

William Perfect (1734–1809)

The Life and Contributions to Freemasonry of an Eighteenth-Century Provincial Grand Master

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THE MASONIC CAREER OF WILLIAM PERFECT HAS OFTEN BEEN OVERLOOKED, but it provides considerable insight into Freemasonry at the end of the eighteenth century. In the way in which it shapes the development of the Province of Kent it also throws light upon the role of the Provincial Grand Master and the extent to which the Grand Secretary was called upon for his advice. Such archives as survive for Kent illustrate non-Metropolitan relationships between Grand Lodge, Provincial Grand Masters, and members.

Geographically close to the centre and with several lodges south of the River Thames aligning with the Masonic jurisdiction of London, Kent did not have a Provincial Grand Master until the relatively late date of 1770. The first appearance of Freemasonry in the county dates from a lodge granted a warrant to meet as No. 66 [SN 97] at the Red Lion,

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High Street, Canterbury but this was erased on 29 November 1754.¹ Royal Kent Lodge of Antiquity, granted a warrant as No. 13 [SN 40] on 28 March 1723, met at various London hostels before relocating to Chatham, Kent in 1748. In common with other lodges formed subsequently in the naval and military town, members continued to consider it a London lodge. Travelling military lodges met and other lodges were formed in several Kent towns in the 1760s, but few members of the local nobility joined to encourage the development of eighteenth-century Freemasonry in the county.

The first four Provincial Grand Masters for Kent were military or naval men, and Thomas Dunckerley was approached on two occasions to serve in this office. However, members of the Province broke this mould completely when selecting their fifth Provincial Grand Master. Unique among contemporary eighteenth-century Provincial Grand Masters, William Perfect was a country doctor who specialized in midwifery, smallpox variolation, and care for mental illnesses. He was initiated as a Freemason in an unknown lodge meeting in the Dartford area in c.1765, although a record confirming this event remains to be discovered. He joined True and Faithful Lodge which he relocated to West Malling by 1787, after purchasing a medical practice in the small Kent town. He served as Provincial Grand Orator and then Deputy Provincial Grand Master in Kent before his appointment as Provincial Grand Master in 1794. That same year he joined Old Union Lodge, then Union Lodge of Freedom and Ease, which met near Perfect's London consulting rooms on the Strand, adding the gloss of town Freemasonry to his provincial roots.

A published author, who compiled medical case studies on midwifery and cases of insanity, Perfect contributed numerous poems and prose articles to *The Freemasons' Magazine* and other London periodicals. Three published volumes of his poetry delighted provincial and London subscribers. Several verses penned by Perfect about Freemasonry were sung at lodge meetings and included in anthologies of Masonic songs. He was interested in the theatre and took part in local productions, despite warnings about the potential damage to his professional reputation. His charismatic personality and influence encouraged cohesion in a large and geographically disparate province. His tenure as Provincial Grand Master, which continued until his death in 1809 and involved London and Kent Freemasonry, included the creation of several new lodges. This included the short-lived Perfect Lodge at Woolwich, named in his honour.

This paper provides an opportunity to update previous research by Sidney Pope and others about such a distinguished Freemason, writer and medic.² It includes the results

¹ Throughout this paper the author includes Serial or Seniority Numbers in brackets after lodge numbers. Allocated to Moderns' or Antients' lodges which changed numbers before 1863, these numbers facilitate searching Lane's Masonic Records Online <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/lane/index.php> and requesting lodge files and annual returns at the Museum of Freemasonry, London.

² S. Pope, 'Freemasonry in Canterbury and Provincial Grand Lodge (1785–1809), and Dr William Perfect,

of further investigation by the author based on recent enhanced accessibility to archive resources.³ A successful partnership project funded by the Kent Museum of Freemasonry, the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, the Leche Trust, and the London Grand Rank Heritage and Educational Trust, achieved the conservation and digitization of the William Perfect Manuscript.⁴ Each of its almost seven hundred pages are now accessible from The Museum of Freemasonry's website.⁵ This unique manuscript, compiled from eight of Perfect's original volumes of differing paper sizes bound together in the Victorian period, provides an insight into Perfect's charismatic personality.⁶ One small notebook, comprising prose pieces sent for publication in the Canterbury press, survives with a descendant, but it is possible that other volumes survive in archives yet to be identified. The William Perfect Manuscript reveals how gentlemen and Freemasons negotiated town and provincial professional and social relationships. Towards the end of the eighteenth century doctors occupied an undefined position – they were neither tradesmen nor members of the local gentry. Perfect socialized with a wide cross-section of provincial and urban society while assuming not one but several public and private roles: a fond family man; a benevolent and well-regarded medical practitioner; an author of prose and verse, and a Freemason. He established separate social circles within each sphere and while such groups co-existed, they seldom crossed boundaries.

Birth, Origins and early life

The future doctor, the third generation of the Perfect family to be christened William, was baptized at St Cross, Holywell, Oxford in 1734.⁷ His father, the Revd William Perfect, whose Huguenot ancestors derived from Leicester and Dorchester, matriculated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford on 26 July 1734.⁸ Two younger Perfect uncles, John and Henry, graduated from Christchurch and Magdalen Colleges and also pursued careers in the church. His mother was Sarah Weller, the daughter of John, a yeoman, and the couple

Provincial GM of Kent (1795–1809)', *AQC* 52 (1939), 6–58; S. B. Black, *An 18th century mad-doctor: William Perfect of West Malling* (Darenth Valley Publications, 1995).

³ S. Snell, 'Poetry, medicine and madness: the self-representations of William Perfect', dissertation for MA in Eighteenth-Century Studies, King's College University, London, 2012.

⁴ *Poeticae Compositiones Guelmi Perfect*, Perfect Manuscript, Kent Museum of Freemasonry, ref: R 4/A/1.

⁵ <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/william-perfect-manuscript>

⁶ The manuscript owes its survival to a vigilant Exeter College academic, FGW, who sought information about Perfect in 1867, having salvaged fifteen manuscript notebooks from a London Bookstall. *Notes and Queries*, [1867], Series 3, vol. IX, 441–42.

⁷ William Pearfit, christened 1 January 1734, son of William in the parish of St Cross, Holywell, Oxfordshire History Centre, ref: PAR199/1/R1/1. It is likely that the Perfect surname derives from the French Huguenot Parfait, which may account for the mis-spelling in the parish register in Oxford.

⁸ J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715–1886 and Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1500–1714* (Oxford: Parker and Co., 1888–92); *The Christian Remembrancer, or, The Churchman's Biblical, Ecclesiastical & Literary Miscellany* (1819–1840), vol. 11, No. 4, April 1829, 259.

obtained a marriage bond in Oxfordshire two years before the birth of William.⁹ William Perfect senior was ordained as a deacon at the King's Chapel, St James's, London on 19 September 1736, before moving with his wife, Sarah, to East Malling, Kent as curate in 1745, promoted to vicar two years later.¹⁰

Raised by a clergyman in genteel but impoverished circumstances, Perfect was imbued from a young age with the social and cultural aspirations necessary to acquire the status of a gentleman. The Revd William Perfect supplemented his son's formal education at Maidstone Grammar School by introducing him to works of the new Augustan age, including Pope's poetry and articles by Addison and Steele in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. These periodicals disseminated literary culture from London, smoothing 'the path which enabled a metropolitan culture to reach the provinces', disproving assumptions about the inferiority of provincial readers and their intelligence.¹¹ At school Perfect junior learnt the Classics from the Revd Charles Walwyn, who taught his near contemporaries the clergyman and poet, Christopher (Kit) Smart, and the Freemason, William Dodd. Perfect was asked later for his medical opinion on Smart, a troubled writer, noting he was 'a man of much cultivated genius and poetical talent – unhappily lost almost as soon as known to the author.'¹² It is likely that his father tutored local boys in the Classics and helped to prepare them for university or ecclesiastical careers. Owing to restricted finances and an expanding family, Perfect senior was unable to send his only son, William, to an Oxford college.

Medical and Literary Life

Instead of following the family clerical tradition, which demanded a university education, William Perfect embarked on a different career and entered into an apprenticeship with a London doctor, William Everred, on 13 November 1749.¹³ Perfect senior pre-empted the advice on acquiring gentlemanly skills, including literary pursuits and social conversation with men and women of every description, to avoid the ridicule and contempt aimed at medical students in Thomas Withers's *A Treatise on the Errors and Defects of Medical Education*.¹⁴ While there is no evidence to suggest Perfect read Ancient Greek texts,

⁹ Marriage Bond between William Perfect and Sarah Weller, 1732, Oxfordshire History Centre, ref: C522.

