



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 191

PREPARED BY: G.H. Cumming.

### **JAMES DUNLOP (1793-1848)**

#### **ASTRONOMER**

James Dunlop was born on 31 October 1793 at Dalry, Ayrshire, Scotland. Dalry is about 6 km north of Kilwinning.

He attended primary school and then evening classes at Beith whilst employed in a thread factory. Beith is some 8 km north-east of Dalry.

By 1810, Dunlop was experimenting with the construction of telescopes and, ten years later, he met Major-General Sir Thomas Brisbane, KCB, who had an observatory and an interest in astronomy.

In 1821, Brisbane was appointed Governor of New South Wales where he intended to establish an observatory.

He appointed Carl Rümker and James Dunlop as assistants. Dunlop was to look after and repair instruments in the observatory erected in Parramatta Park, near the Governor's residence.

Rümker and Dunlop arrived in Sydney on 7 November 1821 and the instruments were set up and ready to observe the solstice.

A building was erected and regular observations began in May 1822.

In June 1822, Dunlop was the first to see the re-appearance of Encke's Comet. This was only the second time that a predicted return of a comet was verified. It followed the prediction of the return of Halley's Comet in 1758.

Dunlop conducted the greater part of the observations for a catalogue of stars and observations of the length of the pendulum and the results were published together with those of Henry Kater in *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, London in 1823.

The astronomer Carl Rümker resigned in June 1823 and Dunlop carried on alone, cataloguing stars and nebulae.

In 1825, Governor Brisbane's term expired and he returned to his native Scotland.

From March 1826 until 4 February 1827, Dunlop continued his astronomical survey work, using an instrument he had built himself, at his own home situated on the block bounded by St John's Park, Macquarie, Hunter and Marsden Streets, Parramatta.

During that time he made 40,000 observations and catalogued 7,385 stars. This formed the basis of the *Parramatta Catalogue of Stars*.

He also produced catalogues of nebulae, star clusters and double stars.

Dunlop then returned to Scotland where he worked at Sir Thomas Brisbane's private observatory at Makerstoun.

On 28 February 1828, The Royal Astronomical Society of London conferred the gold medal, its highest honour on James Dunlop. In 1830, he became a Fellow of the Royal Society in London.

On 6 November 1831, Dunlop returned to Sydney where, on 11 November, he was appointed Astronomer Royal of New South Wales and Superintendent of the Parramatta Observatory which had been taken over by the government.

His first task was to restore the building and its equipment.

For the next four years, he reported observations of asteroids, planets and comets which were published in *Memoirs of the Royal Astronomical Society*.

In 1833, he received a gold medal from the King of Denmark for discovering a comet. He continued his observations which are preserved in eight manuscript books at the Sydney Observatory.

He gave guidance and assistance to the Surveyor General Sir Thomas Mitchell prior to his journeys of exploration in 1831 and 1834.

In 1847, he began to suffer ill health and the *Sydney Morning Herald* for 9 November 1847 reported that he had resigned his appointment.

He and his wife Jean whom he had married in 1816, retired to their farm at Boora Boora on Brisbane Water.

He continued his interest in poetry, geology and zoology and his collection of birds, eggs, spears and other artefacts found their way to a museum at his home town of Dalry.

He was also a man who showed compassion to his neighbours at Parramatta and the Aboriginals near his farm.

He died, survived by Jane, on 22 September 1848. They had no children.

In 1890, an obelisk was erected in Parramatta Park to mark the site of the Observatory established by Governor Brisbane on 2 May 1824.

Dunlop Street in North Parramatta commemorates the name of James Dunlop, the First Astronomer Royal of New South Wales.

We do know that he signed the attendance book on the meeting night of the Parramatta St John Lodge No. 668, English Constitution, in January 1842. He signed in the Past Master's space but we do not know if he was an Installed Master or if this was an error on his part.

The first meeting of the Lodge was held under dispensation on 29 March 1836 at Nash's Woolpack Inn.

After many difficulties, the final meeting of the Lodge was held on 3 October 1849.

Attached to the Lodge was the first English Constitution Royal Arch Chapter in New South Wales.

The Charter is dated 4 August 1842 and the first meeting was held in the Australian Arms Hotel, Parramatta on 10 September 1844.



The foundation Principals were:

Z	Dr Bnte Stuart
H	James Dunlop
J	Joseph Snape

The Chapter was declared extinct in May 1861.

References:

The Grolier Society: *The Australian Encyclopedia.*

Harley Wood: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

*Encyclopedia of Australian Science.*

R G Hay: *Freemasonry in Parramatta 1836 – 1936.*

G H CUMMING, OAM, PDGZ