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The Early History of Freemasonry in Worcestershire

No doubt most of you will recall that endearing fictional character from "Alice in Wonderland", the White Rabbit. In the trial scene he is ordered to give evidence before the king, who is also the judge. Nervously he asks, "Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" "Begin at the beginning," the king said gravely, "and go on until you come to the end; then stop." Sound advice, you may well think, for any lecturer to heed. However, I fear it is not very helpful, for in the first place there is no beginning since the origins of Freemasonry are lost in that well-worn phrase "time immemorial"; and secondly, I am sure we all fervently pray the Almighty Architect that there will be no end.

Where then to begin? Well, Brethren, where better place than with your own lodge. I had the great privilege, W.M., of attending your installation. Quite apart from that being a rare Masonic treat with three generations of the same family involved in the ceremony, I was fascinated to listen to your W. Bro. Secretary reading the preamble from the first Minute Book in which it records, if memory serves me correct, that your prospective first W.M. died six days before your lodge's consecration and the Great War ended two days after. History in the making, Brethren, Masonic, national, international. And the reading of that foreword is a tradition which I trust will be preserved for as long as there are members of this fine old lodge to read it.

W.M., it probably does not need me to tell you or your Brethren that St. Mary's Lodge, despite its relatively late numbering of 3879, is the twenty-fourth lodge in order of seniority in the Province of Worcestershire; or, to put it another way, there are now one hundred lodges newer than yours. But for the sake of historical accuracy I am bound to observe that that statement needs qualification: St. Mary's is the twenty-fourth surviving lodge in order of seniority and, so far as is known, the thirty-fourth to have been founded in Worcestershire, since it appears that ten of the twelve earliest foundations did not survive. Of these ten extinct

lodges, one was founded before the split of 1751, five were Athol or Ancient lodges, two were Modern lodges and two were founded after the Union of 1813.

Now, may I crave the indulgence of those Brethren familiar with the two generations of Masonic hiatus during the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to explain to those who are not? The original Grand Lodge of All England was founded in 1717 on 24th June at the Goose and Gridiron tavern in St. Paul's Churchyard, initially for improved fellowship between Four Old Lodges, as they were collectively called (Goose and Gridiron, Crown, Apple Tree, Rummer and Grapes), in London. The move proved popular and several other lodges in and around the City sought to join, thus unexpectedly extending the pioneer Grand Lodge's authority so that it was felt necessary to produce regulations in order to maintain some degree of uniformity. One of these regulations was to the effect that every new lodge "must obtain the Grand Master's Warrant" before it could be considered properly constituted, and the earliest documentary evidence of this is from the diary of the famous antiquary, William Stukeley, for 27th December 1721. Word spread still further and by the end of 1724 lodges in Bristol, Chester, Norwich, Bath and Chichester had applied for recognition, so that a national network was beginning to emerge and a greater degree of control was obviously becoming necessary. It was at this juncture that Cheshire unexpectedly provided the middle tier of what is the familiar three-tier structure of today, when the three earliest lodges in Chester (the Castle and Falcon, the Spread Eagle, and the Sun) jointly sought from the Grand Lodge in London recognition of the "Grand Lodge of Cheshire Province". This request was eventually granted in April 1727, although Cheshire officially dates its formation as a province to 1725. And by 1728 Freemasonry had been even further extended with the formation of lodges in Gibraltar, Madras and Bengal.

New lodges continued to be formed over the next two decades, but it was during this period that the seeds of disunity seem first to have been sown. In 1730 there appeared the publication of Prichard's "Masonry Dissected", the best known of several exposures to provide details of the ceremonies. In order, it is

said, to exclude irregularly made Masons, the Grand Lodge altered some of the Ancient Landmarks of the Order, including transposing the words and signs of the First and Second Degrees, and this caused such offence in many lodges that in 1751 the "Antients" was formed by five lodges meeting at the Turk's Head in Greek Street, Soho. This new "Grand Lodge of England according to the Old Institutions" adopted its distinctive name to signify its members' adherence to the ancient practice of the Craft; they are also known as "Athol" masons after the third and fourth Dukes of Athol who were between them Grand Masters for thirty-four of its sixty-two years' existence. The original or premier Grand Lodge became known as the "Regular" or "Constituted" Grand Lodge, while its members were dubbed "Moderns" to distinguish them from the "Antients", or "Prince of Wales" masons after the future George IV who, as Prince of Wales, was Grand Master from 1790 to 1813. In this latter year the differences were resolved and both existing Grand Masters stood down; the Duke of Sussex, younger brother of the Prince of Wales, then became the first Grand Master of the "United" Grand Lodge of England and the split - at least in Craft masonry - was over.

