The Oddfellows Hall, Grimsby, and its Place in the Social Life of the Town

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Although in the nineteenth century members of friendly societies were often keen to look for their origins in historical myths and legends, the first friendly society recognisable as such was probably the Friendly Benefit Society of Bethnal Green founded in 1687. 1

In the eighteenth century societies were usually purely local, catering for and catering to a village and in the towns for members of a craft or trade, but in the early part of the nineteenth century, the national societies with local affiliated branches began to develop. Stimulated by the conditions of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, new societies were formed all over the country, the threat of indoor relief in the Union workhouse prompting many men to seek other forms of relief during sickness. Between August 1835 and August 1845, the number of new societies registered was 360, but by the time of the first report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1835 a further 750 had been registered 2 and of the 3,074 English lodges of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows which were still active in 1875, 1,470 had been founded between 1835 and 1845. 3 The Poor Law Commissioners in the years following 1834 saw friendly societies as a means of reducing the poor rate. 4

The basic objects of all the societies were the same. Money was received by the way of entrance fees, subscriptions and fines, and after the establishment of the trustee savings banks, by accrued interest on accumulated funds (earlier societies usually kept their funds in a doubly locked box at the place of meeting). The members were insured for a weekly payment when incapacitated by sickness and a lump sum was payable on the death of a member or his wife. These were the material benefits to be obtained from membership, but the ritual practiced at the meetings was an attraction to the members; the oaths, the signs, the passwords and the wearing of regalia provided a diversion from the preoccupations of everyday life and gave the feeling of participation in an unique organisation. In the lodge all men were equal. In theory, every member could aspire to lodge office, to district office or to the highest offices in the order. A member of any of the affiliated orders would find friends waiting for him in most parts of the country, ready and willing to receive him into their lodge or court. An annual dinner or tea, followed by a concert or ball was a greatly anticipated event, often preceded by a procession through the town or to an adjacent village, led by a band with banners and emblems being carried. The friendly societies in Grimsby could be found joining in most celebration processions in the town. ‘All the Friendly Societies’ took part in the parade celebrating the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837. 5

In 1831, on the occasion of the opening of the new dock a procession of merchants and tradesmen was followed by the ‘Benefit Societies, who, with the splendid regalia brought from London for the occasion, presented a gay scene. 6 The clubs and trades were reported as being present upon the Queen’s visit on 14 October 1854 7 and the Oddfellows, Foresters and other clubs took part in the celebrations at the time of the wedding of the Prince of Wales on 10 March 1862. 8 In 1897, the year of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, a monster procession was arranged by the friendly and trades Societies which included the Free Gardeners, the Grimsby Order of Oddfellows, the Rechabites and the Sons of Temperance, the Kingston Unity of Oddfellows (Albert Lodge), the Manchester Unity, the Druids, the Foresters and the Buffs. 9 Each year, following the election of the new mayor, the procession from the Town Hall to the parish church invariably included contingents from the friendly societies.

The first friendly society to be established in Grimsby was the Grimsby Royal, founded on 31 December 1768. It was probably the only friendly society in the town during the fifty four years of its existence. It was dissolved in 1822. Members had to be ‘free born subjects of the king’ and no ‘known common tipplers, swearers, drunkards or persons of scandalous behavior’ were to be admitted as members. The objects of the society were to grant relief during sickness or accident ‘according to the necessities of the sick member and to provide funeral benefit to a member or his wife’. The entrance fee was two shillings and sixpence of which one shilling was to be spent at the time of initiation in the public house in which the meeting was being held. The subscription was to be one shilling a month of which twopence was to be spent at the meeting. The amount of sick benefit is not known but the death benefit for a member was six pounds and for a member’s wife ‘as many sixpences as there are members’. This was to be ‘taken from the box and repaid by sixpence from each member’. The box in which the funds were kept was to be kept at the public house, the steward for the time being holding one key and the landlord another. The membership at one time reached 112 but at the time of its dissolution, had fallen to twelve. 10

