

FSL GRP 60 years at Lodge of Furness for Rowley Saunders Presentation

The Lodge of Furness, the Group's oldest lodge, has been pleased to celebrate the diamond jubilee of its most senior member, Harold Rowland Saunders, known to all as Rowley.

There were 83 brethren present to see Principal Guest Peter Schofield, Assistant Provincial Grand Master celebrate Rowley's life and masonic career in a fascinating retrospective.

Grand Officers present were Francis Anthony Umbers, PGSwdB, Deputy Provincial Grand Master, James Anthony Harrison PPGM, Norman James Thompson PPGM (Cumberland & Westmorland) Philip Harry Gunning PJGW, PDepPGM, Mathew Damian Hampson PJGW, PDepMetGM, Frank Philip Gardner, PSGD, PAPGM, David Grainger PSGD, PAPGM, Keith Stanley Kemp, PSGD, PAPGM, Christopher John Band PJGD, Alan Jones PAGDC, Philip James Preston, PAGDC, Paul Stephen Broadley PAGDC, and Gary James Rogerson PAGDC, testament to the respect and esteem in which Rowley is held by so many across the province of West Lancashire.

Acting Provincial Officers in attendance were Jamie Robert Lindsay ProvAGDC, Mathew Ian Woods – ProvGStwd, and Philip James Renney AssttoProvGDC. The Furness and South Lakes Group was represented by Chairman Chris Gray, Vice Chairman Harry Chatfield and Secretary Kevin Rigg. Having opened the lodge up to the third degree in due and ancient form, and salutations having been given, WM Garry Grieve welcomed Deputy PGM Frank Umbers to the lodge, Frank in return thanked Gary and the assembled brethren for their welcome and salutations and introduced Peter Schofield to Gary. Gary offered the gavel and the chair to Peter, which he accepted.

Peter settled himself and the celebration of Rowley's Diamond Jubilee began in earnest.

Harold Rowland Saunders was born in December 1937 at the family home in Spark Bridge. He lived with his father Fred, mum Mary, three brothers and a sister. Fred was a local haulage contractor operating horse drawn carts in those days and mum Mary was a busy housewife looking after the family home and taking care of her large family.

His father believed in getting him started in the family business from an early stage, from the age of six he and his older brother had to wash out the inside of the cattle wagons by hand at the end of each day and to make matters worse he had to walk to the nearby river to fill buckets for the cleaning process. The business was originally established by his grandfather and grandmother Saunders.

Fred developed his strict disciplined work ethic from an early age and was taken out of school at the age of 13 to tend to the horses used to transport stone from quarries around the local area for the construction of roads.

At the end of the Second World War the Ministry of Defence were selling off wagons which were surplus to requirements. Fred took this opportunity and purchased a fleet of motorised vehicles, Ashes Farm was purchased and developed into the Company depot and remains the home of the business.

Rowley attended local infants and junior school. He must have been considered a very respected pupil by his Form Tutor who requested in her will that he should be a bearer at her funeral, a fact of which he remained very proud. His local church at Tottlebank played a role in his younger years and he attended Sunday School there every week. At Junior School Rowley's close friends bragged that they were receiving private tuition in order to gain entry to Ulverston Grammar School, Rowley did not have access to a private tutor, however he was admitted to the Grammar School unlike his friends.

Rowley left Ulverston Grammar School with four GCSE's. He also played rugby for the school team which left him with a love for the game that has stayed with him for life.

On leaving school he started his working life at Martins Bank in Coniston as a bank clerk. However, he still maintained his association with the family business by driving company vehicles at weekends.

In 1956 Rowley was called up for National Service and served for the Royal Air Force based initially at Locking Airfield near Bristol. During his service he was promoted to Senior Aircraftman, the highest rank possible in the National Service, an achievement of which he was known to be extremely proud.

When asked what role he wished to train for in the RAF he quite naturally requested training as a lorry driver. The powers that be talked him out of that and sent Rowley to train as a radio mechanic. On completing his training at Locking he was posted to Nicosia in Cyprus and was awarded the General Service Medal. He was demobbed from the RAF in May 1958.

Rowley recalled that one of his proudest sporting achievements was that he was selected by the Royal Air Force rugby team to play against Bristol first team at their home ground in the city.

On his return to the UK he resumed employment at Martins Bank. By this time his father's health was failing and he requested leave of absence to help out with the business during this difficult time. The bank refused so he resigned and went to work full-time in the family firm as driver manager and "General Dogsboddy".

Rowley's father sadly passed away and his future was working in the family business, although mum Mary made it abundantly clear that she was the boss.

