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A SHORT HISTORY
OF THE ORIGINAL
EVESHAM LODGE
MERCY AND TRUTH NO. 703

Compiled by

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Library and Museum

In presenting this short account of the beginnings of Speculative Masonry in Evesham, I wish to express my gratitude to the following Worshipful Brethren:

WOR. BRO. W. J. CRAVEN, P.P.G.W./Worcs., for whose instigation I started the necessary research, and without whose constant encouragement I should never have completed the allotted task.

WOR. BRO. F. UNDERWOOD, P.P.G.D.C., for placing his invaluable knowledge unreservedly at my disposal, and

The late WOR. BRO. E. A. BARNARD for information gained from his notes on the Mercy and Truth Lodge.

F.D.

Evesham, March 1954.

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MERCY AND TRUTH LODGE No 703

IT is reasonable to suppose that Lodges of Operative Masonry functioned in Evesham during and after the construction of the Abbey, but it was not until 1818 that our town had its own Speculative Lodge. It is true that many years before that date the need for such a Lodge had been felt, as is evidenced by the following letter written on 11th December, 1771, by John Brown, Mercer, of Evesham, to the Grand Secretary (Heseltine) in London: "You will no doubt be rather surprised at the reception of a letter from one not personally known, but hope ye subject will in some measure atone for ye freedom taken—the purport of which is, we find you are at present Grand Secretary to ye Grand Lodge of England, under ye modern constitution, and as we have in this town about five Masons, all of which have been raised to ye Degree of M.M.—one or two of which are P.M. and R.A., we have lately had a meeting to consult about holding a Lodge in this town (as we are all well-wishers to ye Craft), but as we are so few in number and fearful ye expenses of a Warrant, with ye furniture of ye Lodge will be too high for our number, we should therefore take it as a particular favour if you would be so kind as to inform us, what ye expense of a warrant from Grand Lodge will be, and whether (as we have no Lodge near us) our P.M. cannot legally install a Master in ye Chair, and whether our giving a particular account of what Lodge he was Master of, and where ye other brethren were legally made and raised will be sufficient to procure ye Warrant or what proof and recommendation will be required for that purpose.

I am, with great respect in ye name of all ye brethren,

Your most obedient humble servant and bro.

John Brown."

Evesham,
Worcester.
11 December 1771.

The above letter is in possession of the Grand Librarian, but unfortunately there is no record of a reply, and it was not until nearly fifty years later that John Brown's ambition was fulfilled, by which time he had presumably joined the Grand Lodge above, as his name does not appear in the Mercy and Truth records.

In 1818, on May 13th, Mercy and Truth Lodge No. 703 was formed by dispensation of the Grand Master, Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex. This dispensation, which is still in our possession, constituted William Farr, George Mathieson, John E. Lane, John Monk, Hugh Ferry, Thomas Snapp, Samuel Dangerfield and others resident in Evesham into a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons

under the title of Mercy and Truth, to be opened and held at the Cross Keys, Evesham, and authorised them to make, pass and raise, Freemasons according to the Antient Custom of the Craft in all ages and nations throughout the known world; William Farr, George Mathieson, and John E. Lane to be the first Master, Senior, and Junior Wardens respectively.

The Petition of the Founders, which is in possession of Grand Lodge, shows the Masonic origins of these Brethren as follows:

William Farr. A doctor, of Apollo Lodge (Alcester), No. 503, now No. 301. Attended 15 times.

George Mathieson. Of Amphibious Lodge (Heckmondwyke), No. 489, now No. 258. Although nominated as first Senior Warden, this Brother only appears once in the Minutes, and then as a Visitor (25.11.1818).

John E. Lane. A Silversmith, of Worcester Lodge, No. 525, now No. 280. He only attended three times, paid one quarter's dues and then resigned.

John Monk. A Hat Manufacturer of Bridge Street, Evesham, W.M. 1819, attended 49 times, resigned in 1822, of St. Andrews Lodge (London), No. 407, now No. 231.

Hugh Ferry. Of Veterans Lodge, No. 381, erased in 1833, attended 38 times and resigned in 1820.

