

What is Freemasonry and when did it start?

What is Freemasonry and when did it start? Freemasonry is one of the oldest fraternal societies. Its members enjoy mutual association and friendship within the strict codes of principle and morality that are prescribed.

Freemasons support charitable needs at Grand Lodge and local Lodge levels. They strive to be loyal members of society and to contribute to their communities.

Its origins are uncertain. There are several theories that Freemasonry was in existence when King Solomon built the Temple at Jerusalem and that the stonemasons who built the Temple were organised into Lodges. Other speculative theories link Freemasonry with the builders of the Egyptian Pyramids, and the Knights Templar who escaped to Scotland when the Knights were persecuted in Europe.

No firm evidence has been found to connect Freemasonry with these or any of the other theories which abound. It is a fact that we do not know how Freemasonry originated. The theory most favoured by serious students of Freemasonry is that it developed from mediaeval stonemasons, who built great castles and cathedrals. These 'operative' masons met in 'lodges' for rest and refreshment. Over a period, the 'lodges' represented groupings of 'operative' Masons who developed standards and practices to regulate their craft and skills. In common with other trades and guilds operating at that time 'Lodges' developed initiation ceremonies for new apprentices. This took place at a time when the only way to prove the authenticity of a stonemason, other than testing his skills over many hours, was by word of mouth, the discreet passing of private words, one to another.

In the early 17th Century, operative 'Lodges' started to accept men who were not operative masons (men who actually worked with stone). The reason for this is unknown but towards the end of the century some Lodges lost any connection with 'operative' stonemasons and became styled similarly to those which exist to-day: Lodges of 'free and accepted or speculative' Masons.

The first recorded Lodge of 'free and accepted Masons' is evidenced in the diary of Elias Ashmole, the renowned Lichfieldian, Antiquary and Founder of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He records being made a Freemason in 1646 at a Lodge held at his father-in-law's house at Warrington. Ashmole listed those present and none had any connection with operative stonemasons.

Moving from the uncertainty of Freemasonry's origins, it is possible to state with certainty when regularly organised Freemasonry was established. On 24th June 1717, four London Lodges formed a Grand Lodge and for several years held an annual feast and elected a Grand Master and two Wardens, the three senior ranking officers in a Lodge. By 1730, the Grand Lodge had over 100 Lodges within its control and had issued a Book of Constitutions, a form of guidance and regulations by which all Lodges should operate. This demonstrates the desire of Freemasonry from the earliest days of regular organisation, to enforce standards amongst members and to be publicly accountable for those standards. A Book of Constitutions to this day provides standards and guidelines by which all Lodges and members must operate.



In 1751, a rival Grand Lodge (the Moderns), consisting of those who were unable to join the London Lodges, was established. There followed a degree of conflict between the two Grand Lodges. The new Grand Lodge claimed to practice the 'Old Institutions' of Freemasonry, whilst alleging that the Grand Lodge, formed in 1717, had departed from the established customs of Freemasonry. This

rivalry continued until 1813, when the Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge, His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex, and his brother, His Royal Highness Edward, Duke of Kent, the Grand Master of the Antients Grand Lodge, formulated Articles of Union between the two Grand Lodges. On 27th December 1813, the United Grand Lodge of England came into being at a special great ceremony.

From these beginnings, Freemasonry has spread around the World. Around 1725, the Grand Lodge of Ireland was formed and in 1736 the Grand Lodge of Scotland. It can be justifiably claimed that Freemasonry universally traces its origins back to the Grand Lodges established in the British Isles.

Early History of Freemasonry in Staffordshire

The first Provincial Grand Master was the Rev Francis Henry Egerton, son of the Bishop of Durham, later to become Eighth Earl of Bridgewater, who was already Provincial Grand Master for North Wales and Shropshire. The Shropshire Calendar stated that in 1791 the Rev Egerton had his patent for North Wales and Shropshire confirmed but found that the Counties of Stafford, Flint, Denbigh and Montgomery had been added, hence Staffordshire was granted the status of a Masonic Province and gained its first Provincial Grand Master, the fact being noted in a letter from Egerton himself, dated 13th April 1791, to the Grand Secretary.

