



THE ORDER IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Order in South Africa owes its origins to a District Grand Secretary of the Transvaal, and his friend, the Provincial Prior of Essex. What they had in common, of course, was the Order of Holy Royal Arch Templar Priests. The District Grand Secretary was W Bro George Walter Hookham, a PGI in Britannic Tabernacle No.13, and the Provincial Prior was Rt Ill Kt. Pt. Arthur Murphy, who was also the first Grand Superintendent of the Order.

George Hookham was appointed District Grand Secretary in 1965, and there is no doubt that the possibility of extending the Order to South Africa had been in his mind for some time. He had met up again with Arthur Murphy in 1966 when the former had consecrated a Red Cross of Constantine Conclave in Johannesburg. At that time he had asked Murphy to arrange for the admission in to the Order of one Julien Missak, who duly became a member of Kingsway Tabernacle No.17.

Hookham wrote to the Grand Recorder in July 1967 thanking the Grand High Priest for his intention to promote him to PG IVP. In the same letter he reminded the Grand Recorder that he had asked for details of KTP members in South Africa, as he wished to explore the possibility of erecting a Tabernacle in South Africa. He eventually learnt that, besides Missak, there were two other Knight Priests, A.V. Green and A.G. Oliver, both of Surrey Tabernacle No.27, and both living in the Johannesburg area. He was also pleased to note that the Grand High Priest would support a proposal for a Tabernacle in South Africa if there were sufficient members available.

In December 1967, George Hookham, no doubt seeking to speed matters, and considering four to be a sufficient number, pressed Arthur Murphy to ask for a petition, telling him that the first candidate would be the Provincial Prior for Transvaal.

Things moved very quickly thereafter. The petition went out at the end of December, was duly returned with the names of the four local petitioners, to which were added nine members of Royal Kent TI and one from Brinkburn Tabernacle. The Kosmos Tabernacle No.38 was accordingly consecrated in Newcastle-upon-Tyne by the M Ill Kt. Pt. George W Bourn on St Valentine's Day, 14th February 1968. George Hookham was appointed the first High Priest, with Julien Minas Missak and Albert George Oliver his VII and VI Pillars. Thirty-three attended. It is interesting to note that the Deputy Grand High Priest, M Em. Kt. Pt. PT Duxbury, as acted as Consecrating VIIth Pillar.

It was unfortunate that the date selected clashed with Supreme Grand Chapter, as Arthur Murphy found himself unable to attend the consecration, much to his chagrin. Hookham had promised the Grand Scribe "E", Richard Stubbs, that he would also be attending, and felt rather embarrassed at having to break his word. George based himself in London at a bed and breakfast hotel near Victoria Station, and recorded that an excellent breakfast was served.

In an interesting sidelight, he mentioned in a letter that he had undergone a major and a minor operation in December, and had been advised to take care. For this reason, he said, he would not undertake any journeys by night, as he believed he did too much in recent months on narrow gauge railways visiting lodges in the far and isolated areas. In the event he caught the 10:00 am train from King's Cross and arrived in Newcastle an hour before the meeting. He obviously travelled light as he reported he had no KTP regalia with him!

The first Kosmos meeting was held on 4th April 1968 at which, as promised, the Provincial Prior was admitted. In its early days, Kosmos tacitly restricted membership to leaders of the masonic community in Johannesburg. In 1972, Hookham listed seven present and past rulers and three high office-holders.

The Tabernacle progressed quietly and steadily over the next 10 years, but interest and pressure was growing for the erection of further Tabernacles. Writing to the Grand Recorder on 27th March 1978

George Hookham reported he had twenty candidates from the Durban area, including the Irish Royal Arch Grand Superintendent, and that there was a desire to have a day time Tabernacle in Johannesburg.

A month later, Hookham reported that Kosmos Tabernacle had agreed to sponsor these two Tabernacles, and another in Port Elizabeth or Grahamstown. In fact Grahamstown was chosen, but this turned out to be a mistake, to which I'll return later.

It was during this time that the Grand High Priest, now M III Harry Beckett Raylor, had decided to make an official visit to South Africa. Arthur Murphy, who had just returned from a visit, reported to Harry Raylor that there would probably be five Tabernacles for him to consecrate.

Certainly matters were racing ahead. Kosmos arranged two Emergency meetings, in Pietermaritzburg in October to admit 14 candidates, and at Grahamstown in November to admit 21. The reaction of the Grand High Priest to these mass entries is not known; he had written to Hookham in August spelling out in detail the method of admitting two candidates, and no more, at a meeting. Drawing his attention to these meetings Murphy suggested an enlightened view be taken in view of the fact that the admission teams were spending about £60 each on air fares.

