

[Every year the Waikato Lodge of Research, meeting at Rotorua in New Zealand, invites a distinguished researcher, often from overseas, to deliver a paper designated the Verrall Lecture, so named after the foundation Master of the lodge. This is the Verrall Lecture delivered by VWBro Neil Morse, KL, ASM, PDGIW, in November 2012. The paper was also published in the *Transactions* of Discovery Lodge of Research in April 2014.]

The Relationship Between Grand Lodges and Research Lodges

by Bro Neil Wynes Morse

In my jurisdiction, when opening the lodge in the first degree, the Master asks the IPM what is the duty of his (the Master's) office. The response is: 'To employ and instruct the brethren in Freemasonry.' You will note that both verbs have equal weighting or importance. 'Instruct' is no less important than 'employ'. So what happened to make the 'instruct' part so infrequent or so difficult?

This is a meander, a meander through my thoughts. I had hoped, and I'm sure Bro Miller hoped also, that I would be able to produce a learned paper full of footnotes and references. I cannot, because my wife and I have been travelling around New Zealand for a month—and having a wonderful time—and I've not had access to my Masonic resources. As Bishop Leadbeater said: 'Australia, far away from the chief centres of Masonic life and learning'. However, I can give a broad overview.

A lodge of research is a place where the 'intelligentsia'¹ of the Craft can meet to address, discuss, argue, and, later, distribute, their thoughts about Freemasonry. Just as Freemasonry is, by its very nature, elitist; then so are lodges of research. But even more so.

You may be aware of Harry Kellerman's statement that '1% of masons are interested in Masonic education in the broad, and 1% of them do something about it'. And yet, in many minds, Masonic research is considered boring. Put the word 'lecture' anywhere near a summons and the attendance at the stated meeting will drop by at least 40%! You know that it's true.

But why aren't lodges fulfilling 50% of their function?

Bro Bob James has a thesis that Grand Lodges, generally, aren't interested in Masonic Education. Maybe he's correct. That's not something I'll discuss now, because (a) I believe he's wrong, and (b) we disagree as to what lodges of research are about.

But is this recurring discussion an expression of our insecurity? We are probably good at what we do. But what is it that we do? And for whose benefit?

It appears to me that the relationship between a Grand Lodge and a research lodge depends upon the members. The members who start it; as they accept the conditions set by their Grand Lodge in accepting the proposed by-laws, and again the members who continue to accept the by-laws.

Like every relationship, each one is different. There is no 'one size fits all' solution. Despite the name being the same, research lodges *are* different. For example, the Western Australian Lodge of Research (WALoR) was established with a view towards providing programmes for private lodges. I have to state here that the term 'Lecture Lodges' was used several times at the recent Australian & New Zealand Masonic Research Council Conference as a pejorative term.

All of this goes to the heart of an on-going debate on the role of research lodges within jurisdictions. This debate is very much worthwhile as it engages both the lodges and the Grand Lodge. What is the Grand Lodge getting for its investment? What is the research lodge getting for its involvement? The debate is also useful as it helps ANZMRC define its role, because, if it does not meet the needs of its members, it is redundant and meaningless.

The first issue to be considered is one of jurisprudence. Grand Lodges approve our by-laws—virtually our *raison d'être*. However, it should be pointed out that WALoR and the research lodges in New Zealand have a commonality not shared with most Australian research lodges. They are established constitutionally. This legal relationship, over and above the 'usual', adds another linkage between the two bodies.

From *The Freemasons New Zealand Book of Constitution*, the Objects and Powers of a Research Lodge:

114. Objects and Powers

1. The objects of a Lodge of Research shall be the historical and comparative study and illustration of the origins,

¹ I use the term in the context of the Wikipedia definition: 'Some authors use the term "intelligentsia" in reference to intellectuals . . . whose main task is to create and distribute knowledge'. Accessed 19 March 2012.

development, and modern trends and activities of Freemasonry, its organisation, ritual and teachings, and the dissemination of Masonic knowledge amongst the members of the Lodge and other Brethren.

2. A Lodge of Research shall not initiate any candidate into Freemasonry, but may confer the Second or the Third Degree at the request of any other Craft Lodge.
3. No Brother shall become or remain a member of a Lodge of Research unless he is a Master Mason and a member of a Craft Lodge or a Lodge holding a Charter under a recognised Grand Lodge, other than another Lodge of Research.
4. Any Master Mason who is a member of a Research Lodge shall be eligible to hold any office in the Lodge, save the offices of Master, Senior Warden and Junior Warden.

In the other Australian jurisdictions there is no similar mention in any of their administrative documents.

I'm currently writing a history of the Sydney Lodge of Research and it is recorded in the minutes of the eighteenth meeting (10 March 1916), that correspondence was received from the Grand Secretary: 'approving the publication of Vol 2 of Transactions.' There is no prior mention of an approach to or from the Grand Secretary. How the approval process came into being is now lost. And what qualifications did the Grand Secretary have to approve the *Transactions* of a research lodge? Later, in the minutes of succeeding years, there is mention of the Grand Master approving the *Transactions*. But never a mention of the *Transactions* being submitted for approval. Passing strange, to my mind.

