

## **FOUNDERS NIGHT TOAST 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

**Terence W. Fisher PPGSD**

Worshipful Master, Worshipful brethren and brethren, tonight we are here to celebrate an annual event in the history of the Humber Lodge. On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1827, a solemn dedication was made when the Foundation Stone of the Humber Masonic Hall was laid in Osborne St. However, before I continue, I should advise you that this toast may not be anything like similar toasts given it in years past. I make no apology for that but hope that those of you who have given the toast and are here this evening, or those who are absent or are gazing down from the Grand Lodge above, do not start tut-tutting, as is their wont, for what I am about to deliver.

This toast is always billed as 'The Founders Toast' which is usually coupled with the names of three undisputed giants of the Lodge, W. Bro. Crow, Feetam and Eglin. It is difficult to say how many years this toast has been given, for the proceedings at the Festive Board are obviously not recorded, and the earliest copy of the toast is dated 1934, when W. Bro. Kendall was given the honour of giving it. Given the paucity of reference, it is impossible to say if the three worthy brethren have always been associated with the toast, or whether their names have crept in over time. From my stand-point I think that the term 'Founders Toast' has become corrupted from what it originally was, to what it has become, but I should quickly add that I do not say that with any disrespect in mind, more a personal observation.

What is traditional is that the toast is always accompanied by a brief history of the Lodge, and I am conscious that many will have heard the history before, so I intend to introduce something a little different this evening, in the hope that you will hear things that you were perhaps unaware of.

Whilst reading copies of the toast given in past years, what has struck me is that little is ever mentioned of the Warrant, other than the date of its issue, and nothing at all of its early history, so I hope that you will indulge me, whilst I travel the highways and byways of the Lodge Warrant.

I have the Warrant here, but I suspect that few of you, especially the younger brethren, will have had the opportunity of examining it. The Warrant was issued by Grand Lodge in 1756. I do not mean Grand Lodge as we now know it, but the Grand Lodge of the most Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, according to the old Constitution, granted by His Royal Highness Prince Edwin, at York in A.D. 926. One of his titles was the Earl of Atholl, and as such, we

can call ourselves an Athol Lodge, of which there are few remaining, about 125 at the last count. Incidentally, A.D. 926 is the earliest date in which operative masons are recorded in England<sup>1</sup>.

It is well known that in 1717, four London Lodges got together to form a Grand Lodge, which they named the Premier Grand Lodge. This event seems to have triggered a plethora of new Lodges being formed, but of course these four Lodges were not the first, there is ample evidence that speculative Masonic Lodge meetings were being held at least 100 years prior to the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge, but nonetheless, this Grand Lodge was the first in the world, from which all others have followed. However, the rules and regulations of this first Grand Lodge, together with some of the practices it adopted did not meet with universal approval. These practices included the substitution of the wording in the First and Second Degree ceremonies; the abandonment of the installation ceremony for incoming Masters; and the denial, or at least the refusal to recognise the Holy Royal Arch Degree<sup>2</sup>. Several attempts were made to correct this, but without success, and in 1751 out of sheer frustration, a number of Lodges broke ranks, and formed their own Grand Lodge at York, which they called the Ancients Grand Lodge, because they retained those traditional parts of the ritual which the Premier Grand Lodge had abandoned. The Premier Grand Lodge became known as the Moderns because they had 'modernised' the ritual.

This Ancient Grand Lodge issued its 53<sup>rd</sup> Warrant on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 1756 to an un-named Lodge, meeting in Liverpool. The Grand Master of the Ancients at that time was William, First Earl of Blesington. The Warrant was issued to Patrick Vaughan, Edward Ledward and Thomas Griffith, the Worshipful Master, Senior and Junior Wardens respectively. Nothing is known of the Lodge other than that it met at the Buck and Dog. Sadly this pub seems to have followed many others over the years and is no longer standing. It appears that the Lodge did not prosper because on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April 1775, it relinquished the Warrant and handed it to another Liverpool Lodge, which took the name 'Knights Templar' Lodge No 53. The Ancient Grand Lodge had by this time relocated to London.

