Widely Scattered and Doomed to Fail? Freemasonry in North Wales 1727-1851

Bro. Dr Rob Hammond

Until Bro. Peter Davies's 2016 article 'How Freemasonry Evolved in South Wales,'[1] Welsh Freemasonry had been a neglected field of research in *AQC*. On the approach of its tercentenary in 2027, the Province of North Wales is taking an interest in its own history. Theirs is perhaps unique, as the Province is older than any of its lodges, either extinct or extant, and was '. . . the first Province to have its Grand Master appointed by the Grand Lodge in London.'[2]

After the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717, organized Freemasonry spread across England and Wales,[3] with areas beyond London being granted the status of Provinces. What also makes the history of North Wales as a Masonic Province interesting is that although it can claim, just ahead of South Wales, to have lineage from 1727, for

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[1] P. M. Davies 'How Freemasonry Evolved in South Wales', *AQC* 129 (2016), 41–84.
[2] A. E. Evans, *Fragments of Freemasonry in North Wales* (Oldham: Pollard, 1943), 1.
[3] Scottish Freemasonry seems to have had its own origins separate to the events in London. See R. Lomas, *The Secrets of Freemasonry*, (London: Constable & Robinson, 2006).

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a considerable portion of the period until 1851 it existed largely in name only, with no Provincial Grand Lodge before 1852. In terms of private lodges, the first were thinly spread over time and space. Despite the 1727 claim there was a gap of sixteen years until the first lodge was consecrated in 1743. Another four lodges followed in the next thirty years, and a less than grand total of nine by 1795. By 1811 these had all been erased:

> The handful of lodges which were established were generally introduced by outsiders. These lodges were small, prone to internal quarrels, and short-lived. By 1850, freemasonry was on the verge of disappearing altogether in Wales.[4]

The aim of this paper is to explain why Freemasonry struggled to establish itself in North Wales before the mid-nineteenth century. Who were the 'outsiders' who introduced the Craft; why did lodges suffer poor Masonic discipline, and what made them close so soon after consecration? We shall try to establish why Freemasonry struggled in the Principality, when compared with other parts of Great Britain, as well as identify some factors in common with other nascent provinces.

The immediate explanation rests on the geography of the region, which is mountainous and prone to poor weather, and with limited transport infrastructure. In North Wales the first lodges were dispersed across a relatively inaccessible area with little chance of either interaction, or effective supervision, by a Provincial Grand Master. As a result they often behaved irregularly and soon became inactive, even if it took some time for them to be removed from Grand Lodge's list. This action in 1811 formally ended the speculative Freemasonry that had begun in 1743, until another two lodges opened in 1826. By 1838 the Province had just one lodge left – St David's No. 384 in Bangor. That lodge struggled on alone until 1852, when Freemasonry again started to expand in North Wales.[5] For the first 125 years of its history, therefore, there was either just one lodge, or none, for at least forty-five of them. With the considerable lag between lodges stopping meeting and formally being erased, this inactivity would have been even longer in reality. If the same criteria were applied by the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) to provincial centenaries as to private lodges, that is '. . . proof of uninterrupted existence,'[6] then North Wales's claim to 1727 would be tenuous at best.

As well as the challenges of distance and terrain there are other explanations for the uneven development of Masonry in North Wales. The first is that there was never any indigenous Welsh Freemasonry, and Wales has always been subsumed into the English

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[4] 'Freemasonry and the British Problem', Internet Lodge, accessed 23 July 2022, https://internet.lodge.org.uk/index.php/research/93-library/research/233-freemasonry-and-the-british-problem. .

[5] St David's is the mother lodge for much of North Wales. See its family tree, 'Chart 384', available Museum of Freemasonry, accessed 23 July 2022, https://museumfreemasonry.org.uk/themes/pippip/lodge/Chart_384.pdf..

[6] United Grand Lodge of England, 'Rule 252', *Book of Constitutions* (London: UGLE, 2009), 119.