Thomas Snapp. Of Lodge of Fidelity (London), No. 75, now No. 58, lived in Cheltenham, attended 12 times, resigned 1820.

Samuel Dangerfield. Of Mercian Lodge, No. 578, erased 1832. This Brother appears to have lost interest before the first meeting as his name appears neither in the Minutes nor in the Cash Book.

There is no record of a Consecration Ceremony and probably this is the reason the Lodge was constituted by Dispensation.

The first Meeting was held on Wednesday, May 27th, 1818, when the following were present:—

William Farr	...	...	...	W.M.
John Monk	...	...	...	S.W.
J. E. Lane	...	...	...	J.W.
Thomas Snapp	...	...	...	J.D.
Hugh Ferry	...	...	...	I.G.
George Matthews	...	...	...	Tyler

Although the Grand Lodge Dispensation named the Cross Keys as the meeting place, the Worcestershire Masonic Calendar shows this meeting to have taken place at the Rose & Crown. Apparently our Ancient Brethren were not so punctilious in obtaining Grand

Lodge permission for deviations, as we are nowadays. After going through the first section of the Lectures the business of this meeting was to receive proposals for three Candidates "so that they might be initiated to enable us to fill the various offices." It is to be noted that there was no Senior Deacon in office, and the Minutes were signed by the W.M. acting as Secretary. The Tyler, Bro. Matthews, was a visitor but was elected a member at the next meeting.

The Lodge next met on Wednesday, June 3rd, 1818, when three Candidates, W. L. Phelps, W. Loxley, and T. Harris, were duly initiated. Immediately after initiation Bro. Phelps acted as Senior Deacon, and Bro. Loxley as Treasurer. Rapid promotion indeed! Apparently Bro. Harris did not wish to be Secretary, as the W.M. still signed the Minutes as Secretary.

At the next Meeting three more Candidates were initiated and a joining member enrolled. The new Lodge was now beginning to grow, and on Wednesday, 15th July, 1818, the D.P.G.M., Wor. Bro. W. Thomson, accompanied by the Masters and Officers of Cheltenham, Worcester and Alcester Lodges, attended in order to install the various officers in due and solemn form. The Minutes do not show at what time this meeting commenced, but at 11.0 a.m. a procession was formed and proceeded to Church (un-named) where Divine Service was performed by the Rev. Bro. Palmer, a member of Alcester Lodge, and later P.G.C. of Warwickshire, who gave a most excellent discourse on Masonry. At 2.0 p.m. the Lodge was opened in the First Degree and the D.P.G.M., in the Chair, installed and invested the various officers. At 3.0 p.m. the Lodge was called off for refreshments, and returned to labour at 6.0 p.m., when four new Candidates were proposed and accepted, and W. E. Rouse-Boughton, Esq., proposed and elected a joining member. The Lodge closed in perfect harmony at 7.0 p.m.

Wm. Ed. Rouse-Boughton, of Downton Hall, Salop, and Rous Lench, was Whig M.P. for Evesham, 1818-1826. He succeeded to his father's baronetcy in 1821. According to the Lodge account book, he paid an entrance fee of £30 and maintained his dues of 34s. per annum until the end of 1823, but is never recorded as having attended the Lodge.

The normal fees were four guineas for initiation and one guinea for raising. Joining members paid £1 3s. 6d. in 1818, and one guinea from 1819 onwards. The dues were 8s. per quarter and 2s. per annum for benevolence.

In the Minutes of 27th August, 1818, the name of a Bro. Claret of Cheltenham appears as a visitor. This visitor seems to have made himself "persona grata" with the members of the Lodge, for his name appears on several later occasions. Indeed, an emergency meeting was called on 11th October, 1818, "to take benefit of the attendance of Bro. Claret". At this meeting Benjamin Workman, of whom more later, was initiated, and the third and fourth sections

(of the First Lecture) gone through. Subsequently Bro. Claret, who had been made an Hon. Member, occupied the Chair on five different occasions, the last being on 27th December, 1825, when he duly installed Bros. Phelps, Workman, Haynes, and Warner as Past Masters.

