

THE EARLY HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY IN WORCESTERSHIRE

W.M., I thank you for the honour of inviting me to address my grandmother lodge - for, as most of you know, I am a member of your daughter lodge, Fort Royal. May I also be permitted to acknowledge my gratitude to W. Bro. Lawrence Talbot for allowing me to give this talk since he is, after all, your own Lodge Historian, and anything I say on my subject must inevitably draw on early records from the Lodge and encroach on his preserve. He has been most generous in allowing me to go ahead, so may I ask you to regard this as a trailer for what he will undoubtedly produce for you in your rapidly approaching bicentenary. May I also take this opportunity of publicly acknowledging another debt of gratitude. This talk is not original in the sense that all the research is my own; rather is it a compilation from a number of different sources, and two authors upon whom I have particularly relied were members of this Lodge, namely W. Bro. C.C. Whitney Griffiths from the last century and W. Bro. J.C. Brooke from this.

Unfortunately I cannot say to you that the earliest traces of Freemasonry in Worcestershire occurred in its capital city, Worcester. If it was so, then all such traces have been lost; for the earliest records extant suggest that the first lodge to be founded was No.119, the Dog - later and better known as the Talbot - at Stourbridge, whose warrant was dated 21 August 1733. This lodge was subsequently renumbered 104 in 1741 and 62 in 1755, it being the custom of the premier Grand Lodge (or the Moderns, as they were later known) to close up gaps left by defunct lodges; it was eventually erased in 1765. Sadly, what we do not know - and are unlikely ever to find out since no Minute Books survive - is who founded it and where they came from. We do not even know anything of its history during the three dozen years that it survived; but for a variety of reasons - some of which I will illustrate in due course - this was probably chequered, since no eighteenth century lodge had an easy existence.

Believe it or nor, it was at this juncture - that is to say, with one lodge precariously in existence - that Worcestershire acquired its first Provincial Grand Master. For in our excellent Masonic Year Book we read: "1753 - Sir Robert de Cornwall granted a deputation as Prov. G.M. of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and North Wales". 'Granted a deputation', I should explain, is a quaint term of the age meaning 'appointed' - the ceremony of installation being a nineteenth century innovation. The first misleading

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implication of this appointment is that he was placed at the head of an existing or newly created provincial structure. No such organisation existed; and indeed, sad to say, in this province none was to do so for nearly a hundred years, as I shall presently show you. The other implication is the vastness of his task. True, the extent of his province in square mileage was huge, but not in terms of lodges - for instance, apart from the Talbot at Stourbridge and three Bristol lodges, only the Swan at Gloucester and the Three Horse Shoes at Leominster existed in the Three Choirs' Counties. Nor was there any expectation at that period that a Provincial Grand Master was obliged to visit his province; though I would not go so far as the Prestonian Lecturer for 1966 - admittedly the then Prov. G.M. for Gloucestershire who may not have enjoyed his descent from something of a charlatan - in considering the appointment a practical joke!

But we are entitled to ask, why the appointment? And who was he? I will take the second question first. The de Cornwall family were descended from the illegitimate son of Richard, Earl of Cornwall and brother of Henry III, and settled at Burford in Shropshire, just across the Teme from Tenbury Wells, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Our Sir Robert's father was an admiral who had been offered a baronetcy "in consideration of his services against the Barbary States and for saving lives of women and children"; but it appears he declined it on the grounds that he regarded the fee of honour as too expensive and so the patent was never taken out. Obviously feeling cheated, however, our Robert ignored this and claimed the title after his father's death, entering it on his nomination form for the Parliamentary borough of Leominster which he eventually represented at Westminster for seven years. I say 'eventually' because it appears that the election might have been declared null and void on the grounds that no such person as the baronet existed had Robert not appealed to King George II who, fortunately for him, recognised his title. Even the 'de' part of 'de Cornwall' is no more than an affectation, being a medieval term of convenience. So much for his origins; what of his appointment? Unfortunately we have virtually no knowledge concerning his Masonic qualifications. We know that he once attended the premier Grand Lodge when Lord Carysfort, the Grand Master who gave him his 'deputation', was present. And we know that he died in 1756. But we know nothing of his work in Worcestershire, if any, nor if he even visited the Three Horse Shoes at Leominster which was, after all, less than ten miles from his country house. My guess, based on other observations of

the workings of this Grand Lodge, is that the appointment was purely nominal, as befitted a titled Member of Parliament, and that Sir Robert's influence in his vast province was minimal or, more likely, non-existent.

