

PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF
WORCESTERSHIRE

Brethren, Before we come on to talk about our own Province, I feel that I should make a quick journey through the early History of Freemasonry in Genral.

Let us therefore go back to the formation in 1717 when the four Lodges met and decided along with other brethren to form a Grand Lodge. Remember that this was in its original sence only in London and the surrounding area. There were other Grand Lodges, but these are another story.

the 1720's saw the consolidation of Masonry, with the Duke of Montagu as Grand Master. Freemasonry became fashionable, and many people made application to join, especially as it had at its head a distinguished person.

In the 1720's we saw the basis of Membership of Grand Lodge (which originally consisted only of the Grand Officers of the year and the Masters and Wardens of regular Lodges) was broadened during the period 'First' to include Past Grand Master's (1724) then later Deputy Grand Masters (1726) and finally Past Grand Wardens in (1727.). In this latter year also the subject of Masonic Clothing came under the attention of Grand Lodge.

In all 'private Lodges and Quarterly Communications and General Meetings' the Masters and Wardens do wear Jewels of Masonry hanging to a white ribbon. The Master wears the Square, the Senior Warden the Level and the Junior Warden the Plumb Rule.

The process of expansion went on throughout the 1730's. But at the same time Grand Lodge was still very much concerned with the problem of 'irregular' Lodges and 'irregularly' made Masons, and in consequence of this and of the unwelcome publicity which the Craft was now attracting, Grand Lodge found it necessary to take action in all these difficulties. In its reaction to these it sowed the seeds of future bitterness and dessention within the Craft for half a Century to come.

In August 1730 the Exposure "The Mysteries of Freemasonry" was published and Grand Lodge decided it was time to take action. In the following October "Masonry Dessected" was published, and as a result certain modes of recognition were transposed, this innovation became one of the burning issues between the Premier Grand Lodge (that formed in 1717) and the Antients Grand Lodge formed by a break away section, (also know as the Athol Grand Lodge) formed in 1751.

I shall leave the History at this point, but would remind you that you will find that I use the words (Premier or Moderns) which refers to the Grand Lodge formed in 1717, and the Antients or Athol) which refers to the Grand Lodge formed in 1751.

It was at this time, and amid the turmoil of the difficulties of the Premier Grand Lodge that we find Freemasonry arriving in the County of Worcestershire at Stourbridge. Here we find a Lodge with a Warrant dated 1st August 1733, No. 119, meeting at the Talbot Hotel, and hence called the Talbot. It met every week on a Thursday. It only survived until 1769 when it was erased.

Later in the 1730's we find further developments taking place in Grand Lodge, for in the 1738 book of Constitutions the first existence of Provincial Grand Master is recognised. However the first reference to Provincial Grand Masters in the Minutes of Grand Lodge occurs on 24th June, 1747. Here I quote:

'The procession in the Hall was laid down. The Provincial Grand Masters were placed Juniors first after Grand Treasurer and followed by Wardens'. The seniority between Provincial Grand Masters and Treasurer was to change more than once during the next 60 years.

The term Provincial Grand Master in the 18th Century does not imply that there was any Provincial Grand Lodge, or if there was it bore any resemblance to the kind of gathering we are familiar with to day.

Two of the most absurd appointments of Provincial Grand Master took place in this Province.

In 1753 Robert Cornwall, M.P. for Leominster was appointed Prov. Grand Master not only for Herefordshire but for the adjoining Counties of Monmouth, Gloucester, Worcestershire and Shropshire and North Wales. His father a Vice-Admiral, had been offered a Baroncy but declined it "not liking the expense in the way of fees". Robert reckoned that he had been cheated out of his dignity and called himself 'Sir Robert'. He also called himself 'de Cornewall' as his ancestors had done in the middle ages. He never appeared in the Masonic World in this Province and there appears no date of his death.

On the 16th March 1757 we find that the Antients Grand Lodge had spread its wings into this Province with the Lodge held under a Warrant from this Grand Lodge meeting at the Stone Masons Arms, Fish Street, Worcester. Little is known of this Lodge, other than about 1766 two of the brethren were taken before the Grand Lodge for 'ravishing another brothers wife'. This Lodge seemed to

go into decline about 15 years or so after its being formed, though it still appeared on the list of Antients Grand Lodges until 1804. The late W. Bro. John Brooke says they had in the Worcester Lodge records of correspondence coming to them for this Lodge during the early years of the Worcester Lodge.

