

# Freemasonry in Teesdale

A short talk prepared for the Vale of Tees Lodge,  
no 5016

by WBro A R Farrar PJGD

for Wednesday, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2023.

Worshipful Master, Distinguished Brethren and Brethren All.

*WBro Farrar has asked for his apology to be recorded for tonight's meeting, which unfortunately clashes with a meeting of Dunelm Chapter, of which he was a founder. The candidate at the Chapter meeting this evening is his candidate – WBro Alan Comerford, the current Worshipful Master of Dunelm Lodge.*

I was asked, some three weeks ago, by WBro John Bayles to give this talk, in the light of the Visiting Provincial Officers, and try to offer some explanation to the vagaries which exist in the Masonic Province of Teesdale, to enhance the understanding of our weird and wonderful ways to those of you who are unfortunate enough not to live in this wonderful dale.

To do that, you need to understand something of the Teesdale character, and where it comes from. Let me start by saying I am an incomer – I've only lived in Teesdale for 42 years, but that is now considered long enough for John Brass to say good morning to me! To develop that theme further, I must tell you a story concerning John and a late, much respected Past Master of our mother lodge, the Strathmore – this worthy soul was a retired apothecary, ex-Mayor of Barney and a pillar of the Methodist chapel. "Incomer" snarled Brassy to me one night. I asked how he came by that judgment – "He was born in Kirby Stephen," came the reply. Now I was privileged to serve for nearly ten years as the Dale Registrar, and when this worthy soul passed to the Grand Lodge Above, his son (whom I knew quite well) came up from Bradford to register the death. I advised that although I knew the answer to many of the stock questions, I would play it by the book, and as we came to "And where was he born?" I started to type in Kirby Stephen. "Battersby Junction" was the reply – Grandad was an engine driver who was subsequently posted from there to Kirby and then to Barney in the 1930s."

This illustrates two points – the great local pride in the dale for the dale, and also that sometimes that pride can go slightly askew – it's also given me the opportunity to dine out on Brassy on several occasions!!

So where did it really all start?

The earliest settlement in Teesdale goes back to the Neolithic period, and the pattern of development is similar to where I have traced my own family back to at the top end of the Calder Valley. There is however one major difference, in that the early settlements of Calderdale, such as Sowerby and Heptonstall, were on hill tops, whereas in Teesdale they were in the valley bottom – it's a bit cold and draughty at Kirk Carrion on a January day! Thus, Middleton in Teesdale is exactly what its name says – the middle town in the valley of the Tees. The market town for the dale is, and has been for centuries, Barnard Castle, and I say all this to try to give our visitors tonight a flavour for the dale.

The earliest literary reference I know of is from the Roman historian Tacitus, who says of the Roman general Cerialis in c72 AD, that “he pushed the Brigantes into the hills, and surrounded them with a ring of garrisoned forts.” Thus, John Bayles’ ancestors were forced to farm on the less fertile lands of the Upper Dale, and probably went hungry until they accepted the Roman yoke. One of those garrisoned forts was at Bowes, which provided the earliest literary reference to stone masons, when the cavalry garrison at Binchester kindly rebuilt the bath house for the infantry cohort at Bowes. Clearly Roman foot soldiers really were the PBI!

We move onto the Norman period, where at the building of Bowes Castle we have a reference to Maurice the Mason – few realised the late WBro Maurice Race was so venerable! We also know that the Templars were present in Barnard Castle – some of their gravestones are on the north transept wall of the Parish Church – also consider the shape and location of the Market Cross in Barney.

But to take us into the speculative era we have to move on to 1760, when a young solicitor from Stockton arrived in Barnard Castle, where a “Barnard Castle Lodge” had been warranted on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1759. In 1770,

as the Master of what had morphed into the Lodge of Concord, that young solicitor, William Hutchinson, presided over the laying of the foundation stone over the River Tees by Egglestone Abbey. It must have been quite a sight to see the lodge members in full regalia parading from the town along the Yorkshire bank to the site of the bridge, and then on to Rokeby to enjoy Judge Morritt's hospitality. It may have been a greater sight to watch them trying to march back to Barney, after a good day out! Hutchinson of course went on to become a very famous Masonic author, and his pamphlet entitled "The Spirit of Masonry" is still often referred to today in Masonic academic circles.

Some thirty years later, Britain found itself embroiled in the Napoleonic Wars. In 1801 my Batley Lodge was consecrated – it went on to become Lodge 264, one more than the number which Restoration Lodge at one time carried and some thirteen years after that, several Masons serving in the Durham Militia were stationed at Auchtermuchty in Fife. They decided to form "St Cuthbert's Durham Militia Lodge" under charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland and the lodge was consecrated on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1813. However, thirteen months later the regiment returned to Barnard Castle (do you all know where the barracks were in Barney?) and was stood down. This lodge met at a variety of hostels around the town and in 1825 applied to the Scottish Grand Lodge to change its military charter to a civilian one. The request was rejected, as the lodge was now meeting in England, so the lodge under the Scottish Constitution was erased and re-warranted as a new lodge under the English Constitution, St Cuthbert's Lodge (don't believe Andrew Foster when he refers to "The St Cuthbert Lodge – Barney had one as well!) no 800, later re-numbered to 530 in 1832 when Grand Lodge revised its numbering.