Two years before our colourful first so-called Prov. G.M. received his 'deputation', that is to say in 1751, the English masonic world was split in two by the foundation of a new 'Grand Lodge of England according to the Old Institutions'. Now, I have no doubt that the senior brethren present will be thoroughly conversant with the whys and wherefores of this unfortunate occurrence; but let me just offer a brief explanation for the benefit of the newer members of the Craft. The creation of the original Grand Lodge in 1717 was followed by an increasing number of disclosures of Masonic ceremonies, culminating in the publication in 1730 of Samuel Pritchard's "Masonry Dissected". In order, it is said, to exclude irregularly made masons, Grand Lodge decided to alter some of the Ancient Landmarks of the Order, including transposing the words and signs of the First and Second Degrees, and this caused such offence in many lodges that the rival Grand Lodge, to which I have just referred, was established. For this reason its members became known as "Antients", and later as "Athol" masons after the third and fourth Dukes of Athol who were between them Grand Masters for thirty-four of its sixty-two years' existence; while the adherents of the original Grand Lodge were dubbed "Moderns", or sometimes "Prince of Wales" masons after the future George IV who, as Prince of Wales, was Grand Master from 1790 to the Union of 1813. It is against this background of dissention that the next part of our story in Worcestershire unfolds, but I would ask you to bear in mind one other thing: it has generally been supposed that the greater the distance from London, the stronger was the friendship between the Antients and the Moderns - or at least there was less friction.

During this period of hiatus nine Worcestershire lodges - five Athol and four Modern were founded, of which two of the Moderns' ones still survive. The first Athol or Antient lodge appears to have been founded on 16 March 1757 and was No.60 meeting, appropriately, at the Stonemason's Arms, Great Fish Street, Worcester. This lodge is thought by some not to have had a very protracted existence. You will observe that I use the words 'appears' and 'thought'; the sad fact of the matter is that records from these early days of masonic existence are very hard to come by. If regular records were kept, they have certainly for the most part not been preserved.

As an historian one is left to make what one can of such remains as there are and, without falsifying the evidence, to put forward reasonable conjectures. I am bound to say that I believe Freemasonry had an earlier origin than 1757 in the City of Worcester. There are two reasons. The first is that at their General Assembly on 17 July 1751 the Antients' Grand Lodge adopted its "Rules and Orders", of which Regulation No.8 states as follows: "No admission or Warrant shall be granted to any Brothers to hold a Lodge until such time they shall have first formed a Lodge of Antient Masons and sit regularly in a Credible House and then to Apply by Petition and such Petition to be Attested by the Masters of Three Regular Lodges who shall make a proper Report of them". Secondly, it is stated at their meeting on 16 March 1757 that one of their number was excluded "as deemed unworthy". Now, in order to be excluded you have first to be admitted; and while this may only have occurred a short time before, the first reason I adduced would seem to suggest a prior existence of several months at the very least. Entry into this earliest Worcester Lodge must have been poorly controlled or the membership must have provided an interesting cross-section of society, since we are told that, apart from the excluded brother already alluded to as "deemed unworthy", later that same year (21 November 1757) another brother was excluded "for making Masons clandestinely for 1s. each" - a not infrequent misdemeanour in those days - and that in about 1766 two of the brethren were taken before the Grand Lodge for "ravishing another brother's wife". How long this lodge lasted is unclear, and it may be that such activities brought it to decline in the 1770s. On the other hand, there is some suggestion of correspondence between this lodge and the current Worcester Lodge, a Moderns' lodge, in the 1790s. In any event the lodge appears in the Ahiman Rezon (the Antients' catalogue of lodges) for 1804 and 1813 though not for 1807. I suspect that it was thoroughly dormant by this time, and it was finally erased at the Union.

