

The Union: Harmony, Disharmony, Expulsions and Desertions

Summary: *The Union: Harmony, Disharmony, Expulsions and Desertions - The appointment of the two sons of King George III, the Duke of Sussex as Grand Masters of the Moderns and his brother, the Duke of Kent as Grand Master of the "Ancients" enabled the two Grand Lodges to finally put their differences to one side and form the United Grand Lodge of England. Although differences and difficulties remained in many lodges across the country, the Union has stood the test of time, but not without casualties.*

The "Athol" Grand Lodge (Ancients) was formed in 1751, however, there was not many 'Ancient' Lodges along the Yorkshire/Lancashire border. Although, there is some evidence that members of Ancient lodges did visit lodges under the Premier Grand Lodge Warrants.

The Duke of Sussex, Grand Masters, of the Moderns and his brother, the Duke of Kent, Grand Master of the "Ancients" or "Athol" Masons, agreed and formed a working party to iron out the differences between the two orders. The working party was charged to come up with a set of proposals to take forward as a basis for a union. The work was drawn out and it took four years for them to come up with their proposals.

Compromises were made on both sides, however, there was many brethren who **where** never satisfied with the outcome. The act of union to some gave too much away causing some members to speak out very critically.

One of the casualties of the Unions was that the Mark Degree was outlawed.

In some lodges the Mark Degree was continued to be practiced until a Grand Mark Lodge was established in 1873.

Part of the Act of Union required all members, to take new oaths according to the new constitution and to agree to, and work a revised and standardised form of Masonic Working.

Several members were expelled from the Craft for being too outspoken and critical of the Royal Leaders. One leading brother close to the royal circle was expelled from the craft for criticising the Duke of Sussex for conceding too much to the Ancients.

The Duke of Sussex became the first Grand Master of the order on the completion of the Union, his brother, the Duke of Kent becoming Patron of the Craft. The two Dukes agreed to each appoint nine brethren to form a Lodge of Reconciliation to iron out any problems that may arise following the Union and to visit lodges for the purpose of obligating, instructing and perfecting the Members.

The Ceremonies of the Order were revised by a Lodge of Reconciliation, which consisted of members of both parties. Demonstrations were carried out to enable representatives from all lodges to learn the new oaths according to the new constitution as well as the revised working of the degrees.

It was not until November 1814 that the brethren of the Halifax Lodge of Probity No. 84, (now No. 61) received a letter from Grand Lodge informing them of meetings of Instruction at Grand Lodge. The letter was deferred until the February 1815 meeting.

It was agreed each member of the lodge should provide £2 towards sending three brethren to London to learn the new requirements.

This venture became common knowledge in Halifax, and the members of the Lodge became a bit of a laughing stock in the town. The Tyler of the lodge, was expelled for being indiscrete.

The members of Probity Lodge decided to share the information that they had obtained in London with other lodges in the area. They also wanted to claw back some of the 22 guineas outlay. They invited the lodges in their area, both in Lancashire and Yorkshire to a meeting with a view of forming a Lodge of Promulgation. Several of the lodges who attended were descended from the Royal Lancashire Lodge, Colne. Six lodges that attended of 2nd April 1815.

Each lodge of the lodges who attended the meeting contributed 4 Guineas to Probity Lodge's expenses in visiting London.

A Lodge of Promulgation was formed in Keighley at the beginning of April 1815 under the leadership of the Halifax Lodge of Probity. Over the next 12 weeks, members from sixteen lodges within a twenty mile radius of Keighley and an odd one from Staffordshire had been obligated and instructed in the new rituals. A further three Lodges were obligated and instructed at the beginning of October 1815, before the Lodge of Promulgation was closed down.

The Lodge of Promulgation wrote to the Grand Master, HRH the Duke of Sussex, offering their congratulations on the accomplishment of the Union of the two Grand Lodges. In return the Grand Secretary wrote on behalf of the Grand Master expressing his appreciation to the members of the Lodge of Promulgation.

