

Sir John Throckmorton: An 18th-Century Catholic Freemason

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AMONGST THE EARLIEST PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTERS OF THE EIGHTEENTH century one of the most interesting is the first Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire, Sir John Throckmorton. He was appointed in 1796, at a time when there were no active lodges in Buckinghamshire.¹ The only lodge in Buckinghamshire before Throckmorton's death in 1819 was the Etonian Lodge, formed in 1813,² but in 1825 it crossed over to Windsor, and it was not until 1852 that Buckinghamshire again had a lodge.³ As a further complication, in 1817 Sir John was also appointed as Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire, although the two Provinces continued to operate separately; it was not until 1847 that they were re-organized as a combined Province.⁴

¹ L. R. Harborne & R. L. White, *The History of Freemasonry in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire* (Provincial Grand Lodges of Berkshire & Buckinghamshire, 1990), 34, 46.

² Harborne & White, *History of Freemasonry*, 102.

³ Harborne & White, *History of Freemasonry*, 146, 147.

⁴ Harborne & White, *History of Freemasonry*, 46.

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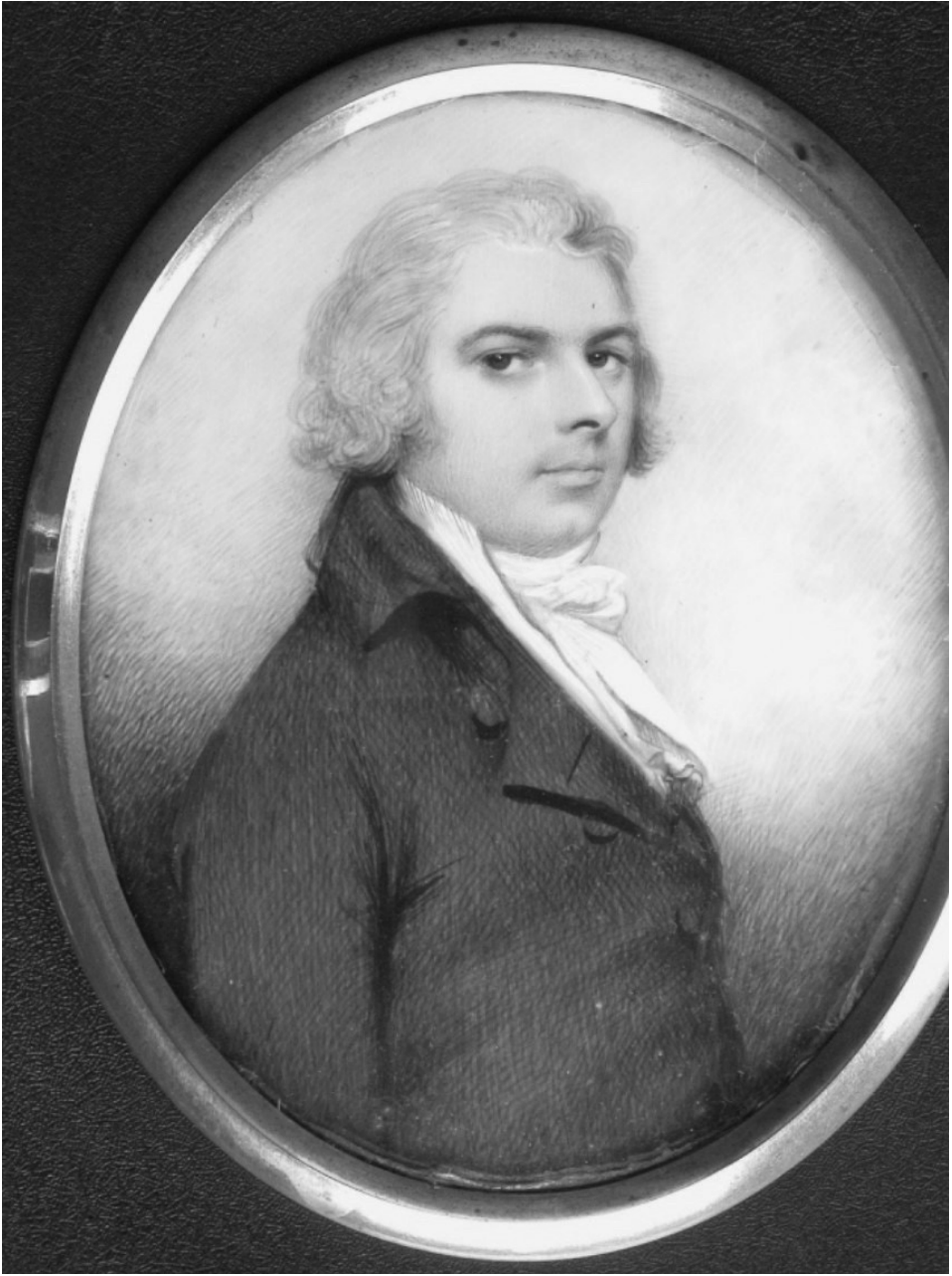


