

Report by Rt Wor Bro Joe Watson

Introduction

It was agreed that Rt Wor Bro Norman Humes (NH) (Chairman), Rt Wro Bro Joe Watson (JW), and Wor Bro Gerry Harrison (GH) should form a panel of mediators to hear complaints made by Wor Bros Brian Hood PGSoW (BH), Stewart Hood (SH), and Lodge 549, represented by Wor Bro Billy Beattie (BB), and counter complaints made against these Brethern, with a see if they could be resolved amicably.

For various reasons GH did not attend the first scheduled meeting on 17/1/08, and whilst this caused some considerable difficulty, at that time, and subsequently, the parties continued with the mediation process, which was largely due to the skill/negotiating powers exhibited by the Chairman.

The Chairman considered that as GH had not been present on the first day, when the major complaint (the Col Form) had been discussed in detail, that he could not 'catch up', and therefore the process should continue with only two mediators, and this was eventually accepted by BH, SH, & BB.

Four meetings were held, on 17/1/08, 18/2/08, 10/3/08 & 7/4/08, at which all parties were present, albeit at different sessions, and they agree that the mediators have heard their complaints in full, and thanked the mediators for taking the time to ensure that all aspects of this matter have been addressed.

All parties have expressed their desire to have these matters resolved with fairness and equity.

They also claim that they have in the past endeavoured, 'had gone to great lengths,' to have these dealt with by discussion.

A meeting was held between the PGM and Bros. Hood on 30th October, but the notes would indicate to me that entrenched positions on both sides were simply restated, with little or no attempt to try to understand what was being said, much less to resolve the issues.

The scheduled meeting with BB did not proceed as the PGM refused to have another member of 549 accompany BB.

It is my opinion that these matters could have been resolved by dialogue, however no-one was prepared to 'go that extra mile', and therefore all must bear equal

responsibility, in that they did not explore all avenues in order to restore Peace, Love and Harmony.

There is no doubt that, in allowing the original complaint to go unresolved, it has allowed the matter to 'fester', leading to other complaints following on, which have now blown out of all proportion.

One of the major problems encountered by the mediators was that all parties would not accept confirmed minutes in that they alleged that they contained items of business which did not occur, or did not record all that transpired at various meetings.

It is accepted that prior to circa mid-May 2006 that BH, SH, & BB had been peaceable and loyal members of the Province of Antrim.

Complaints by BH, SH & 549

Can be categorised:-

- 1) The procedures adopted to have a new CoI Form (NPGLCoIF) approved by the Province.
- 2) Defamatory comments made by the PGS against SH & BB.
- 3) The position of SH as PGLSoW
- 4) General complaints of maladministration in the Province

1) Procedures adopted to have a new CoI Form (NPGLCoIF) approved by the province

Chronological order of events

March 2006 --- Rt Wor Bro George Dunlop's letter of 12/11/06 – The present approach, adopted by the Council in March 2006, was the each Province should have the option to use its own design (of CoI Form).

11/5/06 --- GL BoGP. At this meeting, it was recorded 'The Board considered application forms for membership, on the lines of those drawn up and approved by the PGL of Munster, submitted by the Province of Down in tandem with Antrim. Following some discussion it was agreed that this matter be returned to the Grand Master's Council for review'.

24/5/06 -- PGL CoI meeting. Copies of the NPGLCoIF were distributed towards the end of the meeting, and Brethren were asked to take a copy with them. SH queried some of the questions on this form. No mention was made of them in the minutes.

6&13/6/06 ---NPGLCoIF were distributed and discussed at the PGL Secretaries' Day

28/6/06 ---PGL Col meeting. SH referred to the NPGLCoIF saying that he did not agree with the question re.criminal convictions, and objected to them being forced on Brethren and Lodge representatives. He asked when they had been distributed.

