

# Grand Masters, Provincial Grand Masters, and Provincial Grand Lodges.

*The power division between Provincial  
Grand Lodges and Grand Lodge*

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**N**EARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO I HAD THE HONOUR OF DELIVERING A Prestonian Lecture in which I discussed English freemasonry in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a period that saw bitter clashes between the Grand Master and some younger Masons who felt that the central administration was too much a law unto itself. This might also be linked with a growing general spirit of forthright independence of thought amongst the rising mercantile and professional classes at the time.

There were clashes over the way in which the Grand Master chose Provincial Grand Masters, and there were clashes between many Provincial Grand Lodges and their Provin-

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*To be Presented to the Lodge 25 June 2020*

cial Grand Masters over the way some PGMs ignored the Province over which they theoretically presided. All this played out not only in Grand Lodge but also in the columns of the Masonic Press, at a time when the Masonic Press was much more influential than today.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of those disputes went deep, and though the result was a partial victory for the rebels, on some issues there were no solutions. Even the appointment of the Prince of Wales as Grand Master left many of the issues hanging in the air. Perhaps the social prestige of the Prince had a massive effect on the willingness of masons to pursue controversial arguments--his political power may have been negligible, but his social influence was enormous. The influence of Marlborough House and its 'set' cannot be over-estimated here, especially as that group, and other members of the Royal family who were beginning to achieve a certain type of revered status in Society (justified or not), were so often prominent masons. The membership would no longer challenge the Grand Master, not because he was Grand Master, but because he was a very senior member of the Royal family.

The basic problem had been a discordance between Grand Lodge at the centre and Provincials who felt that Grand Lodge in London attracted too much of the attention of English masonry. They felt that London behaved as if the Provinces were milch cows set up for the benefit of London interests. At stake were such issues as whether Provincial Grand Masters had been appointed for life and how far they had to pay attention to the wishes of their Provincial Grand Lodges. The meetings of Grand Lodge were tumultuous, with the Grand Master's supporters striving every muscle to undermine the opposition. However, as time went on it has become rarer for battles to be fought out at meetings of Grand Lodge. Rather they have been fought behind the scenes – just as bitterly as in the past perhaps, but rarely in public. Perhaps one of the last of such open battles was over the future of the Masonic Hospital where one of the issues involved resentment from many Freemasons in the Provinces that their subscriptions were being used largely for the benefit of Freemasons in London. However, I think it is fair to say that the debate about provincial v central power has been stifled by the disappearance of platforms for it to be held. There are no longer the likes of *The Freemason* to host a dialogue. We only have our UGLE house magazine, *Freemasonry Today*. Another aspect is the virtual disappearance from the London scene of the so-called 'County' lodges, the Lodges based in London that attracted as members the leading members of that County who had also strong business and political links with London. The 'Cornish' lodge in London, for example contained

<sup>1</sup> A. Newman, 'Masonic Controversy and *The Freemason's Magazine* in mid-Victorian England', *AQC* 122 (2010), 185–199. See also J. W. Daniel, 'The Masonic Observer. A Specialist Masonic Publication Par Excellence', *AQC* 123 (2010) 15–41.

all the powerful financial and masonic interests in Cornwall and had great sway over the Provincial Grand Lodge, but it also had good connections to Grand Lodge.

Another factor must be the extent to which the Grand Master took an active part in the governance of United Grand Lodge. The Grand Masters who served between the Duke of Sussex and the Prince of Wales – Zetland and Ripon – had been very much ‘hands-on’ in their approach to Freemasonry. However, it was well known that the Prince of Wales did not want to be bothered by the details of administration. Inevitably then the President of the Board of General Purposes – always a significant officer in the Craft – became more important, and the Board itself took over the policy-making role. Certainly, the list of those who held that office after 1874 shows a wealth of experience and ability.

If it is true that in practical terms the eventual result has been to strengthen the power of the central administration in Great Queen Street, then the question I would ask is how could that have come about? Some words from the Pro Grand Master a couple of years ago, made at one of the Quarterly Communications, are perhaps very relevant. I quote:

At home, we have had 28 changes of Provincial or District Grand Masters. The Deputy and Assistant Grand Masters have been greatly involved . . . We are enormously encouraged by the calibre and enthusiasm demonstrated by our new Rulers and I am pleased that we seem to have a strong team of leaders throughout our Constitution.