In 1763, The Antients Grand Lodge warranted a Lodge No. 107 at the Wheatsheaf, Bewdley, it made no returns after 1788, and its warrant was returned in 1805.

In 1768, we find that an Antients Lodge was meeting at the Talbot Hotel Stourbridge, this is one year before the Moderns Lodge 'The Talbot No. 119' was erased. Here we might speculate and ask ourselves 'was this the Talbot Lodge taking a Warrant from the Antients Grand Lodge.' or had the Talbot Lodge folded up earlier than 1769. This latter Lodge did not survive long as it returned its warrant. This warrant was passed on to a Lodge which was formed in Whitehaven.

In 1772 we now find an Antients Lodge with a warrant to meet at the Raven Arms, Kidderminster, here again it lapsed in 1792.

1788 saw another Antients Lodge warranted to meet at Kings Street, Dudley. This Lodge moved to Tipton, Staffs.

During this period we find that Lodges were being formed taking their warrants from the Premier Grand Lodge. The first of these was 'Lodge of Hope' No. 372 meeting at the Three Tuns Inn, Stourbridge, this Lodge met at several different hostalries until it was erased in 1828. (Warranted in 1775)

In July 1784, 'Harmonic Lodge' No. 457 with a Warrant from the Premier Grand Lodge met at Dudley, (became 313 and later 252) one of the two surviving Lodges of the 18th Century).

In 1786, St. Johns Lodge was Warranted under the Premier Grand Lodge, and met at the Golden Cross Hotel, Bromsgrove, later moving to the Star and Garter, Droitwich. It was erased in 1811.

1790, the Worcester Lodge was Warranted No. 574 (later 483, 349 and now 280) the second of the two Lodges to survive from the 18thth Century, but the only one to have continued without a break to this day.

In 1792, the second of the absurd appointments of a Provincial Grand Master was made in the appointment of the first Provincial Grand Master over the Province of Worcestershire along, was made in the appointment of Bro. J. Dent. He was an M.P. a distinguished Freemason and an Officer of Grand Lodge, holding at time the Office of Grand Treasurer. There is no record that he ever visited the

the Province, but the Collar Jewel of his Office was presented to our Museum, after being found by Grand Lodge in a Jewellers in bath. The Hall Mark on the jewel shows that it was dated two years before he passed away in 1826. There is speculation as to him having it made in order to wear it on a visit to Worcester, but more likely, he had it made to wear at Grand Lodge, as by this time, the rank of a Provincial Grand Master was senior to that of Grand Treasurer.

From 1803 until 1828, Harmonic Lodge, at Dudley was in obedience, and as such lost their seniority, once again coming back into the fold, and which has worked continuously since this date.

It would appear as the old Lodges disappeared, so new Lodges were formed, and so we find that the Worcester Lodge is joined in 1816 by the Faithful Lodge, meeting at Kidderminster, this Lodge survived until 1844 three years before we were to have a Provincial Grand Lodge established. In 1818 the Lodge of Mercy and Truth was formed, this Lodge met at intervals both at Evesham and Pershore, but was erased in 1833.

But let us return to the Lodges which survived, and which our year book tells us were consecrated. I feel that we shall have to emend these entries as well as those showing the Installation of the two first Provincial Grand Masters who were appointed (not Installed).

Bro. J. Brooke informs us that Bro. Dent was held in high esteem by the Brethren of the Worcester Lodge, over the 34 years that he held the appointment of Provincial Grand Master. As Bro. John says his role would appear to have been purely administrative. As I have said he never appeared in the Province nor were any Grand Lodge Officers appointed, at least there is no evidence in the Province. However John does tell us that he appointed a Deputy in Bro. William Thompson, Master of the Worcester Lodge in 1802. I have seen no evidence of this, and it must be remembered that in different parts of the country at this period, a period when the Craft in both Grand Lodges were in turmoil, and had been for some twenty years or more, the Master of the Senior Lodge appeared to appoint himself as a deputy P.G.M. or in some cases where there was no P.G.M. appointed themselves as P.G.M.