Bro. George Claret, Lodge of Fortitude, No. 12 (London), was evidently a strong believer in himself as an exponent of Masonry. In 1822 he obtained permission of the P.G.L. of Gloucestershire to hold a Lodge of Instruction at Cheltenham, in spite of the fact that the Lodge of Union at Cheltenham had its own L.I. This caused friction between Claret and the Cheltenham W.M., which ended in both being called before the P.G.L. and Bro. Claret being severely censured. Apparently this did not tame him for in the early 1840s a London Brother named George Claret, a Publisher of Rituals, gave Grand Lodge considerable trouble. There are specimens of Clarets Rituals in the Worcestershire Library and Museum.

One wonders on what authority he installed the four brethren of Mercy and Truth as Past Masters. So far as can be gleaned from the Minutes, only one W.M. was properly installed in the Chair. This was W. Farr, installed 1817-18 by Wm. Thomson, D.P.G.M. The next W.M. was J. Monk, who on 6th December, 1818, "passed the Chair" and occupied it as W.M. at the next meeting. The only other W.Ms. during the life of the Lodge were Bros. Haynes, Workman, Warner and Phelps, who as shown above were installed as Past Masters. This was after each of them had occupied the Chair for at least a year.

In this connection it should be noted that before the formation of United Grand Lodge, the Moderns had discontinued the Ceremony of Installation of Masters, and also transferred the words of the 1st and 2nd degrees "in order to guard against knowledge gotten from spurious rituals."

These departures from the ancient landmarks, which were responsible for them being called Moderns, were corrected by The Lodge of Reconciliation (1813-1816), but apparently the influence of the Moderns was still at work during the life of Mercy & Truth, as all the founders were members of former Modern Lodges.

At the first meeting of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire, held at the Reindeer Hotel, Mealcheapen Street, Worcester, on 22nd October, 1822, the following Evesham Brethren were present:

B. Workman, W.M., P.S.G.D.

John Warner

C. Kendrick

J. Hatch

W. L. Phelps

C. Holland

} Stewards

An interesting member of the old Lodge was Benjamin Workman, father of Henry Workman, a former Mayor of Evesham, who was responsible for the Workman Bridge and Gardens. When initiated in 1818 he was shown as of Pershore. In 1822 during one of his periods of Mastership, a letter from the P.G. Secretary regarding a meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge at the Reindeer, Worcester, showed his address as Hampton. In 1826, however, he appears to have been Churchwarden at Bengeworth, and is described in Shawcross and Barnards History of Bengeworth as "Attorney at Law". The then Vicar of Bengeworth, the Rev. John Shaw, was initiated in this Lodge on 25th May, 1819, but there is no record of his passing or raising, although the fact that in a collection of books left by him to succeeding Vicars there were two volumes of Masonic sermons, would make it appear that his interest was more than transitory.

In the Evesham Journal of Saturday, November 30th, 1812, there is a report of the Ceremony of laying the Corner Stone of the new school at Hampton, at which Benjamin Workman officiated. At the conclusion of the Ceremony, Mr. Workman said: "Having been for many years the Master of the Evesham Lodge of Freemasons, and having assisted in the laying of the first stone of the Pivvie Spa at Cheltenham, I ought to have been enabled without the direction of the Architect to have got through the Ceremony of laying this."

Another interesting member was Dr. Edward Barry O'Meara, who joined the Lodge on 18th August, 1819.

O'Meara was born in Ireland in 1786, entered the army as Assistant Surgeon to the 62nd Regiment in 1804, and in 1807 was dismissed the Service for having acted as Second in a duel between two brother officers.

