

SCINDE LODGE No 5

Its Origins and Development

An address given by VWBro Owen Brown, PGLec, PM, at a meeting of the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305, held in Napier on 2nd February 2009

This address (and I prefer this term to lecture) is essentially a rounding off of the sesquicentennial or one hundred and fifty year celebration of Scinde Lodge. Many of you will have read the printed Historical Outline issued on our Birthday last October and I will not indulge in detail, which can be read there.

Among our few early records is the public notice that on the first Monday of February 1859 the first lodge meeting was to be held in the schoolhouse on the corner of Hastings and Tennyson Streets in Napier - hence the significance of today. However, I want to widen the focus to include freemasonry in the whole of Hawke's Bay and indeed East Coast districts in these formative years.

Ninety years earlier, in 1769, on Cook's first voyage to the Pacific, he sighted and landed in Poverty Bay, near the present Gisborne, and with him to step ashore was a freemason. I refer to Joseph Banks, a member of one of the oldest English Masonic lodges, Lodge of Antiquity No 2 EC. Unlike the next man (and, interestingly, both were knighted for services to their country) Banks did not stay onshore long enough to found a Masonic lodge among the native peoples.

The second Masonic name I want to bring before you is that of Charles Napier. He never came to New Zealand but as his name was chosen for our home city we have a special interest in his life - and now especially as he also was a freemason. You are all aware of Napier as Lieutenant General in command of British forces in India and his successful attempt to gain the province of Scinde in what is now Pakistan. He returned to Britain and to Limerick, Ireland, where he had earlier joined the Ancient Union Lodge No 13 IC. He was not Irish by birth but had spent some time in Ireland during rebellions in the South.

I have been fortunate in obtaining photocopies of correspondence between Charles Napier and his old lodge. I read: A deputation consisting of the Worshipful Master, Henry Waldron, and his wardens waited on Sir Charles Napier at Crusades Hotel at 5 o'clock and presented the following address which was read by the Worshipful Master:

*Masonic Club, Limerick,
2 November 1848,*

*Lieutenant General Sir Charles Napier,
Sir and Brother,*

Allow us the Worshipful Master and Officers of the Lodge No 13, to offer you our most sincere and cordial congratulations on your arrival in the city of Limerick from the far distant lands. We have observed your glorious military career during which the greatness and superiority of the British Arms have been so nobly sustained, and add the proud qualification that we feel the honour you have conferred by your visit to our city is doubly enhanced by the reflection that the ancient and honourable craft has enrolled among its numbers the name of the Hero of Scinde.

Napier's reply:

The honour, which you have bestowed upon me, is most flattering to me both as a soldier and a mason. The troops which served under my orders (among whom were many masons) won a country by their courage, and held it by their good conduct. To them I owe the honour, which you have raised today. It will I hope gratify the Worshipful Master, Officers and Brethren to know that we built and established a Masonic Lodge in Scinde and thereby found many natives who were, I believe, initiated into the mysteries of the Craft previous to the arrival of our Countrymen among them, and thus was an additional bond of union established here. I have great pleasure in accepting the offer of Honorary Member of the Masonic Lodge No 13.

I have spent some minutes with references to Charles Napier for these reasons: -

- (1) They have not to my knowledge been stated before;
- (2) They explain our lodge's name;
- (3) They emphasise the role of the military in our early days; and
- (4) They in part help to explain our Irish origin.

Sadly, Charles Napier did not live to witness the name(s) he promoted. He died in 1853. Less than a year later Alfred Domett was appointed Commissioner of Lands and Resident Magistrate at Ahuriri. Domett was well educated and well travelled and he wrote to Dr Featherstone, Superintendent of Wellington Province suggesting the name of Napier for the new settlement here in Hawke's Bay. In April 1855 the first sale of sections took place in the new Napier. The sections on the hill and the small area of land at the base came under the heading of Scinde Island, so we know that Domett must have given the name of Scinde Island to the Napier Hill which at that time was like an island almost surrounded by sea and swamp. Hence the association of the name Scinde to the early lodge which was established just three years later.

The question arises (and I think this quite fascinating) – Did the early founders of Scinde Lodge know of Charles Napier’s Masonic background, or was it just coincidence that has let this come about?

It is of interest too, in this connection, to remember that for the first seven years of Scinde Lodge, Napier was largely a garrison town with British troops occupying the barracks built on what was called Hospital Hill. First the 65th Regiment then the 14th Regiment. In particular we recognise Lieutenant Colonel Wyatt, Commander of the 65th, as the first candidate of the new Scinde Lodge. And the fact that many of the Regiment were Irish may have helped steer the early founders to adopt the Irish Constitution. The prime reason, however, was that New Zealand’s first Masonic Lodge had already been established under an Irish charter. This was Lodge Ara No 348 IC, which received its warrant in 1847.

Another officer of the 65th Regiment was Major de Burgh Adams. He was both Irish and a freemason and took a keen interest in the formation of both Lodges Ara and Scinde. And afterwards when the Regiment was transferred to Taranaki, he promoted the formation of another Irish lodge, which is still working as Lodge De Burgh Adams, and still under the Irish Constitution.