Fig. 1. Sir John Throckmorton by Andrew Pilmer. Photo Copyright National Trust / Simon Pickering.

A significant feature of Sir John's career was that he had been born into a very wealthy, staunchly Roman Catholic, family. At this time Roman Catholics had to live with many legal restrictions. They could not vote, study at Oxford or Cambridge,⁵ become an MP, hold public office or serve in the Army; they were also subject to heavy fines if they failed regularly to attend an Anglican Church. But there were no restrictions by Grand Lodge or the Roman Catholic Church in England on Roman Catholics becoming Freemasons and progressing to the highest offices in the Craft. His career throws considerable light upon the social history of some of the English Roman Catholic gentry at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their involvement in Freemasonry. During the Napoleonic Wars he saw one of his younger brothers and wife imprisoned by Napoleon in France.⁶ He was an acquaintance of William Wilberforce whose Act abolished the slave trade in the British colonies. At the same time his Masonic career spanned a momentous period in English Freemasonry, especially with the unification of the Moderns and Antients Grand Lodges in 1813.

In 1778 a Catholic Relief Act had eased a general anti-Catholic sentiment, but the Protestant Association, headed by Lord George Gordon had stirred up a considerable anti-Catholic sentiment, culminating in the Gordon Riots in June 1780, when there were several days of rioting in London, involving the looting and burning of Catholic chapels in foreign embassies and the looting of at least one major distillery. The rioting was only suppressed when the Government finally sent in the Army.⁷

On 3 June 1782, Sir John was elected as a member of the revived Catholic Committee. The committee sought to further the achievements of the *Catholic Relief Act 1778* through emphasizing the independence of English Catholics from papal control.⁸ On 19 August that year he married Maria Catherine (1762–1821). Clearly this was a busy year for him, as in the same year he was initiated into Freemasonry.

In 1791 he was installed as Master of the Royal Lodge, just before he went on his second European Tour, accompanied by his wife, during which time he left Paris only two days before the Insurrection of 10 August 1792, when armed revolutionaries in Paris stormed the Tuileries Palace.⁹ The Throckmortons escaped into Switzerland, and had returned to England by August 1793. Immediately after his return he threw himself once again back into opposition politics. He took up chairmanship of the Foxite Society of Friends of the

⁵ Pre-1824 the only universities in England. In 1824 the Manchester Mechanics Institute was opened to educate the city's working population and subsequently became part of the University of Manchester.

⁶ In May 1803, Charles Throckmorton was arrested as a 'détenu' with his wife Mary, whilst taking advantage of the new peace of Amiens to travel back to France, in search of a milder climate. See E. M. Duché, *A Passage to Imprisonment: The British Prisoners of war in Verdun under the First French Empire*, PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, at http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/66883/1/WRAP_THESIS_Duche_2014.pdf.

⁷ G. Rudé, *The Gordon Riots, in Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974).

