previous payments fifty two pounds ten shillings, and thus became a Patron.'[454]

Acknowledgements

Ellic Howe, the most remarkable of English masonic researchers, first suggested that Bradlaugh's masonic career deserved investigation and noted that the British Library held pamphlets by Bradlaugh on Freemasonry which were not at Great Queen Street. I am sad that I never met Ellic Howe, but would like to dedicate this paper to his memory. As with all research into English Freemasonry, this paper could not have been completed without the unfailingly friendly and efficient service of Rebecca Coombes, Katrina Jowett and the team in the Library at Great Queen Street. I am also grateful for the assistance and advice of Michel Brodsky, *Professor* Máire Cross, Robert Gilbert, John Hamill, Pierre Mollier, *Professor* Aubrey Newman, Raymond Salzmann and Estelle Stubbs. The responsibility for all errors is, of course, entirely mine. This paper not only bears testament to the remarkable collections at Great Queen Street, but also to the importance of the masonic holdings of the British Library. The prescience of the 19th-century librarians at the British Museum in ordering runs of *Le Monde Maçonnique* and *La Chaîne d'Union* covering the key years in the history of French Freemasonry can only be marvelled at. The only disappointment at the British Library is that François Tafery apparently failed to deposit in the British Museum the numbers of *La Chaîne d'Union* printed in London.

All petitions, correspondence, subject files and other archival material are in the collections of the United Grand Lodge of England in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry at Freemasons' Hall, London, unless otherwise stated.

[454] *The Freemason* (7 February 1891), p. 75. See also Tribe, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 268, and Hypatia Bradlaugh afterwards Bonner, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

Freemasonry and the History of the Labour Party in London: Some Approaches

Lecture to Labour Heritage, November 2002

I've been Director of the new Centre for Research into Freemasonry at the University of Sheffield for almost three years now. I was formerly a curator in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Library, and had no previous scholarly interest in freemasonry. The attraction for me of this work at Sheffield has been the opportunity to explore an archive which has not previously been much used by scholars. I was very pleased to attend the previous conference organised by Labour Heritage earlier this year, and was looking forward to spending a day hearing about subjects other than freemasonry. So, imagine my surprise, when following Dan Weinbren's paper, which emphasised the importance of examining social networks, somebody asked about the relevance of the study of freemasonry to the history of the Labour party. I was so amazed that I didn't say anything at the time, and I think that is what prompted Sean to suggest that I might talk to you at greater length today.

Let me begin by stating that I am not a freemason myself, and that nothing I have seen since starting this work has made me wish to become one. English freemasonry is an archaic and old-fashioned institution, a curious Victorian survival, whose atmosphere reminds

me of the Anglican church of my childhood in the 1950s - something I have no wish to return to. However, I am funded by freemasons. The Centre at Sheffield, the first Centre in a British university devoted to the study of freemasonry, is funded by the United Grand Lodge of England, the governing body of freemasonry in England and Wales, the Yorkshire West Riding province, the province which includes Sheffield, and Lord Northampton, the current Pro Grand Master. These funds are administered by an independent trust, and, by their own request, these masonic groups have no involvement in the administration or research agenda of the Centre. The University of Sheffield established this Centre not simply because it offered substantial research funding, but even more because of the opportunity it presented to explore the rich inheritance of archives, books and artefacts held by freemasonry. The Centre has been given special access to the records held by English freemasonry, and much of my work over the past couple of years has consisted of a preliminary exploration of these archives.

Freemasonry began in Britain, probably evolving in Scotland from guilds of working stone masons, and emerged in its modern form with the establishment of an English Grand Lodge in 1717. Freemasonry rapidly became one of the largest and best organised clubs in Britain. It claims still to be the largest secular fraternal organisation in the country, with a membership in Great Britain of somewhere in the region of 300,000 men. Internationally, the membership is in the region of eight million. Yet freemasonry has attracted only limited interest from professional historians in Britain. There are many reasons for this, but one is that the records of freemasonry have not been easily accessible. Stephen Yeo, for example, in his study of the social culture of Reading before the First World War, published in 1976, was told that the history of the town in the nineteenth century could not be understood without investigating the masons. He visited the local Masonic hall, but was not allowed to examine records there. From the 1980s, these attitudes changed, as a result of attacks on freemasonry by Stephen Knight and others, and masonic archives were opened up to scholars, particularly the substantial library and archive housed at Freemasons' Hall. This is now the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, a registered Museum with a full complement of professional staff, open daily to the public.