William Thompson was however a remarkable character and served for 20 years, during 13 of which he was master of ~~the~~ ^a Lodge,, this no one could do to day, but this may give us an insight into the position of Lodges in this period, when most lodges struggled to exist and so we find William Thompson devoting most of his energies to keep this Lodge going. He did not however attempt to summons a

meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge, and as during this period the Worcester Lodge was the only Lodge in existence in the Province for a time.

The first steps in this direction were taken by his successor, Adam Dodds, also a master of the Worcester Lodge.

In that year there were only two Lodges besides his own still functioning in the Province. Those were as I have already stated the Faithfull Lodge, Kidderminster and Mercy and Truth, at Evesham and Pershore. Adam Dodds, as Deputy Provincial Grand Master, got in touch with them and invited them to attend a so-called Provincial Grand Lodge, at the Raindeer, Worcester. This meeting was held, and is recorded in the History of the Worcester Lodge:- various Officers drawn from the three Lodges were appointed and subscription was agreed. Unfortunately the subsequent proceedings were marred by a dispute as to who should pay for the clothing for the newly appointed Officers: whether they should do this personally or whether it should come out of the subscription. The Worcester Lodge stood out against the other two on this issue; and after a second meeting of this Provincial Grand Lodge in 1824 they declared categorically that they would not pay towards the cost of the clothing, and on this score the early attempt at a Provincial Grand Lodge collapsed. Both the Faithful Lodge and Mercy and Truth went out of existence several years later. The only version of this story now preserved in the Worcester Lodge records.

These two meetings are not recorded as official meetings of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire. Various questions do arise, Had Adam Dodds as Deputy Provincial Grand Master power to call a Provincial Grand Lodge, or did this power rest only with John Dent. Was he acting with John Dents' authority, or did John Dent even know about it? we cannot say. Perhaps had this Worcestershire Provincial Grand Lodge succeeded it might have been officially recognised by Grand Lodge. But with its early demise it became just another of the curiosities of history.

Whitney Griffiths in his history of the Worcester Lodge throws doubts on Dodds as Deputy P.G.M., for it would appear that a copy of the letter sent to the Grand Secretary on the orders of the W.M. Bro. Adam Dodds dated 27th Dec. 1820, stating their desire to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge, and enquiring if "the appointment is registered in the records of Grand Lodge of a Deputy P.G.M., and is so the name of the brother. At the next meeting

of the Worcester Lodge, a communication was ordered to be sent to Brother Thompson, congratulating him "upon his appointment as Deputy Provincial Grand Master" and "hoping to be favoured with his as often as it was convenient for him to do so". In his reply was not an appreciation of the compliment paid to him, as he stated that he had been D.P.G.M. for eighteen years before. Bro Thompson is said to have been writing master to his R.H. the Prince of Wales, and these circumstances may have had something to do with his appointment as D.P.G.M.

Adam Dodds lost heart and resigned in 1825, In 1826 Bro Dent died, no successor was appointed to his office. After 34 years of existence as a Province whether it be with or without any Officers, the prospect of a Provincial Grand Lodge seemed further away than ever. The 21 years which elapsed between the death of John Dent in 1826 and the first meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge in 1847 fall into two periods.

During the first of these the Worcester Lodge campaigned alone, and unsuccessfully to get a Provincial Grand Lodge established., and after a dramatic and almost disastrous climax, give up the struggle. Other Lodges then took the lead, with eventual success.

Within a few months of John Dents' death the secretary of Worcester Lodge wrote to Grand Lodge enquiring whether it would be possible to recommend a suitable Brother in his place. He received the following reply "-----I beg to state that by the Constitutions of the Fraternity, the appointment of this Office is a perogate solely vested in the M.W. Grand Master; of consequence were anyone to be recommended who is not personally know to H.R.H., it would place the G.M. in an awkward position to appoint such, without being first informed of their fitness and due qualifications of the party, which could not well be done were an entire stranger to be named. Upon these grounds the Grand Master has formed a general rule to decline receiving the recommendations of a Province in favour of any one individual, in order to esert his own frre will in the choice. Yet, should there be a nobleman or other distinguished Brother qualified and willing to accept the appointment, upon the name being communicatèd to us, it might be privately made known to H.R.H. prebably with the desired success. This you will not consider an official communication, but grounded upon past experience, and knowledge of what is the constant usage with our Royal G.M.

