

EARLY FREEMASONRY IN NORTH WALES.

Unlike Scotland in particular, and England to a lesser degree Masonry in North Wales shows little evidence of having grown from operative Masonry.

It is fairly clear that there were lodges of operative Masons engaged in building Edward I. castles, and in 1304 it is recorded that Walter of Hereford the Master Mason in charge of building Beaumaris and Caernarfon Castles was to receive two shillings per day.

In 1316 there is reference in the accounts of Caernarfon Castle - To "Hire of Cart and two horses to carry stones from the new quarry to the lodge of Kings Mason - 4 days at sixpence per day." In 1320 42 shillings was voted for the renovation of a tumbledown house which was in a condition in which "masons ought not to work".

There is little evidence that, unlike England, where masonry attracted the attention of people not directly connected with actual building, but who saw in the continuing construction of beautiful and noble edifices skills almost beyond the power of mortals and who perhaps saw a similarity to the description of the past glories of King Solomon's Temple whose costliness and splendour became objects of admiration to the whole of the known world.

The reason may perhaps be that the castles were built by "Kings Men" who were civil servants, mainly from Hampshire, permanently employed on crown buildings, and who kept themselves to themselves and did not fraternise with a conquered, and to them barbarian people, who did not even speak their language, and accordingly they did not "moonlight" as they did in English Cathedral to build a house for a prosperous local merchant.

In 1392 Master Robert Fagan, who was afterwards made a Kings Mason, appeared in the Recognizance Court at Chester to enrol a contract for an addition to be made by him to St. Asaphs Cathedral. He was probably the head of the Guild or Lodge of operatives freemasons at that time at Chester where Robert Fagan lived and served the office of Mayor.

The earliest reference to a Welsh Mason that I have been able to find is in the return of a list of members of Freemasons Lodge meeting at Chester
about 1660

66 There were a number of members with Welsh surnames, e.g. John Parry, John Lloyd and particularly William Hughes of Holt, Denbigshire.

The first recorded Lodge in North Wales was in Dolgellau. Warranted in 1743, and erased in 1780.

Little is known of this Lodge, but we may speculate that like the third Lodge in North Wales, the first Welshpool Lodge, No. 142 Warranted in 1706 and erased in 1775, it was based on the wool and flannel trade. It was also on the drovers' route. Some of you may remember a jingle we used to sing as children, a parody on "All through the Night" *Hen wraig weddi yn ym gwyddelan, a ddydd hon o Fachynallt Dolgellau* *A. Lgd y nos - old Welsh woma drowy gen a H. C. P. & Dolgellau* which tends to show that it was well established for livestock fairs, as indeed was Welshpool.

The second Lodge to be Warranted was Holywell, St. Davids No. 286, Warranted in 1761 and erased in 1757.

There was, in fact, an earlier Lodge in Holywell, or perhaps the same Lodge which did not come to the attention of Grand Lodge until later, which was not unusual.

A number of ancient manuscripts generally known as the old Charges have been preserved containing the traditional history of masonry, the possession of a copy of these old Charges was regarded as sufficient authority to hold a Lodge.

The Holywell manuscript consists of 20 pages of foolscap containing, apparently a 17th century Probate of a Will and various masonic charges. The document shows every appearance of having been often used. It commences:-

"Thomas Humphries who was made a freemason at ye Grand Lodge at ye sign of the Star Holywell in ye presence of William Wessel de Linden who was ye Grand Master of the Lodge. This book was finished ye 14th day of February in ye year of the Lord 1748/49."

There is also an extract from the 1723 Book of Constitutions stamped in gold leaf:-

"John Cole Clough Master.

Josiah Coleclough) Wardens.
Sam I Jenkins)
Holywell 1728"

Dr. Linden is fairly well documented as a manufacturer of spa waters and a writer of articles on the medical advantages thereof, and John Coleclough is found among the list of members of a Lodge at Chester, and seems to have moved to Holywell and founded a Lodge there.

One's immediate reaction is to say "Why Holywell", but it must be remembered that it was close to Chester ^{which} and until the ^{Dec} silted it had a harbour, that Holywell was one of the birth places of early industry in North Wales. It had access to navigable waters which in pre-railway days would have made transport easier and for a while it was a burgeoning industrial area, with a thriving copper industry which would have looked to Chester for administration and finance.

This might be a convenient place to digress to ^{mention} the famous expatriate Welshman The Rev. Gronwy Owen, an Anglesey man famous for his poem

"Lay of the last judgment. He was born in 1723 and in 1754 he was Chaplain of the St. George and Dragon Lodge in Liverpool, one of the first references to a Masonic Chaplain although the first Grand Chaplain was not appointed until 1775. The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse refers to the Lay as ^{interest} "inherent in the critical theories of the age". The Rev. Owen wrote to a friend Lewis Morris, another eminent poet "If there is ever a brother that is not as good as we could wish him I am sure he could not have been better but worse without masonry."