Constitution, be it the first Grand Lodges, or the United Grand Lodge of England.[7] This was exacerbated by the arm's-length nature of supervision by Provincial Grand Masters, often London-based Englishmen of 'distinction' invited to oversee areas with little, if any, Masonic presence.[8] If we add economic challenges, with lodges often linked to towns reliant on primary industries, we can start to explain the neglect and decline of Freemasonry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Working alone after 1838, St David's Lodge began to agitate for a North Wales Province under its own Provincial Grand Lodge and Welsh Provincial Grand Master.[9] It was only when this happened in 1852, with the appointment of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 6th Bt. of Wynnstay, as Provincial Grand Master – that Freemasonry was resurrected. It was on his death in 1885 that the large Province of North Wales and Shropshire was able to be split, with the Province of North Wales becoming a separate entity.[10] An early historian of Freemasonry in North Wales put it thus:

> The history of Freemasonry in the Province during the 18th and the beginnings of the last century would appear to be a succession of noble efforts to found Lodges, but, unfortunately, they were short lived, probably owing to the difficulties of the inter-communications between the widely scattered towns. However, from the middle of the nineteenth century, there has been a steady growth, due to the better and safe means of transport, and also the effect of the appointment of resident Provincial Grand Masters, who have evinced an increasing interest in the craft, as well as the formation of a live Provincial Lodge.[11]

Ever Closer Union: Wales and England after 1536

Freemasonry does not exist in a political or socio-economic vacuum, so this history needs to be placed within a wider context. Wales had effectively been absorbed into England in 1536, and, until the industrial revolution 'were in that period a rural people of "Anglican" faith who were bereft of political structure specific to themselves.'[12]

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[7] Anecdotal evidence suggests that there was an initiative by Lord Farnham as Pro Grand Master in the 1990s to change the name of the UGLE to the 'United Grand Lodge of England and Wales.' The matter didn't get as far as Quarterly Communications but was discussed at the Board of General Purposes, and most likely the Grand Master's Council, but was not well received.

[8] Even if he does not specifically mention Wales, the issues around the nature of these early Provincial Grand Masters and Grand Lodges was covered by Bro. Prof. Aubrey Newman in his Prestonian Lecture for 2003. See A. Newman 'The Contribution of the Provinces to the Development of English Freemasonry', *AQC* 117 (2004), 68–82.

[9] *Freemasons' Quarterly Review* (March 1845), 100, accessed 5 July 2022, Museum of Freemasonry, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fqr/issues/fqr_31031845/page/103/. .

[10] The Provincial archives for North Wales, and also Shropshire, only hold Minute Books from 1885. The Minute Book for 1852–1885, when the two were combined, is yet to be found.

[11] R. H. Gough Smallwood, *The History of Freemasonry in North Wales* (Wrexham: Breese, 1927), 15.

[12] J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 2007), 218.

This union created new counties and closer links across the border, the former 'Welsh Marches,' an English-speaking legal code, with landowners holding estates in both England and Wales. Many of these became the new representatives of Wales in the Westminster parliament, as part of the creation of an Anglophone Welsh ruling class, who governed an agrarian, conservative society. This Welsh aristocracy consolidated their estates in the period after the Civil War, with unification of families by marriage, such as the Williams Wynns of Wynnstay, producing vast land holdings.[13] The ascendancy of parliamentary government after 1707, with private control of constituencies, consolidated the links between these Welsh landowners and politicians, and London. As a result the Welsh 'had been wholly assimilated into the English ruling class by the mid-eighteenth century.'[14] London also became the centre for Welsh cultural institutions with the creation of societies like Cymmrodorion in 1751, which, with its own ceremony and rituals, sought to promote Welsh language, culture, and economy.

As well as the first lodges being formed in a time of major social and political change, it was also a period of Masonic turbulence, coming between the founding of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717, the schism between the Antients and the Moderns in 1753, and union as the UGLE in 1813. An account of this period that led to the formation of the UGLE suggests this is not 'just an English story . . . the Brethren of the British Isles, be they English, Irish or Scots, had all played a role.'[15]

Note the absence of a separate Welsh Grand Lodge, or a distinct Welsh Freemasonry,[16] which is indicative of Wales's absorption into English political life. Mirroring the Welsh ruling classes' assimilation into London, the area that is now the Province of North Wales was an offshoot of English Masonry, firstly in Cheshire (or, more specifically, Chester), and later Shropshire and its county town Shrewsbury. Elements of Freemasonry in North Wales, however, had taken root earlier with the foundation of the first lodges in the mid-eighteenth century, and appointment of a Provincial Grand Master in 1727.