A second Athol or Antient lodge, No.107, was warranted on 27 December 1762 and met at the Wheatsheaf in Bewdley High Street. The continuity of its existence is also problematical since it made no returns after 1788. It is thought to have held its last meeting in June 1797, but it is listed in the Antients' Calendar for 1800 and in Ahiman Rezon for 1804 and is known to have returned its warrant on 27 December 1805 after a probably chequered career of exactly forty-three years.

Much more interesting is the third Athol or Antient lodge to be warranted in the province, No.154, since it met at the Talbot in Stourbridge. The date is 1768 and this, you will recall, is the year before the erasure of the original (or Modern) Talbot Lodge (as it had inevitably become). Unfortunately we can now do no more than guess at the sequence of events. Did the original lodge, No.119, collapse and were its premises at the Talbot taken over by a new set of masons? Or did the original members transfer their allegiance to the Antients and thereby suffer erasure at the hands of the premier Grand Lodge? We shall probably never know. We do know, however, that during this period lodges often changed allegiance, as did individual members; and there are even instances of lodges holding a warrant from each Grand Lodge, just as individuals often kept a foot in both camps. And, as I mentioned earlier, being removed by a considerable distance from London, the bond between masons was often stronger than the divisions between rival Grand Lodges. Stourbridge, Bewdley, Kidderminster and Worcester are four centres where such fraternisation may have taken place. But, sad to relate, this second Talbot Lodge seems to have fared no better than its predecessor for at some stage its warrant was returned, and in 1805 it was made over - as was the alternative custom with the Antients - to an entirely new set of Petitioners in Whitehaven.

A fourth Athol or Antient lodge, No.178, was warranted on 10 November 1772 and met at the Raven Arms, Kidderminster. The fate of this lodge is equally uncertain, but it was thought that it lapsed about twenty years later; others suggested that it survived until the Union and that the remnants of its membership subsequently formed the nucleus of Hope and Charity Lodge of 1824, the third oldest extant lodge in the Province. And since first producing this talk about three years ago, its Minute Book has been found, and this proves the latter conjecture to have been correct.

The fifth and final lodge sponsored by the Antients, on 26 February 1788, was the Lodge of Freedom No.264 of Dudley, meeting first at the Hen and Chickens and then in 1812 at the Green Dragon Hotel. With names like these it seems to me just as well that this lodge did not follow the usual custom of the period, that of taking its name from its place of meeting! But, in common with its four predecessors, it had ceased to be a Worcestershire lodge by the Union of 1813, having earlier that year moved one mile across the border to Tipton in Staffordshire. It was erased on 5 March 1828.

And so it remained for the Moderns to carry the flag of Worcestershire Freemasonry into the Union. They had founded four lodges prior to 1813, two of which still survive. The first of these four was in Stourbridge, the Lodge of Hope No.372, meeting at the Three Tuns Inn, and again one is forced to speculate whether there were not certain brethren in the town who were not happy with the new Athol Talbot Lodge. Conflicting dates of origin appear - 1768, 1770, 1772 or 1775. At any event, in this latter year it seems to have acquired the warrant of an old London lodge called Hope. It was renumbered on four different occasions, was still active at the Union, and was finally erased on 5 March 1828.

The second Moderns' lodge was Harmonic No.457, warranted on 23 July 1784 and meeting at the Bush Inn, Dudley. After being renumbered 313, and now 252, it remains the oldest foundation in the Province still in existence, but unfortunately not of continuous existence for it was in abeyance for some years until it was erased in December 1827. This seems to have stirred Dudley masons into action for they immediately applied to the United Grand Lodge for reinstatement, received it by special warrant on 5 March 1828, and have since continued without interruption.

Two years after the foundation of Harmonic, on 11 July 1786, St. John's Lodge No.487, meeting at the Golden Cross in Bromsgrove High Street, received its warrant. This Moderns' lodge became No.397 in the renumbering of 1792, and moved to the Star and Garter at Droitwich in 1802; but it did not survive there long and was erased on 6 February 1811.

