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RIGHT WOR. BRO. JOHN WILLIAMS (1813-1889)

District Grand Master of New South Wales, English Constitution.

One of the most determined opponents of the movement to establish an independent Grand Lodge of New South Wales was Right Wor Bro John Williams, the District Grand Master of the English Constitution in New South Wales. Williams was a man of strongly held principle who, having settled on a position, maintained it to the end unless convinced there were grounds for change. This was a characteristic which was evident throughout the long drawn out argument between the Grand Lodges concerning the future of the Craft in the colony, an argument which was finally resolved by the formation of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales in 1888.

John Williams was born at Ballymena in the county of Antrim, Ireland, in 1813. He migrated to Liverpool, England, at the age of 17 or 18 years and took employment as a seaman. On a voyage to the west coast of Africa, he was shipwrecked near the Kingdom of Dahomy, where his companions succumbed to yellow fever and he was, for three years, detained as a slave. Escaping from captivity, he returned to Liverpool, where he married. It was in Liverpool that Williams first became involved in Freemasonry. In 1838 he was Junior Warden of Lodge Harmony, meeting in that city, and was present at the Masonic ceremonies associated with the laying of the foundation stone of Liverpool's St George's Hall. The state of his wife's health led him to migrate to New South Wales in 1839, where he engaged in employment as a cooper and ultimately became the proprietor of a large coopering business in Pitt Street, near Circular Quay, Sydney. His wife died soon after their arrival, and he resumed his interest in Freemasonry.

The first New South Wales lodge of which he was a member was the Australian Social Lodge No 260 I.C. For reasons not altogether clear, he found himself at odds with the Lodge and, in 1843, when Junior Warden, he, with three other members, was 'specially suspended' by the Grand Lodge of Ireland for unmasonic conduct causing dissension in that Lodge. He then joined the Lodge of Australia No 820 E.C. The suspension from the Australian Social Lodge was still in force when, in 1846, he became a foundation member of an English Constitution Lodge, The Australian Lodge of Harmony, meeting in Sydney. He was installed as Worshipful Master of the Lodge on 7 January 1847. Williams continued to maintain an unfriendly attitude towards Lodge No 260 I.C. and this appears to have coloured his opinion about Irish Freemasonry during the rest of his life.

Williams became associated with New South Wales Freemasonry, as worked under the English Constitution at a time when there were moves afoot to place its administration on a more satisfactory basis. A Provincial Grand Master of the

