

The Founders Toast - May 10th 1988

Tonight we celebrate the 161st anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the number Lodge building in Anne Street, a building which stood for 114 years, and in the toast connected with this celebration we honour as our founders three worthy Past Masters of our Lodge, Bros. Lt. Wm. Crow, Thomas Feetham and Joseph Eglin.

This is our tradition - this is the established practice of the Humber Lodge, and tonight I am honoured to have been invited to propose this toast. It may seem unusual that we still celebrate the laying of the foundation stone of a building which has long since disappeared, and the fact that Bros. Crow, Feetham and Eglin were not our founders at all, may strike you as being something of a contradiction in terms. Our bewildered visitors may be forgiven for thinking of the occasion as one of our singular eccentricities, but the dictionary describes the word 'founder' as a person who establishes an institution or society, and in this context we have no hesitation in honouring as our founders three illustrious Brethren whose generosity and enthusiasm reversed the ailing fortunes of the Humber Lodge between 1824 and 1827, and thus made possible the laying of the foundation stone of the Lodge building in Anne Street - which anniversary we proudly celebrate tonight, 161 years on.

This celebration at our May meeting provides us with a unique opportunity to look back for a moment or two, to remind ourselves of our heritage, to consider albeit briefly the work and dedication of so many Freemasons who preceded us as members of our Lodge, all of whom contributed greatly to the establishment we enjoy today, to remind ourselves to maintain and indeed strengthen our resolve to uphold the standards set for us, and from another angle, the proceedings tonight enable the younger members of our Lodge to learn something of its history, in an atmosphere suitable to the occasion.

Let us go back than very briefly to the beginning, to set the scene and recall something of our history which hopefully will remind us of what we owe to our founders, the memory of whom has inspired the members of this Lodge for so many generations.

The early history of the Lodge is fairly well known and documented. Our Warrant was first issued to a Lodge in Liverpool by the Grand Master of the Ancients on the 19th May 1756, some 232 years ago. After some years the Warrant became dormant and in 1775 it was re-issued and confirmed bearing the same number 53, to a Lodge which became known as the Ancient Knights Templar Lodge which held its meeting's in Strand Street Liverpool. For many years this Lodge was prosperous, so much so that in fact in 1804, the Master in a communication to the Grand Master of the Ancients in London stated that he had carried out twenty seven initiations in the previous six months. Sometime later the Lodge came under censure for un-masonic conduct, and the Warrant was withdrawn and returned to London.

In 1809 there was a petition from ten citizens of Hull to form, a new Lodge in the town. These applicants had been attending two military Lodges Nos. 120 and 215 which were attached to the 2nd Royal Lancashire and Cumberland Regiments of militia then stationed in the town, and these two Lodges supported the application. Across

the margin of this petition is written "Let the petitioners have the Warrant No. 53 lately held at Liverpool, to be transferred to them February 24th 1809."

The reason for transferring a Warrant rather than issuing a new one as would be the case today, has caused much speculation in the past, but it is reasonable to assume that the Ancients Grand Lodge were using this method to overcome the dictates of the Unlawful Societies Act of 1799, which declared certain Societies unlawful, but in which a clause was inserted that the Act 'was not to extend to regular Lodges of Freemasons held before the passing of the Act.' To overcome this problem the Ancients Grand Lodge re-issued Warrants that had been surrendered by defunct Lodges, or where the withdrawal of a Warrant coincided with a new petition, of transferring the Warrant to a new body of Masons meeting at a different place. In this case they did not appear to create a new Lodge, which would have been illegal, merely a change of meeting place of an existing Lodge. It was thus decided to transfer the old Liverpool Lodge with its Warrant No. 53 to continue its existence as the Ancient Knights Templar Lodge in Hull. Although the Humber Lodge as we know it really started its existence in Hull in 1809, because of the circumstances of the transfer of the Warrant it was legally constituted in 1775, some 213 years ago.

That very briefly is what might be described as the early history of the Humber Lodge Warrant, but to continue with the story of the Lodge, and particularly with the events leading up to the laying of the foundation stone, I thought it might be more interesting if I referred to our earlier days by including events, some historical some amusing, included in that delightful little book entitled 'Synopsis of Records of the Humber Lodge No. 57 1809 - 1903 by Bro. Wm Tesseyman, who was Master in 1871.

1809 March 16 Lodge met for the first time at the Fleece Inn in the Market Place.

1810 July 2 Resolved :- That the Lodge hitherto known by the name of 'Ancient Knight Templar' should in future be called the 'Humber Lodge'

1811 Feb. 6 Resolved:- That any of the Brethren whispering during the Lodge being in labour be fined 2/6d.

That was quite a substantial sum, and one can only imagine that what with the noise of the revellers in the inn down below, and the whispered stories of the seafaring members in the Lodge room, that the Master was having a difficult time conducting a ceremony in the manner expected of him.

1811 Dec. 18 Every member to pay a shilling a year for coals, and 2/- be paid by visitors after the first visit.

I rather like the custom of paying a shilling a year for coals, and if we really wanted to maintain this tradition, I suppose it would be a case of popping a shilling in the meter as you come in, and if any of our visitors are getting worried about the two shillings, and are expecting the steward to be tapping them on the shoulder with his hand out, I can assure you that we have now allowed that rule to lapse.

