

## Royal Lodge of Friendship – Famous Brethren



### **Bro. Alexander Roberts Dunn VC.**

(15 September 1833 – 25 January 1868)

From the London Gazette, February 25, 1857.

*"During the Charge of the Light Brigade, Lt. Dunn, one of the handsomest men of his day and one of the finest swordsmen and horsemen in the army, won the Victoria Cross."*

Alexander Roberts Dunn was born September 15, 1833, in York (later Toronto), Upper Canada. His father John Henry Dunn was a businessman and a prominent politician and was Receiver-General for Upper Canada from 1820 to 1841. He was educated at Upper Canada College and, after the death of his mother when the family moved to England he attended Harrow School.

In 1852 he purchased a commission in the 11th Prince Albert's Own Regiment of Light Dragoon (Hussars). As a 21 year old Lieutenant he served in the Crimean War and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry during the famous "Charge of the Light Brigade" when he saved the life of Sgt. Bentley by cutting down several Russians who were attacking him. He then cut down another Russian Hussar who was attacking Pte. Levett of the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars. He was one of only 25 cavalrymen to survive this ill-fated charge.

He sold his commission after the Crimean War and returned to Canada to manage his family estate where he was Initiated into the Ionic Lodge No.798 E.C. (now No.25 in the Grand Lodge of Canada) on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1856, this was indeed an historic meeting as the Minutes, just before and after the record of Bro. Dunn's initiation, refer to some discussion of the imminent move of the Provincial Grand Lodge (Canada West, now Ontario) to break away from the jurisdiction of the United Grand Lodge of England. Bro. Dunn progressed rapidly through Passing (February 16 1857) and Raising (by special dispensation February 18, 1857) as he was about to leave Canada. He retired from Ionic Lodge on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1858 on leaving the country.

Bro. Dunn was presented with his V.C. at the first investiture ceremony, on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June 1857, he was 17<sup>th</sup> in line as Queen Victoria, on horseback, pinned on the medals.

From his Victoria Cross Citation: *"Having emptied his revolver at the Russians he flung it at them and resorted to his sabre, which he used to good effect. Dunn stood 6-foot-3 and used a sword much longer than the regulations permitted. He saved Sgt. Bentley's life by cutting down several Russians who were attacking him. He then saved another life cutting down another Russian Hussar who was attacking Pte. K. Levett, 11th Hussars."*

After returning to the army he organised the 100th (Prince of Wales Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot, a British unit raised in Canada, at the outbreak of the Indian mutiny (1857-58) being appointed to its Lieutenant Colonel in 1861. Subsequent service took him to Gibraltar, Malta and Abyssinia.

Whilst serving in Gibraltar Bro. Dunn became a member of the Lodge of Friendship No.345 E.C. (Now The Royal Lodge of Friendship No.278) a lodge popular at the time with Officers. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1861 Lt. Colonel Dunn was elected as Worshipful Master of the Lodge. Unfortunately, he had to decline his appointment as his stay in Gibraltar was uncertain. At a meeting held in January, 1862 Bro C. Swain was elected and installed as Worshipful Master instead.

At the time of Bro. Dunn's membership, the Lodge of Friendship had no shortage of members of distinction, indeed his successor in the Senior Wardens Chair was one Charles Warren, later Sir Charles Warren, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police at the time of Jack the Ripper.

In 1864, he was promoted colonel, at age 31, the youngest in the British Army.

His death was tragic. On the 25th January 1868, according to his native servant, the only person with him at the time, they had gone hunting, taking his rifle, looking for game. Whilst stooping forward over a ditch to get some water, Colonel Dunn's gun was accidentally fired from both barrels into his right side. He managed to say, "if for a doctor," before dying.

Around Christmas 2000, Major Steve Beattie, a British officer based with Canadian troops on United Nations peace keeping duty in Eritrea discovered Colonel Dunn's abandoned grave in a tiny ramshackle graveyard, tucked behind an African hospital in ruins. Major Beattie is a bit of a history buff and realized the importance of his discovery.

Canadian Lieutenant, Earl Maher organized a work party of 13 engineers to effect the necessary repairs. The soldiers removed 25 wheelbarrow loads of rubbish, the stone wall that encompasses the handful of graves in the yard was repaired, the wrought iron gate freshly painted and the cross that had broken off Dunn's tombstone was replaced. *"It was a mark of respect for someone who won the Victoria Cross,"* said Lieutenant Maher, a Queen's University graduate.

The 234 Canadian troops stationed there were so inspired by the discovery they named their camp in Dunn's honour. The Canadian Chief of Defence Staff, the Minister of National Defence and the Deputy Chief of Defence all visited the site.



The restored grave of Col. Alexander Roberts Dunn V.C.

There is some interest in possibly exhuming the body of Bro. Dunn and repatriating it back to Canada.