Perhaps a little autobiographical as the Rev. Owen is reported as having visited Liverpool Taverns more frequently than desirable. A trace of his feelings appears in one of the stanzas of his poem:- "Of his servants, men without faults, there will not be who ^{know} effects. They will do ^{abundant} good."

^{It would like}
^{of his servants} 'O'i weinia dynion dera ^{Ni bydd a}
^{Di'wedd a} ^{Di'wedd a} ^{Di'wedd a}
The Rev. Owen became secretary of the newly established ^{Cymdeithas}

Honourable Society of Cymrodorion

OR

formed in London

to advance the language, literature and history of the Principality. The Society supported the Welsh Girls School, now the St. David's School and now at Ashford which has strong masonic connections.

One of the leading supporters of both the school and the Society was Sir. Watkin Williams ^{Wynne}, fourth baronet of Wynstay, who was Senior Grand Warden in 1771. Sir Watkin was the fourth baronet and, of course,

a direct ancestor of a very famous Provincial Grand Master of this Province.

You will, of course, recollect, that until the formation of the United Grand Lodge in 1813 there were two Masonic Grand Lodges, the Ancient and the Modern. The moderns were solid upper middle class, and the ancients were mainly of artisan origins, with strong Irish connections, which would account for their Lodges at Holyhead and Holywell, Caernarvon *which is on the route to Holyhead & then to Denbigh*

In 1799, the Unlawful Societies Act was passed, prohibiting clandestine Societies, the administration of Oaths and Secret Societies. The Duke of Athol prevailed on the Government to exclude freemasonry provided that such Lodges had been operative before the passing of the Act.

This led to the practice of assigning warrants. Welshpool, for example, assigned their Charter in 1810 to a Lodge in Kings Lynn, Norfolk, Caerarvon to Torquay in 1809, and Denbigh to Hadleigh in Suffolk.

I mentioned Chester earlier. In 1725 it was telling Grand Lodge that they had a Provincial Grand Master who was elected, not appointed. Possibly it was felt that Chester was already a Province owing allegiance to the Grand Lodge at York. Possibly it was the Irish influence, Chester being, of course, on the route to Holyhead.

A brother rejoicing in the name of Rev. John Theophilus Desaquilers, Deputy Grand Master, realised the need for a Grand Lodge of England, and he made a special visit to Chester in 1727, and in a very statesmanlike and tactful manner persuaded the Lodge at Chester to offer obedience "to our superiors in London and Westminster". ^{As a} ~~They~~ quid pro quo this resulted in the issue of a deputation in 1727 to Hugh Warburton as Provincial Grand Master for North Wales at Chester. Chester was probably named in consequence of the number of Welsh gentry who lived there during the winter months, and also because this gave him surveillance over the Lodge at Holywell.

Thus North Wales can justly claim to be the premier Province constituted by Grand Lodge. Hugh Warburton was the owner of many estates in North Wales, including Penryn Castle, near Bangor. He was an eminent soldier attaining the rank of General. In 1741 had it not been for the demands of the service and his military duties he would doubtless ~~if~~ have extended the craft in the Province.

In 1741, William Vaughan, M.P. a Lord Lieutenant of Merioneth, was appointed the second Provincial Grand Master of North Wales. He had been for some years, a prominent Mason in London, and a friend of the fourth baronet Sir. Watkin Williams Wyn.

He became the Chief President of the Honourable Society of the *Cymrodorion* strengthening the association between that Society and The Craft. After the death of William Vaughan, the Province was for many years without a ruler.

In 1811 William Rawlings was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Anglesey, but seems to have been a sinecure without any duties, and little is known about him.

In the meantime, Rev. Hon. Francis Henry Egerton, afterwards Earl of Bridgewater, became Provincial Grand Master for the Counties of Flint, Denbigh and Montgomery. He was already Provincial Grand Master of Shropshire. Unfortunately his succession to the Peerage as Earl of Bridgewater, and his family estate, precluded any active intimacy with his various provinces.

Sir Edward Mullen. Provincial Grand Master for Shropshire in 1732 was deputed to be Prov. Grand Master for North Wales in 1735, but this was a typical paper transaction of the age, since he knew nothing of Holywell, nor they of him.

In 1726, the oldest now surviving Lodge in North Wales, St. Davids, Bangor, number 38th held its first meeting at the Steam Packet Tavern, Bangor. Meanwhile the Mona Lodge at Hollyhead was constituted in 1768 and erased in 1769, In 1771 a Lodge was held at _____ at the home of the fourth Baronet Sir. Watkin Williams Wyn, who was its first Worshipful Master. That Lodge moved to Oswestry and was erased in 1789.

Holywell tried again in 1795, and was erased in 1839. The Royal Denbigh Lodge as consecrated in 1787 and assigned its Warrant in 1811.

