion to our duty. May our Lodge go from strength to strength and continue to flourish from generation to generation.

W.R.S.

One hundred years of Masonry in the Lodge was celebrated with due ceremony in the Temple, on 10th January, 1968, full details of which are contained in the Centenary Summons and history of those first hundred years, so well written by WBro W.R Sandy, the Lodge Secretary for that year. The first duty carried out by the Worshipful Master was to make a presentation to this Brother for so ably organising the Centenary Year and Festival.

During 1968 the By-Laws of the Lodge were brought up to date, as a result there was a committee meeting every month of the year. Apart from the Bye Laws the question of a Minster Lodge meeting with Axminster was discussed and considered not to be practical, and it was not until 1977 that the matter came up again, when it was decided that this Lodge and Lodge Virtue and Honor meet on the second Tuesday in June in Axminster. This proved to be a great success, and a further meeting was arranged at our Temple in 1979, and thus has continued, with Beaminster Manor joining making the three Minster Lodges from Devon, Dorset and Somerset meeting regularly every two years.

1969 brought the first recorded visit of the Ladies to the Temple, and it was resolved that this occur only every ten years. With the advent of open Masonry this has been changed to anytime agreed by the Lodge, so becoming a regular Christmas event in December in the Temple.

WBro C. Barratt presented the Lodge with a cabinet for the Working Tools, and later the Deacons Chairs were given by WBro's A.W. Gooch and L.A. Housego.

In 1971 a lecture was given on the discovery of the source of the Nile by Captain John Hanning Speke, a transcript of this history is stored in the archives of the Lodge.

Also the first mention of the possibility of forming a Chapter in Ilminster, it was turned down, but in 1976 the question again arose, and pursued as a possibility as far as the Grand Superintendent for Somerset, RWBro Sir Lionel Brett, who was also an honorary member of this Lodge, he after due consideration refused the application.

However, a second Lodge was formed in Ilminster. The Somerset Tablers Lodge, No.9075, became the daughter Lodge of Nyanza. It was consecrated in April, 1983, WBro S.R. Shepherd, a member of this Lodge, being its first Worshipful Master.

So, back to 1973, and the sad death of the Worshipful Master in office, WBro R. Male, the authority of the Lodge now being vested in the Senior Warden. The next year brought the Air Disaster in Switzerland when many members of the Province and their wives lost their lives. An appeal for relief was launched by the Provincial Grand Master, RWBro Col. H. Owen Hughes, to which the Lodge gave generously. Also our target of £2,000 for the festival was reached, in ten years time it was £10,000, and in 1993 nearly £30,000.

1974 saw the first Annual Charity Supper in December, and the first social wine and cheese evening allowing non-masons to attend. This Lodge applied to allowed to give to local Charities. This was forbidden by Grand Lodge. Just ten years later there was a complete change, Masonry becoming more open, and in 1985, £100 was given to St. Margaret's Hospice, and two wheel chairs to the Vaughan Lee Old Peoples Home. And so it now established that Masonry embraces the world as a whole, and ceases to be inward looking.

1977 saw the introduction of the new logo for our summons, based on the painting on the banner, this was drawn by Brother J. Chasty. The yearly history of the world inserted in the Minute Book each year after Installation was now a well established practice. In this year it

was suggested that this Lodge bought the redundant Congregational Church and convert it into a Temple and a Dining Hall with catering facilities. Over the next twelve months the entire project was examined, but found too expensive and in any case many Brethren were reluctant to leave an old building of character, for a new more modern Temple, so on these counts the idea was abandoned.

In May, 1985, WBro Hector Hutchings celebrated fifty years in Masonry, unfortunately he was unable to attend the Lodge, so a small Presentation Ceremony was held at Ilminster Bowling Club (no stairs).

In 1988 the Lodge and Club Room were redecorated by volunteers, also there was a visit from an Australian Lodge, and on their return they sent us a Director of Ceremonies Wand.

In 1991 the Banner was repaired and encased in glass. **NCP**

In the summer of 1996 a specification and provisional costs were produced for the redecoration and renovations and repairs of the Lodges interior and contents – this included decorations throughout, recovering of the banquet seating, furniture repairs, amended counter and new floor coverings. During the summer breaks 1996-2001, under the direction of Bro R Crabb and W Bro M J Thomas, a number of Brethren met on Tuesday evenings to implement the renovations. Some minor electrical work, roof repairs and floor laying was carried out by others.