¹⁰ Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCed) <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/DisplayOrdination.jsp?CDBOrdRedID=73795> and <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/DisplayLibClDetail.jsp?CDBLibClDeID=18320>

¹¹ J. Feather, *The Merchants of Culture: Bookselling in Early Industrial England*, *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire: 1983) vol. 217, 18–20; based on R. M. Wiles, *The Relish for Reading in Provincial England Two Centuries Ago*, in *The Widening Circle: Essays on the Circulation of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. P. J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 87–115.

¹² W. Perfect, 'Teston, near Maidstone, A Poetical Sketch', *The European Magazine*, vol 25, January 1794, 53–54.

¹³ The National Archives of the UK [TNA], Kew, Surrey, England, Board of Stamps: Apprenticeship Books, Series IR 1 Piece 18 p.217.

¹⁴ M. Brown, *Performing Medicine: Medical culture and identity in provincial England, c.1760–1850* (Manchester:

he demonstrates a wide knowledge of the Latin equivalents, contributing translations of Horatian Odes and quoting lines from Roman authors with ease in prose and verse. While Latin was essential for doctors, a liberal education enabled medical practitioners to engage in 'polite, public discourse' rather than discussing private technical or specialist medical matters 'regarded as pedantic and private' in social circles.¹⁵ In consequence, Perfect championed enlightenment concepts of reason and empirical discovery – he regarded the arts and sciences as combined rather than separate spheres, as demonstrated in two poems, 'An Ode to Reason' and 'An Ode on Mathematic Science'.¹⁶

During his London apprenticeship Perfect acquired some Town bronze, and it is likely that he boarded or associated with the Shrimpton family of Islington. In his spare time he visited coffee houses, gaining an appreciation for convivial, fraternal sociability. He joined one of the over one thousand such clubs formed in England between 1700 and 1800, a period referred to as the century of association, to meet men beyond his medical circle.¹⁷ He wrote a verse, 'Sons of the Sun', which was sung by his friend, Daniel Shrimpton, at a meeting of a fraternity, 'The Sons of Apollo', at Moorgate Coffee House.¹⁸ He also wrote blank verses addressed to its members at an extraordinary court meeting held at Surgeons' Hall.¹⁹ It is possible Perfect regretted any dissolute younger behaviour while serving as Orator General of one such society, as revealed by a prose letter sent to the editor of the *Political Chronicle* under one of his many literary pseudonyms, Probus, published on 9 September 1758.²⁰

Perfect experienced discrimination when attempts to widen his Medway-based Parnassian literary circle, whose members included William Woty and John Nichols, sometimes failed.²¹ The doctor and his poet and actor friend, Folly Streeter, subscribed to *The Shrubs of Parnassus*, a verse anthology by the Revd William Hawkins, the former Professor of Poetry at Oxford.²² Hawkins rebuffed Perfect's attempt at witty verses, including some lines from 'a genius in the country (with whom I had some private pique) on perusing my works in manuscript.' He responded to Perfect:

University of Manchester, 2011), 48–49.

¹⁵ Brown, *Performing Medicine*, 22.

¹⁶ <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts> 'An Ode to Reason', 6 July 1758 vol. 3, 3; 'An Ode on Mathematic Science', 1760, vol. 6, 23–24.

¹⁷ P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Fig. 4.2 on page 132.

¹⁸ Little is known about the 'Sons of Apollo', not a society listed by F. W. Levander, 'The Jerusalem Sols & Some Other London Societies of the 18th Century', *AQC*, 25 (1912), 9–38 or W. B. Hextall in 'Some Old Time Clubs & Societies', *AQC*, 27 (1914), 25–62.

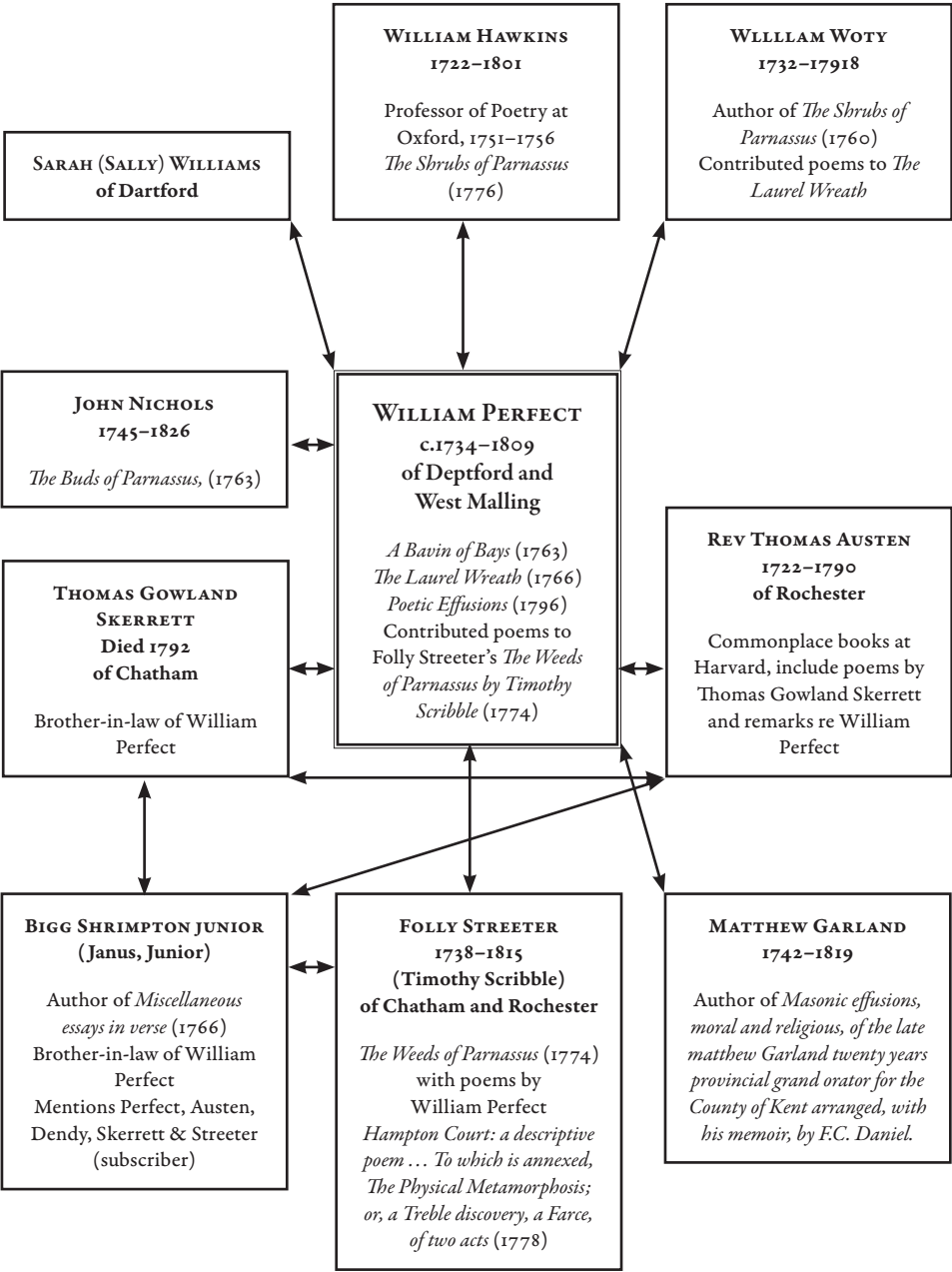
¹⁹ <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/william-perfect-manuscript>, vol. 8, 2–3 and vol. 9, 28–29.

²⁰ <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/william-perfect-manuscript> vol. 3, 26.

²¹ See Fig. 1 diagram revealing the reconstructed circle of Medway poets or 'Parnassians'.

²² W. Hawkins, *The shrubs of Parnassus, or, Juvenile Muse. A Collection of Songs, and Poems. Chiefly Pastoral*. (London: printed for the author; by J. Rozea; and sold by R. Baldwin, Pearson and Rallison [i.e. Rollason], Birmingham, and all other booksellers, 1776).

Fig. 1. William Perfect's Literary Connections. © Susan Snell



My sweet pretty doctor of Malling fair town,
Thou art surely stark mad or a simpleton grown;
For no man in his senses could ever have writ
Such bombastical nonsense, had he the least wit;
But thy poetry, I doubt, has cracked thy brain,
And made thee, alas! Like thy patients, insane;
Or MIDAS's fate has again come to pass,
And thou, my dear doctor, art turn'd to an ass.
Pray send me no more such illiterate stuff,
For I think you have made yourself foolish enough.

*The person here alluded to, living at Town Malling, in Kent, and by profession a surgeon, in which art he is very eminent in curing insanity, and not a bad writer in the poetical way.'