Along with his mum, older brother and other members of the family Rowley developed the business into a highly successful organisation and it quite literally became a household name in the area, giving meaningful employment to many local people over many years and has contributed to the success of the local business community and network. Rowley, along with his business, are held both locally and nationally in the very highest esteem and having gained immense respect from fellow business owners and clients alike. The business eventually became one of the largest, most well respected haulage companies in the North West.

Rowley has, over his working and professional career, proved to be a highly successful business man demonstrating great leadership and management skills throughout his outstanding career and was truly an inspiration to all who knew him.

He finally retired from the family business in November 2015 after almost 73 years of totally committed, devoted and dedicated service, a truly magnificent achievement.

As a young man before his National Service he would regularly attend local Hunt Balls. It was while attending such a Ball at Grizebeck a certain young lady caught his eye. This was, of course, Joyce, who lived with her parents in Chapels near Kirkby. Joyce was a wages clerk in Vickers Shipyard.

After plucking up the courage to ask her for a dance, the relationship grew and they continued to write to each other during his National Service. On his return to the UK the relationship blossomed and following a suitable courtship he was married in May 1960 at St Cuthbert's Church in Kirkby.

Initially Rowley lived with Joyce's grandparents at Marshside for some two years until Hill Farm at Grizebeck was ready. This became the family home, where he still resides.

In 1961 Rowley was blessed with his daughter Debora, who is married to John, a member of Baldwin Lodge. Deborah has provided him with two grandsons. Rowley has been further blessed with three great-grandchildren. His pride was evident of his entire family and all their achievements and just how much an important part they all play in his life, while he retained that strong family bond and remaining in regular close contact with each other.

Unfortunately, Joyce is no longer with us. She was a very special lady and she is deeply missed by him and his entire family.

Rowley's main hobby in life has been Freemasonry however, he found time for other hobbies and community activities. He has held two spells as Chairman of the Kirkby and Ireleth Parish Council over many years and remain an active member to date.

He was Chairman of the Kirkby branch of the British Legion helping to raise many hundreds of pounds for the local Poppy Appeal.

He has been an active member of Rotary for over 40 years, being actively involved in the organisation of many meetings and assisting greatly in their charitable fund raising activities including the organisation of charity concerts, so much so that his hard work and dedication was recognised when the club made him a Paul Harris Fellow. He enjoys gardening and socialising with his new found friend and companion Mrs Doris Barker, a lovely lady who the brethren convey their best wishes.

Outside of Freemasonry Rowley has always shown and demonstrated a great charitable and local social awareness and have, over many years, contributed hugely with many donations anonymously made by him. However, his reputation goes before he and there are known to be many charitable organisations that have benefitted hugely from his generosity while he never sought personal recognition, just genuinely happy to help those less fortunate than him.

Representing all the brethren, widows, individuals, charities and people less fortunate than themselves who have benefitted from his hard work and the charitable funds he has generated over many years, Peter thanked him most sincerely.

As Rowley was growing up, Freemasonry was no stranger to him as his grandfather and great-grandfather were members of Whitwell Lodge meeting in Millom in the Province of Cumberland and Westmorland. The seed of interest in the Craft was already firmly planted in his heart from an early age, so it came as no real surprise to anybody when his Masonic journey began on 6th September 1966 when poor and penniless, he was Initiated into The Lodge of Furness No. 995 meeting at Kings Road, Ulverston.

He was proposed into Freemasonry by Jack Ivison who was a manager at Stott Bobbin Mill who he met when delivering timber. He obviously had a good eye for potential talent and one day pulled Rowley to one side and explained that he thought that he would be good for Freemasonry. His judgment proved entirely correct and this group and Freemasonry in general owe him a great debt of gratitude for that very wise choice. His seconder was Charlie Dickinson.

Having written to the lodge, Rowley said that following the submission of his letter he had to wait 5 years for a response. Had things been the same as they are now the gathering might well have been celebrating his 65th anniversary this evening. Mum Mary was immensely proud that he was following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather by joining Freemasonry, thus keeping up a well-established family tradition.

Rowley was passed to the degree of a Fellowcraft on 4th April 1967 and raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason on 6th June that same year.

Peter then asked our Bro. Secretary to read an extract from the Minutes of his Initiation. There was no doubt that those names mentioned brought back many happy memories of his long and distinguished journey in Freemasonry.

Following his Initiation Rowley progressed through the various offices of the Lodge of Furness before becoming Worshipful Master in 1978, all the offices of all of which he fulfilled with great commitment and dedication.