But back to Worcestershire or, more accurately for the moment, the West Midlands. It is believed that the first lodge to have been founded in this part of the world was the Woolpack named, as so many lodges were in the eighteenth century, after its place of meeting, the Woolpack Inn in the Market Place at Warwick; its date of formation was 22nd April, 1728, but it was erased at the end of 1754. It was followed by the Dog of Stourbridge and the Swan of Birmingham, both in 1733. The former, later and better known as the Talbot No. 119, dated its warrant from 21st August of that year and thus holds the distinction, so far as we know, of being the first lodge to be formed in Worcestershire; it was renumbered 104 in 1740, 62 in 1755 (the custom of the Moderns being to close up gaps left by defunct lodges by renumbering), and erased in 1769. The latter, No. 125, is now known as St. Paul's and is numbered 43 on the roll of the United Grand Lodge of England; it thus holds the distinction of being not only the oldest extant lodge hereabouts, but one of the oldest in the world. And it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that Birmingham at that period was still no more than a relatively insignificant market town.

Nearly twenty years later, at the time of the split of 1751, the Talbot of Stourbridge was still the only lodge in Worcestershire. But on March 16th 1757 it appears to have been joined by an Athol or Antient lodge No.60, meeting appropriately at the Stonemason's Arms, Great Fish Street, Worcester; this lodge is thought by some not to have had a very protracted existence. You will observe that I use the words 'appear' and 'thought'; the sad fact of the matter is that records from these early days of masonic existence are very hard to come by. If regular records were kept, they have certainly for the most part not been preserved. As an historian one is left to make what one can of such remains as there are and, without falsifying the evidence, to put forward reasonable conjectures. I am bound to say that I believe certain Freemasonry had an earlier origin than 1757 in the City of Worcester. There are two reasons. The first is that at their General Assembly on 17th July 1751 the Antients' Grand Lodge adopted its "Rules and Orders" of which Regulation No.8 states as follows: "No admission or Warrant shall be granted to any Brothers to hold a Lodge until such time they shall have first formed a Lodge of Antient Masons and sit regularly in a Credible House and then to Apply by Petition and such Petition to be Attested by the Masters of Three Regular Lodges who shall make a proper Report of them". Secondly, it is stated that at their meeting on 16th March 1757 one of their number was excluded "as deemed unworthy". Now even the boy in my House of meanest intelligence would be able to tell you that in order to be excluded - always provided he knew what the word meant - one would first need to be a member. And while this may only have occurred a short while before, the first reason I adduced would seem to suggest a prior existence of several months at the very least. Entry into this earliest Worcester lodge must have been poorly controlled or the membership must have provided an interesting cross-section of society, since we are told that, apart from the excluded brother already alluded to "as deemed unworthy", later that same year (21st November 1757) another brother was excluded "for making Masons clandestinely for 1s. each" - a not infrequent misdemeanour in those days - and that in about 1766 two of the brethren were taken before the Grand Lodge for "ravishing another brother's wife". How long this lodge lasted is unclear, and it may be that such activities brought it to decline in the 1770s. On the other hand there is some suggestion of correspondence between this lodge and the current Worcester Lodge, a Moderns lodge, in the 1790s. In any event

the lodge appears in the Ahiman Rezon (the Antients' catalogue of lodges) for 1804 and 1813, though not for 1807. I suspect that it was thoroughly dormant by this time, and was finally erased at the Union.

A second Athol or Antient lodge, No.107, was warranted on 27th December 1762 and met at the Wheatsheaf in Bewdley High Street. The continuity of its existence is also problematical since it made no returns after 1788. It is thought to have held its last meeting in June 1797, but it is listed in the Antients' Calendar for 1800 and in Ahiman Rezon for 1804 and is known to have returned its warrant on 27th December 1805.

Much more interesting is the third Athol or Antient lodge to be warranted in the Province, No.154, since it met at the Talbot in Stourbridge. The date is 1768 and this, you will recall, is the year before the erasure of the original (or Modern) Talbot Lodge (as it had inevitably become). Unfortunately we can now do no more than guess at the sequence of events. Did the original lodge, No.119, collapse and were its premises at the Talbot taken over by a new set of Masons? Or did the original members transfer their allegiance to the Antients and thereby suffer erasure at the hands of the premier Grand Lodge? We shall probably never know. We do know, however, that during this period lodges often changed allegiance, as did individual members; and there are even instances of lodges holding a warrant from each Grand Lodge, just as individuals often kept a foot in both camps. It has been suggested that the greater the distance from London, the stronger the friendship between Antients and Moderns. Stourbridge, Bewdley, Kidderminster and Worcester are four centres where such fraternisation may have taken place. But, sad to relate, this second Talbot Lodge seems to have fared no better than its predecessor, for at some stage its warrant was returned, and in 1805 it was made over - as was the alternative custom with the Antients - to an entirely new set of Petitioners in Whitehaven.