Most of the work I have so far undertaken has been in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry. The richness of these collections is apparent from a quick tour of the Museum, where there are some objects with striking London and national associations, including the maul allegedly used to lay the foundation stone of St Pauls cathedral, lodge furniture constructed from wood of Old London Bridge and of the Old Putney Bridge, and masonic regalia of figures ranging from Winston Churchill to Donald Campbell. But most fascinating of all are the library and archives. Many of the 40,000 or so

volumes there are simply not publicly accessible elsewhere. For example, I am interested in the history of Battersea. The first major scholarly study of Battersea's history was a history of the parish church by a local headmaster, John George Taylor. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry includes an otherwise unknown historical publication by Taylor, a history of a local masonic lodge, which reveals that he and a number of other prominent local inhabitants were keen freemasons. This history was privately printed, and no other copy is available elsewhere. The riches of the Library are not confined to lodge histories, valuable though these can be in local studies. Other useful categories which might be worth mentioning here are masonic periodicals, such as the weekly newspaper, *The Freemason*, published between 1869 and the Second World War, and provincial yearbooks, which frequently contain full details of membership in a particular county.

It is membership information, of course, that everybody is interested in, and investigation of the membership records has been one of my major preoccupations. Establishing whether or not somebody is a freemason can be surprisingly difficult, not because of any secrecy, but because of the structure of the records. The English Grand Lodge has been active now for nearly three hundred years, and its membership records have gone through a series of phases. Registers compiled from lodge returns were started in the eighteenth century. These were replaced by a card index in the 1930s, and then replaced by a database in the 1980s. Recently a magazine for the membership has been begun, 'MQ' [Masonic Quarterly], and the process of mailing this magazine has revealed serious inaccuracies in the database. To make matters more complicated. the present United Grand Lodge was created by the amalgamation of two rival Grand Lodges in 1813, and prior to this date there are two parallel sets of records. Admission to freemasonry is performed by the local lodge, and occasionally lodge secretaries do not forward details of admissions to the Grand Lodge. For these reasons, even when an exhaustive search has been undertaken, one can never be certain whether or not somebody was a freemason. It has been suggested that George Jacob Holyoake, the nineteenth century freethinker, was a mason. His name cannot be located in the membership records, but it is still possible that he was admitted, and that his name simply cannot be traced. It is only in recent years that full details of the admission of the atheist MP Charles Bradlaugh to a lodge in Tottenham have been located.

Ideally, of course, one would like to work towards a database of membership information since 1717 but, for the reasons I have outlined, this will be a long-term undertaking. In the meantime, however, the importance of the archive at Freemasons' Hall can be best illustrated by the kind of information which emerges from correspondence about the formation and administration of masonic lodges. For example, Professor Owen

Ashton, the authority on chartist history, has recently completed a study of the Newcastle Chartist leader Richard Bagnall Reed. Reed was in later life a very active freemason, achieving high office in a branch of freemasonry known as Mark Masonry. The Library in Freemasons' Hall has a copy signed by Reed of a lecture by him that gives a vivid account of his reasons for being interested in freemasonry.