He was ADC of the lodge from 1980 to 1982. He was elected lodge treasurer from 1982 to 1992, a magnificent 10 years dedicated period of service fulfilling the office with great diligence, care and commitment. It was reported on good authority that he was an excellent treasurer, 'Rowley was a bit of a stickler, everything had to be just right with every single penny being accounted for, everything had to be just right as had come to be expected of him but he was always there to offer help, guidance, encouragement and support to any brother in need. In many respects not just an outstanding Treasurer but an excellent mentor to many as well'.

Rowley's dedication and commitment to the long service of the Lodge has been absolutely outstanding. Members of the Lodge consider him the driving force behind its success and hold Rowley in the very highest esteem. They thank him for all the many years of hard work he has so freely given and the great support he has demonstrated to the members under his care.

Rowley was appointed Group Secretary of the Furness and South Lakeland Group in 1994 and Group Vice-Chairman in 1996. He continued in that role until 2006 when he was appointed Group Chairman, finally retiring from that role in 2013. Overall a magnificent period of 20 years as a Group Officer to the Furness & South Lakeland Group.

His chairmanship of the group during his tenure can only be described as absolutely outstanding. The group continued to develop and go from strength to strength under his expert guidance earning him the respect, not just of all the members of this group, but also across the whole Province generally with the Provincial Grand Masters in office at the time valuing his opinion and guidance on many Masonic subjects.

Peter Schofield had the privilege of serving alongside Rowley and his colleague Alan Jones as a Group Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Furness and South Lakeland Group and expressed sincere thanks to both men for the guidance, support and encouragement they gave to him, saying he could not have

wished for more genuinely experienced, caring and dedicated Freemasons as his Mentors, for which he thanked them most sincerely.

Rowley was the Founder treasurer of the Furness and South Lakeland Group Boxing Committee from its inception in 1985 until 1993, helping to establish this wonderful event which is still going strong today and has raised in the region of £200,000 for local charities and worthy causes.

During his time in the Rotary when he was organising charitable concerts, some 30 years ago, the success of which was being very closely monitored by Jim Whitton and Wilf Hackett, who thought it would be a good idea if the Northern Group, as it was then known, organised a Masonic concert for local charities. In accordance with the saying that a job done well should be given to a busy Mason, he was told to 'get on with it'.

Rowley met with some opposition in the Group, but members soon changed their minds when the money came flooding in and it proved a huge success. Now 30 years later the concerts are still going, and many local charities and worthy causes have good reason to be thankful to him for all his efforts.

Over the years he has brought many well-known artists to the Coronation Hall for his charity concerts including Kenny Ball, Herman's Hermits, the Houghton Weavers, the Batchelors and home talent Dean Fawcett and his own personal favourite, Ann Breen.

As a Group Officer Rowley was instrumental in setting up and organising the stewarding of the Brathay Marathon 30 years ago following friendly persuasion from then Group Chairman Michael Davies. The group still steward this event to this day. The organisers of the marathon readily admit that without the group's help the event, quite simply, could not go ahead. Their contribution has been widely recognised as a magnificent example of Freemasonry working in local communities and has gained massive recognition in public and Masonic circles.

In Provincial Grand Lodge Rowley was appointed to PGStwd in 1985 and received promotion to PPrGSwdB in 1989 before being promoted in 1995 to the very high rank of PPrJGW undoubtedly just reward for all his hard work, commitment and dedication to the lodge, the group and the Province of West Lancashire. In 1997 Rowley received the Grand Rank appointment of PAGDC before being promoted in 2007 to the rank of PJGD in the United Grand Lodge of England, again just reward for his outstanding commitment to Freemasonry generally.

Rowley is a Founder Member of Lonsdale Lodge of Installed Masters No. 9422 and is also a member of Hindpool Lodge No. 1225. In the Holy Royal Arch, he was exalted into Furness Chapter in 1980 becoming First Principal in 1989. He joined Vale Chapter of Installed Principals No. 5256 in 2007 and were installed as First Principal in 2015. In Provincial Grand Chapter he was appointed to PPrPGSoj. In 1993 before being promoted to the very high rank of PPrGSN in 1995.

His outstanding service to Freemasonry was once again acknowledged by Supreme Grand Chapter in 1999 when he received the appointment of PGStdB before further promotion in 2010 to the rank of PAsstGSoj.

Rowley has truly had a magnificent and outstanding professional and Masonic career and can feel justifiably proud of all his lifelong achievements. He has always displayed great compassion and fairness and demonstrated humility and understanding in all his dealings with many brethren under his care whilst retaining that respect needed to fulfil his vital roles. His evident care for people less fortunate than him has been continued throughout his Masonic career and the brethren thanked him wholeheartedly for the unstinting and outstanding commitment he has demonstrated to the charity function over many years.