Subsequently he became Surgeon on H.M.S. Victorious, and later on the Bellerophon, when Napoleon was received on board as prisoner in 1815. Bonaparte was attracted by his ability to speak Italian, and when his own Surgeon, Mengeaud, refused to follow him into exile, asked for O'Meara to stay with him as Medical Attendant. This request was granted by the Admiralty. Apparently he was at first used, to some extent, to spy on his charge, but afterwards "changed sides", and in 1818 was dismissed from his post for intriguing with the Emperor. He carried with him a letter, signed by Napoleon, which read: "Je prie mes parens et mes amis de croire tout ce que le docteur O'Meara leur dira relativement à la position où je me trouve, et aux sentiments que je conserve. S'il voit ma bonne Louise, je la prie de permettre qu'il lui baise la main." O'Meara's partisanship for Napoleon was popular with many in England. Indeed, Byron in his "Age of Bronze" mentions his dismissal thus:

"The Staff Surgeon who maintained his cause,
Hath lost his place, and gained the World's applause."

The Doctor's association with Evesham was probably through

Bro. W. E. Rouse-Boughton, for in 1823 he became third husband of Theodosia, daughter of Sir Edward Boughton, uncle to this member of our Lodge. He died in London in 1836.

The Lodge met on 90 occasions, in various places.

1818-1819	Rose & Crown, Evesham.
1819-1823	Crown, Evesham.
1824-1826	Cross Keys, Evesham.
1826-1827	Ship, Pershore.
1827	Coach & Horses, Pershore.
1827-1831	Cross Keys, Evesham.

Only four meetings are recorded in 1827, three in 1829, none in 1829, one in 1830, and one in 1831, the final meeting.

From 1822 onwards members seem to have lost interest, and the Treasurer appears to have had difficulty in collecting his dues. In that year, three members were excluded for non-payment. In February 1825, a by-law was passed to the effect that each candidate, on admission, "to enter into a note of hand, in order to secure the regular payment of fees". That this was enforced is evidenced by a minute that on 10.7.1828 Bro. Chandler resigned and withdrew his note. At the same meeting a resolution was passed that Brothers in default be again written to for fees and as a last resource, at the final meeting on 9.11.1831 the Master was requested to write to all members, threatening proceedings for non-payment of dues.

Apparently this threat did not have the desired effect, as there is no record of any further meeting, although the Lodge was re-numbered by Grand Lodge as No. 454 in 1832, and not finally erased until 1833.

A Grand Lodge minute dated 28.8.1833 states: "The members have not met for nearly two years and therefore the Lodge may be considered as defunct."

During the early years of the Lodge's existence several of the ordinary meetings were held as Lodges of Instruction, but on 1st December, 1824, a separate L.I. was formed. The minutes, such as they are, are written in a small unruled exercise book, with a wood block picture of a scissors grinder on the cover, and titled in perfect copper plate writing. The inside title page is inscribed "Rules to be observed in the Lodge of Instruction established December 1st, 1824" followed by: "We the undersigned have agreed to form a Lodge of Instruction under the following rules:—

- (1) That the Lodge be held once a fortnight, commencing on Wednesday, December 1st, 1824, at Bro. Trotman's, and continue to meet at the respective Landlords (alternately) who are regular and good members of our Lodge.

- (2) Each member is expected to expend one shilling every night of meeting and forfeit 3d. on his non-attendance. No excuse to be permitted.
- (3) The Lodge to be opened precisely at 6 o'clock in the evening in the winter and 8 in the summer and close not later than 10, unless any particular circumstance should occur.
- (4) The forfeit money to be spent each night of meeting.

signed: Wm Law Phelps.	B. Workman
John Warner.	Thos Sheaf
Benjn Padgett.	W. Haynes.
Wm. Trotman.	
George Matthus (Matthews)	
Thos Pearn.	

There is little to be gleaned from these minutes, which give no indication of the work done. From them we learn that the L.I. only lasted from December 1st, 1824, to April, 1825. Meetings were held at Bro. Trotman's, The Cross Keys, Bro. Jarrett's, The Bell, or Blue Bell (now extinct), and Bro. Penney's, The Royal Oak.

Occasionally details of expenditure are given, e.g., March 9th, 1825 (at Bro. Trotman's):

3 Qts. Cider, 2s. 0d.; 3 Qts. Ale, 1s. 0d., Tobacco, 10d.; 6 Suppers, 3s. 0d.; Swig, 2s. 0d.; Sugar and Rum, 8d.; Total, 10s. 0d.

