

“Well – blow me down. Is that all it is? I’ve lived over the road here for over twenty years and I’ve watched you chaps coming and going all the time. And I’ve often wondered what it was all about. This is the first time I’ve ever been into the building.” I well remember these comments from a neighbour in Karori. Back in the eighties – when Freemasonry was just beginning to emerge from those shadows of secrecy - I thought that it would be a good idea to get the lodge more involved in the local community again, so one sunny weekend I organised a street barbecue at the Standen Street Lodge room. We set up barbecues in the back yard and opened up the building (including the lodge rooms) and invited all of our neighbours to drop in. And they came in waves. Young and old, men women and children. It really was a great and successful afternoon. It helped to dispel some of the myths surrounding our organisation and brought us closer together with our neighbours in Standen Street.

Anyway Brethren – have you ever been to a friend’s funeral - and you’ve been sitting listening to the eulogy and thought – “well I never! Is that right? did he really do that? was he really one of those?” One admirable aspect of being a Freemason is that in the lodge room, we consider ourselves to be equals – but it’s really surprising who we sit with. Who we think we know, but really may not. In my time as a member I’ve found that I’ve been friends with a wide representation of interesting persons – from doctors and lawyers to bomber and fighter pilots from opposing armies, wharfies, taxi drivers, policemen, murder victims and bankers and boilermakers and bakers. People from all walks of life, each with his own story to tell. I knew one of the last of the British Colonial Army officers stationed on active duty in the Northwest Frontier, and I knew the nephew of the inventor of the jet engine. I knew a Messerschmitt pilot from South America, and I knew a passenger on TE901 which flew into Mount Erebus. A lot of this I only found out about after it was too late. What do you know about Lodge Homewood’s roots? Wouldn’t it be a shame to get into later life without really knowing where we came from.

W Master – thank you for inviting me to contribute these few memories, words and personal comments about our origins as Lodge Homewood. Comparing what we are and have now with what we used to be and have.

Lodge Homewood has been in existence for over 35 years now and I think our Master is correct in having us take a few minutes for some reflection and recollection. To reflect on what we know of ourselves- who we are, where we have come from and maybe where we are heading.

Brethren – I am sure that you have all observed that whenever our lodge is opened, our charter is open and on display on the front of the Master’s pedestal. And you all know why it is there. I don’t know, however, if you have ever bothered to read it, but I do invite you - one day when you are not too busy - to actually take some time and read it. On it, you will see that the nominated place of meetings is stated as Karori – or such time and place as authorised by the Master in accordance with the Book of Constitution.

Early in the twentieth century, Freemasonry in New Zealand was in its infancy, but it was flourishing. Now remember, at that time, Karori was not conveniently serviced by sealed roads or public transport as it is today. It was quite a trek – a day’s journey – to get from the city and back. It really was on the outskirts of the settlement of Wellington. It was a remote, isolated fertile valley used for farming. Most of the population did not travel, but stayed in the Karori area, so it was logical to have a local lodge. In 1923 a group of enthusiastic Masons established Lodge Karori, No 247. A plot of land was purchased in Standen Street (Number 20) and a sole-purpose two-storey brick building was designed and erected. On the ground floor was the refectory, a small kitchen, two toilets and a fire-safe and a storage room. Upstairs was the lodge room, a committee room, and a couple of small storage rooms. Lodge Karori met there regularly on the last

Thursday of every month (except December of course) and grew and flourished. Membership continued to expand – especially with the return of servicemen from duties overseas in both the first and the second world wars. Those servicemen had become accustomed to the companionship of trusted, like-minded men and Freemasonry was an ideal vehicle for this. However, as is with any successful, growing organisation, a time comes when some members may feel a wish to break away and extend themselves. There could be any number of reasons, such as impatience at having to wait so long on the ladder before achieving the Master’s chair, or whatever. In 1952, a group of members decided to do this very thing - to form a new lodge – Lodge Endeavour No 368, with W Bro Ken Jeffs in the chair. Lodge Endeavour was sponsored by Lodge Karori, and as such was considered a “daughter” lodge.