Sir. W. W. Wynn the Fifth Baronet formed a Lodge at Wynstay, with a Welsh name *Heddwel - chynghedd* ^{of the Rose} in good fellowship. This was erased in 1809 for not contributing to the liquidation fund of Grand Lodge.

The latter half of the 19th Century saw a spectacular growth in freemasonry

in North Wales.

The Report on Education in 1847 which had led to the Education Act, of 1870 established universal schooling. That year was a time of great education awakening in Wales. English was becoming more prevalent, and at the same time communications were improving. A Welsh journey had long been a byword for inaccessibility. Then came the railways which opened up distribution and caused major population increases in consequence thereof.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man and North Wales Masonry was no exception, and it was particularly fortunate in two eminent Masons.

In January, 1852, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn the sixth baronet, was appointed Provincial Grand Master of North Wales and Shropshire. At the time there were only two working Lodges in North Wales, Bangor and Holyhead. In 1852 Sr. Watkin consecrated Caenarvon, and Llandudno was consecrated by his deputy in 1858.

In 1864 Sir Watkin held a Prov. Grand Lodge at Llystey to commemorate the rebuilding of the Mansion. Invitations were issued to every subscribing member of the Province and the Minutes inform us that a large party of ~~the~~ assembled who were entertained in a princely manner. *See Name*

Residents of Welshpool have never been averse to a party, and it would have been surprising if there were not many ~~principal~~ brethren who ^{had} ~~have~~ connections with other lodges present at the party, and ^{described as} there was a demand for a Lodge at Welshpool. Accordingly, the Welshpool Lodge, The Royal Oak number 998, was consecrated later that year.

The first W. M. of the Lodge was Dr. Goldsboro, the son of the Perpetual Grand Master of Trelystan, Welshpool. He had served his medical apprenticeship ^{with} ~~as~~ a Napoleonic prisoner of war. Freemasonry was active in France in that era, and he could well have been influenced by his tutor.

Two years later W. Bro. Dr. Goldsboro had become Past Prov. Grand Warden, and rushed around the Province consecrating Lodges.

Anglsey Lodge and Menai Bridge was formed in 1866 and Royal Denbigh in 1867. The Sir. Watkin Lodge in Mold in 1874 and the St. Eleth in Amlwch in 1874. Llanedloes in 1876 and Cedewain in Newtown in 1876.

Sir Watkin himself was not idle and at the time of his death in 1885

there were 28 Lodges in the Province of North Wales, to be more accurate in the North Wales portion of the Shropshire/North Wales Province.

In the same year the province of North Wales was split from Shropshire and stood on its own with Lord Harleigh as Provincial Grand Master. The last Lodge to be consecrated by Sir. Watkin was the Second Bangor Lodge, The Royal Leek in 1879. Mawddach, Barmouth, was consecrated by his deputy in 1880 and the First Lodge to be formed by Lord Harleigh as the new Prov. Grand master was at *Cornwall Alley* in 1892.

This is a convenient place to leave early freemasonry in North Wales. May I conclude by joining the old and the new, the latter the formation last year of what I hope is an adopted daughter of the Prov. of North Wales, the Lodge of which I am the founding W. M. the Lodge of Dewi Sant number 9135. Although in the Province of Worcester it serves expatriate Welshmen in the Midlands, and owes its conception in no small degree to the friendship and hospitality of many of us from the Province of Worcester and Warwick haveover the years received from the brethren at Welshpool in 998. Indeed, we wanted Welshpool to be the sponsor lodge but we were informed by Province that the sponsor must be the ~~same~~ *same* lodge, but your Prov. Grand Master, Lord Kenyon was kind enough to come to our consecration.

As to the old may I read from the New Book of Constitutions by James Anderson in 1738 *Handwritten* A deputation of several Grand Masters to Wales, the Country of England and Foreign parts. To Wales the learned of that old principality can best deduce their own history of masonry from the noble *Handwritten* ancient Britain *Handwritten* Hadrian, the First King of Wales, AD 589 down to King Roderick Mawr. who partitioned his kingdom into three principalities amongst his three sons which again cemented into one principality till Edward 1st King of England overran Wales. *Handwritten* More princes being slain without issue, their nobles and gentry willingly submitted to the crown of England until King Henry ~~Six~~ *Handwritten* Eighth united Wales to England AD 1536 and so down to these times.

For in Wales there are many venerable remains most ancient religious houses, and many ~~scattered~~ *Handwritten* ruins of the strongest castles in Gothic style.

But now the *Handwritten* style is as well esteemed in Wales as it is in England

have combined

and there ~~are~~ also the brethren of the Royal Arts ~~and~~ into Lodges
as branches of our franternity under our Grand Master.

On the 10th May, 1727 the Grand Master granted a deputation to Hugh
Warburton to be the Prov. Grand Master of North Wales at Chester.

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