In 1956 the Master of the Sydney Lodge of Research addressed the Grand Secretary in the following terms:

A justification of existence of a Lodge of Research is good reading in Transactions, which attracts Elder Brethren of the Craft, mature of mind and deeply experienced in F. M., and to counsel us and take office; and junior brethren of F.M. to join us in search of wider knowledge than ritual and ceremonial provide.

He also wrote, in the same letter:

Discussion had been deteriorating for years. At one time, past masters skilled in research, well posted on other constitutions and practices and in the great side-Degrees, could be relied upon for constructive comment and debate, valuable not only to non-attending members and correspondents but to Lodge prestige in Australia and the world.

Later, when an attempt was made to resurrect the Sydney Lodge of Research, the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Masonic Education commented, in a report to his committee:

(1) ADVISABILITY AND (2) POSSIBILITY OF REVIVING THE SYDNEY LODGE OF RESEARCH

This needs little elaboration. The advisability of reviving activities should be obvious, if only to restore a loss for which no replacement has been made.

Earlier I used the word 'controversy'. This word was used in 1960 when the Grand Master of Western Australia refused to approve publication of a WALoR lecture on the basis that it was 'controversial'. When asked what portion needed revision, he stated that the whole paper required rewriting! A helpful approach?

While I'm mentioning WALoR, a Past Master of that lodge, in a retrospective of his term as Master, stated that 'for the second time I learned that integrity and Grand Lodge were not compatible'.

Another aspect to the relationship is illustrated by the recent instances in my own jurisdiction of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory where limitations were placed on discussions by its members. Based on a directive issued by the Grand Secretary, the following preamble was to be used before the delivery of a paper:

Grand Lodge has stated that Regular Freemasonry does not permit within it any form of esoterism which encompasses or tends towards – occultism, sorcery, alchemy, astrology, profane mysticism, transcendentalism, supernaturalism, druidism, Rosicrucianism, Satanism, or any concept or movement related to any of these. However my research has resulted in certain findings that touch on these subjects and I emphasize that I do not promote these findings in any way or as part of Regular Freemasonry and I mention them only in the context of pure research and not in any Regular Masonic context.

Earlier this year that directive was withdrawn and the following edict imposed:

GRAND MASTER'S EDICT: ANNOUNCED AT THE GRAND COMMUNICATION, 13 JUNE, 2012

On 12 May 2010 the Board of Management passed a resolution stating the principles governing esoteric research. These principles are central to the practice of Regular Freemasonry. In order that there be no doubt that they bind every brother and Lodge in this jurisdiction I have decided to make them the subject of a Grand Master's edict. At my request the Board of Management has rescinded its resolution so that it may

- be substituted with the following edict which takes effect immediately.
5. Authorised, official Masonic Education and Instruction is only 'Regular' when applied to Free and Accepted or Speculative Masonry (Regular Freemasonry).
 6. Because of the widely divergent interpretations which can be placed upon it, I am concerned about the unqualified use of the word "esoteric", or any of its derivatives or extensions, within Regular Freemasonry. Such use needs to be avoided as it has been and can be misconstrued to the detriment of the Craft.
 7. I encourage all Masons to make daily progress in the acquisition of Masonic knowledge. Speculation and discussion within the Landmarks of the Order are to be commended.
 8. Within Regular Freemasonry, interpretive discussion and exposition concern only the progressive acquisition of Masonic knowledge towards an understanding of the secrets and mysteries of the Craft, promoting the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. To avoid any misapprehension, such regular discussion and exposition shall be described as "speculative" and the term "esoteric" shall not be applied.
 9. Regular Freemasonry does not permit within it any form of esotericism which encompasses or tends towards – occultism, sorcery, alchemy, astrology, profane mysticism, transcendentalism, supernaturalism, druidism, rosicrucianism, satanism or any concept or movement related to any of these. The presentation, endorsement and/or promotion of such subjects in any Lodge holding under the UGL of NSW and ACT whether the Lodge be open, adjourned, at refreshment or closed or at any connected or associated Lodge function should be deemed irregular and is strictly forbidden.
 10. Any breach of this Edict constitutes serious unmasonic conduct and shall be treated accordingly.
 11. The Grand Master from time to time may grant dispensations to permit the presentation of papers on esotericism which would otherwise constitute a breach of this edict. A dispensation may be granted on such terms and conditions as the Grand Master may impose. An application for a dispensation must be made to the Grand Master in writing through the Grand Secretary. Normally it will only be granted if the proposed paper is a genuine and proper piece of Masonic research.

