

FREEMASONRY IN WORCESTER-SHIRE.

The Masonic brotherhood in the province of Worcester, the boundaries of which are coterminous with the confines of the county, last week celebrated the centenary of the Worcester Lodge, now numbered 280, and held the annual Provincial Grand Lodge in the city of Worcester. For these functions such elaborate preparations were made that there can be no doubt that the gatherings will rank amongst the most ornate and magnificent that the Freemasons of the province of Worcester have ever participated in, and the occasion was indeed quite worthy of the celebrations which it evoked. For the ceremonies the Provincial Grand Lodge and the Worcester Lodge had for their guests several brethren who have attained to high eminence and correlative distinction in the universal craft, which has had its being "ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms." Upon such an occasion, therefore, it may be worth while to give a brief resumé of the history of Freemasonry in the Province, which now includes twelve Craft Lodges—namely, the Harmonic Lodge, at Dudley, No. 252; the Worcester Lodge, 280; Hope and Charity, 377, Kidderminster; Royal Standard, 493, Dudley; Semper Fidelis, 529, Worcester; Vernon, 560, Stourport; Stability, 564, Stourbridge; Perseverance, 573, Halesowen; St. Michael's, 1,097, Tenbury; Royd's, 1,204, Malvern; Lechmere, 1,874, Kidderminster; and Masefield, 2,034, at Moseley.

Of the early history of the craft in Worcestershire there are but few traces, which cannot be wondered at when it is remembered that Freemasonry was interdicted in England in 1424, and until a comparatively recent period nothing which concerned the Order was allowed to appear in print, also that until the union of the Grand Lodge of York, of which the Duke of Athol was appointed Grand Master in 1772, and the Grand Lodge of England under the Duke of Sussex in 1813, the Masonic records of the country could not assume that consolidated and regular form for which they are now distinguished. But it is clearly established from records now in the possession of the United Grand Lodge that a Lodge, numbered 60, under the Athol or York Constitution had existence and held its meetings at "The Mason's Arms, Great Fish Street, Worcester, in 1757. How long it had previously or did subsequently exist is not known, its last and only official record being the roll of members for that year, the return of which was given up amongst 350 other Lodges said to be working under the Constitution. "The Mason's Arms," in Great Fish Street, Worcester, has long since ceased to exist, and indeed the exact remains which formerly were described as such are scarcely known, but there are, on the gable of a roofed house in that street, at the present time traces of emblems or devices which by some are considered to have some appurtenance to Freemasonry, but which are of a doubtful character.

A paragraph appeared in *Brown's Worcester Journal* in 1766, in which it was announced that a company of Brethren from London would appear in Worcester by desire of the lodge of Freemasons. This and other fragmentary information seems to justify the belief held by many that Freemasonry has existed in the Faithful City itself for almost two centuries, and possibly for a much longer period. In the April of 1790 a curious advertisement which has always remained an enigma to Freemasons, and of which the following is a copy, appeared in the same newspaper:—

["MASONRY.]

"In all ages, by all sectaries, and in all nations the advantages of Masonry have been manifest. No society since the creation of the globe have ever been so universal and so respectable. They never have contaminated their laws, nor like many premature societies exposed themselves to ridicule or contempt. The Brethren must feel a secret satisfaction when they are informed that a Lodge under the auspicious names of the Right Hon. Lord D—ley and W—d, the Right Honourable the Earl of Ply—th, and the Right Honourable the Earl of Cov—try (gentlemen and brothers resident in this county) will be instituted; and when the brethren recollect the politeness, affability, and humanity of the noble patrons, who can doubt of success? For the purpose of promoting a constitution, Chapters are held every Sunday evening at the Rein Deer, till it is brought to its wished-for crisis. The company of every brother is requested."

It is not known what the effect of this was, but on the 2nd of October in the same year an interim warrant was issued by command of the Deputy Grand Master of England, in which "Brethren D. B. Curwen, Thomas Smith, Jos. Dillon, Richard Hill, Moses Leviston, John Barnesley, Edward Connop, and John Whittaker, residing in or near the city of Worcester," were "authorised to assemble as a

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regular lodge of "Free and Accepted Masons
under the title or denomination of the Worcester Lodge,
and to make, pass, and raise masons as occasion shall
require until a Warrant of Constitution shall
be made out." It will be noticed that in this interim
warrant the names of none of the "noble patrons"
who are referred to in the advertisement before men-
tioned occur, neither do their names appear on the actual
warrant which was issued under the seal of the Grand
Lodge of England on the 9th day of October in the
same year, acting under which it is recorded that the
lodge continued to hold regular meetings, but from
December in 1792, when Bro. Richard Moseley was
installed Worshipful Master, the records appear to have
been lost, and it was thought that it must have lain dor-
mant for five years, until 1797, when the Rev. Bro.
Thomas Heynes, M.A., was Master. The absolute
correctness of the impression that the lodge had lain
dormant for so long a period has several times been
questioned, and it was left to the late and much-lamented
Worshipful Bro. Joseph Randle Buck to settle the point
once and for all. After much personal labour and diligent
research that esteemed brother was enabled to lay
before the Grand Lodge of England such proofs of the
continued and unbroken existence of the Worcester
Lodge—from the date upon which its warrant was
granted to the present time—that the Grand Lodge
ultimately consented to grant to the lodge an "additional
charter," recording the proofs as advanced by Brother
Buck and accepted by them. This additional charter
—the possession of which is regarded as one of the
proudest acquirements of any lodge—was presented to
the Worshipful Master of the Worcester Lodge by an
officer of the Grand Lodge of England at the special
centenary meeting held yesterday afternoon.

