

Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No.1501

Consecrated 18th July 1989



Keystone Lodge

*A Brief History of the Lodge
on the occasion
of the 100th Meeting Celebration*

18th July 2023

Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No. 1501

List of Founders

W.Bro.Geoffrey E. Newby, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.,	Bedford Charity 115
R.W.Bro.Rev. Canon Albert Webb,	
G.M.R.A.C., G.M.(Worcs.),	St. Egwin 1135
W.Bro. Raymond Rooke	Hertford Military 408
W.Bro. Peter R. Cox	Hertford Military 408
W.Bro. Peter T. Muddiman	Concord 735
W.Bro. Trevor F. Wellings, R.A.M.G.R.	Matthew Clarke 1012
W.Bro. Colin K. Saunders, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.	Concord 735
W.Bro. David C. Hooker, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.	Hertford Military 408
W.Bro. Spencer T.E. Fenn, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.	Essex Jubilee 1123
W.Bro. Alfred W. Dudley	Moseley 667
Bro. Graham Taylor	Central Keystone 744
W. Bro. Robert W. Boots	Concord 735
W.Bro. Philip A. Love	Ark 59
Bro. R. Peter Archer	Shakespeare 40
Bro. John Searson	St. Egwin 1135
Bro. Alec G. Taylor	Bedford Charity 115
Bro.Peter J. Wellings	All Saints Kings Heath 1462
Bro.Barrington T. Trumper.	All Saints Kings Heath 1462
Bro.Peter C. Woollerton	St. Laurence 893

Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No. 1501 Past Commanders of the Lodge

- 1989 W.Bro. Geoffrey E. Newby, **R.A.M.G.R. *Primus Master***
- 1990 W.Bro. Raymond Rooke, **R.A.M.G.R.**, P.Dep.Prov.G.M.
- 1991 W.Bro. Peter R. Cox, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1992 W. Bro. Graham Taylor
- 1993 W.Bro. Spencer T.E. Fenn, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1994 W.Bro. Robert W. Boots,
- 1995 W.Bro. R. Peter Archer, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1996 W.Bro. Peter J. Wellings, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1997 W.Bro. John Searson, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1998 W.Bro. Barrington T. Trumper, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 1999 W.Bro. John M. Stewart
- 2000 W.Bro. David S. Carey, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2001 W.Bro. Martyn R. Hale, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2002 W.Bro. John S. Hill, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2003 W.Bro. William H. Kerr, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2004 W.Bro. Colin G Hill, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2005 W.Bro. John F.R. Handley, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2006 W.Bro. Peter J. Wellings, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2007 W.Bro. D. John Maries, J.P.
- 2008 W.Bro. Robert R. Smith
- 2009 W.Bro. William Roberts, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2010 W.Bro. C. Brian Southgate, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2011 W.Bro. John S. Clarke. Prov R.A.M.G.R.
- 2012 W.Bro. A.W. Michael Love, M.B.E., Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2013 W.Bro. Trevor F. Wellings, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2014 W.Bro. William Roberts, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.
- 2015 W.Bro. John C. Roberts, Prov R.A.M.G.R.
- 2016 W.Bro. Martyn R. Hale, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2017 W.Bro. Barrington T. Trumper, **R.A.M.G.R.**
- 2018 W.Bro. W G. Andrew Mills,
- 2019 W.Bro. W.G. Andrew Mills
- 2020 W.Bro. W.G. Andrew Mills
- 2021 W.Bro. W.G. Andrew Mills
- 2022 W.Bro. W.G. Andrew Mills
- 2023 W.Bro. John S. Clarke, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.

Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No. 1501

Officers and Members

2023 – 2024

Imm. Past Mast.....	W.Bro. John S. Clarke
Master.....	W.Bro. Michael Littler
S.W. (J).....	W.Bro. John Roberts
J.W. (S).....	W.Bro Aaron J. Powell
Chaplain.....	W.Bro. John S. Hill
Treasurer.....	W.Bro. Peter J. Wellings
Scribe.....	W.Bro. John F. R. Handley
D.C.....	W.Bro. Peter J. Wellings
Almoner.....	W.Bro. David S. Carey
S.D.....	W.Bro. Barrington T. Trumper
J.D.....	Bro. Nigel J. Hawkins
A.D.C.....	W.Bro. Martyn R. Hale
Guardian.....	W.Bro. William Roberts
Steward	Bro. John J. Curtis
Warder.....	W.Bro. W.G. Andrew Mills

Honorary Members

R.W.Bro. Roger S. Mac, **P.Prov.G.M.**

V.W.Bro. Raymond Rooke, **R.A.M.G.R.**, P.Dep.Prov.G.M.