Some years ago, Provincial Grand Masters suggested that the Rulers got even more involved in the appointment of their successors. This rather surprised us as we felt it could be seen as unwelcome interference. However, we were encouraged to think about the qualities that a good Ruler in the Craft might possess, and how this might manifest in the success of their Province. As a result, the whole system is now more robust, and we are seeing the benefits. This is not in any way meant to denigrate those who have gone before – far from it, but with decisions being more transparent, I believe the sharing of the burden of decisions has been welcomed, and the Craft is benefitting as a result.

Or again:

Believe it or not, brethren, in addition to selecting those we think will do the best job and are the best fit, we now actually tell our Provincial and District Grand Masters what is required of them. About three times a year we run courses for future and new Provincial and District Grand Masters and the feedback that I have had from those who have attended has been extremely positive.<sup>2</sup>

And in September 2019 the Grand Secretary said at a Quarterly Communication:

UGLE has traditionally been a federal amalgamation of ‘city states’, each ruled by a Provincial or District Grandmaster, whose patents were granted by the Most Worshipful Grand Master. It was not uncommon, in decades past, for those chosen few to be

<sup>2</sup> Quarterly Communication. *Freemasonry Today*, Spring 2019, 84.

given their patent and told to 'get on with it', but with very little instruction or guidance as to what the 'it' entailed. We like to think that we are more enlightened now and take some time and effort to explain what we think a Provincial or District Ruler might want to consider.<sup>3</sup>

For anyone who has spent time studying Freemasonry during its first 150 years these remarks are truly revolutionary.

Let me take first a matter of statistics. Whereas the number of Provinces in England and Wales has barely changed since the middle of the nineteenth Century, the number of lodges has very much increased. Their importance is clear, even if merely in terms of their number. In 1851 there were 613 Provincial lodges; in 1900 there were 1354. Thirty years later, they had virtually doubled in number, to 2599, but in 1951 – following World War II – their number had risen to over 4000. At their peak, in 1991, there were nearly 6000 lodges in the Provinces. As recently as 2007 there were 1489 London lodges and 5996 Provincial lodges, while in 2016 there were 1274 London lodges (showing a decline of 215) and 5376 in the Provinces (a decline of 620). The decades during which the Prince of Wales had been Grand Master had seen an explosion in numbers, and there were similarly significant increases following the two World Wars. But even if we recognise that in recent years there has been a falling-off of numbers of individual Freemasons and in the numbers of Lodges, there can be no doubt that Grand Lodge would not have been able to cope with the administration of the Craft without the existence of a strong structure linking London with the Provinces.

Then, as now, the key to that link rests with the various Provincial Grand Masters. When the first Provincial Grand Masters begin to appear – as in 1738, in the second edition of Anderson's *Constitutions* – they did so following approaches made by some lodges in the Provinces for recognition by what had been originally the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster. Cheshire was the first to have its locally elected leader given such recognition, but with the growth of the number of lodges in the Provinces and overseas the number of such deputations of authority by the Grand Master increased. Such deputations were granted in 1727 to individuals in Wales. Then deputations were requested from and sent to four counties in England; and there is a record of sixteen names of various ad hoc appointments at different dates for areas in Central Europe, especially Hamburg and Hanover, as well as one for East India 'where nobody is to be found' and similar appointments for Africa and North America. Such officers were often appointed without there being any definite plan about their powers. Clearly, they represented the Grand Master in places considered too far distant from London for Grand Lodge to be able to exert any effective authority. However, within a generation the rank of Provincial Grand Master was being given to individuals where there were no local lodges for

<sup>3</sup> *Freemasonry Today*, Winter 2019, 2.

them to manage, in effect to give such individuals status within Grand Lodge and Freemasonry as a whole. Typical of several others was the Provincial Grand Master in Yorkshire who, when he was asked to resign because he had never done any work for that office, replied that he did so willingly; had he known that there was any work associated with the appointment he would never have taken it in the first place. Parallel to that was often a strong desire locally for an effective Provincial Grand Master, shown in frequent complaints from the Provinces that their Provincial Grand Master was neglecting them, or that their Provincial Grand Master had died, and that no successor had been appointed.