There is now one Lodge, and there have been others
whose warrants under the United Constitution of Grand
Lodge bear date prior to that of the Worcester Lodge,
viz., the Lodge of Hope at Stourbridge, whose warrant
is dated 1763, but which has long ceased to exist, and
the Harmonic Lodge at Dudley, now spoken of as
the Mother Lodge of the Province, whose warrant
is dated 1784. This Lodge, however, did no
work for some time, but the Grand and Pro-
vincial Grand Lodge dues are said to have been
paid during the period it is recorded as having been
dormant. At the time of the hundredth anniversary
of the date of the Lodge's warrant an attempt was made to
induce the Grand Lodge to grant the coveted additional
charter, but the supreme authorities in this instance
proved inexorable and proof against even the special
pleadings of the Worshipful Deputy-Provincial Grand
Master Bro. A. E. Godson, M.P. who warmly exerted
himself in the matter. The remaining Lodges in the
province are all of comparatively recent formation, and
call for no further remarks save that in all their
"work" they have maintained that high standard of
excellence and conscientious adherence to the ancient
and sublime principles and forms of the Order which
have always distinguished the older Lodges in the
Province.

In tracing the history of the Provincial Grand
Lodge of Worcester the absence of consecutive records
against the Province; indeed, until 1847 no such records
exist, since when it must be allowed that they have been
kept with more than commendable completeness and
liberary finish by our distinguished brethren who have
filled the office of Provincial Grand Secretary. We
first hear of the Province of Worcester in the year 1752,
Lord Carysfort being Grand Master when a "deputa-
tion" was granted to Sir Robert De Cornwall, Baronet
as Provincial Grand Master for the counties of
Worcester, Gloucester, Salop, Monmouth, and Here-
ford. This might seem no ordinary jurisdiction for
one individual, considering the difficulties of locomotion,
but the reader's surprise will be much abated when it is
known that at this period this authority embraced three
lodges only—one in Worcestershire, held at the Talbot
at Stourbridge, and which probably shortly afterwards
became defunct, of which the warrant was dated August
1st, 1733; a second at the Swan Inn, Gloucester; and the
third at the Three Horse Shoes, Leominster. An inter-
esting reference to the Province of Worcester is found
in the year 1792, when his Royal Highness the Prince of
Wales, Grand Master, appointed John Dent, Esq.,
Provincial Grand Master of Worcestershire, an
appointment which he held till 1826. The
interesting document recording this appointment is,
happily, now preserved in the archives of the Worcester
Lodge. It bears date 31st July, 1792, and was signed
by William White, Grand Secretary. From this time
Provincial Grand Lodges appear to have been held at
infrequent and irregular intervals, but in 1847 a very
successful meeting of Provincial Grand Lodges was held
at the Guildhall, Worcester, governed by the Worshipful
Brother William Boden, of the Royal Standard Lodge,
which was then located at Kidderminster, Deputy

Provincial Grand Master. The next Provincial Grand Lodge was held at Dudley in the following year, and the third and last meeting under the deputed rule of Worshipful Brother Roden took place at Kidderminster on the 28th August, 1849. The retirement of Worshipful Brother Roden was repaired by the appointment of Mr. Henry Charles Vernon, of Hilton Park, in the county of Stafford, and of Malvern, in the county of Worcester, who was a Past Senior Grand Warden of England, and a Deputy Provincial Grand Master of Stafford, who was proclaimed Provincial Grand Master of Worcestershire on the 17th of June, 1851. This was the first occasion upon which a Right Worshipful Grand Master had been invested with supreme provincial authority in Worcestershire. On that occasion Sir Edmund A. H. Lechmere, who was destined ultimately to govern the Province, was appointed and invested as Provincial Senior Grand Deacon.

"Now" (in the language of an old historian) "Masonry flourished in harmony, reputation, and numbers, and many desired to be admitted into the fraternity who found in a Lodge a safe and pleasant relaxation from intense study or the hurry of business, without politics or without party," in the Province of Worcester, and since then annual meetings of Provincial Grand Lodges have been held in different parts of the Province. In 1866 it was intimated that failing health had induced the Chief to retire from the duties of Provincial Grand Master after a rule of fifteen years, and Mr. Albert Hudson Royds, of Falinges, Rochdale, Lancashire, and Crown East Court, Worcestershire, who was a Deputy Provincial Grand Master of East Lancashire and Worcestershire, was installed and proclaimed in his stead. In 1874 Sir Edmund A. F. Lechmere, Bart., M.P., was installed Provincial Grand Master, which office he still holds. During Sir Edmund's government of the Province the teachings and principles of Freemasonry have been diligently taught, inculcated, and practised; the exalted position of the fraternity has never been subordinated to any unasonic—a term of infamy of which is only known to the brethren of the mystic tie"—purposes and the distinguishing characteristic of the Freemason's heart, Charitableness has been encouraged and fostered to the fullest extent; and the solemnity and solemnity of the unapproachable ritual of the fraternal ritual which the Church can excel in beauty, suggestive of grandeur—has been preserved inviolate and unsullied. "So not it be."

returned to that effect was returned.

MASONIC CENTENARY.—Last evening the members of the Worcester Lodge (280) of Freemasons celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the lodge's existence. A masonic conversazione was held in the Guildhall last evening, at which there was a very large gathering of the working officers of every lodge in the province of Worcestershire, the past and present officers of the Provincial Grand Lodge, some distinguished masons, a few of the leading citizens, &c. The Worshipful Brother John Stallard, jun., received the guests. A very pleasant evening was spent. To-day a Provincial Grand Lodge will be held at the Chapter House, preceded by a luncheon at the Guildhall, and followed by a service at the Cathedral and a banquet at the Guildhall. Tomorrow there will be a special centenary meeting at the lodge-room, when Worshipful Brother Underwood, director of the ceremonies, will read a history of the lodge. The festivities will terminate with a Masonic ball the same evening.