

A Historical Sketch of Ashlar Lodge
A.F. & A.M. No. 610, London (Byron)
(as written in Ashlar Lodges 50th Anniversary Booklet)

On March 22, 1922, ten Masons living in the vicinity of Byron village met to discuss the possibility of organizing a Masonic lodge. The prime organizer was Bro. Major H. P. Snelgrove an administrative officer at the nearby Queen Alexandra Sanatorium.

As a result of this meeting, 21 Masons met in the Town Hall on April 19th where it was reported that 33 had signed the petition to. Grand Lodge and that unanimous support had been received from St. Paul's Lodge No. 107 in Lambeth, the nearest rural lodge in the district. The top floor of the Town Hall was rented from, the village trustees for the sum of \$4 per meeting.

Many of the original founders were either patients or staff at the Sanatorium.

Things moved swiftly and on June 26, 1922, Ashlar Lodge U.D. was instituted by Grand Lodge under the direction of R.W. Bro. Wm. C. Moore, the District Deputy Grand Master of the London District. On that very night five applications for affiliation and twenty for initiation were received. A press write-up of the occasion states that "after the ceremonies the charter members of the lodge entertained the visiting brethren to a chicken dinner at the Bungalow Tea House, (later the Cobblestone Inn and now the Hermitage Club). A standing vote of thanks was extended by all the brethren present to Br. H. P. Snelgrove for his work and enthusiasm in organizing Ashlar Lodge".

On September 10, 1923, Ashlar Lodge No. 610, was dedicated by the Grand Master, Most Worshipful Bro. W. J. Drope after which ceremony he was presented with a silver tray to commemorate the occasion.

THE EARLY YEARS

The original members of Ashlar were a very interested and enthusiastic group.

After being instituted in June they proceeded to work with a vengeance. During the first six months no less than 48 men had applied for initiation into the lodge. Meetings, (some quite lengthy) were held during July and August, a practice that continued until 1925. The first class of candidate contained at least four members who would make substantial contributions to the lodge's future. They were Bros. Eli Davis, Fred Fuller, D. R. Sanderson and Trevor Meriam.

Mention should also be made of two charter members who are still with us in 1972.

Bro. N. T. Sanderson was the first junior steward of Ashlar but was not on the list of charter members as he had not received his third degree in his mother lodge, St. John's No. 20, London. He was Worshipful Master in 1928 and also served the lodge faithfully as secretary from 1932 to 1942 inclusive.

Bro. Deacon Chapman was a member of Kilwinning Lodge No. 64 and received his 50 year jewel in Ashlar lodge in September, 1971. He was employed as an engineer at the Sanatorium and served as Worshipful Master in 1943.

Other lodges contributed to Ashlar's formative years. The original bylaws were those of Kilwinning No. 64 in London and the seal was copied from Ashlar No. 247 in Toronto. The first lodge to pay a fraternal visit was Doric No. 289 in Lobo, another close neighbour. The date of this visit was April 28, 1924.

The lodge grew restless in its rented quarters and decided it would like to own the building. Several overtures and offers were made to the village trustees and finally in 1925 the Byron Town Hall was purchased for \$1,000. This was a frame, two storey building with a back outside covered stairway leading to the lodge rooms. The building had been originally built by the Canadian Order of Chosen Friends, a fraternal group. It was heated by wood stoves and many references in the early

minutes are made to the smoke, the purchase of wood, and the placement of the stoves for the best heat and vision.

Byron, at this time, was a police village of some 200 residents with two churches, Anglican and Methodist. Some of the residents worked in the nearby City of London and many were employed at the Sanatorium. A very prosperous farming area surrounded the village. A greenhouse and market gardening area was located across the river on Riverside Drive and the Sanderson's, Davis' and Fullers' were engaged in that occupation for many years.

In 1924 Ashlar contributed to the benevolent fund at the Sanatorium, a practice that is still being carried out in 1972. In that year, also, Ashlar sent a donation to a neighbouring lodge, Delaware Valley No. 358, whose temple had been destroyed by fire.

THE DEPRESSION YEARS

By 1929, although there were still many members from the Sanatorium, their influence seemed to lessen and the lodge became much more of a community organization. The original birth pains were over and it was now a matter of settling down and working at being a good member of the London Masonic district. The London district, at that time, was comprised of 24 lodges, 11 in the City of London and 13 in the surrounding area but all located in Middlesex County. Ashlar was the youngest member of the family following Temple No. 597 which had its first meeting in February 1922. It was to remain the youngest member of the London district for some 33 years until the formation of Centennial No. 684 in London in 1955.