This proves that by the mid-1770s Perfect's literary ambitions and work among the insane were well-regarded beyond Kent, but that his provinciality restricted conversation within polite society. This satirical exchange reveals Hawkins's superior literary skills and the limits of shared poetical interests in breaking down the barriers of social convention. Perfect's inelegant ode exceeded Hawkins's notions of 'politeness', its values summarized as 'moderation, mutual tolerance, and the overriding importance of social comity', which one contemporary noted 'makes us beloved, and our company courted by all ranks of people.'²³

Meanwhile the association with the Shrimpton family gained Perfect other benefits when he married Elizabeth, the daughter of Bigg Shrimpton senior at Dartford, Kent on 3 October 1753.²⁴ The young couple had two daughters in the town before relocating to West Malling, where Perfect acquired the long-established medical practice of John Hicks. The older surgeon and apothecary obtained his surgeon's licence from the Rochester Diocese in 1724, signed by John Sisley, who had signed for Hicks the previous September.²⁵ The couple moved into Hicks's double-fronted High Street premises in late 1756, and the birth of three sons soon extended the family.²⁶ There was plenty of work for a new doctor as a 'plague', possibly smallpox, had swept through the residents of Town or West Malling in 1756, with sixty four deaths recorded and all the victims buried in a communal grave.²⁷

²³ L. E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (2002), 874; 'Britannicus, Sentimental Magazine', quoted in J. Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, & Community, 1762 to 1830*, Introduction: 'Opening Gambits' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.

²⁴ Dartford Parish Register, 3 October 1753.

²⁵ Kent History and Library Centre, Diocese of Rochester, Licences for Surgeons, ref: DRb/Ls4/1 & 4.

²⁶ Elizabeth Shrimpton Perfect, born 1755; Sarah Perfect, born 1756; William Perfect, born 1758; Huntley Bigg Perfect, born 1760, and George Perfect, born 1762.

²⁷ A. Cronk, *A Short History of West Malling, Kent*, published by the author, 1951, 24.

It would appear that Perfect did not complete his full apprenticeship with Everred, as he was living in Dartford by 1754. Perhaps he thought he had gained sufficient skills after five years or he broke the apprenticeship before its completion to marry the love of his life, Elizabeth.²⁸ Perfect sought to extend his medical knowledge by attending the midwifery or obstetrics lectures given by Colin Mackenzie in 1758. The young medic followed the less interventionist and scientific methods taught by Mackenzie near his private lying-in hospital in Southwark, which revolutionized childbirth and encouraged a growing popularity for the scientific approach of man-midwives.²⁹ Perfect's work, *Cases in Midwifery*, published as two volumes in 1781 and 1783, indicates he continued to correspond with Mackenzie, who was well-regarded by John and William Hunter and later credited with making the first observations on the placenta.³⁰ The *Cases* represent an account of one hundred and sixty one childbirths, supervised by Perfect between May 1761 and March 1774, including correspondence with Mackenzie concerning fourteen difficult deliveries.³¹

Despite Perfect's growing obstetrics expertise, he was unable to save his wife, Elizabeth, who died on 13 November 1763, shortly after giving birth to the couple's sixth child, Daniel Thomas, who outlived his mother by just a few months. This was a bitter blow to Perfect, whose first volume of verse, *A Bavin of Bays*, was published that year.³² Including pastoral poems written for friends this anthology represented a considerable achievement for a busy doctor and family man. He remarked to his friend, Daniel Shrimpton, two years earlier that 'poetry as you know was always my favourite amusement', and expressed his frustration at the lack of time to indulge his literary desires more often: 'As my avocations in life increase I am oblig'd to pay my Devoirs to the Nine Ladies (ie the Muses) much seldomer than my natural bent inclines.'³³

Mark Akenside, Oliver Goldsmith, Erasmus Darwin, Tobias Smollett, the friend of John Hunter, and the vaccinator and Freemason, Edward Jenner, all helped to establish 'the image of the medical practitioner as men of wit ... within the eighteenth century popular

²⁸ Black, *An 18th Century Mad-Doctor*, 10–11.

²⁹ W. I. C. Morris, 'Colin Mackenzie MD (St Andrews): An estranged pupil of William Smellie', *The British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, New Series, Vol. 82, Issue 10, October 1975, 769.

³⁰ J. M. Lloyd, 'The Casebooks of William Hey FRS (1736–1819): An Analysis of a Provincial Surgical and Midwifery Practice', PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, April 2005, 70–71. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/2687/>

³¹ W. Perfect, *Cases in Midwifery; with References, Quotations and Remarks* (Rochester: 1781 & 1783). <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/rh7n3562>

³² W. Perfect, *A Bavin of Bays: Containing Various Original Essays in Poetry* (Rochester: 1763). https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=CitcAAAaAAJ&pg=PA42&lpq=PA42&dq=william+perfect+a+bavin+of+bays&source=bl&ots=Z7rfGofu5X&sig=ACfU3Uiy-QIZB_P8gVECNcbNZJOePk1doA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwikiqfysDoAhUURuUKHZNTB9YQ6AF6BAGPEAM#v=onepage&q=william%20perfect%20a%20bavin%20of%20bays&f=false

³³ *William Perfect Manuscript*, copy letters William Perfect to Daniel Shrimpton, 28 September 1761 and 14 October 1761 and vol. 7, pages 20 & 24, <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts>

imagination.³⁴ Perfect was not alone among medics interested in caring for the insane to publish verse. The Staffordshire mad-house proprietor, Thomas Bakewell, compiled at least one volume of poetry, including verses such as ‘Drunkenness not distinguishable from Madness’ and ‘Lines after a Dispute respecting insanity.’³⁵ While pursuing his love of poetry Perfect may have empathised with James Atkinson, a York-based medic, who ‘scolded himself for the banality, tedium and futility of his ‘two-letter life’, claiming ‘What blockhead but myself would chose such a subject for relaxation.’³⁶

The doctor enjoyed country life in West Malling and took part in boat trips on the River Medway with friends, playing cricket, watching the hop pickers, fishing, and walking in the local area, all of which influenced his poetical verse. Another of his interests included the theatre, which inspired and encouraged him to assume additional roles beyond his familial, medical, and Masonic spheres. He delivered a prologue at a performance of Addison’s *Cato, a Tragedy*, at the Golden Lion, Brompton.³⁷ He wrote a prologue for Daniel Shrimpton’s role as Lothario in a performance of *The Fair Penitent*, Nicholas Rowe’s popular eighteenth-century tragedy.³⁸ Perfect’s prologue was delivered by Mr Hamilton as Castalio in Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan*, at the opening of their playhouse at Malling.³⁹ The Revd Thomas Austen attempted to warn Perfect about the potential damage to his reputation, when asked to play Chaumont in the domestic tragedy.⁴⁰ Such concerns did not deter the exuberant medic, who inserted prologues and epilogues for several plays in the *Perfect Manuscript*.

Perfect’s pastoral poems, inspired by the Kent countryside of the Medway valley, reveal a strong influence of Pope. The bucolic lines resonated with locals and metropolitan audiences; he also wrote verses using Classical pseudonyms lamenting lost friends and relatives laid to rest in the churchyard of East Malling, including his father the Revd William Perfect, vicar of this country parish, immortalized as ‘Honesto’. The loss of his wife, whom he called ‘Octavia, the best of women, gentlest wife . . . blossom of my soul blasted to death’, a mere six years after the death of a much-respected father, affected Perfect profoundly and he ceased to write for several months. Picking up his pen again after sorting out domestic arrangements to care for his young family, he wrote six ‘Night Thoughts’ poems inscribed to friends, published by *The Westminster Journal* in July 1764. Lines published in Perfect’s second verse anthology, which appeared in 1766 as ‘The Laurel Wreath’, hint that Perfect experienced depression and found release from anxiety

³⁴ Brown, *Performing Medicine*, 68.

³⁵ A. Ingram & M. Faubert, *Cultural Constructions of Madness in Eighteenth-Century Writing: Representing the Insane* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.

³⁶ Brown, *Performing Medicine*, 73.

³⁷ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, 21 August 1757, Vol. 2, 3v.

³⁸ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Prologue to ‘The Fair Penitent’, c.1763, Vol. 7, 35.

³⁹ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, 24 June 1765, Vol. 8, 18–19.

⁴⁰ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, 19 July 1766, Vol. 8, 56.

by writing. A third anthology appeared as *Poetic Effusions: Pastoral, Moral, Amatory, and Descriptive* in 1796,⁴¹ and other poems were issued as printed versions.

