

Aegis Lodge No 9115

25 Years of Aegis Lodge No 9115 – A celebration

In speaking about the short 25 year history of this Lodge, it is of course necessary to mention brothers by name, past and present, because in speaking about a lodge, we are talking about people. The lodge is people, and there will be names that visiting brethren perhaps will not know, and for that I apologise.

It is felt important however that this occasion is the opportunity to ensure a record is made by the secretary, to place these thoughts on our books, to ensure that future Freemasons in this lodge realise how and when the lodge was formed, and by whose efforts we are able to stand in this room today.

After considerable initial work by various Freemasons, who at that time were either serving or retired fire officers, and others who had an affinity with the Fire Service and its ideals, a meeting was held in 1982 under the chairmanship of WBro Sidney Pyatt, to organise matters which would lead to the establishment of a lodge for the benefit of Fire Service personnel and associated persons in the North West Region.

WBro Pyatt collected all the necessary data, statistics and information with the full support of the then APrGM WBro E C Dickson (an honorary member of the lodge) and the Chairman of the Preston Group WBro S J Canning Mathews, and duly sent off the formal letter of Intent on 18 June 1983. This received approval, with the requirement that it was supported and recommended by another lodge.

On 8 November 1983 Stanley of Preston Lodge No 2600 resolved to recommend to the Most Worshipful Grand Master that the petition be acceded to.

Stanley of Preston was the only one of the oldest four Preston Lodges without a daughter, and it had close links of friendship with several Aegis Lodge founders and the then Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Lancashire Fire Brigade had been initiated in 1957.

The founders who held office in 1984 each donated their collars and jewels, and our mother lodge, Stanley of Preston, donated the masters chain collar on which are engraved the masters names. There is room for 36 names in all, so in the next 10 years some of you should be starting a collection!

The magnificent gift of this collar was a most appreciated gesture of Masonic friendship. It is sad to declare that Stanley of Preston Lodge has surrendered its warrant. It did however, hand to our lodge the `Arthur Foster jewel` which is presented (hopefully with its history by a past member of Stanley Lodge) to be worn with pride by our WM, which should help to keep Stanley of Preston alive in our lodge.

On 13 January 1984 it was announced that the Grand Master was pleased to prepare the warrant.

The name of AEGIS (pronounced E`Jis) was agreed after much deliberation and was suggested by the then Bro Don Smith.

The word AEGIS is of Greek origin and means "under the protection of" or, a shield held over the arm in battle". The Fire Service is dedicated to the protection of life and property and so it was thought very appropriate.

The consecration of the lodge took place on 22 May 1984. Considerable tribute was paid to the time, trouble, work and effort put into the occasion by WBro T Blackburn, who became an honorary member. He left no stone unturned to make the consecration a wonderful event in Preston Masonic circles.

The consecration so efficiently carried out by the then Provincial Grand Master Alan F Ferris and the Deputy PrGM VWBro Lewis A Pardy then installed the first WM of Aegis Lodge WBro S Pyatt.

WBro Sidney was with us to remember 20 years of the lodge at over 91, he couldn't see very much, but was listening I know to every little word! We had to watch our steps. He was a credit to Freemasonry.

The lodge opened with 21 members, WBro Bill Rawlinson being Director of Ceremonies, followed by WBro. Ken Smith, and their excellent standards have been continued. Grand lodge stated that the emulation book of ritual should be followed, as many of the joining members used variations, but all quickly adopted to the book as written.

Since that time sadly we have lost all of the founders, but two. Many were strong active characters. WBro Harry Judge CBE retired Commandant of Fire Service College, a joy to listen to, WBro Les Thomas, ex Chief Fire Officer Burnley, a pure gentleman, WBro Don Smith Assistant Chief Fire Officer, whose sons joined the lodge and on moving around the country both reached high rank in the Fire Service. WBro Jack Bitkon, ex Fire Service, whose son joined the lodge and later in life moved to Scotland as a Firemaster.

Too many to mention, but all deeply committed to the lodge.

It is nice to say that one of our founders WBro Kenwright, Lancashire County Senior Engineer, has kept his eye on us from the 'Grand Lodge Above', by appointing his son as our IPM and who presented a jewel to the lodge to be worn by the IPM in his father's name.

Over the last 25 years, even though subtle changes have been made, the brethren have always been conscious of the traditions which were envisaged and promulgated by our founders.

For several years now the sharing of work in the Lodge has been used. A ceremony performed well with significance by a number of people is far more likely to impress than hesitant faltering monologue. This has been found to give confidence to our new members who should not feel overwhelmed by the possibility of advancing too quickly. The lodge hosted a demonstration of this type of ceremony in 2006 to a large number of masons, who appeared very impressed.

At a special meeting on 1 December 1988 the banner was dedicated. It was a gift to the lodge from WBro Harry Judge CBE and WBro Mel Cross and was designed by WBro Sid Pyatt.

The eight pointed star on a Fire service badge is originally from the Cross of St John, adopted by the Crusader Knights of old, is said to represent their virtues.