A fourth Athol or Antient lodge, No. 178, was warranted on 10th November 1772 and met at the Raven Arms, Kidderminster. The fate of this lodge is equally

unclear, but it is probable it lapsed about twenty years later; others suggest that it lasted until the Union and that the remnants of its membership subsequently formed the nucleus of Hope and Charity Lodge of 1824, the third oldest extant lodge in the Province.

The fifth and final lodge sponsored by the Antients, on 26th February 1788, was the Lodge of Freedom No.246 of Dudley, meeting at the Hen and Chickens and then in 1812 at the Green Dragon Hotel. But, like its four predecessors, it had ceased to be a Worcestershire lodge by the Union of 1813, having earlier that year moved one mile across the border to Tipton in Staffordshire. It was erased on 5th March 1828.

And so it remained for the Moderns to carry the flag of Worcestershire Freemasonry into the Union. They had founded four lodges prior to 1813, two of which still survive. The first of these four was in Stourbridge, the lodge of Hope No. 372, meeting at the Three Tuns Inn, and again one is forced to speculate whether there were not certain brethren in the town who were not happy with the new Athol Talbot Lodge. Conflicting dates of origin appear - 1768, 1770, 1772 or 1775. At any event in this latter year it seems to have acquired the warrant of an old London Lodge called Hope. It was renumbered on four different occasions, was still active at the Union, and was finally erased on 5th March 1828.

The second Moderns lodge was Harmonic No.457, warranted on 23rd July 1784 and meeting at the Bush Inn, Dudley. After being renumbered 313, and now 252, it remains the oldest foundation in the Province still in existence, but not unfortunately of continuous existence for it was in abeyance for some years until it was erased in December 1827. This seems to have stirred Dudley masons into action for they immediately applied to the United Grand Lodge for re-instatement, received it by special warrant on 5th March 1828, and have since continued without interruption.

Two years after the foundation of Harmonic, on 11th July 1786, St. John's Lodge No.487, meeting at the Golden Cross in Bromsgrove High Street, received its warrant. This Moderns lodge became No.397 in the renumbering of 1792, and moved to the Star and Garter at Droitwich in 1802; but it did not survive there long and was

erased on 6th February 1811.

It only remains, therefore, for me to mention the fourth lodge of the Moderns, the Worcester Lodge, meeting at the Reindeer Inn, Mealcheapen Street. It received its warrant from the premier Grand Lodge on 9th October 1790 as No.574, and was renumbered on no less than four separate occasions, finally becoming No.280 at the last renumbering of the United Grand Lodge in 1863. The oldest lodge in continuous existence in Worcestershire, it celebrates its bicentenary very soon, and I for one much look forward to the History which W. Bro. J.L. Talbot, a P.M. of the Lodge and a former Provincial Grand Warden, has been commissioned to produce.

Thus far to the Union of 1813. Ten lodges founded, but only three surviving and one of these precariously. Post 1813 the picture is entirely reversed, with only two lodges failing to survive. Both of them illustrate one of the major problems of eighteenth century and early nineteenth century lodges, namely the permanency of meeting place - or, more accurately, the lack of it. As I have previously indicated, most early lodges met at inns or coffee houses from which, particularly in the eighteenth century, they often took their name, and it was essential that good relations were maintained with the landlord; often he was a member of the lodge or a Serving Brother, acting as Tyler and caterer. The Faithful Lodge No.680 of Kidderminster, which dated its warrant from 20th October 1816, met in four different hostelries in the town in the space of eight years, its shortest sojourn curiously enough being in the Freemasons' Tavern in Bromsgrove Street. And on one occasion after the landlord had been declared bankrupt its furniture was locked up in the Lodge Room and the members feared its sequestration, only regaining the items some eight months later. This lodge became No.442 in the renumbering of 1832, but was clearly in decline by then and was erased in 1844, the last Worcestershire lodge to suffer this fate. Even more chequered was the career of the Lodge of Mercy and Truth No.703, changing location no less than seven times in nine years from the date of its warrant, 13th May 1818, and oscillating between Evesham and Pershore like a pendulum. Its 1832 renumbering to 454 was superfluous, as it had already closed on 9th November of the previous

year, and it was erased in 1833. This was a great pity as one of its regular visitors - he was even asked to occupy the Chair on five occasions - was the celebrated George Claret, an outstanding ritualist who, in 1836, was responsible for publishing the first ever Emulation Ritual.