It only remains, therefore, for me to mention the fourth lodge of the Moderns, your very own Worcester Lodge, meeting at the Reindeer Inn, Mealcheapen Street. It received its warrant from the premier Grand Lodge on 9 December 1790 as No.574, and was renumbered on no less than four separate occasions, finally becoming No.280 at the last renumbering of the United Grand Lodge in 1863. You are, I need hardly say, rightly proud of being the oldest surviving lodge in continuous existence in Worcestershire.

Thus far to the Union of 1813. Ten lodges founded, but only three surviving and one of those precariously. After 1813 the picture is entirely reversed with only two lodges failing to survive. Both of them illustrate one of the major problems of eighteenth and early nineteenth century lodges, namely the permanency of meeting place - or, more accurately, the lack of it.

Most early lodges met at inns or coffee houses, and it was essential that good relations were maintained with the landlord; often he was a member of the lodge or a Serving Brother, acting as Tyler and caterer. The Faithful Lodge No.680 of Kidderminster, which dated its warrant from 20 October 1816, met in four different hostelryes in the town in the space of eight years, its shortest sojourn curiously enough being in the Freemasons' Tavern in Bromsgrove Street. And on one occasion after the landlord had been declared bankrupt its furniture was locked up in the Lodge Room and the members feared its sequestration, only regaining the items some eight months later. This lodge became No.442 in the renumbering of 1832, but was clearly in decline by then and was erased in 1844, the last Worcestershire lodge to suffer this fate. Even more chequered was the career of the Lodge of Mercy and Truth No.703, changing location no less than seven times in nine years from the date of its warrant, 13 May 1818, and oscillating between Evesham and Pershore like a pendulum. Its 1832 renumbering to 454 was superfluous, as it had already been closed on 9 November of the previous year, and it was erased in 1833. This was a great pity as one of its regular visitors - he was even asked to occupy the Chair on five occasions - was the celebrated George Claret, an outstanding ritualist who, in 1836, was responsible for publishing the first ever Emulation Ritual. Its Master's Chair is still to be seen at Evesham.

Now you might suppose, Brethren, that during this increased activity and masonic interest shown in Worcestershire a Provincial structure would have emerged, presided over by an interested mason who was not an absentee. Such, I am afraid, was not the case. After the death of Sir Robert de Cornwall in 1756 there was a gap of thirty-six years when nothing happened at all on this front. And then on 31 July 1792 a very similar appointment was made. The new Prov. G.M. granted his deputation by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, was John Dent, a prominent London banker, partner in the firm of Child & Co. of Temple Bar, Member of Parliament for Lancaster until 1807 and then for Poole, Dorset. A letter, extant I believe among your records, notified the brethren of the appointment, and charged them to "correspond with him upon all Masonic business"; it was signed by the Grand Secretary, William White. Why was the appointment made then? Had the premier Grand Lodge been awaiting the establishment of a Moderns' lodge in Worcester? We shall probably never know; but from my knowledge of the haphazard working and attitude of Grand Lodge both to the appointment and status of Provincial

Grand Masters generally, I rather doubt it. And the fact that John Dent was again almost certainly an absentee confirms my suspicion that it was a reward of status for him rather than any desire on the part of Grand Lodge to put the Masonic affairs of Worcestershire on a more regular footing. We do know, however, that Dent held the post for thirty-four years until his death at the end of 1826. And, unlike his predecessor, we also know a good deal about his Masonic career which proves him to have been a distinguished mason. An initiate of the Lodge of Freedom in 1788, he later joined the celebrated Lodge of Antiquity No.2. Becoming an officer of Grand Lodge, he rapidly rose to the rank of Senior Grand Warden in 1793, and was later particularly active in the negotiations leading up to the Union of 1813. Such must have been the esteem in which he was held that he was elected the first Treasurer of the United Grand Lodge, a post he filled with distinction until his resignation on the grounds of ill health at the beginning of 1826, the year of his death. But while the records of Grand Lodge bear testimony to his zeal for the Craft in general and he is known to have been referred to in terms of high regard by the Worcester brethren, there is no record at all, neither in the Province nor in Grand Lodge, of his ever having paid Worcester a visit. We have only three pieces of further evidence from the period - a Jewel and two Deputy Provincial Grand Masters.

