



Province of East Lancashire

Lancashire Craft Lodges

1717-1813



The history and especially the early history, of any organised body is indissolubly bound up with the history of its component parts, and the story of the development of our Grand Lodge and Provincial Grand Lodge is no exception.

It can be claimed that every 'Moderns' Lodge in the Province during the eighteenth century came into being by the strict machinery of Provincial activity and those few earlier Lodges owing their existence to the Grand Master's 'Deputation' can also be included in this category, when it is accepted that it was here also that Provincial activities carried out the essential duties. We should, however, modify this rather loose statement, since it is closer to the truth to say that in the days of the earliest Lodges in the County there was no Provincial Grand Lodge in the sense that we understand today, and Grand Lodge used the term Province more in its strictly geographical sense than with any Masonic signification. It was in fact a commissioning of people on the spot to deputise for the Grand Master in constituting a Lodge. And even when in due course a Provincial Grand Master was appointed for Lancashire he was no more than a personal communicating link between Grand Lodge and local Lodges. It was to be many years before the first signs of organisation of any kind appeared in the County and a Provincial Grand Lodge began to function as an administrative entity.

There are occasional references in the Minutes of several Lodges to Provincial Meetings dating from about 1760, and although certain Provincial Offices are traceable from shortly after that year they were for a period of over thirty years drawn from the Lodge of the Provincial Grand or the Deputy Grand Master, and few authoritative records remain of their activities as a Provincial Grand Lodge. When it is pointed out that there were not more than 33 Lodges in the County under the aegis of the Regular Grand Lodge at the end of the eighteenth century it is readily understood that the activities of the Provincial Grand Lodge were intermittent.

Bearing in mind that this is a historical record of the Craft in Lancashire, I have endeavoured to place the Lodges in chronological order, as they appear on the Lancashire scene, ignoring, except for record, any previous existence in other parts of the country.

Apart from the well-known instance of the initiation of Elias Ashmole in 1646 in a Lancashire Lodge, the Provincial story begins ten years after the formation of Grand Lodge, for it was in 1727 that the first attempt to establish precedence of the "several lodges" was made in order that they might be "finally settled and entered accordingly". At that same meeting a request was received from the Master, Warden and Brethren of a Lodge held at the King's Head, Salford, that a "List of their Members" may be entered in the Grand Lodge Book, and that they may be under the Care and Patronage of the Grand Lodge, and it was agreed that they be entered accordingly. It appeared in a list of 1729 as No.48, but in 1730 as No.47. As there was a membership of 24 it had probably been in existence for several years and is accorded pride of place in the Lancashire story but it is sad to relate that it was among a number of Lodges erased from the Grand Lodge Register in 1754, as it was thought (but not proved) that it had not met for several years. The precise dates of origin of many Lodges of the early Grand Lodge era are uncertain but in 1732 a Lodge was meeting at the New King's Arms in Leigh. This Lodge had a comparatively brief existence and little is known about it. In 1734 it was No 87. The correct date of its Warrant baffles the searcher. In the list for 1734 the date of 22nd February 1731 is shown, but other dates have also been given, one as early as 1725. These discrepancies of origin are unimportant in the case of Lodges that no longer exist, but they have caused a little heartburning in surviving Lodges when the question of Centenary has arisen.

In sharp contrast to the uncertainty of origin of the two Lodges mentioned that of the next is clearly defined. It is the Lodge now known as Anchor and Hope, No. 37, of Bolton, one of the half dozen Lodges brought into existence by means of a "Deputation". This was issued on 23rd October 1732, by the Grand Master, Lord Montague to Mr. Edward Entwistle ('Rt. Worshipful and well-beloved Brother Mr. Edward Entwistle' is the designation) to authorise him to "convene our Brethren at Bolton-Le-Moors. Here again the question promptly springs to mind as to how long there had been Brethren in the town, but we must pinpoint its birth as 9th November 1732, on which date it was duly constituted by the said Edward

Entwistle.

Its claim to seniority in the Province as a whole gets a little involved, but there is no doubt whatever that it is the oldest Lodge surviving in the Lancashire Provinces. In 1734 it was listed as No.105, one of the few that had no sign to distinguish it, as it met in a private room. However, in 1765 it is mentioned as meeting at The Hope Inn (long since vanished) and by 1767 was known as Anchor and Hope.