The Importance of Chester: The Unofficial English Capital of North Wales

At the start of the eighteenth century Chester 'was practically the then Capital for North Wales.'[17] Given the difficulty of travelling south, Chester had a prominent place in the

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[13] By the end of the nineteenth century the Williams Wynn lands totalled over 60,000 hectares, and had become the largest landowners in Wales. See Davies, *History*, 277.

[14] Davies, *History*, 292.

[15] J. Belton, *The English Masonic Union of 1813: A Tale of Ancient and Modern* (Bury St. Edmonds: Arima, 2012), 17.

[16] By this we may mean in constitution, language, ritual, or regalia. Unlike Scotland or Ireland, Wales has always been 'English' in Masonic form.

[17] R. H. Gough Smallwood, 'Early Freemasonry in Chester,' Read before the Quatuor Coronati Lodge at the summer meeting in Chester, 20 June 1936. UGLE Archives: BE 60 (CHE) SMA Fol. Later published in *AQC* 50 1937, 77–91.

region, sitting just on the English side of the border. As well as being the winter residence for local landowners, it was an ancient Roman settlement, a cathedral city, the county town of Cheshire, a military headquarters (with its own castle), and the centre of the judiciary for Cheshire and North Wales.

Operative masons were present in Chester and North Wales as far back as the thirteenth century, as evidenced by the impressive collection of castles along the North Wales coast. King Edward I's master engineer, Richard, possessed a mason's seal, and masons' marks were left on buildings in the city and surrounds.[18] Chester had a long-established Company of Masons, with a coat of arms, and a history of Freemasonry published in 1900 'points to Chester as being then the great seat of Masonry, as it had been from Roman times, the chief town and only borough in the North Western Provinces of England.'[19] With the collection of ancient buildings in the city, this account points to the transition of operative to speculative lodges after 1550 and, by 1650, the existence of an Old Chester Lodge, whose '26 members were, hardly without exception, of the upper middle classes, the alderman and well-to-do tradesmen of Chester, with a sprinkling of the neighbouring gentry.'[20]

Elias Ashmole was made a Freemason in nearby Warrington in 1646, and past research has suggested that a lodge of speculative Freemasons was meeting in Chester in the mid-seventeenth century.[21] There is also evidence of Freemasons with Welsh names meeting in Chester between 1650 and 1680, including Thomas Foulkes, John Lloyd, and William Hughes. To support this claim, the *Masonic Magazine* of February 1882 has an appendix titled 'Freemasonry in Seventeenth Century: 1650–1700.'[22] In this article there appears in a list of Masons, including 'William Hughes, of Holt, co. Denbigh, Gentleman. Dated and proved 1693.' Although not much is known of Bro. Hughes, his presence fits into the pattern of speculative Freemasonry developing in Cheshire and North Wales towards the end of the seventeenth century.

In 1898 Chetwode Crawley identified a Book of the Provincial Grand Master of West Chester in the Bodleian Library, as most likely predating *Constitutions* of 1725,[23] with the first recorded office of 'Provincial Grand Master' in the same year. This was part of the self-generated Masonic Province of Chester, whose Grand Master in 1726 was Colonel Francis Columbine.[24] His Provincial Grand Warden, Captain Hugh Warburton, became

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[18] R. H. Gough Smallwood, *Some Notes on the History of Freemasonry in North Wales* (Wrexham: Breese, 1927).

[19] J. Armstrong, *Antiquity of Chester Freemasonry* (Chester: Thomas, 1900), 10.

[20] Ibid, 10.

[21] S. L. Coulthurst and P. H. Lawson 'The Lodge of Randle Holme at Chester', *AQC* 50 (1932), 68–89.

[22] 'Freemasonry in Seventeenth Century: 1650–1700', accessed 6 July 2022, Museum of Freemasonry, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/mmg/issues/mmg_01021882/page/1/.

[23] Armstrong, *Chester*, 16. An unreferenced citation of W. J . Chetwode Crawley 'The Masonic *MSS* in the Bodleian Library', *AQC* 11 (1898), 37.