However, after Thomas Dunckerley's appointment in 1767 as a Provincial Grand Master, he transformed the office and the range of its possible activities. At one stage, he was even described as 'Provincial Grand Master of England.' While that was not exactly true, at one time or another – and often at the same time – he was the Superintendent or Provincial Grand Master of Hampshire (1767), Isle of Wight (1772), Essex (1776), Dorset (1777), Wiltshire (1777), Gloucestershire (1784), Somerset (1784), City and County of Bristol (1786), and Herefordshire (1790). Eventually he was to be Provincial Grand Master of no fewer than nine craft Provinces as well as Superintendent of twelve Provinces in the Holy Royal Arch. Dunckerley did most to promote the image of Provincial Grand Master, not only in his relations with Grand Lodge in London but with the various lodges that came under his jurisdiction. He was extremely active, both in giving a real structure to his Provinces and in going out of his way to attract many of the gentry at a local level. His work in collecting and remitting large sums of money for the charity and Hall funds was particularly important. He visited individual lodges and Provinces widely to publicise and encourage new members; he wrote for example:

I have in the course of this year held Grand Lodges at Colchester, Blandford, and Bristol. I was favoured with the attendance of near two hundred Brethren (on His Majesty's birthday) in procession to the Church at Wells.<sup>4</sup>

He argued for the creation of further new Provinces:

it will enable me to appoint a greater number of blue and red aprons which I find of great advantage to the Society as it attracts the notice of the principal Gentlemen in the several counties, whom seem ambitious to attend me at my Provincial Grand Lodges.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly then Thomas Dunckerley had been anxious to extend the range of his Freemasonry, and its appeal to a wide range of possible members.

What sort of person was appointed as Provincial Grand Master? Usually attempts were made, both by the Grand Master and by local Freemasons, to secure the appointment of

<sup>4</sup> Quoted W. R. S. Bathurst, 'The Evolution of the English Provincial Grand Lodge', *The Prestonian Lecture for 1966*.

<sup>5</sup> Bathurst, 'The Evolution of the English Provincial Grand Lodge'.

a notable local landowner. A survey of thirty-eight Provinces at the time of the Union in 1813 suggests that eleven Provincial Grand Masters were Peers, ten titled gentry (usually baronets), and six naval or army officers; the social origins of eight of them were obscure. This emphasis on a nobleman or a landed man continued throughout the century. In 1860 one Past Provincial Grand Master for Kent, an eminent Q.C. by profession, wrote: ‘My appointment would not have been thought of had there been “a nobleman or gentleman, having estates in the Province and settled there, willing to undertake the office.”’<sup>6</sup> In 1870 there were in place 38 Craft Provincial Grand Masters; seventeen of them were peers, five were baronets, three were (untitled) Members of Parliament, two were Reverends, two were army officers, and nine were untitled gentry. That was the year that the gentry and Freemasons of Leicestershire forced William Kelly on the Grand Master as Provincial Grand Master for Leicestershire and Rutland. Kelly had served as Deputy Provincial Grand Master for over twenty years, despite his comparatively lowly status as Borough Accountant, but he wrote of himself:

My social position was not high enough to fit me to be the Grand Master of the Province; the head of Masonry in the Province should be a man in a far higher social position as regards wealth and rank than myself.<sup>7</sup>

There was however in the Province a very strong feeling of support for him, and one local Mason wrote of a possible alternative titled candidate:

I have not a word to say against Lord Ferrers personally; he is quite unknown to us, but I do say that if Lord Howe can't be induced to remain and Bro Kelly to continue to act under him, Bro Kelly ought to be our PG - we don't want a boy pitch-forked over us.<sup>8</sup>

The Grand Master objected very strongly about this, but when Kelly was eventually appointed the Grand Secretary wrote to him:

The Grand Master, however, is convinced that should it hereafter appear desirable for the benefit of the Province to appoint Earl Ferrers or any other nobleman to the office you are too good a mason to stand in the way some years hence.<sup>9</sup>

Within three years, Kelly had surrendered that office to a peer – though he retained all his other Masonic offices.

