



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

Presentation given at the Special General Meeting – Novotel Hotel Friday 3rd February 2017

Formation of the Masonic Province of Hampshire

Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master and brethren.

We are living through extraordinary times.

Our political, cultural and social norms are being scattered in many directions across the full spectrum of society today; even in Freemasonry, our past thinking is being challenged and changed at great speed and in some quarters causing disquiet and uncertainty.

Yes, our place in the world is changing! But how interesting it is to realise that each and every one of us is part of this living history, shaping and forming it as we live our lives.

Change is inevitable and was none more so than that faced by society during that great period of the Age of the Enlightenment between the years 1650 to the mid 1800's when Freemasonry, as we know it, developed.

Born from the speculative lodges of earlier times; men of intellect sought to bring freedom of expression and thought to a world hindered by religious dogma and superstition, by developing scientific and cultural thinking and thus bringing change to the world at large.

Organisations such as the Royal Society and Freemasonry provided the vehicle in which men of standing could meet as equals without recourse to political, scientific or religious constraints.

Freemasonry, formed by such men from the operative lodges had by the beginning of the eighteenth century created a predominance of purely speculative lodges in the south of England, with operative and mixed lodges still in the majority in the north of England and in Scotland.

At this time, the Grand Lodge of England was limited to a small number of Masonic lodges within the City of London with its initial founders meeting as a Grand Lodge at the 'Apple Tree Tavern' in Covent Garden with a second meeting convened at the 'Goose and Gridiron', St Pauls Churchyard on 24th June 1717. This being the first Grand Lodge created.

However, in 1751 a group of Irish Freemasons in London formed a *rival* Grand Lodge, claiming that the existing Grand Lodge had departed from the old ways of practicing their ritual whereas their lodges were working according to the 'Old Institutions' granted by Prince Edwin at York in the year AD 926. They styled themselves Ancients with the first Grand Lodge being viewed as the Moderns.

Needless to say, neither Grand Lodge recognised each other as 'regular' Freemasons.

However, by 1813, these two Grand Lodges settled their differences and combined to form the United Grand Lodge of England. It is thus that the United Grand Lodge of England as we know it dates back to the founding of the first Grand Lodge in June 1717. It is from this date that we celebrate our Tercentenary in 2017.

The authority of the United Grand Lodge of England therefore spread across the country.

However, with the problems of travel and communications in those far off days and for efficient regulation and administration of the Craft, the first Grand lodge had previously found it necessary to establish 'local' representation which led to the appointment of the first Provincial Grand Master in 1725, under the original Grand Lodge – in this case for the county of Cheshire.

This continued with the United Grand Lodge of England.

Provincial Masonry therefore developed throughout the rest of the eighteenth century with the Masonic Province of Hampshire having come into being on 28th February 1767 under the auspices of the first Grand Lodge with the appointment of its first Provincial Grand Master, Thomas Dunckerley.

It is by this appointment that in just 25 days time we shall have reached the 250th birthday of the Province.

Now, Thomas Dunckerley was spoken of as a most "Remarkable Freemason". Born on 23rd October 1724, from it is said, a liaison between Dunckerley's mother Mary Dunckerley and the Prince of Wales, later King George II and therefore the King's illegitimate son.

At the age of ten Dunckerley entered the Navy, and continued in naval service for 26 years, acquiring by his intelligence and uniformly good conduct, the esteem and commendation of all his commanders. But having no personal or family connections, he attained no higher rank than that of Gunner. However, it must be noted that such a rank in those days held considerable responsibility on a man-of-war.

Dunckerley spent many years on foreign service, not returning to England until after the Siege of Quebec in 1760, when at that time he learnt of his mother's death and that on her death-bed she had made a solemn declaration, accompanied by such details as left no possible doubt of its truth, that Thomas was the illegitimate son of King George II, born while the King was still Prince of Wales.

This fact of the birth had, however, never been communicated by the Mother to the Prince thereby King George II died without knowing that he had such a son.

Dunckerley was Initiated on January 10th 1754 at the age of 29 into a lodge meeting at the Three Tuns Tavern in Portsmouth, later known as the Lodge of Antiquity No28; he also took an active role in a number of lodges becoming Master of a lodge in Plymouth in 1756.

It is because of his military service and knowledge of men of high rank, and his skills within the Craft, that led him to be appointed as the first Provincial Grand Master of the Province of Hampshire on 28th February 1767. Dunckerley certainly led a most interesting Masonic life rising to Past Senior Grand Warden in the Grand Lodge in 1786.

The first lodge actually constituted by Dunckerley was the New Inn Lodge No405 at Christchurch in 1770, now known as Lodge of Hengist No195, which still meets to this very day.

Dunckerley was succeeded as Provincial Grand Master by Lord Charles Montagu who became the Provincial Grand Master in 1776, then later by Captain Michael Pascal R.N. in 1784 when in 1786 Dunckerley once again took charge as Provincial Grand Master continuing until his death in 1795.

It is interesting to note that in the Grand Officers List for 1795, the time of Dunckerley's death, that he was the Provincial Grand Master for Dorset, Essex, Gloucester, Hereford, Somerset, Southampton, the City and County of Bristol and the Isle of Wight.

At its outset in 1767, the Province of Hampshire consisted of eight Masonic lodges of which only one, Ringwood No. 318 is still working today as Lodge of Unity No132 which still meets in Ringwood in the Unity Hall. The remaining seven lodges were formed in and around Portsmouth between 1724 and 1764.

Brethren, our modern combined Masonic Province will celebrate its formation in 2019 and no doubt, this will be a cause for further celebration.

However, for many years there has been some doubt as to whether the correct title of our modern Province should contain the word "the" before "Isle of Wight". However, the official usage is the Patent of Appointment of the first Provincial Grand Master.

The Right Honourable William Wither Bramston Beach was styled as Provincial Grand Master for Hampshire and *the* Isle of Wight. However, in these modern times it has become the custom not to use the word "the" but merely Hampshire **and** Isle of Wight. But woe betide those today who use the old wording!

Our modern Province has advanced considerably from those days with 252 lodges at present and some 9,000 brethren meeting across the Province; technology now plays a vital role in communications between brethren, creating a portal for non-Masons to obtain a better understanding of Freemasonry; long may this continue.

Brethren, our Province has a rich and most interesting history and I encourage you all, not only to research your own lodge history, but that of our Province; we have, through the services of our local Masonic Centre museums and libraries which have been established across the Province, many interesting books as well as artefacts to enable you to study our history as well as our new Provincial Lodge history website.

Brethren, by understanding our past we can all help to shape the future for as I stated at the beginning of this Presentation we are all part of a living history.

Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master and brethren - I thank you for your attention.

George Mars, **PAGDC**; Provincial Grand Orator
September 2016

