



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### EARLY FREEMASONRY IN MAITLAND

The Maitland Lodge of Unity No 4 was formed on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1840 and it had taken only 123 years after the Grand Lodge of England was established for this to happen.

At this time in 1840, five lodges existed in Sydney, making Maitland Lodge of Unity the only country lodge in N S W. It was numbered 804 EC. With the formation of the United Grand Lodge of NSW in 1888 all existing lodges were renumbered according to seniority and Lodge Unity was numbered 4. (One lodge, Lodge St John at Parramatta, formed in 1838, had folded before 1888 so the Maitland lodge was the fourth lodge when the renumbering took place).

The second lodge formed in Maitland was Lodge Hunters River in 1858 under the Scottish Constitution it being numbered 381 SC.

This lodge met in the Cross Keys Hotel situated where High Street branches off at the railway overpass near High Street Station.

It has been variously known as Lodge Hunter's River, Lodge Harmony and Hunter's River Lodge of Harmony. This lodge moved to Newcastle in 1872 as Lodge Harmony, and at the Union in 1888 was re-numbered 15. William Arnott, of biscuit fame, joined the lodge when it was in Maitland.

The third lodge was Lodge Orient, in East Maitland, formed in 1894 by the UGL NSW and numbered 215

Lodge Mindaribba, the next lodge was formed in 1917 by the UGL NSW and was numbered 307.

In more recent times Lodge Allyn, which had been formed in 1932 at East Gresford, moved to East Maitland in 1974.

Lodge Excelsior 167 which had been formed in Greta in 1887, also moved to East Maitland, in 1991. Lodges Allyn and Excelsior amalgamated in 1994 and became Lodge Allyn Excelsior 167.

This amalgamated lodge joined with Lodge Orient 215 in 2002 forming a new Lodge Brotherhood of Maitland No 1029.

While there is concern at the diminishing membership in the Craft – this is not confined to present times; in V Wor Bro John Algie's history of Lodge Unity (*The First Sixty Years 1840-1900*) he refers to it as being "At a very low ebb 1856-71.

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Transportation of convicts to Australia ended in 1840, the year Unity was established and Freemasonry tended to reflect the manners and, to some extent, the faults and shortcomings of society in general.

According to M Dingle of Monash University, this time was the heaviest period of spirit drinking in Australian history.

Unmasonic conduct occurred in some early lodges reflecting the behaviour in some sections of the community; and Lodge Unity suffered to some extent likewise.

Intoxication, insulting behaviour, distasteful and unmasonic conduct in Lodge Unity was recorded in early years.

Some of the Brethren charged, regarding this activity, were dealt with at two Lodges of Emergency and the minutes of the meetings cover thirty-three pages.

The result was that four members were excluded.

During the period 1856-1871, main causes for concern were non-attendance of members and the difficulty many members experienced in paying their dues.

A lack of PMs caused the installations of several Masters, in the period 1860-1866, and the lack of members caused many meetings to be abandoned in the period 1862-1871, some 44 meetings.

It was suggested that the lodge be closed for (say) 3 years but this did not occur.

Economic conditions were improving and membership began to increase and after the formation of the UGL NSW, all local lodges progressed steadily although over the years there have been 'highs' and 'lows' in membership.

Lodge Unity had 232 members in 1929 and this day, unfortunately 35 members.

We have passed through some difficult times in traversing the years from 1840 to the present.

History records many interesting happenings in that period; some serious, and yet many humorous.

In one instance a petitioning gentleman was rejected by ballot – apparently regarding the sale of cattle; he again petitioned, was then accepted and later became W M of the lodge.

On another occasion, two brethren went to visit Lodge Hiram at Dungog. The means of transport being via horse and sulky – with poor lighting NO street lights and for the most part unsealed roads.

The two managed to get lost on the return journey and finished up at Martins Creek.

Perhaps some may remember the lantern on the entrance post at Lodge Allyn 642, at East Gresford, if you mistook the entrance – the next turn led to the local cemetery. (the lodge building had been an old butter factory and was in a paddock at the edge of town).

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Speaking again of Lodge Allyn – at one installation week the mosaic pavement was given several coats of clear enamel which however, unfortunately did not completely dry. On install night everyone sitting on seats which had been placed across the lodge, stuck to the pavement when they tried to move.

Regarding the lack of sufficient lighting in earlier times, we find that some country lodges used the moonlight to assist members, when going to and returning home, by meeting on or near the date of the full moon.

No Maitland lodge used the full moon for night navigation – however many country lodges did so.

Minmi, West Wallsend and Toronto took advantage of the moon phases.

At one time, according to the Masonic Directory, some 82 lodges had their monthly meeting date according to the full moon.

Acknowledgements: "The First Sixty Years" late V Wor Bro John Algie  
Wor Bro J Crethary – Lodge Unity 4

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