We know that the Grand Secretary was not using the Grand Master as an

excuse. That dignitary, H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex, ruled English Freemasonry in an autocratic fashion and did in fact personally select, - sometimes rather unwisely - all the holders of the principle Offices.

The hint that the name of a nobleman or other distinguished Brother might be whispered was taken. A few months later two gentlemen of title were proposed for the Lodge, and this cannot have been a mere coincidence, since until that date the membership had been exclusively recruited from the professional and business circles of and around Worcester. The first was Sr. Edward Denning Bart, who was elected a joining member. He attended a few times and then dropped out. The second was that of The Hon. Wm. George Coventry, Viscount Dewhurst, he was proposed and approved as a candidate. However on the night appointed for his Initiation he wrote saying owing to unforeseen circumstances he had been prevented from attending.

Inconclusive correspondence passed between the Lodge and Grand Lodge during the next few years on the subject of Provincial Grand Master. Grand Lodge continued to insist that this was a matter for H.R.H. and no business of the Worcester Lodge.

By 1831 the Worcester Brethren were so frustrated that they took drastic steps of withholding their dues to Grand Lodge in protest.

For a very long time, Grand Lodge seems to have been very tolerant, or very lax, over this act of defiance. Correspondence, which has not been preserved, took place during the succeeding years, but it was not until seven years later, in 1838, that the matter came to a head. In April of that year some negotiations took place through the intermediary of a Doctor Crucifix, an Officer of Grand Lodge. These were evidently successful, and in July Grand Lodge struck. A letter was received as follows.

"-----We are directed by the Board to acquaint you that it has pursued the correspondence which has taken place with your Lodge on the subject of its arrears; and the Board is led to infer that your Lodge grounds its neglect to make its returns and payments upon the circumstance of there not being having been a Provincial Grand Master appointed for the county of Worcestershire.

The Board feels itself called to state most distinctly and unequivocally that such objection can by no means be allowed.

The Board therefore requires that you make your returns with the payments which may be due thereon prior to the next

meeting of the Board or that in default you, together with your Wardens, do attend the Board on that day to show cause why the Board should not recommend to the Grand Lodge forthwith to erase your Lodge and to declare its Warrant forfeited. and you are required to bring with you the Warrant and Minute Books of the Lodge."

This blow was softened by a personal letter from a certain Henry Udell, of the Middle Temple, with whom the W.M. had some contact. Henry Udell was a member of the Board of General Purposes, and described how Grand Lodge had originally intended to erase the Worcester Lodge without further appeal: but he himself had interceded with H.R.H. the Grand Master and the matter had been deferred until the next meeting of the Board. He warned the W.M. in a friendly fashion that the Lodge had put itself entirely in the wrong, and he strongly advised that the necessary returns should be made, and dues paid, without delay. The Brethren, no doubt severely shaken and realising that they had gone too far, paid up forthwith. Henry Udell wrote again to say how pleased he was at the outcome and made a constructive suggestion. In the absence of a Provincial Grand Master, the Grand Registrar was, under the Constitutions, responsible for the Province. Henry Udell had obtained a ruling from the Board of General purposes that the Grand Registrar was competent to appoint a Deputy Provincial Grand Master of the Province. Therefore he seemed to be hinting - give up the idea of a Provincial Grand Master, but suggest someone as a Deputy, who might be able to organise a Provincial Grand Lodge.

The Brethren however were dispirited after their shattering experience and did not take a hint. It was left to others to act upon it. So far as they were concerned, the subject was dropped, and no further initiative came from them.