Ashlar seemed to weather the depression years very well both financially and in interest. Letters were received from other lodges asking for financial assistance and a loan of \$10 at 3% interest was sent to Melville Lodge, Saskatchewan to help them over hard times. Although this seems insignificant in 1972, this item appeared as an asset on the lodge's books right up to the fifties when it was written off.

The perennial problem, non payment of dues, was ever present but probably no worse than in present times. For instance, in 1933, it was reported that 8 members were in arrears for that year but no dues prior to 1933 were still outstanding. In 1934 four brethren were suspended for non payment.

In 1931 it was reported that the membership dropped to 97 from 101 due to one death and three resignations but applications for initiation still seemed to come in. The year 1936, however, proved to be the exception, when, for the first time, not one application was received.

Ashlar made such progress in the early thirties that the Brethren felt that it was time to have some gold braid in the lodge. As a result, F. C. Fuller was elected District Deputy Grand Master of the London district in July, 1935 and Wor. Bro. Eli Davis was appointed a Grand Steward in 1936.

During the thirties and even into the forties Ashlar showed its community spirit by giving consideration for the free use of the downstairs hall to help worthwhile community projects. Just a few are mentioned here. The Byron Skating Club was given the hall free to hold a dance "to pay off a deficit as a rink is a benefit to the whole community." In 1936 and again in 1937 the lodge granted the United Church free use of the hall as an assembly base for fruit and vegetables to be sent to distressed areas in Western Canada. Ashlar contributed 50 lbs. of honey.

In 1941 the Officers Club of the Royal Canadian Air Force Depot in St. Thomas was given free use of the hall and later on the residents of Byron were given the hall to hold a meeting to discuss the possibility of obtaining a public library.

The lodge hall, being in the centre of the village, was always used for elections of all levels of government.

During the depression years, although money was scarce, Ashlars social life did not suffer. Many card parties were held in the winter months for the enjoyment of the members and their wives.

In 1938 and for 2 years after, a very successful picnic was held at Bro. Lorne Brock's "Deer Park Lodge" at Bayfield on Lake Huron.

THE WAR YEARS

In December, 1939, Ashlar showed its patriotic spirit by immediately remitting the dues for the duration of the war of any of the brethren joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Along with other Canadian lodges, we were asked by Grand Lodge to look after the children of English Masons during the Battle of Britain. Some of the members replied in the affirmative but no mention is made of any children actually coming.

Substantial donations were made to the Grand Lodge British War Relief Fund and boxes were sent to three Ashlar members serving Overseas at Christmas time in 1942.

During the war Masonic activities slowed somewhat and, like all people in the world, the members were very thankful when the war was over. On May 16th, 1945, a thanksgiving service for victory in Europe was held at Ashlar and was well attended by the members.

THE POST WAR YEARS

Following World War II Masonic membership soared. In the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario membership rose considerably and Ashlar was no exception although the increase was gradual reaching a peak of 195 in 1963. (1972 membership is 168).

In 1947 a very close association that was to continue for some ten years began with a neighbouring lodge. Henderson No. 388 at Ilderton lost its temple in a disastrous fire, and Ashlar immediately offered the use of the Byron Hall. Joint installations were held between the lodges with each lodge alternating until the practice was forbidden by Grand Lodge in 1956. When Ashlar was building its new temple Henderson kindly offered the use of its rooms. Ashlar gave Henderson a secretary's desk and chair for its new quarters and Henderson gave Ashlar a cash donation. The fraternal friendship between the two lodges was most enjoyable.

Many other lodges visited during the early 1950's to confer degrees. Some of these were St. David's No. 352, St. Thomas, Malahide No. 140, Aylmer, St. Marks No. 94, Port Stanley, Acacia No. 580, London and Nilestown No. 345. Ashlar returned many of these along with Kilwinning No. 64, London and Middlesex No. 379, at Bryanston.

NEW BUILDING

Ashlar continued to show its community spirit by giving the use of the hall to such groups as the Boy Scouts and the Byron Volunteer Fire Dept. for socials. It was still also used for many other groups and a full schedule of rental rates was adopted in December 1951

The village of Byron, however, was growing rapidly in the post war era and new subdivisions of many homes were appearing. The old building had changed very little in appearance over the years and was a little inappropriate for a modern suburban community. The lodge rooms had received a new tile floor and a refurbishing in the middle 40's due to the effort of some of the officers but the chemical toilets were very much outdated.