In 1852, the Ancient Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity opened its first lodge in Grimsby, the Loyal Sovereign Lodge, No. 570 and about two years later, the Ancient Order of Foresters established themselves in the town. By 1850, other friendly societies meeting in the town were the Yorkarboro lodge of the Oddfellows, meeting at the White Hart Hotel, the Hearts of Oak lodge (or tent) of the Ancient Shepherds at the Navigation Hotel in Cleethorpe Road, while the Rechabites were meeting in a room above the Temperance Hall in Silver Street. Others in the town at this time were the Free Gardeners and a court of Shepherdeses. Both the Loyal Sovereign lodge and the Foresters were using the old Oddfellows Hall. 11 The Oddfellows had originated in the industrial towns of Lancashire and had spread throughout the country and by 1850 were well established in the towns and villages of Lincolnshire. There were 5,126 members in the county, ninety-two lodges and fourteen districts not including the 961 members of the Leicestershire Belvoir Castle District whose seven lodges were all in the Grantham area. 12 By 1874, Lincoln alone had eight lodges of the Manchester Unity with 1,297 members and by 1900, 6,209 members. 13

The dispensation to form the Loyal Sovereign lodge at Grimsby had been granted by the Manchester Unity on 3 January 1832. The first Noble Grand (Chairman) was Charles Gott and the first secretary James Kennington. The lodge was in the Bell District and the first lodge meeting was held in the house of Brother W. M. Dann, Queen’s Head Hotel. 14

The centenary leaflet, issued by the lodge in 1932 gives the first meeting place as the Globe Inn in the Old Market Place, so possibly it transferred to that venue shortly after its formation. In 1838, the lodge took the first steps to acquire its own premises. A plot of land was purchased situated in the new part of the town with a frontage to the turnpike road at that time known as Loft Street and subsequently to be renamed Victoria Street, containing about 516 square yards. This had originally been purchased in 1826 by George Bubb, the Town Clerk of Grimsby for sixty-three pounds. The abstract of the conveyance to the lodge on 4 September 1838 gives no indication of the price paid by the lodge. 15 Before the Friendly Societies Act of 1850, 16 the whole of the membership of an unregistered...
lodge was responsible wholly and severally for the affairs of the lodge and that is why we find eleven members of the Loyal Sovereign lodge jointly responsible for the purchase of this plot. It is possible that this was the full membership at the time. These men were Charles Lewis (chemist and druggist), William Cook (turner), Charles Manby Nainby (auctioneer and bookseller), George Frevelove Turner (joiner), Charles Hales (carpenter), Charles Hall (cowkeeper), William Berry (relieving officer), William Ward (watch and clock maker), William Ackrill (bricklayer), William Genney (ironmonger and nailseller) and James Kennington. By 1841 the lodge had built its own room on part of the plot at a cost of £200. It would appear to have been a building about thirty feet square. It had an ante room at the entrance and a large platform at the other end. Seating accommodation was on long wooden benches and it was probably capable of seating about two hundred. Apart from its use by the lodge and the Foresters, the hall was in demand for other meetings. Political and temperance meetings were held there as well as bazaars and lectures and the Roman Catholic community was using the hall after 1852 and paying an annual rent of ten pounds for Sunday use. The Rev. Parkinson Wilson in his journal for 3 January 1851 says ‘Today attended the Teetotal Meeting in the Oddfellows’ Hall, Grimsby. About 500 (sic) present. I spoke for about quarter of an hour and signed the pledge.’

In 1849, with a membership now up to 114, the subscription was 4d/week per member but an initiation fee was payable, varying from £1 at the age of eighteen (the minimum age of admission) to £4 at the age of thirty six (the upper age limit). The sick pay was 10s. weekly for the first half year, 7s. 6d. for the second half year and 5s. thereafter. £12 funeral benefit was payable on the death of a member, and 10s. for a member’s wife. In December 1851, the lodge was registered to conform to the requirements of the Friendly Societies Act of 1850 and was described as an auxiliary branch of the Grimsby District of the Independent Order of Oddfellows of the Manchester Unity Friendly Society. The Grimsby District comprised three lodges with a total membership of 174.