Aware of the disfiguring effects of smallpox and its resulting obstetric complications, Perfect entered into a partnership with Humphrey Porter, a Maidstone surgeon, and opened an inoculation centre at Wye. The pair advertised this new service in Kent newspapers by January 1767. It is likely that Porter, a member of the town's Lodge of Fortitude No. 437 [SN 967] by the 1780s, gained knowledge of smallpox variolation as deployed by the Suffolk surgeon, Daniel Sutton, at Maidstone in 1766. Although Perfect and Porter referred to this as inoculation, it involved inserting pox spores into a cut on the arm which led to a less dangerous slight fever and rash. Inoculation by inserting viral spores by vaccination was not perfected until the work of another Freemason, Dr Edward Jenner, in the 1790s. Perfect contributed a song 'The Inoculator Triumphant, or the Smallpox Totally Vanquished' to *The Westminster Journal* in August 1767.⁴²

The pair licenced or delivered this new technique throughout Kent, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Worcestershire, but competition between medical practitioners intensified. With a growing family Perfect was keen to increase his earning potential, but the welcome income soon declined. In January 1769, the year after his second marriage, Perfect wrote an epistolary poem to his friend, the Revd Thomas Austen, in Rochester, complaining:

This journey my last, for to settle accounts,
And to see o what sum all our labour amounts.
Contest then who will for advantage o'er Sutton,
Forbidding in regimen, beer, beef and mutton,
So small now's the fee for this wholesome invention,
'Tis even too poor for a poet to mention;⁴³

His personal experiences of despair and melancholy after the death of his first wife enabled Perfect to empathise with patients and families seeking a cure for nervous disorders. References to cases involving mental illnesses, where Perfect expressed his interest in this emerging medical specialism, appear in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1758 and in the *Manuscript* by 1761. Unlike midwifery, no records survive to indicate that Perfect attended additional training, but it appears likely that by the early 1770s he began to care for patients with mental illnesses. Subsequently Perfect revealed his indebtedness to Dr William Battie in *Methods of Cure in Some Particular Cases of Insanity*, published in 1778. He dedicated a third, revised edition, of *Methods of Cure*, published as *Select*

⁴¹ W. Perfect, *Poetic Effusions: Pastoral, Moral, Amatory, and Descriptive* (London: Printed by A. Paris for A. Milne, 1796).

⁴² *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Song, Vol. 8, 66.

⁴³ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Copy verse epistle, W. Perfect to the Revd T. Austen, 7 January 1769, Vol. 9, 27.

Cases in the Different Species of Insanity, Lunacy or Madness, to another personal friend, John Coakley Lettsom, physician and founder of the Medical Society of London, which Perfect joined in 1795.

Often referred to him by families seeking assistance, at first Perfect welcomed patients into his home. The double-fronted house on West Malling High Street has a small footprint with only two storeys, and it is not clear how the patients and growing family existed side by side. After a few years Perfect rented additional accommodation in West Malling, but obtained a licence under the *Act for the Regulation of Madhouses* from the Kent Quarter Sessions for up to ten patients, but without limit, from 1781. Visits to Perfect's establishment by Justices and a doctor reported that 'we found the house in good order, and heard of no complaints but what might be reasonably ascribed to the disordered state of the patients.'⁴⁴ Perfect's contribution to the advancement of mental health care are now acknowledged, with his published works recording the earliest descriptions of general paralysis of the insane (GPI) caused by late-stage syphilis. The case studies also include descriptions of Schizophrenia which pre-date later notes on the admission of James Tilly Mathews at Bethlem (colloquially Bedlam) and Pinel's observations in 1809.

Several patients wrote verses thanking Perfect for restoring them to health, such as the 'Stanzas of Gratitude' published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the author applauding his restoration 'from the most wild and frantic madness, to cool sense and rational judgement.'⁴⁵ Adopting an enlightened, empirical approach, the resourceful Perfect carefully observed patients' daily progress, trying different remedies but changing treatment as required and based on previous experience. Perfect advised the authorities to remove restraints from one patient at the Frindsbury workhouse, but recommended placing him in an isolated space in a reinforced straight jacket. After Perfect's careful care and a restricted diet the patient recovered sufficiently to lead a constructive life.⁴⁶ A supporter of compassionate moral treatment, perhaps influenced by his Freemasonry, Perfect encouraged one patient to correspond with friends and play the violin while in his care.

Freemasonry

No record survives of where and when Perfect was initiated as a Freemason. As demonstrated, as a young medical student he joined drinking clubs and fraternities with his Islington friend and future relative by marriage, Daniel Shrimpton. An early marriage and the rapid arrival of small children, together with the pressures of establishing a medical practice, left little time for writing poetry let alone joining Freemasonry. Perfect appears to

⁴⁴ Kent History and Library Centre, Madhouse Report Book, 1777-1791, CKS-Q/A/Lp1 & Lp2; Madhouse reports in Quarter Sessions bundles, Q/SB 1775-1777, 1779, 1781, 1791, 1792, 1794-1795; Q/A BW/15, 1803

⁴⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 58, pt. 2, October 1788, 916.

⁴⁶ W. Perfect, *Annals of Insanity*, Case XXVI, 99-102.

have turned to Freemasonry as a source of solace after the death of his first wife, Elizabeth. Fraternal male companionship provided brief respites and a temporary escape from a noisy house occupied by five young, boisterous children. The first hint of his interest in Freemasonry is a list of Masonic lodges in England, transcribed in the *Perfect Manuscript* up to Union Lodge No. 357 [SN 625], meeting at the Blue Boar, Norwich, which received a warrant in 1765.⁴⁷ Enticingly the list includes details for Royal Kent Lodge of Antiquity No. 20 [SN 40], meeting at the Globe Tavern, Globe Lane, Chatham, where Perfect may have been initiated, as he had friends in this naval port. At the end of the list there is a lodge motto with a translation from Latin:

Free Mason know thyself place thy Trust in God
Pray – avoid shew; Content thyself with Little
Hear without sneaking - Be discreet- Fly from
Traitors – assist your Equals – Be docile to your
Masters, always active and agreeable, humble
& ready to endure Hardships – Learn the art of
Living well and that of dying.

The Manuscript also includes a prose piece about a group of female Freemasons meeting at Maidstone, established by ‘a lady of leading influence’, and referred to as Jiggy Joggies. He criticized the town’s young bloods, who offered ‘indignities and indecencies’ to its members ‘too rude to mention’, which he sent for publication to the editor of *The Westminster Journal* in April 1765.⁴⁸

In a verse epistle to his friend, the Revd Thomas Austen, Perfect announced his marriage to Henrietta, the young daughter and heiress of William Johnston. Johnston was a surgeon at Chipping Camden, Gloucestershire, where the Malling doctor was inoculating patients against smallpox in partnership with Humphrey Porter by November 1767. A surgeon and Freemason, Humphrey Porter was a member of Lodge of Fortitude No. 437 [SN 967], Maidstone, by the 1780s.⁴⁹ Perfect announced the arrival of a new daughter, Follriott Augusta, named after his writer friend, Folly Streeter, in a verse epistle to the Revd Thomas Austen, remarking that ‘the house is in odours with nutmeg and candle.’⁵⁰ Henrietta, aged twenty six, took on Perfect and his five young children and bore the doctor four more children.⁵¹ Two years after her death in 1804 Perfect married a third wife, Henrietta’s companion, Elizabeth Longhurst. She outlived her husband for many

⁴⁷ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Vol. 8, 59–61. <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts>

⁴⁸ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Vol. 8, 8. <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts>

⁴⁹ Museum of Freemasonry; London, England; Freemasonry Membership Registers; Description: Register of Admissions: Country and Foreign, vol II, Fols 1-649, 256; Museum of Freemasonry, London, Annual Returns, Lodge of Fortitude, Maidstone, ref: GBR 1991 AR/967.

