

History of Lodge of St. John

No. 191, Bury

Province of East Lancashire

1769 – 2019

by

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Preface

I would like to thank the members of Lodge of St. John who allowed me to attempt this history, particularly W.Bro. Jeremy Aston P.J.G.D. who gave much encouragement and assistance. Also, thanks are due to W.Bro. John Acaster P.Prov.S.G.W. who provided valuable guidance and to the Archive Department of Bury Library.

Finally, a special thank you is due to my wife Elaine who word-processed this history and who tolerated the musty old books for a long time.

The original Warrant 1769

According to Lanes Masonic Records (1895) the warrant of Lodge of St. John was dated, 4TH June 1769, but according to lodge minutes, 2nd October, 1845 this warrant was described as illegible and Grand Lodge was asked to provide a warrant of Confirmation. This was granted, 4th July, 1846 and collected from London by a lodge member.

The original number of the lodge was 458 and it met at the "Woolpack," 7 Deansgate, Manchester. A picture of this hostelry hangs in the Farraday Room at the Masonic Hall, Bury.

Grand Lodge records do not record the name of the lodge until 1781, although, throughout its existence it has always been called Lodge of St. John and not St. John's Lodge.

The Lodge of St. John was granted its warrant by John Allen, P.G.M. for Lancashire. At the time according to J.M. Howarth (1963) Provincial Grand Lodges and Grand Lodge barely functioned. John Allen served as P.G.M. for Lancashire 1769 – 1806 and was a native of Bury.

The Lodge was warranted by the Premier Grand Lodge or "Moderns" which existed 1717-1813. The rival Grand Lodge, "The Antients" 1751-1813 maintained more of the older traditions than the "Moderns."

The Cash Book 1791 -1813

This hard-backed book measuring 15 inches by 9.5 inches is the earliest substantial record possessed by the lodge and covers some of the period when the lodge was situated in Manchester.

The book lists the names of the following members, viz. James English, John White, Robert Young, Robert Fairweather, John Thelwell, John Caldwell, Henry Sutton, William Lane, Joseph Bennett, Robert Ormrod, Peter Sutton, William Shaw, John Harlow, Robert James, Paul Price, Joshua Green, Ralph Mather, Samuel Walker, William Goodall, Thomas Lithgow, John Edge, Peter Fletcher and David Thompkinson.

Looking at the membership total the lodge appears to have been quite successful but not all were members throughout this period.

William Goodall, from these records, was, also, the Landlord of the Fleece tavern where the lodge met 1791 – 1809.

The addresses of four members only appear in the cash book, viz. James English, St. Mary's Gate; John White, 31 Portland Street; Robert Young, 2 Blackfriars and John Thelwell, Openshaw. These brethren are amongst the earliest in the book and may well have been founders 22 years before.

The cash book also shows that:-

1. regular contributions were made to the Infirmary, Piccadilly, Manchester which relied on voluntary contributions.
2. sick members as well as their family members were assisted by the lodge.
3. contributions were made towards the funeral costs of members.
4. Expenses were paid to members who attended Provincial Grand Lodge which was usually held in the lodge of the P.G.M.
5. the lodge met twelve times per year with meetings held every month.

It appears that in most years St. John's Festivals were held, viz. St. John the Baptist, 24th June and St. John the Evangelist, 27th December. The latter seems to have been the Installation, although in some years the Festival and Installation was held in January. The cost of the meal at these Festivals was increased to two shillings or two shillings and sixpence. Normal lodge meals were one shilling.

The cash book records the expulsion of two members for "disobedience of summons" which meant unauthorised non-attendance of lodge after a summons had been sent, though in this particular case both members were in arrears.

The cash book does not indicate whether members were W.Ms.

Finally, the book records that a Royal Arch "cloth" was purchased, a possible indication of Royal Arch working in the lodge.