Several members anonymously purchased the black and white squared carpet, whilst Lodge funds and donations paid for the remainder of the work. It was estimated that the 'inhouse' work had given a saving of over six thousand pounds on the professional quotations.

W Bro K Nicholas passed away in March 1997 following a long illness. During his health problems he offered the Lodge a new Bible to replace the existing very well used one which had been donated to the Lodge in 1870 by W Bro Knight. In May 1997 the new Bible was presented by Mrs Irene Nicholas in memory of her husband. The Assistant PGM WBro V R Harding delivered the Bible address and the Provincial Chaplain WBro S T R Ewins gave an ovation. The PGM RWBro S H A F Hopkins attended.

From 1960 the Nyanza summons was a narrow single sheet which printers produced each month. In September 1999 these were replaced by a folded A4 one which enabled more information to be included – list of Officers: list of Past Masters and a space for others notices. These were designed and produced by W Bro B J Baker who also computerised the Lodge records and methods of communication. Subsequently the summons were printed by W Bros M Abbott and Ian Pamplin and now by W Bro R Allen.

For 1993 and 2007 Somerset was selected by Grand Lodge as one of the leading contributors to its annual Charity Festival. Nyanza, as well as other Somerset Lodges, each contributed at least a five figure sum on both occasions.

W Bro E Amor left a legacy to the Lodge to be spent as thought appropriate. It was agreed that all the minute books since 1867 should be rebound. The Brethren transferred their contents onto discs and the original books were stored with the Records office, Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton. Copies of discs and memory sticks were distributed to members.

The installation of Bro A Habberfield in March 2007 was a rarity as the participants were all Nyanza members – as the Provincial Junior Warden W Bro M J Thomas gave the address to the Master and the Provincial D C was W Bro C J Powell.

There was a concern as to how the Lodge could save time at our meetings. It was decided to replace the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting by sending them to the majority of the Brethren by email. This commenced in September 2007.

In common with most Lodges, Nyanza has variants in some wording and movement from the 'laid down' procedure of ceremonies.

W Bro C J Powell produced a confirmation book of the Nyanza amendments and on his passing he left a donation for the production and distribution to all members of the Nyanza Ceremonies.

To mark one hundred years of occupying our premises in Court Barton, before the meeting in October 2013, a number of Brethren, including the PGM, formed a procession and walked from our previous premises in North Street to the present Lodge. The Brethren wore their full regalia. This was the first time since WW 2 that a walk of this type had taken place in Somerset.

It was necessary in 2014 to make good a long external crack on the entrance elevation and repairs were required to the stone mullions of the windows in the robing room. The costs were met by a loan from the Provincial Building Fund and the repayments were made by May 2015.

In 2014 we were very grateful to Mrs M Morgan, widow of W Bro D Morgan for donating his exceptional quality electric organ to the Lodge. W Bro David as well as being a member of Nyanza was also the organist at Wellington School Lodge.

During this twenty five year period the Lodge has been honoured by the appointment of twelve active Provincial Officers the most senior of whom was V W Bro J P Layzell who held offices of Provincial DC 1995-8 ; Assistant PGM 1999-2000 ; Deputy PGM 2001-2009. The Lodge was further honoured by the appointment to Grand Lodge Rank of WBro D E Irish PAGDC.

Over the same time thirteen members celebrated fifty years as a Mason. Initially the celebration was 'in house' but more recently Provincial Grand lodge have provided an appropriate certificate and button hole badge which are presented by one of the Rulers during a Lodge ceremony.

In 2012 W Bro D V I Phillimore celebrated sixty years membership and in April 2013 it had been fifty years since W Bro D A Coombes had occupied the chair of Nyanza. The occasion was celebrated by the presentation of a decanter, appropriate contents and a certificate at his home.

In each of the past twenty five years Nyanza has donated at least one thousand pounds each year, divided between different local non-masonic charities, groups and requests. Also two or two hundred and fifty pounds has been given to the Christmas Pensioners lunch held at the Shrubbery with some members acting as waiters.

To commemorate our 150th anniversary a circular blue plaque has been fixed to our building. As 2018 is the Tercentenary of Grand Lodge we now have a tercentenary jewel attached to the Master's collar.

So, on our 150th Anniversary another 25 years of Masonry is recorded and may the Lodge continue to prosper for the benefit of its members and the local community. Repeating W Bro Sandys previous conclusion, we must consider ourselves as custodians of a great heritage and may our Lodge go from strength to strength.

MJT