⁸ Scott, 'Sir John Throckmorton', *ODNB*.

⁹ H. Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France*, Volume 3 (Project Gutenberg EBook, 2011), 298.

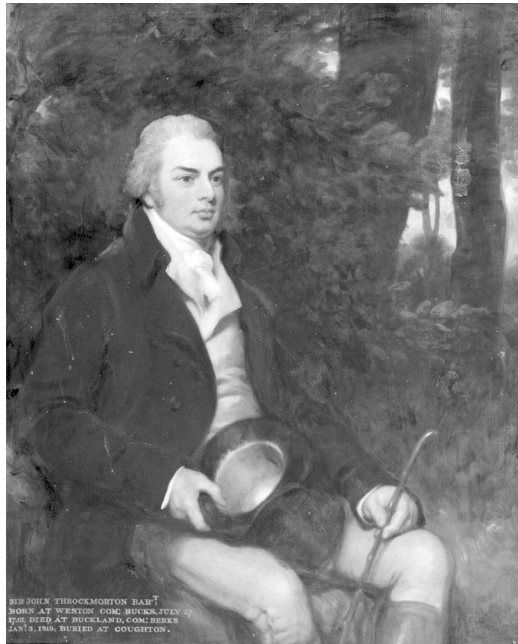


Fig. 2. Sir John Throckmorton, attributed to Thomas Phillips.
Photo Coughton Court, Copyright National Trust.

People, an organization in Great Britain that was focused on advocating Parliamentary Reform. He was also prominent later in supporting the eventual *Catholic Emancipation Act 1829*, which removed many of the previous restrictions on Catholics.¹⁰

At the Reformation (1529–37) all former Catholic dioceses in England and Wales had become Anglican, and thereafter, for nearly 300 years, there was in England no formal Catholic hierarchy. The state would not allow it and the Vatican regarded England as missionary territory. There were no dioceses, and instead of parishes the Roman Catholic Church operated a network of covert ‘missions’, often based in the country house of a Catholic family. From the late seventeenth century onwards the Roman Catholic Church in England was overseen by four missionary bishops, known as Vicars Apostolic, each responsible for a missionary region. Each Vicar Apostolic was a titular Bishop, meaning he was given the honorary episcopal title of a ‘dead diocese’ from times past.

From 1782 until the end of his life Sir John worked as a member of the revived Catholic Committee, to demand that, instead of Vicars Apostolic being appointed by the Pope, the laity and clergy should elect their own bishops. To promote this concept Sir John wrote and published two very lengthy documents. The first one anonymously, entitled *A letter*

¹⁰ *An Act for the Relief of His Majesty’s Roman Catholic Subjects*, introduced by the Duke of Wellington. It received royal assent on 29 April 1829.

addressed to the Catholic Clergy of England on the appointment of Bishops by A Layman., had twenty-two pages which ends 'I am, Gentlemen, Your obedient humble Servant, A LAYMAN. June 12, 1790.'¹¹ Subsequently, this time under his own name, he wrote *A second letter addressed to the Catholic Clergy of England on the appointment of Bishops in which the Objections to the first letter are answered*. This letter was 113 pages long, with almost as many pages again in an appendix, and concludes with 'I am, Gentlemen, Your obedient humble Servant, JOHN THROCKMORTON. "Weston" Nov 17, 1790.'¹²

Sir John was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law (DCL) by Oxford University on 15 June 1796, when his address was recorded as Buckland, Berks. However, this reference does not record the reason for the honour. It is interesting to note that the original Test Acts in late 1600 did not allow Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, and non-Christians to attend university and presumably not receiving even honorary degrees. It was not until the *Universities Tests Act 1871* that restrictions on student and staff of all faiths and no faith were finally lifted.