In addition to the Loyal Sovereign lodge, there was the Loyal Yarborough lodge with twelve members who met at the White Hart Hotel, Grimsby and the Loyal Fishermen’s Rest lodge which had been established in 1859 with five members and now had fifty four. This lodge met at the Leeds Arms, Cleethorpes until 1854 when an Oddfellows Hall was built in Cambridge Street near the site of the present Cleethorpes District Council offices.

After the registration had been certified by the Registrar of Friendly Societies in England, the lodge appointed three trustees who were responsible for its acts in law. These three trustees were Thomas Ackrill (plasterer), Charles Tasker (plumber) and John Marian. Ten years later, in 1860, five men, Robert Dreyfus, a retired master of the grammar school, and Francis Lister, a butcher, were members of the lodge. In 1861, the lodge had already disposed of a part to Jabez Robinson, to the north of the site adjacent to the New Market Place. Robert Dreyfus died in 1855 and on 29 May of that year, William Guy, a thirty nine year old bricklayer, employing four men, was elected as trustee. He, however, resigned after a short time in office and on 12 June 1854, the lodge appointed Robert Keetley in his place. Robert Keetley at this time was aged thirty one, was a ship builder and ship owner, a borough magistrate and mayor of the town, serving in this capacity in 1853 and 1854. It has been recorded that William Guy’s resignation was the outcome of negotiations by the lodge to acquire land on which to build a new hall, for which he, as a bricklayer, wished to contract.

By 1854 the population of Grimsby had more than doubled since the Loyal Sovereign lodge had been formed, and was still growing. The lodge, no doubt with an influx of members who had come to the town to work or start in business (of the 8,860 inhabitants enumerated in the 1851 census, only 30% were born in the town) had now increased its membership to over 200 and justifiably seeing a larger potential membership, decided to acquire larger premises. By a deed dated 17 June 1854, a plot of land, adjacent on the south to the old hall, was purchased for £40, a standard plot such as had been laid out in the early part of the century and still undeveloped, thirty four feet frontage to Loft Street and ninety feet deep, through to Burgess Street. This purchase in itself is indicative of the increasing value of land in this part of the town when it is recalled the original plot bought by the lodge and containing 516 square yards had been purchased by George Babb in 1826 for £3, and now a smaller plot, somewhat over 300 square yards in area was costing £280. It was bought from John Moody J.P. and connected with the town council, John Johnson, Thomas Edward Loftus and Robert Keetley.

No time was lost in erecting the new building, which covered the whole of the site, the cost being £800. The frontage to the main street was two storey, the lower floor containing an entrance hall with side offices and the upper floor consisting of a large committee room. The whole of the building was single storey, a hall about forty feet by twenty eight feet wide, capable of seating 400. The hall was formally opened on Wednesday, 13 December 1854, when the lodge celebrated the occasion by holding a public dinner.

The Grimsby Gazette praised the lodge for its initiative in providing this accommodation, pointing out the great deficiency of suitable buildings in the town for holding public meetings. The old hall, it continued, which had only been erected a few years had proved too small for the requirements of increased numbers of members in the lodge and the new hall was ‘beautiful in exterior and neat and convenient in the interior, an ornament to the town and a credit to the Society . . . . The Hall is in an eligible situation and is very neat and commodious and was made available to prepare a dinner for the accommodation of the guests (though in a very unfinished state) on her Majesty’s visit to Grimsby’. One criticim the paper made was that the new hall was ‘yet too small, six or seven feet in the width it will be found would have added very materially to the convenience of the building’.