One of Reed's associates in Newcastle was a man called John Baxter Langley, a surgeon who had been a radical journalist in northern England, and who collaborated with Ernest Jones in the establishment of the *People's Paper*. Moving to London in the 1870s, Langley became the Chairman of the Artizans Labourers and General Dwellings Company, which helped pioneer the provision of good quality working class housing. Under Langley, the company developed the Shaftesbury Park Estate in Battersea, described by Langley as 'a workmen's city' and which, he claimed, influenced subsequent legislation on working class housing. Like Richard Bagnall Reed, Langley was a keen freemason. Langley was a controversial figure within masonry. Grand Lodge proposed making a charitable donation to mark the safe return of the Prince of Wales from India, and it was suggested that Grand Lodge should pay for the restroration of St Albans and St Pauls cathedrals. Langley, a unitarian, led a successful campaign against the proposal, saying it would cause offence to non-Christian masons, but himself causing great offence when, in a letter to *The Freemason*, he described the carvings on medieval cathedrals as remnants of phallus worship.

In 1874 Langley wrote, as Chairman of the Artisans Labourers and General Dwellings Company, to the Grand Secretary at Freemasons Hall, describing the new estate at Battersea, and declaring that ‘there is a desire on the part of the superior officials, superintendents of works and other residents on the estate to be admitted into masonry in a lodge connected with the new town; and the Directors cordially second that desire’. Langley himself would be the first master of the lodge, and the lodge would eventually meet in the public hall planned for the estate. Langley added that ‘The petitioners specially desire that the first stone of the new lodge and public hall may be laid with masonic honours..’ Langley's proposal was an imaginative means of encouraging the working class inhabitants of the estate to take an interest in freemasonry, and the Grand Secretary took a personal interest in the scheme.

The signatories of the petition for the establishment of the Shaftsbury lodge were mostly people connected with the company who lived in various parts of London. Only one gave his address as the Shaftesbury Park Estate itself, a glass merchant named Solomon Frankenburg. In 1877 disaster overtook Langley. Much of the day-to-day supervision of the building work had been left to the

Company Secretary, William Swindlehurst (not apparently a mason). There were rumours of irregularity in the handling of funds and inadequate purchasing procedures. In June 1877 the company appointed a committee of inquiry. It was found that the board had given Swindlehurst supplies of blank cheques and that he had taken some of the profits from the sale of company land. A particular concern was that building materials had been purchased from a single merchant, Solomon Frankenburg, who had often charged twice the going rate. Frankenburg was, of course, a signatory of the petition for the Shaftesbury lodge. In July 1877 Swindlehurst and Langley were arrested for fraud, and in the following October they were sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. Langley and Frankenburg were expelled from freemasonry, and the Grand Master cancelled the warrant for the Shaftesbury lodge. The case of John Baxter Langley illustrates the unexpected new insights which the archive at Freemasons' Hall can provide. It is well known that the company building the Shaftesbury Park Estate had a strong social agenda - there were for example no pubs on the estate - but the fact that this social engineering had a masonic dimension, and that the Shaftesbury Hall at the heart of the estate was the first purpose-built masonic hall in South London, has been otherwise unnnoticed.

Owen Ashton first noticed that Richard Bagnall Reed was a freemason from a reference in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. The *Dictionary* is an exception to the comment I made earlier that British historians have taken little interest in the history of freemasonry. The contributors to the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* have generally been more thorough than, for example, their counterparts on the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and frequently notice membership of masonic lodges. The Dictionary consequently suggests some interesting themes for further investigation. Scottish freemasonry for example has always been much more working class than freemasonry in England, and the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* notes the large number of Scottish labour leaders who have been freemasons. A number of cooperative pioneers also joined freemasonry, presumably viewing it as a mutual organisation similar to the friendly societies of which they were also members. The bulk of the references to freemasonry in the *Dictionary* relate to membership of New Welcome Lodge No. 5139. Among the members of this lodge noted by the Dictionary were Ben Tillett, the Dockers' leader, Arthur Greenwood, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party from 1935-54, and Alfred Short, a Home Office Minister in the Second Labour Government.