Only nine months after Anchor and Hope came another Lodge which also happily still exists, that known as Lodge of Relief, No. 42, which meets in Bury. This was constituted on the 3rd July 1733 at the sign of the Red Lion, Bury by Edward Entwistle. In Pines List of 1734 it is shown, as No. 18 and the sign is a lion with the word "Red" written over it. In a history of the Lodge by E.A. Evans, compiled in 1883, it is recorded that in 1786, it absorbed the Lodge of Temperance, also of Bury. It is the proud possessor of an old Tyler's hat, the accompaniment to the old coat which is on view in the Masonic Hall, Bolton, and which is the property of the Anchor and Hope Lodge.

Next in order of date so far as the accepted date of the Warrant shows is the St. George and Dragon, at Liverpool in 1736. This too was constituted by "Deputation" by Edward Entwistle. In 1766 it was shown as meeting at the Custom House, by the Old Dock, under number 81, but was erased about 1775. Edward Entwistle constituted his last Lodge on the 9th January 1739, at Salford. This Lodge is now known as Fortitude, No. 64, now of Manchester, and is the oldest surviving Manchester Lodge. Between 1744 and 1863 it had 23 meeting places, including 4 at places nearer to Bolton or Oldham than to Manchester. At the Special Grand Lodge held at the London Tavern, Bishopsgate, on the 14th March 1774, it was one of three Lancashire Lodges "prepared to contribute towards the cost of building Freemasons' Hall", with a contribution of 1/-, the other two being Royal Oak, Prescott and Royal Lancashire, Colne.

These then are the Lodges, which may be said to form the embryo of Freemasonry in Lancashire. To Edward Entwistle must be accorded more than a perfunctory word of praise for bringing into the Masonic world these old Lodges. The Earl of Craufurd, Grand Master, honoured him with the first Provincial Grand Mastership of Lancashire in 1734.

The above-mentioned Lodges are the only ones of which we have record in the years before the birth of the "Ancients" Grand Lodge. It was not until 1755 that the first "Ancients" Lodge made its appearance in the County, and of all those which came on the scene in the next 25 years none reached even a respectable middle age.

But before taking a closer look at the "Ancients" there are three more Lodges, two of them of vintage quality, that deserve a special mention. In the small village of Prescott, near Liverpool, there came into being on the 20th December, 1753, Lodge No. 235, which has lived to receive its Bi-Centenary Warrant, named in 1801 and now known as Loyalty, No. 86, and is one of the very few Lodges distinguished from the rest by having a "Deputation" as its authority, and was in fact the last so Constituted in Lancashire.

There follows a Lodge which has more than one claim to fame, Unanimity, No. 89; in the first place it was the first actually Constituted (and Warranted) by William Ratchdale, who succeeded Edward Entwistle as Provincial Grand Master, and received what has been described as the first true English Warrant. Secondly, it was constituted in Liverpool, although it was to meet at St. Ann's Coffee House, Manchester. In 1759 it moved to the King's Head, Salford, but 4yrs later returned to the Coffee House and had several other meeting places in Manchester before moving to Dukinfield, Cheshire in 1807.

We now come to the second Liverpool Lodge, Sea Captains. Although there is some confusion of dates, it was undoubtedly constituted in 1755, for this was done by Ratchdale who resigned his Office in 1760, but it was erased in 1823, due to the Liverpool troubles at that time. It was in December 1823 that a group of Masonic rebels met at the Shakespeare Tavern in Williamson Square, Liverpool to recreate the Antient Grand Lodge. This rebellion was the culmination of discontent within the large Lancashire Province, which

seemed to have been simmering since the union of the Antients and Moderns Grand Lodges in 1813. A new Grand Lodge was formed in Wigan, the make up being the Liverpool and Wigan Lodges that were involved in the rebellion. Lodges were renumbered and new warrants issued. The Wigan Grand Lodge continued to function, although most of the rebellious Lodges had returned to UGLE, until 1913, when all the brethren of the Wigan Grand Lodge had to be Initiated, Passed and Raised.

The next Lodge to enter the scene is the Ancients No 39, on the 18th June 1755. It first met at St. Ann's Church and Mitre in Manchester and seems to have become moribund a few years later, for it was "renewed" at the Black-a-Moors Head in 1775 but lapsed again in 1793. Two years later it was again "renewed and revived" at the Queen's Head, Old Church, Manchester, but did not long survive. On the 20th August 1755, a Lodge to be held at The Cock, Warrington was constituted, but it lapsed the following year. In 1755, a Lodge was Warranted at Liverpool, with the name Ancient and Amicable Lodge, and given the number 45. There appears to be some confusion over the years concerning the number and it was re-named in 1814 as St. George's Lodge and is now known as St George's Lodge of Harmony, No.32. Two more Lodges were founded in Liverpool in 1756, No's 51 and 53. No 51 seems to have dropped out immediately and No 53 also lapsed very quickly but the number was assigned to another Liverpool Lodge in 1775, the warrant of which was withdrawn for un-masonic conduct in 1807. The scene now shifts back to Manchester and in November 1756, we have three Lodges bearing the "Ancients" number 56. This was cancelled in 1775 "for various misdemeanours". Six years elapse before the next Lodge is added to the Lancashire roll, and this ushers in a new Provincial Grand Master, John Smith. His first Warrant was to a Lodge whose prestige stands high in the Hall of Masonic fame, the Royal Lancashire. No.116, of Colne, dated 4th February 1762, but was allowed the date 27th March 1760, when it was proved without difficulty, when a history of the Lodge was produced to mark its Bicentenary.