Meeting Places

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| 1769 No. 458 | "Woolpack" 7, Deansgate, Manchester |
| 1770 No. 393 | |
| 1771 | Sun in the Coldhouse, Manchester |
| 1777 | "Fleece Tavern", Shudehill, Manchester |
| 1780 No.304 | |
| 1781 No. 305 | |
| 1792 No. 255 | |
| 1811 | "Pack Horse", Old Church Yard, Manchester |
| 1812 No. 305 | "Black Moors Head", Old Church Yard, Manchester |
| 1816 No. 322 | "Dog and Partridge", Market Street, Manchester |
| 1817 | "Grapes Inn", Oxford Road, Manchester |
| 1817 (Nov) | Private Room, Dispensary, Warrington |
| 1825 | "Talbot Inn", Warrington |

1834 (July) "Fleece Inn", Church Street, St. Helens
 1845 "Albion Hotel", 19 Haymarket, Bury
 1848 (May) "White Horse Inn", Fleet Street, Bury
 1856 (Feb) Masonic Rooms, Broad Street, Bury
 1857 (Feb) "White Horse Inn", Fleet Street, Bury
 1863 No. 191
 1866 (June) "Queen's Hotel", Market Street, Bury
 1871 (Jan) "Knowsley Hotel", Haymarket Street, Bury
 1977 (Jan) Bury Masonic Hall, Parson's Lane, Bury

Lodge numbers before the 1870s changed according to a list maintained by Grand Lodge, erasures enabling lodges to move higher up the list.

The lodge has met in 16 places, all of them public houses except the last at Bury Masonic Hall, from 13th January, 1977.

Lodges who met in public houses frequently had to deal with quarrels with landlords and quality of food and in this respect Lodge of St. John must have been very similar to most lodges. An unusual argument confronting the lodge is mentioned in the minutes 18th January, 1848, when members arrived to find a billiard table in the public room of the Albion Hotel, Bury where the lodge met. They moved to the "White Horse Inn" shortly after.

The move to the Masonic Hall Bury came about because the brewery, who owned the Knowsley Hotel required a large contribution towards the £3,000 cost of strengthening the lodge room floor which the lodge felt unable to make.

The late W.Bro. J. R. Vose was our last member to be Initiated and to attend meetings at the Knowsley Hotel.

The lodge in early 19th Century Manchester

The cash book 1791-1813 clearly shows a fall in the fortunes of the lodge after about 1814 and this could possibly be attributed to a number of reasons.

Political unrest in Europe caused by the French Revolution resulted in the government fearing unrest and revolution here. The Seditious Societies Act, 1795 and the Unlawful Societies Act, 1799 made all societies illegal but freemason's lodges were allowed provided that a list of members was given to the Clerk of the Peace annually, a requirement that remained in force until the 1960s. Also, the Acts forbade any new lodges being formed and both the "Moderns" and the "Antients" re-issued old warrants for a time. New lodges were allowed after 1817.

Also, the early 19th Century in Manchester saw scarcity of food, high taxation and reduced cotton exports due to war as well as a lack of parliamentary representation. Further there was a decline in domestic hand weaving, caused by the new industrialisation resulting in much unemployment and poverty. These problems in Manchester culminated in the Blanket Riots, 1817, and Peterloo, 16th August, 1819. P. R. James (1962) states that of the 650 masonic lodges at the Union 1813 there were fewer than 500 in 1843. The decline in Lodge of St. John at this time should be considered against the political, social and economic background.

Before finishing with the lodge in the early 19th Century mention must be made of the "Lancashire Ritual". Several Masonic historians claim that this ritual was probably developed in Lodge of St. John between 1799 and 1813 and that it was passed on to the Lodge of Lights, Warrington. This ritual is of national importance.

The move to Warrington

The Lodge of St. John moved to Warrington in 1817 a move well documented in the earliest minute book, 1817-1850, in our possession. This is a hard-backed book measuring 9.5 inches by 8 inches.

The last meeting in Manchester was held at the "Grapes Inn", Oxford Road, 28th September 1817, when three brethren from elsewhere viz., George Jones (294 in Wigan), Peter Goulden (246 in Warrington) and Thomas Williams (586 in Preston) were proposed and admitted as joining members. These three were then elected as W.M., S.W. and J.W. respectively. A proposition was then passed to move to the Dispensary, Warrington.

This meeting took place in the presence of Daniel Lynch, D.Prov.G.M. and Charles Pidgeon, Prov.G. Secretary. These two signed a Dispensation allowing the move to Warrington, dated the same day as the meeting..

The first meeting at Warrington took place 10th November 1817. There is no written evidence that the Warrant was sold but this was common practice at the time.