Now we know much more about this Lodge than we did about its predecessor, because although it may have been a happy and well attended Lodge, it caused much consternation with other Lodges in the city. We know this because several, no, several dozen letters were sent to the Ancient Grand Lodge by other Lodges in Liverpool, complaining about the manner in which the Knights Templar Lodge was conducting itself. We know for instance, that the Lodge dissuaded other Lodges from

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<sup>1</sup> The Religious Origins of Freemasonry. Prof José A. Ferrer Benimeli. *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Vol. 123, 2010, page 134

<sup>2</sup> Promulgation and Reconciliation. C. John Mandleberg. *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. Vol. 123, 2010.

making fraternal visits. One letter to Grand Lodge informed them that Knights Templar was being so obstructive that the local magistrate in Liverpool had been forced to intervene and temporarily order its closure. Now you may well ask what power the magistrate had. I asked the same question and I will give you answer shortly.

There is a report that on one occasion, after a Lodge meeting, three of the brethren, in a state of extreme inebriation broke into a warehouse. They were apprehended and taken before the local Assizes where they were sentenced..... to transportation. I wonder what Australia would say if we transported all burglars to those fine shores nowadays?

However, complaints against the Lodge continued to be made, and in 1807, these culminated in an enquiry being ordered by Grand Lodge, and to hear evidence of the complaints made by the other Lodges in Liverpool. The outcome of this enquiry was that Grand Lodge exercised its prerogative, withdrew the Warrant, erased the Knights Templar Lodge No 53 and demanded that the warrant be returned to London, which duly happened.

Now, across the other side of the Pennines, two military Lodges had been practicing at the Citadel in Hull. The Citadel was a large, walled fortress garrison on the east side of the river Hull, and at one time held the largest arsenal in the north of England, so large in fact, that in April 1642, during the Civil War, Charles 1<sup>st</sup> tried to enter the city in order to raid the arsenal, but was turned away by the then the Governor of the city, Sir John Hotham. But that of course, is another story.

These two military Lodges, both of which were Ancient Lodges, were the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Lancashire Regiment No 120, and the Cumberland Regiment, No 215. Most of the brethren were of course in the military but there were also several civilian members. As these were Military Lodges, there was always the possibility that they would move on, and as the civilian members could not easily move with them, they petitioned for a Warrant so that they could start their own Lodge, and this was supported by both of the two Military Lodges. But let us not get too far ahead of ourselves because there was another important element at work.

In the early 1790's, Napoleon was engaged in battles of one kind or another but the 'Battle of the Nile' in August 1798, saw Nelson totally destroy the French Navy, and this was the beginning of hostilities between the two countries, although a formal declaration of war was not made until 1803. Not surprisingly these hostilities were discussed in parliament, not only because of the seriousness of the developing situation, but also because it had been reported that several societies

and other organisations in the country employed secret oaths and allegiances, and it was feared that these organisations could or may undermine the government, and should therefore be prohibited. Of course, Freemasonry has secret oaths and allegiances and although there was no suggestion that English Freemasons were undemocratic or pro-French, they would nevertheless have been caught by any legislation. Approaches were therefore made to the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger by both Grand Masters of the two Grand Lodges. The Prime Minister assured them that any Act would not include Freemasonry. Perhaps, as now, politician's should not be trusted because his assurances did not materialise into positive action or protect Freemasonry, and in 1799<sup>3</sup> the Unlawful Societies Act was duly passed. This Act prohibited any organisation which required its members to swear a secret oath. It also prohibited the private ownership of printing presses. The only concession to Freemasonry was made at the very last minutes when it was agreed that Lodges already in existence could continue, provided that each Lodge made an annual declaration that its avowed objectives was charity and benevolence. Each Lodge was required to make an affidavit to the local magistrates to that effect, and to include the place where the Lodge met, and the names of each subscribing member. The legislation also gave power to the local magistrate, in any case of well-founded complaints against any particular lodge, to suppress its meetings. And there we have the answer to the earlier question about how the Knights Templar Lodge No 53 was temporarily closed after a complaint by other Lodges in Liverpool! This legislation was only repealed in 1967, although the restriction on private printing presses was lifted in 1865. Of course, hundreds of Lodges have been formed since the passing of the 1799 Act, but how they were granted a Warrant is for another time.