That this attitude of Grand Lodge was still prevalent a generation later is illustrated by the remark in 1912 of Lord Ampthill, Pro Grand Master, that it was ‘advantageous to the Craft that its conspicuous positions should be filled by those who enjoy the exter-

<sup>6</sup> *Freemasons Monthly Magazine*, 9 June 1860, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly Correspondence, Masonic Library, Freemasons' Hall, Leicester.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly Correspondence.

<sup>9</sup> John Hervey to William Kelly, 13 December 1869. Kelly Correspondence.

nal advantages of rank and fortune.<sup>10</sup> In that year out of forty-three Provincial Grand Masters twenty-six were Peers, nine were retired army officers, six were landed gentry, and two were clergymen. Many still served for life, and certainly for very long periods of time. A similar analysis of the Provincial Grand Masters in 1969 shows that out of 42 Provincial Grand Masters then in post seventeen can be identified as being ex-military and thirteen as members of the nobility. One senior member of the staff at Great Queen Street recalled quite recently that

The desire to have a local peer or magnate to preside over a Province, no matter how active or experienced he was in Freemasonry, with a strong deputy actually running the Province, was still prevalent when I joined the staff here in 1971.<sup>11</sup>

A rapid analysis from various Provincial web sites would suggest that at present twenty-nine Provincial Grand Masters can be identified as 'professional' and that none of them can be identified as substantial land-owners. If we move from the Provincial Grand Masters in general to specific Provinces I can point to two very significant examples. Out of seventeen Devonshire PGMs since the late eighteenth century three have been peers; two were titled gentry; two were clergymen; one was ex-military; four were businessmen; three were professionals such as solicitor, schoolteacher, or chartered engineer; one a farmer; and one unknown. Of the last eight to hold this office it has been remarked that they have been

essentially very worthy, but ordinary, members of the Devon community. Not in any way part of the 'Devon establishment'/'county set'. Very limited local political connections by comparison with the pre-2nd world war period.<sup>12</sup>

I look also at Leicestershire. Out of its first seven Provincial Grand Masters six were titled – four being peers; - one of the seven was William Kelly who has already been discussed. But after the death of Kelly's titled successor the position was held at first by the local Chief Constable (of very plebeian origins), then by representatives of the wholesale boot and shoe trade and hosiery manufacturing industries, by an ex-military yarn merchant, and latterly by representatives of various professions such as quantity surveyor or solicitor. And while the earlier appointments had been for life, the more recent ones have always been for a specific number of years.

From almost the beginning of the existence of the office of Provincial Grand Masters there had been Deputies, appointed by the Provincial Grand Master and on many occasions recognised as having performed many of the duties that normally fell to the Provincial Grand Master himself. However, Grand Lodge gave no recognition given to the

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, Provincial Grand Lodge of Leicestershire and Rutland, 1913.

<sup>11</sup> Private Communication.

<sup>12</sup> Private Communication.



rank. In 1857 a motion was proposed at Grand Lodge 'That all Deputy Provincial Grand Masters be entitled to appear in Grand Lodge in the clothing of their office and to take their seats upon the dais' In support the proposer set forth the great services rendered to the Craft by this valuable class of Officers. The acting Grand Master opposed it, saying that it could not be carried out unless the Grand Master had the power of appointing the Deputy Provincial Grand Masters as well as the Provincial Grand Masters themselves. A study of Provincial Grand Masters and of Deputy Provincial Grand Masters shows a highly variable pattern. In some Provinces the Deputy has rarely (or never) been appointed to the higher office, although more recently it has become much more common for the Deputy to receive that appointment. What stands out in Leicestershire is that since 1851, with only two exceptions, all its installed Provincial Grand Masters had previously served as Deputy Provincial Grand Master.