The PGS in reply said that they had not been forced on anyone, **they had been approved at the GLBoGP for use by the Northern Provinces.**

The PGS stated that the NPGLCoIF had been distributed at the last meeting of the PGLCoI, and **had been or are in the process of being circulated to the various Lodge representatives,** and are due to be discussed at the next PGLBoGP in August.

24/7/06 ---Circular convening meeting of PGLBoGP to be held on 21/8/06 issued on Item 9 on agenda – Consider proposed NPGLCoIF.

- 21/8/06 ---PGL BoGP meeting . The PGS presented the proposed NPGLCoIF.
Following discussion, the Board approved the new forms, with seven votes against.
- 25/9/06 ---SCof PGL. Item 9 on Adgenda – To consider proposed NPGLCoIF.
The PGM advised the Brethren that the proposed NPGLCoIF had been approved by the GL BoGP and by the PGL BoGP, and said that these Application Forms were to be used throughout the Northern Provinces.
There were no comments on these new forms.
- 27/9/06 ---PGL CoI meeting . Rt Wor Bro Noel Miller informed BB that the forms had been issued in May and most other lodges did not have difficulty in reaching conclusion regarding them.
- 18/10/06 ---GM's Council meeting . Following some discussion of the membership forms, it was decided to recommend the use of a standard form based on that used by the United Grand Lodge of England to the GL BoGP.
The form is to be used by new and rejoining members.
- 7/12/06 ---GL BoGP meeting. Reported a recommendation from the Gm's Council meeting of October that the Candidate Application Forms be made mandatory for all Masonic Provinces in Ireland. This was proposed, seconded and passed. Recommended to GL.
- 27/12/06 --- SC of GL. Mandatory Form approved.

Allegations.

It is alleged

1) A) CoI minute of May 06 was to be amended at CoI meeting in June, but this was not done.

B) Minutes of CoI meeting in June disputed in September.

C) New Candidate Forms to be left over to September

D) NCFs not to be brought before PGL BoGP in August.

2) Rt Wor Bro Noel Millar (NM) incorrectly chaired a meeting of the CoI in September.

Three Brethren objected to the minutes.

NM advised that FF- did not speak

SH – referred to PGS and what had been said in June

BB – spoke (but NM could not remember any detail)

NM is of the opinion that he gave everyone enough time, if as now alleged there were 20 objectors why did they not speak up.

3) Brethren advised that NPGLCoIFs had been approved by GL (by PGM at SC of PGL on 25/9/06) & GL BoGP (By PGS at PGL CoI meeting on 28/6/06), which was incorrect as the GL Form was not approved by the GL BoGP until 7/12/06, and by GL at its SC in December.

It should be further noted that the NPGLCoIF is not the same as that now made Mandatory by GL.

SH had been informed by PGS that these had been approved by GL.

Discussion.

1) The PGM was aware that at the GL meeting on 1/6/06 the forms were once again returned to the GM's Council for review

2) That despite assurances given to the Brethren, the NPGLCoIF had not got GL BoGP or GL approval in September. (This was not done until December 06)

The PGM refers to the GM's Council in March 06 where the general approach was that each Province should have the option to use its own design. (Presumably pending the approval by GL of a NCoIF).

The PGM says that he was acting in good faith within this remit, and if he thought otherwise, he would not have proceeded.

Having 'looked the PGM in the eyes', I am persuaded of his sincerity.

However in my opinion he has acted incorrectly, or has been misled, and therefore some reparation needs to be made.

I am at a loss to understand how this matter was allowed to continue on its way, in view of the fact that Rt Wor Bro Denis Millen (PDGM), RT Wor Bro Noel Miller (PAGM) and V Wor Bro Alan Askin (PGS) were at the meeting of the GLBoGP in May when this matter was referred back for review, yet issued a new form some 13 days later, and in the PGS' case assured the Brethren that these had been approved by the GL Board, the others remaining silent.

It is also noted that the NPGLCoIF was never the subject of a formal Notice of Motion, and has been accepted without formal proposal and second.

