Masonic banners in South Africa

Robert A. Laing

ABSTRACT: There are over five hundred freemasons' lodges in South Africa, many of which have their own banners. The paper discusses the various Masonic symbols and heraldic devices which appear on these Masonic banners.
The illustrations for this paper appear on Plates 19–23.

1   Introduction

This paper can be nothing more than an overview of a subject that requires a great deal more study than has been done here. I have found no literature on the subject at all. In his book on *Heraldic Standards and other Ensigns,* Gayre of Gayre and Nigg devotes a full chapter to "The Gonfallon or Gonfannon." From reading this it becomes apparent that he considers these to be the same. Dr. Whitney Smith draws a distinction between these terms. He states that the Gonfalon is "A flag characteristic of Italy and of associations (particularly religious ones) in Western Europe, hung from a crossbar and generally terminating in tails; often confused with Gonfanon." Smith further defines the Gonfanon as "A war flag of preheraldic Western Europe, generally attached to a lance and ending in squared tails.." It seems apparent that the difference between these two flag types is their orientation (**Fig. 1**).

2   Craft masonry in South Africa

There are over five hundred freemasons' craft lodges in South Africa meeting in some one hundred locations scattered over the length and breadth of the country. Of these there are at least one hundred lodges in the Johannesburg area and over fifty in the Cape Peninsula. The oldest lodge in the country is 'De Goede Hoop.' It was established in the 18th century and meets in Cape Town. This lodge was originally chartered under the Grand Lodge National

of the Netherlands. It now tops the roll as premier lodge on the Roll of The Grand Lodge of South Africa. In South Africa lodges owe allegiance to one of five different 'Grand' lodges. These are alphabetically the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Scotland and South Africa. Each 'craft' lodge has its own officers, symbols and colours.

Many lodges also have their own banners. These banners are generally in the form of the old 'vexillum' used by the Roman cavalry. The 'vexillum' or Gonfalon "is a flag fixed to a horizontal bar which is in turn fastened or hung from a staff" (Gayre 1959). Most lodge banners are similar in type to those used by clubs, religious and friendly associations. The following quote from Gayre (1959) echoes my own feelings: "This type of ensign, as generally used today in processions, is often displeasing because of its tawdry appearance, which is not due to cheapness of materials nor lack of craftsmanship in working intricate embroidery, but due solely to a total disregard for heraldic principles of design. ... By the imposition of numerous words, names, initials and cyphers on banners, along with intricate (and on the whole unheraldic) symbols (usually acclaimed as "crests"), and often portrayed in natural form without any regard for clarity of form and colours, flags are created which defeat the very purpose for which such designs were created - to display and proclaim boldly their message to near and far, and particularly the latter."

Those Masonic banners that I have seen are generally made of material with the designs embroidered on them. I have also seen examples painted on real or synthetic leather. In all but a few cases the banners have an amateurish appearance. It seems that in most cases a member of the lodge, a spouse or friend of a lodge member has been responsible for the manufacture. The majority of the designs have a multiplicity of Masonic and/or other symbols on them. In addition it is usual to find the lodge name, number and Grand Lodge allegiance indicated. A further variation is the addition of the Date of Consecration of the Lodge. In a few cases I have found banners with the name/s of the donor/s.

Gayre (1959) states: "It seems that the modern Briton is unable to carry in his head two different systems of communication at one and the same time - that of signs and symbols (represented by the charges of heraldry) and that of letters." This statement seems to be true for all of the Masonic banners I have seen. So perhaps the unfortunate Briton is unfairly selected here.

3   Symbols used

3.1   Masonic symbols

It is not surprising that the most common symbol found on Masonic Banners is the 'square and compass' usually associated with the fraternity. Other popular symbols are elements drawn from the 'seal of Solomon' - two interlaced equi-

lateral triangles and the two Masonic pillars associated with King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. **Fig. 2** shows several examples of the 'badges' used by South African Lodges. In most of these cases, banners have been derived by placing the badges on a field of cloth in the lodge colours. Occasionally additional decoration has been added. Braemar places its emblem within a border of Thistles for Scotland. Towerby has the square and compass on a tower, with the addition of a lightning flash and a thistle. Towerby is an area in Johannesburg often subjected to grand electrical storms. It is possible that this was the original motivation for the lightning symbol — no-one remembers any longer. Turffontein uses a symbol that could be interpreted as the 'open' Lodge. The altar has the open volume of the sacred law between the wardens' columns and the sun rising in the East. Middelburg adds a tower in the middle. In Afrikaans a tower can be a "burg" and this completes the pun. Woodlands lodge places a drawing of a woodland between the columns standing on the square pavement of the lodge. Losie Jakaranda is a Scottish Lodge that works in Afrikaans. They meet in Pretoria, the 'Jacaranda' city. Unlike many lodges, they use their lodge banner as their emblem on lodge stationery. The banner is green fringed gold. It has the square and compass motif between the Masonic columns with a jacaranda in chief. The motto is "Ons is Broers" - "We are Brothers."