The lodge in Warrington prospered for a number of years but, according to the minute book eventually declined after 1828 with the last minutes recorded, 25th January 1829. The minute book then has 9 blank pages and does not begin again until 1845 in Bury.

Of the period after January 1829 it should be pointed out that the Lodge Secretary was absent in Ireland on business for several years and that minutes could have been recorded separately. (Mitchell 1969).

On 28th December, 1829, the Lodge of Lights (246), Warrington passed a resolution that the brethren of Lodge of St. John be invited to join with them to secure their future (Petition 2017) with the Lodge of Lights agreeing to take the Warrant and all furniture. According to Mitchell this was carried out with all dues for the Lodge of St. John paid by Lodge of Lights for some years. During this period the lodge's number changed to 226.

The move to St. Helens

According to the cash book of the Lodge of Lights, 28th July 1834, 6 guineas was received for the Warrant of Lodge of St. John from brethren in St. Helens (Mitchell 1969). Later in the year the same cash book reveals that John Smith, a member of Lodge of St. John received 5 pounds for the lodge, 26th November 1834. Mitchell states that the sale was agreed at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, a popular meeting place for Masonic Lodges.

The lodge has in its possession a Tyler's Book which measures 15 inches by 10 inches and covers the period 24th July 1834 to 8th May 1872. At the first recorded meeting in this Tyler's Book at the Fleece Inn, St. Helens, 25 members and one visitor were present. Meetings continued up to the 23rd July, 1837 though not with such large numbers.

Mitchell claims that at the first meeting the list of members included at least 5 initiates with most of the others being joining members.

Also, Mitchell states that in the Petition to the D.Prov.G.M. the Lodge was to meet every month on the Thursday nearest the full moon.

At St. Helens the lodge had several members who were leaders in the community and industry not least Edward Greenhall and Peter Greenhall of the brewing family (Petition 2017) Edward was W.M. in 1835 and Peter in 1837 (Tylers Book). Another member William Stubbs was a leading industrialist in the town (Petition 2017).

The move to Bury

Several brethren in Bury, notably Bros. James Dack, Henry James Hinxman and Joseph Kay were keen to hold another lodge in the town and after being informed by Bro. Hinxman that he had heard at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool that the brethren of Lodge of St. John were desirous to transfer their right to the Warrant, they decided to pursue the matter. The brethren of Lodge of St. John agreed to the move provided that the R.W.P.G.M. of Lancashire (Western Division) consented, that the successors pay nine years of unpaid dues to Grand Lodge and purchase jewels, furniture and clothing. (Mitchell 1969).

At an Emergency Meeting of the lodge at St. Helens, 5th May, 1845 Bros. Dack, Hinxman and Kay were proposed and admitted as joining members.

The first meeting in Bury was held, 29th July, 1845, at the Albion Hotel. In the minutes of this meeting it states that permission was given for the move in a joint dispensation from John Drinkwater D.Prov.G.M., Lancashire (Western Division) and Stephen Blair, D.Prov.G.M. Lancashire (Eastern Division). The lodge has remained in Bury ever since.

In 1847 the lodge nearly closed after a dispute involving Bro. Hinxman with several brethren refusing to attend. Also at the meeting, 22nd June the Secretary resigned saying he declined to meet Bro. Hinxman. The meetings 27th July and 24th August 1847 did not take place because of insufficient present and at the meeting 21st September 1847 it was decided to dispose of the Warrant and

furniture. However, at an Emergency meeting 30th September the matter was resolved and harmony was restored.

At the meeting 5th June 1849 a Lodge of Past Masters was opened and six brethren were allowed to "Pass the Chair" and "receive" the Mark Degree. These brethren were Bros. Chadwick, Greenwood, Kenyon, Dack, Milne and Kay. Later the same evening the lodge initiated Mr. John Sellers into Craft.

Passing the Chair and the Mark Degree were again done at a meeting in early 1850 (date not recorded but probably January) when Bros. Sellers, Nuttall and one other (name illegible) passed the Chair and were "initiated to Mark Masonry."

The practice of Passing the Chair and Mark Degree as well as other non-craft activities were forbidden during the Grand Mastership of the Earl of Zetland 1844-1870.