In the meantime new Lodges were being formed in the Province, and began to ask 'why Worcestershire had no Provincial Grand Master or Grand Lodge. The Harmonic Lodge at Dudley had emerged from its period of abeyance, and in 1843 - five years after the events just described - sent a Deputation to Worcester to enlist support in the matter of a Provincial Grand Lodge. The Worcester Lodge were defeatist. They would write again to Grand Lodge they said, but they knew in advance what the answer would be - that the appointment of a Provincial Grand Master rested solely with H.R.H. They did write and they did get this reply.

The Breakthrough came from one of the new Lodges, The Royal Standard

Lodge, No. 730 (now 498) Consecrated in 1844 at Kidderminster, now at Dudley, and particularly from an energetic P.M. of the Lodge Dr. Roden. Dr. Roden saw that the way to get a Provincial Grand Lodge was to organise the Lodge itself in advance as a co-operative effort; to get agreement on the Officers, on the subscription and on all other matters of internal regulation procedure. If Grand Lodge could be told that there was a ready made Provincial Grand Lodge waiting to be summoned and to come into operation, Grand Lodge could hardly fail to depute someone to preside over it. He communicated with all the Lodges in the Province, and in 1847 organised a series of meetings where all details of a Provincial Grand Lodge were thrashed out and agreed. He also negotiated with the Grand Registrar - who as I mentioned before, had been responsible for the Province throughout the 21 year vacancy. We must also remember that during this period the Lodge of Hope and Charity No. 523 now (377) had been consecrated on 26th January, 1824. and Semper Fidelis Lodge No. 772 now (529) had been consecrated by W.Bro. Samuel Hunt, of Kidderminster 7th September, 1846.

Success crowned his efforts on August 17, 1847.

On that day the first Official Meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge was held at the Guild Hall, Worcester. The proceedings commenced with the opening of a Craft Lodge by the Worshipful Master of the Worcester Lodge. Then the Grand Registrar arrived and opened a Provincial Grand Lodge. His first act was to appoint Dr. Roden as his Deputy, and then to appoint the various Officers as arranged in advance between the Worcestershire Lodges. The Brethren then adjourned to a sumptuous banquet at the Shire Hall, the menu of which is recorded and makes fascinating reading in these more abstemious days. Well deserved compliments were paid to Dr. Roden for his indefatigable exertions in promoting the Provincial Grand Lodge.

Dr. Roden did not rise above the rank of Dep. Prov. Grand Master, and although the Duke of Sussex was now dead, Grand Lodge still seemed reluctant to appoint a Provincial Grand Master, not satisfied perhaps that any brother of sufficient Masonic or Social rank was available. Dr. Roden as Deputy presided over the Province the following year, 1848 and again in 1849, In that year differences of opinion were taking place between Dr. Roden and the Worcester Lodge as well as within his own Lodge, and he resigned the Office of Deputy Provincial Grand Master. No Provincial Grand Lodge was held in 1850 and it looked in danger of foundering

again.

However, Grand Lodge had at last found a suitable candidate for the Office of Provincial Grand Master: Henry Vernon, a member of a distinguished Saffordshire family, and Deputy Provincial Grand Master of that Province, who had come to live in Malvern. Provincial Grand Lodge was re-convened for his installation in 1851, 25 years after the death of his predecessor, and since that date the peaceful sequence of its Annual Meetings has been undisturbed.

1849 saw the consecration of the Clive Lodge at Bromsgrove No. 819, which is now Vernon No. 560. Their Warrant is dated 15th January, 1849. The Lodge met at the Town Hall, Bromsgrove. It is interesting to note that all the petitioners but one were members of St. Johns Lodge No. 348 Leicester, and one X.N. Paszkowicz, a member of Filde Union Lodge, Fleetwood, No. 533. Most of the Leicester Brethren were coach builders and at this time they had probably had links with the Railway Carriage Works which had just been established at Bromsgrove. The petition for the Lodge was recommended by Joseph Bennett, F.N. Gosling, and Thomas Clitterbuck, the W.M., S.W. and J.W. respectively of Kemper Fidelis Lodge; and Alexander Dobie, Grand Registrar at that time.

It was a Lodge with its members very widely scattered, and this resulted from the early meetings of very small attendances. The second Meeting was attended by six brethren and two visitors, Rev. Harcourt-Oldham, vicar of Stoke Prior, was initiated on October 10th, 1849, was elected to the Masters Chair on November 12th, 1851. With such adverse influences at work, it is not hardly surprising that our Bromsgrove Brethren lost heart.