Sir John also published a book entitled *Considerations arising from the debates in Parliament on the petition of the Irish Catholics by Sir John Throckmorton, Bart.*¹³ The content of this book also appears in *The Edinburgh Review*, in which he states:

We may venture to lay it down as a general proposition, that all restrictive laws, which exclude certain classes of men from political stations, are, in that immediate operation, oppressive and impolitic. That the classes excluded are sufferers, is abruptly clear: and evil suffered by individuals are in some measure evil suffered by the public, if it be true that the public is composed of individuals.¹⁴

Sir John was a prodigious diary keeper, many of which remain in the Warwickshire County Council – County Record Office.

Sir John Throckmorton the Freemason

At the age of twenty-eight Sir John was initiated and passed on 6 June 1782 in the Royal Lodge No. 251 (later to become Royal Alpha Lodge No. 16) meeting at the Thatched House Tavern, St James's Street, London. He was not raised until 9 April 1787. He was Master in 1791 and 1798. Only nine years after he was raised, he was 'appointed' or more correctly given the Grand rank of Provincial Grand Master for Buckinghamshire on 13 April 1796, the first time that title / rank was used. The date of '3 April 1796' has yet to

¹¹ *A Letter addressed to the Catholic Clergy of England, on the appointment of Bishops. By a Layman* [Sir J. C. Throckmorton] (London?: 1790).

¹² J. C. Throckmorton, *A Second Letter addressed to the Catholic Clergy of England on the appointment of Bishops in which the Objections to the first letter are answered* (London: J. P. Coghlan, 1791).

¹³ J. C. Throckmorton, *Considerations arising from the debates in Parliament on the petition of the Irish Catholics* (London: Oxford, 1806).

¹⁴ *The Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal*, April 1806 to July 1806.

be completely verified, whilst many other sources report 1796 as the year of his appointment. Sir John did attend the next Grand Feast on 11 May 1796, presumably as Provincial Grand Master for Buckinghamshire. His diary records: ‘Dined at Grand Festival. Prince of Wales in chair.’

Nothing in the reports or Minutes of the Grand Lodge indicates that Sir John was formally ‘invested’ with any sort of ceremony. The Minutes of the May 1796 meeting only record the appointment and investiture of the officers of the year and the presentation for approval of the following year’s Grand Stewards. However, these very brief statements about his Masonic career do not answer a very important question: why and how did he, as a staunch Catholic, become a Freemason? The challenge was to put some detail on how that occurred.

By 1787 Royal Lodge Bye Laws state:

1st . . . THAT Eight regular Lodges be held in every year Viz: On the First and third Thursdays in February, March, April, and May unless sufficient matter be laid before the Lodge to induce an Order for an extraordinary One—the members summoned to meet at four—Dinner to be on Table at ½ past four—the Lodge opened at Seven and closed when Business will admit or the Master shall think proper.

2^d . . . THAT the Annual Subscription of each Member be four Guineas payable to the Treasurer of the Lodge on the first Meeting in each year.

4th . . . THAT the Master upon his Election contribute four Guineas to the Fund of the Lodge the Senior Warden Two Guineas: and the Junior Warden One Guinea.

Clearly it was quite expensive to be a member of Royal Lodge. Sir John’s Masonic footprint is not large in internet searches. However, a paper by Bro. Gordon Hills provides an invaluable secondary source.¹⁵ Hills starts by recording his source: ‘The record of forty years in the life of the Royal Lodge is contained in a volume preserved in the Library of the British Museum bearing on its binding the title: “PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL LODGE OF FREEMASONS, London: 1777–1817,” No. 29.970 in the Catalogue of Additional MSS.’ Hills’s paper lists the name ‘Throckmorton’ at least seven times and ‘Throgmorton’ once.

Sir John’s main Masonic interests appear to have been in London, as you will see below in the Minutes of the Royal Lodge at the time of his initiation, when his address is recorded as being in Harley Street in London:

THROCKMORTON [appears as Throgmorton at first entry only] John, Esq^r. of Harley Street, Proposed by Bro. Meade. “passed the Lodge of an Entered Apprentice and was by permission of the Lodge advanced to the Degree of a Fellow Craft” June 6, 1782.