Upon the impending departure of the two Hull military Lodges, the civilian members of the Lodges made application to the Ancient Grand Lodge for a Warrant and authority to set up a new Lodge, but as we can see, legislation prevented Grand Lodge from granting the application. However, what they were able to do was forward the surrendered Knights Templar Lodge Warrant, on the spurious argument that the legislation did not prevent Lodges from re-locating from one town to another. Thus in 1809, the Warrant was handed over to a group of brethren in Hull. There was no butcher, baker or candlestick maker, but there were three watchmakers, two publicans, a jeweller, shoemaker and a general merchant. The first meeting was held at the Fleece Inn on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March 1809 when Bro. William White was installed as Master, Thomas Larard and Isanel Shacklack as the Senior and Junior Wardens, Denton Northgraves as the Treasurer and Thomas Wilson as the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.southchurch.mesh4us.org.uk/oaths/unlawful.pdf>

Secretary. The following year, it was resolved that the Lodge should be renamed to more appropriately reflect the area, and it therefore took the name Humber Lodge No 53.

Now, during this time, the two Grand Lodges, the Ancient and Moderns had been trying to reconcile their differences and on several occasions had been very near to achieving that goal, but had always failed. However, in late 1813 success, the two Grand Lodges found common ground, the installation ceremony for the new Master was re-introduced, the Holy Royal Arch was recognised and agreement was reached on the wording of the first and second degrees, and on 27<sup>th</sup> December that same year, a ceremony was held in London and the two Grand Lodges united to become the United Grand Lodge of England. At that time, there were of course two number 1 Lodges - an Ancient and a Modern. To resolve this, it was agreed that the Ancient Grand Lodge No 1 would retain that number, whilst the Modern Grand Lodge number 1 would take number two. Thus the Roll of United Grand Lodge started with the Lodge of Reconciliation No 1, an Ancient Lodge, now renamed Grand Masters Lodge, followed by the Lodge of Antiquity No 2, a Modern Lodge, and all other Lodges were shuffled about in similar fashion. Humber Lodge No 53 became Humber Lodge No 73. In 1833, the numbers were reshuffled to take account of Lodges becoming defunct or erased and the Lodge was re-number 65, but once again, in 1863 a further reshuffle took place and we became number 57. Fortunately there have been no more re-shuffles of Lodge numbers.

It may be coincidence but the misfortune the Warrant had whilst in Liverpool seem to have followed it to Hull, because during the early years it suffered from a lack of support, with occasionally only a handful of members attending, sometimes as low as six brethren. Over several months the Warrant was withheld by the Treasurer on the grounds that the Lodge owed him money, and it was consequently not displayed, as is required, thus over that period all meetings were irregular. These problems eventually culminated in the Lodge being suspended by the Provincial Grand Master. But in the early 1820's things started to pick up; the suspension was lifted, and several dozen new members joined, some from the recently disbanded Rodney Lodge. Amongst this new blood was Bros. William Crow, Thomas Feetam, John Harper and eight other brethren from Minerva, who all joined the Lodge in 1824. In May 1827, Bro. John Ward, the famous Hull artist joined the Lodge. Many of his works can be found hanging in Feren's Art Gallery, and one of his prints is hanging on the wall here in the function room at Dagger Lane. The same year, 1827, Bro. Joseph Eglin joined the Lodge. To give you an idea of the popularity of the Lodge, between January 1823 and December 1827 the Lodge increased membership by 62 and of those, 36 were Joining Members from Minerva. To put that into perspective, the Lodge nowadays has a total membership of 66. The question that is perhaps on all of your lips is "What was happening at Minerva which cause so many to resign?" I do

not know the answer to that question; perhaps they didn't resign but joined a failing Lodge to lift it. If that is the reason, it worked!

