

Founders Night Toast – Tuesday 10th May 2011

Presented by W. Bro. R. Smedley ProvGStwd

WM, W Brethren, Brethren, Visitors. Tonight I have been given the responsibility and indeed have been delighted at the honour of giving the toast to the Founders of the Humber Lodge No 57. Our history, to the uninformed, being somewhat mixed I will set the scene.

It is somewhat confusing, even for those familiar with the lodge, to have heard in discourse that the Humber Lodge warrant is dated 17th April 1775 yet tonight we celebrate Founders night, a date of the 7th May 1827, some 50 years later.

Tonight is not a celebration of Founders Night in its literal sense as the actual founders of the lodge were 10 men linked to 2 military lodges in the city who petitioned and received a warrant from the Grand Lodge of the Ancients to hold a lodge in Hull. The History of our lodge and warrant is for another evening.

Tonight is more correctly a celebration of the much later laying of the Foundation Stone of the Humber Lodge building in Hull which was instigated by 3 brethren whom we remember this evening as being the Patrons of our lodge. These men being most worthy of note for their drive and philanthropy in providing us with a lodge of strength, solidity and prosperity. The laying of that Foundation Stone is synonymous with the start of a lodge of equally solid foundation and a secured future.

You will understand more completely why I state this case if I give you some idea of the roller coaster ride that was the Humber Lodge prior to the date of tonight's remembrance.

1756 - The Warrant we now hold was registered with Grand Lodge and nothing is known of its whereabouts or life for the next 19 years.

1775 - The warrant was held by the Ancient Lodge in Liverpool when in 1804 the WM of the time wrote to Grand Lodge for two certificates and states incidentally

"I have the honour and pleasure of announcing that these two certificates make twenty seven initiations over which I have had the honour of presiding being a period of but 6 months"

This surge was somewhat short lived and the Lodge soon became dormant and was suspended until 1809. Following the petition from the original 10 founders, The Warrant No 53 lately held at Liverpool, was transferred to Hull. It would seem that the Lodge benefited from a period of strength through to 1817 when regular minutes were recorded of its activity.

Yet again however, the lodge descended the seemingly inevitable curve of misfortune, these meetings became intermittent to July 1819 and no record was left from thence. The sad decline of the lodge was notable in its speed.

The lodge continued meeting (though unconstitutionally) for another 2 years until 1822 when certain brethren agreed to meet at the Black Swan Inn to reconcile their differences. The manner in which the **lack** of reconciliation took place meant that after a report had been submitted to Lord Dundas the then PGM, he suspended the Warrant (could fortune sink to a lower ebb, perhaps not!).

The lodge remained suspended until late 1823 when 12 members of the lodge met at the Turks Head, Mytongate and reconciliation eventually transpired. Thus lifted the dark years of the Humber Lodge and the final climb of the roller coaster into prosperity. However, the astute amongst you will realise that even now, we are not as yet at the date of this nights remembrance celebration. We are however at the beginning of its greatest epoch of solidity and strength.

The year is now 1824, the same year as was formed both the RNLI and the RSPCA. The year in which tonight's honoured individuals Bros Lieut. William Crow RN, Thomas Feetam and John Eglin joined the Number Lodge from the Rodney lodge which suffered demise. The Number Lodge succeeded in replacing its sold furniture etc. purchasing the Jewels and furniture from Rodney Lodge in 1825 for the sum of £15.6.11. From here we never looked back as they say.

This injection of enthusiasm changed the lodge from one which recorded in its minutes the level of its inebriation by the number of bowls of punch quaffed, to one which recorded the study of the lectures in the 3 degrees. It is to these 3 individuals that we owe our gratitude for the Number Lodge No 57's continuation to present day.

So noteworthy was Bro Crow that he was installed in the Chair of King Solomon on June 12th 1825 only 8 months after joining. Bro Feetam was his JW and took the chair himself in 1827. Whilst Bro Eglin immediately followed him into the chair in 1828

With the joining of these 3 members, the concept of the Number Lodge Benevolent Fund was proposed. Whilst not commenced at this time, nor was it forgotten, but lay dormant and we will return to its awakening. This prosperity and increased numbers inevitably meant that the lodge outgrew the Turks Head Public House. Possibly motivated by his time in the Rodney Lodge, Bro Crow chaired a meeting between the Number and Minerva Lodges to discuss raising funds to build their own Masonic Lodge Room. Minerva Lodge subsequently backed out of this scheme and the Number Lodge members had the character to go-it-alone.

