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EARLY FREEMASONRY
IN
WARWICKSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE AND STAFFORDSHIRE.

Paper read to

FAITHFUL LODGE NO. 473, on
Wednesday, 28th October 1953.

There is authority no less than that of Dr. Robert Plot for stating that Freemasonry had been practised in Staffordshire many years before his History was published in 1686; and the more thought one gives to his assertion, the more likely its truth becomes. Likewise with the residence in Sutton Coldfield of Sir William Wilson, who had been initiated in Asmole's Lodge in London in 1689, it is not unreasonable to premise that the art was known to others in Warwickshire prior to the formation of Grand Lodge; there is also documentary evidence of pre 1717 speculative working in other counties, notably Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire.

I propose however on this occasion to discuss Masonic happenings in the Three Shires after 1717; that is to say, to deal with Lodges and their ancillaries, constituted under the auspices of Grand Lodge, and with subjects related thereto.

Although their activities overlap at certain times, it will be most convenient to treat the Counties separately, and Warwickshire will be taken first.

The first Lodge was consecrated at the Woolpack Hotel, Warwick on the 22nd April 1728 by W. Bro. James Prescott, who in the First Minute Book of the Grand Lodge of England, is described as Provincial Grand Master of Warwickshire - it was many years later that Brethren were said to be Provincial Grand Masters for a Province, rather than of it. Of Brother Prescott's Masonic Career nothing can be found either locally and ^{at} or London, and it is improbable that he acted as Provincial Grand Master other than to consecrate the Warwick Lodge referred to, which incidentally was numbered 66 - Lodges were not named in the sense we now understand that term until some sixty years afterwards - and was erased from the Roll of Grand Lodge in 1754 - probably after many years of inactivity.

Let us proceed a little further with Provincial history before returning to private Lodges; there is ample evidence that the County of Warwick was without a Provincial authority from about 1740 to 1792, yet in 1928 the Province celebrated its double centenary, that is to say it takes precedence from the date of the formation of the first Lodge at Warwick, and if you consult the Masonic Year Book, you will find that is the case. The Provincial Grand Master at the time of the celebration, R. W. Bro. Col. Sir William Wyley was under no misunderstanding about the break in continuity as may be gathered by reading the magnificent address he delivered at the Birmingham Town Hall on the 14th May 1928.

Returning now to the privates Lodges of the County, No.125 was consituted at the Swan in Birmingham in 1733, and three years later, in 1736, No.149 came into being at the Kings Arms in Edgbaston Street.

Lodge No.149 had been renumbered 83 in 1755, and left Birmingham for Wolverhapmton in 1766; No.125 on the other hand is very interesting and has been the cause of much discussion for it was from this Lodge that St.Paul's Lodge, now No.43 took its Double Centenary in 1933.

No.125 clearly was a Modern Lodge for the good and sufficient reason that it was Constituted many years before Antient Grand Lodge was formed. It was renumbered 109 in 1740 and 64 in 1755. There is not now neither has there been for 190 years, any evidence that the Lodge did other than become dormant for many years in the seventeentforties and seventeentfifties; and then took place what surely must be one of the most remarkable masonic conincidences on record. You will recollect that I have just said that in the closing up of the numbers in 1755, this 1733 Lodge became No.64 on the Register of the Moderns. In 1764 some Birmingham Brethren made application to Athol Grand Lodge for a Warrant and were granted No.64 dated December 1764; this Warrant was a relict of a Deptford Lodge constituted in 1757. You will appreciate then that there were ~~new~~ two Warrants in Birmingham each bearing No.64, one issued by the Moderns, the other by the Antients.

Moreover it is extremely probable that amongst those who in 1764 applied for Antient Warrant, granted as No.64, were some who owed allegiance to the Modern Lodge No.64.

Meanwhile there would appear to have been a general skirmish between the freemasons of the Town of Birmingham, for early in 1764 the Grand Secretary of the Antients had made a special journey from London with these terms of reference:-

to examine, hear, and adjust and determine all singular matters of complaints, disputes and controversies then subsisting or obtaining in or between the Members of Lodge No.71 or any other Brethren in Birmingham.

Lodge No.71 incidentally had been constituted at the George in Digbeth in 1758.