3.2   Heraldry

Real and pseudo-heraldry abound in Masonic banners. The heraldry is usually derived from the name of the Lodge and this in turn is usually derived from the place or person celebrated in the name. Hence we find examples in three Johannesburg Scottish lodges. Lodge Argyll uses the 'belt and buckle' badge worn by members of Clan Campbell - their chief is the Duke of Argyll. The shield and crest of Douglas are used by Lodge Douglas. On their stationery Lodge Gordon uses the crest and motto of the Marquess of Huntly - chief of the Gordons. (Their Banner has St Andrew on it.) Two lodges, namely Vernon and Doornfontein, have coats-of-arms on their banners. At this stage it is not possible to say which arms they are. This may explain why there is lettering on Lodge banners (see **Fig. 2.2**). Emrys Lodge uses the crest and motto of J. Emrys Evans, the first master of that Lodge in 1907. I know of three lodges that use the full achievement of arms of United Kingdom cities. Lodge Belfast, an Irish Lodge, uses the arms of the City of Belfast. Another Irish Lodge, Armagh, uses the arms of the City of Armagh. The use of the arms of cities by lodges named for them is understandable. Whether this has any validity under the law of arms is a question that would have to be decided. An oddity is Ophirton Lodge, which falls under the Grand Lodge of Scotland. It uses the coat-of-arms of Manchester. The latter lodge was chartered in 1899 as George S. Rideal Lodge and later had its name changed. After nearly a century no-one remembers why or when the lodge assumed 'their' emblem. Cleveland Lodge has an emblem which combines a saltire with the individual arms of Scotland,

England and Ireland in chief and in flanks. In base is the 'square and compass' motif and a thistle. Transvaal Volunteer Lodge, a Lodge under the Grand Lodge of Scotland goes even further. This Lodge displays the full achievement of the Kings of Scotland with a small shield of the old Transvaal coat-of-arms in chief. This differs from emblems used on its lodge summons, which are in the form of rifles in saltire with sundry other Masonic symbols.

3.3   Punning symbols

A few examples of punning emblems are given here. In the case of Corona Lodge the emblem is a double pun. The first is the sun within its corona and on this is placed a crown - the second corona. In the case of Melrose Lodge the square and compass are placed on the double rose. Phoenix Lodge has a phoenix rising out of the flames. Lodge Golden Thistle has a sprig of three golden thistles; these placed on a blue background form the banner of the Lodge.

3.4   Ad hoc symbols

Lodge Republic uses a stagecoach on its stationery. This is painted on the lodge banner. The banner is of red leatherette and has a fringe of Royal Stewart tartan. The lodge aprons are white leather with the same tartan seam. The Lodge was founded in 1966 - the year of the 5th anniversary of the Republic of South Africa. The first Master was James P. Hall, who collected old vehicles. The stagecoach was outside the Temple at the consecration and was taken as the lodge emblem.

3.5   Landscapes

Many Lodges use pictorial symbols. These may contain naturalistic or stylised landscapes. Lodge North Western has a badge showing Brixton Tower (the first microwave tower in the country) placed against a starry firmament. I have not established the reason for this symbol. Lodge Northern Province has a waterfall in a naturalistic landscape. These are the Kalambo Falls, 13th highest in the world, found in the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The lodge was founded there in 1960. With the coming of independence the lodge relocated to Johannesburg, where it still meets. Lodge Zion had a stylised representation of King David's tomb on Mt. Zion. The author subsequently designed a new banner for this lodge, which is discussed below.

3.6   Human figures

Hesperia Lodge derives its name from the Greek land of the evening star, where the golden apples of Hera were guarded by the dragon Ladon and by the seven immortal maidens, the Hesperides. Presumably the figure on the Lodge banner

is meant to represent one of these immortal maidens. Fraternity Lodge has two male figures that are presumably meant to represent the biblical David and Johathan. These figures represent the ultimate example of fraternity. Several Lodges have Saints on their banners. These include Saint Andrew Lodge and Gordon Lodge.

