



WBro. William S. Furby

The Prince Of Wales Lodge No.1338 EC



William Stafford Furby was born in London 1849 and in 1858 arrived at Lyttleton with his parents George Furby and Elizabeth Anne.

He was educated at Christ's College in Christchurch and in 1850 joined the Post Office as a cadet.

In 1866 he was posted to Hokitika to be in charge of the Telegraph Office on a salary of £225 p.a. He stayed in Hokitika for seven years and in 1873 was transferred to Blenheim to be in charge of the office there. In 1880 he was transferred to Auckland as Chief Telegraphist and in 1900 to Wellington as Inspector. In 1909 he was transferred back to Auckland as Telegraphic Engineer.

He was a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

He took a keen interest in telephones and built the first phone and made the first phone call in New Zealand on 5th April 1878. He manufactured a pair of telephones, and spoke from his private residence in Blenheim, to a telegraph operator at the Nelson Telegraph Office, over the Blenheim No 1 wire. An example of this phone is held in the Telecom Museum at Ferrymead in Christchurch.

In 1881 he pushed for a Telephone Exchange in Auckland which required only 20 subscribers to be successful.

His service was acknowledged by the then Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward at the laying of the foundation stone for the new Chief Post Office in 1910.

As the Chief Telegraphist he was also responsible for advising the community when mails were closing for various overseas destinations. He worked with the Auckland Harbour Board to establish a link so the arrival of incoming vessels could be posted in the city early. He also worked with the Auckland City Council to establish both the Eastern and Western Fire Alarm circuits.

In 1883 his long service was acknowledged by a year's leave – somewhat generous by today's standards.

In 1891, he was responsible for reporting the major Auckland earthquake on 24th June.

He often gave lectures at the YMCA and other venues.

He was initiated into the Prince of Wales' Lodge in 1888 and rose to serve as Master in 1894.



WBRO WILLIAM FURBY



He was appointed to District office and rose to be DDGM, in which capacity, in 1918 he installed the new master of Star of the North Lodge No. 1647

The Prince of Wales Lodge

www.englishmasons1338.org.nz

The Prince of Wales Lodge, No. 1338, under the United Grand Lodge of England, was founded on the 18th day of December, 1869, and consecrated on Thursday, the 28th day of September, 1871, at the Masonic Hotel, Princes Street, Auckland, by Bro. J.J. Fitzgibbon, Past Master of the Waitemata Lodge, No. 689, E.C.





In 1911 he retired as senior officer of whole service after 46 years service and was given a “handsome roller top desk”.

As a senior civil servant he was also prominent at social events including parties hosted by the Governor General and gave one of the toasts at the gathering to farewell the 7th Contingent when they left for the Boer War in 1901.

He married the daughter of Henry Dodson from Blenheim (a former member of the House of Representatives – not to be confused with the other prominent Henry Dodson who was a brewer in Nelson).

He played cricket for the Telegraphists team. It seems he was not particularly good with the bat but very good in the field as he made many catches.

In 1877 he was a member of the vestry of the English Episcopalian Church in Blenheim. From 1895 to 1900 he was a member of the vestry of All Saints Anglican Church, Ponsonby. He was Superintendent of that church's Sunday School for over twelve years and a member of the Sunday School Board for the Diocese.

In Auckland he was a member of the Ponsonby Regatta Club for many years and in 1911 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Colonial Institute. He was also, for a time, the Wellington representative of the Palestine Exploration Fund who sponsored archeological research.

In 1887, when he was living in Argyle Street, Ponsonby, he saved the lives of two young girls who were trapped when their home caught fire. Unfortunately one later died from her injuries.

He died in 1930 at the age of 81.

He was initiated into the Prince of Wales' Lodge in 1888 and rose to serve as Master in 1894. He served as one of the lodge trustees for some time.

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Sources and Acknowledgements:

Contemporary Newspapers

IPENZ Engineering Heritage <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/default.cfm>

Furby Family History <http://liverpolitan.im/furby/index.htm>

Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 4-JDR7441



The ‘Furby’ telephone, an example of which is preserved in the Telecom Museum at Ferrymead in Christchurch

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Biography Research 2010