The Jewel is John Dent's Collar Jewel of his office as Prov. G.M., and was found by Grand Lodge in a jeweller in Bath in the early 1960s and presented to the Provincial Museum here. Made in 1821, there is some speculation that it was commissioned for a projected visit to Worcester. But since, as I have already indicated, no record of such a visit exists - indeed, other evidence points to the contrary - the alternative suggestion of W. Bro. Tommy Grounsell seems far more likely: namely, that he had it made to wear in Grand Lodge, where the office of Prov. G.M. had recently become senior to that of Grand Treasurer.

Then there is the evidence of the two Deputy Prov. G.M.s, some of it begging more questions than it answers. We have clearly entered on one of the more peculiar phases in the history of the non-existence of the Province of Worcestershire! On 27 December 1820 the W.M. of the Worcester Lodge, Dr. Adam Dods, ordered a letter to be sent to the Grand Secretary stating "their desire to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge" and enquiring if "the appointment of a D.P.G.M. is registered in the books of the Grand Lodge, and if so, the name of the brother, but if not,

information as to the proper course of procedure". The immediate question that this prompts is: Why did Dr. Dods not write to John Dent, the Prov. G.M.? Was he unaware of the 1792 instruction? Or did he know that Dent was generally too busy - or too disinterested - to apply himself to Worcestershire affairs? But this is only the beginning of the story. A reply was received that a W. Bro. William Thomson had been appointed Dep. Prov. G.M. At the next meeting of the Worcester Lodge it was thereupon resolved to write to W. Bro. Thomson congratulating him upon his appointment and "hoping to be favoured with his visits as often as his convenience would admit of". This friendly communication received a slightly frosty reply in which W. Bro. Thomson pointed out that he had actually been Dep. Prov. G.M. for eighteen years already, that is to say, since 1802. One can only comment by using the modern phrase and saying that he must have kept a remarkably low profile. For consider the facts. William Thomson lived at Henwick near Worcester and, during the period of nineteen years, 1799 to 1817, he was W.M. of the Worcester Lodge for no less than fourteen of them. And yet three years after the last occasion we have one of his more immediate successors apparently totally unaware of his appointment. Part of this can possibly be excused by the fact that W. Bro. Thomson was, despite his distinguished record of service, not a regular member of the Lodge, having resigned and rejoined it on at least two different occasions. But although there is no record of his Provincial appointment of 1802, at his first resignation in December 1811 he expressed his "desire to benefit the Lodge, either individually or in my capacity as D.P.G.M.". And in January 1816 he and his two wardens signed the Faithful Lodge Petition, and he put D.P.G.M. after his signature; and again in July 1818 he installed Dr. Farr as the Founding Master of Mercy and Truth Lodge in Evesham. In those days when connection was so important he was certainly ideally suited to the post since he had formerly held the position of Writing Master to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Grand Master of the Moderns. But why was his appointment unknown? He appears to have resigned it in 1822, because in that year we hear of him once more, referred to in passing as P.D.P.G.M. And why during the whole of this twenty year period did he not, so far as we know, attempt to summon a Provincial Grand Lodge?

We do know that he seems to have been succeeded - ousted - by the same Dr. Adam Dods in 1822. But was Dods appointed by the Prov. G.M.? Again, sadly, any evidence either way is

