

IRISH FREEMASONRY

The earliest known record of Irish Freemasonry, is to be found in the Minute Books of the Corporation of the City of Cork, under date the 2nd December, 1725, wherein it is recorded that a Charter be issued out for the Masters, Wardens and Society of Freemasons, according to their petition the next entry in the Corporation records relating to Freemasonry being under date 31st January 1726: "The Charter of Freemasons being this day read in Council, it is ordered that the further consideration of the said Charter be referred to next Council, and that Alderman Phillips, Mr Cooper, Fourth, Austin, and Commissioner Speaker do us well serve save these two entries, the Minutes Books of the Cork Corporation contain none, or can any further information be obtained as to this Charter.

The earliest Masonic records of Freemasonry in Ireland are those at present in the possession of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Munster. These invaluable records commence on the 27th of December 1726. The first minute stating "The Hon. James O'Brien Esq. was by unanimous consent elected Grand Master for the ensuing year"

The next minute contains the appointment, by the Grand Master, of Spriggett Penn Esq. as Deputy Grand Master, and Bro: Good and Riggs as Grand Wardens. These minutes end on 31st July 1733. B. W. Bro Spriggett Penn was a lineal descendant of the great W^m Penn of Pennsylvania.

A minute exists under date 21st June 1749. It is clearly a private Lodge minute, and is believed to refer to the then and present Lodge No. 1, Cork. These important entries are contained in ten pages of a book seven and a half inches wide by nine and one half inches long. The present Grand Lodge of Ireland was founded on the 3rd February, 1729. The history of its foundation is given in the late Bro Mullikens "Historic Masonic Tracts" which is as follows:

"The Masonic annals of England bear testimony to the high character of Grand Master Kingston, he having presented gifts to the Grand Lodge still kept in the Grand Lodge archives

to the perpetuation of his memory. He was installed Grand Master of ~~England~~ ^{Ireland} 27th December 1728, and in the following year Provincial Grand Master of Munster, in the house of Bro Herbert Phair in Cork.

"During his year of office, the Parliament house in Dublin (the present Bank of Ireland) was about to be built, when Lord Carteret, then Viceroy, with his suite, attended by the Corporation and garrison and a number of gentlemen Freemasons, marched in procession and laid the footstone of the building, with the usual formalities, on the 3rd February, 1729. The Freemason gentlemen dined together and there being no Grand Lodge in Dublin, resolved as was the case in London in 1717, to erect a Grand Lodge in Dublin, and invited the Grand Provincial of Munster, Lord Kingston, to take the Grand National Chair of Ireland, which honor his Lordship readily accepted, gratified at being the person selected to revive the National Grand Lodge, well known to have had existence at some very remote period. His Lordship, on taking the Grand National Chair, appointed Adam Newman, Esq^r of Downe (his Deputy in Munster), with a view of preserving that ancient Grand Lodge which had been the nucleus of Masonry in Ireland then immemorial, a desideratum in the Metropolis as well as in the Province of Munster.

"The earliest minutes of the Irish Grand Lodge commenced on the 24th June 1780, although there are records from 1727 containing lists of Members of subordinate Lodges then in existence, and some of which still exist. The history of the loss of the minutes of Grand Lodge prior to 24th of June is twofold.

1. That a Brother was employed in the early part of the present century to copy the records of Grand Lodge and he thereupon was given all records prior to 24th June 1780. No bargain was made with this Brother as to payment. On his completing the copy of the set of records so given to him, he furnished the then Grand Lodge Secretary, an account demanding the sum of £50 for those copies. This account was objected to by the Grand Treasurer, and finally the matter

came before Grand Lodge, the brother all the time holding both the originals and the copies. The result of all seems to have been a long contest between the brother and Grand Lodge which terminated by the death of the brother and Grand Lodge of her valuable records. The 2nd explanation is even more strange; it is as follows: In the year 1807 some differences arose, in Grand Lodge between the Grand Secretary and Grand Lodge, and which lasted for some years; so far did those differences go that, certain brethren were expelled by the majority of Grand Lodge amongst them being Bro Alex. Seton. On the 2nd April 1807, these differences finally ended in the Chancery cases of John Leek plaintiff Alexander Seton, defendant and which suit was continued for some years and then seems from that days records to have ceased.

The Chancery Master and Record Offices have all been searched, but in vain. The records are for the present lost to Grand Lodge.

Fortunately for the existence of the present Grand Lodge, from the year 1780, is clearly shown by the following list:

Almanac Review Constitution or Pocket Companion	Date of Publication	Place of Publication	Printed by or Editor.
P. C.	1730.	DUBLIN.	T. WATTS.
P. C.	1735.	"	E. RIDER.
A. R.	1740.	"	L. DERMOTT.
P.	1751.	"	E. SPRATT.
With Records 6 th April	1731. to 25 th June	1750	
A. R.	1752.	DUBLIN.	L. DERMOTT.
C.	1767.	"	WILKINSON.
A. R.	1782.	BELFAST.	L. DERMOTT.
A. R.	1790.	DUBLIN.	WILKINSON.
A. R.	1795.	BELFAST.	L. DERMOTT.
A. R.	1803.	DUBLIN.	"
A. R.	1803.	BELFAST.	"
C.	1804.	DUBLIN.	DOWNES
C.	1807.	"	"
C.	1816.	"	"

C.	1817.	DUBLIN.	DOWNES.
C.	1818.	"	"
C.	1820.	"	"
C.	1839.	"	UNDERWOOD.
C.	1858.	"	"
C.	1875.	"	"

The Grand Lodge of Ireland during the last and beginning of the present century, had several opponents besides the Grand Lodge of Münster. On the 7th day of December 1779, a lodge styling itself the High Knight Templar Ireland Kilwinning Lodge, was formed in Dublin having procured from Mother Kilwinning a Charter dated 8th day of October 1779. This lodge was opened by a Bro George August Cunningham then in the City of London, but seems to have lasted only until 11th day of October 1806.