Lawrence Dermott brought with him a new Warrant and constituted a Lodge No.124 accordingly, as well as installing the First Master. Thereafter the new Lodge, Antient No.124, met with Ancient No.64 at the Kings Head in New Street, until in 1767 the Brethren of No.124 applied to Modern Grand Lodge for a Warrant of Confirmation for their theoretically existing Warrant No.64; this was granted on the 2nd February of that year and as you perhaps remember the Centenary Jewel for St. Paul's Lodge was granted in 1867.

In 1765, Modern Lodge No.342 was constituted at Coventry by James Sketchley, a Past Master of Antient Lodge No.124, but it is important to note that in the Minutes of

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the Consecration Meeting he is described as of Lodge No.64, so that in 1765 he, who 27 years later was to become the first Provincial Grand Secretary of the Province of Warwickshire, was either concurrently a Modern Mason and an Athol Mason or he was an Athol Mason who tacitly allowed the Coventry Brethren to assume by similarity in Lodge No. that he was a Modern Mason.

About this time the following Notice appeared in Aris's Birmingham Gazette:-

Stolen from the Red Lion Inn in Digbeth, Birmingham, on Sunday the 27th July, a Silver Pint CUP, with the Masons' Arms and a Porcupine and Lion engraved thereon.

One guinea reward for intelligence of same, from Joseph Piper at the Red Lion aforesaid.

The importance - I might even say the necessity of searching the local press in these investigations on former times is shown in reference to Lodge No.71. There are no records at Grand Lodge as to its place of Meeting; there is ample evidence in the local press however.

Returning now to our itinerary, Freemasonry went at first to Coventry in 1755 when two Athol Lodges were founded; one of them met for about two years and the other for about 25 years, so that one Modern Lodge - the No.342 of which we have just spoken - and one Antient worked in Coventry from 1765 to 1775; the longer lived of the Antient Lodges Lapsed about the time when Trinity Lodge now No.254 was constituted in 1785 as No.471.

Recapitulating then, we may note that Freemasonry under the auspices of Grand Lodge came to Warwickshire as follows:

- To Warwick in 1728.
- To Birmingham in 1733.
- To Coventry in 1755.
- To Kenilworth in 1778, and it may be

said to have worked with continuity,

- in Coventry from 1755,
- in Birmingham from 1758,
- in Alcester from 1794,
- in Warwick from 1808,
- in Leamington from 1829,
- in Nuneaton from 1836,
- and in Rugby from 1844.

In 1785 the Secretary of St. Pauls Lodge - which had just been so named and had grown out of the rather uncertain fusion of 64 Modern, 64 Antient and 124 Antient, was directed to write to the Grand Secretary to ascertain whether there was a Provincial Grand Master within the Warwickshire district.

On the 21st January of that year i.e. 1785 the Grand Secretary replied that there was not an appointment of a Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire.

Immediately afterwards efforts were made to form a joint Province of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, but nothing came of them, and it was on 1st June 1792 that the Grand Master appointed Thomas Thompson, M.P. for Evesham as Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire.

Bull in his History of Warwickshire Freemasonry states

Returns to Warrinckshaw

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that Thomas Thompson was a descendant of the Rev. John Thompson sometime Vicar of Knottingley, Co. York., he was in fact the nephew of the Vicar and took his name from his Mother, his father being Levi, a Jew well known in the City and on change. ^{as we have noted} [R.W. Bro. Thompson was well educated and very rich, but subsequent to holding a meeting some six days after his appointment he did little if anything for the Province. At this meeting he appointed his Deputy - James Timmins - and six other Provincial Officers including James Sketchley as Secretary.

The Deputy, a very zealous worker, conducted the affairs of the Province with great satisfaction to all until his death lamented throughout the Midlands by Masons and non-masons, in 1809.

During the reign as Deputy of James Timmins, there was made one of the infrequent attacks on the Order, but as a result mainly of his personality [and [assiduity] it came to a very quick death.

The following advertsiement appeared on the 12th June 1797 in the local paper:-

here read pages 6 to 14 of the
Circle paper.

Masonry.

In consequence of a recommendation from the Government to arm the people for the protection of persons and property in their respective Parishes, and also from a respectable requisition to me, a meeting of Masons was held on Saturday evening last to take into consideration the propriety of forming one or more companies out of this society, which being unanimously approved of by all present I do hereby appoint another meeting to be held this day at 4 o'clock in the afternoon at the Shakespeare Tavern where the company of every Brother Mason is particularly requested.

