

A History of the Dunstable Masonic Centre

Before the Dunstable Masonic Centre was built, local Lodges used to meet at various locations in and around Dunstable and Luton.

One of the original Lodges which met at the Centre was the Lodge of St Peter. This Lodge was formed in 1945. Originally, it held its meetings in the Parish Hall, Church Street, Dunstable opposite the Old Palace Lodge Hotel, and its Festive Board at the Saracen's Head public house in High St South. In 1950, it moved to the Assembly Room at the rear of the Sugar Loaf Hotel, High St North, where it met for over twenty years. However, when the Sugar Loaf Hotel closed for alterations in 1972, the Lodge was forced to move again and briefly met at the Assembly Hall at the Old Grammar School, High Street North.

A meeting was held on 12th October 1972 at Chews House, High St South to consider a permanent meeting place in Dunstable. This meeting was open to all Masons and Units that met in the Dunstable area. At this meeting, it was agreed using the Old Grammar School was not a success; nor was using the Dining room at the Moat House, Leagrave as its use was dependent on the good will of the manager!

Several possible locations were considered. One option was an empty factory, which had a large 53' x 35' room, an entrance hall, toilets, and the use of some first-floor rooms along with a car park for twenty cars but this would cost of £30,000. A second option was the Old Methodist Church in Albion Street but as renovations would cost at least £15,000 this proposal was also abandoned. Finally, the current site was considered and ultimately chosen.

The first application for outline planning consent was made by WBro Jack Land. However, this application was refused as Cemetery Lane was an unmetalled footpath. Over the next four years, numerous meetings and discussions were held with the Dunstable Municipal Borough Council. Eventually permission to build the Centre was granted in 1975, with some very strict planning restrictions on its use which were not removed until 2016. The permission to build the Centre came with the condition that £10,500 was paid for the creation of road and pedestrian access to the site. Dunstable Municipal Borough Council demanded a 10 feet wide carriageway and a 5 feet footpath! Three Lodges (Chiltern Lodge, Lodge of St Peter and the Old Dunstablian's Lodge) all agreed and each paid its share of the cost. Approval to build the Centre was finally granted by the Local Authority in December 1977. The adopted road finished at the bollards the rest of the lane remained as rough gravel. The residents complained so much to the council that they finally surfaced it!

WBro Albert Hutchins's building company commenced work in February 1978 and the Centre was completed and ready for use in September 1979. The total cost for the Centre was £44,395 which included £5,000 for furnishings. Bro McIntyre's building company also helped keep the costs low, by generously tiling the roof for free!

On 3rd October, 1979, the Lodge of St Peter held the first masonic meeting at the Centre.

The Temple was dedicated by the then Provincial Grand Master RW Bro Cyril Robinson, assisted by Officers of Provincial Grand Lodge, at a special meeting which was held on Tuesday 29th April 1980. This ceremony was attended by 91 Brethren and is marked by a plaque in the entrance of the Centre.



Two Lodges that helped during the early stages of funding the building, Old Dunstablian's Lodge and the John Hindle Lodge never actually used the Centre, having moved elsewhere!

Initially, only three Craft Lodges used the Centre. However, in November 1989, the Thistle and Rose Lodge of Bedfordshire was consecrated with the Centre as its home.

At this time, the Centre was funded by Unit rents, bar takings and various donations from Lodges.

In April 1983, extensions to the dining room and one to form the changing room were agreed at a total cost of £16,000. These improvements were funded from donations, raffles and monies raised from Race Nights and other Centre functions.