[24] For a full account of these events see Gough Smallwood, *Early Freemasonry in Chester*, 77.

the next Provincial Grand Master, elected in 1727 as Provincial Grand Master for North Wales at Chester, so establishing the date of the Province's foundation. In February 1727 the new Grand Master, Lord Inchiquin, had appointed Willian Cowper as his deputy, and in the April he visited Chester in this capacity.[25] In the Quarterly Communications in May 1727 Grand Lodge recognized Warburton in his new post, and so, as this appointment came from the Grand Master, the Province can claim to be the first constituted by Grand Lodge. This demonstrates the extent to which North Wales Freemasonry came under English jurisdiction from its beginning, evident in Warburton's title, North Wales at Chester, and also a natural reflection of the connections between the two, with legal, social and economic links across the border.[26]

Provincial Grand Masters of a Notional Province: 1727-1743

In addition to geography and the dominance of Chester, an important limitation on the development of the Province was the nature of its leadership. Captain Warburton set the tone for the early years – as an absentee landlord. To be fair to him, however, there was nothing from which to be absent. There were no lodges working during his tenure, and the Province, insofar as it existed at all, did so only in his title. This was not unusual, however, with the Premier Grand Lodge in its early years being slightly vague about the role of Provincial Grand Masters, the post and its duties not being formally established until 1756. London also tended to view these appointments as less to do with fulfilling a role of oversight and leadership beyond the metropolis, and more about the prestige they afforded to Grand Lodge by association with the individual concerned.[27]

Although Warburton had spent some time in North Wales, his military career, a lot of which was spent abroad, would have precluded close attention to domestic Freemasonry. He was born at Winnington Hall, Cheshire in 1695, but had family connections to North Wales. His mother was Anne Williams (daughter of Sir Robert Williams, 7th Baronet of Penrhyn), who had inherited half of the Penrhyn Estate near Bethesda on the death of her father in 1745. As part of his inheritance Warburton gained possession of the Penrhyn Slate Quarries, and it is believed that he was responsible for naming the different category of slates, using the precedence of aristocratic titles, such as Princess and Countess, to rank them according to size.[28] He joined the army as a cornet on 25 July 1715, and in 1734 he was made Lieutenant-Colonel of Lord Mark Kerr's Regiment of Dragoons. In addition, following the death of his father in 1727, Hugh Warburton was appointed Chancellor and Chamberlain for the Counties of Anglesey, Caernarvon, and Merioneth by King George II, this patent being renewed in 1761 by King George III.

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[25] C. Powell 'William Cowper (1690–1740): First Grand Secretary and Poet', *AQC* 125 (2012), 173–4.

[26] Gough Smallwood, *North Wales*, 10.

[27] A. Newman 'The significance of the Provinces for the Masonic Historian', *AQC* 112 (1999), 4.

[28] 'The Slate Industry of North and Mid Wales', accessed 6 July 2022, http://www.penmorfa.com/Slate/sizes.htm.

His first recorded attendance at a lodge was in 1725 at The Sun Inn, Bridge Street, Chester, and he is also identified as Provincial Junior Grand Warden in the same year. As we have seen, he was appointed Provincial Grand Master of North Wales, by Deputation from William, 4th Earl of Inchiquin, Grand Master, on 10 May 1727. After assuming command in 1734 he resigned his patent as Provincial Grand Master, although it is possible, if not proven, that he might have continued his Freemasonry in a military lodge, as he continued in the army until 1770, when he retired as a full General.

Grand Lodge records that the following year Sir Edward Mathews succeeded him in the post, although there is some historical doubt as to whether he was appointed as such, or simply that he took on North Wales due to its proximity to Shropshire, of which he was Provincial Grand Master, the two being closely connected.[29] This follows the pattern of the time, where Provincial Grand Masters had multiple counties to oversee, and huge areas to cover in a period of limited communications and transport infrastructure. As a result, in the early days of Freemasonry these titles seem largely honorific, with not much practical oversight and leadership either possible, or perhaps even expected. Very little is known of Sir Edward. UGLE records indicate that he was made Provincial Grand Master of South Wales in 1726, Shropshire in 1731, and then additionally North Wales in 1734.[30] There is also a potential historical inaccuracy, with Sir Edward Mathews Baronet actually being Sir Edward Mansel 2nd Baronet of Trimsaran, the latter being Provincial Grand Master for South Wales from 1727.[31] In terms of the archival evidence Mathews remains a bit of an enigma, if indeed he existed at all. Harold Temperton's *A History of Craft Freemasonry in Shropshire: 1732-1982* notes that:

> Despite the most exhaustive of searches, including parish registers, records of the nobility, parliamentarians, barristers and university graduates, the identity of Sir Edward Matthews remains a mystery . . . In fact the only source of information is a rough notebook preserved at Grand Lodge headed 'An Acct. of P.G.M.'S', compiled about 1737. On succeeding lines are written Sir Edward Matthews for Shropshire and Sir Edward Mansel for South Wales. With the similarity of names it is possible that at some stage an incorrect transcription was made, that a Sir Edward Matthews never existed and Sir Edward Mansel was our first [Shropshire] Provincial Grand Master.[32]

Opening and Closing: 1743–1811

Whether there was ever a Sir Edward Mathews who was Provincial Grand Master of North Wales, or whether it was Sir Edward Mansel, is a moot point, as there were still no lodges to oversee. Also, if it was Mansel, he was still part of the Welsh gentry that had

[29] See Gough Smallwood, *North Wales*, 10 – 11 and 26
[30] Email Snell – Hammond, 24 June 2022.
[31] Davies, *Freemasonry*, 45.
[32] Email Cherry – Goldsmith, 11 January 2017.

been absorbed into London social and Masonic life,[33] and, being based in South Wales, had no obvious connection to the North. What is certain is that William Vaughan, who came from Cors y Gedoll near Barmouth, became the next Provincial Grand Master in 1741. As Member of Parliament for Merionethshire he would have spent at least some of his time in London. In addition, he was also President of the Cymmrodorion, being one of the few who were Welsh speakers.[34] His earliest recorded Masonic activity came in 1731, as a member of Lodge No. 7, which met at the Rummer, Queen Street, Cheapside, London. A keen Freemason, he was Junior Grand Warden in 1740, and then in 1741 Senior Grand Warden, appointed by James, 14th Earl of Morton, the Grand Master. In the same year he was made a Grand Steward, joining the Grand Stewards' Lodge, Provincial Grand Master of North Wales and Shropshire, and finally in 1744 Deputy Grand Master of the Moderns Grand Lodge.

As Provincial Grand Master William Vaughan oversaw the beginning of the Craft in North Wales, with six lodges opening before his death in 1775. He consecrated the first lodge, meeting in the Angel and Crown in Dolgellau, No. 194, in 1743. Associated with the wool trade, which was key to the local economy, it is thought that this lodge was founded by Lancashire Masons working in the textile industry and then resident in the town. The lodge was erased in 1780, after the Secretary had apparently emigrated to Australia, taking the warrant and lodge records with him.[35] The other lodges consecrated under Vaughan's leadership were St David's Lodge No. 286 in Holywell in 1761, Welshpool Lodge No. 142 (A) in 1766, followed by two that shared the same number, 415: the first was formed in 1768 at the Lord Boston's Arms, Holyhead, subsequently called the Mona Lodge, and the other in 1771 at Wynnstay in Ruabon, with Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 4th Baronet of Wynnstay, in the chair.

St David's Lodge No. 286 met at the Boar's Head in Holywell, moving four times to various inns during its seventeen active years. The only return sent to Grand Lodge, completed in 1772, shows three different locations being used that year, and a membership of only eleven brethren.[36] The lodge was erased in 1787, but there are no records to determine when it stopped meeting prior to its formal removal by Grand Lodge.

Welshpool Lodge No. 142 (A) was consecrated in 1766, meeting at the splendidly named King of Prussia's Head Inn. Interestingly, and as an example of the fluidity of Provincial oversight, this lodge was constituted under the warrant of the recently established Antients or Athol Grand Lodge, the only to be so in North Wales.[37] There was

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[33] See R. A. Berman, *The Foundations of Modern Freemasonry*,(Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), 169–173.