A leaflet printed in 1850 gives the names of 117 men who were members of the Loyal Sovereign lodge. Fifty seven of these are readily identifiable and show a remarkable diversity of occupations, religious sects and political beliefs. Henry Smethurst, a joiner was a Primitive Methodist local preacher, and with Thomas Campbell, a shopkeeper, George Stinson, a bricklayer, Samuel Smethurst, a labourer and Joseph Wilton, a bricklayer, was a past master of the Grimsby Marsh Temperance Society. In contrast, the landlord of the New Dock Tavern and Robert Suggett, a beer house keeper were also members. John Irvine, the retired master of the grammar school was a Baptist and Francis Lister, a butcher, was a member of the established church, as was John Myring, the cashier to the new dock contractors. He was also secretary to the Church of England Sunday School. There were seven bricklayers among the members, one employing four men, another two and three apprentices, and William Johnson, the trustee previously mentioned with fifteen men. There were three carpenters and joiners, two masons, a plumber and glazier and a brickmaker. Sixteen members were shopkeepers covering all the retail provision trades and including five tailors, a chemist, a hairdresser, a coal merchant and a watchmaker. Other trades included two blacksmiths, two nail makers, a saw sharpener and an oil cake maker. Two members were employed by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company, one as an engine driver and the other as a ticket collector. Charles Lewis, surgeon and chemist, was another member and others included four pilots and eight mariners and four members classed as labourers. Ignoring six members over fifty, the average age
of the identified members was thirty six. Thirty four
members were entitled to vote in the 1852 Parliamentary
election, eighteen as freemen and sixteen as £10 householders.
Ten voted for Annesley, the successful Tory candidate and
nineteen for Henage, the unsuccessful Liberal, while five
chose not to exercise their franchise.30

As can be seen, the identified members were obviously
middle class or superior working class, the only type of man
who could readily afford the initiation fee and regular
weekly subscriptions. The class the Victorians described
as the 'labouring poor', with intermittent earnings or low
regular wages would have found it difficult to find the
weekly subscription, apart from the initiation fee. This
trend seems to fit into the national picture. One social
historian says 'it is agreed that they (the friendly societies)
include the more prosperous or stably employed persons'.31
Again, referring to the years following the 1854 Poor Law
Amendment Act, another writer mentions that, although
provident friendly societies flourished, they hardly touched
any but the better paid workers.32 In his budget speech of
29 April 1909, David Lloyd George, referring to compulsory
health insurance spoke of 'the several millions who either
cannot be persuaded or perhaps cannot afford to bear the
expense of the systematic contributions which makes
membership effective in these great institutions' (the
friendly societies).33 He returned to this theme when
introducing the National Insurance Act in 1911 speaking of
'those who stand in most need of it (provision against
sickness and unemployment) make up the bulk of the
uninsured. Why. Because very few can afford to pay the
premiums and pay them continuously ...'.34

The benefit societies themselves were well aware of the
situation. In 1853 there was a general trend to reduce
initiation fees. The three lodges of the Manchester Unity of
Oddfellows of the Great Grimsby District and other local
friendly societies made their decisions to do this during the
year. A special meeting of the Loyal Sovereign lodge was
convened on 17 October 1853 when it was decided to
reduce the fees for men from eighteen to twenty four to
five shillings and grade them upwards so that a man joining
at the age of thirty six paid £1, although an additional
annual payment was called for varying from sixpence at
twenty four and 7s.6d. at thirty six and the committee was
given discretionary powers to admit men over that age,
these persons paying an additional 7s.6d. for each and every
year their age exceeded thirty six.35

The old hall was put up for sale in 1855 and Mr. G. Drakes
sought to purchase it. He had come to Grimsby in 1852 and
set up in business as a draper in Loft Street. He was a
Roman Catholic and his concern for the spiritual welfare of
his co-religionists in the town, particularly a large number
of Irish labourers working on the building of the new dock,
has resulted in him organising them in the old hall. The
lodge offered him the premises for £650, which Drakes
considered an excellent price, but he was unable to secure
the necessary financial backing and had to decline the offer.
36 It was eventually conveyed to Thomas Edward
Loftus on 20 March 1855 for £229.19s.6d. Loftus had
resigned as trustee prior to the transaction and in his place
had been appointed Joseph Copeland Willerton. John
Myring was now the lodge secretary.37

Loftus used the premises for his trade as a plumber
and glazier. In 1860 he sold the part fronting Victoria Street
(Loft Street was re-named Victoria Street following Queen
Victoria's visit to the town in 1855) and when he died in
1870, the lodge bought the remaining portion fronting
Burgess Street from his executors and it was still in the
possession of the lodge, when, together with the second
hall, it was compulsorily purchased in 1957.39

It is easy to be critical of the lodge management commit-
tee's financial dealings without knowing the full facts, but
it would appear that the offer of £650 to Drakes was
considered such a high price that it would not be acceptable,
in which case the lodge could sell at the low figure of
£229.19s.6d. to their member, Loftus, and satisfy the general
members that they had tried for more.