Dr Robert Plot's History of Staffordshire published in 1686, refers to the Society of Freemasons in the Moorlands of the County, but sadly no records can be found from this period. The Masonic Province of Staffordshire was formed in April 1791. It now has over 225 years of continuous service to the ideals of Freemasonry. It is interesting to reflect on how it all began and the immense changes in society that have taken place.

The first Lodge known to be recorded was no.88 founded in the County of Stafford, warranted on 28th March 1732. It met at the Bell and Raven public house in Rotton Row, Wolverhampton, and the first Master was the Rt Hon John, Lord Viscount Dudley and Ward, Baron of Birmingham.

Nothing else is known of this early Lodge, no records whatsoever have been preserved. The details quoted are those which remain on the engraved copper plate list of Grand Lodge. It survived a mere 22 years, being erased in 1754, but it is of great interest because surprisingly that Lodge pre-dated any Lodge in the neighbouring counties of Derby, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Leicestershire and even in the great town of Birmingham.

In 1763 the 'Antients' constituted a Lodge numbered 398 at the Crown Inn, Penkhull Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, which lapsed around 1766. Tamworth had its first Lodge in 1795 and Lodge No 220 was warranted in Lichfield in 1784 at the "Scales", Merchants Lane.

The Lodge of Fortitude No 652 was warranted in 1814 in Stafford, and later became the Royal Chartley Lodge of Fortitude.

Between 1764 and 1800, a total of 13 Antients or Modern Lodges were constituted in the County. All sadly have passed out of existence. Only one old minute book of Lodge No 42, which lapsed in 1795,



survives together with a few old relics preserved by Noah's Ark Lodge. Grand Lodge have a few brief records on these old Lodges from the past.

Between 1800 and 1805, two Antient Lodges were formed, later to be erased, and in 1804 four new Moderns Lodges were constituted in the Potteries. Three were erased but the fourth, St Martin's Lodge No 98 (then numbered 130, later No 115), is the oldest and is still going today.



Noah's Ark Lodge No 347 originally No 668 holds a warrant dated 1815 and held its meetings in Wolverhampton. Its first Master was Brother Hope Wood a Tin Plate worker from Chelsea who had been initiated into Lodge No 231 in 1803. Over a period of 14 years he would be Master of the Noah's Ark Lodge for 12 years. This Lodge would move to Tipton in the heart of the black country, where it became one of the province's best known and much-loved black country Lodges.

In 1803 Etruscan Lodge was established in the province. Its warrant had first been issued to the Cambridge regiment of Militia and was numbered 327. In 1801 it was transferred to the Staffordshire regiment of Militia, then stationed at Windsor. In 1803 its warrant and Jewels were transferred to Hanley to form Etruscan Lodge No 327 in the Potteries. The Master's Jewel, a very fine rare quality silver Jewel is still in existence today in a private collection. (see photo)

This first Etruscan Lodge was erased in 1847 only to be reissued later that same year as no. 803. A rare punch bowl from this early Lodge is also said to exist in the Liverpool Museum.

(It was quite common during the 18th and 19th century for military regiments to have Masonic Lodges attached to them. The Staffordshire 64th Regiment from 1788 -1817 had No 686 and from 1817 to 1858 No 130 under the Grand Lodge of Ireland.)

Moving forward Menturia Lodge No 418 Hanley and St Peter's Lodge No 419 Wolverhampton were both consecrated in 1834.

The first thought of a Lodge for Installed Masters came in 1866 from a suggestion by the then Provincial Grand Master William Kenwright Harvey, (1864-1866) and was originally going to be named after him, the Harvey Lodge of Union. The Lodge was not consecrated owing to his resignation as PrGM. It was finally consecrated in 1898 when the Foster Gough Lodge No 2706 was warranted as the Installed Masters Lodge for the Province.

One of the first Royal Arch Chapters for our province was established in 1822: St Martins Chapter held under chartered constitution by the Grand and Royal Chapter in London and attached to the warrant of St Martins Lodge No 154 held at the Legs of Man Inn, Burslem.