The reason for the prominence of the New Welcome Lodge in the *Dictionary* is that it is the parliamentary lodge. The qualification for membership of the lodge is that one should be a (male) Member of Parliament or work at the Palace of Westminster. Its existence was picked up by Hugh Dalton, who mentioned it in his diaries. In April 1938, Dalton was shown by William

Nield of the Labour Research Department a summons to a meeting of the New Welcome Lodge, held four days before the meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1935 at which Clement Atlee was confirmed as leader. Dalton had on this occasion supported Herbert Morrison for the leadership. The third candidate was Arthur Greenwood. Dalton found from the summons that Greenwood was a member of the New Welcome Lodge, and that the lodge secretary was Scott Lindsay, who organised Greenwood's leadership campaign. Moreover, another member of the lodge was F. J. Bellenger, who had attended a meeting organised by Dalton to support Morrison's membership and who, Dalton now suspected, had damaged Morrison's chances by talking to the press. In May 1939, Bellenger unsuccessfully tried to persuade Dalton to join the New Welcome Lodge. Dalton records that Bellenger said that 'there was no politics in Free Masonry, but that there was a wonderful sense of fellowship, etc.' A month later, Dalton suspected that the members of the New Welcome Lodge were manoeuvring again to try and secure the leadership for Greenwood while Atlee was ill in hospital with prostate trouble. Dalton considered the masonic group of Labour M.P.s 'a scandal', and urged Ellen Wilkinson to expose them in a newspaper article.

The references in Dalton's diary might lead one to suppose that the New Welcome Lodge simply shows that freemasonry is everywhere, but the papers relating to the formation of the lodge at Freemasons' Hall show it was a very unusual lodge, and one that is perhaps unique in the history of English freemasonry, in that there was an avowedly political purpose to its formation.. In December 1928, a ceremony was held in connection with the High Cross Lodge at Tottenham - Charles Bradlaugh's former lodge. The Master of the lodge at that time was Sir Percy Rockcliff, who had held national office in freemasonry and was, as Secretary of the Joint Committee of Approved Societies, also active in the friendly society world. The ceremony was attended by Sir Percy Colville Smith, the Grand Secretary. A conversation developed about the difficulty of recruiting working class members to freemasonry in large urban areas such as London. Colville Smith described how the Prince of Wales (afterwards Duke of Windsor), at that time an active freemason, had expressed his concern that Labour MPs and officials of the party who were interested in becoming freemasons found it difficult to find a lodge which would accept them and that a number had been blackballed. The Prince had suggested setting up a lodge specifically for Labour MPs and officials. Rockcliff was aware on his part that at Labour Party conferences motions were regularly proposed that freemasons should not be trade union officials. These motions were generally defeated by moving next business, but left Rockcliff, as a freemason, concerned at the hostility. Rockcliff felt that the Prince's idea of a lodge for Labour MPs might also help address this issue.

At this time, of course, Labour were on the verge of forming its first majority government, while at the same time the effects of the depression were hitting hard. The formation of the New Welcome Lodge reflected the tense political situation in two ways: first, there was the concern, expressed explicitly by the Prince of Wales, that members of the governing party was not excluded from freemasonry, and, second, there was the wider belief, held particularly strongly by Rockcliff, that freemasonry could help ameliorate class conflict. The New Welcome Lodge was, in other words, a strategy to use freemasonry to help avert social revolution. Rockcliff forwarded a memorandum to Colville Smith outlining the philosophy of the new lodge, without explicitly revealing the Labour connection of the lodge. The aim of the lodge, he declared, was 'to bring home to the industrial section of the community the principles and tenets of the Craft.' 'It is doubtless true', Rockcliff wrote, 'that, in rural areas, social barriers are to some extent broken down in certain lodges which exist in those areas. But, as regards the great centres of population, the same position can hardly be said to obtain.' The members of the new lodge would be missionaries for freemasonry. It was a firm conviction of Rockcliff and others that freemasonry could help reduce 'unsettling influences' on the shop floor, and would encourage loyalty to the crown. Considerable thought was given as to how the reduce practical barriers to membership. Subscriptions would be kept to a minimum, and the meal after the lodge meeting would also be of a more 'homely' variety than the grand feasts usually enjoyed by masonic lodges. Rockcliff proposed three names for the lodge: the Civitas Brittanicus lodge; the Lodge of New Citizenship; and the 1929 Lodge. However, at the Prince of Wales' suggestion, the name of 'New Welcome' was chosen, as more indicative of its purpose.