It was the financial dealings and auditing of the books
of the lodge which prompted the Friendly and Benefit
Societies Commission in 1874 to criticize it for the way the
money had been raised for the new hall. The Commission's
report says, 'There is an Oddfellows Hall there (in Grimsby)
which a large body of the Manchester Unity acquired some
time ago. The accounts are not so kept that one can say
whether they have gained or lost by it, but there is no doubt
that their benefit fund has lost considerably by it, as they
borrowed the money from that fund and have paid a very
inadequate interest (2½%). This could not have happened had there been a proper district audit . . . . The lodge also owns houses and seems generally to have indulged in experiments rather beyond the scope for a friendly society. Some years ago they paid £39.12s. 6d. for a banner.

II

As the Grimsby Gazette pointed out in its editorial on the occasion of the opening of the new hall, there was "a great deficiency of suitable rooms to hold public meetings in the town". For large meetings and even dinners, warehouses were being used, and as has been noted, the new hall, even in an unfinished state, was the most suitable building in the town in which to hold a dinner on 14 October 1854, after Queen Victoria's departure, following the opening of the new dock.

Plate I Oddfellows Hall, Victoria Street, Grimsby. 
Humberside Leisure Services.

In providing additional accommodation for its own members, the Loyal Sovereign lodge had provided increased facilities for the temperance movement in the town. Many friendly societies met in public houses, but in such lodges as the Loyal Sovereign and the Earl of Yarborough Court of Foresters, both meeting in the Oddfellows Hall, the temperance adherents could join and use their influence on the other members. For instance, pressure had possibly been brought to bear on the lodge by the temperance members when it was decided to hold an anniversary dinner instead of a dinner in 1858. In an after tea speech, Henry Smethurst congratulated the lodge on this innovation "as he had always contended against anniversary dinners on account of the intemperance which invariably accompanied them". Some friendly societies expected their members to sign the pledge to abstain from alcoholic drinks, such as the Independent Order of Rechabites, a society with a local branch. During the 1860's there was a short lived friendly society formed by the Grimsby Marsh Temperance Society, the body which was the most regular user of the hall, and which catered for all tastes in its programme. The converted would welcome lectures, teas and entertainments as an alternative to the public house, while the free lectures, which during the winter months were often given on three or four successive evenings, would no doubt attract the poorer members of the general public who, with no money available for entertainment, would welcome the chance of an evening away from their homes at no cost to themselves. The society, for its part, would hope to educate them into its way of thinking, so that, the public house would lose its attraction.

The weekly meetings of the society and its Band of Hope were held on Tuesday evenings. Its first annual festival and tea was held on 2 January 1855, followed by a series of free lectures. Recitations and dialogues were given by the Band of Hope twice during the year and on 23 January, the militant and aggressive United Kingdom Alliance for the Total Suppression of the Liquor Traffic organised a public meeting in the hall.

In 1856, the pattern of meetings was again repeated with a tea meeting early in January, followed by an evening of children's recitals. The United Kingdom Alliance held another lecture meeting in February, followed by another seven society meetings later in February and March. On Wednesday, 7 April, Mr. R. Allen of Newcastle delivered a lecture on 'The Bottle' illustrated by 'Cruikshanks beautiful drawings exhibited through a powerful Magic Lantern'. This was a special occasion and an admittance charge was made of 2d for adults and 1d for children. Further meetings were held in April and May and on Thursday 17 July, a procession was held through the town followed by a tea in the hall at 5 p.m. (Tickets one shilling each), which in turn was followed by a meeting. At this time it was announced that until further notice, public meetings of the Temperance Society were to be held in the Temperance Hall, Silver Street. Later lectures were also arranged by the society in the Mechanics Hall and the Baptist School Room. It was not until November 1856, that they returned to the Oddfellows Hall. On the 25 and 26 of that month, the United Kingdom Alliance again arranged lectures there. The Grimsby Marsh Temperance Society annual tea and festival was held in January and a full programme was arranged for 1859 with the usual run of lectures given at which admission was free.