¹⁵ G. P. G. Hills, ‘An Account of the Minutes of The Royal Lodge, 1777–1817’, *AQC* 31 (1918), 69–122.

His proposer, Bro Meade, is not recorded in the Minutes of the Royal Lodge as being initiated there. They record the following:

Meade, DOMINICK, Master 1799: elected Treasurer December 6, 1781 and so continued until December 4, 1783, when he was not re-elected because of "being gone to the West Indies." Next appearance as attending February 1, 1787 and on February 17, 1787 again elected Treasurer in February 1788 declined re-election on account of absence.

Several brethren of Royal Lodge served as Grand Stewards for one year between 1766 and 1792. Meade was a Grand Steward in 1771. He seems to have proposed three candidates, all immediately before Sir John, including: 'Honble Charles Stourton [later Lord Stourton] in 1781, John Palmer Boteler in Jan 1782 & Henry Crathorne in Feb 1782,' but none after Sir John. Henry Crathorne was a Grand Steward (via Friendship Lodge) in 1784 and Senior Grand Warden in 1790. The Minutes record Charles Stourton as being the son of the 'Late Grand Master of Germany.'

There is no record of Meade in the Minutes of the Royal Lodge after 1788. However, by the time Sir John was initiated it is clear from the following that he moved in social and Catholic circles which involved many prominent Freemasons with membership of or as visitors to Royal Lodge. It is most likely that one of his acquaintances, who was a Mason, perhaps even Lord Petre, Grand Master from 1772 to 1777, who asked Meade to act as Sir John's proposer. Petre and Sir John had close connections in the Catholic Committees, etc.¹⁶ Petre would have known Dominick Meade and may have asked Meade to act as Sir John's proposer. There appears to be a link between Dominick Meade and Petre, as Meade was a Grand Steward in 1771, the year immediately before Lord Petre became Grand Master.¹⁷ Hence Meade would most likely have been heavily involved in the preparation for the Grand Lodge meeting and Feast on 4 May 1772, at which the current Grand Mster, the Duke of Beaufort, was present. Lord Petre was elected for the ensuing year, and after dining the Duke invested him with the ensigns of his high office.¹⁸ It is interesting to observe what were 'with the ensigns of his high office' and 'usual ceremonies, especially as the investiture was after dining!

Sir John took an active involvement in Royal Lodge. For example, in 1792 he apparently objected to the proposed 'stylish' uniform for members. At the time it seems that several of the more prestigious London lodges were discussing distinct uniforms.¹⁹ Sir John proposed four candidates for membership of Royal Lodge between 1789 and 1813, but he did not propose his brother William to be initiated into the lodge. On 3 March

¹⁶ See D. A. Bellenger, 'Petre, Robert Edward, 9th Baron Petre' (1742–1801), ODNB.

¹⁷ Anderson, 1784 *Constitutions*, 409.

¹⁸ Anderson, 1784 *Constitutions*, 409.

¹⁹ Hills, Minutes of The Royal Lodge, 87.

1791 William was proposed by Bro. Stanhope and seconded by Bro. Henry Howard, both of whom had been originally proposed by Sir John. Sir John was Master in 1791–2. He succeeded as the 5th Baronet on 9 December 1791. As already indicated he was at this time heavily engaged in campaigning for what became the *Catholic Relief Act 1791*. Even so, it still seems surprising he did not propose his brother unless he saw it as a conflict of interest as he was Master. Much later he joined Foundation Lodge in Abingdon, Berkshire on 9 January 1811, and in the same year was exalted into the Royal Arch Chapter of St James No. 2.. He may have joined Foundation Lodge owing to one of his family homes, Buckland House, Faringdon, Oxon, which was about eleven miles away.

He was still an active member of one of the lodges of which the Duke of Sussex was instrumental in their resuscitation and later amalgamation of it and other lodges to form Royal Alpha Lodge No. 16, which was the Grand Master's personal lodge and remains so.