Some of the officers prepared a plan in 1952 which would install modern washrooms, an expanded ante room and a new entrance to the lodge room. After much discussion and investigation, a contract for \$4600 was let in June, 1954 with work to be done during the summer months. Fortunately for the lodge, the work was never done due to the inability of the contractor to commence the renovation. The plan was therefore dropped and the officers then investigated the possibility of replacing the building.

A proposal was placed before the lodge in April 1955 by the Immediate Past Master, the Worshipful Master and the Senior Warden whereby a private company in which certain Ashlar members would be interested would lease the lodge property for a period of 50 years and erect a new building which would incorporate a lodge room and ante room at no cost to the lodge. At the end of the period the building will revert to Ashlar. The total cost of the building was approximately \$40,000 and the company installed bowling alleys in its portion.

Ashlar members who were original stockholders of the company were; Bros. Rolfe Weekes, Owen Foster, Ross Fuller, Harry Unwin, N. T. Sanderson, D. R. Sanderson, Earl Woodcock, Roy Weir, Harry Phillips, Stan Davies and Elmer Quinney.

Having sold the back of the lodge property to Quinney Lumber Co. for \$3,000, the lodge was in a reasonably good position to spend the \$6,200 required to renovate the old furniture and buy new furnishings.

Things moved swiftly and after storing the furniture at member's homes, the old building was demolished in July, 1955. Construction proceeded at a rapid pace and the first meeting in the new lodge room was held in January, 1956.

Many Ashlar members helped with the actual work in preparation for the opening and it was therefore a very proud membership that attended the dedication of the new lodge rooms on June 26th, 1956 by Grand Lodge, represented by V. Wor. Bro. E. A. Miller, Acting Grand Master, Rt. Wor. Bro. J. A. Irvine, Deputy Grand Master and Rt. Wor. Bro. George Hotham, District Deputy Grand Master of the London District.

Others groups besides members made donations, namely, London Consistory Club, Kilwinning No. 64, Union No. 380, and Henderson No. 388. A new Volume of the Sacred Law was presented by the 1952 Worshipful Masters.

The new building created new interest and many more candidates joined Ashlar. The size of the membership also created new problems. In 1955 a notice of motion was made to increase initiation fees from \$50 to \$75. This was defeated but was finally adopted in 1957. Dues were increased from \$5 to \$8 per year. (1972 initiation fee — \$100, dues — \$15).

Because of the size of the membership and the number of emergent meetings, a practice that was started in the thirties had to be abandoned. This was the practice of three members bringing the lunch for each meeting.

During this period, meetings were well attended and many visitors came to see our new quarters.

THE SIXTIES

In September, 1960, the members of Ashlar No. 610 were present at the dedication of the fourth Ontario Ashlar Lodge — Ashlar No. 701 at Tillsonburg. The others are Ashlar No. 247, Toronto, and Ashlar No. 564, Ottawa. Several members of Ashlar 701 visited us in January, 1961 and complimented us on our new lodge rooms.

Ashlar, following the practice of taking turns in the London District, was really not eligible for a District Deputy Grand Master for 26 years. Thus many capable Masons were denied the privilege of serving in this exalted capacity. As early as 1957 it was decided by the past masters to propose Wor. Bro. Ross Fuller as a District Deputy candidate, but it was not until July, 1961, exactly 26 years after his uncle had held the post, that Ashlar was so honored. Fifteen past masters attended Grand Lodge that year for the election. Wor. Bro. Rolfe Weekes was chosen District Secretary and in July, 1962, Wor. Bro. Weekes was appointed a Grand Sword Bearer by Most Wor. Bro. J. A. Irvine.

In the late fifties, there was a feeling that the London District was too large and that it was too much work for one person to adequately serve 24 lodges as District Deputy Grand Master. Several

overtures were made to Grand Lodge to divide the district but it was not until 1965 that a Grand Lodge committee, headed by Rt. Wor. Bro. J. J. Talman, a member of the Board of General Purposes and also a member of The Tuscan 195, London, recommended that the London District be divided. As a result, Ashlar became part of the London West District in July, 1966.

Another member of Ashlar Lodge who has received Grand Lodge honors is Rt. Wor. Bro. Hector McKillop. Bro. McKillop moved from Rodney, his birthplace, to Byron where he lived while working for the Toronto Dominion Bank in London. He was initiated into Ashlar Lodge in 1931 and attained the office of Inner Guard when he was moved by the bank to Peterborough in 1938. He returned to London and Ashlar in 1941 where he became an officer once more but, unfortunately for the lodge, he was moved again to Oakville in 1946. He affiliated with Oakville Lodge No. 400 and became its Worshipful Master in 1952. In 1956 he affiliated with Claude M. Kent Lodge No. 681 in Oakville and in 1963 he was elected District Deputy Grand Master of Hamilton "A" district. All this time he retained his membership in Ashlar.