On this occasion six members were present, and six recorded as absent, who presumably sent their fines of 3d. each towards the above conviviality.

Although the old Lodge ceased to exist in 1833, there are still several tangible mementoes of its activities. We have, in our Supper Room, the Master's Chair, and also the original Tracing Boards. All these have been carefully and successfully renovated owing to the kind offices and enthusiasm of Wor. Bro. W. J. Craven. Abbot Lichfield Lodge still uses the Volume of the Sacred Law, on which the Brethren of Mercy and Truth sealed their obligations, and two brass columns of the ancient lodge adorn the Secretary's Table at each meeting of the present Evesham Lodges. An entry in the Inventories 1688 and 1908 of Worcester Lodge, No. 280, read: "Two books that belonged to the old Evesham Lodge, Mercy and Truth, No. 703, two brass columns from the same lodge, Holy Bible ditto. The above property of the Evesham Lodge presented by Wor. Bro. T. L. Smith, February 1890 and to be returned to Evesham should a Lodge be ultimately opened there."

Apparently when Abbot Lichfield Lodge was founded in 1909 these articles had disappeared from 280 Lodge, but the two columns,

which are inscribed one "Mercy - Truth Lodge No 703 Evesham 1818 Erased 1833. T.L.S." and the other "Presented to Worcester Lodge No. 280, Feb 20th 1890 by Bro. T. Lamb Smith" later came into the hands of Bro. J. T. Williams who handed them over to Abbot Lichfield Lodge.

The two Books mentioned in the 280 inventory are evidently the Minute Book and Cash Book from which most of these notes have been compiled. They have been found in the possession of the Worcs. Prov. Grand Lodge Library, but where they were when the Columns were handed over to Abbot Lichfield Lodge is a mystery still unsolved.

The original warrant was also found with these books and four Grand Lodge certificates in the names of Benjamin Podgett, Walter Haynes, John Hatch and Robert Smith. The first three certificates dated 15th December, 1825, were forwarded to Evesham by Stage Coach in a wrapper addressed to Benjamin Workman, Esq., bearing on the back the Grand Lodge Seal in wax and marked on the front with the charge for carriage (1s. 8d.).

Another two interesting documents were found in the Cash Book. The first appears to be the Charity Steward's account for the year 1828 and is signed by John Warner, Watch & Clock Maker of Evesham, at that time I.P.M. and Secretary of the Lodge. From this it would appear that the main purpose of the 2s. p.a. benevolence levy was to relieve transient brethren. In this year Brethren of 20 different lodges were relieved to the extent of 2s. 6d. each, one "foreigner" received 1s. 6d. and the widow of a member of Lodge 651 received 2s. 6d.

The second document is dated 19th January, 1846, and reads:—
"Received of B. Workman the following Masonic Jewels which I promise to restore to him on or before Monday next:

Past Master's

Deacon's

Junior Warden's

Master's

Signed

T. R. Greer (. . .)

What connection T. R. Greer had with Freemasonry is not known, nor is the subsequent history of the jewels.

It has been rumoured that certain Evesham people who emigrated to Australia in the latter half of the 19th century founded a lodge there having the same name and number as the old Evesham Lodge, and that some of the relics of Mercy and Truth went with them. Correspondence with Masonic authorities in Australia has however failed to find any trace of such a Lodge.

The Worcester Lodge, No. 280, has in its possession a Theatre Playbill headed as follows:

Theatre Drury Lane, Evesham.
By desire of
The Masters, Officers and Brethren of the
Lodge of Freemasons
Monday Evening, Dec. 11th 1820

The programme included a play:

“Secrets worth Knowing.”
or A Lesson for the Ladies
several variety turns
and a Masonic address by Bro. Le Grose.

Bro. Le Grose is shown as a visitor to the Lodge on Wednesday, December 27th, 1820, but with no indication as to the name of his Lodge or place of residence.