The issue or otherwise of a Catholic becoming a Freemason in the 1800s

We are all aware of the ambiguous position today of an English Freemason who is a Catholic; their previous and current position is well outlined in a paper by Bro. Powell entitled 'Pure, Ancient Masonry and the Catholic Church.'²⁰

However, owing to a quirk in the inability of the Church of Rome to enforce papal bulls in England, there was no 'legal' Catholic authority to enforce the bulls, including the original ban on Catholics 'becoming' Freemasons in the famous papal bull of 1738 *In Eminenti Apostolatus*. This quirk allowed Catholics the freedom, without seeming to fall foul of the rest of the Catholic Community, to become active Freemasons, and many did, with some achieving the highest offices in Grand Lodge. Not only were there Roman Catholics in the fraternity, including four Grand Masters before Sir John was initiated, but these men were often in highly influential leadership roles in the Roman Catholic laity who are described in Bro. Read's paper entitled 'Let a man's Religion . . . be what may . . .'²¹

Becoming a Provincial Grand Master in the late 1700s

Bro. Berman notes what may in reality be typical if not the general situations as regards Provincial Grand Masters at this time:

The appointment of a Provincial or District Grand Master – within England and overseas – was historically in the gift of the Grand Master, and in many cases appears to serve as ornamentation rather than an active office.²²

²⁰ C. Powell, 'Pure, Ancient Masonry and the Catholic Church', *AQC* 132 (2019), 115–52.

²¹ W. Read, 'Let a Man's Religion . . . be what it may . . .', *AQC* 98 (1985), 77–9.

²² R. Berman, comment on A. Newman, 'Grand Masters, Provincial Grand Masters, & Provincial Grand Lodges',

With the above background in mind, I was not surprised to have found no evidence that Sir John was a visitor at Grand Lodge or was a Grand Officer before he was appointed or, perhaps more correctly, given the rank of Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire. While today this may seem strange, in the late 1700s and early 1800s this does not appear to be uncommon.

A similar case is the appointment of a fellow Catholic, pupil of St Gregory's school in Douai, Grand Tour traveller, and member of Royal Lodge, Sir John Swinburne. He had not attended a Masonic meeting for twenty-five years before he was invited to accept appointment as the Provincial Grand Master of Northumberland. On 12 September 1806 he replied to the invitation:

Sir, I had last night the pleasure of receiving your obliging letter announcing the honour the Provincial Grand Lodge of Freemasons in the County of Northumberland propose to confer upon me. I cannot but be highly flattered by such a distinction, at the same time, I must feel how unworthy I am of it. 20 years ago, I was made a Master Mason and I am ashamed to say various circumstances have prevented me from attending any Lodge since. The Brethren, will I fear, find me a very ignorant Brother, but they may rest assured that, as far as lies in my Power, everything shall be done that can contribute to the welfare and interest of our Most Ancient and Respectable Order. I beg, Sir, that you will accept my best thanks for the handsome manner in which you have been so good as to convey the wishes of the Brethren, and believe me, to Remain, Your very sincere and obedient servant, (Signed) John E. Swinburne.²³

Royal Lodge being a Moderns Lodge, it necessarily follows that its members, who were nobility or high-ranking gentry, might reasonably aspire to the Grand Lodge rank and status of Provincial Grand Master, if not actually expecting to head up a Province.

Based on the above, in the late 1700s, a route to becoming a Grand Officer, Grand Steward, or even a Provincial Grand Master seems to be at least for some the membership of the Royal Lodge or of another lodge in a small list of influential London lodges, as can be seen from the following extract of the Minutes of the lodge. The membership of the Lodge of Friendship No. 6 seemed to convey similar benefits.

