

WBro ROBERT DONALD FISHER, PPrGSwdB (2025)

Temple Lodge 1094

Robert Donald FISHER was born in Hornchurch, Essex in July 1940, to Alexander Hector Henry Fisher, a tool maker by profession, and Dorothy May (nee Rolfe). There followed a younger daughter, Rhona Dorothy but alas she passed away some years ago. Hornchurch is a pleasant suburban town some 15 miles east/north/east from the centre of London and but since those days has become part of the Greater London Area, in the Borough of Havering inside the M25.

In July 1940, the Second World War was 10 months old, and just before and immediately after that month, two critical wartime events took place, one which directly affected Hornchurch. The first 1940 crises occurred in late May to early June when the BEF which had been sent to France to try and stop the German advance (just as happened 25 years earlier at the start of the WW1) but it was pushed back to the Channel, so Operation Dynamo was activated. This meant that flotillas of small, low-draught boats, lifeboats, launches and I.O.M. ferries, totalling 850, some privately crewed, supported by Royal Navy, with some Canadian and French destroyers evacuated over 330,000 soldiers, British, Allied, French and Belgium from the beaches of Dunkirk. 68,000 men were lost or captured, but that saved the core of the British Army albeit they lost all their equipment.

During WW1, although the fighting was confined to the Belgium/French border, the Germans had "Blimp" airships called Zeppelins, which could reach London and drop bombs. At Hornchurch, the RFC took over some farm fields in Hornchurch (called Suttons Farm). They erected an airfield for training pilots but also had "combat" aircraft that were sent up to try and destroy the Zeppelins which, occasionally they did. The airfield was de-commissioned early in the 1920s and the land returned to the farmer. However, as tensions rose again in the 1930s, the now RAF returned for the land and built a new airfield. This time it was titled Hornchurch and became the Group 11 Fighter Command base. During the evacuation of Dunkirk, many Spitfires from Hornchurch flew to confront the German planes attempting to bomb and strafe the troops on the beaches. Following Dunkirk, the Germans plan was to invade the UK, (Operation Sealion), but needed control of the skies before risking trying to cross the Channel. Therefore, a programme of bombing radar stations and airfields began in mid-July 1940 (Eagle Day) and lasted until September, now known as "The Battle of Britain." Hornchurch was therefore a major target and the area was repeatedly attacked. Unable to command the airspace, Hitler abandoned the invasion and turned his attention to the blitz on towns and production centres. The airfield is no more and is now a housing estate but many of the road names are synonymous with people and events associated with the airfield during wartime.

When Bob was about two years old, the family moved to Liverpool and he was educated at Alsop High School, Walton, and excelled as a swimmer and boxer, interests which have stayed with him. He was secretary of the Merseyside Boxing section and served on the Police North West Region Committee for boxing. He was also a founder member of the Police National Boxing team.

Bob joined the Liverpool City Police in May 1960, as Con 184"B" and a little later, he passed an Advanced Driving Course which resulted in him transferring to the Traffic Division as Con 185"T." In 1967 we became the Liverpool and Bootle Constabulary and in 1974 enlarged into the Merseyside Police as it now., as Con 1768"T". Bob was promoted to Sergeant and posted to the City Centre "A" Division where he spent several years before returning to the Traffic Division. Towards the end of his service, Bob was posted to a Headquarters position which included the Coroners Court.

12 July is also the Orange Lodges' main marching day with bands from outlying areas merged together to go Lime Street Station and on to Southport. They returned in the evening and that was when the fun, from a policing perspective, started.

Bob met his wife Stephanie via a “blind date” arranged by his cousin Marion, although only after she had to show Bob a photograph of her first! Having past that test, Stephanie went to Marion’s house and Bob answered the door wearing a false red beard and berry. Despite his antics, Stephanie bravely decided he was worth the effort and they married in July 1964. They have three sons – Andrew, Paul and David, plus five grandchildren, Jack (29), Sam (27), Bethany (26), Thomas (23) and George (10). Stephanie was the perfect match for Bob in supporting him but also keeping him under control when necessary. It was a major loss to Bob and all the family, when Stephanie succumbed to cancer in late 2015.

On retiring on completion of his police career, Bob became a volunteer driver for the Multiple Sclerosis Society on the Wirral, a Welfare Officer for the National Association of Retired Police Officers (Liverpool Branch), and for a time was a volunteer Ambassador for the North West Air Ambulance. Unfortunately, he has had to step down from those roles.

Both his father and father-in-law were Freemasons, albeit in the Cheshire Province. Although keen to see him follow in their footsteps, the fact Bob lived and worked in Liverpool meant that it was more appropriate he join a Liverpool (West Lancashire) lodge. He was introduced to Joe Way and William Jackson of this Lodge and they proposed and seconded his entry into Freemasonry on 13 January 1965. It is rumoured that at a committee meeting, some brethren were wary of bringing a serving police officer into the Lodge. However, it happened and he readily progressed through the various offices and was installed as the W.M. in April 1971. At this time, it is believed that he was the youngest reigning Master in the Province. In 1955 the Lodge totalled 102 members, in 1966 there were 71, Bob being chronologically, the 68th Out of the Chair, he was DC for five years, chaplain for four, and returned to the WM’s chair in 2011, 40 years afterwards. He became the lodge almoner in 2014 and would “fill in” if somebody couldn’t attend.

In the late 70s Masonry came under scrutiny by the powers to be and it was suggested that all police officers would be forced to admit membership, there was also a hidden agenda that they could be denied promotion. Although it never came to pass, it had an adverse reaction to Masonic recruitment and many, already Masons resigned for fear of their future. As a result, numbers dropped but Bob managed to convince others to join, as did Howard Youdan after him, which kept the Lodge going. Bob joined the Sovereigns Peace Lodge No 8911 (retired Police officers) in April 1991 and took the WM chair in 2011. Latterly, his health has meant that he has to curtail some of his Masonry.

His service to masonry was recognised with his first Provincial appointment in 1983 to PPGSD, then to PPGSuptWks in 1995 and after a short wait of 30 years, he will in May this year be invested with the rank of PPGSwdB. He has remained very loyal to the Craft but joined the Mark Masons’ Degree in January 2017 – in Cheshire.

On a personal note, Stewart Hyde mentioned that when he joined the Traffic Division, Bob and his partner in crime, another Temple Lodge hooligan called Peter Lowe (RIP), incidentally also born on the same day as Bob, but in 1933, kind of took him under their wing and were his proposer and seconder into this lodge in 1972. Bob guided Stewart through his earlier Masonic years as well as being very supportive when he had domestic issues. The main ethos of Masonry is that we should try to be the best we can, so that we can live respected and die regretted. However, recently an ex-police officer died after living in Spain for many years having resigned from Merseyside Police. His name was Robert Fisher who served in both “A” and “B” divisions but was never in Traffic or promoted. I had actually served with him around 1965/6. His death was circulated as usual within a police group on Facebook. There were some 26 complementary comments about him – but over half mentioned him as both Traffic and a good boss in “A” Division. I saw these entries and told Bob about them and he agreed that I could point out to that group that they were getting the two Bob Fishers mixed up and “our” Bob Fisher was still alive and kicking. However, it meant that Bob has his obituaries before he has died!!!