



In December 2004, Lodge of Loyalty No 86 celebrated 250 years of continuous Masonry in Prescot. Apart from the church and the Earldom of Derby it is difficult to think of any other organisation with such a long connection with the town.

The history begins in 1753 when 24 year-old Anthony Tyrer, who had been made a Mason elsewhere, petitioned the Moderns Grand Lodge to grant a warrant of constitution authorising the foundation of a lodge of Freemasons in Prescot. This was duly issued and dated 20 December 1753 and is one of a class of documents called 'Deputations', of which only six exist in the country, three of them in Lancashire.

Readers will readily appreciate why ours is stored in a bank vault until the day of a meeting and returned promptly the next morning. This document and the original by-laws, which were written on parchment, are perhaps the most treasured items in the lodge's inventory of effects.

The deputation does not mention a lodge name or number and during its lifetime the lodge has been allocated a total of nine numbers: 235 in 1753, 172 in 1755, 136 in 1770, 110 in 1780, 111 in 1781, 101 in 1792, 126 in 1814, 101 in 1832 and finally 86 in 1863.

Grand Lodge records show it to have been known in a variety of ways e.g. in 1756, as No 172 followed by a pictorial representation of a rose and crown 'at Prescot Lancashire', and about this time it seems that the lodge was called, but not officially named, 'The Rose and Crown Lodge'. Letters exist showing that in 1777 it was referred to simply as 'Lodge No 136', later as '101 Legs of Man at Prescot Lancashire'. The name Loyalty appeared for the first time in 1801 and this is the only name, apart from that of the meetinghouse, in the records. At this time meetings were being held at the Green Dragon public house (now demolished) but it was felt that this was not an acceptable name.

It is thought that 'Loyalty' was adopted because many of its members were also members of The Loyal Club.

The lodge has met on the Wednesday before the full moon ever since its foundation. There have been at least four attempts to move it to a fixed meeting day, all being soundly and happily defeated.

In the early days, meetings were held in public houses but at no time were they ever more than a few 100 yards from the lodges current home. A Freemasons hall had been built halfway down Derby Street and was used between the years 1875 and

1877. It has a beautiful domed "Masonic" ceiling but it had to be sold when the Masonic Hall Co. got into financial difficulties, and today it is occupied by social services.

Later, when the building became available, the brethren decided, perhaps short-sightedly, for good times do not last forever, that they were too comfortable – and too well looked after by the unrivalled catering skills of Annie Watkinson at the King's Arms – to contemplate a move. It was only in 1927 that the lodge came to its present home.

During its lifetime, daughter lodges, granddaughter lodges, great-granddaughter lodges, and even a great-great-granddaughter lodge have been formed. The first daughter lodge was Equity No 1384 in Widnes, followed by Antient Manor in Prescot, but all the St Helens lodges owe their existence to Lodge of Faith No 484 in Ashton-in-Makerfield.

Whilst Lodge of Loyalty can today boast a history of 263 years, had it not been not for the tenacity of five brethren in 1851, the lodge would have foundered.

Between 1840 and 1841, interest waned to an alarming degree, in fact in some years there were no meetings at all. Some of these difficulties can be attributed to the activities of The Chartists, a forerunner of today's Labour party, who caused considerable unrest in the town.

The determined five invited brethren from Liverpool to help keep the lodge alive. A meeting was set for 26 April 1850 but the brethren failed to appear. The despair felt and recorded in the minutes is almost palpable. The five did, however, resolve to pay all the arrears due to Grand Lodge and at the next meeting, six Liverpool brethren from lodges 294 and 368 attended.

By the following year the membership had increased to 24 and three years later to 44. The rest, as they say, is history.

Written by Frank Davies.