

Southern Cross
Lodge No. 24
1858-1991

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*This history was compiled by
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and presented with the compliments of
Wor. Bro. W. G. Telford
on the occasion of the Installation 1991.*

ON 28th SEPTEMBER, 1858 a meeting attended by seven Brethren, was held in the British and American Hotel, to discuss the advisability of forming a new Masonic Lodge in Maldon under the English Constitution.

The Brethren present quickly arrived at a decision, and it was proposed that the Lodge should be known as the Southern Cross Lodge of Tarrangower.

Further meetings were held with Bro. F. Chapman as Chairman and Bro. J. B. Jones as Secretary pro tem.

The Brethren were very thorough in the preparation of their petition and events moved rapidly.

Dispensation was received from the Deputy Provincial Grand Master early in November 1858, and on 17th November of the same year the Southern Cross Lodge was consecrated.

The first meeting was held in the building attached to the Royal Hotel and was known as the Masonic Hall, referred to in the Minutes as the Lodge Room. It was here that the Mackenzie Lodge conducted its meetings. The same hall is now known as the Royal Theatre.

The following is an extract from the Minutes of the first meeting:— "The Mackenzie Lodge having opened the Lodge in form to the third degree, the acting secretary, Bro. J. R. Jones, read the petition to the Grand Lodge and the Dispensation from the Deputy Provincial Grand Master authorising Bros. T. Staggs, F. Chapman, J. W. Wright, E. Hawkins, J. B. Jones, R. C. Mackenzie, R. Peard, T. Peard, J. Wood, John Wright and E. Bentley, to form themselves into a Lodge to be called the Southern Cross Lodge of Tarrangower."

"The acting Provincial Grand Master Bro. R. C. Mackenzie, having examined the same and found everything in order, proceeded solemnly and impressively to consecrate the new Lodge, and at the con-

clusion of the ceremony Bro. Thomas Staggs was regularly installed as Master and appointed Bro. F. Chapman, S.W.; Bro. J. W. Wright, J.W.; Bro. J. B. Jones, Secretary; Bro. E. Hawkins, S.D.; Bro. J. Wood, J.D.; and Bro. F. Bentley, I.G. Bro. John Wright was elected as Treasurer, and Bro. T. Peard as Tyler. Following the investiture of the Officers, the Lodge was called from labour to refreshment and the Brethren adjourned to the festive board for the installation banquet. On return to the Lodge Room, the Brethren were called from refreshment to labour and the Lodge proceeded to ballot for several joining members, and afterwards carried out the ceremony of the first degree when five candidates were initiated." Quite a big day.

On 31st December, 1859 the Southern Cross Lodge co-operated with the Mackenzie Lodge, in conducting a Masonic Ball; the cost to each Lodge being £24/15/9 and a voluntary subscription list was opened to raise the necessary funds. For several years the two Lodges co-operated and made the Masonic New Year's Ball an annual event. It was also their custom to celebrate the Festival of St. John in a similar manner in June of each year.

In March, 1860 the Charter was duly received, and at the April meeting in the same year, the dispensation under which the Lodge was constituted, was presented to the foundation Master, Wor. Bro. T. Staggs.

A Lodge of Instruction was formed in January, 1860 and continued to function until about June, 1882.

In June, 1860 the Southern Cross Lodge paid its first official visit to the Mount Alexander Lodge and carried out the ceremony of the third degree.

The spirit of the fraternal friendship which prevailed at that meeting has continued throughout the years.

According to an old custom and privilege, it was not unusual for Freemasons' Lodges to officiate in the laying of foundation stones of public buildings, and

the Southern Cross Lodge had the honour of arranging for the laying of the foundation stone of the Maldon Public Hospital, on 25th June, 1860.

The Masters and Brethren of both the Southern Cross and Mackenzie Lodges, in full regalia, and bearing the working tools and emblems, formed a procession which was followed by officers and members of the Loyal Maldon Lodge M.U.I.O.O.F., members of the Hospital Committee of Management, and the Municipal Councillors; and on arrival at the site of the intended structure, R.W. Bro. F. T. Gell, Deputy Provincial Grand Master — who had been invited by the Lodge to officiate — with due ritual and ceremony, declared the stone well and truly laid. In a specially prepared cavity the following items were placed:— One each of the coins of the Realm from one sovereign to one farthing; a scroll bearing the names of the Officers and Brethren of the Southern Cross Lodge; a scroll bearing the names of the Officers and Brethren of the Mackenzie Lodge; a scroll bearing the names of the Officers and members of the Loyal Maldon Lodge M.U.I.O.O.F.; a scroll bearing the names of the Committee of Management of the Maldon Hospital; a scroll bearing the names of Municipal Councillors; a copy of the "Tarrangower Times." Five sovereigns were placed on the stone for the refreshment of the workmen.

Funerals of deceased Brethren were also publicly attended in full regalia.