Charges for admission were however made for some of the lectures and entertainments with seats at 6d and 3d for a mock trial, 'The Trial of Sir Timothy Traffic' (alias Daniel Deathspirit) for High Crimes and Misdemeanours against the people of this realm'. On two evenings in March the Society arranged Musical and Oratorical entertainments at which the same admission charge was made and other lectures followed. On Monday 5 November, a temperance fisherman's tea was held followed by a public meeting addressed by 'fishermen and other friends'. In January 1860, Mr. G. Lomax, described as a 'highly talented lecturer' who had spoken in the hall on three successive evenings the previous September, again visited the town to give two lectures. On 9 April, the Band of Hope gave a 'recital of Dialogues and other interesting pieces'. Reserved seats were 6d, second seats 4d and back seats 2d. The proceeds were for the widows and orphans of the men who had been lost with the fishing smack Forlorn.

Another regular user of the hall was the Grimsby Ratepayer's Association which was formed at a meeting on Thursday 18 September 1856 to further the interests of the Grimsby ratepayers. This association held its meeting in the hall every Wednesday evening from November 1856, but later met on Tuesdays when the Grimsby Marsh Temperance Society ceased using the hall. When the temperance society returned late in 1858, the association reverted to Wednesdays. The objects of the association were to keep the financial burdens to be borne by the ratepayers to a minimum and attend council meetings and carefully examine every action of the municipal body and report back to the ratepayers at regular intervals.

Anti-Roman Catholicism, which was rife in England at this time, was reflected locally by the visits of Signor Gavazza, who on Thursday 20 March 1856, gave an oration
in the Oddfellows Hall on 'The Papal Army in Great Britain and its Protestant Allies'. He returned to the hall on Monday 12 May, and lectured on 'The Inquisition — Ancient and Modern'. At both of these lectures there was an admission charge of 1s. for front seats and 6d for back seats.

Other events advertised to take place in the hall were a Grand New Year Ball on Wednesday 2 January 1856 for which fifty single and fifty double tickets were printed, the charge being 1s. for a single ticket; an 'Exhibition of Scenery' staged on 28 February at which reserved seats were 1s. 6d., other seats 1s. and 6d.; and on 14 May the Grimsby Statute Grand Ball was held there. A municipal election meeting was held on 7 November. A grand concert with distinguished artistes was advertised to take place on 15 January 1857 with reserved seats at 2s. 6d., second seats at 2s. 6d., and promenade at 1s. On 26, 27 and 28 May 1858 the hall was booked for a 'Grand Entertainment in Mememism and Electro-Biology' to be given by Mr. Andrew, for which admission charges were to be 1s., 6d. and 3d.

This description of the various uses and users of the hall is derived from proofs of handbills, posters etc., kept by Mr. Skelton, the Grimsby printer, who was succeeded by Albert Gait in 1860. There were four other printers in the town in 185645 and twelve by 1872,44 who were in no doubt also printing notices advertising events in the hall, and although these have not survived, it seems that it was in regular use during the 1860's.

A report in the Grimsby Gazette on Friday 20 July 1853, says, 'The Magistrats, having interdicted dancing at any of the public houses in the town, four spirited young men have engaged the Oddfellows Hall every Wednesday evening from 7.30 to 11.30 and admit respectable parties at the low figure of 6d'. Whether their efforts were rewarded is not known, but Wednesday evenings were certainly free when the Ratepayers Association was formed late in 1856.

The Grimsby Mutual Aid Society also held its meetings in the hall,46 as did the Welcome Home lodge of the Manchester Unity, and of course, the Loyal Sovereign lodge, which in addition to its fortnightly and special meetings, was arranging teas, dinners and other functions. The 24th anniversary dinner was held in the hall on 7 August 1858 followed by a tea in December. The membership was now 212. On Monday 18 August 1858, the 26th anniversary was celebrated with a public tea to which 500 persons sat down. This was followed by a procession through the streets, accompanied by the Grimsby Brass and Drum and Fife Band with flags and banners and this was followed by a public meeting in the hall. 400 people attended another tea held on 29 December 1865. This was followed by a meeting presided over by the Mayor of Grimsby, John Winting and by a ball which 'broke up at an early hour'. The public dinner on 26 July 1866 was preceded by a procession of members of the lodge and the Band of Hope Juvenile Lodge, headed by the Grimsby Old Brass Band.46