This sudden influx of so much new blood was the catalyst for a revival in the fortunes of the Lodge and it was agreed that rather than meeting in the Turks Head, its usual meeting place for several years, the Lodge should endeavour to have its own building, and a fund was immediately set up. Only five days later, land was purchased in Osborne Street, Hull for the princely sum of £204. 16s and only three weeks later, a tender was agreed for the erection of a new Masonic Building at a cost of £340. 7s. 2p. In today's money, that total equates to around £394,000, depending upon which website you use! How they managed to get that much money together, at such short notice is miraculous but it is known that Bro. Crow gave an initial donation of £100 and later increased that by another £32. In today's money, about £95,000 - a sizable amount by any standards! Three weeks later, on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1827, and with much pomp and ceremony the Foundation Stone was laid by W. Bro. Robert Mackenzie Beverley, the DPGM. On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 1827, only 5 months after the laying of the Foundation Stone, the building was completed and the first meeting took place.

However, the Lodge was not to be allowed to enter this new phase without some unpleasantness. The landlord of the Turks Head was not well pleased at the prospect of having to sever his connection with those who had been providing him with a generous income, and he made himself so unpleasant to the Brethren that on the occasion of a Lodge of Emergency, when a new candidate was to be initiated, the Worshipful Master, fearing for the safety of the Warrant, wrapped it around his body in place of his apron. After the Lodge closed, the landlord summoned the local constabulary and accused the Lodge of being about to remove property from the premises. The constables declined to interfere, and with a burst of rage, the landlord is said to have told the Brethren to immediately take away everything that belonged to them. It is reported that the new candidate was introduced into the brotherhood by walking through the streets of Old Hull carrying the Wardens candlesticks, in which the candles were still burning. That must have been a sight!

Humber Lodge has now adopted the Model Bylaws, but there are a couple of interesting bylaws, which were introduced by the Lodge during the early years:

1. In February 1811 it was resolved that any of the brethren whispering during Lodge, being in Labour, be fined 2/6d. Brethren take note that some would be well out of pocket toady because that equates to about £8.50!

2. In December 1811 it was agreed that Visitors pay 2/- after their first visit.

This means of course that if any of our visitors are here for the first time this evening, then your meal is free, but for those of you who are regular visitors, the Lodge Steward will be pleased to take 2/- from each of you.

Brethren, the title of this toast is 'Our Founders' but to be absolutely honest, I am not entirely sure what that actually means, does it mean our Founders, or the laying of the Foundation Stone or has the Toast simply become corrupted over time. The Warrant was issued in 1756, re-issued in 1775 and again in 1809. The Foundation Stone was laid in 1827 after several dozen new members joined the Lodge and with the zeal and enthusiasm of three, namely William Crow, Joseph Feetam and Thomas Eglin and some may say a fourth, John Harvey, not to mention the dozens of other Joining and new members, the Building Fund was started and in less than 7 months, the new Masonic building was in use.

But before I ask you to toast the Founders, I would like to remind you of the date with which I started this Toast, the date of the laying of the Foundation Stone – 7<sup>th</sup> May 1827, 185 years ago. On the night of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1941, the City and County of Kingston upon Hull suffered, what many say was the worst night-time bombing raid outside of London. There was much loss of life and many buildings totally destroyed including the Masonic Hall in Osborne Street, which had stood for 112 years. There had been a meeting that evening and presumably at the Festive Board, the Toast to the Founders would have been given. Remarkably, out of the rubble that had been the Humber Masonic Hall, one item was recovered.....totally unscathed - our Warrant, and in my humble opinion, this toast is as much to the Warrant, as to the Founders of the Lodge, whether they be the original Warrant holder of 1756, their successors of 1775, or their successor of 1809, or indeed of those who rekindled the Lodge in the early 1820's, and which culminated in the laying of the Foundation Stone in 1827. Brethren, our Warrant is now 256 years old and has seen many changes, it has witnessed upheaval, disharmony and regrettably, un-masonic behaviour, and has been through fire and bombardment but is our greatest legacy and a link with our past. We should hold it in true veneration.

**Worshipful Master, Worshipful Brethren and Brethren, I ask that you please stand, and in darkness and silence honour this most noble of Toasts, Our Founders and may I add, Our Warrant.**