Lodge Endeavour met in the same building, as a tenant of Lodge Karori, on the second Wednesday of each month (except December and January). Both Lodges flourished and were actively involved in the Karori community. They competed for membership from the same available source. Relations were very warm between the two lodges, and regular visits and activities were undertaken.

Karori brethren enjoyed a fraternal relationship and regular visits with Lodge Whanganui, while Endeavour brethren enjoyed a similar relationship with Lodge Te Puni. Sadly the Whanganui visits have lapsed over the years, but we still look forward to the annual visits to and from Te Puni.

Society has slowly changed over the years, and interest in Freemasonry, and the corresponding membership, began to wane. This was more noticeable in Lodge Karori, which had an older age-grouping than Endeavour. Endeavour continued in a very strong position, while Karori was struggling. In the early 1980’s, initial discussions were held between the two lodges, to address this worry – with a possibility of amalgamation. Steering

committees were set up to iron out any possible points of contention – such as the choice of the name, by-laws, ceremonial differences, meeting dates, finances, office holders etc.

Eventually, it was decided that instead of one lodge closing and joining the other, both lodges would hand in their charters, and the brethren would be given the option of becoming charter members of a brand-new lodge. The name Homewood was chosen, as it had strong connections with Karori, being the name of the residence of the British High Commissioner in Homewood Avenue. (There is no connection at all with the settlement in the Wairarapa.) One of the steering committees ironed out the ceremonial differences and created a book of customs – to be followed by everybody. This obviated the possibility of “we’ve always done it this way” type of arguments or ill feelings. This book of customs is still in use today after 35 years – with some amendments – and has proved to be an example copied throughout the greater Wellington region.

There were some strong personalities in both lodges and there was some discrete head-butting, and compromises had to be made. Karori met on the last Thursday, Endeavour on the second Wednesday. Karori’s installation was in August, Endeavour’s was in March. Karori owned the building and Endeavour was a tenant.

Arrangements progressed, and both lodges voted to proceed, with the ceremony of constitution and dedication and W Bro Hall's installation to be held on 6th August 1983. This meant that the 1982/1983 officers of Lodge Endeavour had to serve an extra six months in office. And any Junior Warden will know what an extra 6 months as the ostensible steward means. The actual ceremony was held in the Lodge rooms at Tinakori Road, in order to accommodate the very large numbers attending.

Membership of lodge Homewood was not restricted to the two “contributing” lodges. When it became known that a new lodge

was being formed, numerous brethren from throughout the greater Wellington region elected to join as charter members too. The initial role was in the vicinity of one hundred and twenty members – we were the largest, most pro-active and most successful lodge in the area.

Now, our number is 447. At the time, it was Grand Lodge practice to allocate numbers to new lodges on a “next in line” policy. If one checks the register, one will find that lodge 446, and maybe 445 and 444 were consecrated after Lodge Homewood. I was told by the then secretary of Lodge Karori that as 447 was available, and as it was quite similar to Karori’s number, he requested and was given that number for our Lodge.

The Lodge crest – used on the PMs’ jewels, Charter jewel, letterhead, banner etc. was designed by Worshipful Brother Lindsay Linney – a charter member joining from Lodge Hataitai if my memory serves me. It depicts a column and pavement by a stream of water and an ear of corn. Not only is this significant in masonic terms, but it is significant to Karori – as an early agricultural area of Wellington near the Karori Stream. W Bro Linney’s original design included the inscription “ahdut coah hi” (strength through unity) but for undetermined reasons the inscription on the jewels reads “coah ahdut” and on the printed version “coah ahdut hi”.

As I mentioned a moment or so ago, both charters were handed in to Grand Lodge. It is my understanding that the Endeavour Charter was put into dormancy, rather than cancelled, so technically, it could be re-activated at any time. Should a group of masons wish to re-form the lodge, the charter is waiting. I have seen that there is a Lodge in Christchurch called the Lodge of Endeavour. Not the same lodge.