lacking. And the same is equally true of the attempt to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge in that year. Was it sanctioned by, was it even known to the Prov. G.M.? We have no means of knowing. From the records of the Worcester Lodge, however, we do know what happened. At their regular meeting on 2 September 1822 the new Dep. Prov. G.M. gave notice of his intention to call a meeting of his own and the other two extant Worcestershire lodges - Faithful at Kidderminster and Mercy and Truth at Evesham (Harmonic of Dudley being then in abeyance) - in order to hold a Provincial Grand Lodge and to appoint Officers. This was scheduled for noon on 2 October 1822 at the Reindeer Inn, Worcester, and duly took place, twenty-eight members of the three lodges being present. But subsequently the Worcester Lodge refused to endorse the proposal that £16 be taken from Lodge funds and put into a Provincial Lodge Fund for the purchase of Provincial Grand Lodge regalia. And although a second Provincial meeting was held in 1824, the same disagreement continued and in 1825, no doubt discouraged by the deadlock, Dr. Dods resigned as Dep. Prov. G.M. and the attempt at founding a permanent Provincial Grand Lodge collapsed. There is a mysterious postscript to this story from the beginning of 1828. At the time when Harmonic Lodge was attempting to recover its warrant they were advised to seek confirmation of its existence "from Worcester Province". On enquiry it was reported that "the P.G.M. for the County is dead, the Deputy is in Worcester goal for debt, and their secretaries are not known". Which deputy, we may ask, did this refer to? William Thomson? Adam Dods? Or some third and hitherto unknown figure?

While dealing with the period of the Provincial Grand Mastership of John Dent I would like to turn my attention briefly to the Royal Arch, since in December 1812 he was also designated Grand Superintendent of Royal Arch Masonry in Worcestershire. As with the Craft so in Royal Arch he was the first Grand Treasurer from 1817 - the Union in the Royal Arch took four years longer to achieve - to 1823, but it appears that he made no attempt to introduce or foster the Supreme Degree in any part of the Province. But it did already exist independently and probably in spasmodic fashion, and although we are on very uncertain ground in recording the earliest days of the Royal Arch in Worcestershire there is definite evidence of its existence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is not the place, nor is there the time, to outline the origins and development of this Supreme Degree; but I feel certain in my own mind that it would have been

introduced into the Province certainly by the Athol lodges and possibly also by some of the Moderns' lodges, that is to say in the last forty years of the eighteenth century and some considerable time before any concrete evidence. Such evidence as we possess indicates that a W. Bro. John Allen, who was W.M. of the Worcester Lodge in 1807, 1808 and 1812 (that is to say three of the five years when W. Bro. Thomson was not!), worked the Royal Arch ceremony in the Lodge as part of the Third Degree and was responsible for exalting many masons. There exists in the Museum at Worcester early Royal Arch regalia which is known to be associated with W. Bro. Allen, and since he died in 1813 he must have bought it at the time he was exalting brethren of the Lodge.

So far I have chronicled almost the first hundred years of the masonic history of the Province down to the death of John Dent in 1826, and it has to be admitted that it has not been a particularly rosy picture: lodges being born and then withering or dying completely, with only the Worcester Lodge exhibiting any degree of continuity at this time; two inappropriate, absentee and historically isolated Prov. G.M.s and no Provincial structure whatsoever whereas, for example, that in Cheshire - the oldest Masonic Province - had already been in existence for just over a century. And I regret to say that the position was not to improve for another twenty years; indeed, we enter a period when even the Worcester Lodge was almost brought to extinction, though for a quite different reason.

Grand Lodge did not bother to inform anyone in the Province of the demise of their Prov. G.M. at the end of 1826, and goodness knows when they might have found out had it not been for the Secretary of the Worcester Lodge who happened to spot the obituary in the newspaper. Accordingly he wrote to the Grand Secretary asking for a replacement for both Prov. G.M. and Dep. Prov. G.M. The reply was not encouraging. It ignored the latter appointment entirely and indicated that in so far as the former was concerned the appointment was the sole prerogative of the Most Worshipful the Grand Master, and that he would only appoint someone personally known to himself or a nobleman or other brother of distinction. Not only was there nothing new in this - it had been the position since it had been clearly stated in the 1756 edition of the Book of Constitutions - but it was also true. H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex ruled English Freemasonry in a most autocratic manner from his appointment at the Union of 1813 to his death thirty years later,

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choosing - sometimes unwisely, it is said - all the major office holders. The Worcester Lodge took the hint from the Grand Secretary and found a baronet and a nobleman. The baronet, Sir Edward Dening, was elected a joining member, attended a few times and then dropped out. The nobleman, Viscount Deerhurst, future Earl of Coventry, withdrew on the night of his initiation and was never heard of again - in masonic circles, that is. Having failed at the local end, the Worcester Lodge continued to petition at the Grand Lodge end, but always received the same reply; it was entirely a matter for H.R.H. and no business of theirs. So frustrated did they become that in 1831 they took the drastic step of withholding their dues to Grand Lodge in protest.

