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PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY: J. Scullion

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Most Wor. Bro. SIR HARRY HOLDSWORTH RAWSON 1843-1910

ADMIRAL and GOVERNOR

Harry Holdsworth Rawson was born at Walton-on-the-Hill, Upper Islington, Lancashire, England, on 5 November 1843. He was the second son of Christopher Rawson, a merchant, and his wife Ellen Frances, nee Wright.

He was educated at Marlborough College from 1854 to 1855. In April 1857 at the age of 14, he joined the Navy serving in the *Calcutta* during the Second China War from 1857 to 1860.

He then served on several ships before being promoted to Lieutenant in 1863; then Lieutenant Commander in 1871. After serving for twelve months on the Royal Yacht, in October of the same year, he married Florence Alice Stewart Shaw at Woodford in Cheshire.

Three years later in 1874, Lieutenant Rawson was raised to Commander, then promoted to Captain in 1877.

In 1878, he reported on the Defences of the Suez Canal and acted as Military Commander in Cyprus, when Turkey handed administration over to Britain. Also he personally raised the Union Jack flag in Nicosia. During the Egyptian War of 1882, Harry Rawson was Acting Principal Transport Officer and was created a Companion of the Order of the Bath.

In 1892, Captain Rawson was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral. Then in 1895, he was appointed Commander in Chief of the West African and Cape of Good Hope Naval Stations, remaining in command until 1898.

During this period he bombarded Zanzibar and was chiefly remembered for commanding a naval force of 1200 men known as the Punitive Expedition of 1897 that captured, looted and razed to the ground the city of Benin in retaliation for the massacre of British political officers, destroying nearly all of the city's treasured art and disbursing most of the famous Benin Bronzes.

1897 was also the year that Rear Admiral Rawson was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath,

The following year, 1898, he was promoted to Vice Admiral. Then from 1898 to 1901, Sir Harry commanded the English Channel Squadron and served as President of a committee which investigated the structural strength of torpedo boat destroyers.

On 29 January 1902, Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson was appointed Governor of New South Wales. He was sworn in on 27 May 1902. Sir Harry Rawson became the first naval officer to be appointed Governor since Captain William Bligh in 1805.

Sir Harry was a large burly man, straightforward to the edge of bluntness with a capacity to suggest to the government modifications and improvements. In order to save money he felt was wasted in Parliament, he suggested that apart from the party leaders all others should only speak for as long as it took to take up three columns of Hansard, and if they wished to continue, an amount of 10 shillings a column be charged.

In 1903, Sir Harry was promoted to Admiral.

In June 1904, the Premier, Br. Sir John See, discussed his impending resignation and favoured Bernhard Wise or William P. Crick as his successor. Sir Harry pointed out the unreliability of Wise and the notorious alcoholism and unpopularity of Crick. He thought it doubtful if Cabinet would serve under either and refused to send for Crick. Premier See discussed the matter in Cabinet and recommended that the Governor send for Thomas Waddell, the Colonial Treasurer.

Wise and Crick declined to serve under Waddell and other members threatened to resign. Sir Harry dealt with the turmoil by summoning an influential member warning him that they were playing into the hands of the Socialist Party for if the ministry resigned, he would have to send for the Labor Party leader. Waddell became Premier on 17 June 1904.

Sir Harry Rawson also promoted the formation of a separate Navy for Australia, and he endeavoured to smooth the bitter religious differences, including relations between State and Commonwealth.

Sir Harry also spent a great amount of time dealing with the defiant Norfolk Islanders.

On his appointment as Governor, Sir Harry Rawson was conferred with the rank of Past Junior Grand Warden, English Constitution. In 1905, he was installed as Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales. As Governor, he travelled widely throughout the State attending to his many official duties and visiting a number of Masonic Lodges. Sir Harry was so successful and popular as Governor, his term was extended during which he received the GCB in 1906 and the GCMG in 1909.

Sir Harry enjoyed a cigar and clay pigeon shooting at the Vice Regal residence at Sutton Forest.

Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson retired in May 1909. He died eighteen months later on 3 November 1910 in London and was buried in Bracknell Parish Churchyard, Berkshire.

In an address to Grand Lodge after Sir Harry's death, the Grand Master, Most Wor. Bro. Lord Chelmsford said:

"I shall not be exaggerating our feelings when I say that we all received the news of his death with deep sorrow, and regarded it, each one of us, as a personal loss. Sir Harry was a simple, kindly, generous man who laid a spell on us which is difficult to analyse. With no outward graces, and with no meretricious attempt to win popularity, he won the esteem and love of the community by the simple discharge of his duty day by day.

It will be well for us to cherish his memory as a man and a Mason, for it is not often given to us to know one who was a finer exemplification of himself of what a man and a Mason should be."

The Rawson Institute for Seamen, Sydney, Rawson Park, Stockton and Rawson Streets in Sydney and Kurri Kurri were all named after him.

His nephew, Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, was Governor of New South Wales from 1924 to 1930.

MASONIC RECORD

Initiated November 1863 in Royal Sussex Lodge No. 501, English Constitution.

Passed Fellowcraft, December 1863 and raised a Master Mason in January 1864.

Joined St. John and St. Paul Lodge No. 349, English constitution, December 1889.

Invested as Senior Warden, January 1891.

Joined Royal Navy College Lodge No. 1593, English Constitution in April 1892.

Joined Navy Lodge No. 2612 English Constitution, as a foundation member.

Invested as Senior Warden in December 1898 and Installed as Worshipful Master in December 1901.

Grand Lodge Honours of Past Junior Grand Warden, English Constitution, were conferred in 1902.

Served as Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales from 1905 to 1909.

REFERENCES

Australian Dictionary of Biography - Martha Rutlege.
Masonic Grand Masters of Australia - Kent Henderson.
Wikipedia Encyclopedia.
Newcastle City Library - New South Wales Government.
National Library of Australia.