⁵⁰ *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Vol. 9, 26. <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts>

⁵¹ Follriott Augusta, born 1769; Lucy Dorothy, born 1772; Thomas William Chamberlain, born 1777 and Almiria Sarah Weller, born 1779.

years, inheriting Perfect's collection of over one hundred and fifty books, in addition to other volumes distributed among his children.⁵²

Perfect's literary, medical, and Masonic social and business spheres co-existed, but seldom crossed boundaries. One exception is when William Perfect came to the rescue of James Heseltine, the Grand Secretary of the Moderns' Grand Lodge, in response to an unprecedented situation. The Committee of Charity granted five pounds in April 1769 in response to a petition from Alexander Matthewson or Matthison, captain of a packet boat and a member of Mona Lodge No. 229 [SN 716], Holyhead, Anglesey.⁵³ The sum was intended to cover the costs of conveying Matthison's son, afflicted with mania, to Bethlem and into the care of Dr Munro. Rowland Holt, Senior Grand Warden, a governor of the London Hospital, helped to facilitate his admission. New patients were admitted on Saturday mornings for examination at 10am, within a month of submitting an application. James Heseltine advised the lodge to send the patient to London on the Friday before his intended admission. Unfortunately all did not go as planned, and Matthison junior arrived on a Wednesday in December 1769. The landlord of the Horn Tavern in Doctors Commons agreed reluctantly to chain Matthison's son to a table in his house and accommodate his keeper, Dr Hide. The doctor, unable to stay until Saturday, forced Heseltine to make alternative arrangements at short notice, which involved entrusting the patient into the care of Dr Perfect at West Malling, charged at the weekly rate of fifteen shillings.⁵⁴ Heseltine had to recoup the additional payment totalling five pounds and eleven shillings, a not inconsiderable sum, for board, coach hire, and attendance at the hospital from the lodge.⁵⁵

The Perfect Manuscript includes surprisingly few references to Freemasonry before the surviving volumes come to an abrupt conclusion in 1773. Perfect's friend, the Revd Thomas Austen of Rochester, provides a poem on 'The Freemasons' for Perfect, and mentions the ballad-opera, *The Generous Freemason: or, the Constant Lady*, by Chetwood. In a transcript of a verse epistle in reply to the clergyman, who has requested more works about Freemasonry, Perfect refers to a recent book on Freemasonry as *King Solomon's Glory*.⁵⁶ There is a lacuna before the next references to William Perfect and Freemasonry,

⁵² The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Kew, Surrey, England. Will of William Perfect, Doctor of Physic of West Malling, Kent, 26 July 1809, ref: PROB 11/1501/184.

⁵³ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Moderns' Grand Lodge, Committee of Charity, List of payments to petitioners, 25 April 1769

⁵⁴ Museum of Freemasonry, London, United Grand Lodge of England, Minute Book.

⁵⁵ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Moderns' Grand Lodge, Outgoing Copy Letter Book, Vol. 2, 15 June, 1 July 1769, 16 January, 27 March 1770; Confirmation of the payment by the lodge of the additional costs incurred is provided by a transcript of Mona Lodge No. 229, Holyhead, Minutes for 1768–70, Provincial Grand Lodge of North Wales, kindly provided by Rob Hammond.

⁵⁶ W. R. Chetwood, *The Generous Freemason; or, The Constant Lady with the Humours of Squire Noodle and his Man Doodle: a Tragi-comi-farcial Ballad Opera in Three Acts: with the Musick Prefixed to Each Song by the Author of the Lover's Opera, 1730; The William Perfect Manuscript*, Vol. 8, 53; vol. 9, 1 and 8, <https://museumfreemasonry.org>.

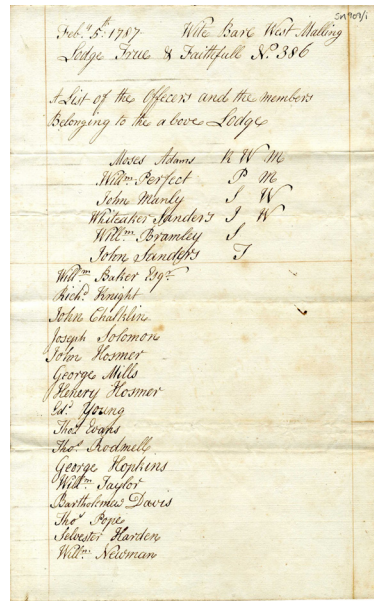


Fig. 2 A List of Officers and members of True and Faithful Lodge No. 314 Annual Return
 Ref: GBR 1991 AR/909/1 © Museum of Freemasonry, London

which occur in the annual returns of True and Faithful Lodge No. 314 [SN 909]. Perfect is described as Past Master and he had relocated the lodge from Dartford to West Malling by 1787.⁵⁷ Awareness of Perfect's ability to write and deliver appropriate verses soon spread in Kent, and he was appointed Provincial Grand Orator, appearing at the Provincial Grand Lodge meeting for the first time in this role on 2 June 1788.⁵⁸

In July the next year Perfect, as Past Master of True and Faithful Lodge, was involved in a legal case brought by Thomas Smith, a rag merchant of West Malling but later of Maidstone. A letter from William Epps, Provincial Grand Secretary and a resident of West Malling, to William White, Grand Secretary, reveals that William Perfect brought a motion, seconded by Whittaker Saunders of Luddesdowne, Kent, Worshipful Master, against Smith at a meeting of True and Faithful Lodge. Smith was accused of making 'unfounded abuses and scurrility to this Lodge, in general forfeited every degree of

org.uk/manuscripts; *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd, or, Gospel Light Fetch'd out at the Temple at Jerusalem, to Let us More Easily into the Glory of New-Testament-Truths / by John Bunyan, Bound in the Library's 4th Copy of Hiram, or, The Grand Master-Key to the Door of Both Ancient and Modern Free-Masonry: Being an Accurate Description of Every Degree of the Brotherhood, as Authorized and Delivered in All Good Lodges . . . / by a Member of Royal Arch. Dublin, Ireland: Printed and sold by Thomas Wilkinson, Bookseller and Stationer (No. 40) Winetavern-Street [ca. 1777].* Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: A 795 HIR

⁵⁷ Annual Returns of True and Faithful Lodge, Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: GBR 1991 AR/909

⁵⁸ Minute Book, Provincial Grand Lodge of Kent, Kent Museum of Freemasonry, Kent

honour and confidence consistent with the true Principles of Freemasonry.’⁵⁹ The lodge printed and circulated details of Smith’s expulsion, and asked the Grand Secretary to send cautionary letters to the Worshipful Masters of lodges in England. According to Hextall a copy of this letter survived among the papers of Tyrian Lodge No. 253 [SN 1038], Derby. Smith, whose unsavoury character and habit of attending lodges as a visitor was detailed in the circular, brought a libel action at Maidstone Assizes against Perfect and was granted fifty pounds damages.⁶⁰

It is difficult to know how successful True and Faithful Lodge was in recruiting members at West Malling or whether it elected officers each year as expected. Two years after the Smith incident William Perfect, Past Master, on behalf of Whittaker Saunders, Worshipful Master, signs a letter to William White, Grand Secretary, indicating that he will bring the lodge annual returns with quarterage and charity contribution to London in person on 28 September 1791.⁶¹ By this date Perfect held regular consultations with relations of those afflicted with mental illness in rooms on the Strand.⁶² The doctor advertised details of his Kent asylum in the London press, on ‘terms as much inferior in point of expense, as his treatment is superior to that experienced in private mad-houses in and about Town’, and, from 1776, offered private consultations at Blossom’s Inn, near Cheapside.⁶³ The adverts stressed the convenience of Malling, accessible by daily coach on a new turnpike road, and ‘most delightfully situated in a dry, healthy air’ in the leafy Kent countryside, less expensive at around forty pounds a year and far from the private mad-houses located in Bethnal Green and Hackney.⁶⁴

Provincial Grand Master of Kent

In a comparatively late development for such a large province, the Moderns’ Grand Lodge appointed the Hon. Robert Boyle-Walsingham as the first Provincial Grand Master of Kent in 1770. An Irishman who attained the rank of Captain in the Royal Navy, Boyle-Walsingham was an opposition member of parliament. His increasing involvement in politics and the Navy but limited connections with Kent may have resulted in his resignation as Provincial Grand Master in 1774. He was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Rutland the subsequent year, a post he held until his death on board *HMS*

⁵⁹ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from William Epps to William White, 3 October 1789, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/34.

⁶⁰ W. B. Hextall, ‘The Craft in the Law Courts’, *AQC* 30 (1917), 224–25 and comments by A. Heiron, *AQC* 31 (1918), 188.

⁶¹ Letter from William Perfect to William White, 10 September 1791, Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/39.

⁶² Hextall, ‘The Craft in the Law Courts’, 224.

⁶³ *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 18 January 1776, Issue 2330, Burney.

⁶⁴ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Tuesday 1 August 1775, Issue 1932, Burney; *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday 15 May 1781, Issue 168, Burney.

Thunderer, wrecked with the loss of all hands during a hurricane off Jamaica in October 1780.⁶⁵ A letter from, Captain George Smith, third Provincial Grand Master, reveals that Thomas Dunckerley was approached to serve as Boyle-Walsingham's replacement but declined.⁶⁶ In fact Captain Charles Frederick (died 1791) had been appointed as the second Provincial Grand Master in 1774 when Boyle Walsingham went off to be PGM for Rutland.

According to the Minute Book of Faversham Lodge, now the Lodge of Harmony, No. 133 [SN 585], Frederick was proposed on 27 October 1773, made a Mason on 10 November 1773, passed to the second degree on 24 November 1773, and raised a Master Mason on 22 December 1773. He was elected as Junior Warden on St John's Day, 1773 and then attended on 27 December 1773, 25 January 1774, and 25 January 1775. His name continues in the register until December 1776, when he appears to have left four quarters in arrears.⁶⁷ Frederick served until Captain George Smith was appointed the third Provincial Grand Master in 1777.