On the surface all appeared well and harmonious; however, there was rumblings back in several of the Lodges. The Lodge of Harmony at Haslingden were divided in opinion on the subject of the new obligations and the revised ritual, the monies that they paid to the Lodge of Promulgation was reimbursed.

The members of the Silent Temple Lodge, Burnley, reflected on the new obligations and rituals. W/Bro. Ivan Eastwood of the Silent Temple Lodge informs me that it is in their minutes that the Lodge decided to ignore the changes.

The Royal Lancashire Lodge, one of the three last lodges to take part in the conversion, commissioned a member of the of the Halifax Lodge of Probity and a member of the Lodge of Promulgation to provide further instruction over the following two years. This was an expensive exercise that costly to the Lodge, in excess of £33.

The five lodges who joined the Lodge of Probity in the Lodge of Promulgation agreed to share the cost of the venture. In return they were given the new obligations and the revised rituals. They also agreed to offer the same to other lodges providing that the lodges agreed to pay a fee of 4 guineas.

Members from twenty lodges were re-obligated and the new ceremonies demonstrated. The additional funds raised were shared out between the Lodges forming the Lodge of Promulgation.

One early sour note, the Lodge of Harmony No. 257 from Halifax, where not happy with the Lodge of Probity proposals regarding the Lodge of Promulgation. They took it upon themselves to write to all the lodges in the six surrounding towns and villages inviting them to put forward their own delegate to travel to London to receive the

revised working as opposed to obtaining this information from the member of the Lodge of Probity.

This campaign failed and all the lodges in the area eventually joined in with other lodges to receive the new workings from the Lodge of Promulgation.

The Grand Master the Duke of Sussex, instructed the Grand Secretary to write a letter of thanks to the Lodge of Probity for the work that they had done in promoting the Union and the revised rituals and obligations.

Meanwhile the principle Lodge in Colne, the Royal Lancashire Lodge, had paid £1 16 shillings to a visiting brother John Singleton in March 1815 for information on the Union. A further £4 was paid for the new Constitutions and further £20 was paid towards the expenses and accommodation of Brother Daniel Sugden, a musician and a member of Probity Lodge, for his services of providing further instruction on the new rituals between 1815 and 1817.

Royal Lancashire Lodge did attend and pay the fee of 4 guineas to the Lodge of Promulgation for its members to be re-obligated and to receive instruction.

Unrest as a result of the Union was common. Charles Bonnor the acting Master of the Lodge of Antiquity who had done much useful work in the Lodge of Promulgation, voiced his concerns regarding the terms of the Union and was expelled from his lodge, he also had his Grand Rank rescinded.

Bro. Goldsworthy led a campaign of resistance within the London Ancient Lodges against the Union; the Lodge of Reconciliation expelled Bro. Goldsworthy from its membership and called all the other dissenters before its committee.

There was also disharmony in Bath, resulting in both the Royal York Lodge and the Lodge of Virtue being erased. One of the consequences of the unrest was that there were no new Lodges in London between 1813 and 1839.

From Sussex to Lancashire and from Ipswich to Bristol came reports of unrest, Eventually, the dissenters became less vocal or just drifted away, with the exception of a few Liverpool Lodges.

At the western side of Lancashire discontent was smouldering. Some Liverpool lodges very were displeased with the Union and also the lack of responses from both their Provincial Grand Master and from the Grand Lodge. This led to several lodges braking away from the Union. The breakaway lasted a number of years and several lodges from the Wigan area joined them to form their own Grand Lodge calls the Wigan Grand Lodge. This rebellion finally dwindled away, with the last of the renegade Lodges returning to the Grand Lodge in 1913.

On a positive note, the Union Prince George Lodge relocated to a remote moorland area of West Yorkshire called Bottom near Eastwood. The lodge initiated fifty-one candidates in its first three years. Several Masonic historians have intermitted that these candidates may have been former members of Private Lodges or former members of the old York Grand Lodge, who wished to become regularised.

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