Closer in time and in geographical location there follows another Lodge distinguished by an honourable old age. On the 27th December 1762, the Prov.G.M. John Smith gave his warrant to Lodge 305, known today as Silent Temple, No.126, of Burnley. On the 8th November 1765, a Lodge was created to meet at The Fleece, Warrington, known as the Lodge of Lights, No. 148. Although the "Lodge at Warrington" of which Ashmole wrote cannot now be identified, Warrington is justifiably proud of its oldest existing Lodge.

Almost ten years had elapsed since we last saw the Constitution of a Lodge in Manchester, but the year 1776 saw the birth of a Lodge of high repute. It first met at the Swan & Saracen, Shudehill, and was given the Number 385, and in 1783 the title of Lodge of Industry, but it is now known as Integrity No 163.

On the 24th June 1769 St. John's Lodge No 191 was formed in Manchester to meet at the Woolpack. Falling out with the landlord it moved to The Sun in the Cold House, and in 1818 it moved again this time to Warrington, but is now well established in Bury. 1770 another Lodge was formed in Bury known as Temperance, but united with the Lodge of Relief No 42 in 1786. February 1774 saw Leigh make its second contribution to the list, when No. 462 was added. It remained in the town for over 70yrs, when it transferred to Todmorden where it has continued to meet as the Lodge of Prudence, now No. 219. Leigh made a further attempt to raise the banner of Freemasonry with an "Ancients" Lodge at the Fox Inn, but again failed to retain its hold. In 1786 it appears in Bolton where it was renamed the Lodge of Antiquity No. 146.

In 1777 yet another "Ancients" Lodge came into being, at The Cock, Stretford, but had a life of some five years. It was given the number was 201, and this was later taken up in 1796 by what was known as Red Cross Lodge of Manchester. The name was altered in 1832 to Lodge of Virtue No.152, and still exists under that title. Liverpool once more takes up the tale in 1780 with a Merchants Lodge No. 241, In 2003 Prince Arthur Lodge No. 1570 and Sceptre Lodge No 4341 are to amalgamate with Merchants Lodge. The Mariners Lodge No. 249 followed this three years later. In 1786 Wigan made its first contribution to the Lancashire story with an "Ancients" Lodge now know as Antiquity No. 178. This was closely followed by a "Moderns" Lodge known later as Sincerity. It became involved in the Liverpool Rebellion and was removed

from the English Grand Lodge in 1828 but continued in sturdy independence until 1913 when it was received back into the fold as Sincerity No. 3677.

In 1788 we move back to Salford with a "Moderns" Lodge named Naphtali No. 266. After four years it moved to Manchester then to Whitefield, Prestwich and Bury. It finally settled in Heywood in 1858 and now meets at Rochdale. The next Lodge in date order is Unity No. 267, which moved to Macclesfield in 1845 where it still remains. Also in 1788 Manchester brought another Lodge to the County Union No. 268. In 1822 it moved into Derbyshire but in 1860 it moved back over the border to Ashton-under-Lyne where it still meets. 1788 seems to have been a busy year as another Lodge was warranted at Burnley; this was named Fidelity No. 269 but moved to Blackburn in 1836, where it has remained.

The scene now moves to the Rossendale Valley where the Lodge of Tranquillity No. 274 was constituted on the 17th July 1789 and meets at Rawtenstall. We now move to Oldham where Friendship Lodge No. 277 entered the Masonic field in August 1789. After meeting at several hostelries in the area it finally settled at the Masonic Hall, Oldham. The year also saw Lancaster enter the Masonic field with the Lodge of Fortitude No. 281. Nearly two years elapsed before the appearance of the next Lodge and once more we are back in the Rossendale Valley in 1791 with the Lodge of Amity No. 283, which first met at Rochdale but moved to Haslingden in 1817 where it has remained.

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