4.   New moves in banner design

In 1986 the District Grand Lodge of the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Northern Cape - under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, approached me to design armorial bearings for them. The following were designed and registered with the State Herald in South Africa:

> **Arms:** *Per pale Argent and Vert; dexter in chief a lion rampant Gules and in base a protea head, slipped and leaved proper, all within a bordure per bordure Or and Vert, overall a fess wavy Azure; sinister on a chevron Or, between three towers Argent masoned, a pair of compasses extended chevronways, sable.*
> **Motto:** *BY EXAMPLE AND PRECEPT.*

The symbolism can be interpreted as follows: The white background with its green and gold border echoes the apron on the District Grand Lodge. It also represents that gold seam underlying the area covered by this district and on which much of the economy is based. The red lion rampant was selected as a fitting symbol as it firstly not only alludes to the coat-of-arms of Scotland but it also refers to the lion which appears in the armorial bearings of the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Cape of Good Hope and Kimberley (where the two oldest lodges in this district are situated). The wavy blue line symbolises the Vaal river that separates the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The protea is only found at the southern tip of Africa and is a recognised symbol of this area as well as being the national flower.

A principle from the Heraldry Council has been that the only lettering that will appear on a grant of arms will be that appearing on the motto scroll. To overcome this limitation the District Grand Lodge applied for registration of not only a coat-of-arms but also of a seal. It is acceptable to have extraneous lettering on a seal which is registered in black and white. A logical outcome of these grants was the request that I design a new District Grand Banner. The previous one had the arms of the Grand Lodge of Scotland and the Provincial Coat of Arms of the old Transvaal. Attempts to have a banner accepted that conformed to the traditional Gonfalon, were unsuccessful. The request was for a Banner which displayed the new Seal. However, it had to be in colour. This was designed as requested and the commission for making the banner was accepted by Ms Dulcie Byrne of Johannesburg. The resultant banner can be seen in Fig. 3.

As a result of this banner three further banners were requested over the next four years (**Fig. 4**). The first was the banner for Zion Lodge. Here the lodge had an old banner on which appeared Masonic symbols together with a representation of King David's Tomb. A coat-of-arms was designed for the lodge. This would serve on new lodge stationery and would also appear on the new banner. At the request of the Lodge additional Masonic symbols were included, as well as the dedication from the donors. The second was a coat-of-arms for Lodge Energy, consecrated in 1985, but with no banner. Thus one was to be donated by the District Grand Master, Brother Morris Linton. At the Lodge's request this donation was commemorated on the Banner. The third banner was for Unity Lodge, founded in 1906. It had a former banner with a multitude of Masonic symbols. Once again a coat-of-arms was designed incorporating the former symbolism. This is now used on Lodge stationery and as a seal on the Lodge Banner, in this case with no further inscriptions.

It would seem that Gayre hit the nail on the head when he declared that the "modern Briton is unable to carry in his head two different systems of communication at one and the same time - that of signs and symbols (represented by the charges of heraldry) and that of letters." The modern South African is in a similar situation.

References

[1] Botha, C.G., Article on 'Lodge De Goede Hoop' in *General History and Social Life of the Cape of Good Hope,* Struik, Cape Town, 1962.

[2] Gayre of Gayre and Nigg, R., *Heraldic Standards and other Ensigns,* Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1959.

[3] Smith, W., *Flags through the Ages and across the World,* McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975.

