

The Masonic Hall 1899 – to date

At the top of the hill in Adelaide Street, at the junction with Lower King Street, on the north side of the street, was a vacant plot of land. On the corner of Church Street and King Street stood the Stanley Arms and next to it, on Church Street, was St John's School. The playground was clearly visible from Adelaide Street and houses lined both sides of the street. The cost of this plot of land in 1888, was £1700.00 and was purchased by the Blackpool Masonic Hall Limited on the 1st February. The Company had been incorporated on 2nd December the previous year and 6000 £1 shares were issued. Whitaker Bond, the landlord of the Stanley Arms and Thomas Sankey, the schoolmaster of St John's School owned the land. From the signatures on the original documents it appears that the same Thomas Sankey was also the secretary of the Masonic Hall Limited.

Plans for building the Masonic Hall were passed in 1896. The Right Honourable Lord Skelmersdale, P.G.W., laid the corner stone on May 7th 1898, and the building was officially opened by him, now Lord Lathom and the new Provincial Grand Master, on the death of his father, on Saturday 23rd September 1899.

A mortgage of £2500 was arranged at 3¼% per annum. All the available land was not used in the building of the new Masonic Hall. A small plot was left at the corner of Adelaide Street and King Street and also between the new Masonic Hall and the houses in Adelaide Street. This later plot was sold to a Mr Esclome of Morecambe for £300 in 1900 and in 1919 was bought back, complete with a house, for £1,075. The house was then sold to The Blackpool Trades Club for £1.575 in 1920 and bought back from them in 1931 for £1,605. The two rooms on the left-hand side of the front door were made into one room and became an extension to the billiard room, which is now the dance floor. The room to the right was converted into an office for the Secretary, and it is now the ladies toilets. Two bedrooms above the new extension were made into one room and served as a practice room. One of the rooms in the cellar was also converted into a practice room. The rest of the property was used as living quarters for the Steward.

During the alterations to the building it is believed that the corner-stone was moved to its present position on the lounge wall. As there is no Minute Book available that covers this event there is no record of this happening or that anything was found under the stone, if indeed it was moved, although there are rumours that guinea coins were found during some alterations to this particular part of the building. W.Bro. Arthur Foster, P.G.D., Deputy Provincial Grand Master opened the extension on 22nd April 1932. There appears to be a hollow section above the corner-stone and in May 1999 a hole was cut into the wall above the commemorative stone to see if any artefacts were entombed. A time capsule was placed in the space and the void covered with another plaque.

In the early 1980's, when the Club (Management) Committee decided that there was no need for a Steward to live in, the staircase to the first floor was closed off, and the first floor was rented to Roland Robinson's, Solicitors, who already rented the two houses next to the Hall which are owned by the Masonic Hall Ltd.

A Bazaar was held in the Hall in 1903 to enable the mortgage to be discharged and to raise money for Charity. By 1914, of the 6000 shares issued, 3,971 had been taken up and another mortgage of £2500 was taken out at the same rate of interest. At this time a valuation was made of the property and the annual rent from the Masonic Club was £100 and rent from the Blackpool Billposting Co., for advertising on the gable end, £12. The full valuation was £4,050 comprising of £3,600 for the Masonic Hall and £450 for the plot of land at the corner of Adelaide Street and King Street. It was recommended, by the surveyors, that for mortgage purposes the figure should be two thirds the valuation i.e. £2,700. As stated earlier the mortgage taken out was £2,500 at 3¼%. The interest was raised to 4½% later in the year and raised again in 1916 to 5%. The valuation report listed the building as having cellars in the basement, a lecture hall, a smoke room, billiard room, card room, bar and lavatory on the ground floor, and two large rooms and two small rooms on the second floor. The third floor comprised of a kitchen and scullery, presumably the two small rooms above the

Lodge Room, and a bedroom, which is Room 7, now used as a practice room and also housing the Museum.

During the period from the end of the First World War to the early Thirties there was a great increase in the number of Lodges consecrated. Sixteen new Lodges were formed in the Fylde area and the Blackpool Masonic Hall was home to the majority of them. It was due, to some extent, to the extra income received from these new Lodges that the mortgage was repaid in 1931. There is no indication in any of the Deeds as to when the air raid shelter, which is under the main entrance steps, was built, but it must have been during 1940 when the threat of air raids was at its height.