The complainants take the view that, as we are solely a Moral Society that 'teaches', uprightness and rightness in our conduct, and are urged to act with perfect uprightness when entrusted with the charge of your Brethren, then they believe that this undertaking has been broken, and as a result have lost all faith in the Senior Officers of the Province, and particularly in the PGS, and to a lesser extent the PGM.

Resolution.

It has been conceded by the PGM

1)CoI is not the proper forum for distribution or discussion on NPGLCoIF.

2)Lodges/representatives were not (properly) informed that these forms would be brought before PGL BoGP in August.

The NPGLCoIF is to be withdrawn and the old form reintroduced until such time that the DGM has completed his 'audit' of Irish Freemasonry.

3)NM in hindsight considers that it might have been better practice to have put the specific objections to the meeting.

I am of the opinion that there was ample time for any objector to have made their point, and therefore NM has acted correctly and the minute must stand.

2) Defamatory comments made by the PGS against SH & BB.

At the May 06 meeting of the PGLCoI the proposed NPGLCoIF was produced. It is alleged by SH that he asked the Chairman (V Wro Bro JA Laury) when this was to come before the Brethren for discussion/approval. The Chairman said that this would be dealt with under matters arising at the next meeting in June.

None of this is recorded in the minutes, nor is any reference made to the NPGLCoIF.

At the June meeting of the PGLCoI (temporarily chaired, by Rt Wor Bro D Millen PDGM) it is alleged by SH that he challenged the minutes in that they did not refer to the assurance given at the May meeting for discussion on the NPGLCoIF to take place at this meeting. The brethren accepted the amendment, saying that this correction should be inserted into the May minute.

No such amendment has been made.

When questioned by the mediators Rt Wor Bro D Millen could not remember any detail of this matter, and now relies on the official minute.

Discussion did take place on the NPGLCoIF, and the PGS advised that the GL BoGP had approved its use.

The minutes record that this matter would be brought up at the PGL BoGP in August.

SH & BB would allege that following subsequent discussion it was agreed that this matter should be further discussed and therefore postponed until the October meeting of the PGL BoGP to enable the Brethren to consider the matter.

This is not recorded in the minutes. However it is interesting to note that the minute states 'Following a general discussion, it was agreed that this matter would be discussed at the September meeting of the CoI'.

It seems strange that this would be the case if this matter was to be brought before the PGL BoGP in August and PGL in September for approval.

At the September meeting of the PGLCoI the minutes were challenged by three Brethren in relation to the alleged assurances given in regard to this matter not being brought before the PGL BoGP, PGL, and discussions which were to take place at this meeting.

The minutes were passed (by the temporary Chairman Rt Wor Bro N Millar PAGM) by majority, the objectors being recorded by name and Lodge number.

The complaint is that at the PGL BoGP in August the 'PGS advised the board of purposes when asked by a member of 549 that he understood that an assurance was given by the PGS the COI June meeting, that the matter of the forms would not be

on the agenda for the August BOP, but would be deferred to the OCT BOP, with further discussions on the form to take place in the COI sept meeting. PGS replied 'no that is not right'. The rep for 549 then asked 'have I then been misinformed by our representative' the PGS replied 'Yes'.

None of this is recorded in the minutes.

BB of 549 and SH (indirectly) take the view that their integrity has been brought into question, particularly in front of the other members of their respective Lodges, in that they apparently have given them an incorrect report as Reps to the PGL CoI, and they take great exception to this, and complain that they have been called liars.

There is no doubt that there has been and there remains some doubt in this matter as to who said what and when.

To say that someone is mistaken and therefore inadvertently misleading is not as severe as calling someone a liar.

Resolution.

BB & SH have accepted this and do not wish to persue this matter further.

3)The Position of BH as PGLSoW

It is accepted without qualification that BH has been an able, capable and competent PGLSoW.