Once again, Peter thanked him on behalf of all those people whose personal and Masonic lives have been made better because of his drive, commitment and dedication and quite frankly, by just having he in their lives. Peter also stated that Rowley is the most honourable, kind, generous and loyal, caring person known to him, a true gentleman and he was proud to call him a friend.

His story demonstrated beyond words his devotion and loyalty to Freemasonry and all the brethren owed him a great debt of gratitude for all he has done and it has been a great privilege and pleasure for the speaker to share that story with all the brethren present.

After honouring the charities, the lodge was closed in Due and ancient form.

At the festive banquet upstairs, WM Gary proposed the toast to Rowley's health, the following are extracts from that toast.

"This evening, we have gathered not only to celebrate a remarkable milestone in Freemasonry, but to honour a remarkable man. Sixty years in the Craft. When you say those words aloud, they scarcely seem believable. Sixty years of service, sixty years of commitment to our principles, sixty years of friendship, guidance and example. Tonight, we celebrate Worshipful Brother Harold Rowland Saunders, known to all of us simply and affectionately as Rowley. Brethren, many men become Freemasons. Far fewer remain active for six decades. Fewer still leave behind a legacy measured not by offices held, jewels worn, or honours received, but by the respect, affection and friendship of those around them.

Rowley is one of those rare men.

There cannot be many situations within a Lodge that he has not encountered, many challenges he has not overcome, or many questions he has not been asked. And if he doesn't know the answer, he usually knows someone who does. That kind of wisdom cannot be found in books. It can only be earned through years of service, friendship and dedication. I have had the privilege of knowing Rowley for many years, and throughout that time I have been fortunate enough to witness first-hand the qualities that have earned him the respect, affection and admiration of so many people, both within and beyond Freemasonry. As I have stood here and said before, I count myself very fortunate to have been proposed into our wonderful Craft by Rowley. I still remember one of the first things he said to me about Freemasonry.

He said: "Freemasonry takes a good man and makes him better."

Those words stayed with me and throughout my own Masonic journey I have often reflected upon them.

Tonight, as I stand here looking around this room, I can see the living proof of those words. Sixty years ago, Freemasonry certainly took a good man and made him better. But on this occasion, Brethren, I believe there was an exception made to the rule, because sixty years ago, a good man took Freemasonry and he made it better. Through his friendship, his example, his service, his humour and his unwavering commitment to our principles, Rowley has enriched every lodge, every brother and every life he has touched throughout his remarkable masonic career. And he has done so for the past sixty years with distinction. He has never sought recognition. He has never sought praise. Yet recognition and praise seem to find him regardless.

This evening is testament to that fact. The presence of so many distinguished brethren, including our senior Provincial Officers and honoured guests, speaks volumes about the esteem in which Rowley is held. They have not travelled here simply to recognise sixty years served. They have come to honour the man who served those years. Brethren, when Rowley was initiated into Freemasonry, Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister, man had not yet walked on the Moon, and many of us in this room were still years, if not decades, away from joining the Craft. Yet despite all those years, Rowley remains exactly as we know him today.

Warm. Approachable. Good humoured. Generous with his time. And always ready with a story, a smile, or a helping hand.

Brethren, in this country we recognise achievement with many great honours. A man may become a Sir.

He may become a Lord. He may receive a CBE, an MBE or any number of distinguished titles that carry weight, stature and national recognition. Yet up here amongst these green hills of ours, where common sense still prevails over any degree in political science, I believe there is a higher accolade than any of them.

One that, for me, surpasses them all. It is the simple title of a gentleman. Not a title bestowed by a monarch.

Not an honour awarded by a committee. But a reputation earned over a lifetime. It cannot be requested.

It cannot be demanded. It cannot be purchased. It can only be bestowed by those whose lives you have touched. Rowley, of all the men I have known, none is more deserving of that title than you. You have never sought it. You have never demanded it. You have never expected it. Yet you honour it every single day of your life. And I have never met anyone who wears it more naturally."

Gary's toast elicited a wry, thoughtful and poignant response from Rowley. He offered the opinion that "if my mother had been here, she'd have believed every word".

Rowley thanked everyone for their attendance, voicing his appreciation to the volunteer bar staff, to Christine and Terry the caterers, for postponing their retirement, giving thanks to "Nev and his gang" for decorating the function room over the summer break, and to "head waitress" Wolly Wilcock for his hard work serving food.