

Freemasonry in Worcestershire

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Craft Fry derives from Operative Masons' Guilds

Guild system reached its heyday in 14th - 15th centuries

Worcester had several guilds - Glovers, Mercers, Carpenters, Butchers, Bakers

The Taylors Guild was authorised by letters patent issued in 1466 by King Edward IV

By this authority members were privileged to elect their Master Warden who made ordinances for the good govt of their craft & regulation of their trade, to hold feasts and to wear livery. Initiates were reqd to swear that they would be true to the fraternity, obey the Master, not to disclose affairs of the craft or to receive another's workman apprentice or customer & to pray daily for the Guild & the King

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The lodges of 16th & early 17th cent. were quite independent & self governing, & were recognised as bona fide if they possessed a copy of the Old Charges. There was no ruling Masonic authority, to issue warrants & new lodges were formed as & when req^d. The first mention of an authority of constitution occurs in an entry for 21 Dec 1721 in the diary of Rev Wm Stukely "We met at the Fountain Tavern. Signed and by consent of the Gd. Master, Dr Beal his deputy, constituted a new lodge there where I was chosen Master". The date just four years after formation of the premier Gd lodge by the four Old lodges. Other lodges in & around London, ^{wished to} joined the Alliance which led to a development & extension of Gd. h. authority. Regulations compiled by P.G.M. Geo Payne insisted that every new h. must obtain the Gd. Master's Warrant before it could be considered to be properly constituted. But as distant towns applied for recognition (Bristol was first & by end of 1724 Exeter, Norwich, Bath & Exeter (sic)) it was clear that some new procedure for the Constitution of lodges away from London was necessary. An application was made for the recognition of a Gd. h. of Wiltshire Province. This was agreed to by Gd. h. in London in April 1727 & the date of formation of this first Prov. Gd. h. has been officially accepted as 1725. As more Provinces were created it was agreed that applications for new lodges within a Province should be made to the Prov. G.M. of that Province. In 1728 Warwickshire became a separate Province (James Prescott first P.G.M.) followed by North and South Wales. Durham, Northumberland & Lancashire were constituted in 1734 & Yorkshire in 1738.

In 1753 Sir Robert de Cornwall was appointed Prov. Gd. M. of the combined areas of Wores, Glos. Hereford, ^{Monmouth} with only one h. in each county. The Talbot (No 119) at Stourbridge warranted in 1733. The Swan Inn of Gloucester 1738 & the Three Horse Shoes at Leominster 1742. There were no lodges in Monmouth which became a separate Province in 1801. Bristol became a Province in 1798.

or Cathol

during 60 years of conflict

The Ancients made inroads into the Midlands & many Ls constituted under their Jurisdiction

By the end of 18th century there were 4 more Ls in Wores under Gt. of the Moderns
L. of Hope - 1768^{NO 241} in Crown Inn Stourbridge St Johns L of Bromsgrove 397 at Golden Cross 1786 Harmonic L Dudley 369 (NOW 252) 1784 at ³ Smith Inn.
Worcester L 483 (NOW 380) at Reindeer Inn 1790. 397 & 241 erased 1811 & 1828 respec

and the two opposing camps existed together in certain townships of this Province particularly in Dudley & Worcester

The Union of Ancients & Moderns came about in 1813

Wores became a separate province about 1792 when a London Banker John Dent was appointed P.G.M. and officiated until his death in 1826 i.e. 34 yrs There is no record of his ever having visited any Worcestershire L. or any Provincial function - difficulties of journey - not till 1809 that a mail-coach service ran between L. & W. taking 2 days with an overnight stop at Oxford which it left at 4.30 am & reached W at mid-day. Rail link completed in 1853 Dent had 2 efficient deputies - Wm Thomas Thomson for 20 yrs from 1802 & his successor A. J. Sells - both P.Ms of the Worcester L.

The Prov was without a P.G.M. until 17th Aug 1847 when R^t Wm Roder M.D. M.A. P.M. of Royal Stud was installed Deputy P.G.M. He resigned in 1850

and Henry John Vernon who had been Senior Gd Warden of Staffs & Deputy to P.G.M. Staffs was appointed ^{in 1851} P.G.M. & came to live in Malvern. He joined Worcester L in 1850 & ruled for 14 years

In June 1857 a special P.G.M. was held at the Abbey Boarding House at Malvern

when Officers Bro supported Lady Foley at foundation stone ceremony for the new Malvern schools - the National School in Mill Lane built to accommodate 500.

After the ceremony a special service was conducted by the Rector of St. Malvern Rev Geo Fisk - a mason for 50 years. The collection amounted to over £70 and was donated for educational needs of poor children

RW Bro Vernon was succeeded by

Wor Bro AM Royds was installed Deputy PGM in 1857 and Prov G.M. in 1866 on the resignation of RW Bro HC Vernon - Royds was consecrated the following year ¹⁸⁶⁷

Wor Bro Royds was a Lancashire mason who came to live at East Brown Court Worcester on his retirement 1864 he had been Deputy GM of Province of East Lancashire

in Townshend House in College Rd a hydropathic establishment run by Dr Ralph Barnes Grindrod an active enthusiastic mason & temperance worker. Prov. G.M. met there in 1872 followed by service in Priory Church

In August 1869 Bro Royds was High Sheriff of County of Worcester & presided at unveiling the Masonic window in the North Transept of the Cathedral