For seven years Grand Lodge was silent over this act of outright defiance, either through extreme tolerance or excessive laxity. Then, after further abortive correspondence, some of it with the famous Dr. Crucefix, in July 1838 they struck. Their ultimatum in effect was this: either come to heel or be erased. The Worcester Lodge was given until the next meeting of the Board of General Purposes to decide; and even this was a concession, since the original intention had been to erase them on the spot. Only the personal intervention of a member of the Board, one Henry Udall who was a barrister friend of the current W.M. of the Worcester Lodge, solicitor Charles Bedford, prevented it and gained a little time. He also helped to soften the blow by writing a friendly letter, warning the W.M. that the Lodge was entirely in the wrong and strongly advising them to make speedy amends. After lengthy debate the Worcester Lodge complied and so the danger of extinction was narrowly averted. Henry Udall used his good offices further, and obtained a ruling from the Board of General Purposes that the Grand Registrar had the power to appoint a Dep. Prov. G.M. for the Province, the implication therefore being that Worcestershire should temporarily abandon the idea of a Prov. G.M. and suggest someone to fill the lesser post who could then organise a Provincial Grand Lodge. But, perhaps not surprisingly after the shock of their narrow escape from enforced extinction, the Worcester Lodge seem to have had enough and no further initiative came from them.

By now, however, there was growing masonic interest in the Province and many wondered why Worcestershire lacked a Provincial organisation. In 1843 it was the turn of the now revived Harmonic Lodge of Dudley to take the initiative. They sent a deputation to the Worcester Lodge to enlist their support in approaching Grand Lodge on the subject. The

Worcester Lodge reluctantly agreed to write again, but they told the members of Harmonic Lodge that they knew exactly what the reply would be - that the appointment was vested solely in the hands of H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex. They did write and they were right!

But it was from the north of the Province that success ultimately came and from the then newest lodge, Royal Standard of Kidderminster (now of Dudley). They had had considerable difficulty and delay in obtaining a warrant in 1844, because Grand Lodge pointed out that there were already two lodges in the town - Faithful No.442 and Hope and Charity No.521 (founded in 1824) - and although the former had ceased to function, its warrant had not been surrendered. The sponsors of Royal Standard ultimately traced the warrant to the Leamington home of W. Bro. Torre, the Dep. Prov. G.M. of Warwickshire, to whom for some reason it had been entrusted for despatch to London and who, for some equally unexplained reason, had failed to do so. Royal Standard members became convinced that had they had a Provincial Grand Lodge of their own the annoying delay would not have occurred. So in 1846 one of the Past Masters, W. Bro. Dr. William Roden, decided - as his fellow medical practitioner Dr Dods had done a quarter of a century before - that the best way to succeed was to organise one and then apply to Grand Lodge for endorsement. Accordingly he wrote to the other four Worcestershire lodges - Worcester, Harmonic, Hope and Charity, and Semper Fidelis (which had only just been founded) - inviting them to meet at Kidderminster in February 1847. This meeting was well attended and strongly supported his initiative. Further meetings produced an agreed sharing of offices and Dr. Roden negotiated with the Grand Registrar, W. Bro. Alexander Dobie, for formal recognition. The latter complied and on 17 August 1847, together with the Grand Secretary and the Grand Tyler, he formally opened the first official Provincial Grand Lodge at the Guildhall, Worcester, suitably appointing Dr. Roden as the Dep. Prov. G.M.