James Timmins,

Deputy Provincial Grand Master for the County of Warwick.

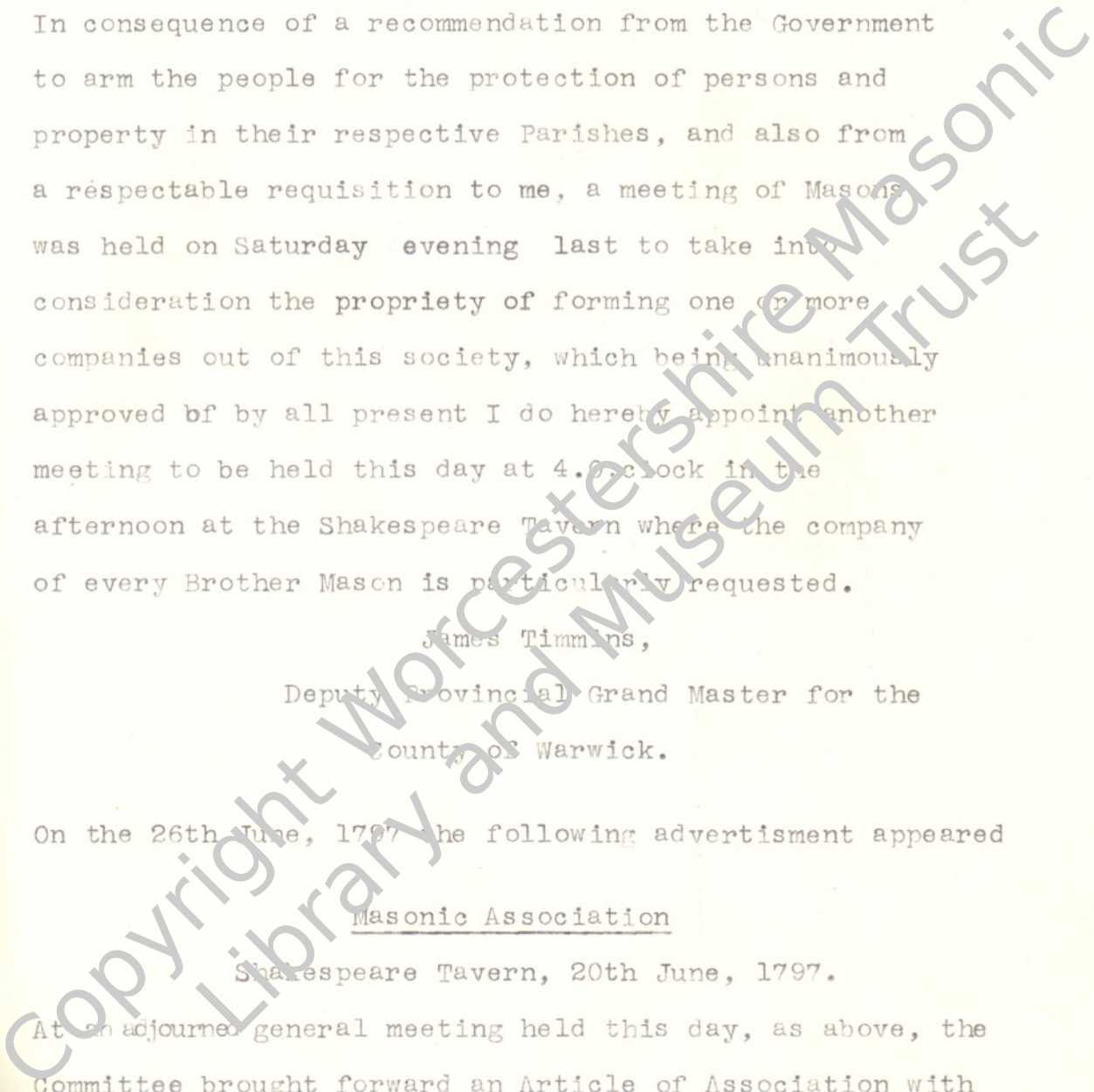
On the 26th June, 1797 the following advertisement appeared

Masonic Association

Shakespeare Tavern, 20th June, 1797.