To bring my story up to the middle of the last century - for a reason which will emerge later - and the number of lodges I shall have mentioned to eighteen, I need briefly to add six more. They are: the Lodge of Hope and Charity of Kidderminster, founded as No.523 in 1824, now No.377; Royal Standard Lodge, founded in Kidderminster also as No.730 in 1844, but now recognised as No.498 and meeting at Dudley; Semper Fidelis No.772, now 529, of 4th July 1846 in Worcester; Clive Lodge No.819, founded in Bromsgrove in 1849, moved to Dudley in 1856 and renamed the Vernon Lodge, and moved again to the Swan Inn, Stourport, in 1865; the Lodge of Stability No.824, now 564, of the Talbot Hotel, Stourbridge, also founded in 1849 (28th June); and finally the Lodge of Perseverance No.878 founded in Dudley in 1850, and now No.573 of Halesowen, having moved there in 1861. Of these eighteen lodges by 1850, ten extinct and eight extant, you will have noticed that Stourbridge and Kidderminster had four each, Worcester and Dudley three each, Bromsgrove two, and Bewdley and Evesham one apiece. Now, conscious as I am of the fact that I am talking to a King's Heath Lodge and in a city in which currently well over half the total number of Worcestershire lodges are situated, I feel you are owed an explanation as to why the first lodge in this part of the county did not appear until 1881 (Lechmere Hughes Volunteers), almost one hundred and fifty years after the original lodge was founded. The answer is a double one, combining History and Geography, and I can only apologise if this brings your schooldays uncomfortably to mind. The industrial revolution brought expansion both of population and wealth, to the West Midlands on an unprecedented scale, but it was at first uneven rather than general. Villages and market towns developed into much larger units but still not, by the middle of the last century, into the vast conurbation that we recognise today and, given the peculiarities of the county boundary - for example, at Stechford one not infrequently hears visitors give greetings from the "surrounding Province of Warwickshire" - Birmingham's expansion was mainly in the

opposite direction, and contained half a dozen lodges of its own.

Brethren, having dealt exclusively so far with individual lodges, I would now like to turn my attention to what can only be described as the 'chequered' history of our Provincial Grand Lodge, and which I trust you will find no less interesting. You will recall that to Cheshire belongs the honour, as far back as 1725, of forming the first Provincial Grand Lodge - indeed, of coining the phrase and thus creating the middle tier of the familiar three-tier structure. A glance at our Provincial Year Book might lead you to suppose that Worcestershire was not all that far behind, for there we read the first entry under the heading of 'Notable Events in connection with the Province': "1753 - Sir Robert de Cornwall installed Prov. G.M. of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Salop, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire." This statement, however, contains one actual and two implied inaccuracies. The actual inaccuracy is that Sir Robert was not installed. He was appointed or, to use the quaint terminology of the age, "granted a deputation as Provincial Grand Master", the ceremony of installation being a nineteenth century innovation. Secondly, the word 'installed' implies that he was placed at the head of an existing or newly created provincial structure. No such organisation existed; and indeed, none was to exist for nearly a hundred years, as I shall presently show you. The other implication is the vastness of his task. True, the extent of his province in square mileage was huge, but not in terms of lodges. Apart from the three Bristol lodges of Rummer, Red Lion and White Lion, there were only three others in the whole area - Shropshire and Monmouthshire contained none, and Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire only one each: The Talbot No.119 of Stourbridge warranted on 1st August 1733, the Swan of Gloucester of 28th March 1738, and the Three Horse Shoes No.191 of Leominster of 11th October 1742. So, we may logically ask, why the appointment? And who was he?

I will take the second question first. The de Cornwall family were descended from the illegitimate son of Richard, Earl of Cornwall and brother of Henry III, and settled at Burford in Shropshire, just across the Teme from Tenbury Wells, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Our Sir Robert's father was an

admiral who had been offered a baronetcy "in consideration of his services against the Barbary States and for saving lives of women and children"; but it appears that he declined it on the grounds that he regarded the fee of honour as too expensive and so the patent was never taken out. Obviously feeling cheated, however, Robert ignored this and claimed the title after his father's death, entering it on his nomination form for the Parliamentary Borough of Leominster which he eventually represented at Westminster for seven years. I say 'eventually', because it appears that the election might have been declared null and void on the grounds that no such person as the baronet existed had Robert not appealed to King George II who, fortunately for him, recognised his title. Even the 'de' part of 'de Cornwall' is no more than an affectation, being a medieval term of convenience. So much for his origins; what of his appointment? Unfortunately we have virtually no knowledge concerning his Masonic qualifications. We know that he once attended the premier Grand Lodge when Lord Carysfort, the Grand Master who gave him his "deputation", was present. And we know that he died in 1756. But we know nothing of his work in Worcestershire, if any, nor if he even visited the Three Horse Shoes at Leominster which was, after all, less than ten miles from his country house. My guess, based on other observations of the workings of this Grand Lodge, is that the appointment was purely nominal as befitted a titled Member of Parliament, and that Sir Robert's influence in his vast province was minimal, if not non-existent.

