

HUMBER LODGE 57: Founders Toast

The Dark Side

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Worshipful Master, Worshipful Brethren and Brethren, I submit the toast to our founders with great humility. Many eminent Worshipful Brethren in the past have undertaken the task, and I look with awe at their researching and presentation skills.

This evening we celebrate the 189th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the Humber Lodge premises in Osborne Street, Hull, a building which stood for over a century until it was destroyed by enemy action in May 1941.

We also celebrate the toast to our founders, Brothers Lieutenant William Crow, Thomas Feetam and Joseph Eglin. Brothers Bill, Tom and Joe.

Many of you have heard this toast submitted over the years, and each year the proposer endeavours to present it afresh, focussing on particular aspects to maintain interest. The essential toast, however, cannot be changed, as it is solidly built on recorded history of which we are duly proud. I make no apology for repetition, and for our most recent members I hope that my humble dissertation proves of interest, as it enables us all to ponder on the past and consider what influence we ourselves might have on our history as the Lodge continues through the twenty-first century.

It is tempting, looking backwards, to put on rose-tinted spectacles and to regard our predecessors almost as saints, looking at their achievements and contributions to Freemasonry. Many of them were indeed most notable men and Masons, but I want to look for a change on the dark side, at some of the dodgy practices and in-fighting that took place in the Lodge in the early days – at the bad behaviour and poor judgements. Why? Because researching what happened before Brothers Bill, Tom and Joe came along made me realise that what happened subsequently was all the more amazing. It is against the shadows of the rogues and vagabonds, the petty, the surly and the stupid that

our true founders shine like bright stars in the heavens. It is clear that had it not been for Bill, Tom and Joe, this Lodge could never have survived.

And so, a little history. In 1756, warrant number 53 was issued by the Duke of Atholl, Grand Master of the Ancients, authorising the constitution of a Lodge at the Buck and Dog Tavern in Liverpool. I will not here dilate on the adjusting of Lodge numbers at the merging of the Ancients and Moderns in 1813; suffice it to say that this Lodge has held a variety of numbers: 53, Letter C, 73, 65 and, from 1863 onwards, 57.

However, the Lodge in Liverpool was a turbulent hotbed of troublemakers, it seems, several of its members being deported for burglary, and complaints being made by other indignant Liverpool Lodges about the bad behaviour of the Brethren. It was eventually suspended, and its Warrant remained dormant until 1809. In Hull, three watchmakers, two publicans, a cobbler, a jeweller, a stationer and a merchant applied for possession of the Warrant, and bought it. They were granted permission from the Grand Master to work with it in Hull. They called the new Lodge "The Ancient Knight Templars" but after only a year, the name was changed to the one we now revere.

The early days were precarious. There were not many members, and they kept falling out with each other. They usually met on Sunday evenings in licensed premises such as the Fleece Inn, the Black Swan, the Turks Head, the Humber Tavern and the Neptune Inn. The furniture and ornaments of the Lodge would have to be taken and perhaps stored at these establishments, along with the Warrant, of course. There were financial difficulties, and Officers were fined half a crown for non-attendance or a shilling if they were late. The minutes of February 1811 show the resolution "that any Brethren whispering during the time the Lodge was in labour, be fined two shillings and sixpence." The fines didn't cover the Lodge's costs, however. What money they had seems to have been spent on liquor.

The minutes are intermittently chronicled between November 1817 and November 1820. We know there was an emergency meeting called on June 21st 1819 to elect the officers for the forthcoming year, but only four members turned up. A month later there was another meeting, at which the four

members resolved that the furniture of the Lodge be sold in order to liquidate its debts. The sale took place on August 19th and everything was disposed of with the exception of some clothing, the jewels and the Warrant. These had been seized by the Treasurer, owing to a financial dispute.

There seem to be no records until November 1820, when minutes show that Brethren decided to meet at the Black Swan on every first Wednesday in the month until further notice. These meetings would have been unconstitutional as the ex-Treasurer still had the Warrant. This needed resolving, and in November 1822, the offending Treasurer was summoned to surrender the document. I quote from Worshipful Brother George Shaw's *History of the Humber Lodge of 1909*:

"The late Treasurer was evidently fully convinced that the conference would not be a perfect exhibition of brotherly love, so, instead of taking the Warrant upstairs into the presence of the assembled Brethren, he left it in the bar with the landlady, telling her that she was on no account to deliver it up to anyone but himself. His anticipation of the tone of the meeting was fully justified, for there was considerable discord and disorder."

George Shaw explains that the Worshipful Master had suspected something of the sort:

"He accordingly, leaving the Brethren to wrangle, interviewed the landlady, finally inducing her to part with the parcel confided to her care. Instead of bearing it in triumph to the room upstairs, he deposited it for the nonce in an empty house down a passage leading out of Dock Street, with the object of conveying it, at the close of the proceedings, to a more secure hiding-place. He returned to the meeting without any comment, and the lengthy and acrimonious discussion terminated without any solution of the difficulty being arrived at."