W.Bro. Peter R. Cox, **R.A.M.G.R.**

W.Bro. Philip A. Love, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.

V.W.Bro. John Searson, **R.A.M.G.R.**

...W.Bro. A.W. Michael Love *MBE*, Prov.R.A.M.G.R.

...W.Bro. Derrick W. Wattison

Early Days

The story of the Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners meeting in Alcester starts much earlier than the 100th Meeting of the Lodge that is being celebrated today.

We have the original minute book which records in detail the events which took place at Consecration of the Lodge on Tuesday 18th July 1989 but unfortunately, nothing which gives any information of the early discussions which resulted in the decision to expand the masonic offering with the founding of a Royal Ark Mariners Lodge.

Signa Bene Lodge of Mark Master Masons No 1501 had already been established in Alcester since it's Consecration on 7th February 1978 so the development of a RAM Lodge must have been an ambition discussed many times. It is fair to say that the main thrust for the new RAM Lodge came from the senior Mark Masons of the Province most of whom were members of the Signa Bene Mark Lodge.

Consecration of Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No 1501

The Consecration of Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners Lodge No 1501 took place on 18th July 1989 at The Town Hall, Alcester, opening at 4.30pm and was carried out by the Provincial Grand Master, R.W. Bro. R.C. Garner, assisted by the Deputy Provincial Grand Master W.Bro. R.G. Russell, the Assistant Provincial Grand Master, W.Bro. R.L. Wallington and well supported by eleven senior Provincial Grand Officers.

The Founders, no less than 19 of them were members of a wide range of RAM Lodges within and without the Province.

There were 17 Founders present as well as R.W. Bro. J.A. Hawsworth, the Provincial Grand Master for Staffs and Shrops, W.Bro. David J.F. Rawlins, at the time the Dep Provincial Grand Master for Worcestershire and W. Bro. Rev A.E. Griffiths, Deputy Prov Grand Master for Staffs and Shrops plus a staggering 39 Visiting Brethren making a total of 73 Brethren in attendance.

The first Worshipful Commander of the Lodge was W.P.Cdr. Geoffrey E. Newby with R.W.P.Cdr. Rev. Canon Albert (Bertie) Webb, **G.M.R.A.C.**, Prov.G.M. (Worcs) as the Immediate Past Commander.

R.W. Bro. T.A. Wood, **P.J.G.W.** presented to the Worshipful Commander. an excellent purpose made Past Commander's Jewel as a personal gift to the Lodge.

The Worshipful Commander then presented it to W.P.Cdr. Rev Canon A Webb for his year as Immediate Past Commander.

It is interesting to note that many of the Founders including W.Bros. Raymond Rooke, Spencer Fenn and David Hooker were the first of many members of the Lodge who held or went on to hold very senior Masonic Offices in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire.

These mighty men formed the backbone of Freemasonry in the Greater Midlands area over many years with huge demands on their time. That they should seek membership of and hold office in the Royal Ark Mariners is a testament to the high regard they held the Order in.

The Town Hall

In 1618 the Lord of the Manor of Alcester, Sir Fulke Greville III, provided the sum of £300 for the building of a market hall. Prior to that traders and customers would have gathered at a well and market cross which are likely to have occupied the same site.



Simon Whyte was appointed master mason. The limestone for the columns of the colonnade and the cornice came from his own quarry at Chipping Campden; the remainder of the stone was Arden Sandstone, probably from Little Alne.

Originally the whole building was to have been constructed in stone but this was found to be too expensive. The timber-framed upper floor, with its magnificent roof, was constructed at the later date of 1641. The date carved on one of the roof beams to the west side of the hall; has been confirmed by tree-ring dating of the timbers.



The arches of the ground level were open, and all kinds of produce would have been traded using the space between the pillars, particularly those which needed shelter from the sun like cheese, or expensive goods such as silk which had to be kept out of the rain.

