

A HISTORY OF PALATINE LODGE, No 97  
 A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH  
 of  
 Bro James Cawdell 1750 - 1800



Bespeak Theatre

James Cawdell – Theatre Manager.  
 DRURY lane Theatre, off HIGH street, Sunderland

Reciting his eulogy on “Charity” on the Stage of Sunderland’s  
 First Theatre, Drury Lane, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1784. The whole of the  
 Receipts on that occasion (Fifty-two Pounds) were given for the  
 Relief of local distress.

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5<sup>th</sup> November 1783

“The New Theatre at North Shields was first opened with a new occasional Prelude written by Mr  
 Cawdell and a Comedy of the

‘Bold Stroke for a Husband’  
*(Never before been acted in the Country)*  
 With a new MUSICAL FARCE”

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BESPEAK NIGHTS AT THE THEATRE



The Minute Books refer again and again to the Favourite practice of Bespeaking Plays and attending them in  
 procession  
 It was an annual custom (falling into disuse in the 1860’s) to attend the theatre, on which occasion the Worshipful  
 Master made a selection from a list of Plays or Farces.

In 1841 the ‘bespeak’ was left to the choice of Lady Williamson and in 1844 to Lady Sharp.

This account of the bespeak night is thus given in the minutes:-

“ On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1793 the WM (Bro Michael Scarth) after opening the lodge informed the brethren that a Dispensation for a Public Procession to the Theatre had been granted”.

The Dispensation was read out together with the Form of the Procession.

Bro Hardcastle, JW proposed Captain John Atkin to be immediately made a mason, which the lodge consented to, and he was regularly made and afterwards joined the Procession.

The brethren proceeded by *TORCHLIGHT* to the Theatre in due form, attended by the Peace Officers and an excellent Martial Band.

After the performance of “*The True Born Tar*” and “*Appearance is against Him*” they returned in good order to the Lodge Room.

After drinking his Majesty’s Health and other Loyal Toasts and voting thanks to Bro Cawdell, manager of Drury Lane Theatre, the lodge was closed in due form.

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**A few selections of the productions of these bespeak nights are interesting in comparison with the present time.**

January 1795 (Friday) ---- “The Mountaineers” and “Midnight Hour”

December 1800 ---- £3.3.0 extra expenses of Procession to Theatre.

December 1811 ---- “Secrets worth Knowing”, Bro Stanfield’s Benefit.

February 1819 ---- “The Winter’s Tale” and a Farce: “Modern Antiques”

February 1822 ---- “Richard III” and “The Spectre’s Bride”.

February 1827 ---- “School of Reform”, Farce; “A Chip of the Old Block”

February 1833 ----- Bro Sam Roxby in “Fifteen Years in a Seaman’s Life”.  
and Farce “The Happiest Days of my Life”.

February 1853 ----- “Lady of Lyons”. Farce; “Fish out of Water”.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1874 ----- The Brethren of the Town Lodges gave their Patronage to a Complementary Benefit To Bro E D Davis, PM



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**Monumental Inscription in Sunderland Church-yard**

**In Memory of James Cawdell Who Died  
12<sup>th</sup> January 1800 aged 50  
Also Sarah His Wife Who Died  
27<sup>th</sup> November 1842 aged 75  
Also two sons and one daughter  
who died in their infancy.**