Although born in England, Smith served with the Prussian military forces and was initiated as a Freemason in a German Lodge. On his return to England he was appointed the Inspector of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, enjoying closer connections to Kent than his predecessor.

Smith was appointed Junior Grand Warden at Grand Lodge in May 1780 despite the concerns of the Grand Secretary, James Heseltine. Later that year Smith resigned from this role citing ill-health but this avoided an awkward vote at the November Quarterly Communications that members could not serve simultaneously in more than one Grand office. In 1783 Smith published a volume entitled, *The Use and Abuse of Freemasonry: a work of the greatest utility to the Brethren of the Society, to Mankind in general, and to the Ladies in particular*, which supported the formation of lodges for women emulating those formed in France and Germany.⁶⁸ Smith was also involved in holding a lodge meeting at the King's Bench Prison and his reputation rapidly declined.⁶⁹ In October 1784 Grand Lodge approached Thomas Dunckerley once again to serve as Provincial Grand Master for Kent, even before Smith was expelled on 2 February 1785 for forging a document

⁶⁵ A portrait of Boyle-Walsingham by Thomas Richard Beaufort Hinks was unveiled at an installation meeting of Walsingham Lodge, No. 2148, Wilmington, with Henry Sadler reporting in *The Freemason* that the Walsingham family owned property near Dartford, "The Freemason: 1888-07-14, Page 11" *Masonic Periodicals Online*, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 30 Dec. 2021, masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fvl/issues/fvl_14071888/page/11/.

⁶⁶ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from George Smith to Grand Lodge, n.d. c.1777, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/8; H Sadler, Thomas Dunckerley: his life, labours and letters, including some masonic and naval memorials of the 18th century, 249.

⁶⁷ S. Pope, 'The Provincial Grand Lodge of Kent 1769-1785', *AQC* 55 (1942), 122.

⁶⁸ Digital resource, <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=q4NJAAAIAAJ&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁶⁹ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from George Smith and Thomas Brooke to the Grand Secretary, 19 November 1783, ref: GBR 1991 HC 8/F/48.



Fig. 3. RW Bro. William Perfect, Fifth Provincial Grand Master of Kent
Kent Museum of Freemasonry © Museum of Freemasonry, London

recommending two distressed brethren for relief.⁷⁰ Dunckerley indicated that he was willing to take on the additional responsibility of Kent but refused to ‘canvass for their Votes & Interest.’⁷¹ In the event Webster Gillman, Provincial Grand Secretary, wrote to Grand Lodge in April 1785 and sent a petition and further letter in June, indicating that the preferred candidate of the principal Kent lodges was Colonel Jacob Sawbridge.⁷²

An army officer in the 1st Troop of Horse, Grenadier Guards, Sawbridge had strong local connections and was appointed fourth Provincial Grand Master of Kent in 1785.⁷³ A member of the Whig Club, he was a son of Jacob Sawbridge of Canterbury, the second son of Jacob Sawbridge, MP for Cricklade, Wiltshire, who purchased the Olantigh estate, Wye, Kent. However, a decade later Colonel Sawbridge began to display symptoms all too familiar to Perfect, by this time regarded as an expert in the field of mental illnesses.

⁷⁰ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from Thomas Dunckerley to Rowland Berkeley, 21 October 1784, ref: GBR 1991 HC 6/C/3; H Sadler, *Thomas Dunckerley*, 249.

⁷¹ Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from Thomas Dunckerley to William White, 3 January 1785, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/13.

⁷² Museum of Freemasonry, London, Letter from Webster Gillman to William White, 24 April 1785, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/16; petition principal lodges in Kent to Grand Lodge, June 1785, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/17 & letter Webster Gillman to William White, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/18.

⁷³ Letter from William Epps, Provincial Grand Secretary, to William White, Grand Secretary, 31 January 1785, Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/14.

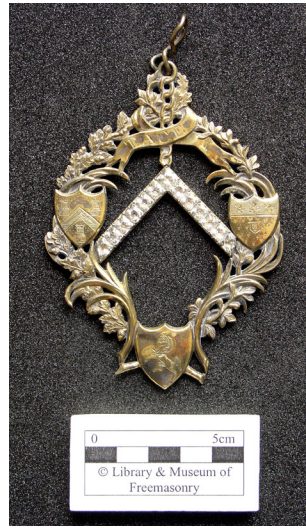


Fig. 34. William Perfect's Collar Jewel, Museum of Freemasonry
Ref: M2012/234 © Museum of Freemasonry, London

Unfortunately no correspondence survives to suggest that Perfect oversaw the medical care of the Colonel, who died in a private asylum at Stamford, Lincolnshire in 1796, but it is likely that his professional opinion was sought. The Earl of Moira wrote to the Prince of Wales, Grand Master, seeking approval to appoint Perfect, who is listed as Deputy Provincial Grand Master in the Provincial Grand Lodge Minute Book on 19 May 1794, as the replacement for the Colonel 'who is deranged in his intellect.'⁷⁴

Perfect's appointment as the fifth Provincial Grand Master is unusual: he was not a military man or member of the local gentry, but he was a popular and charismatic Freemason who had gained the respect of local members. With contacts in Kent naval ports, but without vested interests in the civic rivalry between Canterbury and Maidstone, it is likely that the Province regarded Perfect as a non-political candidate with an ability to navigate waters unsettled by a socially and geographically diverse membership. By June 1794 Perfect wrote to William White to enquire about the Masonic etiquette required when electing a new Provincial Grand Master at an emergency lodge at Maidstone and the fee payable for accepting the role.⁷⁵ Over twenty letters written by or relating to Perfect's Masonic activities survive in the archives at the Museum of Freemasonry, revealing his inexperience in the role but demonstrating his commitment and dedication. Freemasonry provided Perfect with an opportunity to meet and converse with elites and non-elites

⁷⁴ H. Mendoza, commenting on J. Hamill, 'The Earl of Moira, Acting Grand Master 1790–1813', *AQC* 93 (1980), 42; A. Aspinall, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, vol. II, 1789–1794* (London: Cassell, 1983).

⁷⁵ Letter from William Perfect to William White, 30 June 1794, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/42

‘on the level’ and he informed Grand Lodge delightedly that Clement Taylor Esq, the Maidstone Member of Parliament, was to serve as his deputy.⁷⁶ The next January Perfect wrote again to White to thank him for his appointment, apologising for the delay in responding due to a ‘long continued and dangerous illness’ which involved the application of blisters and prevented him travelling to London.

Perfect asked White why the lodges at Deptford and Greenwich, where he knew many Freemasons, were not under the jurisdiction of Kent.⁷⁷ Such friends in the locality included the poet and auctioneer, Matthew Garland, the Deptford-born author of *Masonic Effusions* and the Revd Jethro Inwood, curate of St Paul’s Church, Deptford, whom Perfect appointed Provincial Grand Chaplain. Perfect’s pique at not having responsibility for London and not Kent lodges in Deptford and Greenwich was mollified by the consecration of Perfect Lodge No. 576 [SN 1293], Woolwich, on 10 November 1796. The lodge, named in his honour, whose members included Perfect’s friend, Matthew Garland and other Woolwich, Deptford, and Dartford tradesmen, last paid subscriptions to Grand Lodge in 1806 and was erased in 1822.

Owing to his increasing London consulting commitments, Perfect stayed at 4 Beaufort Buildings, Strand, near the former residence of Henry Fielding, author of *Tom Jones*, and later the home of the perfumier, Eugène Rimmel. Missing lodge meetings at West Malling, Perfect joined Union Lodge of Freedom and Ease, later Old Union Lodge No. 46 [SN 160] London, whose members included surgeons, gentlemen, and tradesmen, on 12 August 1794.⁷⁸ Perfect described himself as a physician rather than a surgeon on joining this lodge, as an advertisement in the *Kentish Gazette* a decade before announced he had passed an examination, probably a purchased degree from St Andrews University.⁷⁹

Travelling to London from West Malling was not without incident, as Henrietta Perfect and her house-maid, Jane Kidwell, testified at the Old Bailey on 20 February 1799. On arrival at 91 Strand she noticed that two portmanteaus were missing. John Groves and George Bamber were indicted for ‘feloniously stealing, on the 23d of January, a cotton bed-gown, value 5s. a coloured cotton gown, value 20s. a white gown, value 20s. a white muslin gown, value 20s. a japan white muslin gown, value 40s. a blue silk gown, value 40s. a night-gown, value 2s. a pair of sheets, value 10s. a white petticoat, value 10s.