On 17 August 1868, the big event in the town and indeed in the history of the Oddfellows movement in Grimsby, was the launching at Cleethorpes of the lifeboat Manchester Unity, which had been presented to the National Lifeboat Institution by the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity. The boat was thirty three feet long and eight and a half feet wide and rowed ten oars doublebank. A grand demonstration had been arranged and by ten o'clock several special trains had arrived in the town and upwards of 50,000 strangers. For some time before the actual event, the streets were paraded by thousands of members of the Manchester Unity in the various insignia of office, together with bands. Shortly before noon, the procession was marshalled into proper order outside the Corn Exchange in the Old Market Place. Eight horses were attached to the lifeboat carriage; the banners were raised and the huge procession started on its way, with members of the Grimsby and Lincoln Districts preceding. On arrival at Cleethorpes, Edwin Smith, the Grand Master of the Order, presented the lifeboat on behalf of the order, to Captain Ward, the inspector of lifeboats. The boat was named in the usual manner by Miss Walker, daughter of George Walker, the Immediate Past Grand Master and was launched by the regular crew, wearing the lifebelts. A banquet followed at which the Mayor of Grimsby, Thomas Oates, presided.47 By 1872, it was becoming apparent that the hiring of the hall by outside bodies was declining. At the annual meeting which followed a tea on 18 January 1872, Bro. Willerton, in the chair, reported that the income from the hall in 1871 was less than half that of the previous year. The membership however, had now risen to 421.48 The lodge apparently, did not rely on the income from the hall for its viability, but on increasing membership. At the meeting which followed the annual tea, concert and dance held in the hall on 27 February 1873, and which attracted an exceptionally large attendance, more in fact than had been provided for, Bro. Wattmough, in the chair, said the financial condition of the lodge was highly satisfactory. George Kendall, the lodge secretary, reported that there were 455 members on the books at the end of 1872, forty four having been admitted during the year. Since the beginning of 1873, that was in the two months before the meeting, a further twenty four had been admitted, making the unprecedented total of sixty eight new members in fourteen months. A concert followed this meeting and lasted until midnight, when dancing followed. This was kept up until five a.m.49 It is not difficult to understand the reasons for the decline in the popularity of the hall. When it was first built, it was in a central position for the population of the new town, but in the 1860's and 1870's the development was on the east side of the railway and there was no access from the Freeman Street area to the Central Market until the building of the Newmarket Street railway bridge in 1873. Other more convenient and larger halls were being built in the Freeman Street and Cleethorpe Road areas and the condition of the streets of the town at that period would give no encouragement to pedestrians. The state of the roads was that which was usually found in the towns - a surface of water-bond macadam, full of holes with deep pools in the winter and clouds of dust in the summer. People complained that mud was ankle deep in the Central Market, and in many parts of the town the granite crossings at intersections were the only places where the roads could be reasonably crossed on foot.50 There would be some alleviation of travelling conditions in the town when in June 1881 the Great Grimsby and Cleethorpe Tramway Company commenced operating a public horse tramway from the Wheatsheaf in Bargate to High Street,51 but apart from its situation, the Oddfellows Hall was not large enough for the ever increasing numbers requiring accommodation.