I also mentioned the building in Standen Street. For the greater part of its existence, it was used solely for Masonic meetings. It was only in later years that the lower refectory area was made

available to outside organisations such as a polling booth and a kindergarten. In my opinion, it presented rather unattractive and forbidding exterior in keeping with the portrayed mystique of Freemasonry in those days. The upper level only had a few frosted windows at the road-end and just plain brick walls. It was accessed by means of a steep, narrow footpath leading from the road frontage, and for many years, the section behind the building was virtually abandoned. It was very overgrown and unkempt - it was an ideal location for the cultivation of an illicit crop. And also, according to graffiti sometimes chalked on the walls, an ideal place for local youths to experiment with the delights of shall we say "youth". I think some of the local lads and lasses were somewhat disappointed when the section was finally cleared and tidied. It was owned by Lodge Karori and there were actually three lodges meeting there – Karori, Endeavour and Zetland. Lodge Homewood, upon its creation, assumed ownership of the building. Lodge Zetland was not involved in the “Homewood” discussions and continues today as an independent lodge. Since the building was sold, Homewood has moved its meeting place to various venues – Kilbirnie, Ohiro Road and latterly the Wellesley Hotel.

As I have grown older, I have listened with some considerable interest to the various comments and questions from members. Some have been made in obvious jest, while others appeared to be of a more serious nature. As I listened, it really made me realise how times, and with it, our expectations have changed over the years.

When I joined Freemasonry in 1976, we (and I mean we ordinary folk) generally looked at life differently from today. Some of us knew first-hand the real meaning of austerity. And of course, our parents even more so. They strived to make life better for our generation, and we in turn strived to improve the lot of our children's generation and so it goes on. I well recall having to boil a kettle for hot water rather than turning on a hot tap. I well recall being fed soup made from potato peelings, with mashed

potato and luncheon sausage as the main course. And a bath! That was a luxury involving chopping the wood, boiling the copper and bucketing the hot water into a bath.

Anyway, when we went to our lodge meeting, there was no outside assistance. We all joined in and worked together to set up the refectory and the lodge room. The refectory as some of you may recall, was a large empty cold hall, with no carpet, no insulation and very meagre heating. The tables were large, heavy formica-covered tops on collapsible pipe legs. They all had to be unstacked from beside the wall, set up, arranged and set. Tablecloths were only used on special occasions such as installation meetings. The seating consisted of long wooden benches with no backs and no padding -it was true refectory seating. And afterwards everything had to be cleared, folded and stacked. Our supper - and it was only a light supper - was b.y.o. - where we all brought a plate. The stewards organised the food onto plates and shared it around the tables. On a rare really cold occasion someone may organise a hot soup. We did have alcohol, and coffee and tea. Our coffee was known as Endeavour coffee, and it had quite a reputation around the whole area because it always had a good slug or two or five of rum in it. Our Karori brethren had a slightly different take on refectory. There was no alcohol, and one of the members always brought along and boiled those little red weenie cheerio sausages. They had those with tomato sauce and buttered bread every evening, supplemented with sandwiches made in the kitchen by the stewards. And after the loyal toast, people were given permission to smoke. I vividly recall going home reeking of cigarette and or cigar smoke. It got into your clothes, it got into your hair, it got anywhere. At the conclusion of the evening's proceedings, we all (and again, I say we all, irrespective of office) pitched in and tidied up. We washed the dishes and put them away, we swept the floor, put out the rubbish, and left the place clean and tidy for the next user.

As I've mentioned before, times, expectations and - dare I say it - the perceived entitlements of newer generations will continue to change. Future pages of our history are yet to be written.

Thank you, Worshipful Master, for the opportunity to share these few memories, and thank you Brethren for your attention. Hopefully I have filled in a few blanks about our history, and now you don't feel too much like that mourner at a colleague's funeral.

One very important fact to note and be proud of, is the continued success of Lodge Homewood. It was formed by brethren who were keen and willing to work together in unity and harmony in order to keep Freemasonry alive and well. They knew that compromise and sacrifice had to be made by each lodge in order to progress, and they did so willingly – respecting each other's history while at the same time looking to the future. You may also have noted that Homewood has now been in existence for more years than the entire lifespan of Lodge Endeavour, and over half the total lifespan of Lodge Karori. And with judicious and prudent stewardship we will continue to succeed and flourish.

Apart from W Bro Jeffs. W Bro Hall and W Bro Linney, I have deliberately not included any names. I have only touched on the subject of the origins of Homewood and not the more recent history but if any brother has any questions or comments. I'm very happy to respond.