Robert A. Laing
Chairman of the Transvaal Branch of the Genealogical Society of South Africa (GSSA) 1982 - 1987; Co-founder of the Southern Transvaal Branch of the GSSA 1988; National Chairman of the GSSA 1989 - 1992. Member of the Heraldry Council of South Africa 1984 - 1996; Member of the State Herald's Advisory Committee 1984 - 1996. Member of the ANC Advisory Committee on National Symbols 1991. Honorary Editor of the Heraldry Society of Southern Africa 1994; Chairman 1995 to date. Author of over 100 articles on Heraldry, Genealogy and related subjects published in numerous journals.
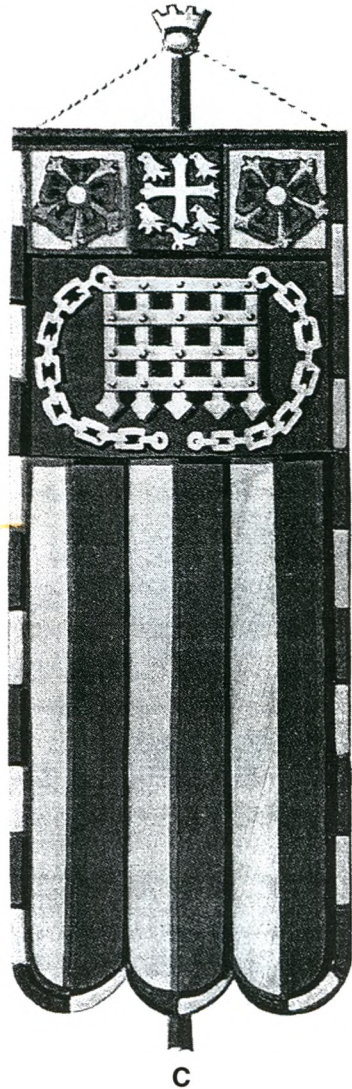
ADDRESS: P.O. Box 81011, Parkhurst 2120, South Africa
e-mail: robertal@cna.co.za

Plate 19
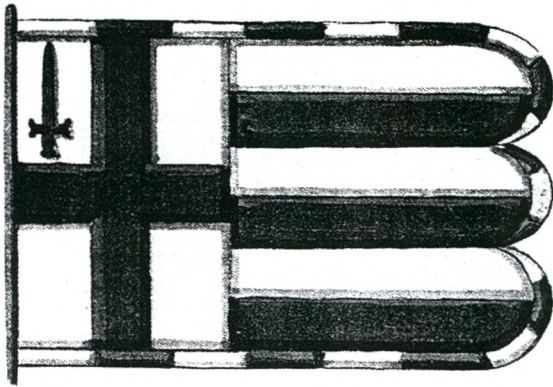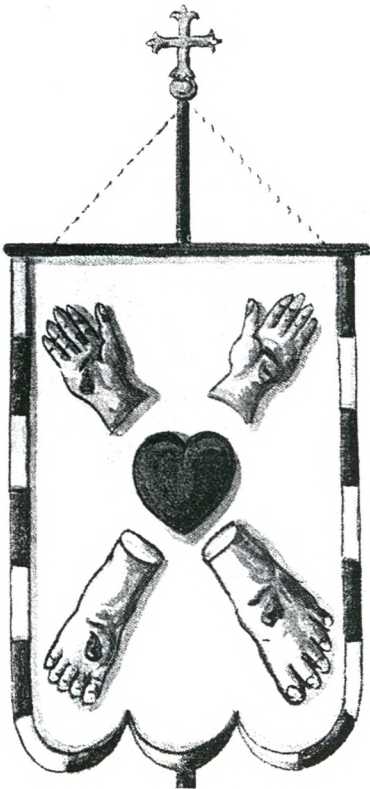
Figure 1 - Corporate Flags in the form of Gonfannons: Gayre (1959)
a) Gonfannon of the arms of the City of London.
b) The Gonfannon banner of the Five Wounds, under which the Cornish
   marched against the English in 1549.
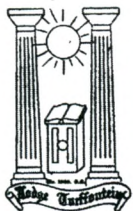c) The Gonfannon of the arms and liveries of the City of Westminster.

Plate 20

Lodge Braemar
No. 1469 S.C.

Middleburg United Lodge
No 794 S.C.

Lodge Towerby
No. 1500 S.C.

Lodge Turfontein
No. 1556 S.C.

Woodlands Lodge
No. 3668 E.C.

Losie Jakaranda
No. 1514 S.C.

Lodge Argyll
No. 1548 S.C.

Lodge "Douglas"
No. 799 S.C.

Lodge Gordon
No. 804 S.C.

Figure 2.1 - Some Lodge "Badges" taken from Lodge Circulars

Plate 21

Ophirton Lodge
No. 886 S.C.

Emrys Lodge
No. 3259 E.C.

Cleveland Lodge
No. 964 S.C.

Melrose Lodge
No. 7034 E.C.

Corona Lodge
No. 2731 E.C.

Phoenix Lodge
No. 3602 E.C.

Lodge Republic
No. 1621 S.C.

Lodge North Western
No. 1596 S.C.

Lodge Northern Province
No. 1576 S.C.