Throughout these discussions, Rockcliff had carefully avoided committing to writing any explicit statement that the lodge was intended primarily for Labour MPs. The suggestion that the new badge of the lodge should incorporate Big Ben was turned down. The only MP to be involved in these negotiations was the Rev. Sir Herbert Dunnico, a Baptist minister who was at that time M.P. for Consett, and an influential parliamentary figure, as Chairman of Committees of the House of Commons. The other founders of the lodge had friendly society or trade union connections, such as John Bowen, the General Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers, and Charles Sitch, the Secretary of the Chain Makers Society, both of whom had become MPs by the time the lodge was consecrated in November 1929. The lodge immediately began actively to recruit further sitting Labour MPs. The Freemason described how the first four initiates in the lodge were all Labour MPs: Sir Robert Young, the Deputy Speaker, Joseph Compton, J H Shillaker and Walter Henderson, the son of Arthur Henderson, at that time Foreign Secretary. Scott Lindsay, the Labour Party Secretary, was initiated soon afterwards, and Arthur Greenwood himself was initiated

as an entered apprentice in February 1931, made a fellow craft a month later and finally a Master Mason in April 1931. Over twenty Labour MPs were recruited over the next three years. They came from all parts of the country, but among London Labour MPs who joined the lodge may be noted George Hicks, MP for East Woolwich, who had ironically been creator of the Amalgamated Union of Building Operatives, one component of which was the Operative Stonemasons Society, and Charles Ammon, MP for North Camberwell, who had been Leader of the LCC. The lodge did not only recruiting MPs. Clerks and other employees of the House also joined, and others with no obvious connection with parliament, who were presumably connected with the Labour party in London.

By 1934, then, the New Welcome Lodge had certainly achieved the Prince of Wales' aim of ensuring that the parliamentary labour party was not alienated from freemasonry, and a substantial group of freemasons had been built up within the labour ranks. There is no indication however that it achieved much success in pursuing Percy Rockcliff's wider vision of taking freemasonry to the shop floor. However, the political situation had of course changed dramatically, with Ramsey Macdonald's creation of a National Government and the 1931 General Election in 1931 election, which saw Labour reduced to just 54 MPs. This reduced the pool of potential recruits to the New Welcome Lodge, so that in 1934, no MP came forward to join the lodge, and it was decided to fundamentally alter its nature. It became a house facility of the Palace of Westminster, open to staff working there and to MPs of all parties. Its membership consequently ceased to be dominated by MPs and it was chiefly run by members of staff of the Palace of Westminster. By the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the lodge, the membership of the lodge stood at 58, but just seven of these were MPs, none of whom took a particularly active part in the life of the lodge. Between 1934 and 1980, only three MPs served as Masters of the lodge; otherwise the Masters were all members of staff of the Palace of Westminster. The change in the nature of the lodge was indicaed by the abandoning of its original badge, showing an ever open door, and its replacement with a badge incorporating the portcullis of the House of Commons.

The chief connection of the New Welcome Lodge has been with the parliamentary labour party and as such it may not seem to have much direct relevance to the labour party in London. However, the story of the New Welcome Lodge does point to a number of other themes which are relevant to the history of Labour in London. A particular concern of Sir Percy Rockcliff in setting up the New Welcome Lodge was the problem of organising freemasonry in large urban areas. Although modern freemasonry began in London and London remains very much a powerhouse of freemasonry, there has always been a strong distinction between London freemasonry and freemasonry elsewhere. In the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, lodges were geographically based, usually two or three in a small town, and the only connection between its members tended to be a geographical one. In the provinces, a strong provincial organisation emerged, based broadly on county structures, with provincial officers keeping a close eye on the different lodges. London, however, was different. As it grew, it was hard for lodges to define their identity geographically. In the Greater London area, no provincial structure was ever established, and lodges were administered directly by Grand Lodge. Attempts to create locally based lodges in the new London suburbs in the nineteenth century faltered, as difficulties of accommodation and other issues meant that the new lodges moved inexorably into facilities in central London and lost touch with their local roots.