The Town Hall has been the preferred meeting venue for all of the Alcester Masonic Units and despite the failure of the heating system sometimes, it remains a meeting place with character and a true sense of history. Many members of the Alcester Lodges have served on the Management Committee and the Alcester Court Leet.



Festive Board

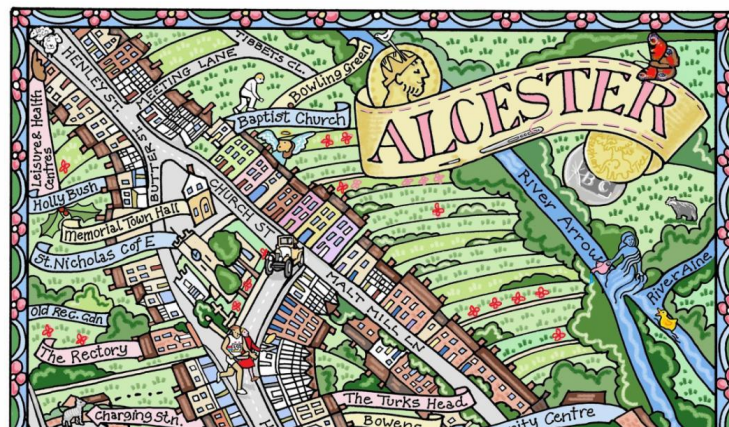


Until it's closure in C. 2016 The Swan Hotel, in Swan Street, was the venue for the Festive Board not only for the RAM Lodge but all the other Lodges and the Chapter that met in the Town Hall. Records show that Apollo Lodge first met there in 1794!

This historic, allegedly 400-year-old, former coaching inn offered a splendid dining room ideal for masonic meetings and had a relaxed and friendly atmosphere with plenty of character.

Many happy Festive Boards were held there and brethren will no doubt recall the original Dumb Waiter and the everlasting waitress Doris!

Many of the local dining venues have been used over the years including The Kings Court Hotel, The Moat House, The Arrow Mill and recently the Amore Italian Restaurant and even the Cardamon Avant Garde Indian Restaurant whose three course set menu at £12.95 was thought to be good value!



The Lodge Minutes

It is fortunate that the full story of the Lodge is able to be told through the Minute book which gives details of Installations, Elevations etc. You would expect a rich picture of the years from 1989 to 2023, years which would include some major domestic events but, the fact is they are just quite ordinary!



We know from the Warder's book that the Lodge continued to meet three times a year, usually with about 18-20 or so Members in Attendance and, pleasingly, given their Provincial commitments many Provincial Officers attending as Visitors. Unfortunately, the number of members since then has sadly declined in line with many Masonic Orders.

The Minute Book commences in 1989 and items of interest within them are detailed below.

At the Consecration on Tuesday 18th July 1989, with 28 members attending, was notable with the ballot for six candidates for Elevation, all of which were Past Masters of or Brethren of Signa Bene Lodge of MMM. which included one Bro David S. Carey, who was to become a mainstay member within the Lodge and the Mark Province of Warwickshire.

The First Regular Meeting of the Lodge was held quite soon after the Consecration on 15th November 1989 when the six Candidates proposed at the Consecration were balloted for and Bro. John M. Stewart was Elevated. The Keystone Jewel and Collarette was presented to the Worshipful Commander.

The following meeting in January 1990 saw two of the six candidates who were balloted for at the Consecration Elevated into the Order.

The July 1990 meeting of the saw W.P.Cdr. Raymond Rooke installed, by dispensation as he was the current Worshipful Commander of another Lodge, as the Worshipful Commander after the Elevation of candidates David Carey and Cyril Hallam.

At the meeting in November 1990 the ballot took place for a Candidate for Elevation – Comp Martyn Ronald Hale. The thanks of the Lodge are also recorded to the candidate Elevated that night, Bro. Wallace Taylor, for the gift to the Lodge of the Working Tools, the Lodge chest, the Ballot Box, Charity box and the Dining Room

Gavels. His wife had made the cushion for the Working Tools and was now working on embroidering the Lodge Banner. Quite a gift!

The November 1991 meeting was of importance to the Lodge Conclave with the Elevation of John S. Hill and the Dedication of the Lodge Banner by R.W.Bro. R. G. Russell, Provincial Grand Master. A splendid and lengthy Oration was delivered by the Provincial Grand Chaplain, W.Bro. Steve Ellson, a copy of which is in the Minute Book.