Scinde shares its military origin in Hawke’s Bay with Services Lodge of Hawke’s Bay No 313, which was founded much later (after World War 2 ended). In 1970, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Services Lodge, Scinde Lodge hosted a combined meeting.

When the barque *Eastfield* landed in the Ahuriri estuary with 150 officers and men of the 65th Regiment they had been sent to resolve a conflict between the new settlers and the indigenous Maori. I think it is timely here to remember that freemasonry began in troublesome times in the 16th -17th centuries in Europe. Men of goodwill were seeking to put Brotherly Love to replace intolerance in race, religion and politics. Perhaps here in Hawke’s Bay in a much more minor scale freemasonry asserted itself and laid its foundations within the sound of gunfire. By 1867 when the British Regiments left Hawke’s Bay, Scinde Lodge was well established.

To look at Scinde’s origins in the particular we need to go back to 1844 when there came to our district a man who was to play an important part in the development of the district, Alexander Alexander. He was one of the first permanent pakeha settlers in the Ahuriri area and he conducted a large trade with Maori in pork and flax. He took an active part in local government in the 1850s but for freemasons this pioneer has a special significance. He was one of the founders of Scinde Lodge. One presumes that when Alexander first made the acquaintance of the owner of the Royal Hotel, Daniel Munn, he was delighted to find not only a fellow settler but also a worthy member of the craft. (Munn had already joined New Zealand Pacific Lodge in Wellington). One presumes, too, that as these men met others who were masons, they pondered the question: Why not a Masonic Lodge here in Hawke’s Bay?

That the question fired the imagination of these brothers in freemasonry and was soon to become more than a fond idea is evidenced by an announcement in the district’s first newspaper, The Hawke’s Bay Herald. On the 9th January 1858 appeared a notice addressed to the Masonic Brethren at Ahuriri calling on them “to attend on 2nd February, at High Noon, at Brother Daniel Munn’s Royal Hotel, to consult concerning the proposed Masonic Lodge”. (Note the date – exactly 151 years ago today).

This inaugural meeting decided to apply to the Grand Lodge of Ireland for a charter for a lodge to be called Scinde Lodge, and a dispensation to work until the arrival of the charter. This application was sent to Lodge Ara in Auckland. In those days of sailing ships nearly twelve months elapsed before the charter arrived in Napier. But the brethren apparently did not work under this dispensation as the Ara lodge minutes of March 17, 1859, contain an attached cutting of the Hawke’s Bay Herald stating that the Warrant had arrived from Ireland of Scinde Lodge No 419 IC and calling on the Brethren to meet on 2nd February at the schoolhouse. (This I mentioned to you at the start of this address.) Michael Fitzgerald WM, John Smith SW, George Cooper JW, Alexander Alexander, Daniel Munn, Philip Dolbel and Donald McLean signed this notice.

It is of some historical interest that of these names we already mentioned Alexander a settler and trader, McLean (later Sir Donald McLean) was Land Commissioner and responsible for land purchases. Fitzgerald was his surveyor, and Cooper the District Commissioner. The next meetings were held in rooms above John Smith’s store in Waghorne Street, Ahuriri. Smith SW was also treasurer and Cooper JW was secretary. The original Warrant was dated 8 October 1858 and this has ever since been fixed as the birthday of Scinde Lodge. It was signed by the Duke of Leinster, who died in 1874 after ruling the craft in Ireland for 61 years.

This Irish heritage was soon to fragment. At a regular meeting of Scinde Lodge in August that same year, 1874, Bro Isaac Carley made an attempt to persuade the Scinde brethren to transfer their allegiance to the Grand Lodge of England. His proposal was defeated and Scinde remained loyal to the Irish Constitution. But there was a strong desire to have a lodge working under the English Constitution and the following year, 1875, saw the founding of Victoria Lodge with Bro Carley as its first Master. Victoria was No 1577 EC, later of course to become No 21 NZC. Its first meeting was 14 February 1876, using Scinde’s lodge room until a new building was completed in 1878 in Munroe Street. Victoria appears to have had trouble with their early masters having to leave the district. Bro Kennedy, of Scinde, took the chair on several occasions.

In that same year, 1878, Scinde Lodge sponsored the founding of Bedford Lodge, in Waipukurau, also under the Irish Constitution, with its first master Bro Kennedy. Alexander Kennedy was a great stalwart of freemasonry in Hawke's Bay being master of Scinde on four occasions between 1862 and 1875. His apron and jewel is still in the possession of Scinde Lodge. And, of course, the name Kennedy was commemorated in the establishment of Lodge Kennedy in 1947. It may be worth noting here that his two sons were also masters in Scinde Lodge in later years. Charles, a civil engineer, was largely responsible for land reclamation in Napier South and Kennedy Road is named after him.