In May, 1861 a suggestion for the amalgamation of the Southern Cross and Mackenzie Lodges was put forward. A committee comprising members of both Lodges was appointed to discuss amalgamation terms and draw up by-laws for submission to each Lodge. Some time elapsed before a special meeting of both Lodges was summoned to consider the by-laws drawn up by the committee and make final arrangements for amalgamation. The meeting was duly held, but an

agreement could not be reached and the proposed amalgamation lapsed.

It was about this time that it was decided to discontinue using the Lodge furniture and equipment which had hitherto been made available by the courtesy of the Mackenzie Lodge, and arrangements were made by the Southern Cross Lodge for the purchase of new furniture, etc.

The Mackenzie Lodge has, during the century, transferred its place of meeting to several different localities in the surrounding district, and now meets at Newstead. The question now arises "Would the Mackenzie Lodge be still meeting at Maldon had the Southern Cross Lodge not been formed?"

The original Number of the Lodge was 1095, but in the year 1864, advice was received that the Number was changed to 793.

Fines were imposed on Officers and Brethren who failed to attend the summoned meetings unless they forwarded a written apology. The fines imposed were on a sliding scale as follows:— W.M., 5/-; Wardens, 2/6; other Officers and Brethren 2/-. For late arrival at meetings fines of one half of these amounts were imposed. A number of instances are on record where fines imposed were paid to the Treasurer.

It is interesting to note that there appeared to be no fixed time for the opening of meetings. The Lodge would be summoned to meet as early as High Twelve and rarely later than 6p.m., and it was not unusual to initiate one or more candidates and immediately open the Lodge in the second or third degree and confer advancement on other Brethren.

The Tracing Boards in our Lodge were painted in oils in 1863, by Bro. T. R. Drape, a member of the Lodge. Bro. Drape was awarded the sum of twenty guineas, and the Tracing Boards are described in the Minutes as being "a work of rare beauty."

As early as January, 1861 correspondence was received from Melbourne and Ballarat, seeking the opinion of members concerning the formation of a Grand Lodge of Victoria.

On receipt of the first communication the Lodge passed the following resolution:— "That this Lodge disclaim any participation in the movement seeking an independent Grand Lodge of Victoria and pledges itself to adhere to its allegiance to the United Grand Lodge of England."

Further correspondence on this subject was received at irregular intervals and similar resolutions were passed.

In January, 1889 a circular letter was received from the Acting Secretary of the Executive Committee of the proposed United Grand Lodge of Victoria, advising that the United Grand Lodge of Victoria would be duly constituted on Wednesday, 20th March, 1889 and at the regular meeting of the Lodge held on 21st February, 1889 it was resolved that the Lodge tender its allegiance to the United Grand Lodge of Victoria.

In April, 1889 the warrant issued by the Grand Lodge of Victoria dated 30th March, 1889 was read by the Secretary and duly handed to the W.M. The Lodge was then closed for the last time under the United Grand Lodge of England and reopened under the United Grand Lodge of Victoria.

The old charter was forwarded to the Grand Lodge of Victoria and was returned to the Lodge on 5th June, 1889 bearing the following notation:— "Cancelled on the recognition of the United Grand Lodge of Victoria by the United Grand Lodge of England and returned to the Lodge as a memento of its former connection with the United Grand Lodge of England."

It was in August, 1889 advice was received that the Southern Cross was No. 24 on the Register of the United Grand Lodge of Victoria.

A change occurred in 1910, when the Lodge vacated its original meeting place and moved to a new Temple known as the Freemasons Hall, now an antique dealer's premises.

The Lodge has known both prosperous and difficult times. With the decline of the mining industry in Maldon, the Lodge lost many of its members, and during the late twenties and thirties there were only 39 members and some meetings had to be cancelled.

After World War II the Lodge again prospered with a steady influx of members, and Lodge of Instruction was again formed in 1954.

One hundred years of Freemasonry in Maldon was celebrated on 8th November, 1858. The Lodge Temple not being large enough, the Installation was held in Mount Alexander's Temple, Castlemaine. The ceremony of Installation was conducted by Most Wor. Bro. G. B. Beachham, P.G.M. and some 200 brethren signed the appearance book.

With facilities at the Lodge Hall being inadequate, the Building Committee submitted a proposed plan for a new Lodge complex in June 1973. The Building was commenced in June 1979 and the first meeting was held on 9th February, 1980.

The Temple was dedicated by the Grand Master Most Wor. Bro. N. L. Colbram on 8th November, 1980.

Over one hundred and thirty years have passed, and as our thoughts now turn to the future, we cannot do better than to reaffirm our faith in the Great Architect of the Universe, to whom we express in all sincerity our grateful thanks, and pray that He will imbue the hearts of our Brethren with all the notable impulses of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, and that our Lodge, fortified by those ideals, might enter a new era of prosperity and usefulness.