[34] Davies, *History*, 296.

[35] E. G. Williams, *A Brief History of the Masonic Province of North Wales* (Printed Privately by the author, 1998), 7, and Evans, *Fragments*, 9.

[36] Annual Returns St. David's Lodge No. 166, UGLE Archives Call Number: GBR 1991 AR/480.

[37] This also happened in South Wales: Antient Lodge No. 33 (A), was operating in Bridgend in South Wales

a gap of nine years until returns were provided, but the lodge appears to have flourished, with nine new members in 1774, and another five the year after.[38] Unfortunately, the lodge becoming entangled in local politics,[39] when it 'met a calamitous misfortune in its contact with "the bitterest election on record,"'[40] which caused divisions amongst the brethren, and meant it was difficult for the lodge to meet in harmony. As a result, and with the death of three of its most prominent members, the lodge became dormant.[41] In 1810 the charter was assigned to a new lodge in King's Lynn, Philanthropic No. 107, which had the privilege of passing the future Edward VII to the 2nd Degree.[42]

Mona Lodge in Holyhead was constituted in January 1768, and, typically for these early lodges, 'had a chequered but colourful career.'[43] The impetus for the lodge came when Charles Dillon, then Senior Grand Warden and later the Moderns Deputy Grand Master, passed through Holyhead on his way to Ireland, and was asked to support the opening of a lodge in the town. So keen were the resident Freemasons for a lodge that the man who was to be the first Master, Humphrey Edwards, accosted him again on his return through the port. This application was therefore a direct appeal to the Premier Grand Lodge, that is not through any Provincial structure, and soon the Grand Secretary wrote confirming the promise to support their application. Duly consecrated, the lodge relied on its many seafaring brethren,[44] and, possibly as a result, stopped meeting in 1792.

The slightly chaotic nature of these early lodges is captured by gaps in the Minutes, and also in the behaviour of some of the brethren. For example, in March 1785 the Master of the Lodge, Bro. H. Wynn, had been absent, but entered the lodge on its closing:

> . . . much intoxicated by Liquor, and behaved in a violent and most outrageous manner such as Cursing, Swearing and abusing not alone the Brethren Present but everyone belonging to the Lodge in the grossest Language and attempted to burn one of the Books and struck the Tyler, for which the Brethren turned him out.[45]

Although Bro. Wynn later made amends, he was finally suspended in 1787, having disgraced himself once more, coming to the lodge the previous December, again drunk,

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from 1765, and others after 1807. See Davies, *Freemasonry*, 50, 59–62.

[38] A. S. J. Davies, *The Welchpool Atholl Lodge No. 142: An account of the First Lodge of Freemasons on Welchpool 1766 –1775* (Printed privately by the lodge 1927), 4.

[39] This is politics before democracy, with a very limited franchise returning MPs who were largely local land-owners and their heirs. The electorate who were in the lodge would have been well known to each other.

[40] Evans, *Fragments*, 9.

[41] Lodge File, Welchpool Antients Lodge. UGLE Archives: LF SN 655 and Davies, *Welchpool*, 8.

[42] Gough Smallwood, *North Wales*, 12.

[43] C. Ellis, *A Short History of St.Cybi Lodge No. 597 from 1851–1951*, (Conwy: Jones, 1951), 13.

[44] One of which, Bro. Matthewson, bears a small mention in Susan Snell's article 'William Perfect: PGM of Kent and Doctor of Medicine', *AQC* 135 (2022), 33.

[45] Ellis, op.cit., 18–19.

and proceeding to abuse and insult the brethren present.[46] Despite reduced numbers, a small core of Freemasons worked hard to maintain the lodge, but, even with past members being encouraged to re-join, it declined. There were three lodge active members by 1789, and none the year after. After two years of inactivity five resident Masons met and wrote to Grand Lodge in 1792, asking for instructions on to how to proceed. There is no evidence of a reply, and the lodge was formally erased in 1799, which marked the end of Freemasonry in Holyhead for sixty years.