(The Royal Arch degree was worked in craft Lodges at one time, a lodge would simply close in Craft and then open in Royal Arch.)



COL. A. C. FOSTER GOUGH, LL.D.

D.P.G.M. 1865 to 1867, and 1881 to 1889.

P.G.M. 1889 to 1892.

G.S. 1889 to 1892.

P.G.M.M. 1882 to 1885.

This very old Lodge also had what is thought to be the provinces first Knight Templar Encampment attached to it, St Martin's Knight Templar Encampment No 1 a certificate from 1840 from this Encampment is on display at Shelton Masonic Hall. Arch.)

Province Progression and new orders. The Province progressed from strength to strength, establishing many new Lodges in the forthcoming years. Its first Knights Templar Preseptory, Godefroi de Bouillon No 42 was warranted in 1853. The first Mark Lodge, Jerusalem Lodge No 18 in 1862 was established in Burslem, under the Scottish Grand Lodge, later to become Gough Lodge of Mark Master Masons No 45 under the GLMMM in 1881.

The Province had the great honour when the then Grand Master HRH The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) came to the Province in 1866 to lay the foundation stone of the North Staffordshire Royal Infirmary in Newcastle, and again in 1897 when the foundation stone of the Sutherland Institute in Longdon was laid. In 1925 King George V laid the foundation stone of the extension to the Royal Infirmary using the same Masonic tools as his predecessors. The tools are the property of Sutherland Lodge of Unity No 460.

By 1914 the Province would have 34 Lodges. There were several Army Training camps in the Province during the First World War. This would see an influx of Initiations. One such Lodge to benefit was St Augustin's No 1942 Rugeley, which had 19 Initiations from 1915 to 1919, mostly from the Training camp on Cannock Chase, and all were above the rank of sergeant. During this period of the 1914-18 War, Staffordshire had 16 serving Freemasons who made the supreme sacrifice for King and Country (see 1914 -18 army roll of honour)

By the end of 1945 the Province had 58 Lodges. At the end of both the first and the second world wars the province had an increase of members and new Lodges. As the men came back from active service, they wanted to continue the bond of fellowship and comradeship, so for them Freemasonry was a great way of achieving this.

Thus, from these humble beginnings developed Freemasonry in Staffordshire – a thriving Province of 100 Lodges. The more recent Lodges being warranted are: the Lodge of Universal Brotherhood No 9329 warranted in 1989, Black Country Heritage Lodge No 9702, that was warranted in 1999, Musket, Pike and Drum Lodge No 9906 a Lodge formed by members of a historical re-enactment society and the University Lodge of Staffordshire No 9907, both Lodges being consecrated in 2016.

The Masonic Province of Staffordshire celebrated its Bi-Centenary in April 1991 and will shortly help celebrate the Craft's 300th anniversary in 2017.

Other points of History from our Province.

Provincial Grand Masters of Staffordshire.

1819 The Hon and Rev. Francis Henry Egerton.

1832 The Right Hon. Earl of Ferrers

1837 The Hon George Hanson MP

1852 Col George Augustus Vernon.

1864 William Kenwright Harvey Esq

1866 In charge of the Grand Registrar

1871 The Right Hon the Earl of Shrewsbury and Talbot

1877 In charge of the Grand Registrar.

1881 Major George Singleton Tudor.

1888 Col Alex C Foster Gough LLD (Lt Col J A Bindley, DPGM in charge 1892)

1894 William Heneage, 6th Earl of Dartmouth PC. GCVO.KCB.VD.TD

Walton Stanley DPGM in charge 1936

1937 Walton Stanley Esq

Horace D Austerberry DPGM in charge 1941

1942 William 7th earl of Dartmouth GCVO. TD. DL.

Robert Bradley Mummery DPGM in charge 1958

1960 Robert Bradley Mummery Esq

Major H Wilson Keys MC. TD. DPGM in charge 1963

1964 Major H Wilson Keys MC. TD.

James E V Toney DPGM in charge 1974

1975 James E V Toney

Stanley Barrington DPGM in charge 1980

1980 Stanley Barrington TD.

Kevin Chawner DPGM in charge 1990

1990 Kevin Chawner

John T Bedson DPGM in Charge 2003

2003 Thomas D C Lloyd OBE TD. DL.

D Gary Read DPGM in charge 2012

2012 Dr Alexander I Stewart TD.

2016 John Lockley.

W Bro Frank James of St Matthews Lodge No 539 (DPGM 1873) was at the time of his death in 1924 aged 102 thought to be the oldest serving Freemason in the in the world.