‘Drury Lane’ was a facetious name given to ‘the Newdley’ on this occasion.

A list of the various relics mentioned in this paper is appended, and also a list of all members of the old Evesham Lodge, which may perhaps enable some of our present members to trace masonic ancestry in the town.

LIST OF RELICS
MASTER'S CHAIR
THREE TRACING BOARDS
V. S. I.
TWO BRASS COLUMNS
WARRANT
MINUTE BOOK
CASH BOOK
11 MINUTE BOOK
FOUR G.L. CERTIFICATES
PLAYBILL
WRAPPER WITH G.L. SEAL
CHARITY LIST
RECEIPT FOR JEWELS

MEMBERS OF MERCY AND TRUTH LODGE, No. 703

Evesham, 1818 - 1833

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Initiated</i>	<i>Joined</i>
Arkless, Richard	Evesham	27.12.1819	
Atkins, William	Blockley	30.5.1821	
Baker, Henry	Pershore		3.6.1818
Bendenham, John	Evesham	2.12.1818	
Bowen, Thomas	Pershore	14.7.1824	
Bryan, William	Pershore		10.6.1818
Chandler, James	Evesham	14.7.1825	
Claridge, Wm. P.	Evesham	27.4.1825	
Clemens, William	Birlingham	7.9.1825	
Dignley, Samuel	Evesham	29.9.1819	
Farr, William	Evesham		FOUNDER
Ferry, Hugh	Evesham		FOUNDER
Green, John	Evesham	2.12.1818	
Goore, Wm. Henry	Pershore	18.8.1819	
Hardy, William	Evesham	24.11.1819	
Harley, Edward	Pershore		27.12.1822
Harris, Thomas	Evesham	3.6.1818	
Hatch, John	Pershore	25.5.1819	
Haynes, Walter	Pensworth	29.7.1818	
Holland, Corbett	Crothorne	30.6.1818	
Holmes, William	Evesham	18.8.1819	
Hopkins, William	Evesham	2.12.1819	
Henderson, John	Evesham	29.8.1827	
Jarrett, John	Evesham	10.6.1818	
Jarrett, Thomas	Evesham	27.8.1818	
Jordon, Samuel	Cheltenham	28.4.1819	
Kendrick, Charles	Stanway	28.6.1820	
Kinsey, Samuel	Evesham	30.9.1828	
Lane, John Eames	Evesham		FOUNDER
Loughton, Joseph	Pershore	27.12.1822	
Leonard, George	Evesham	25.5.1819	
Leonard, John	Evesham	24.11.1819	
Loxley, William	Hampton	3.6.1818	Died 1819
Mathews, George	Evesham		3.6.1818
Maurice, Capt.	Plymouth	18.8.1819	
Melen, Henry	Pershore	30.4.1823	
Millsom, John	Cheltenham	27.10.1819	
Milton, Thomas	Pershore	30.12.1818	
Monk, John	Evesham		FOUNDER
Morgan, John	Evesham	24.4.1822	

O'Meara, Edward B.			18.8.1819
Padgett, Benjamin	Bengeworth	10.6.1818	
Pearn, Thomas	Evesham	29.7.1818	
Penney, William	Evesham	2.12.1818	
Percy, Henry	Bengeworth	28.4.1819	
Phelps, William Law	Evesham	3.6.1818	
Rouse-Boughton, Wm. E.	Rous Lench		8.7.1818
Shepp, Thomas	Cheltenham		FOUNDER
Shaw, John (Rev.)	Bengeworth	25.5.1819	
Sheaf, Thomas	Offenham	30.6.1819	
Smith, Robert	Wick	3.5.1826	
Taylor, George	Bengeworth	25.5.1819	
Tidmarsh, William	Evesham	16.7.1822	
Trotman, William	Evesham	7.4.1824	
Tugwood, Henry	Powick	10.6.1818	
Warner, John	Evesham	29.7.1818	
Workman, Benjn.	Evesham	11.10.1818	
Workman, William	Pershore	18.7.1822	
Wright, Henry	Evesham	29.9.1819	