To sum up, in the past Provincial Grand Masters have been recruited from the leading social and economic figures in the Province, and that usually meant members of the local landed aristocracy. With the decline of the power and influence of the aristocracy, a change has gradually come over the groups regarded as forming the local establishment. It might be argued that perhaps the new, twenty-first-century regional establishment has not yet properly emerged. Who, it might be asked, are the obvious makers and shakers in the Provinces at the present time? And if power and authority do not derive from a position of local strength that implies that it has perhaps come even more strongly from the centre.

Another issue that has been of considerable importance and of considerable controversy has been the position of the Provincial Grand Lodge. If the office of Provincial Grand Master tended to be rather vague in origins, authority, and even in usefulness, the approach to a Provincial Grand Lodge was even vaguer. There were arguments about whether Provincial Grand Officers had any independent existence. Even when they were recognised as having local status there were arguments about the regalia to be worn by its officers. In some provinces the most senior (sometimes the only) craft lodge arrogated to itself the title and status of a Provincial Grand Lodge, and on occasion, when there was a vacancy for Provincial Grand Master, the Master of that Lodge would claim to be able to act in that capacity. It was not until 1815 that a Regulation was made that the powers and existence of a Provincial Grand Lodge depended upon the Provincial Grand Master. The *Book of Constitutions* declared:

no Provincial Grand Lodge can meet but by the sanction of the Provincial Grand Master or his deputy; and that it ceases to exist on the death, resignation, suspension or removal of the Provincial Grand Master until he be re-instated or a successor appointed, by whose authority they may again be regularly convoked.<sup>13</sup>



PGMs were also enjoined to hold meetings of their PGL at least once a year, but that was often neglected. There were regular complaints of a failure by Provincial Grand Masters to consult the leading Masons in his Province. Correspondence in the archives of Grand Lodge shows that even after the *Book of Constitutions* had mandated the holding of regular meetings of a Provincial Grand Lodge there were many complaints from all over the country that Provincial Grand Lodges had not been summoned for a number of years. Even when Provincial Grand Lodges had been constituted and appointments made to various Provincial Grand offices there were complaints that the appointments had gone to persons who were either unsuitable or even unqualified for any appointment. If I may again be allowed to take Leicestershire as an example, its first Provincial Grand Masters were appointed by the Moderns Grand Master at a time when there were no Moderns lodges in the Province, and even after such a lodge was eventually founded the new Provincial Grand Master, Lord Rancliffe, only appeared in the Province on one occasion. That Moderns lodge, St Johns, was most concerned over Rancliffe's inactivity. It declared that it was the Provincial Grand Lodge of Leicestershire and on Lord Rancliffe's death it decided to take an initiative to fill the vacancy. Despite making many appeals to the Grand Master, it was only after a gap of some twelve years that Rancliffe's son was nominated to fill the vacancy. The lodge then tried to persuade the new PGM to appoint a Deputy and to fill the other Provincial Officers. Rancliffe continued to ignore his Province and it was not until 1833 that he was forced to make such appointments. The Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, was visiting a friend in Nottingham; the various neighbouring Provincial Grand Masters attended to pay their respects to the Duke who invited them to present to him their leading Provincial Officers. Rancliffe had hastily to withdraw to a side room, gather together various members of St John's Lodge and appoint them to Provincial office, and then present them to the Duke.<sup>14</sup>

Another outstanding complaint concerned the Province of Sussex and its Grand Master, the Duke of Richmond. The 4th Duke of Richmond had been Provincial Grand Master from 1814 until his death in Canada in 1819, but the post was left vacant until 1823 when his son, the 5th Duke, was appointed to it. He in turn was not exactly known for his attention to masonic business, so that in 1830 one Lodge in Brighton held 'an emergency meeting for the purpose of writing to the Duke on the propriety of calling a Provincial Grand Lodge.' Nothing happened. In 1852, another Sussex lodge wrote to him:

... to address Your Grace on the position of the Craft in this Province, owing to the non-organisation of a Provincial Grand Lodge. The last Provincial Grand Lodge was convened ... in the year 1827 (twenty four years earlier) since which period the Craft

<sup>14</sup> See A. D. Herbert, 'Masonic Personalities as seen through the Byron Connection', *Transactions, [Leicester] Lodge of Research*, 2003, 54–55 and A. Newman, D. Peacock, and D. Hughes, *A History of the Masonic Province of Leicestershire and Rutland* (Leicester: Provincial Grand Lodge of Leicestershire & Rutland, 2010), 10–11.

have been (comparatively) without a Deputy Provincial Grand Master or Provincial Grand Secretary with whom to communicate on Masonic matters . . .