We find the Membership of the Lodge drawn from the nobility, gentry of good social position, professional men and city merchants, and amongst the visitors the Grand Master, Lord Petre, and the Deputy Grand Master, whilst several of the Members, besides serving the office of Grand Steward (to which later I must refer in detail), attained the rank of Provincial or District Grand Master and Grand Office at home or abroad. Amongst these may be noted:

Capt. Francis Minshall, Prov.G.M., Sussex, 1774.

AQC 133 (2020), 134.

²³ I. Brown, 'Antiquity's Pride: The Third Provincial Grand Master of Northumberland', Undated & Unpublished.

George Durant, Prov.G.M., N. Wales and Shropshire, 1774.
 Arthur Stanhope, Prov.G.M., Berkshire, 1795.
 Sir John Throckmorton, Bart., Prov.G.M., Buckinghamshire, 1796, and Berkshire, 1817.
 Henry Harford, Prov.G.M, Maryland.
 Henry Crathorne, Senior Grand Warden, 1790.
 A Senior, P.D.G.M., Asia.
 William Birch, Senior G.W., America.²⁴

Some further insight into the membership of Grand Lodge between 1717 and 1784 can be gleaned from Anderson's 1784 *Constitutions*.²⁵ in the section entitled 'A Chronological Table of Patrons, Grand Masters, Officers, and Stewards.' If the names from AD 587 – Austin the Monk to AD 1698 – Sir Christopher Wren are ignored, it records a list of the Grand Officers each year starting in 1717; with just the Grand Master and two Grand Wardens, then progressively adding Deputy Grand Masters, Grand Secretaries, Grand Stewards, Grand Treasurers, Sword Bearers. Later by 1782, adding an Assistant Grand Master. By the last record in the list for 1783 the number of Grand Officers had stabilized to include all the above i.e. only twenty-two Brethren, including twelve Grand Stewards. The list goes on to name thirty-nine Provincial Grand Masters, both in England and overseas, but with no mention of Buckinghamshire, as Sir John was not 'appointed' as the first Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire until 1796, but there is a record of the Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire as Col. John Deaken, who was the first Provincial Grand Master appointed in 1773. At the Grand Lodge meeting in April 1777 John Deaken was reported as the Deputy Grand Master (he may have been acting), and at the meeting in May 1777 he was reported as Senior Grand Warden. However, at the next meeting in November 1777 his name does not appear in the list of officers present, as Thomas Parker appears as Senior Grand Warden. Deaken first appears in 1768 as Major John Deaken in the list of Grand Stewards and its Treasurer. Of course, Sir John was himself appointed as Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire in 1817 as the third Provincial Grand Master. His predecessor in Berkshire, Arthur Stanhope, appointed in 1795 is not recorded in Anderson's book.

In trying to understand the appointment of Sir John as Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire, one might have expected his name and rank progression to appear in Anderson's *Constitutions*, but it does not.

In October 1768 Grand Lodge had decided to establish a fund to build a hall and it required Grand Officers to contribute.²⁶ This may be the reason that at the Grand Lodge

²⁴ Hills, 'Minutes of The Royal Lodge', 70.

²⁵ J. Anderson, *Constitutions of the Antient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons containing their history, charges, regulations etc.* (London: J. Rozea, 1784).

²⁶ Anderson, 1784 *Constitutions*, 386.

meeting on 23 Nov 1796, the meeting shortly after Sir John's appointment as Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire, the Minutes record him as making a charitable donation of £10.10.00 (Ten Guineas). This was quite a large donation when seen against the total donations recorded of £200.0.4 (200 Guineas). Ten guineas is worth at least £1700 today.

Sir John is shown as President of the Grand Lodge Board of Schools from December 1815 until June 1817, at which point James Perry becomes President, but Sir John remains a Board member. He was again appointed as a Board member in April 1818.

The Minutes of the Moderns Grand Lodge Communications for the period 1770 to 1812 show no record of Sir John attending Grand Lodge between his initiation in 1782 and in 1796, when he was given the rank of Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire. This does not mean he did not attend, but more likely that his status was not high enough to be recorded. I rather assume he would have attended at least occasionally.

