

BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL BLAKE MUSEUM



The Masonic Hall, King Square

FREEMASONRY IN BRIDGWATER BY JERRY HEYES & NORMAN HUCKER

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2018

Membership is open to all men of good reputation and integrity, of any race or religion, who can fill the one essential qualification that the applicant believes in a Supreme Being. He is also required to acknowledge obedience to lawful authority and the laws of the land in which he resides.

The Aims and Objectives of Freemasonry are for its Members to be good citizens by practising the highest moral and social standards in friendship, charity and integrity, to encourage its members to serve their own religion and community, to demonstrate that they are a society of upright men, and to enjoy each other's company and develop team spirit and fellowship.

The questions of when, how, why and where Freemasonry originated are still the

subject of intense speculation. The general consensus amongst Masonic scholars is that it descends directly or indirectly from the organisation of operative stone masons who built the great cathedrals and castles of the middle ages.



Elias Ashmole (23 May 1617 – 18 May 1692)

Elias Ashmole was an English antiquary, politician, officer of arms, astrologer and student of alchemy. Ashmole supported the royalist side during the English Civil War, and at the restoration of Charles II (1660) He was rewarded with several lucrative offices. Following his initiation in 1646, he recorded these words:

'October 16, 4.30pm - I was made a freemason at Warrington in Lancashire with Colonel Henry Mainwaring [a Roundhead parliamentarian friend related to his father-in-law] of Karincham in Cheshire. The names of those that were then at the Lodge, Mr Richard Penket Worden, Mr James Collier, Mr Richard Sankey, Henry Littler, John Ellam, Richard Ellam and Hugh Brewer.'

This is the first evidence of the initiation of an English speculative mason - notwithstanding the fact that those present and listed would have certainly been initiated at an earlier date.

On St John's Day, 24 June 1717, four London Lodges, which had existed for some time, came together at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard, declared themselves a Grand Lodge and elected Anthony Sayer as their Grand Master. This was the first Grand Lodge in the world.

In 1725 The Grand Lodge of Ireland was established and in 1736 The Grand Lodge of Scotland came into being.

The three Home Grand Lodges began to take Freemasonry overseas and the development of Freemasonry abroad mirrors the 18th and 19th century development of the British Empire.

In 1751 a rival Grand Lodge appeared in London. Its original members were Irish Masons who claimed that the original Grand Lodge had made innovations. They dubbed the first Grand Lodge the Moderns and called themselves the Antients. The two existed side by side - both at home and abroad - for nearly 63 years, neither recognising each other as regular.

After four years of negotiation, the two Grand Lodges in England united on 27

December 1813 to form the United Grand Lodge of England. This union led to a great deal of standardisation of ritual, procedures and regalia.

The earliest record of a Masonic Lodge in Bridgwater was on 28th January 1757 when seven Brethren held a Lodge at the Old Angel, at the rear of the Royal Clarence Hotel. It is uncertain what name the Lodge used but its Number in 1755 was 326, this number changed several times over the years becoming 135 in 1863. On 27th December 1774 it had been agreed that the name of the Lodge should become The Lodge of Perpetual Friendship.

Between the years of 1771 and 1784 the Lodge was in difficulty due to lack of members and therefore lack of funds and was erased on 19th November 1783 and then reinstated on 11th February 1784. From 1764 to 1790 it held its meeting at the Swan Inn, Cornhill, and up until 1866 at the Lamb Inn, High Street, now the Duke. The entrance to the then Masonic Hall, now bricked up, can still be seen at the junction of Lamb Lane and Little St. Mary Street and is marked with an escutcheon above the lintel and inscribed "Masonic Hall". Afterwards at the Royal Clarence Hotel until 1913 when it moved to the newly constructed Masonic Hall in King Square.

Arimathea Lodge No. 150, which had received its Warrant on 9th September 1767, was situated at the Swan Inn, Cornhill. Apparently it lapsed shortly after this date, however it is mentioned in a Calendar of 1800 as having been at the Lamb Inn, High Street. The name Arimathea was derived from the legend that Joseph of Arimathea landed at Comwich and passed through Bridgwater to preach to the heathen British.

On 19th February 1774 the Lodge of Liberty and Sincerity No. 461 received its Warrant and held its meetings at the Crown Inn, St. Mary Street, from 1788. This Lodge lapsed in 1803.

Currently there are three main Lodges, known as Craft Lodges, in Bridgwater:

Lodge of Perpetual Friendship, No. 135. This originated in 1757, as noted above.



Robert Blake (1598-1657)

Admiral Blake Lodge, No 4692,

Consecrated 1924, named to honour Robert Blake, born in Bridgwater 1598, who died at sea off Plymouth in 1657, and is known as the Father of the Royal Navy.



Charles Kemeys Kemeys Tynte (1778-1880)

Tynte Lodge, No 7994,

Consecrated 1964, named to honour Charles Kemeys Kemeys Tynte (1778-1880) of Halswell House, Goathurst, Bridgwater. A Member of Parliament for Bridgwater 1820 - 1837 and Provincial Grandmaster for Somerset between 1820 -1860.

In addition there are several "Side Orders" of Freemasonry which complement the three main Lodges.

The ideals of Freemasonry have spread over the globe and there are Lodges in almost every Country. The United Grand Lodge of England celebrated its tercentenary in 2017 and in June

2018 The Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset celebrated its 250th anniversary with a Church service and parade at Bridgwater under the Banners of The Royal Cumberland Lodge No. 41 of Bath, and The Perpetual Friendship Lodge No.135. This occasion was the first public parade, in Bridgwater, of Freemasons in their regalia since before the Second World War.



The procession on Cornhill, June 2018

Prior to this time, newspapers reported at length Masonic Festivals, ordinary meetings and activities involving Freemasons participation in laying foundations of public buildings and monuments. The issue of the Sonderfahndungsliste GB (Special Search List GB) by Adolf Hitler in September 1939, the previous treatment of German Freemasons, and the subsequent looting of the Jersey Temple as well as many others throughout Europe, is the possible cause of why such reporting became less frequent and eventually stopped completely. This in turn led, in part, to the suggestion in some quarters that Freemasonry was a secret society and this was promulgated in the media.

Today, Freemasonry is, once again, becoming more open as to its activities with all who are genuinely interested in this society of men and women (who have their own Lodges, The Order of Women Freemasons and The Honourable Fraternity of Antient Masonry founded 1908) who maintain the original precepts of this ancient order.

Charity, being a cornerstone of Freemasonry, extends not only to the families of our members but to the wider community, on a

local level by the Lodges in a particular area, but also nationally and internationally by The United Grand Lodge of England. Grants are made throughout England and Wales to many organisations including hospitals, hospices, medical research, education and air ambulances. On an international level Grand Lodge is very active in giving immediate support to organisations helping in areas suffering from natural disasters, and following up with additional support.

Sources

Various Masonic publications and records.

Further information at :

www.ugle.org.uk

www.somersetfreemasons.org

www.owf.org

www.hfaf.org

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