Assuming that he held this honorary appointment from 1753-56, there was then a gap of thirty-six years while the Province lacked any immediate overlord. But on 21st July 1792 a very similar appointment was made, this time for Worcestershire alone. In this year John Dent, a prominent London banker, partner in the firm of Child & Co. of Temple Bar, Member of Parliament for Lancaster until 1807 and then for Poole, Dorset, was appointed - not installed as the Year Book again erroneously states - P.G.M. by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. The letter, extant among the records of the Worcester Lodge, notified the brethren of the appointment, and charged them "to correspond with him upon all Masonic business". It was signed by the Grand Secretary, William White. Why was the appointment made then? Had the premier Grand Lodge been waiting for the establishment of a Moderns

lodge in Worcester? We shall probably never know. But we do know that John Dent held the post for thirty-four years until his death at the end of 1826. And, unlike his predecessor, we also know a good deal about his Masonic career. And although his appointment was in all likelihood also an honorary one, at least he was a distinguished mason. An initiate of the Lodge of Freedom in 1788, he later joined the celebrated Lodge of Antiquity No.2. Becoming an Officer of Grand Lodge, he rapidly rose to the rank of Senior Grand Warden in 1793, and was later particularly active in the negotiations leading up to the Union of 1813. Such must have been the esteem in which he was held that he was elected the first Treasurer of the United Grand Lodge, a post he filled with distinction until his resignation on the grounds of ill health at the beginning of 1826, the year of his death. But while the records of Grand Lodge bear testimony to his zeal for the Craft in general and he is known to have been referred to in terms of high regard by the Worcester brethren, there is no record at all, neither in the Province nor in Grand Lodge, of his ever having paid a visit to his Province. We have only three pieces of further evidence from the period - a Jewel and two D.P.G.Ms.

The Jewel is John Dent's Collar Jewel of his office as P.G.M., and was found by Grand Lodge in a jewellers in Bath in the early 1960s and presented to the Provincial Museum at Worcester. Made in 1811, there is some speculation that it was commissioned for a projected visit to Worcester. But since, as I have already indicated, no record of such a visit exists - indeed, other evidence points to the contrary - the alternative suggestion of W. Bro. Tommy Grounsell seems far more likely: namely, that he had it made to wear in Grand Lodge, where the office of P.G.M. had recently become senior to that of Grand Treasurer.

Then there is the evidence of the two D.P.G.Ms., some of it begging more questions than it answers; we have clearly entered on one of the more peculiar phases in the history of the non-existence of the Province of Worcestershire! On 27th December 1820 the W.M. of the Worcester Lodge, Dr. Adam Dods, ordered a letter to be sent to the Grand Secretary stating "their desire to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge" and enquiring if "the appointment of a D.P.G.M. is registered in the books

of the Grand Lodge, and if so, the name of the brother, but if not, information as to the proper course of procedure". The immediate question that this prompts is: Why did Dr. Dods not write to John Dent, the P.G.M.? Was he unaware of the 1792 instruction? Or did he know that John Dent was generally too busy - or too disinterested - to apply himself to Worcestershire affairs? But this is only the beginning of the story. A reply was received that a W. Bro. William Thomson had been appointed the D.P.G.M. At the next meeting of the Worcester Lodge it was thereupon resolved to write to W. Bro. Thomson congratulating him upon his appointment and "hoping to be favoured with his visits as often as his convenience would admit of". This friendly communication received a slightly reserved reply in which W. Bro. Thomson pointed out that he had actually been D.P.G.M. for eighteen years already, that is to say, since 1802. One can only comment by using the modern phrase and saying that if that was the case then he must have kept a remarkably low profile. For consider the facts. William Thomson lived at Henwick near Worcester, and during the period of nineteen years, 1799 to 1817, he was W.M. of the Worcester Lodge for no less than fourteen of them. And yet three years after the last occasion we have one of his more immediate successors apparently totally unaware of his appointment. Part of this can possibly be excused by the fact that W. Bro. Thomson was, despite his distinguished record of service, not a regular member of the lodge, having resigned and rejoined it on at least two different occasions. But although there is no record of his 1802 Provincial appointment, at his first resignation of December 1811 he expressed his "desire to benefit the Lodge, either individually, or in my capacity as D.P.G.M." And in January 1816 he and his two wardens signed the Faithful Lodge Petition, and he put D.P.G.M. after his signature; and again in July 1818 he installed Dr. Farr as the Founding Master of Mercy and Truth Lodge in Evesham. In those days when connection was so important, he was certainly ideally suited to the post since he had formerly held the position of Writing Master to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Grand Master of the Moderns. But why was his appointment unknown? He appears to have resigned it in 1822, because in that year we hear of him once more, referred to in passing as P.D.P.G.M. And why during the whole of this twenty year period did he not, so far as we know, attempt to summon a Provincial Grand

Lodge?