In July 1963, Ashlar was again honored when Rt. Wor. Bro. Ross Fuller was appointed for a two year term to the Board of General Purposes of Grand Lodge by Most Wor. Bro. Irvine, Grand Master. Bro. Fuller was elected for two more terms in 1965 and 1967 retiring from this position in 1969. In July 1969, Bro. Fuller was appointed the representative of the Grand Lodge of Colorado near our Grand Lodge.

ANNEXATION

All during the 1950's the village of Byron grew to the point that, by 1960, it now had four or five thousand residents. Although Byron had expanded rapidly, the City of London had grown more rapidly until it practically touched Byron on the east and across the river to the north. On January 1, 1961, Byron became part of the City of London.

Shortly after this, a few Masonic brethren living in the north western part of the City of London decided to form a new lodge. Ashlar was approached for its views and the use of its temple. As a result, Oakridge Lodge No. 708 was instituted on June 7, 1962, by Rt. Wor. Bro. Chas. C. Smith in the Ashlar temple and it is still meeting there in 1972. Some Ashlar members are also members of Oakridge. Two are past masters, Wor. Bro. R. J. Sanderson and Wor. Bro. Fil Cappa.

In July 1967, Wor. Bro. Robert R. Preston, secretary of Ashlar, was appointed a Grand Steward, and the lodge presented him with his regalia at the September meeting.

The latter part of the sixties and early seventies have been plagued by problems similar to other Masonic bodies and, in fact, many other organizations, such as churches and service clubs. Lack of attendance and declining interest, except by a few faithful members, is making it very difficult to keep the lodge up to past standards. Ashlar has been blessed with a very devoted and faithful group of officers who have done their best to keep interest and attendance up. In June, 1970, Ashlar subscribed to the English Lodge, Quator Coronati, to keep abreast of Masonic research and knowledge.

Degree teams from the daily occupations of candidates and groups of past masters and wardens have also helped.

Over the years Ashlar has contributed well to the Blood Donor clinics that have been held.

In preparation for the 50th anniversary, plans were commenced in April, 1971 when an Anniversary committee was appointed. Prior to this time, our energetic secretary, Wor. Bro. Harry Unwin, had been thinking ahead. When Col. Edwin Aldrin, a Mason, set foot on the moon, Bro. Unwin wrote him and invited him to be the guest speaker at our anniversary banquet. Since this was 1969 it was suggested that an invitation be extended in 1972. This was done, but, unfortunately, Col. Aldrin wrote declining the invitation and his letter containing his signature, the first Mason to land on the moon, has been framed and presented to the lodge by Wor. Bro. Unwin.

We were then fortunate to obtain as our speaker, Rt. Wor. Wilfred E. Adams, the Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, of the Sate of Michigan.

As an anniversary project the brethren decided to enlarge and renovate the ante room. Funds were solicited from the membership and the work was completed in May, 1972, under the capable direction of our Junior Warden, Bro. Stanley Norris. At the May meeting we had as our guest speaker, Bro. Dr. H. H. Gilbert, a member of Ashlar Lodge, who had served some years as a Medical missionary in China. He also lived in British Guiana during World War II and now resides in Burlington, Ont. At this meeting, also, a new Volume of the Sacred Law was presented to the lodge by our Inner Guard, Bro. Robert Brewster. After the old volume was retired in a fitting ceremony.

Ashlar was again honored in July, 1972, by Grand Lodge and the London West District by having Wor. Bro. R. D. Palser elected District Deputy Grand Master in our anniversary year. Wor. Bro. Leroy Noble was chosen as District secretary.

Thus is completed the first fifty years of Ashlar's distinguished and varied history. We commend it to the membership and trust that the accomplishments of the past will strengthen and support us in the challenging years that lie ahead.

Anniversary Committee

Chairman - Ex Officio	Wor Bro. Philip Brown
General Chairman and Historian	Rt Wor Bro. Ross C. Fuller
Special Events	Rt Wor. Bro. R. D. Palser
Secretary and Ticket Sales	Bro. Wm. Macrow
Treasurer.....	Bro. Robert Brewster
Project.....	Bro. Stan Norris
Project Assistants.....	Bro. John Austin
	Bro. Robert Soper
Fund Raising and Finance	Wor Bro. Leroy Noble
Dinner and Table arrangements.....	Wor Bro. Harry Unwin
Displays.....	Wor Bro. Fred Edwards
Attendance	Bro. Bryan Symns
Photography.....	Bro. Ron Rupert
	Bro. Ron Legere