The ex-Treasurer was naturally furious. He complained to the PGM, Lord Dundas. Lord Dundas made due enquiries, and suspended the Warrant. The Lodge took no notice – minutes from 1823 show the WM was installed as usual.

Eleven months after the suspension, however, the PGM, having been informed that all the differences were now happily adjusted, removed the ban, and the Lodge was once more in proper working order, with a membership of twelve, meeting at the Turk's Head in Mytongate. The only jewels were the WM's and the Wardens' –and they were made of lead or pewter.

The year 1824 proved to be the turning point of the fortunes of the Lodge. In that year, Brothers Crow, Feetam and Eglin joined. With astonishing persistence and admirable business acumen they purchased the freehold site in Osborne Street in March 1827. Lodge membership was increasing now and everything seemed set fair for the future. Only one person was not happy. This was the landlord at the Turk's Head. In fact, he became so unpleasant, that on the occasion of a Lodge of Emergency for the purpose of initiating a candidate, the Worshipful Master, fearing for the safety of the much-prized Warrant, fastened it round his body in place of the usual apron.

George Shaw tells us:

“After the Lodge was closed, and an adjournment had been made for refreshments, the landlord introduced two constables and accused the Brethren of being about to remove some of his property from the premises, but the minions of the law declined to interfere, and withdrew. Then, in a burst of rage, mine host told the Brethren to take away everything that belonged to them, and the story is told that the newly-received candidate celebrated his introduction into Freemasonry, by walking through the streets, carrying one of the Wardens' candlesticks, in which the candle was still burning.”

Brothers Crow, Feetam and Eglin turned things round with remarkable speed. Their zeal and enthusiasm was inspirational. Lodge numbers increased. Within three years the foundation stone for the proposed new home of the Lodge was laid, following a procession, and the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, R. W. Brother Robert Mackenzie Beverley, having ascertained that there was no Brother in the Company guilty of brawling, strife and disobedience in open Lodge, nor guilty of drunkenness, common swearing or profane words, said “I give you all the joy of this day's proceedings. It has begun in zeal; let it end in

charity.” At the laying of the stone, he said “May this house, of which we have placed the first stone in the earth, be a habitation for worthy men to do good.”

After the ceremony round the foundations, the procession returned to the Neptune Inn, where about one hundred Brethren sat down to an excellent dinner.

Four months later, the new Lodge Room was ready for occupation. The first meeting held there was in September 1827, and the Right Worshipful Brother Beverley joined the Brethren for the official opening the following month.

Brothers Bill, Tom and Joe must have felt quietly triumphant. They were principally responsible for the erection of the temple at Osborne Street despite the dangers of insolvency, inamination and unruliness, and it is their names we hold in veneration and respect as founders of the real Humber Lodge which on this and similar occasions we especially honour. They served the Lodge well – in 1825 Brother Lt. William Crow was elected master and he died in 1834 at the age of sixty-three years. Brother Thomas Feetam held the office of master in 1837 and in 1850 and died in 1858 at the age of sixty-five years. Brother Joseph Elgin was elected master in 1828 and died in 1836 at only thirty-four years old.

It must not be thought, however, that all was sweetness and light for ever after, however. While there have been excellent masters, there have also been some bad ones. It would be remiss of me not to mention Brother William Cooper Robinson, who took the Chair in 1845. He was a lawyer from Hull who also had an office in Grimsby. There were plans to form a Pelham Pillar Lodge in Grimsby in 1846, and Humber Lodge was eager to help. A Warrant was granted in January 1847 for constituting Pelham Pillar Lodge, and the Brethren on both sides of the Humber raised about £27 by subscriptions, and bought all the requisite furniture and jewels. The money was handed over to the Master Elect, Brother William Cooper Robinson. He turned out to be thoroughly dishonest and appropriated it for his own purposes. This became apparent when the Brethren asked him to produce the Warrant. He couldn't do so, of course. He went from bad to worse, it seems, for he was later convicted of forgery and ended his days in prison. There is an annual ceremony between

the Pelham Pillar Lodge and its mother Lodge, Humber, where a bag of money is still exchanged.

The first Master of Pelham Pillar Lodge, incidentally, was Brother Thomas Hewson, who was the Worshipful Master on this side of the River Humber in 1863.

The Osbourne Street building was destroyed in the Second World War, following a meeting that day celebrating the 114th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone. All that remained was the chimney breast, with the Warrant hanging on it. Brother Alf Pickersgill rescued it the following morning. While he never became master of the Lodge, we note his name with interest. Our Warrant has had a long and interesting life, and Brother Pickersgill had rescued it from certain oblivion.

So, Brethren, there are some of the baddies as well as the goodies. We can be proud to be members of this fine Lodge, which has triumphed through all adversity and is still moving steadily forwards.

Worshipful Master, Worshipful Brethren and Brethren, please rise, and in darkness and in silence honour this toast: to Brother Lieutenant William Crow, Brother Thomas Feetam, Brother Joseph Eglin, and to all our founders; Prosperity, Unanimity and Perpetuity to the Humber Lodge.

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