

Howe Lodge

No. 587



1851 - 2001

SESQUICENTENARY
MEETING

12th February 2001

One Hundred and Fifty Years

In the year 1850 there were only four masonic lodges in the newly created town of Birmingham, and they all met at the Town Hall Tavern, Anne Street (now known as Colmore Row). Some of the brethren, all zealous members of the same Lodge of Instruction, resolved to found a new lodge, which would shew Masonry pure and undefiled, free from the old tavern associations, and applying its money to purely Masonic purposes. These excellent principles naturally attracted some opposition and the founders sustained some set backs, but eventually, on 27th January, 1851, Grand Lodge issued to them a Warrant of Constitution under the name of the Howe Lodge, No. 857, taking its name from Lord Howe, the Provincial Grand Master of Warwickshire.

Suitable premises were found over the old Coal Wharf in Newhall Street, the site of which is now occupied by Richmond House, and on 10th March, 1851, the new Lodge held its first Regular Meeting in "The Masonic Rooms, Newhall Street". W. Bro. T. C. Roden, a Past Master of St. Paul's Lodge, No. 51, acted as Installing Master, and installed Bro. John Ward Lloyd as the first Worshipful Master of the Lodge, but there was no ceremony of consecration as would be the case at the present day.

During the ensuing four years the Lodge grew and prospered, devoting the whole of its income to purely Masonic purposes, until it was, at length, in a sufficiently strong financial position to carry out its original intention of erecting a Masonic Hall. In November 1855 a house, No. 27 (now No. 75) Newhall Street, nearly opposite the existing Masonic Rooms, was acquired on lease, and a sum of £825 was spent on erecting a Lodge room and in carrying out alterations and improvements. On 8th December, 1856, the Lodge held its first meeting at the new Rooms, and the Building Committee "congratulated the Brethren upon being in possession of the most commodious premises for Masonic purposes in the Province of Warwickshire.

Much of the Lodge furniture and equipment was presented by the Brethren, and their generosity and enthusiasm was so great that within a year the new building was entirely free of debt. The new rooms provided a home not only for the Howe Lodge itself, but also for its various associated Masonic bodies, the Howe Lodge of Instruction, the Howe Mark Lodge, and the Howe Royal Arch Chapter, all of which were under the direct control and management of the Lodge. Not only were the accounts kept by the Lodge treasurer, who received and paid all income and expenditure, but all candidates for membership of the Lodge of Instruction, the Mark Lodge and the Royal Arch Chapter were balloted for in the Craft Lodge, to whom their fees were paid.

The Lodge then offered the use of the premises to other Lodges at very low rentals, and within a few years the majority of the Birmingham Lodges were holding their meetings there. In 1863, on the revision of the Register of Grand lodge, the number the Howe Lodge was altered from 857 to 587. By that time there were fourteen Masonic bodies meeting in the Howe Masonic Rooms, and it became clear that if the organisation was to continue to expand larger premises must be found. The Howe Lodge again took the lead in the matter, and a Limited Liability Company was formed, charged with the responsibility for erecting a Masonic Hall.

A suitable site was acquired at the corner of New Street and Ethel Street, and on 20th September, 1865, the foundation stone of a Masonic Hall was laid with appropriate ceremonial. When the new building was completed the Howe Lodge, in consideration of what it had done for the promotion of Freemasonry in Birmingham, was granted the privilege of holding the first meeting there on 11th October, 1869.

The Lodge granted to the Masonic Hall Company the right to use all its furniture and effects presented by the Brethren and at the same time sold all the remaining furniture, organ and equipment to the Company at valuation so that the links with the past might, as far as possible, be preserved.

From that time forward the history of the Lodge has been quiet and uneventful. The aims of the founders have been accomplished and their idea of meeting in premises set apart for masonic purposes, so novel in Birmingham in 1850, has now become the general policy not only in Warwickshire but generally throughout the country.

Such was the sentiment expressed on the occasion of the Lodge's centenary in 1951. Since that time, the world in general has changed beyond belief and Freemasonry faces challenges today way beyond those of our forebears at that time.

The Lodge has experienced change as would be expected and indeed falling numbers gave great cause for concern in the early 1990's. Now, on this occasion, we have grounds for optimism. We have begun to build afresh as is symbolised not only with the initiation of the first of a number of prospective new members on this sesquicentenary celebration but also with the refurbishment of the Lodge's equipment and furnishings. We have been in our present home at Stirling Road since its inception in 1971 and we hope that it and we will be there to celebrate the bicentenary 50 years hence.