On November 26th, 1855, the following resolution was passed:-
"That owing to want of members and short attendances at the Lodge, this Clive Lodge be dissolved, its warrant returned to Grand Lodge, and its furniture sold. Any surplus funds to be given to the Masonic Charities.

No meeting was held for several months; at all events the resolution was never confirmed; on the contrary 14 Brethren, all residents of Dudley, were proposed as joining members, and elected on June 30th, 1856. Resolutions of removing the Lodge to Dudley, and altering the name from Clive to Vernon, were all passed at a meeting held at the Golden Cross Hotel on August 27th, 1856.

Due to difficulties mainly with accommodation, the Lodge sought permission to move to Stourport, and obtained the Prov.G.M. permission

but no permission was forthcoming from Grand Lodge, it appeared to be delayed, so the Lodge moved. However, to regularise things, they had to go back to Dudley for one meeting to pass a formal resolution of removal. The previous meetings at Stourport being illegal, the candidate who had already been initiated was again balloted for and initiated.

In 1850 Stability and Perseverance Lodges were consecrated. In 1857, W.Bro. A.H. Royds was appointed and installed Dep. Prov. Grand Master. In 1866 R.W.Bro. Vernon resigned as Prov. G.M. and in 1867, W.Bro. Royds was installed as Provincial Grand Master. In this year saw the consecration of St. Michaels Lodge No. 1097, the first Master being Rev. Sir F.A.G. Ousely, Bro. Rev. J. Hampton S.W. and Bro. Augustus Frederick Godson J.W.

On the death of W.Bro. J. Barber, Dep. Prov. Grand Master, one of the founders and P.M. of the Lodge, the Lodge subscribed £15 to a Masonic Memorial Window in Knighton-on-Teme Church. W. Bro. Royds resigned as Prov. Grand Master in 1878, but not before the work with which he had been dedicated was completed, 'The Masonic Window' in the North Transept of Worcester Cathedral, the cost being raised in the Province.

He was succeeded by W.Bro. Sir, Edmund A.H. Lechmere, another distinguished Mason, as Provincial Grand Master, and a native of Worcestershire. He was the first Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent in this Province.

Lechmere will be remembered for all his work in this Province especially the help and encouragement he gave to the Masonic exhibition held at the Guild Hall in 1884, from whence was born our own Masonic Library and Museum, with the able assistance of W. Bro. George Taylor, who was then Prov.G.Sec. and a collector of Masonic items of interest. Lechmere will also be remembered for the magnificent work he carried out for the order of St.J. being their Secretary General for a time.

Brethren we could continue this paper on for hours, and so I feel that we must now list our succeeding Provincial Grand Masters as I feel we have got to a state in the Province when masonry was well consolidated and from which it has gone from strength to strength with the number of Lodges growing to 122.

1	1733	Sir Robert de Cornwall, Bart.
4	1792-1826	John Dent, Esq., M.P., P.S.G.W., Grand Treasurer.
1	1851-1865	Henry Charles Vernon, Esq., P.S.G.W., Dep. Prov.G.M. (Staffs)
1	1866-1878	Albert Hudson Royds, Esq., Dep.Prov.G.M., East Lancs.
2	1878-1894	Sir. E.A.H. Lechmere, Bart., M.P.
2	1895-1906	Sir Augustus F. Godson, Kt. M.P.
6	1908-1918	General Sir. William Campbell, K.C.B., P.G.D.
48	1919-1948	Gen. Sir. Francis Davies, KCB., K.C.M.G. K.C.V.O., V.L., Dep.G.M.
18	1950-1954	Ben Marsh, Esq.,
6	1955-1961	Dr. Edward Bunting.
12	1962-1973	Lt.-Col. O.W.D. Smith, J.P., D.I., P.G.D.
9	1973-1982	F.H. Griffiths, Esq., O.St.J.
	1983	E.F. Hanson, J.P., LL.D.(Hon) P.A.C.D.S.

Prov. Standards presented in 1888 by Lady Lechmere.

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