Centenary Festival 1869

The lodge celebrated its Centenary in grand style, 24th June, 1869. A Dispensation was obtained which allowed the lodge to meet at 3.00 p.m. in the Assembly Room at the Town Hall, Bury and afterwards to process in public to Bury Co-operative Hall. The Dispensation requests the brethren "to conduct" (themselves) "in the form and costume and with the insignia of the Order and not to appear at large or beyond the limits of the procession in the clothing or jewels of the Order." Also, they were instructed to "conduct themselves with strict propriety and decorum."

The route of the procession was about 300 yards from the Town Hall, now the Met Theatre, to the Co-operative Hall on Knowsley Street. The Co-operative Hall was then newly built and had opened January 1869.

The Festival was attended by the D.Prov.G.M. Bro. William Romaine Callender, jun. and the whole of the Provincial Team. There were 25 members and 95 visitors present.

The banquet cost 5 shillings per head and was provided by Mr. John Smith of the Knowsley Hotel. After the banquet a number of member's wives occupied the gallery immediately above the dining area.

During the evening entertainment was provided by a glee party consisting of six singers.

The lodge has in its possession a printed booklet measuring 8.5 inches by 5.5 inches which contains in full all addresses and orations given at the meeting as well as all toasts and replies at the banquet, again in full.

A jewel was struck for the members to mark the Centenary and one of these is currently to be found in the archives of the U.G.L.E. Library (Petition 2017).

The Centenary Warrant

This was granted to the lodge, 28th July, 1954, and back-dated to 5th May, 1945 after uninterrupted existence for 100 years, acceptable to U.G.L.

The Warrant was presented by the D.Prov.G.M., V.W. Bro. William Horrocks at the Knowsley Hotel, 14th October, 1954. 44 members and 46 visitors attended the meeting. Permission was given for a jewel to be struck and worn by Lodge members.

The Bi-Centenary Celebration

This was held by dispensation at the Masonic Temple, Bridge Street, Manchester, 24th June, 1969. The meeting was attended by the D.Prov.G.M., V.W. Bro. Frederick Towns, P.Gd. Supt.Works and Asst. Prov.G.M. Sir Clyde Hewlett, P.G.D. There were 39 members and 70 visitors present.

The Lodge Banner

The lodge's new banner was dedicated, 8th May 1997. Several brethren helped to design the banner led by W.Bro. J. Vose. It was manufactured by W.Bro. J.R.Kielty and his daughter Ruth. It took 829 days to complete and comprised 221,000 stitches and 1000 metres of thread.

The banner depicts Jesus being baptised by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The blue background is meant as a visual reminder to keep our thoughts and aspirations on things above and reminds us of what we are and what we stand for.

The Dedication Meeting was attended by W.Bro. D.J. Walsh, A.Prov.G.M. and W.Bro. Rev.E. Forrester, Prov.G. Chaplain who dedicated the banner and gave an Oration. There were 29 members and 51 visitors present.

250th Celebrations

This year, our 250th year, has been marked in a number of ways. On 24th June, 2019, at a special meeting, for lodge members only, an enactment of an 18th Century Consecration was held. It was performed by lodge members and researched, written and directed by W.Bro. Graham Wood, P.Prov.J.G.W., one of our members.

The official celebratory meeting is today in the presence of R.W.Bro. Sir David Trippier, P.G.M. and R.W.Bro. Guy D. A. Elgood, J.G.W.

Also, as part of our celebrations this year we have held an Olde English Night and in November will be hosting the Provincial Education and Development Team who will demonstrate and explain aspects of the Third Degree.

Throughout our history we have never given up our Warrant. We have paid all our dues to the Premier Grand Lodge (Moderns), United Grand Lodge and the Provincial Grand Lodges of Lancashire, Lancashire (Western Division) and Lancashire (Eastern Division). We now look forward to an equally successful and happy future.

Bibliography

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3. P.R. James "The Grand Mastership of H.R.H. The Duke of Sussex 1813-1843. The Prestonian Lecture for 1962 in the Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research 1962.
4. Cyril Mitchell "Two hundred years - a history of a Freemasons' Lodge in Lancashire (1969).
5. Petition by Lodge of St. John 191 seeking approval to commemorate 250 years of continuous existence (2017).