At an adjourned general meeting held this day, as above, the Committee brought forward an Article of Association with General Rules for the Regulation of the Corps, which being read were unanimously approved.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee do immediately make an offer to the Government of the services of this Association.



As there are many Freemasons, hearty wellwishers to to the success of this undertaking, who from age or other infirmities cannot attend in person

Resolved:

That a subscription be opened and the money so raised applied to the purpose of providing arms and accoutrements for those Brothers who may find it inconvenient to furnish themselves with the same.

Resolved:

That these proceedings be inserted in both the Birmingham papers.

Resolved:

That the thanks of this meeting be given to our worthy Brother James Timmins, Deputy Provincial Grand Master for his able conduct in the chair.

Charles Greatrex,
Secretary.

On the 17th July the following advertisement appeared:

Shortly will be published

By a Brother of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons for the use and behoof of Hod-carriers, Winch Turners, Mule Drivers and all other attendents of Masons

Masonic Tactisms.

Thompson, who died in ~~1850~~, was succeeded as Provincial
1818,

Grand Master in 1810 by the Honourable Washington Shirley - afterwards 8th Earl Ferrers who reigned until his death in 1842 having been appointed additionally in 1830 as Provincial Grand Master for Staffordshire, resigning the latter office owing to ill health in 1837.

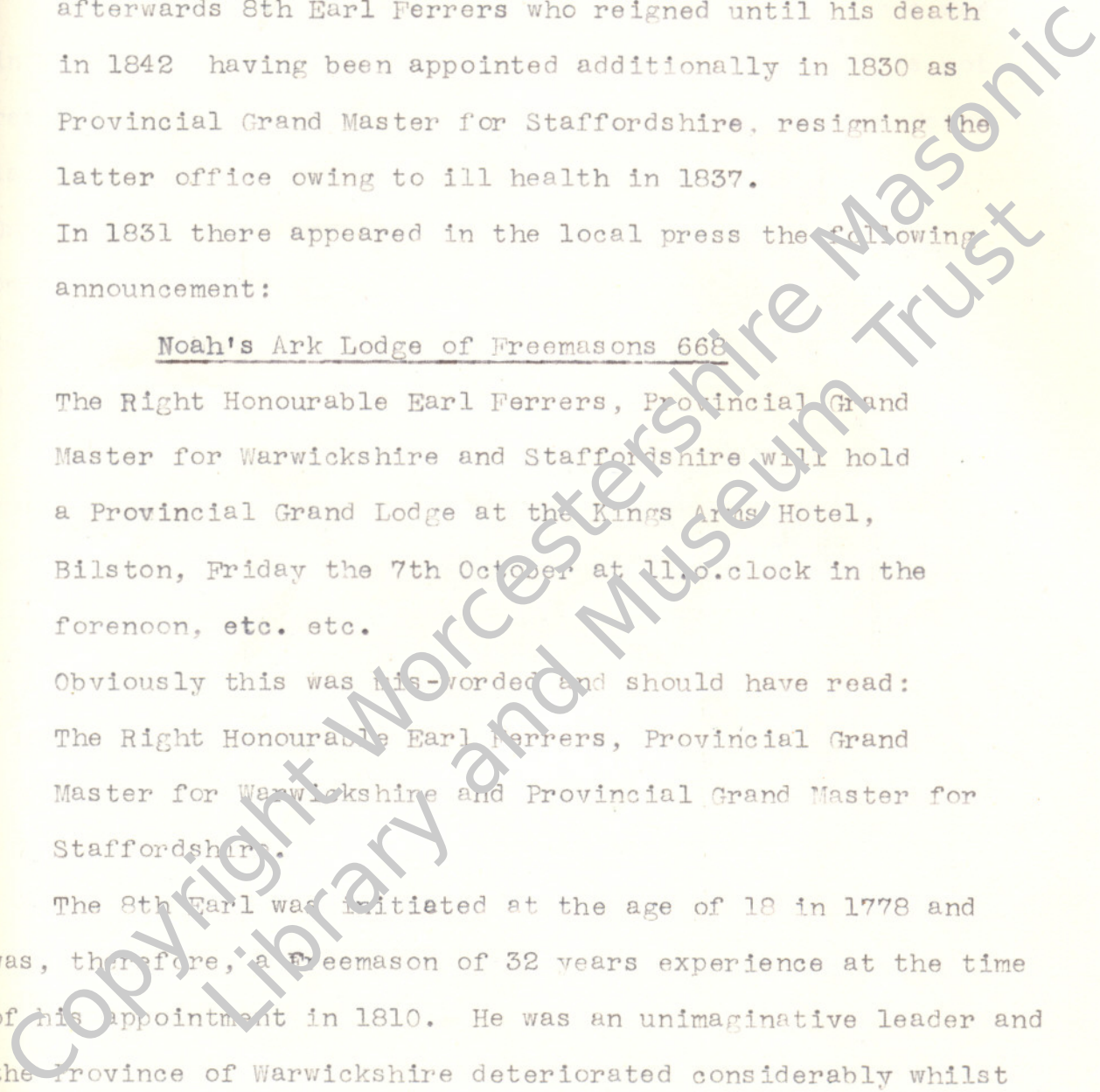
In 1831 there appeared in the local press the following announcement:

Noah's Ark Lodge of Freemasons 668

The Right Honourable Earl Ferrers, Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire and Staffordshire will hold a Provincial Grand Lodge at the Kings Arms Hotel, Bilston, Friday the 7th October at 11.0. clock in the forenoon, etc. etc.

Obviously this was mis-worded and should have read: The Right Honourable Earl Ferrers, Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire and Provincial Grand Master for Staffordshire.

The 8th Earl was initiated at the age of 18 in 1778 and was, therefore, a Freemason of 32 years experience at the time of his appointment in 1810. He was an unimaginative leader and the Province of Warwickshire deteriorated considerably whilst he had charge as his Deputy had not the calibre of James Timmins. In 1817 there were nine Warwickshire Lodges, five in Birmingham and one each in Coventry, Warwick, Alcester and Sutton Coldfield, in 1840 that number had decreased to five.

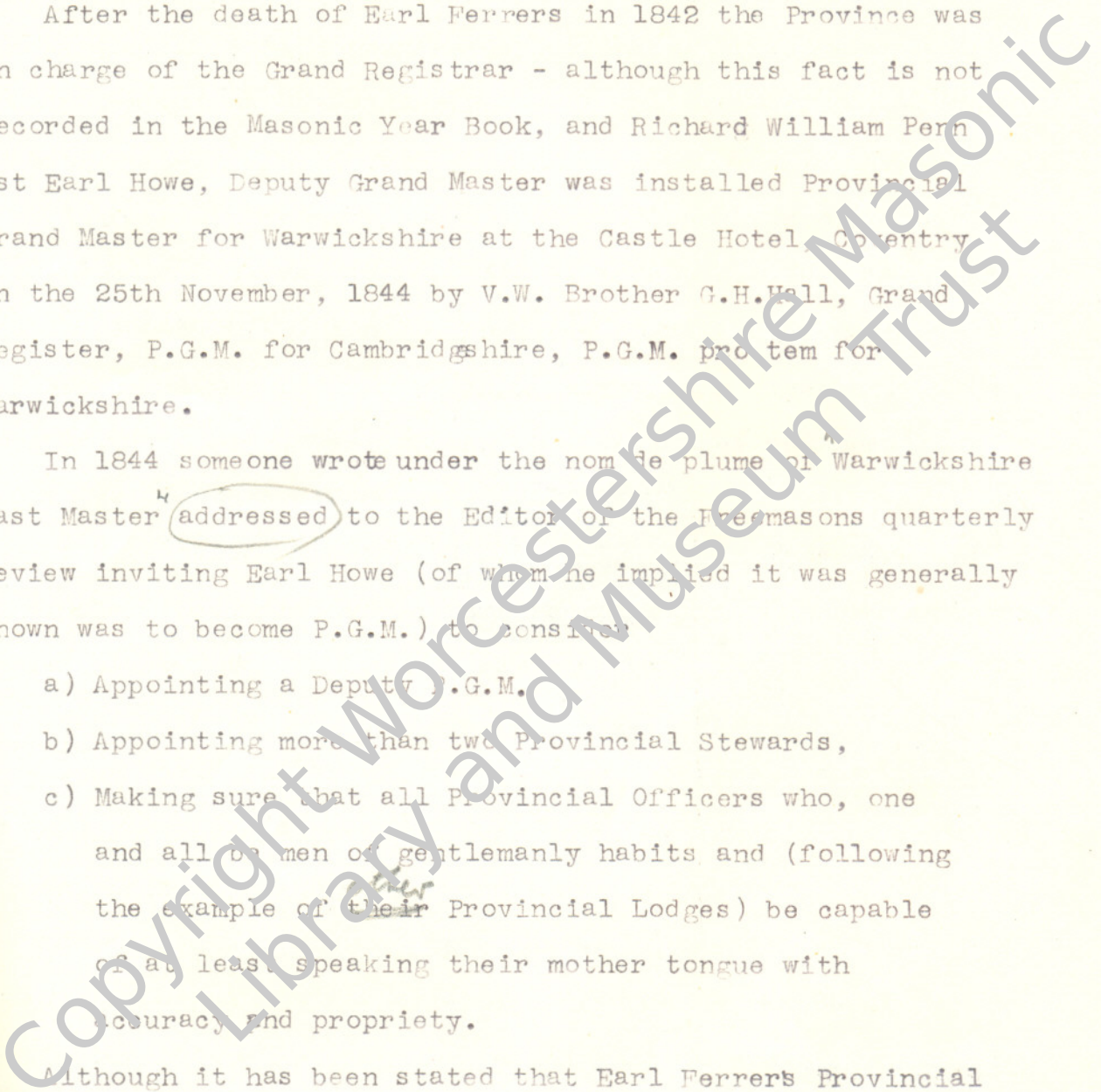


After the death of Earl Ferrers in 1842 the Province was in charge of the Grand Registrar - although this fact is not recorded in the Masonic Year Book, and Richard William Penn 1st Earl Howe, Deputy Grand Master was installed Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire at the Castle Hotel, Coventry on the 25th November, 1844 by V.W. Brother G.H. Hall, Grand Register, P.G.M. for Cambridgeshire, P.G.M. pro tem for Warwickshire.

In 1844 someone wrote under the nom de plume of Warwickshire Past Master ⁴addressed to the Editor of the Freemasons quarterly review inviting Earl Howe (of whom he implied it was generally known was to become P.G.M.) to consider

- a) Appointing a Deputy P.G.M.
- b) Appointing more than two Provincial Stewards,
- c) Making sure that all Provincial Officers who, one and all be men of gentlemanly habits and (following the example of ^{their} Provincial Lodges) be capable of at least speaking their mother tongue with accuracy and propriety.

Although it has been stated that Earl Ferrers Provincial Grand Mastership was disappointing, it must be made clear that for the last eight years of his life he suffered from paralytic and apoplectical afflictions, and in 1840 Earl Howe who had been appointed Grand Senior Warden in 1829 took the place of P.G.M.