W Bro Fred Everiss was Master of Noah's Ark Lodge in 1931-32 and a Founder of Patshull Lodge No 6592 in 1948 and Master in 1949 he was the longest serving football club manager and secretary, he served West Bromwich Albion football club (The Baggies) from over 50 Years.

Bro Reginald Joseph Mitchell CBE Designer of the Spitfire Aeroplane was a member of Jasper Lodge No 3934 he was initiated into this Lodge in 1921. He was a Lewis (son of a Freemason) his father was founding organist of Jasper Lodge and WM in 1923.

Staffordshire Charity Festivals.

Royal Masonic Institution for Girls 1900

Sum raised £23,037

Royal Masonic Institution for Boys 1907

Sum raised £28,570

Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution 1917

Sum Raised £50,499

Royal Masonic Institution for Girls 1933

Sum raised £68,162

Mark Benevolent Fund 1935

Sum raised £8,807 (Staffs and Shrops)

Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution 1951

Sum Raised £183, 281

Royal Masonic Institution for Boys 1962

Sum Raised £319, 218

Mark Benevolent Fund 1971 (Staffs and Shrops)

Royal Masonic Institution for Girls 1976

Sum Raised £635,255

Grand Charity 1990 Staffordshire

Samaritan fund Staffordshire 2002

Mark Benevolent 2007 (Staffs and Shrops)

Grand Charity 2013 Staffordshire

Sum Raised £1,675 Million

In memory of Staffordshire's Freemasons who died for King and Country 1914 – 1918

Pt Thomas Howarth 1stBn The Kings 10th March 1915 Sutherland Lodge of Unity No 460

Capt Arthur Robert Katon DCM. 8thBn South Staffs Reg 6th September 1915 aged 50 St John's Lodge of Lichfield No 1039

Lt Frank Bertram Mayer 5thBn North Staffs Reg 13th October 1915 aged 32 Gordon Lodge
No 2149

Sgt Sydney Charles Jones 5thBn North Staffs Reg 13th October 1915 aged 32 Gordon Lodge
No 2149

Capt William Millner 5thBn South Staffs Reg 13th October 1915 aged 38 Tudor Lodge of Rifle Volunteers No 1838

Major Alfred Armstrong Caddick 8thBn Royal Wark Reg 1st July 1916 aged 44 Legge Lodge
No 2784

Major Henry Hetherington Emmerson 10thBnLeicReg 25th September 1916 aged 36 St Augustine's Lodge No 1941

QM.Sgt Harold Barrett Jones, Household Batt 14th January 1917 aged 40 Menturia Lodge
No 418

Capt Matthew William Lister 5thBnattd 9th Pioneer Bn South Staffs Reg 19th July 1917 aged 38 St James Lodge No 482

Lt Richard Standeford Pullen 1stBn South Staffs Reg 26th October 1917 aged 33 St Bartholomew Lodge No 696

Capt William Norman Lowe 14thBn Highland Lt Infantry 24th November 1917 aged 28 St Peters Lodge No 419

Lt Col James Collins Furness (Surgeon) Royal Army Medical Corps 26th February 1918 aged 53 St Thomas Lodge No 1914

Lt Robert William Callison 8thBnLeicReg 24th March 1918 aged 35 St Thomas Lodge No 1914

CSM Thomas Edward Bloom 12thBnYorksReg 12th April 1918 aged 43 Earl Shrewsbury Lodge No 1520

Capt Percival Ernest Burrows MC. A Coy 2ndBn 3rd Queen's Gurkha Rifles 19th September 1918 aged 21 St Giles Lodge No 1587

Gunner Harold Bertram Potts 233rd Siege Bty Royal Artillery 27th September 1918 aged 31 St Bartholomew Lodge No 696