⁷⁶ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 22 May 1795, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/48

⁷⁷ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 6 January 1795, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/43

⁷⁸ Membership Register, Moderns’ Grand Lodge, 1768–1813, Vol. 1, London, fol. 463. Sadly the 18th century minute books and other records of Old Union Lodge were lost as a result of enemy action. Pre-World War II histories of the Lodge, including *A short history of the Old Union Lodge No. 46 on the roll of the United Grand Lodge of the Ancient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of England 1735-1935*, Sir Gerald W. Wollaston and John Tindall-Robertson, 1935, only confirm the date when Perfect joined the Lodge.

⁷⁹ Black, *An 18th Century Mad-Doctor*, 64.

a striped dimity petticoat, value 5s. two under petticoats, value 6s. a muslin petticoat, value 5s. another muslin petticoat, value 5s. three neck handkerchiefs, value 3s. and a pocket handkerchief, value 12d. the property of William Perfect.⁸⁰ Groves and Bamber were convicted and transported for seven years. The evidence also mentions Elizabeth Longhurst, Henrietta's companion, who became Perfect's third wife in a marriage which took place at St Pancras Old Church on 8 March 1806. By that date, aged seventy two and in declining health, Perfect married Elizabeth to protect her status as his nurse. She outlived Perfect and like Henrietta, who had died in 1804, was interred in the Perfect family tomb in East Malling churchyard on 22 January 1857.

Perfect was keen to uphold Masonic protocol in his new role, but demonstrated inexperience by writing to White on several occasions to check procedure to ensure that he was leading the Province of Kent in accordance with all the rules. By March 1795, before he was installed as Provincial Grand Master, he sought approval after receiving requests from Lodge Fortitude No. 437 [SN 967], Maidstone, and True and Faithful Lodge No. 314 [SN 909], West Malling. The lodges were keen to assemble between lodge meetings, later referred to as lodges of instruction, for the 'purpose of instructing the younger and less informed members by Lectures elucidating the Mysteries of Masonry.'⁸¹ The Patent of Appointment did not arrive until just before Perfect's installation as Provincial Grand Master at the Provincial meeting in the Assembly Rooms, Faversham, on 16 May 1795.⁸²

A new collar jewel was commissioned by the Province, which features prominently in a portrait of Perfect painted by Michael William Sharp. As Perfect's third son, George, Provincial Grand Senior Warden of Kent by 1802, informed White, engravings taken from the portrait by William Say were offered by subscription with any surplus raised to be donated to the Royal Cumberland School.⁸³ The fine jewel is a gold-plated silver set square, inset with clear gemstones and framed by a gold-plated silver wreath with three shields. The shield to the left is the Moderns' Grand Lodge coat of arms and at the bottom the civic coat of arms of Kent. To the right is the coat of arms of the Baronets Aucher of Bishopsbourne, Kent, a title created in 1666 for the Royalist Anthony Aucher, who represented Canterbury as Member of Parliament. However the title became extinct at the death of the third Baronet in 1726 and the reason for its inclusion remains unclear. The shield is divided horizontally: the top section bears three rampant lions and the

⁸⁰ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 05 December 2021), February 1799, trial of JOHN GROVES GEORGE BAMBER (t17990220-35).

⁸¹ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 2 March 1795, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/44.

⁸² Letters from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, April and 22 May 1795, Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/47 and 48.

⁸³ PGM collar jewel, Museum of Freemasonry, London, ref: M2012/234; Printed letter from George Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 5 November 1802, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/56; Portrait of William Perfect, Kent Museum of Freemasonry, Canterbury.

bottom section includes arrowheads and a central inescutcheon bearing a hand. At the top is a banner with the Latin text *tace* ('be silent').

A report of William Perfect's installation as Provincial Grand Master appeared in *The Freemasons' Magazine* in May 1795. This was followed in the September edition by a piece entitled, 'Memoirs of William Perfect MD, member of the London Medical Society, and Provincial Grand-Master of Masons for the County of Kent [with a portrait].'⁸⁴ This five-page laudatory address may have begun as a draft sent to the magazine's editor at the beginning of the year, who stated:

To the merits of Dr P we cheerfully subscribe; but his appointment of Provincial Grand Master was before noticed in our Magazine. The eulogy sent us by A Member of the Lodge of Fortitude, is too fulsome to be pleasing to our readers, and, we are sure, must, if published, be very offensive to the delicacy of that respectable gentleman.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that Fortitude Lodge No. 437 [SN 967], Maidstone, sought permission from Perfect to practice reading the Masonic lectures. It is conceivable that the lodge member offering 'too fulsome' prose was Perfect's smallpox partner, Humphrey Porter, who had edited the effusive tone by September.

As Provincial Grand Master Perfect did his best to ensure the smooth running of Freemasonry in Kent. This often depended on assistance from William White, with Perfect concerned that, by writing to the Grand Secretary on numerous occasions, 'I fear you will think me too troublesome but when I consider you as my Guide, I hope you will excuse the trouble I so often give you.'⁸⁶ In 1800 Perfect attempted to assist Impregnable Lodge No. 336 [SN 950], Sandwich, erased on 13 April 1796. A core of former members wished to revive the lodge, which Perfect supported as 'there is a great possibility of their becoming a very flourishing Lodge if their re-establishment is practicable.'⁸⁷

Sadly Perfect's intervention failed, even though the members acquired the regalia of Lodge of the Three Grand Principles No. 283 [SN 846], Islington, which was in a 'declining state'. Despite an attempt by Perfect to transfer the lapsed Fraternal Lodge No. 13 [SN 49] from Greenwich to Deal or Sandwich, William Hannam, former Worshipful Master of Union Lodge of Freedom and Ease and at that time Treasurer of Old King's

⁸⁴ 'The Freemasons' Magazine: 1795-05-01, Page 68' Masonic Periodicals Online, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 7 Dec. 2021, masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fmm/issues/fmm_01051795/page/68/; 'The Freemasons' Magazine: 1795-09-01, Page 4' Masonic Periodicals Online, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 7 Dec. 2021, masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fmm/issues/fmm_01091795/page/4/.

⁸⁵ 'The Freemasons' Magazine: 1795-01-01, Page 76' Masonic Periodicals Online, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 7 Dec. 2021, masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fmm/issues/fmm_01011795/page/76/.

⁸⁶ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 3 June 1801, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/54a.

⁸⁷ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 24 August 1800, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/53 and letter from William Perfect to William White, 29 January 1803, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/58.

Arms Lodge No. 28 [SN 70], London, intervened. Hannam arranged for the warrant and regalia of the Islington and Greenwich lodges to be transferred to Lodge of Three Grand Principles No. 208 [SN 1429], Dewsbury, Yorkshire, which retains the final Minute Book of Fraternal Lodge up to 1803.⁸⁸ Sandwich residents keen to join Freemasonry in the locality had to wait until the consecration of Cinque Ports Lodge No. 1206 in 1868.

Perfect also sought guidance from the Grand Secretary when the Worshipful Master of Royal Kent Lodge of Antiquity No. 20 [SN 40], Chatham, decided to relocate the Lodge to Rochester after falling out with John Gurr, landlord of the Sun Tavern where it met and Provincial Grand Secretary.⁸⁹ Although White's reply does not survive, the lodge continued to meet in Chatham, moving to the Mitre Tavern by 1820.

Despite expressing liberal views in several prose articles published in the London press, Perfect supported establishment views in the county. He ensured a loyal address was sent in 1800 from the Provincial Grand Master, Officers and Freemasons of Kent after an attempt on the life of George III. James Hadfield failed to shoot the King at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London during the singing of the National Anthem, but his trial defence claimed that he suffered from delusions due to injuries received fighting the French. Hadfield escaped death but was incarcerated at a new criminal section at Bethlem Royal Hospital. Perfect, given his expertise in caring for those with mental illnesses, worded the address with care, stating that 'providence may long continue to defeat every dark and daring attempt, even of insanity itself, that is aimed at his most sacred person.'⁹⁰

However Perfect did not seek advice from William White before permitting William Finch, a Canterbury bookseller, to dedicate his first major work, *A Masonic Treatise, or Masonic Key with an Elucidation on the Religious and Moral Beauties of Free Masonry*, to the Provincial Grand Master of Kent in May 1801. This was to generate considerable opprobrium for Perfect, and later Finch, from Grand Lodge. As Vieler states, the publication of Masonic lectures was to 'completely outstrip the first edition of Browne's *Master-Key* in practical value, as it included both questions and answers of the lectures of the three degrees.'⁹¹ As stated above, lodges under Perfect's jurisdiction in Maidstone and West Malling were holding additional rehearsal meetings of lectures by 1795 for less-experienced Freemasons. Perfect knew of Finch's manuscript and possible practical use by local lodges before its publication. Finch wrote to Perfect in April 1801 thanking him for the kind reception of the manuscript and permission granted to dedicate the printed

⁸⁸ Letters from William Perfect and E. Chambers to William White, Grand Secretary, 11 May, 20 May, and 17 May 1803, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/61 – 63.