This led from the late nineteenth century onwards to the growth in London and then elsewhere of lodges based on social connections other than geography. The first expression of this was the establishment of old school lodges, followed by university and polytechnic lodges. The growth of public services in the late nineteenth century had helped create a new class of public sector professionals, such as teachers, vestry clerks and civil engineers. These new vestry and council officials saw freemasonry as a form of social activity suitable for a respectable and temperate middle class, and formed lodges based around their professional connections. The Crichton lodge in Camberwell was formed by members of the London School Board. Teachers from the Crichton lodge afterwards formed a lodge which met for a time in the masonic hall in Battersea built by John Baxter Langley. The New Welcome Lodge at Westminster had been anticipated by the Gallery Lodge, a lodge for lobby correspondents. The New Welcome was sponsored by the Insuranto lodge, which was intended for staff of insurance and benefit societies. It is in the context of the emergence of these kinds of special interest lodges that the development of the New Welcome lodge needs to be considered.

With the introduction of new borough councils in 1900, there was inevitably a demand for lodges associated with these councils, and many lodges intended for councillors and council employees were established. Curiously, many of these continued in existence after the local government reorganisation in 1964, so that there are still, for example, Holborn Borough Council and Camberwell Borough Council lodges which meet today. The fact that these lodges relate to councils which haven't existed for nearly forty years emphasises I think that their primary function is social. However, in general, the growth of special interest lodges caries a risk of creating tension within the organisation in which the lodge exists, as the reaction of both Dalton and Morrison to the New Welcome lodge illustrates. In London, this problem is exacerbated by the lack of any local administrative structure for the London lodges similar to that in the provinces. All matters relating to the London lodges have

been handled direct by Grand Lodge and its Board of General Purposes, a clumsy mechanism to say the least, a fact which has now been recognised and, for the first time, a Metropolitan Grand Lodge is about to be created.

It is perhaps too early to write the story of the major engagement of London labour with freemasonry, the controversies about masonic influence within councils such as Wandsworth, Tower Hamlets and Hackney which rumbled on from the time of the Poulson scandal to the mid 1980s. However, in considering these controversies, certainly these issues relating to the organisation of London freemasonry will need to be taken into account. Another strand which will need to be teased out are the differing attitudes to freemasonry within the Labour movement. One element of this which needs to be borne in mind is the involvement of figures in the radical and Labour movements with masonic activity outside the limited world of English craft freemasonry. As already mentioned, Charles Bradlaugh was a freemason. Bradlaugh was contemptuous of official English freemasonry, and strongly supported French freemasonry, which was excommunicated by the English Grand Lodge in the 1870s because of its increasingly aggressive stance on political and religious matters. French freemasonry developed into a very left-wing movement, which supported republican principles in France, pioneered anti-racist campaigning and helped introduce early welfare provision in France.

It was in France that Annie Besant became interested in freemasonry, and Annie Besant helped to establish in Britain a form of freemasonry known as co-masonry which admits both men and women. Co-masonry became an important part of the early women's movement, and suffragette marches included contingents of women masons. Among those who joined co-masonry were such major figures of the left as Beatrice Webb and Charlotte Despard. One of the mysteries of freemasonry is why freemasonry in the English-speaking world became a loyalist association run by aristocrats, whereas in France, Spain and elsewhere it became a focus of liberal politics and discussion. It is in Spain that the last irony of this story emerges. After Hugh Dalton found out about the New Welcome Lodge, he began to see masons everywhere, and felt that the masons in the Labour party were conspiring against Atlee. In Spain, freemasonry provided an important focus of anti-catholicism, and during the Spanish Civil War there were many active masonic lodges among the Republican forces. Spanish researchers have recently suggested that Atlee himself became a member of such a masonic lodge in Spain, something of which Dalton was completely unaware.