

## **LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE HARRIS FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND MUSEUM**

Preston Guild of 1882 saw the laying of the foundation stone of the Harris Free Public Library and Museum. It was originally arranged that the stone should be laid by H.R.H. the Duke of Albany but, at the last moment, a change of plan was necessitated by the sudden indisposition of the Duke. Fortunately, by desire of H.M. Queen Victoria, his place was taken by H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge for all the Guild celebrations.

On the morning of Tuesday September 5th the Duke of Cambridge, accompanied by the Earl of Lathom arrived at Preston Railway station from Ormskirk. After an enthusiastic reception and an inspection of the troops, H.R.H. left the station with an escort of Dragoon Guards. The 5th Lancashire Artillery Volunteers formed the Guard of Honour at the Town Hall.

About two thousand freemasons took part in the laying of the Foundation Stone. They assembled in the Christ Church School Rooms leaving the School about noon attired in full masonic attire and jewels. The procession was headed by the headquarters band of the 5th Lancashire Artillery Volunteers. The route lay along Fishergate, doubling at the corner of Lancaster Road, back along Fishergate, Lune Street, and Friargate and to the Market Place.

On the arrival at the site, the approach of the Earl of Lathom was heralded by a flourish of trumpets. The Guide Mayor, Edmund Birley Esq., now made his appearance with the Duke of Cambridge, and several noblemen and ladies. On the south side of the Stone sat the Earl of Lathom and the other eminent brethren. The Guild Mayor sat near the Earl of Lathom and immediately opposite his Lordship on a platform draped with crimson cloth, sat the Duke of Cambridge, surrounded by a brilliant assemblage of the nobility and gentry. The members of Preston Corporation sat on the opposite grandstand.

The architect Bro. James Hibbert, the architect bearing the plans of the intended structure took up his position on the West side of the stone. The ceremony commenced with the singing of the hymn "The Spacious Firmament on High" led by the choir of St. James's Church under the leadership of their Organist, Br. C. J. Yates, accompanied by the band of the Royal Marines. Mr. C. R. Jacson, Chairman of the Harris Trustees presented a silver trowel to the Earl of Lathom and requested him to lay the stone, outlining at the same time the life and benefactions of the donor. The Earl of Lathom having declared the objects of the assembly, Prayer was offered by the Rev. T. B. Spencer and the anthem "Except the Lord build the house their labour is but lost that build it" was sung by the choir and those attending. The Masonic secretary read the inscription on the copper plate to be placed under the stone and the Masonic treasurer deposited the phial containing coins of the realm etc.

The Foundation stone was laid by the Earl of Lathom and the plans were presented by Ald Hibbert and the Earl handed them to the architect. An ode "Prosper the Art" was rendered by the choir and band and after prayer, the ceremony concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

The Rt.Hon. the Earl of Lathom addressed the audience:

"My Lords, Ladies and gentlemen, I have just now performed a ceremony which I little thought would have fallen to my lot. I had hoped that it would have fallen to a Mason of much higher rank than myself, and it was with great regret that I heard that the Duke of

Albany could not come amongst us. But as I understand that the whole ceremony was arranged masonically, and that all the brethren of the province of West Lancashire had been asked to assemble here to-day, I could not do otherwise than accede to the request of the Harris Trustees and the committee. I assure you it has given me great pleasure to lay the stone of a building which will be of such use to this town. I only hope it may be finished as rapidly and successfully as the building, the foundation stone of which we laid, I must say, this day twenty years ago. (This refers to the foundation stone ceremony of the new Town Hall on Tuesday September 2nd 1862) I have used to-day some of the same corn that was used at the ceremony on that occasion. That corn is but a perishable thing, yet it has lasted twenty years. May this building last twenty thousand. I shall not detain you longer, but ask my noble relative to say a few words to you."

After an address by the Earl of Derby, cheers were given for the Duke of Cambridge, the Earl of Derby and the Earl of Lathom.

An amusing account of the ceremony as published in the Supplement to the Preston Chronicle of September 9th 1882

*"This was perhaps the most imposing spectacle of the Spectacular festival, but its effect was greatly marred by the oppressive dullness of the morning and the persistent fall of fine penetrating rain. Before the time appointed the choristers had taken their places near the west end of the vast marquee covering the site of the new library, and just behind the foundation stone which was fully prepared for the occasion. To the varied strains of music, and at the occasional call of fussy officials of the Freemasons in full regalia and wearing their jewels filed into the canvas-covered space and took their places, the privileged members of the town and country having previously taken theirs."*

*"Then came the high officers of the Masonic Order followed by the Duke of Cambridge, the Earl of Derby, and other notables, and the ceremony was ready to begin."*

*"The representatives of the Harris Trustees (C. R. Jacson, Esq.) then in a wearisome monotone detailed the origin of the Harris Library and at a halting but welcome close of his speech requested Lord Lathom to lay the foundation stone with all due care and ceremony. At the same time Mr. Jacson handed his lordship, a handsome silver trowel for the purpose. Lord Lathom's response delivered in a full and manly tone seemed to rouse up the vast concourse of spectators as from a dream, and the choir following with a delightful rendering of the psalm "Except the Lord build the house" put a life and spirit into the ceremony of which it had until then been sadly deficient."*

*"The Duke of Cambridge who had hitherto seemed rather bored, now brightened up, and although only playing second fiddle in the ceremony, he played that part to perfection to the end of it. After the stone had been raised for the purpose of depositing the usual coins etc. it was slowly lowered and carefully laid, Lord Lathom testing it by level, plumb and the square, and then declaring the work properly done, emphasising the declaration by three taps of the mallet. At this point the ceremony was most imposing, the vast assembly standing with bared heads and eyes turned to one centre of attraction, and it needed nothing more than a gleam of sunshine to make it unsurpassable. It would have delighted the hearts of Sir Walter Scott and John Gibbert to witness the display and to do justice to the scene, it would require the pen of one and the pencil of the other. The singing of the choir was good throughout and the response of the assembled masons, "so mote it be," deep and impressive. There was only one attempt at a speech, and that was the Earl of Derby at the conclusion of the ceremony. It was well received, out of respect to the*

*honoured name of Derby, but as an oratory, was not much. The thoughts were commonplace and the speaker seemed to be suffering from some temporary ailment. After the speech the concourse of spectators rapidly dispersed in search of other amusements."*

The remains of the consecrating elements used in this ceremony as well as that of 1862 were preserved and are to-day to be seen in a small bottle in the Harris Museum.

Ivor Whalley (Trustee)