Dr. Roden never became Prov. G.M. He presided over Provincial Grand Lodge in his capacity as Dep. Prov. G.M. in 1848 at Dudley and in 1849 at Kidderminster, but resigned later that year following differences of opinion with members of his own lodge and with the Worcester Lodge. No successor was immediately appointed and no Provincial Grand Lodge was held in 1850, so that all his hard work, not to mention the very existence of Worcestershire's infant Provincial Grand Lodge, looked like foundering. But rescue was at hand from, you may be

forgiven for thinking, the most unlikely quarter of all - Grand Lodge! In 1851 the second Marquis of Zetland, who had succeeded the Duke of Sussex on the latter's death in 1843, appointed a new Prov. G.M. for Worcestershire - Henry Charles Vernon, a member of a distinguished Staffordshire family and Dep. Prov. G.M. for that Province besides being a P.S.G.W. He had recently gone to live in Malvern and had in May 1850 become a joining member of the Worcester Lodge. Grand Lodge had at last found the right man. The third Prov. G.M., but the first both to live in the Province and to take an active interest in its affairs and therefore the first, so to speak, of the modern line, he was installed on 17 June 1851 in the City and County Library at Worcester by R.W. Bro. Tucker, Prov. G.M. of Dorset, ironically one of only two Prov. G.Ms. ever to have been deposed. A new era had begun, and I think it would be fair to comment that what the Province of Worcestershire may thus lack in antiquity it certainly now makes up for in quality.

And the middle decades of the last century mark other ways in which the growth of and interest in Freemasonry in this Province can be seen. For instance, five more lodges were added to the existing five: Clive, founded in Bromsgrove in 1849, moved to Dudley in 1856 and renamed Vernon before moving again, this time to Stourport, in 1865; Stability of Stourbridge, also founded in 1849; Perseverance, founded in Dudley in 1850, and now No.573 of Halesowen, having moved there in 1861; St. Michael of Century Wells of 1866; and Royds of Malvern of 1867. Then there was the foundation of the first two Royal Arch Chapters within a week of each other in December 1844, Dudley Chapter attached to Harmonic Lodge and St. Wulstan's Chapter attached to the Worcester Lodge. And three other Orders all saw their official foundation at this time - I say 'official' since in each case there is a suspicion of their practice within the eighteenth century lodges before the Union. I refer to the Knights Templar in the form of the Richard de Vernon Preceptory of 1857, closely followed in 1861 by that of St. Amand; to the St. Dunstan Chapter of Rose Croix of 1860; and to the Lechmere Lodge of Mark Master Masons of 1863.

W.M., although there is still a great deal more that could be said, I am aware that I have already taxed the patience of your brethren sufficiently. I have dealt with the first half of the history of Freemasonry in the Province and have, I hope, whetted the appetite of your members for the extended working that we all very much look forward to W. Bro. Talbot producing. May I end by saying how very much I always enjoy visiting your Lodge, either in an official or in a

purely informal capacity; by congratulating you on the strength of your Lodge today and on almost attaining your bicentenary; and finally by imploring some member of the Lodge to invite me on that eagerly awaited occasion!

Acknowledgements:

Worcestershire Masonic Year Book

A History of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire
by W. Bro. Albert Brown, P.P.S.G.W., Prov. G. Treas.

Reminiscences of the Worcester Lodge
by W. Bro. C.C. Whitney Griffiths, P.P.S.G.W.

A Historical Sketch of Freemasonry in Worcestershire
by W. Bro. R.H. Hall, P.P.D.G.Swd.B. (Durham)

Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire
by W. Bro. T.W. Grounsell, P.G.St.B.

The Foundation and Early History of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire
by W. Bro. J.C. Brooke, P.P.S.G.W.

The Collected Prestonian Lectures, Volume II, 1961-1974

Freemasonry in London from 1785
by W. Bro. Roy A. Wells, P.A.G.M.C.

Introducing Freemasonry
by Bro. M. de Pace

Glittering Star 1759-1984
by V.W. Bro. Major E.J. Bate, M.R.E.

Royal Arch Masonry in Worcestershire
by E. Comp. T.W. Grounsell, P.G.St.B.

The Early History of the Royal Arch in Worcestershire
by E. Comp. C.F. Parks, P.A.G.Soj.

The History of Mark Masonry in the Province of Worcestershire
by W. Bro. T.W. Grounsell, P.G.Stwd.

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