Sadly losses were reported on the General Account by the Treasurer, W.Bro. Trevor F Wellings who increased the Subscriptions from £15.00 to £18.00!! A 20% increase!

The Installation Meeting on 20th January 1993 saw W Bro Graham Taylor take the Chair and he appointed Bro John Searson as Scribe – an office he held, with a short break when he became Worshipful Commander for some 27 years!!

W.Bro. Peter J Wellings became the Worshipful Commander of the Lodge in July 1996 being Installed by W.Bro. R Peter Archer who then presented the Lodge with a new Tracing Board. An explanation of the Board was made by W.Bro Trevor F Wellings.

At the Festive Board, the Provincial Grand Master proposed his hope that matters of interest which might arise during refreshment should be recorded for the sake of prosperity and this was dutifully done by the Scribe. This practise was only sustained for one further meeting before it was forgotten!!

The Lodge had to pack its overnight bag for the January 2005 meeting and move to Stratford upon Avon Masonic Hall due to The Town Hall not being available.

The Flooding of the River Arrow, as with most of the Country, forced the adjournment of the Installation of Bro D John Maries on 24th July 2007. The Lodge was opened and closed by five intrepid Brethren who had managed to travel to The Town Hall safely. The main business was then adjourned to an Emergency Meeting which was held on 26th October later that year. The first Emergency Meeting ever held by the Lodge.

W.Bro. Trevor F. Wellings was in the Chair for the first RAM Meeting held on the same day as the Signa Bene Mark Lodge. As the regular dates for these two meetings followed each other it was decided to hold separate Lodge meetings on the same day, but with a Joint Festive Board with the Mark and RAM Brethren. This was greatly enjoyed by all resulting in a tradition has been continued ever since with the Lodges taking it in turns to Host the Festive Board.

The spread of the Covid-19 virus in March 2020 had a devastating impact on all Masonry and led to the General Suspension of all Masonic Activity by Order of

Grand Lodge which was the start of a lengthy period of inactivity. A Virtual Business Meeting of the Lodge was held on 21st January 2020 when the death of RW Bro. Robert Giles Russell, Past Provincial Grand Master, and a very good friend of the Lodge was announced.

The 94th Meeting in November 2020 and 95th Meeting on January 2021 were also abandoned due to the Covid Pandemic.

With the news from Mark Mason's Hall that Grand Lodge had confirmed that Masonic activity could re-commence, the first meeting of the Lodge was held on 21st September 2021 with W. Bro Andrew Mills in the Chair. Due to the incapacity of the Lodge's stalwart, W.Bro. John Searson, a substitute - W. Bro John Handley was appointed as Scribe in addition to being Senior Warden which required a special Grand Lodge of MMM Dispensation and an agile mind! This meeting also saw the Election of W. Bro John Searson and W.Bro. Trevor F Wellings as Honorary members to recognise their enormous contribution to the

Lodge since the Consecration. The proposals were greeted with "loud, enthusiastic acclaim and the W.Cdr, with great pleasure, declared them duly elected."

Further Honorary Members, W, Bro. Derek Wattison and W.Bro. Michael Love were also elected in July 2022 to acknowledge their distinguished membership..

In the Nineties and Noughties the Lodge continued to seek candidates for Exaltation with some success but as they moved forward to the early years of the 21st century, although there was an uplift in many Craft Lodges with Candidates for Initiation, there was perhaps not the uptake in those who sought involvement in what used to be considered a side Order.

A line of gold running through the Lodge's history, since its early years, has been the devotion to the Lodge and the Degree exhibited by its members and this shows the very best of masonic virtues.

But when we come together, to celebrate the 100th Meeting of the Lodge, we don't celebrate the name of it, but we celebrate and record our thanks to the eminent and worthy men who founded the Lodge, who nurtured it, through good times and difficult periods.

No one promised that life was a rose garden but the members over the past one hundred meetings have shown dogged perseverance and a determination that the Lodge would survive and succeed. And at a time like this we do not merely look back, but we look forward to a positive future for Signa Bene Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners No 1501.

W.Bro. John F.R. Handley, P.Prov.G.S.W.