I won't go into the ins and outs here of the sorry affair, but relations between Concord and ~St. Cuthbert's were anything but concordic, and the end product was, that as a direct result of their squabbling, both lodges were erased on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1838.

The Masons of Barnard Castle clearly were missing their Masonry and we find that certain of the members of the two former lodges formed a new lodge, consecrated on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1839 by WBro Thomas Laider, Master of Restoration Lodge, prompting Max Gaskin to write that “Restoration Lodge keeps appearing in the record of Barnard Castle Lodges, rather like King Arthur appearing in times of national need!”

One of the founding members of Union Lodge (and the pewter ink stand gifted to their first Secretary which is displayed in the cabinet in the robing room at Barney is well worth a look) was a certain John Bowes, the only son of the Tenth Earl of Strathmore and Mary Milner – I vividly recall the late and much missed WBro Tom Milner of Trinity Lodge standing beneath our lithograph of Bowes when he mischievously replied for the Visitors one night at Strathmore – the similarity was uncanny! When Bowes was appointed Provincial Grand Master in August 1845, he needed to be a subscribing member of a lodge in Durham – the Grand Secretary suggested three – the Wear Lodge (now erased), Lambton or Restoration. The Union Lodge was not included, as, to quote the Grand Secretary “the individuals composing the lodge are of a class which would place your becoming a member of it quite out of the question.” This was a bit rich, as Bowes was already a member of it!

In the event, to maintain harmony, Bowes joined Palatine no. 97 in Sunderland!

Union Lodge was erased on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1861, once again leaving Barnard Castle without a craft lodge.

This was something which the surviving members of Union Lodge were unhappy about, and on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1869 the Barnard Lodge was consecrated. I cannot find with the sources currently at my disposal, (the first two Minute Books of the Barnard Lodge have gone missing) where and by whom, but I would be amazed if Restoration were not involved again! They certainly were when the Barnard Lodge’s second daughter (the first was the Vale of Tees in 1928) the Strathmore Lodge was consecrated in 1946 at the Masonic Hall in Darlington, with the event

being hosted by .....Restoration Lodge! Strathmore of course then went on to be the mother of the third Craft lodge at Barney, the Old Barnardian Lodge, while Vale of Tees in turn became the mother of the North Pennine Lodge.

One or two nuggets to finish..... Freemasonry was very much involved in the founding of Barnard Castle School. There is a reference in “The Ordinances of the Scheme” (the pre-consecration Minutes) of the founders being offered as a suitable site Ridley Hall in the Tyne Valley. The owner of Ridley Hall at that time was John Bowes, our Provincial Grand Master who never was! There were three ex-officio members of this committee, the Marquis of Zetland, the Marquis of Londonderry and the Duke of Northumberland, or to put it another way, the Provincial Grand Masters of Yorkshire North and East Ridings, Durham, and Northumberland. Finally, as you enter through the front door of the school, above you is a stone confirming it was laid by the Earl Fortesque, Provincial Grand Master of Devon. I rest my case.

A famous photograph from 1910 shows the Freemasons of Durham parading in full regalia in mourning for the death of King Edward VII, a Past Grand Master to the County School for the laying of the Foundation Stone of the school Chapel – the stone is clearly visible still on the exterior of the North Wall. The driving force behind this was WBro Edward Dalrymple Walrond (Ninny to his pupils, I was advised), Past Master and Secretary of the Barnard Lodge, and also first Second Master at the School.

During the First World War the Masonic Hall in Barney was requisitioned for military use. The contents of the building were stored at the Bowes Museum – the Curator was one WBro Owen Scott, who had succeeded Walrond on his retirement from school, as Secretary of the Barnard Lodge.

Examination of Minute Books from a hundred years ago shows that the main method of attending lodges was travel by train, with visitors most

frequently coming from Darlington, Bishop Auckland, Kirby Stephen and points west. Small wonder then that with the surge in membership following the Great War, that the founders of this lodge, drawn largely from Barnard, Stanhope, Rose of Raby and Wear Valley Lodges, should look to form a lodge in the middle town of this beautiful dale, meeting initially at a variety of sites, including Middleton House, High Force Hotel and The Hill in Middleton (virtually opposite this building) before settling at the old Baptist Chapel up Hude and for the last thirty years or so in this building. The founding Master was Albert Winpenny, whose family later became better known as drapers on Stockton High Street. WBro George Addison made a little lodge history by being the first member to take the chair twice, and he and Lily are living proof that the good folk of Teesdale have successfully re-defined the definition of a mixed marriage – a Teesdale lad and a Weardale lass, or vice versa!

So there you have it WM; I have tried to outline how this dale (and I have chosen not to include Staindrop in this – otherwise you'd have been here 'til breakfast!) came to have five lodges, three in Barney and two in Middleton – but who knows for how much longer?