The lodge entered into agreement to purchase land on Osborne Street and build a masonic lodge room. So the history of investment in our futures was born and has continued and to which we all owe gratitude to the lodges financial acumen for the subsidy we now receive to our subscriptions.

Now Brethren, NOW we are at that day which we celebrate this evening. The 7th May 1827, when in circumstances of great pomp and ceremony the Foundation Stone of the Humber Lodge Room was laid. Only 4 months later, it was ready for occupation and on the 3rd Oct 1827 it was officially opened and dedicated by the Grand Superintendent who was also the Deputy Grand Master R W Bro R. M. Beverly. The occasion also served as the first meeting of the Prov. Grand Chapter at which the Warrant for the Humber Chapter was also presented.

In 1830 the dormant proposition of these acknowledged men, the "Benevolent Fund", was resurrected and many of our members have received relief from that initiative.

In short time however the lodge was struck a blow when, in the same year that Slavery was abolished in the British Empire following the efforts of William Wilberforce, another noted son of the City, Bro Crow was accepted into that Celestial Lodge above at the age of 63 years on the date of 7th Sept 1834, only 10 years after joining the lodge - but look at what he achieved in that short time.

Bro Crow having taken the chair in both Minerva and Humber twice, the lodges were put into mourning for 4 months. A Bust and Portrait remain to remind us of his presence. He also willed the right and title for his vault at Holy Trinity to be used for the burial of the members.

Shortly to follow was yet another blow when only 2 years later on 30th March 1836, Bro Eglin a Trustee of the Lodge Building and Trustee of the Building committee also departed this mortal coil to that subliminary abode above. Aged 34 he was taken from us in the prime of his life only 3 months after leaving Hull to live in Hamburg, through the failure of an enlarged heart. His legacy remains in the words he wrote to the lodge on the night before his departure.

Come let us hail our glorious art,
And praise its' source divine,
And may each Brother form a part,
To aid the Grand Design.

Blest charity makes man to know
The feelings of a friend,
To soothe the plaints and pangs of woe,
And bid all sorrows end.

Tis Faith's bright emblem bids us trust.
In Masonry and Love,
That Brothers will with Brothers meet,
In the Grand Lodge above.

Tis Hope's sweet vision cheers the way,
We all must daily wend,
That guiding star whose beauteous ray,
Points an immortal end.

Yon glorious Symbol placed above,
May all with faith revere
And may His blessings shower on all,
Through each succeeding year.

Such was the generosity of the Humber members in funding the Humber Lodge Room, that in 1840 in coincidence with the celebration of the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert and the issue of the world's first stamp, the Penny Black, that the lodge freed itself of financial encumbrance and completed its mortgage commitments. To celebrate, a dinner was held at the Victoria rooms where the last surviving Founder Bro Feetam recounted a potted history and notable occurrences of the lodge.

To Thomas Feetam, the lodge owes gratitude for one of the longest serving of its members. Indeed he was honoured for 21 year's service as Treasurer with a Portrait paid for by the lodge. 6 years later in the same role, he was again honoured with the presentation of a silver tea service. He continued in this role until his death on the last day of 1858 aged 65 then having served as Treasurer for 30 years. Again, the lodge was placed in mourning this time for a period of 3 months. The PGM granted dispensation for a Masonic funeral in full regalia at Holy Trinity church. The lodge subsequently purchased 6 graves fronting his vault in which indigent masons could be laid to rest, such was its philanthropy.

The fortunes of the Humber Lodge, ever turbulent as they have been, were solidified and strengthened by our Founders. Long may we as their beneficiaries remain loyal to their name.

"Brethren upstanding - In darkness and in silence I ask you to honour the toast to our founders, Brothers Crow, Feetam and Eglin"

Thank you Brethren.