*(went on to comment very pointedly on the breach of Grand Lodge Regulations about the need to have a meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge at least once every three years)*

. . . We have abstained from appealing to the Grand Lodge on the state in which our Provincial Lodge has for many years been placed out of grateful respect to Your Grace as its Grand Master, and in the confident hope that now your attention has been drawn to the subject Your Grace will be pleased forthwith to adopt such a course as will lead to the appointment of an influential and competent Deputy Grand Master who will under Your Grace's supervision appoint the secretary, wardens, Chaplains and other officers so that a Provincial Grand Lodge may be convened at a very early period.<sup>15</sup>

Arguments over the place of Provincial Grand Lodges were extremely bitter and were not helped by the interventions of the two leading Masonic newspapers. *The Freemasons' Magazine* and *The Masonic Observer* were especially vituperative:

We hope also that the Provincial Grand Masters in the Province or their Deputies – for in many cases the Grand Masters are merely ornamental appendages to the Order serving by high-sounding titles to give a false gloss to the position of Masonry in the Province – will be careful not only thoroughly to learn their own duties but to appoint no brother to office whom they are not fully convinced will do the same. It is only a few months since we were present at a Provincial Grand Lodge at which the Rt Worshipful Provincial Grand Master (a brother of the highest standing in life and one who is universally revered in the district in which he lives) and nearly all, if not everyone of his officers, read their parts, which were written for them on half-sheets of foolscap. Now this should not be, for there is nothing in the opening or closing of any Lodge, be it private or grand, which any man of ordinary intelligence (and none other should be admitted into Freemasonry) ought not to be able to commit to memory within an hour; many men would do so in ten minutes.<sup>16</sup>

The extreme case was that of the linked Provinces of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. The same individual as Provincial Grand Master held these two Provinces though they were always kept independent and separate. In 1847, the Marquis of Downshire had been appointed, but over the next fourteen years he held only five meetings of the Provincial Grand Lodges. A letter appeared in *The Freemasons' Magazine*:

Can you, or any of your readers, tell us how it is that we have had no meeting of the Provincial Grand Lodge of the royal county of Berks for, I believe, the last six years? The sound of the Provincial Grand Master's gavel is heard in almost every county, and in the distant outposts of Masonry, with great regularity, and is hailed with joy by the Brethren who obey it; but we have been listening and waiting for that summons year

<sup>15</sup> Quoted H. R. Dixon, *The History of Freemasonry in Sussex* (Lewes: Privately published, 1974), 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Freemasons Monthly Magazine*, 1 April 1858, 771.

after year in vain. No doubt can be entertained of the benefit and necessity of a Provincial Grand Lodge; why then does it exist with us in name only?<sup>17</sup>

It was partly as a result of the state of this double Province that the first decisive steps to bring order to the Provinces were taken by Grand Lodge which in February 1857 passed a resolution directing the Grand Secretary 'to procure a return of the number of Provincial Grand Lodges held in each Province during the past ten years, specifying those at which the Provincial Grand Master has presided in person and to return the same to Grand Lodge.' The return is of great interest. The Provincial Grand Masters come out of it with mixed reputations. Not surprisingly the twin Provinces of Bucks and Berks did not make any return at all:

When pressed by the Grand Master why no return had been made the noble Marquis commented that he could not say when the last meeting had been held since no one could find the minute book.