We do know that he seems to have been succeeded - ousted? - by the same Dr. Adam Dods in 1822. But was he appointed by the P.G.M.? Again, sadly, any evidence either way is lacking. And the same is equally true of the attempt to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge in that year. Was it sanctioned by, was it even known to the P.G.M.? We have no means of knowing. From the records of the Worcester Lodge, however, we do know what happened. At their regular meeting on 2nd September 1822 the new D.P.G.M. gave notice of his intention to call a meeting of his own and the other two extant Worcestershire lodges - Faithful at Kidderminster and Mercy and Truth at Evesham (Harmonic of Dudley being then in abeyance) - in order to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge and to appoint Officers. This was scheduled for noon on 2nd October 1822 at the Reindeer Inn, Worcester, and duly took place, twenty-eight members of the three lodges being present. But subsequently the Worcester Lodge refused to endorse the proposal that £15 be taken from Lodge funds and put into a Provincial Lodge fund for the purchase of Provincial Grand Lodge regalia. And although a second Provincial meeting was held in 1824, the same disagreement continued and in 1825, no doubt discouraged by the deadlock, Dr. Dods resigned as D.P.G.M. and the attempt at founding a permanent Provincial Grand Lodge collapsed. There is a mysterious postscript to this story from the beginning of 1828. At the time when Harmonic Lodge was attempting to recover its warrant, they were advised to seek confirmation of its existence "from Worcester Province". On enquiry it was reported that "the P.G.M. for the County is dead, the Deputy is in Worcester gaol for debt and their secretaries are not known". Which Deputy, we may ask, did this refer to? William Thomson? Adam Dods? Or some third and hitherto unknown appointment?

In 1826, as you will recall, the absentee P.G.M. died and we enter another phase in the extraordinary saga. The Secretary of the Worcester Lodge, who was not informed by Grand Lodge of the demise but happened to spot the obituary in the newspaper, wrote to the Grand Secretary asking for a replacement, both for P.G.M. and for D.P.G.M. The reply was not encouraging. It ignored the latter appointment

completely and indicated that in so far as the former was concerned the appointment was the sole prerogative of the Most Worshipful the Grand Master, and that he would only appoint someone personally known to himself or a nobleman or other brother of distinction. This was indeed true; H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex ruled English Freemasonry in a most autocratic manner from his appointment at the Union of 1813 to his death thirty years later, choosing - sometimes unwisely, it is said - all the major office holders. The Worcester Lodge took the hint and found a baronet and a nobleman. The baronet, Sir Edward Dening, was elected a joining member, attended a few times and then dropped out. The nobleman, Viscount Deerhurst, future Earl of Coventry, withdrew on the night of his initiation and was never heard of again - in Masonic circles, that is. Having failed at the local end, the Worcester Lodge continued to petition at the Grand Lodge end, but always received the same reply: it was entirely a matter for H.R.H. and no business of theirs. So frustrated did they become that in 1831 they took the drastic step of withholding their dues to Grand Lodge in protest.

For seven years Grand Lodge was silent over this act of outright defiance, either through extreme tolerance or excessive laxity. Then, after further abortive correspondence, some of it with the famous Dr. Crucefix, in July 1838 they struck. Their ultimatum in effect was: either come to heel or be erased. The Worcester Lodge was given until the next meeting of the Board of General Purposes to decide; and even this was a concession, since the original intention had been to erase them on the spot. Only the personal intervention of a member of the Board, one Henry Udell who was a barrister friend of the current W.M. of the Worcester Lodge, solicitor Charles Bedford, prevented it and gained a little time. He also helped to soften the blow by writing a friendly letter, warning the W.M. that the Lodge was entirely in the wrong and strongly advising them to make speedy amends. After lengthy debate the Worcester Lodge complied and so the danger of extinction was narrowly averted. Henry Udell used his good offices further, and obtained a ruling from the Board of General Purposes that the Grand Registrar had the power to appoint a D.P.G.M. for the Province, the implication therefore being that Worcestershire

should temporarily abandon the idea of a P.G.M. and suggest someone to fill the lesser post who could then organise Provincial Grand Lodge. But, perhaps not surprisingly after the shock of their narrow escape from enforced extinction, the Worcester Lodge seem to have had enough and no further initiative came from them.

By now, as you will recall, there was growing Masonic interest in the Province and many wondered why Worcestershire lacked a Provincial organisation. In 1843 it was the turn of the now revived Harmonic Lodge of Dudley to take the initiative. They sent a deputation to the Worcester Lodge to enlist their support in approaching Grand Lodge on the subject. The Worcester Lodge reluctantly agreed to write again, but they told the members of Harmonic Lodge that they knew exactly what the reply would be, i.e. that the appointment was vested solely in the hands of H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex. They did write and they were right!