1) BH complains that he has been temporarily suspended from the Office of SoW (see PGM letter of 14/2/07).

He maintains that he has not been given an explanation for his suspension, and suggests that such action can only be taken by the PGLBoGP.

I suspect that he is referring to PGL Bye-law 22(f), however this is in relation to the permanent removal of any nominated Office of PGL.

The PGM considers that he could not have anyone as part of his team, who was making scurrilous remarks and casting desparations on PGL or its Officers. Initially he had hoped that these matters could be resolved quickly, and did not go to the PGLBoGP in view of the agreement with the AGM that all aspects of these complaints should be the subject of a 'gagging' order.

In temporarily suspending BH the PGM says that he was acting in accordance with PGL Bye-law 31(a).

However this should be committee of no less than six members, who can exercise the powers and functions of the PGLBoGP in relation to suspensions, etc.

The PGM has no power under the present Bye-laws to act alone to suspend a brother.

The PGM accepts that his actions can be construed as having prejudiced the position, and that he has acted as judge and jury.

I am of the opinion that, in the very difficult circumstances the PGM found himself, he had no alternative but to act as he did by suspending SH pro tempore.

Resolution.

On satisfactory resolution of this dispute the PGM is prepared to reinvest BH as PGL SoW.

4) General complaints of maladministration in the Province.

- 1) Why was the rebuilding of Portrush, and Ballintoy halls, and repair to the Ballymena hall not subject to Bye-law 20, in the same manner as all other halls in the Province.

The mediators are satisfied that these projects have been properly supervised by the PGL Finance Committee. (See letter to Trustees of Arthur Square hall).

- 2) Complaints relating to Arthur Square Masonic Hall (ASMH)

a) Why were plans relating to the refurbishment of ASMH requested by Rt Wor Bro Fraser (PAGM) directly from the project architect, rather than through the proper channels i.e. via the Trustees of ASMH.

Rt Wor Bro Fraser accepts that he breached protocol in this instance and offers his apology.

The mediators consider this to be a matter for the Trustees of ASMH and their own appointed architect.

b) The lease between the Trustees and the Trustees of the PMH, Rosemary Street was not completed.

c) VAT charges on invoices to the Trustees of ASMH for hire of rooms in the PMH.

d) Costs forwarded to the caterer for rates, which it is alleged are outwith their agreement.

Items b) & c) are alleged to be poor management on the part of Officers of PGL, and whilst this may be correct, we are not aware of any complaint being made by the Trustees of ASMH.

- 3) Failure on the part of PGL to pay invoices submitted by Sheridan & Hood, in an 'honourable and appropriate time scale'.

A schedule of some 81 invoices has been submitted by BH which show the time to make payment ranges from 8- 112 days, with only 5 being in excess of 90 days.

The mediators note that the average time to make payment is 41 days, which does not seem unreasonable to them.

- 4) BH is of the opinion that his integrity is being brought into question by being restricted in access to the PMH, where his attendance at same has been recorded and questioned by the PGS and PAGS.

The mediators are satisfied as to the assurances given to them as to SH's good standing, access being restricted during his temporary suspension.

- 5) BH was accused by Wor Bro Alistair Boyd, PAGES, of bugging the PMH. The PAGES has apologised unreservedly. This apology has been accepted by BH, who advised the Mediators that this matter is now closed. However the accusation was made in the presence of Wor Bro Ronnie Wilson and Wor Bro Tommy Gardener, and BH is anxious that they also hear the apology, so that they are in no doubt that the accusation has been withdrawn. I have spoken to both Brethren and advised them of the situation and they have accepted my assurance that a full apology has been made by the PAGES, and this matter is now closed.
- 6) BH preserves that an accusation has been made in that he took advantage of his position as PLG SoW to manipulate tender prices, particularly in relation to the 'legionella contract'. The mediators have investigated this matter and find the accusation to be unfounded.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. A. Boyd', is written over a light yellow rectangular background.