without taking the acting title in one of the largest Masonic processions ever held in Birmingham, that on the 18th June for the laying of the Foundation Stone of the extended Queens Hotel *see file* in Bath Row.

With the appointment of Earl Howe and Deputies of ability such as Nicholas Lee, Torre, Bell Fletcher, J.W. Boughton Leigh and Charles W. Elkington the Province commenced an ascendancy from which it has not in any serious way been diverted. From the Masonic ^{population} publication in 1840 of five Lodges and possibly 150 to 175 members, there were 32 Lodges in 1900 with approximately 1250 members, and in ^{to day} 1952 the figures ^{are} were 151 (excluding the Installed Masters Lodge and the London Warwickshire Lodge) and ^{9,000} 9,200.

Before leaving Warwickshire [for Staffordshire] it is interesting to record that in 1811 the Deputy Grand Master of the ^{Antients} counties granted a dispensation to Brother John Dowling W.M. of Lodge No. 305 on the Register of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

"To summon and congregate a number of persons - Freemasons - and men and there in the name of God and the Deputy Grand Master to open a Grand Lodge and preside as D.G.M. for three hours and no longer."

Lodge No.305 I.C. was in the 7th Dragoon Guards then stationed at Great Brook Street Barracks.

The purpose of the dispensation was to enable the consecration of the Athol Lodge at the Swan, Great Brook Street, Ashted.

Incidentally at the 1837 meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge it was reported that since the last meeting a Lodge had been established at Nuneaton by authority of the Grand Master.

Going now to Staffordshire the first Lodge in the county was constituted at Wolverhampton in March 1732; it had a life of about 25 years. Thereafter there was little activity in the county until about 1765 when Modern Masonry returned to Wolverhampton by the constituting of Lodge No. 77 at the Swan, High Green and the transfer thence from Birmingham of No. 83; the former worked for about 40 and the latter for some 6 or 7 years.