The Grand Master added the statement that he had himself written to Bro. the Marquis of Downshire on this subject but had not yet received an answer; but as the noble Marquis was absent on the continent, he might not have received the communication.<sup>18</sup>

The continuing importance of the Provincial structure is best indicated through the finances of the Craft. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the demands from the then two Masonic charities were putting a strain upon the finances of Grand Lodge and there were complaints that individual members of the Craft were failing to give them adequate support. There were complaints too that some Lodges were receiving benefits that their contributions did not merit. Grand Lodge called for an enquiry that recognised that the only answer to these continuing problems was by harnessing provincial endeavours and setting up a structure to raise money on a regular provincial rather than an individual lodge level. It became clear that each Province had to establish a formal local charitable organisation feeding into the national structure. The Provinces became vital for the continuing well-being of Freemasonry. Apart from the amounts of money contributed as fees etc. an important feature of Masonic life are the regular appeals for contributions to Provincial Festivals that continue to be a feature of every Province's life.

There is a further factor in considering the 'balance of power' between London, the Provincial Grand Masters, and individual members of the Craft. Some years ago, a paper in the *Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge* discussed the appointments to Past Grand Rank of individuals who had never been active Grand Lodge officers. It pointed out that one consequence was a considerable change in the numbers attending meetings of Grand Lodge and the ways in which this changed the nature of those meetings. As far as I am

<sup>17</sup> *Freemasons Monthly Magazine*, 1 July 1858, 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Masonic Observer*, 20 June 1858, 8.

aware there has been no study of the comparable development of Past Rank appointments in Provincial Grand Lodges, but the net result must be having had the same effect.<sup>19</sup>

Certainly, the annual meeting of Provincial Grand Lodge is in effect an awards ceremony, so that Provincial Grand Masters have to turn to other bodies – such as Lodges of Installed Masters – in order to ascertain the feelings of members of the Craft. And perhaps we may see the development in the Provinces of a trend already discussed in relation to Grand Lodge itself – that as Provincial Grand Lodge becomes an increasingly ceremonial body the Provincial Committee of General Purposes becomes the forum for the making of local policy.

I return to the remarks that I quoted at the beginning of this lecture. On the face of it, the balance of power as between Grand Lodge and the Provinces has swung in favour of the organisation based on Great Queen Street. There is no longer even a forum in which strongly felt dissensions could openly be expressed. Provincial Grand Masters, always appointed by Great Queen Street, have come more directly within the administrative machine. The parallel drawn by the Grand Secretary between the Italian City states and the individual Provinces was a very real one, and it is significant that eventually they were succeeded by a much more unified equivalent of the nation state.

Are we seeing a series of steps by which Great Queen Street is gradually taking over more and more of the functions previously exercised locally? I was recently approached by a leading Freemason – not in this Province – who suggested that a move to standardise lodge by-laws and directives concerning the use and maintenance of Provincial Freemasons' Halls represented precisely that element of encroachment upon local independence.

There is a parallel to this process of centralization in Freemasonry. Over many generations England had developed a structure of local autonomy in government, economics and social welfare, working through the local landed gentry and their appointments as Justices of the Peace. This structure was weakened during the second half of the nineteenth century partly through a population explosion and partly through a severe erosion of the economic structure of the landed interest. Legislation by Central Government opened local government to new wealth and new social classes. Elected County Councils took over many of the functions previously controlled by the Justices of the Peace. In their turn these Councils came under increasing control from Central Government, operating often through its control over local authority finance. That has led to a deep current political debate about 'localism' and regional devolution, and that might well reflect our own debates about the structure of Freemasonry. I suggest that the parallel is clear.

I would make the point that UGLE has increasingly been seeking to micro-manage not only Provinces but also, through the Provincial Grand Masters, individual lodges by a series of initiatives, such as the Pathway. Increasingly, the acceptable face of Masonry

<sup>19</sup> C. J. Mandleberg, 'Past Grand Rank', *AQC* 126 (2013), 71–81.

is becoming that of a charitable fund-raising body doing much good within society. The issue is whether the result has resulted in a stronger structure than in the past, whether Freemasonry is now better equipped to meet future challenges and maintain its position in society. Currently, Freemasonry remains dependent on the individual Freemason, on his willingness to continue his membership and financial support. Just as it was three hundred years ago, so it is now, the recruitment and retention of each individual Freemason, supporting his Lodge and Freemasonry's financial commitments, remains basic to the future of the Craft. No historian has a crystal ball, and, certainly, this historian has no way of foreseeing the future. All he can do is to point to the past and invite his audience to draw its own conclusions from his interpretation.