But it was from the north of the Province that success ultimately came and from the then newest lodge, Royal Standard of Kidderminster (now of Dudley). They had had considerable difficulty and delay in obtaining a warrant in 1844, because Grand Lodge pointed out that there were already two lodges in that town - Faithful No.442 and Hope and Charity No.527 - and although the former had ceased to function its warrant had not been surrendered. The sponsors of Royal Standard ultimately traced the warrant to the Leamington home of W. Bro. Torre, the D.P.G.M. of Warwickshire, to whom for some reason it had been entrusted for despatch to London and who, for some equally unexplained reason, had failed to do so. Royal Standard members became convinced that had they had a Provincial Grand Lodge of their own the annoying delay would not have occurred. So in 1846 one of the P.Ms., W. Bro. Dr. William Roden, decided - as his fellow medical practitioner Dr. Dods had done a quarter of a century before - that the best way to succeed was to organise one and then apply to Grand Lodge for endorsement. Accordingly he wrote to the other four Worcestershire lodges - Worcester. Harmonic, Hope and Charity and Semper Fidelis - inviting them to meet at Kidderminster in February 1847. This meeting was well attended and strongly supported his initiative. Further meetings produced an agreed sharing of offices and Dr. Roden negotiated with the Grand Registrar,

W. Bro. Alexander Dobie, for formal recognition. The latter complied and on 17th August 1847, together with the Grand Secretary and the Grand Tyler, he formally opened the first official Provincial Grand Lodge at the Guildhall, Worcester, suitably appointing Dr. Roden as the D.P.G.M.

Dr. Roden never became P.G.M. He presided over Provincial Grand Lodge in his capacity as D.P.G.M. in 1848 at Dudley and 1849 at Kidderminster, but resigned later that year following differences of opinion with members of his own lodge and with the Worcester Lodge. No successor was immediately appointed and no Provincial Grand Lodge was held in 1850, so that all his hard work and the very existence of Worcestershire's infant Provincial Grand Lodge looked like foundering. But rescue was at hand from, you might be forgiven for thinking, the most unlikely quarter of all - Grand Lodge. In 1851 the second Marquis of Zetland, who had succeeded H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex on the latter's death in 1843 appointed a new P.G.M. for Worcestershire - Henry Charles Vernon, a member of a distinguished Staffordshire family and D.P.G.M. for that Province besides being a P.S.G.W. He had recently gone to live in Malvern and had in May 1850 become a joining member of the Worcester Lodge. Grand Lodge had at last found the right man. The third P.G.M., but the first both to live in the Province and to take an active interest in its affairs and therefore the first, so to speak, of the modern line, he was installed on 17th June 1851 in the City and County Library at Worcester, by R.W. Bro. Tucker, P.G.M. of Dorset. A new era had begun, and I think it would be fair comment to say that what the Province of Worcestershire may thus lack in antiquity, it certainly makes up for in quality.

For the final part of this talk, W.M., I would like briefly to turn my attention to what are erroneously referred to as the 'Higher Degrees', starting of course with the Royal Arch, being the Degree closest to Craft Masonry and the one which I would hope all M.Ms. would aspire to join.

While not possessing the same antiquity as Craft Masonry, the Royal Arch can certainly claim an existence of some two hundred and fifty years. It is not

absolutely certain precisely how or when it started, but some scholars trace it to France following the Papal Bull of 1738 proscribing Freemasonry for Roman Catholics. Although there is no documentary evidence for its existence in this country prior to the split in the Craft of 1751, the strong presumption is that it had already spread. But paradoxically, whereas the premier Grand Lodge (that of the Moderns) refused to recognise it, the Antients practised it from their inception and adopted it as a Fourth Degree, although there was no evidence whatsoever for its existence prior to the disclosures of 1730, let alone 1717. There are two possible reasons for this. One is the close affinity of the Antients to the Irish Constitution which allowed lodges to practise other degrees in their ceremonies and where the Royal Arch is known to have been worked from the 1740s. The other is the pioneering work of their Grand Secretary, Laurence Dermott, who was determined that the Antients should quickly eclipse the Moderns in number of lodges and members and realised that the Royal Arch would prove an attraction.

This certainly appears to have been the case, for on 22nd July 1766 several Moderns decided to constitute by Charter of Compact a separate Grand and Royal Chapter of Jerusalem with their Grand Master, Lord Blayney, at its head. This body exercised a very efficient control over the Moderns' version of the Royal Arch and laid the foundation for the government that was to come after the Union, a Union which in this instance came on 18th March 1817 and not in 1813. The reason for this four-year delay was that the differences in the Royal Arch surprisingly proved much harder to reconcile than those in the Craft so that it was initially set aside. This proved to the advantage of the Moderns, as the Craft union had not, for in 1813 both sides acknowledged the Royal Arch as "the perfection of the Master's Degree" as the Eleventh Article of Union indicates, and in the 1817 Union the Royal Arch was governed as a separate body.