DEREK J ROBSON AM
GRAND MASTER

Almost concurrently the Discovery Lodge of Research was advised that a dispensation had been granted to that lodge in the following terms:

Effective immediately, the Lodge shall be entitled to have presented to it and discussed in open Lodge papers on esoteric subjects (or any similar topic) provided however that it shall only ever do so if all of the following conditions are met on every occasion and without exception:

- Every paper on any esoteric subject must present and discuss genuine research conducted by a member of the Lodge.
- Every paper presented must contain a clear statement that the views expressed therein are the personal views of the researcher (who is to be named) and not of United Grand Lodge nor of the Lodge.
- The presentation of any paper and any subsequent discussion shall only take place at a regular meeting of the Lodge which must be held at its regular place of meeting, which meeting is not to be advertised any more widely than is usually done by the Lodge for its regular meetings.
- When considered in the context of all papers presented to the Lodge during any 12 month period, it should be clear to the Grand Master that esoteric subjects shall not have been given undue emphasis or preponderance.
- Meetings at which such papers are presented shall not be turned into special events with excessive visitors.
- Invitations to such presentations and/or discussions shall not be issued to young and/or inexperienced Masons (that is to say those with less than 5 years continuous membership in the Craft) except with great caution and only in special cases.
- This permission to allow papers on esoteric subjects to be presented to the Lodge is to be regarded as a trial and will be reviewed by the Grand Master within 2 years from the date of issue of this letter. That said, the Grand Master may withdraw this permission if he believes it is appropriate to do so at any time and for any reason whatsoever.
- It is the responsibility of the Worshipful Master of the Lodge from time to time to ensure that at all times these conditions are adhered to.

This dispensation was neither sought by Discovery Lodge, nor was its contents discussed with the lodge prior to its granting. Double-guessing can be dangerous.

Generally, in South Australia only the Grand Lecturer or a member of his team (graduates of a four-year course in Masonic education) may give a lecture in a lodge of which he is not a member. Other brethren are prohibited from lecturing outside of their own lodge unless the Grand Lecturer or his Deputy has given prior

approval of the content of the lecture. This applies equally to members of a research lodge. Remarkably, no Grand Lecturer has been a member of the South Australian Lodge of Research during his term of office.

It is commonly held that research lodges are dangerous, difficult, opinionated, and unpredictable. Could this be because Masonic researchers take a longer view? History tends to be considered in *centuries* rather than in *decades*—the average span of the corporate memory of Grand Lodges, or less than *half a decade*—the span of a Grand Master's term of office.

Making statements along the lines of 'are you aware that your proposal was tried in 1923 and failed for the following reasons . . .' is usually seen as negative, rather than helpful.

One response made to an inquiry I made among members of Discovery Lodge of Research was:

Grand Lodge sees the Research Lodge as

- 1 a resource
- 2 just another Lodge, and
- 3 a subversive group, a poison.

Accordingly the response is

- 1 co-operate and 'feed'
- 2 ignore, and
- 3 contain and control.

Most of the time over the past seven years my Grand Lodge has been in position 2, above; and more recently in position 3, although possibly as a knee-jerk reaction. If we gain a voice, Grand Lodge will pay more attention to us as a position 3. I can't see how we could ever become a position 1!

Another contributor suggested a paper on 'The nature of raw ambition, the need to control others, and the rise of conservative hegemony in the Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory 2010-2013'!

It seems to me that Grand Lodges in general are intent on administration and their individual member's progress—sometime very high—because of the administration's contributions to the welfare of their Grand Lodge or the Craft.

Members of Grand Lodge, therefore, unless personally interested and so inclined, have little time for 'academics' who constitute, or should constitute, research lodges. In fact this goes further, even to a level of antagonism by Grand Lodges (or their individual members) towards the members of research lodges, who are seen as a threat to the status and standing of Grand Officers who are presumed to be knowledgeable and who are often threatened to be shown to be ignorant in the presence of researchers.

The practical manifestation of this is that Grand Lodges, in whose hands lie the power to grant honours, rarely honour academics, even though their (the academics') educational contributions to the welfare of the Brethren and the Craft is as good as, and at times exceeds, the administrative efforts of Grand Lodge and their Officers.

I hope that the foregoing is not considered a litany of negativity. As I said at the beginning, it is a relationship, and, while all relationships are different, to succeed in a relationship both sides have to adopt a similar goal, and work to attain it. Those of you who have been married for more than five minutes will understand.

There is a mutual dependence whereby Grand Lodges need research lodges, and research lodges need their Grand Lodge. It is finding the 'mix' that works that is critical, and, like all relationships, things change over time. In the good times—and these are the majority, and far outweigh the bad—Grand Lodges and research lodges can form a 'column of mutual support', as members of this and all antipodean research lodges do for each other.



Neil Morse (right) receiving a framed certificate commemorating his Verrall Lecture from Peter Verrall, foundation Master of Waikato Lodge of Research, Past President of ANZMRC, and PM of the Western Australian Lodge of Research.