The book is full of such curious little rules and customs, but there is no time for more at the moment. From 1817 to 1820 there are no records of minutes, and we do know that the Lodge went into serious decline. The organ and sundry items of furniture were sold to pay debts, and by 1821 the Lodge had moved to the Black Swann in Dock Street, but alas there were only eleven members left on the books. The following year they moved to the

Turk's Head in Mytongate, and I believe that at some time the Lodge also met at the Humber Tavern. That would have been a rather interesting address, Humber Lodge, Humber Tavern, Humber Street.

Now we come to a very important entry, 1824 Oct. 6 Bro. Crow of the Minerva Lodge accepted as a joining member. Nov. 3 Bro. Feetham of the Minerva Lodge accepted as a joining member.

From that date on the fortunes of the Humber Lodge took a dramatic turn for the better, and for the next three years there was a tremendous revival of interest, and due to the generosity of Bros. Crow and Feetham there was a much needed improvement in Lodge finances, Bros. Crow and Feetham had perhaps left the Minerva Lodge because of some differences, but I suspect that Bro. Crow had always retained kindly thoughts of his Mother Lodge because in:-

1827 March 21st A proposal that the members of the Humber and Minerva Lodges should unite for the purpose of erecting a Freemasons Lodge.

Two days later:-Mar. 25 at a meeting held at Bro.Harper's, High St. Bro. Lieut. Crow in the Chair, it was resolved : 'That a subscription be entered into for the purpose of erecting a new Masonic Hall, that a committee be formed of the Minerva and Humber Lodges, and that ground on the north side of Osborne St. containing 220 sq.Yds. be purchased for the site.

March. 28 Only five days later. A building committee had been formed and signed an agreement for the sale of land in Anne St. to Messrs' Crow and others.

The Minerva Lodge it appears had decided not to join in on this project.

April 19 only three weeks later, the plans had been prepared, and the Lodge accepted that tender of Bro. Kidd for the building for £340.7.2d.

May 7 Three weeks after that event we celebrate with such pride tonight, the laying of the foundation stone by Bro.R.M. Beverley. D.P.G.M.

There was a grand procession, which included Officers of the Prov. Grand Lodge, the Officers of the Humber, Beverley and Minerva Lodges. A lead box was deposited in the foundation stone, and in the many items of interest which were included in the box was a brass plate which included the manes of Bros. Crow, Feetham and Eglin. In the same year Bro.Feetham was elected Worshipful Master, and on October. 3rd. the new building was opened.

Just think of the time schedule Brethren. March 1827 the first meeting to discuss the project, and 149 days later the grand opening ceremony. I doubt whether such a project could be completed in the same time today. But the enthusiasm of those early founders provided a momentum which took the Lodge from strength to strength, and which happily for all of us continues to this day.

There are so many interesting events included in our records that it is of course only possible to refer to a few. In 1828 Bro.Jos. Eglin was elected Master, and he it was who with Bros. Crow and Feetham gave so generously to establish our Benevolent and Pensions Fund. By 1834 Bro. Crow had passed to his rest and the records show that on Sept. 12th of that year:- A Funeral procession to Holy Trinity Church to attend the interment of the remains of the late Bro.W. Crow in the tomb within the altar rails. It was a significant honour to a worthy man.

I wonder Brethren, at this first celebration of our Founders Night in the old Minerva Lodge Building, whether Bro. Crow might not have felt some gratification if he had known that 164 years after he left the Minerva Lodge to join the Humber, that we would all be

here together again at Dagger Lane, and including in our toast his name as first amongst our founders. He would rest content in that knowledge I have no doubt.

And I wonder also if our distinguished visitor here this evening from the Minerva Lodge might not at this moment be smiling to himself and saying ' The Crow has returned to his nest.'

Upon the foundation laid on the 7th May 1827, the superstructure of the Humber Lodge was raised, which by the loyalty of its member's has I believe, ever remained honourable to the builders. Bro. Crow, Bro. Feetham and Bro. Eglin who contributed so much in terms of energy foresight, service and personal generosity would rest content I think in the knowledge that in 1988, the old Lodge was celebrating the 161st anniversary of the event, with a fine record behind it, and a future as secure and as assured as at any time in the past.

Times have changed, forty seven years ago this very month, the ravages of war deprived us of our building, but the spirit of our Masonry remains constant, and as we look forward into the future, it helps to maintain a proper perspective by calling to mind the early struggles for survival of our founders, whose devotion to the principles of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, have set the scene for our present enjoyment.

It is not sufficient in this day and age, when the moral values which we hold dear, have changed and are still changing, that we should forget the past and look only to the future. It is right and proper that on this day each year we should take stock of ourselves and our Lodge, and remember with gratitude all of our predecessors who have contributed to the prosperity of the Humber Lodge – determined to maintain our traditions - and I ask you therefore Brethren to pause for a moment in our celebrations and to think on these things.

Worshipful Brethren and Brethren, be pleased to stand, and in darkness and in silence -

Honour this most noble toast,

Bro. Lieut. Crow.

Bro. Thomas Feetham.

Bro. Joseph Eglin,

And all our Founders.