

HUMBER LODGE No. 57 - THE FOUNDERS TOAST – 11th MAY 1993.

Presented by W. Bro. M. J. Phillips

W, Master, Officers of Provincial Grand Lodge, W. Brethren and Brethren, for me freemasonry is first and foremost about people and those people who, to the best of my knowledge and belief, have been for well over 300 years and continue to be concerned for each other and practitioners of the ancient customs, arts, rites and ceremonies of the Order. What we have done thus far this evening is a confirmation of those traditions, a confirmation of our commitment to each other and to the fraternity.

What I am now in the act of performing is one of those established practices which, with the passage of time, has become an ancient custom in the Humber Lodge. A custom which, each year at our May meeting, affords us the opportunity to pay homage to our Founders, and as our Founders were by definition people not things, it gives me particular pleasure to propose this honoured toast. I must, however, confess to an element of confusion on my part, for although it is beyond question when studying the text of many of my predecessors toasts, that our Founders are, Bros. Lt. Wm, Crow, Thos. Feetam and Joseph Eglin and all Founders, the act or acts for which they are celebrated took place during the period 1825-27 and we read in our history and indeed on page 5 of the preface to our ritual book that the Lodge was formed in 1809.

Let us look then at what at first view appears a paradox.

It is well known to the longer serving brethren that a Warrant of Constitution was issued under the No. 53, to a Lodge in Liverpool, by the Grand Master of the "Ancients" the Duke of Atholl. The date of issue being 19th May A.D, 1756, from which date until the 16th of March 1809, the Lodges operating under its authority appear to have had a chequered, nay, disastrous history. We read that during the period 1756 to 1809, the Warrant had passed between two Liverpool Lodges, the first having lapsed the second being suspended.

In AD 1809, a number of Freemasons in Hull, with the assistance of two Military Lodges in the city, whose numbers were 120 and 125 attached to the Cumberland and Lancaster regiments of Militia, applied for permission to form a new Lodge, for which a Warrant was required. Permission was granted by The Grand Lodge of "Ancients" and the Warrant No, 53 was transferred by endorsement to the Lodge in Hull, which was named as the "Ancient Knight Templars" whose meetings were to be held in the Fleece Inn, in the Market Place. The first regular meeting under this Warrant was held on the 16th of March 1809 and Bra, William White, had the honour of being the first W, M.

Sixteen months later, on the 2nd of July 1810 it was resolved to change the name of the Lodge, to The Humber Lodge No. 53,

I suspect that you may by now be in sympathy with my earlier statement of confusion for here we have by 1810 the existence of the Humber Lodge No. 53 and we are celebrating our founders who became joining members in 1824. How can this be? There seems to me to be two possible explanations;-

i) that someone has cooked the books, as it were or

ii) that these named brethren had such an enormous positive impact on the time and times of the Humber Lodge that their deeds overshadowed that which had gone before them,

I am happy and rejoice in the knowledge that my researches, like those of my predecessors, have revealed that it was the latter rather than the former which leads us to our homage tonight. For the benefit of the masonically younger brethren who are by now totally convinced that we are a Society with Secrets let me proceed to restore them to light. I left you probably wondering why the No. 53 is referred to in these early days whilst today we proudly bear the Ho. 57. To explain this I must ask you to cast your mind back a few minutes to earlier passages of my address, when I referred to the Grand Lodge of "Ancients", what I did not say was that at that time there was also in existence the Grand Lodge of "Moderns" which also presided over its Empire of Lodges, In due time, 1813, to be precise, wisdom in the form of brotherly love, relief and truth, prevailed and the two Grand Lodges became one, a consequence of which was that all the numbers in both camps were put in a big pack, given a good shuffle and bingo we came out No. 57.

Well to be truthful it wasn't quite like that. In the inevitable reallocation of numbers resulting from the merger the Humber Lodge became No. 73 on the Register of the newly formed and entitled "United Grand Lodge of England" under whose authority we operate today. In due time, 1832 to be exact, a further re-numbering took place, for reasons I know not, but we the Humber Lodge emerged with the No. 65, which we enjoyed until A. D. 1863, when the process of Lodge numbers adjustment was repeated, the consequence of which being that the No. 57 became attached to The Humber Lodge of free and accepted masons, to be worn with dignity and pride by all those fortunate enough to pass through its doors and be received into its bosom.

So now to return to our founders, Bros. Lt, Wm. Crow, Thomas Feetam and Joseph Eglin, they entered the Humber Lodge at a period in its history when, as an infant Lodge, it was going through difficult times and they grasped the nettle and infused new life, new ideas and a sense of purpose and direction. Such was the effectiveness of their actions that the Lodge had to change the meeting place as membership numbers increased and records show that meetings were held in the "Black Swan" in Dock Street and the "Turk's Head" the accommodation of which in due time became - and I quote - uncommodious and inconvenient, so strong efforts were made to break away from the tavern meetings and secure a permanent home of its own where Freemasonry could be practised in comfort and with befitting decorum.

Thus was born the idea, which was to build a befitting place for Masons and freemasonry, an idea which did not meet with the approval of the landlord of the "Turk's Head", So fearful of his wrath and that he might take revenge the W. M. wore the Warrant round his waist as an apron during the last meeting to be held there. Consequently the next meeting was held at the "Humber Tavern" and subsequently at the "Neptune" Inn where it remained until the consecration of The Masonic Hall in Osborne Street.

Bros. Lt. Crow, Feetam and Eglin worked tirelessly to bring about their dream and Minerva Lodge were invited to be party to the grand design, but chose not to do so. Undaunted, the money was raised, plans were laid and land on the corner of Osborne and Anne Street was purchased, all in a matter of a few short months.

It was all systems go and a deputation of Brethren waited upon R. W. Bro. Robert Mackenzie Beverley, D.P.G.M. of Yorkshire, to request him to perform the ceremony of laying the foundation stone. To this he readily agreed and immediately named the 7th of May 1827 for the performance of the Solemnity. And so brethren I have almost squared my circle, the stone was laid with much ceremony, pomp and solemnity and there it rested in peace and harmony for exactly 114 years to the day, when on the night of May 7th/8th 1941 the building was destroyed by enemy action. Some few hours earlier on the 7th of May at 12,30 p.m. a meeting was held in the building to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone, a meeting of historic finality for the possessions of the Humber Lodge.

That the Humber Lodge has survived such a trauma speaks not for the stone work and artefacts of masonry but for the members thereof. A Masonic Lodge is not made by hands alone; it is the flesh and blood not the riches and title that have maintained us on the road to perpetuity. It is therefore my sincere belief that we do honour to our founders, Bros, Lt. Wm. Crow, Thomas Feetam and Joseph Eglin, by the way we conduct ourselves with and to each other and by the quality of our candidates and the example we as sponsors set them. Sadly the reality is that there will never be another foundation stone laid in the name of the Humber Lodge but let us never forget that the real and meaningful foundation stone is laid in the north east corner- of the lodge at each and every initiation, that being the most fitting of tributes that we can pay to our founders.

Worshipful Brethren and Brethren, be pleased to stand and in darkness and in silence honour this most noble toast to Bros. Lt. Wm. Crow, Thomas Feetam and Joseph Eglin and all our founders.