I give this as background once again so that you may be in a better position to judge events in Worcestershire. The first documentary evidence we possess indicates that a W. Bro. John Allen, who was W.M. of the Worcester Lodge in 1807, 1808 and 1812 (i.e. three years when W. Bro. Thomson was not!), worked

the Royal Arch ceremony in the Lodge as part of the Third Degree and was responsible for exalting many Masons. This does not mean, of course, that it did not happen before and I am bound to state that I believe it more than likely that it was worked, maybe spasmodically, by both Antients and Moderns lodges in the Province from as early as the 1760s. Unfortunately none of the records of the five Antients' lodges have survived, and even if they had the likelihood of any reference to the Royal Arch would have been reduced after 4th August 1786 when the Grand Lodge of Ireland - to whose close affinity I have already alluded - issued a directive forbidding lodges to record in their Minute Books "any transactions relative to the Royal Arch". In fact, the Antients' General Grand Chapter or Grand Lodge of Royal Arch Masons, which existed within their Grand Lodge, already read their Royal Arch Minutes separately. It is equally true that Moderns lodges did not always work the Royal Arch separately; indeed, some Moderns lodges had Deacons, admitted Antients members as visitors and even performed the Royal Arch ceremony as part of their constitution, as did Antients lodges. They were styled 'Traditioner' lodges and were in the forefront of the movement for Union. Generally speaking, once again, the further from London the greater the uniformity between Antients and Moderns and the greater the likelihood of deviation from their Grand Lodges - a characteristic of 280 Lodge and Chapter, I may say!

Thus we are on very uncertain ground in recording the earliest days of the Royal Arch in Worcestershire and can only definitely date it to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Apart from the reference in the Worcester Lodge, there is also the evidence of the earliest regalia, now in the Museum at Worcester and known to be associated with the same W. Bro. John Allen. And since he died in 1813 he must have bought it at the time he was exalting brethren of the lodge. The third definite evidence is the fact that R.W. Bro. Dent, the P.G.M., was in December 1812 designated Grand Superintendent of Royal Arch Masonry in Worcestershire. As with the Craft so in Royal Arch he was the first Grand Treasurer from 1817 to 1823, but it appears that he made no attempt to introduce the Supreme Degree in any part of the Province. And so it continued its probably chequered career until 1844. In that year the two oldest lodges, Harmonic of Dudley and the Worcester Lodge both

petitioned Grand Chapter to be allowed to form a Royal Arch Chapter, and the consecrations took place within a week of each other in December. Interestingly, they are the only two Chapters in the Province to have different names from the lodges to which they are attached - Dudley and St. Wulstan's respectively - since they were founded before the custom of retaining the same name was introduced.

Finally, Brethren, I wish to make very brief mention of the Mark, Knights Templar and Rose Croix Degrees; brief, because although all three probably have their origins in the first half of the eighteenth century - the first in Scotland and the other two in France in about 1740 - and all were also probably practised in this country by the 1760s, there is no evidence of any of them being worked in Worcestershire for another century. But this does not mean to say that they were not. We simply lack any evidence, but it is known that Antients' lodges worked other ceremonies just as they did the Royal Arch. We should also not forget the Lodge Glittering Star No.322 in the Ir. S. Constitution, Warranted on 3rd May 1759 as the travelling lodge of the 29th Regiment of Foot, later the First Battalion the Worcestershire Regiment, it is known to have worked other degrees also, including in 1769 containing in its Minute Book one of the earliest references to KT in the world. It is, in my judgment, not too fanciful to suppose that members of this regimental lodge returning to the Province may have wished to keep alive ceremonies they had practised while serving overseas. Athol lodges might well have enabled them to do this.

But I am beginning to enter the realm of too much speculation. What I can assert with certainty is that by the middle of the last century the pattern of Freemasonry in the Province of Worcestershire as we know it today was fully established, and that it has gone from strength to strength ever since.

Acknowledgements:-

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by W. Bro. Albert Brown, P.P.S.G.W., Prov. G. Treas.

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by W. Bro. C.C. Whitney Griffiths, P.P.S.G.W.

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by V.W. Bro. Major E.J. Fate M.B.E.

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by E. Comp. T.H. Perks, P.A.G.Soj.

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by W. Bro. T.W. Grounsell, P.G.Stwd.

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on ~~Monday~~^{Fri}, 14 March, 1986
by W. Bro. R.G.H. Goddard, P.P.J.G.W.
