

He Was Master of His Lodge Twelve Times

by **Brother Fred Lomax**

What was that you said? "Master of his Lodge twelve times," no it can't be true, but it is true Brethren, and before I tell you who it was, I must first give you the background to the story.

Wigan is a town of some ninety thousand people in the north-west of England and is famous in Masonic circles for when its second oldest Lodge, the Lodge of Sincerity No. 386 formed in December of 1786, broke away from the United Grand Lodge of England in 1823. Later it was the leading lodge in the famous Grand Lodge of Wigan, which remained independent for ninety years before returning to the fold of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1913 as Sincerity Lodge No. 3677. Although in existence since 1786, it celebrated its centenary in September 2013. The United Grand Lodge of England was formed when the two existing Grand Lodges in England, the original of 1717 and the second or Antients of 1752, merged in 1813.

I want to tell you about Wigan's oldest Lodge. The Lodge of Antiquity now No. 178 (originally 235) holds a warrant dated May 26, 1786, and it may be considered a daughter lodge of the Lodge of Antiquity No. 146 of nearby Bolton, Lancashire, England. At a meeting of the latter lodge, Richard Holmes of Wigan, an Innkeeper, was initiated. He was later passed and raised at an emergency meeting at his home, the Queens Head Inn, Market Place, Wigan. On Wednesday, June 21, 1786, a special Grand Lodge under the Antients Grand Lodge was held by dispensation at the Queens Head, and the Lodge of Antiquity No. 235 was consecrated.

Initially the Lodge appears to have developed quite well, that is until around the middle of the 19th century when it began to go through a depressed period. In 1844, a Brother Henry Miller's name appears in the minutes when he was appointed to represent the Lodge at the celebration of the laying of the Foundation stone of Literary and Philosophical Hall, Preston, Lancashire. Prior to this, he appeared in the members list from 1815 and is shown as Junior Warden on December 22, 1817, and again on December 18, 1818. He appears as Senior Warden on January 18, 1819. On the 27th of December of that year, he is shown as Worshipful Master for the first time. During this period it was not uncommon for a Worshipful Master to serve for six months; therefore, there would be two installations per year, usually around St. John the Baptist day on June 24th and again at St. John the Evangelist day on December 27th. Hence the Festivals of St. John.

He did not appear again until July 18, 1838, when he was installed as Master, and again on January 28, 1839. Then we have a sequence of Installations of Brother Henry Miller as follows: January 13, 1840; January 4, 1841; and December 27, 1841. Then there is a gap until February 17, 1845, and again in 1846 (no date) followed by a further gap until January 8, 1849, when he appears as Senior Warden

and the same in January 1850. On March 15, 1851, he is shown as Master once more, followed by a further period in the chair in January of 1852 and again on February 21, 1853.

He was installed for the last time in the chair on January 21, 1856. This is a total of twelve times over a period of thirteen years, and while this may not be a record, it is significant when you consider that he also served as Warden of the Lodge five times.

It is recorded that he and his close friend, Thomas Holmes, who was Master in 1843 and 1844 would walk from nearby Hindley, a distance of between three and four miles, into Wigan only to find that there was an insufficient number of Brethren to open their Lodge. However, Brother Holmes always recorded the event and signed the record as Secretary. Eventually the Lodge recovered and is still going strong today.

Brother Holmes died in 1858, but it was another eleven years before Brother Miller passed to the Grand Lodge above when he was buried alongside his old and beloved Brother in Hindley Churchyard. I'm sure you will agree, a remarkable story by any standards.

The author is a Past Master of the Manchester Lodge for Masonic Research No. 5502 and a Past President of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research. He is currently the Provincial Grand Orator for the Province of East Lancashire under the United Grand Lodge of England and a regular guest speaker at many lodges. The above story is taken from the author's book FRED'S FIVE MINUTE TALKS - Your Masonic Questions Answered, available on Amazon.com

[Top](#) Updated: August 12, 2014