⁸⁹ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 3 June 1801, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/54a; letter from John Gurr to William White, 1 November 1801, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/55; letter from William Perfect to William White, 17 May 1803, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/62, Museum of Freemasonry, London.

⁹⁰ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 2 June 1800, Museum of Freemasonry, London ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/52.

⁹¹ D. Vieler, 'The Third Man – A study of Browne's Master Keys', *AQC* 105 (1992), 3.

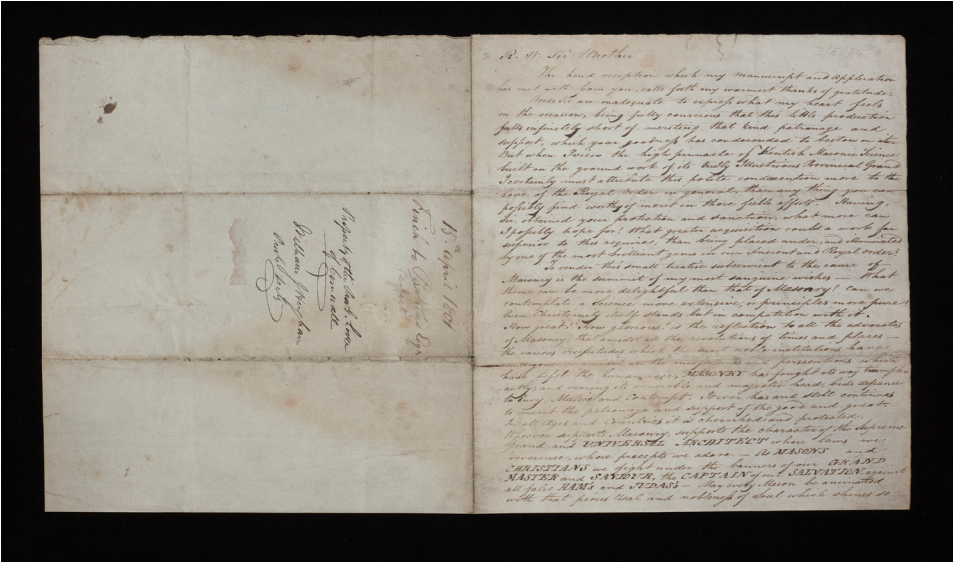


Fig. 5. Letter from William Finch to William Perfect, April 1801, Ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/54b Recto
© Museum of Freemasonry, London

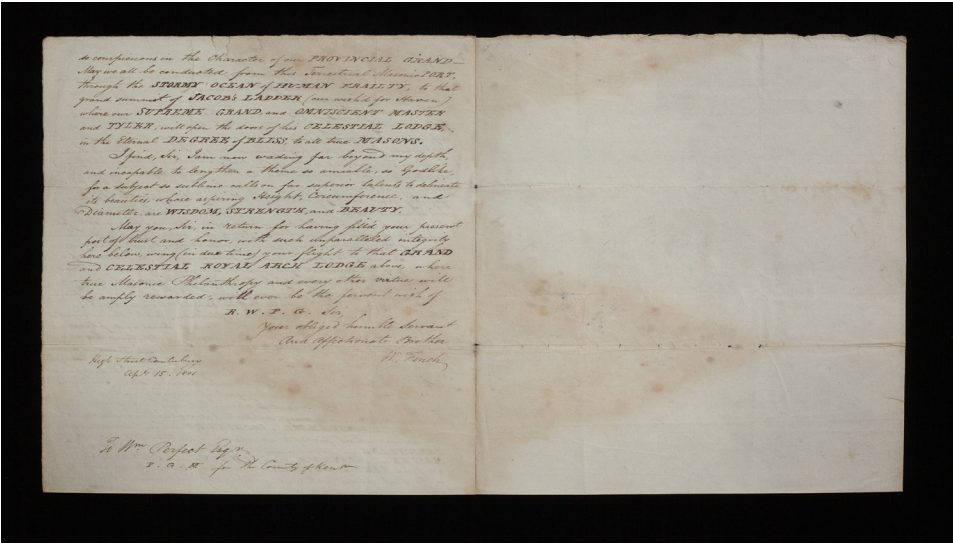


Fig. 6. Letter from William Finch to William Perfect, April 1801, Ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/54b Verso
© Museum of Freemasonry, London

version to the Provincial Grand Master.⁹² By August the Grand Secretary contacted an alarmed Perfect, who responded carefully:

As to the publication you mention I had a sight of it in Manuscript and thinking it a perfectly harmless work did not prohibit the author from printing it but at the same time desired him to use my name in his dedication only as having permitted him to use it. I since find he has been lavish in his panegyric boasting of my patronage and saying more in his preface than he was warranted to do.⁹³

Perfect assured the Grand Secretary that he did not wish to cause trouble for Freemasonry, and promised to discourage any further erroneous repetition. William Finch issued a revised edition of his *Treatise* the next year and caused further trouble for Grand Lodge, which led to his eventual expulsion.⁹⁴ Much chastened by such opprobrium, by 1805 Perfect discouraged Freemasons in Kent from 'purchasing or encouraging the sale of one Mr. Chamberlain's Lectures on Masonry as set forth in his printed letters, the same being deemed derogatory and below the Mystic Rites of our Sacred and Venerable Institution.'⁹⁵

Although Perfect attended the Provincial Grand Lodge at Faversham in 1806, by 1808 he was too indisposed to attend and his Deputy, Dr Richard Thompson of Rochester, was in the chair. The next May Perfect was again too ill to preside and his death was announced on 5 June 1809. His body was interred in the Perfect family tomb in East Malling churchyard. The funeral procession from West Malling to East Malling took place by torchlight and comprised a hearse, three coaches, and one private carriage. His Deputy, Dr Thompson, addressed the congregation on the many virtues of the deceased.⁹⁶ An obituary mentions:

His social and moral virtues will long be remembered by the Antient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in that county; and the memory of their zealous and affectionate Grand Master will be long and ardently cherished; while the numerous dependants upon his bounty will do ample justice to the goodness of his heart, and acknowledge, with regret, that in him Humanity has lost a friend. As an author, he was well known, and not without merit.⁹⁷

A verse from a poem written to his clergyman friend, Thomas Austen, in 1760 provides a fitting epitaph:

No more of that my business done,
To Malling with the setting sun,

⁹² Letter from William Finch to William Perfect, 15 April 1801, ref: GBR 1991 HC 3/E/54b.

⁹³ Letter from William Perfect to William White, Grand Secretary, 4 August 1801, ref: GBR 1991 FMH HC 9/A/5.

⁹⁴ Pope, 'Freemasonry in Canterbury and the Provincial Grand Lodge', 6–58; Colonel F. R. Rickard, 'William Finch', *AQC* 55 (1942), 163–283; D. Vieler, 'William Finch – The Positive View', *AQC* 102 (1989), 61–97.

⁹⁵ Pope, 'Freemasonry in Canterbury and the Provincial Grand Lodge', 47.

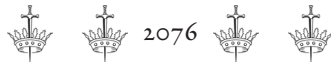
⁹⁶ Pope, 'Freemasonry in Canterbury and the Provincial Grand Lodge', 49.

⁹⁷ J. Nichols (1745–1826), *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London: E. Cave, July 1809 Vol.79), 684.

I in chariot bowled along,
And now have sung the promis'd song,
Command the next whene'er you bill,
I'll e'er be yours, imperfect Will!⁹⁸

After the loss of the Provincial Grand Master in 1809 members may have suggested the Deputy, Richard Thompson, another surgeon, as Perfect's replacement, but Grand Lodge decided to install a member of the local gentry, Sir Walter William James, whose patent was granted on 8 March 1810.

It is clear that Perfect made a substantial contribution to the emerging Masonic administration in Kent as well as leaving a legacy of poetry and prose, including many Masonic songs – some still performed in lodges. An enlightened physician, he championed the improvement of obstetrics, the eradication of smallpox, and the treatment of unseen and often misunderstood illnesses. *The Perfect Manuscript* provides a contemporary record of his personal interests and professional skills. Its conservation and digitisation enables researchers worldwide to access its hitherto hidden riches and benefit from Masonic advancement of knowledge.



⁹⁸ Poem for the Revd T. Austen, 3 April 1760, *The William Perfect Manuscript*, Vol. 6, 41. <https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/manuscripts>