Arthur Murphy seems to have been as active a mason as his friend George. During eleven days in Johannesburg he attended nine meetings, four lunches, two special dinners and two cocktail parties. He also flew to Durban and back for District Grand Master's installation, where he acted as GDC!

By the time Harry Raylor set out on his whirlwind tour of South Africa on 12th January, 1979, George Hookham had lined up five Tabernacles for him to consecrate. Actually the tour started in leisurely fashion for these were still the happy days of liner travel by sea. Harry Raylor's D of C was Ill Kt. Pt. Hubert Taylor; they were accompanied by their wives. On arrival at Cape Town on or about the 27th January, they took the Blue Train to Johannesburg, arriving next day.

Flying to Durban, Harry Raylor consecrated Civic No.62 and Erin No.63, on 31st January 1979. Civic had thirteen petitioners, with V Ill Kt. Pt. AG Oliver, one of the original four South African Knight Priests, as High Priest. Erin had 12 petitioners, with none other than Rt Ill Koen Roorda as High Priest.

A couple of years later, in May 1981, Philip Colenso, as High Priest, wrote to Grand College to say that the Warrant had not been available at their meeting, so they used Erin's. However, on checking later they found that the meeting should not have been held. It appears that there had been a burglary at the Masonic Hall, and it was conjectured that the framed Warrant had been used as a tray to carry out certain crockery. He asked the Grand Recorder, John Neesham, to condone the meeting and arrange for a new Warrant. It is assumed this was done, but unfortunately Grand College records are silent on the outcome.

Sadly, Erin's life was to be a short one. Although supported mainly by two Irish Knight Templar Preceptories life had never been easy, and when one of these Preceptories closed, the falling membership and consequent financial difficulties caused Erin to hand in its Warrant in 1995. Civic had been in slightly better case over the years, and accepted with gratitude the influx of dispossessed members. At the Grand High Priest's suggestion, the surviving Tabernacle was re-named 'Civic Erin.'

The following day, 1st February, Natalia No.64 was consecrated with 13 petitioners at Camperdown, with George Hookham being installed as the first High Priest. Harry Raylor felt sure that the consecration of three Tabernacles in two days must have been a record for the Order!

The party then flew back to Johannesburg and after a (probably welcome) lull of 4 days, Omega No.65 was duly launched in Johannesburg, Another of South Africa's grand originals, Ill Kt. Pt. Albert Victor Green, took the chair. There were ten petitioners. Three days later, St Francis No.66 was

consecrated at Grahamstown, with 20 petitioners. It was probably a coincidence that a Francis was installed as High Priest - V III Kt. Pt. Francis Owen Eaton.

As mentioned earlier, this was soon found to have been a mistake, but one capable of rectification. In February 1981, Eaton wrote to the Grand Recorder as follows:

“Owing to the extreme lack of interest of brethren in Grahamstown plus - and it is very big plus - rapidly rising inflation and consequent increased cost of living not to mention that the price of petrol goes up and up, all the brethren resident in East London and Port Elizabeth are unanimous on the following course:”

“That the St Francis Tabernacle be moved to Port Elizabeth and that a new Tabernacle be formed in East London.”

The sense of this move may be well appreciated when Eaton goes on to say that for the Port Elizabeth members Grahamstown represents a round trip of 160 miles, and for East London members 240 miles.

The motion was received sympathetically by Grand College, and eventually, the petition for Trinity No.87 was approved. The Grand High Priest had very much hoped to travel to South Africa to carry out the consecration. However, as his wife had only recently had a serious operation, medical advice caused him to cancel the trip. George Hookham therefore officiated at the consecration on 6th February 1982. There were 11 petitioners, and V Em Kt. Pt. Neville Randall was installed High Priest. Neville Randall has rendered sterling service to the Order in South Africa; he served six years as a Grand Superintendent and has for the past ten years been the Recorder of Trinity Tabernacle.

The previous day, the tireless George Hookham had travelled to Port Elizabeth, where St Francis Tabernacle was now settling in from its move from Grahamstown, and installed V III Kt. Pt. Francis Eaton in the chair for the second time. He also carried out a rehearsal of the following day's consecration.

The following year, 1983, South Africa became a District, and George Hookham, now a PG VIIP, became the first Grand Superintendent of District No.10, a well-deserved honour.