This original Charter and the Lodge Minute Book are still in existence. On the 5th May 1808, another opposition was started at Danganmon, in the county of Mayo, which finally was formed into what was known as the Grand Lodge of Ulster. This Grand Lodge of Ulster, only lasted for a short period. Having granted some warrants, the offspring of this Grand Lodge of Ulster got the nickname of Thorns. It is believed that certain persons of the humbler class, residing in the northern parts of the counties of Donegal and Londonderry, are up to the present made under these warrants granted by the so called Grand Lodge of Ulster, but their being so is so secretly kept that it is hard to ascertain the true facts.

It is impossible to state where the earlier meetings of Grand Lodge were held in Dublin, as the minutes do not state the fact, but from printed documents it has been ascertained that it used at a very early period to meet at a house in Fishamble Street, subsequently at the Sailors' Hall, in Back Lane, afterwards in Stafford Street, subsequently in Chapel Street. The first settled

place of abode is to be found in the printed Grand Lodge statement of accounts from the 27th December 1815 to 26th June 1816 in which is stated that:

"The attention of your Lodge is earnestly requested to the project now in progress, of providing a general establishment or Freemasons Hall in Dublin for all the purposes of the Masonic body, and which has been undertaken with such success as to require but a reasonable share of assistance from the brethren of the country Lodges, in the registry of Ireland to complete it effectually. The sister countries have established institutions of this nature by the zeal and spirit of the craft, but in Ireland there is no sanctuary or temple for the work of the order no memorial or testimony of fraternal love, or of the devotion of Freemasons to the duties they have undertaken and the principles they have solemnly pledged themselves to support. To redeem the body from this reproachful state is the object of the measure submitted to the consideration of your Lodge as well as to that of every Freemason under whose view it may happen to come; and your support is requested on the strength of this conviction - that there is no part of the world where Masonic duties are better understood and fulfilled than in Ireland, and that, therefore, the magnificent example of genuine Masonic zeal displayed by the Grand Master, and liberally followed by several Lodges and individuals of the craft will not be in vain be contemplated, with indifference, or without good effects by any of the brethren. Any contributions forwarded for this purpose to the Grand Treasurer will be recorded with due credit to the motive and the source from which they proceed.

The foregoing was not completely carried out until 1823, as in the printed statement from 27th December 1822, to 24th June, 1823 the following appears:

FREEMASONS HALL, N^o 19 DAWSON STREET, DUBLIN.

The brethren of the Masonic Order are informed that the above splendid house formerly the residence of the Right

Honorable Lord Northland, has been purchased for the order by a subscription of zealous brethren, taking shares in the establishment of £20 each, under the patronage of His Grace, the Duke of Leinster, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The building has been for sometime open as a Masonic Hall, where Grand Lodge and most Lodges of Dublin hold their meetings. Refreshments are furnished on a system combining accommodation and economy, hitherto unknown to the Order, and it is confidently expected that the Freemasons of Ireland will sanction by their support an establishment so necessary for the welfare and respectability of the Masonic Body. The conduct of this establishment is vested in a president vice-president and fifteen Directors, who have been chosen by ballot for one year, viz: His Grace the Duke of Leinster J. M. President: John Fowler Esq^r. D. G. M. Vice President
[Here follow names of Directors]

Three Directors in rotation give weekly attendance, and a general Board is held once on each week.

The Directors would deem themselves undeserving the high trust delegated to them, did they not communicate to their brethren of Country and Military Lodges, the establishment of Freemasonry will be a measure so productive of evident advantage to the Order in general. Brethren becoming any subscribers of one guinea, will be entitled to participate in all its advantages, as none but proprietors or subscribers are admissible. Brethren who wish further information, or to become subscribers, will please apply to Bro Richard Price at the Hall, or to Bro William Francis Graham D. G. Secretary, who are empowered to receive subscriptions. N.B. There are a few shares yet to be disposed of, for which an early application is recommended.

In the year 1807 the Roll of Lodges in Ireland, numbered nine hundred and fifty one, subsequently increased to one thousand and fourteen, but owing to many of them being Militia and Regimental Lodges, as also from other causes, some of them have ceased to work.

The custom in Ireland as to Lodges is different from England and Scotland, as in Ireland every Lodge is tenured

only by its number, the name being a secondary matter, and consequently Lodge numbers have never been changed from the time of its first having been granted to the Lodge: whereas in England and Scotland, Lodges are principally known by name, the numbers being secondary.

The office of Pro Grand Master of England or Substitute Grand Master of Scotland, are unknown offices in Ireland.

The Irish Ritual differs from any other, being in fact a compound of Irish, York, and Scotch.

The real government of the Irish Order is most wisely left by the Grand Master in the hands of his much esteemed and valued Deputy Grand Master R. W. Hoare Esq. one of Her Majesty's Counsel, of whom it would be impossible to speak too highly, as to his ability as a Chairman, and every other qualification for this arduous and most important office.

The following are a list of Grand Officers for the year 1878.

[Here follows list of names.]

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