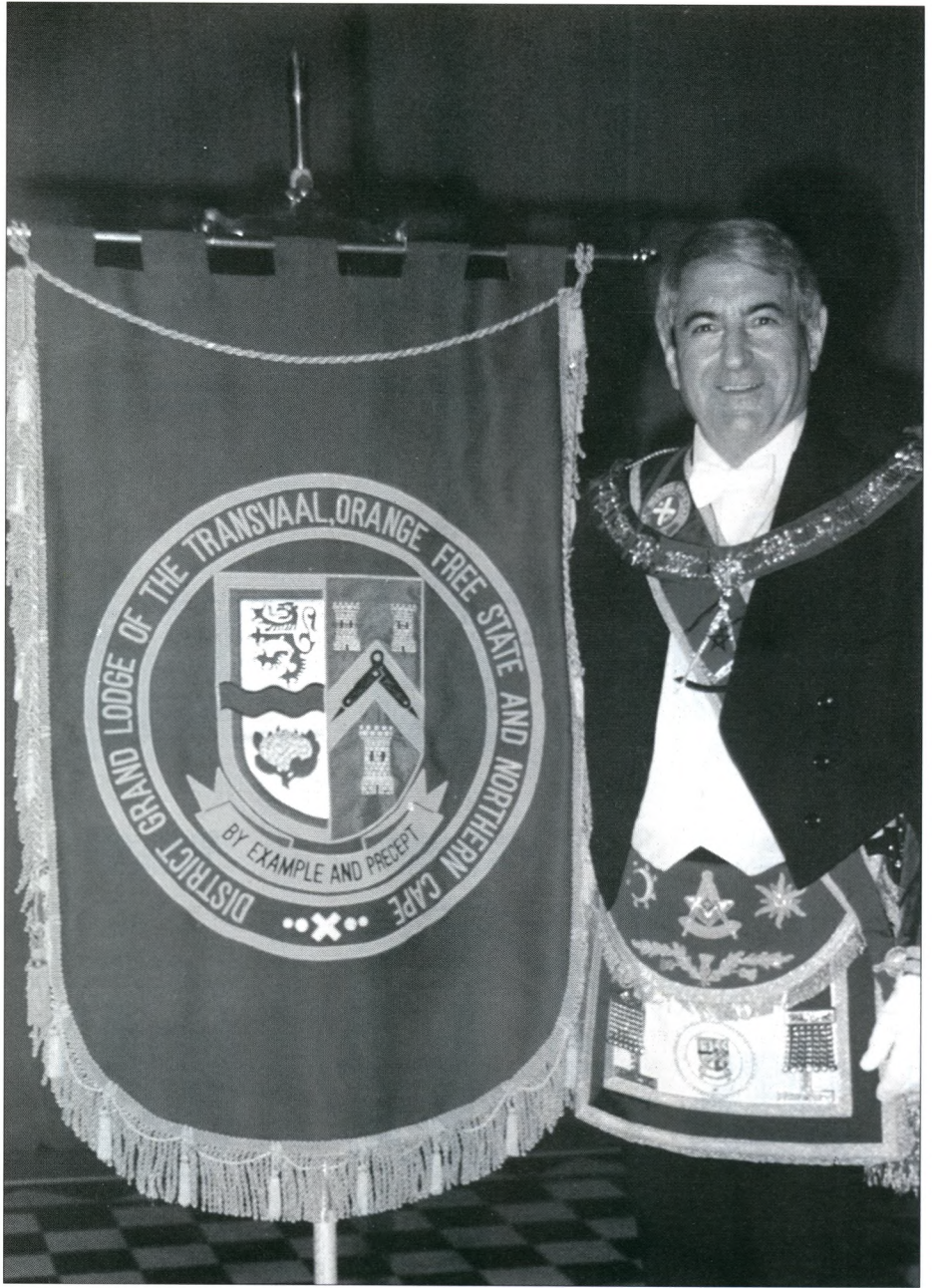**Figure 2.2 - More Lodge "Badges" taken from Lodge Circulars**

Plate 22

**Figure 3 - Bro. Morris Linton, holding the new banner
of the District Grand Lodge of the Transvaal, Orange Free State
and Northern Cape (Scottish Constitution)**

Plate 23

LODGE UNITY No. 1006 S.C.
Consecrated - Pretoria - 23 June 1906

Zion Lodge No. 891 S.C.

LODGE ENERGY No.1760 S.C.
Consecrated on 7th December 1985

Figure 4 - Central elements of three new Masonic Banners