The Mechanics' Institute, opened in 1856, was not far from the Oddfellows Hall. This, as well as being available for the members of the Institute, was also used for public meetings. The Corn Exchange, in the Old Market Place, which was to become a regular venue for public meetings and dinners, was opened on Friday 6 March 1857, when a public dinner was held in the main hall, which measured 75 feet by 35 feet. The new Town Hall was officially opened on 15 October 1863 and its large hall, 80 feet by 45 feet, was immediately available for large meetings, including baptist and balls. The Theatre Royal, on the site where the Palace Theatre is presently stood, was built in 1864 and the Kingston Unity of Oddfellows built and opened their own hall in Lower Spring Street early in 1865. This building was to become known as the Friendly Societies Hall. It was completely destroyed by fire in September 1970. The Temperance Hall in Cleethorpe Road (on the site of the new Grimsby Evening Telegraph offices) with seating for 800, was erected in 1871, costing about £400. The Hall of Science, on the south west corner of the junction of Freeman Street with Duncombe Street (No. 198, Freeman Street) was opened in 1873. It was described as a massive brick building and a notice in the Grimsby Observer on 8 October 1873, described it as suitable for all the purposes for which the Oddfellows Hall was being let.
The Grimsby Observer reported a meeting of the shareholders of the Grimsby Co-operative Society in the Oddfellows Hall on 18 September 1873, but after this, neither the Observer or the Grimsby News circulating in the town at that period, carry any reports or notices of events taking place in the hall. The two lodges of the Manchester Unity and two courts of the Ancient Order of Foresters were still using the hall for their lodge meetings, but it is significant that the fifty years Jubilee of the ‘Loyal Sovereign Lodge’ in 1882 was celebrated by holding a tea, concert and ball in the Town Hall. By 1880, the hall seems to have been used by T. L. Lidgett for his business as an auctioneer and furniture dealer. There was a branch office here of the Caistor Board of Guardians, where the relieving officer attended every Tuesday, and when the Grimsby Board of Guardians were established in 1890, the practice still continued. By 1896, Dr. G. S. Stephenson, the vaccination officer for the district, was making use of part of the premises as a branch surgery. Sometime after 1907 and prior to 1910, the hall was let to the Premier Billiard Hall Company.

In 1955, the buildings surrounding the hall were becoming the subject of Compulsory Purchase and Clearance Orders. It was only too obvious that the hall was to meet the same fate and about June of that year the lodge vacated it, the billiard hall was closed and the whole of the premises leased for use as a garage and store. The Grimsby Evening Telegraph published on 27 January 1956 the Victoria Street (No. 5) Compulsory Purchase Order 1955, for the hall site and surrounding property. 

The Society is indebted to the Loyal Sovereign Lodge No. 570 Manchester Unity Friendly Society for financial assistance towards the publication of this article.

APPENDIX

MEMBERSHIP OF ODDFELLOWS (Manchester Unity)

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Loyal Sovereign Lodge</th>
<th>Manchester Unity Thousands</th>
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The Manchester Unity figures up to 1886 are quoted from P. H. J. Gosden’s The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875 (Manchester, 1961). As he points out, although membership rose rapidly after 1870, many members now only required the financial benefits. Their enthusiasm was now channeled into other directions, particularly to the spectator sports, especially association football. The establishment of Working Men’s Clubs gave an alternative to club nights.

FOOTNOTES

2 Ibid., p.209.
3 Ibid., p.207.
6 Ibid., p.311.
7 Ibid., p.326.
8 Ibid., p.410.
9 Ibid., Vol. 2, p.238.
12 Henry Radcliffe, List of Lodges comprising the Manchester Unity, (1850).
14 Original Dispensation Certificate — Loyal Sovereign Lodge.
15 Centenary Leaflet — Loyal Sovereign Lodge.
16 Grimsby, South Humberside District Archives Office.
17 Abstract of Title — Land – Victoria Street.
18 13 & 14 Vict. c.115 (1855). An Act to consolidate and amend the Laws relating to Friendly Societies.
21 Report to the Board of Health re Grimsby, 1800.
22 Abstract of Title.
24 P.R.O. HO 107/2111-2113. Grimsby Census Return 1851; Abstract of Title.
26 Information of Rex C. Russell.
27 South Humberside District Archives Office. Title Deeds — Oddfellows Hall, Grimsby.
28 Ibid.
29 Grimsby Gazette, 15 December 1854.
33 Ibid., p.145.
34 Ibid., p.160.
35 Skelton, Proof Books, loc. cit.
36 Drakes, loc. cit.
37 Abstract of Title, loc. cit.
38 Ibid.
39 Title Deeds, loc. cit.
40 Grimsby Gazette, 24 November 1854.
41 Grimsby Independent, 21 August 1858.
44 White’s Directory, 1872, p.234.
45 Skelton, loc. cit.
47 Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury, 20 August 1868.
48 Grimsby Gazette, 20 January 1872.
49 Ibid., 1 March 1873.
51 Ibid., p.259.