At the end of the Second World War, as at the end of the First World War there was a sudden increase in the number of Lodges being consecrated, and accommodation had to be found for them. The Masonic Hall, at Blackpool, was a natural choice for those Lodges whose Mother Lodge was already meeting at Adelaide Street. The outcome of these new Lodges meeting at the Masonic Hall was overcrowding and it was felt that more use could be made of the land at the corner of King Street and Adelaide Street. Plans were drawn up for an extension to the Hall comprising of, in the basement, a new Lodge room and ante-room and two storage rooms. On the first and second floors new dining rooms and toilets. An entrance door was to be constructed to King Street and a staircase would lead to all three floors. A staircase was also to be built from the ground floor corridor, between the kitchen and the toilets, to the ante-room and Lodge room in the basement, and the work started in 1955. The extension was opened by Right Worshipful Bro. Sir Sidney A. White, P.G.W., Grand Secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England on 28th June 1956. The brethren, and in particular, the stewards of the Lodges must have been well pleased with the new dining rooms, because previously they had to clear the Lodge room after the Lodge had closed, and then bring in the tables and chairs in order for the brethren to dine. The extension was financed by a generous offer of a £25,000 interest free loan by one of the senior members of the Club and by 1974 all mortgages had been repaid. It was in the early 70's that the Club was facing financial problems with the day to day running of the building and a meeting was convened to discuss the various problems and how best to deal with them. Needless to say there were quite a number of heated discussions, especially on the subjects of raising the rents of the Lodges, and opening the Hall for functions other than Masonic meetings, which would, of course lead to women being admitted to the Hall. It might seem rather silly today that allowing women to enter the building could cause so much dissension, but twenty years previously, at a Group meeting in 1952, the question was asked regarding candidates or joining members whose wives were members of the "Lady Mason's", and the answer was that they could possibly be "blackballed"!! The result of this meeting at which the members voted for the rents to be raised and the Hall opened to non-Masons, affected the running of the Club from that day up to the present time. Some Lodges did leave and the remainder had to raise the annual dues to their members to cover the rise in the Lodge rents. To allow for non-Masonic functions, which would provide extra income, various alterations had to be made to the building. During the next decade ladies toilets were constructed on the ground and first floors. The top dining room had the addition of a bar and the roof of the air raid shelter was strengthened to accommodate the alterations to the front entrance and portico. Plans were prepared for the construction of a member's room and alterations to the bar. These latter plans were never put into operation.

The Club Committee formed an Entertainment Sub-Committee, which worked extremely hard during the next few years and on most evenings of the weekend entertainment in the form of disco's or organist were provided in the lounge and upstairs dining room. During the summer months, especially when the Scots brethren were on holiday, both the lounge and upstairs dining room were filled to capacity. The opening of the second floor dining room on a Saturday night for Bingo proved to be a huge success. This room had a hardwood floor laid for dancing and was refurbished in the early 80's and renamed "The Fylde Suite". Many Lodges have used the Fylde Suite for Lodge Socials and is also used for Anniversary celebrations, birthday parties and wedding receptions etc.

It was also at this time (1981) that the Bar Sub-Committee took a huge step for feminists and engaged a female bar steward. This also proved to be a huge success because Linda (Mrs Wingate) is still with us, in fact she is an essential part of the Club. It was in the late 1980's when

inflation was at its height, that providing entertainment at the weekend proved to be a financial disaster and had to cease. However alterations and decorations continue to take place, usually during the "close season" in June, July and August and The Fylde Suite is still a popular venue. In 1997 a lift was installed which connects to all floors, and proves to be beneficial to some of the infirm and older members. During 1988 the Lodges, Chapters and individual members took up the last of the 2000 shares.

The building was one hundred years old in 1999 and apart from the alterations to the front entrance and the upvc windows, which replaced the wooden ones, the outside of the premises would be easily recognised by any of the Masons who first met here. When they step through the front door they would see a completely changed interior which we hope they would approve of. During its lifetime the Masonic Hall has passed through many phases, some good, some not so good. There have been many instances when decisions had to be made quickly, work needed to be done immediately and finances had to be found when the purse was nearly empty. Yet in every decade there has been a caucus of masons, generous with their time, energy and finances that have stepped forward to fill the breach. Quietly, efficiently and with enthusiasm they dealt with the problems so that our Masonic Hall remained sound, attractive and comfortable for all that use it.

To continue the history of the Masonic Hall for the period 1999 to 2011. It had been recognised that the Masonic Hall needed to be further updated / modernised to attract a younger membership with their families who would use the facilities for social events. The Masonic Club President's in the last 10 years have continued a modernisation agenda. A number of the Masonic Club committee have contributed their time free of charge to carry out extensive redecoration in the internal public areas of the Hall. The whole management approach is to obtain services which provide value for money and as such new supply deals have been negotiated with the Breweries. As a result the alcohol prices in the Club have been kept affordable and the Steward has ensured that the beer quality is among the best in Blackpool. Regular entertainment takes place within the Masonic Club and this has proved to be a big success. The good news is that younger members are being attracted in to Masonry. At this time the Masonic Club have some 660 subscribing members and is a very pleasant location to hold an event or have a meal and a quiet drink.

To the Masons that come after us we hope that we have left you with a legacy that you will be proud to uphold. We have been the custodians for the first one hundred and ten years and have had pleasure and enjoyed the privilege in doing so. We wish you well in all your endeavours.