In 1874 the Prov gave £50 towards cost of repairing the Cathedral

Down the years he has been interested in new churches or church halls built in their localities. have been asked to take part in the proceedings, the PGM laying the foundation stone. Such occasions occurred for instance at St. Martin's church Dudley 1875, St Agnes Moseley 1883 & Church Hall in 1925 St John's Parish Hall Dudley 1931

The movable rota of P.G.M. was arranged in 1848

R. Wor Bro Royds resigned in 1878 and Wor Bro Sir Edmund AM Lechmere installed P. G. M. 7th August 1878. the Prov. then consisting of ten lodges. Three more lodges were consecrated during his mastership

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Sir Edmund Lechmere died in Dec 1894 & Wor Bro A. F. Godson installed PGM 2/9/1895

In Sept 1885 an exhibition of masonic medals, prints, china etc was held in Worcester and this organised by the Prov. Cd. Sec Wor Bro Geo Taylor & this formed the nucleus of the present Library Museum

Augustus Godson was a barrister & a member of parliament. He was a member of the House of Commons for Worcester & lived at Ashfield, St. Malvern. Dedicated Masonic Hall in St. Nicholas St. Aug 1897. Was knighted during period he held P.G.M.

Wor Bro. W.T. Page installed Dep. P.G.M 26/9/1899

Wor Bro Godson died 1906 & the Memorial window in Malvern Priory unveiled 18/4/08

Wor Bro General Wm Campbell CB installed P.G.M 10/12/1908 and died 5/7/1918

Wor Bro Lt. Gen Sir Francis J. Davies installed 6/3/1914 - died 18/3/1948

Tablet to memory of R.W. Bro Campbell unveiled in Malvern Priory 27/9/1919

Sir Wm Campbell KCB. PGD served as ADC to Queen Victoria & King Ed. VII for four years. Came to live at Marchwood, Malvern

Organised a Prov War Relief Fund suggesting each member of a L remaining at home should subscribe £7 per year to make available funds to aid wounded or incapacitated Veterans & their families, war widows & orphans

1851 Henry Elias Vernon PGM lived in M.

June 1857 a special P.G. held at Abbey Boarding House, Gt. M. supporting Lady Foley laying foundation stone for Malvern schools in Mill Lane to accommodate 500

Special service in Priory - Rector - Rev Geo Fisk a mason for 50 years

- Resigned 1865 - Wor Bro W. Rogers PGM 1866
Lancashire mason

P.G. in Malvern 1872 at Jowushead Hse College Rd. Service in Priory

- Wor Bro Godson PGM 1895 lived at
Asbyfield, Gt. Malvern

Dedicated Masonic Hall Worcester 1897

Died 1906 - Memorial window in Priory

- Gen Wm Campbell - lived at Marshwood, Gt. M.

Died 1918 - Tablet in Priory

- Gen Sir Francis Davis

Malvern in relation to P.G.L.

In 1851 Henry Elias Vernon was appointed P.G.M. & came to live in Malvern

He had been Deputy to PGM of Staffs & had joined Worcester L. in 1850

He ruled for 14 years

In June 1857 a special P.G.L. was held at the Abbey Boarding House, Gt. Malvern when Officers of P.G.L. Brethren supported Lady Foley at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for the new Malvern Schools - the National School in Mill Lane built to accommodate 500.

After the ceremony a special service was held in the Priory conducted by the Rector Rev. Geo Fisk - a mason for 50 years. The collection amounted to over £70 and was donated for educational needs of poor children

Wor Bro Vernon resigned in 1865 Wor Bro W. Royds was installed as PGM in 1866

Wor Bro Royds was a Lancashire man who on his retirement in 1856 came to live at East Brown Court Worcester

P.G.L. was again held in Malvern in 1872 at Townshend House in College Rd a hydropathic establishment & was followed by a service in the Priory

Wor Bro A.E. Godson who was installed PGM in 1895 lived at Aspleyfield, Gt Malvern and he dedicated the Masonic Hall in St. Nicholas St in Aug. 1897

Wor Bro Godson died in 1906 and a Memorial Window to him was unveiled ^{in the Priory 18/1/08}

He was followed as PGM by Bro Genl. General Wm Campbell CB who died in 1918

He lived at Hillwood Malvern & a tablet to his memory was unveiled in the Priory in 1919

He was followed as PGM by Gen Sir Francis Davis whom the older Brethren will remember but neither he nor the following PGMs have any direct connection with Malvern, but P.G.L. has met in Malvern on several occasions

The morant's rota of P.G.L. was arranged in 1848

The significance of "Free"

The lord of the manor had feudal power to demand and had legal rights to the labour of the peasants. The rapidly increasing population of England with its pressure on the means of subsistence in the 12th - 13th centuries reinforced the burdens that the serfs had to bear.

The Black Death of 1348-9 reduced the population by 33% to 50%. The resultant shortage of labour put the whip into the hands of the serfs. The price of labour went up & serfs were able to obtain their freedom either by flight from the manor to a town or by purchase. Thus there gradually developed a body of free labourers who could sell their services. These known as freed bondmen. They were not free men, nor were their children if born while the father was in bondage. Children born after the father had obtained his liberty were free-born and became free men. There was a ban on taking serfs or bondmen as apprentices.