Tact, perseverance, gallantry, loyalty, dexterity, explicitness, observation and sympathy and represents the ideals of service and concern for others, which are also recognisable Masonic attributes.

Time and circumstance change.

It was agreed that membership of the lodge be opened to all potential brothers regardless of any Fire Service connections, and it has been found that new blood did not "water down" the traditions, but broadened it, and our list now stands at 21 brethren, the same number as we started, thankfully nearly all of whom are active. We do very much appreciate any joining members, and if they wish, are put to work quickly like our Director of Ceremonies WBro Joe Welsby who is doing a fine job.

It is however, like many lodges, very necessary for the newer brethren to carry on the fine traditions and maintain the high standards of the founders, so that in another 25 years they will be able stand in this place and tell of their contribution.

I think it should be recorded here that WBro Mel has been one of the most active members of this lodge, has seen us through thick and thin when being Director of Ceremonies, and guiding us, in his special way, when necessary. He truly has been a dedicated representative of Aegis Lodge.

It was felt by the lodge brethren that it was most appropriate for him as a founder member to be WM in this special year.

Charity is a fundamental part of Masonry, and the lodge has made great efforts over the years in raising funds which have been a resounding success.

At the anniversary Festival of the Royal Masonic Trust for girls and boys in May 1997 when £7,000,000 was presented from the Province, Aegis Lodge, then comprising 27 members, raised an amazing contribution for its size and age, £20,000 and comments were made on this by some very eminent Masons indeed.

Thanks were given to each and every member, but like many causes it needed a driving hand and again WBro Mel Cross was our team leader, and kept drawing our attention to this important trust. Keeping our enthusiasm over several years did take some doing.

The first sportsman's evening was arranged and our then WBro Alex Elder was the Auctioneer. Alex in his younger days had 40 caps for Northern Ireland and was Captain of Burnley FC when they won the championship (which was well over 30 years ago - but glad to say they are now back in the Premier League) He was "transferred" to East Lancashire, and finally to Spain, but the event was repeated and went from strength to strength, proving very popular at that time.

We have also felt it important to support local non-Masonic charities when possible and we have given generously.

Five years ago Aegis Lodge presented our lodge number to charities in 'Pounds.' £9,115. I am sure that you will appreciate therefore that at this time we need to consolidate our funds somewhat.

Every lodge is pleased to receive visiting brethren, and unquestionably visiting brethren gain much from the visiting in which they partake. Friendships are renewed, new friends are found, so the progress of our order thrives, and grows, and hopefully the lodge image is enhanced.

The spirit of our order is one of brotherly love, care and concern, and we hope that over the last twenty-five years our fellowship has been noted by our visitors, some of whom attend very regularly and are so very welcome.

A close relationship with Lodge Salfire No 1505 in the Scottish Constitution has developed since 1987 when the late and much respected Bro Bobby Walker visited our Lodge and later became a member.

An annual exchange now takes place and they prove to be very joyful and pleasant visits. There have been exchanges of goodwill gifts, over the years, one of which is on display in the lodge room this evening.

They recently celebrated their 50 years, being founded by the then Glasgow Salvage Corps and Glasgow City Fire Brigade, and have an interesting history.

We give a special welcome to our Scottish brethren.

I know that every year thanks are rightly given to our Founders, past and present, but it must be recorded here I feel, the appreciation we should give to a founder, WBro Tom Jones OBE retired Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services who as WM in 1989 travelled from Cornwall to every meeting and practice. He is, I am pleased to say with us today.

We also register acknowledgement to long standing brethren who have held various offices for considerable periods, due to their efficiency and willingness; including WBro Ron Murtagh a past secretary who kept the lodge very efficient for many years, and occasionally gives us an impressive Yorkshire ritual! WBro Ray Leather, who, due to unforeseen circumstances and in order to allow our newer brethren time to fully integrate, became WM on three occasions. WBro John Whittall our organist who greatly enhances our meetings, and indeed a big thank you is given to all brethren not mentioned that have served the lodge in some capacity and have so well supported the lodge.

After many happy years at Preston Masonic Hall, in 2008 after much deliberation, the brethren decided that our future meetings would be held at Wyrebank, Garstang. It should be recorded that in true Masonic fashion we have been welcomed to the Lancaster Group with real fraternity, and brethren of Aegis Lodge hope that we can respond positively to this wonderful greeting over the next 25years.

Brethren this short resume of 25 years of Aegis Lodge tries to show that the lodge has developed an interesting proud history, which will be passed on, will be expanded, and hopefully will continue in the years ahead.

We have newer brethren showing great promise, who, in time we are sure, will wish to create their mark in the lodge history.

With many lodges being over centuries old, we have a short history in the scheme of things, but we feel that the lodge will flourish as the foundation is on solid rock, and gives to the new brethren the impetus to go forward with pride, and to encourage their input for the future of Freemasonry and to this lodge in particular.

Brethren, may Sincerity, Charity, Peace and Friendship, remain established in this lodge.

WBro F W Brown Past Master in the Lodge.

Aegis Lodge No 9115 Meets at Wyrebank, Garstang on the first Thursday September to December, February to April. Installation – April.