Just as Scinde sponsored Bedford Lodge, so, in turn, Bedford later sponsored three other lodges, all in Central Hawke's Bay - Lion 114 in Ormondville (1899), Ruataniwha 172 in Takapau (1910), and Porangahau 296 in 1928 that was Bedford's 50th Jubilee year.

On the 27th December of the same year that Bedford was founded, we have the establishment in nearby Waipawa of Lodge Abercorn. This was under a dispensation from Lodge Victoria and hence came under the English Constitution with the number 1813 EC. Its consecration was held in Victoria's lodge room in Napier in a double ceremony, for on the same day, Heretaunga Lodge 1812 EC was also established. It is of interest to note how all these lodges are linked into a type of family network.

In December 1886 a disastrous fire destroyed a large block in central Napier. This included Scinde Lodge, which lost not just the building but also its early records. The newly established Victoria lodge made available its building until Scinde could rebuild

In the same year as that fire, 1886, there was founded in Gisborne a lodge under the Irish Constitution with the same name as that in Waipawa - Abercorn.

So let us switch our attention very briefly to look at this northern part of our Eastland District. By that year there had already been founded two Masonic Lodges - Turanganui 1480 EC in 1874, and Montrose 722 SC in 1875. With an English and a Scottish presence in the growing town there was a felt a need for an Irish-based Lodge. After a few years and after much debate it chose to change to the New Zealand Constitution with No 76.

At the other end of our two districts, in Woodville, in the same year, Ruahine Lodge was consecrated. It began under the EC as No 2178, later to change to 80 NZC. Four years later and not far away, in Dannevirke, Rawhiti Lodge was founded. This lodge has the distinction of being the first lodge to be formed directly under the New Zealand Constitution in 1890, being the year when the Grand Lodge of New Zealand was formed.

The first three decades of the 20th Century saw a steady increase in freemasonry nationwide and within our two districts twelve lodges were established, nine in Hawke's Bay and three in Gisborne-East Coast. I do not intend to go into the history of all these, but Lodge Waikaremoana 158 opened in 1909, and closer to home, Omarunui 218 opened in 1920, Napier 268 in 1924 with Haeata 272 the same year, and Te Mata 298 in 1929.

In 1890, the year that the Grand Lodge of New Zealand was constituted, Scinde Lodge left its Irish ancestry and became No 5 NZC. At the same time Scinde retained its right in perpetuity to retain all of its original Irish Constitution and Lodge workings. We have our own ritual and visitors are usually quick to detect differences in the ceremonies. Other differences showing themselves over more recent years include being one of the first to offer a meal before the regular meeting; also first in Hawke's Bay to offer a more relaxed winter dress code, moving away from formality. Small matters perhaps but in keeping with a cherished Irish-based individualism.

The Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931 had tragic consequences for many lodge buildings. Scinde, Napier and Omarunui Lodges all lost their rooms. Victoria's hall was badly damaged but was restored and was able to host most other lodges until rebuilding was complete. Scinde opened its fine new lodge room in Cathedral Lane in 1933, along with its commercial building, vacating it sixty years later when it moved in with the United Lodge in Kennedy Road. History was repeating itself for, Scinde as we have seen, had moved in with United's parent, Victoria, in 1931.

Post Second World War saw another steady increase in freemasonry in our districts as elsewhere. In thirteen years, six lodges opened: 1945 Services HB 313; 1947 Kennedy 329; 1950 Frimley 359; 1953 Waiohiki 374; 1958 (being Scinde's centennial year) Lodge Scinde Centennial 405; and Tuahine 408 in Gisborne. Only three of these lodges exist today in their original form but we have seen fewer lodge rooms becoming more used with some lodges merging. Tuahine merged but kept its name when Abercorn-Tuahine 76 was reformed in 1986. We are more familiar with Lodge Woburn No 25 when in 1979 Bedford, Abercorn and Porangahau came together. The name came from Woburn Abbey, home of the Duke of Bedford. The other merger was later when three Napier lodges, Victoria, Napier and Kennedy decided to combine to form The United Lodge of Napier No 21 in 1992.

As a counter to this trend of closing lodges, in that same year, 1992, was formed the Hawke's Bay Daytime Lodge No 453. This lodge, meeting in both Napier and Hastings in alternate months, straddles both of our districts and its growth shows an encouraging trend.

Looking back now on one hundred and fifty years of freemasonry in the Hawke's Bay wider area we see: -

- (1) Strong leadership in Napier beginning with Scinde Lodge.
- (2) Daughter lodges opening to the north and south.
- (3) Periods of rapid rise in membership and new lodges notably during land development and after the world wars.
- (4) Subsequent decline in numbers of lodges and members
- (5) Merging of lodges.

Added to these we now see a move to a more rational use of lodge rooms. This latest development, particularly affecting both Hastings and Napier, shows confidence in the future. The projected new Scinde Lodge complex on Prebensen Drive will be a major development not just for Scinde Lodge but also as a public beacon for freemasonry in Hawke's Bay

I shall end on that positive note ...