After 13 April 1786, when he was 'appointed' as Provincial Grand Master of Buckinghamshire, the Moderns Grand Lodge Communications show him attending on the following occasions:

11 May 1786 (the date immediately after his appointment) and subsequently on 12 April 1797, 4 April 1798,²⁷ 10 April 1799, 12 April 1813,²⁸ and 23 June 1813.²⁹

Some more details on his attendance can be seen in the reports on Grand Lodge Quarterly Communications and Grand Feasts in *The Freemasons Magazine*. The report on the Grand Feast held on 11 May 1796, in the presence of the Grand Master, HRH George, Prince of Wales, shows Sir John as the twenty-fourth name after the Grand Master.³⁰

Sir John died in 1819 and there are no further references either to his death or to any 'Throckmorton' as a Grand Officer or attending Grand Lodge in the Quarterly Communications for the whole period to December 1819. However, the practice of recording the deaths of any brethren except very senior Grand Lodge officers appears not to have started until March 1901.³¹

Conclusion

Sir John, as well as having all the duties of landed Gentry, travelling widely, and his Freemasonry, dedicated an enormous amount of effort into achieving more equal rights for Roman Catholics and their acceptance in English society, with the culmination of the

²⁷ *Freemasons Magazine*, 1 May 1798, 327.

²⁸ Manuscript Minutes of the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns), 1740–1813 BE 140 GRA.

²⁹ Transcripts of Minutes of the Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge, 23 June 1813, supplied by the Archivist and Records Manager of the Museum of Freemasonry.

³⁰ *Freemasons Magazine*, 1 May 1798, 327.

³¹ Minutes of the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge, 6 March 1901.

eventual passing of the Emancipation Act. His Masonic career appears to be quite unexpectedly linked to a number of his social acquaintances, who shared a common interest in Catholicism, Catholic Emancipation, and subsequently Freemasonry.

The ‘education’ of Sir John and his brothers, which so influenced their later lives and Masonic careers, in some ways appears radically different to the ‘education’ of our current Masonic Rulers, but is it that different? In Sir John’s time boys’ early education was at home with a tutor, in Catholic families a monk, no doubt in the company of their siblings. Then attendance at a monastic school in France was followed by a two-year Grand Tour of Europe. Well, I doubt that many of our Rulers were educated at home and not by a monk, but if they came from middle or upper social class of family, with some wealth, or as an officer serving in the military or senior civilian government service, they may have had a nanny or au pair to look after them and received a good start to their education by attending a kindergarten or nursery school where they were taught by professionals. They might well have gone to a prep school and then a good (expensive) boarding or grammar (free) school, followed by a good university, if not Oxford or Cambridge, with all the social and Masonic contacts that can be achieved at, for instance, Apollo and Isaac Newton University Lodges, then adding to their educational experiences with a pre or post gap year, travelling the world. Things really do not change entirely, but today the opportunity for social and Masonic preferment are somewhat more evenly spread and not just restricted in the main to nobility and landed gentry.

But in other ways things have change very significantly in society and Masonry. In England, in Sir John’s time and in the many years following there were no restrictions on Catholics becoming Freemasons, some progressing to the rank of a Grand Master, without any opposition from society in general or from the Catholic Church or many other religious orders. Regrettably, this has not been the case for many years. The specific problems for Catholics and others to join the fraternity and to Freemasons marrying into certain religious families today is not a minor issue, and can deter good potential candidates from joining us, and be the cause of existing members resigning from Freemasonry.

Finally, perhaps the less said about Sir Johns’ contribution to Freemasonry in general in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire the better! His titles within Grand Lodge most likely reflected his wealth, ‘Gentry’ status, and connections in society, rather than his dedication to the role of Provincial Grand Master of eventually two Provinces. However, it might be said, using a modern phrase, that he made a very major contribution to ‘Freemasonry in the Community’, in terms of his dedication to Catholic Emancipation.