The Grand Superintendent was not one to let the grass grow beneath his feet. He perceived a requirement for another Tabernacle in the Transvaal, and on 23rd March 1985, Keystone No.114 was brought into being at Germiston. The nine petitioners were all members of Kosmos Tabernacle, and, once again, III Kt. Pt. Albert Victor Green was installed as the first High Priest. Eight candidates were in the pipeline, including a 77-years-old member of Great Priory. Hookham was not too happy to find that the founders had decided to take only one member per meeting and quietly (his word) pointed out that this candidate would be 80 before admission. He reported later that the founders had now changed their minds on the matter.

A slight problem arose over Keystone's Warrant with the Grand College practice of having the exact date of consecration (and not the date of issue) on the Warrant. The Warrant for Fairest Cape accordingly read “Given at York this First Day of June 1985,” leading George to comment that, “theoretically, it reaches me the same day as the consecration in Cape Town, certainly a supersonic flight!” He went on to point out that the Warrant for Keystone was dated 31st March, not only eight days after the consecration, but also on a Sunday. Needless to say, the Grand Recorder, Gerald Halliwell, promptly issued an amended Warrant!

Belatedly, perhaps, the Order finally became established in Cape Province with the consecration of Fairest Cape Tabernacle No.115 at Pinelands, Cape, on 1st June 1985, with only eight petitioners, with Robert Pearson of St Francis Tabernacle as High Priest. Although there were such a small number of petitioners, Fairest Cape is now second only in strength to Kosmos Tabernacle. Needless to say, the Tabernacle was consecrated by George Hookham, who in spite of advancing years (he was

81) still travelled extensively - including at least one round trip of 2,000 miles - in carrying out his supervisory duties.

George Walter Hookham died on the 27th March 1987, two weeks before his 83rd birthday. There had been no greater servant of the Order, and its establishment in South Africa owed everything to his tremendous energy, administrative ability and dedication. Our Order was not the only beneficiary of this dedication. In addition to District Grand secretarial posts, he was also a District Grand Chaplain, for which, as an active Methodist and lay preacher, he was well suited. He was also Intendant General of the Red Cross of Constantine for South Africa. He had originally trained as a teacher in England and was described as a walking encyclopedia on masonic matters, with a remarkable memory for dates and names.

George Hookham was a prolific correspondent, and quite often, writing ostensibly on KTP matters, he would stray into other Orders and activities. In particular, he was very conscious of time. In one letter he comments on having found the 17:36 from York cancelled, but managed to catch the delayed 17:01 from Edinburgh. And then he tells us the plane due to leave Port Elizabeth at 17:15 finally left at 18:05. The consecration at East London started at 18:20 although scheduled for 18:30, because everyone was present!

George was unmarried but nothing pleased him more than to propose the toast to the ladies, to give conducted tours of Freemasons Hall, and talks to ladies on masonry anywhere. He was certainly unstinting in the time and devotion he gave to all Orders to which he belonged. It was fitting that when a requirement for a further Tabernacle in the Transvaal arose, at Pietersburg, it should be named the George Hookham Tabernacle No.141.

The new and latest Tabernacle was consecrated by the Grand High Priest on 3rd September 1988, with 17 petitioners. Ill Kt. Pt. Gordon Summerley was the first High Priest. The Grand High Priest, now James William Turner, was accompanied by his Grand D.C., V Ill Kt. Pt. Michael Knowles. In a 21-day tour, from 18th August to 7th September, they visited all Tabernacles.

On the death of George Hookham, the Grand Recorder had taken the unusual step of asking his AGDC, Ill Kt. Pt. Koen Roorda, to get in touch with the Tabernacles to suggest a suitable successor. However, Philip Colenso wrote and suggested that Koen Roorda himself should be considered, pointing out that Harry Raylor had "singled him out." John Place was at this time Deputy Grand High Priest in charge; he met Koen Roorda in London on 28th April 1987, and a month later, formally appointed him Grand Superintendent.

It soon became obvious, for the better government of the Order in South Africa, particularly in view of the distances and time involved, that District No.10 should be sub-divided. In December 1987, therefore, on the wise recommendation of Rt Ill Kt. Pt. Roorda, the Grand High Priest approved the setting up of Natal District No.27, under Rt Ill Kt. Pt. Douglas Harris, and Cape District No.28 under Rt Ill Kt. Pt. George McAll.

The most recent Tabernacle to be consecrated was the Cape Peninsula Tabernacle No. 213 on 1st November 2001 at Pinelands in Cape Town.

South African Knight Templar Priests have much to be proud of in the way that in spite of tremendous difficulties, both political and economic, they have kept the Order alive and well over the past thirty years. It is obvious that the spirit of George Hookham lives on: Long may it continue to do so!