In the meantime the Ancients had established themselves at Newcastle-under-Lyne in 1763; Moderns following them there in 1767; the former lapsed after three years but was revived in 1799 after which it lived for 20 years. The Modern Lodge No. 398 lasted for 8 years but the Moderns re-established themselves in 1793 for a further 8 years.

The first Lodge at Lichfield was constituted in 1784 No. 220 of the Ancients and it lived for almost 20 years. The Moderns arrived there in 1787 with the Lodge of Unity which lapsed in 1809.

The first St. John's Lodge was constituted in 1814, so named in 1820 and arrived at Lichfield from Leek in 1833, it was erased in 1850; consequently that fine ancient city has Masonic continuity only from 1864 when the present St. John's Lodge was founded.

Freemasonry did not get to the five town until 1803/5.

The Ancients then establishing themselves Etruria in the former year and at Burslam, Hanley and at Lane End in the latter year.

The oldest practicing Lodge in the Province of Staffordshire is indeed one of those three, it was named St. Martin Lodge in 1807 having taken Ancient Warrant No.130 delivered back to Grand Lodge from Wolverhampton where it had first been issued in 1764, thus it is that the Staffordshire M.C. gives two dates of Warrants, viz. 1764 and 1805, St. Martin's Lodge rightly celebrated its centenary in 1905.

There was virtually a break in continuity at Wolverhampton from 1819 when Noah's Ark Lodge left there for Bilston until 1834 when St. Peter's Lodge, now No 419, was founded, so that in Staffordshire we may say that ^{Freemasonry} under the auspices of Grand Lodge was first practiced in

Wolverhampton	in	1732,
Newcastle-under-Lyne	in	1763,
Lichfield	in	1784,
Hansworth	in	1793,
Lamvorth	in	1796,
Etruria	in	1803,
Burslam	in	1805,
Stoke-on-Trent	in	1807,
Tipton	in	1813,
Stafford	in	1814,
Utoxeter	in	1838, <i>Walsall</i>
Burton-on-Trent	in	1854,
West Bromwich	in	1856,

Incidentally the Lodge at Burton was for 14 years held in the Board Room of the Burton Brewery Company.

On a weighted average basis you will see that Staffordshire is very much junior to Warwickshire.

The first P.G.M. was the Honourable and Reverend Francis Egerton, was appointed according to M.Y.B. in 1789, but as his letter to the Grand Secretary stating that he would consider it an honour to be so appointed was dated 1791, it would appear that his appointment has been ante-dated in the literature. He was the son of the Bishop of Durham and Rector, Whitchurch, Salop and was also P.G.M. for the counties of Shropshire, Flint, Denbigh and Montgomery.

During the early years Egerton's zeal was marked and although his duties in Staffordshire were few he lost interest at the turn of the century and it must have been a relief when the 8th Earl Ferrers P.G.M. for Warwickshire was given this appointment in 1831.

Shortly after this P.G.M. was stricken, as we have already noted, with Paralysis and although he revived P.G.L. he was succeeded in 1837 by Colonel the Honourable George Anson. The Grand Registrar has had to take charge on two occasions, but on the whole there has been a stability, and if one may use the word without being misunderstood, wholesomeness in the working of the P.G.L. of Staffordshire and whilst such a quality might be inspired by the titular head, it does not necessarily follow that this is the case, and it would appear that a nucleus of sound Grand Officers can do much; it is interesting to note that in 1900 Staffordshire with 33 Lodges had one more than Warwickshire, and today Warwickshire has approximately

twice as many as Staffordshire.

Anson certainly revived Provincial Grand Lodge and he presided at a memorable meeting of it in 1847, this being described as the 5th meeting since the resuscitation.

Newcastle Brethren left home at daybreak and made their way to Whitmore and were taken from there by special train to Trent Valley Station. Brother Kato who had prepared a wonderful breakfast for them stated as a Freemason of 70 years standing that he could not recollect such a meeting for 50 years. P.G.L. was held in the Guildhall at noon and at 2 o'clock the Brethren attended divine service at St. Michael's church, afterwards partaking of a sumptuous banquet at the George Hotel.

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