The lodge at Wynnstay was also initially numbered 415, and began the long historical connection between the Williams Wynn family and Freemasonry in North Wales. Sir Watkin Williams Wynn 4th Bt. (1749–89) had a wide variety of cultural interests, as well as managing a vast estate and holding political positions, being Deputy County Lieutenant in 1771, and serving as Member of Parliament for Shropshire from 1772 to 1774, and for Denbighshire from 1774 to 1789. He supported Welsh arts and culture, being an active member of the Cymmrodorion in London, serving as its President in 1775. The degree to which the Welsh aristocracy had been absorbed into metropolitan life is evident in his Masonic as well as political career. He was initiated as a Freemason in Lodge of Friendship No. 3, London, in 1768, soon becoming President of the Grand Stewards, Junior Grand Warden (Moderns) in 1770, and Senior Grand Warden the following year. He founded the Lodge at Wynnstay in 1771, where he served as Worshipful Master, the warrant having been signed by his brother-in-law, the Duke of Beaufort, as Grand Master. Despite the support of Sir Watkin, and also the membership of Sir Robert Salusbury Cotton, Provincial Grand Master for Cheshire,[47] this lodge also seems to have had elements of irregularity. It moved, without dispensation:

> . . . for the attractions of the Bowling Green in Oswestry [in 1785], but after a stay across the border, had the rashness to return home with equally little authority from Freemasons Hall.[48]

Williams Wynn's death in 1789 would have played a role in the decline of the lodge, which by 1801 was in arrears with Grand Lodge, who sent notice it was to be erased. The lodge persuaded Grand Lodge that it would pay its dues in 1802, but this failed to happen, and so it was finally closed, with many others, in 1809.[49] Freemasonry was not to return to Ruabon until 1918.

William Vaughan gave up his patent in 1774, the year before he died. His role was important, in that he was a Welshman who encouraged the establishment of the first

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[46] Ibid., 19.
[47] Annual Return November 1776 for Wynnstay Lodge No. 324, UGLE Archives GBR 1991 AR/812.
[48] Evans, *Fragments*, 10.
[49] Lodge File Wynnstay Lodge No. 415. UGLE Archives: LF SN 812.

lodges in North Wales, even if there was no Provincial Grand Lodge as such. This would be consistent with Smyth's observation that:

> 'It needs to be borne in mind that the early Provincial Grand Masters managed without Provincial Grand Lodges, although in some cases they appointed deputies.'[50]

The next Provincial Grand Master was George Durant (1774–1780), who was a colourful character, with a bit of a roguish streak. The son of the Rector of Hagley in Worcestershire, he was educated at Oxford. On coming down from university he had an affair with Lady Lyttelton, of Hagley Hall, who happened to be the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In order to get George out of the way, in 1757 he was sent overseas as paymaster to British forces in the Guadalupe, as part of the Seven Years War between the great European powers. He later took part in the Siege of Havana in 1762, and after the surrender, being paymaster, was able to partake in the spoils. With additional substantial income from slave holdings, he was able to return to Shropshire in 1764, where he bought the entire village of Tong and rebuilt the castle, having the grounds designed by Capability Brown.[51]

Durant was MP for Evesham between 1768 and 1774, and his early Masonic career seems to have again been centred in the London area. The Grand Lodge Membership Register shows that sometime before 1768 he became a member of Horn Lodge, meeting at the Horn Tavern, Westminster (later Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No. 4). Although he left this lodge by 1777, he was a member of Royal Lodge, which also met at the Horn Tavern, until it moved in 1767 to Thatched House Tavern, St James's Street. For whatever reason he then seems to have moved further north, as the Grand Lodge Membership Register has him as a member of a lodge in St Albans, Hertfordshire, and in 1768 Junior Warden Designate of a new lodge formed at The Swan, Wolverhampton, No. 77. Sadly, there is little detail on his life and career, but in 1774, as well as becoming Provincial Grand Master of Shropshire and North Wales, he was also made a Grand Steward, so he must have been keeping up his contacts in London, as well as having business away from the capital.

With George Durant's death in 1780 there was a six-year interregnum for Shropshire, until a successor was appointed in 1786, and an eleven year gap until North Wales had a new Grand Master. Meanwhile two further lodges were warranted. These were firstly the Snowdon Lodge No. 494 in Caernarfon from 1786, and the Royal Denbigh Lodge No. 505 the following year. Snowdon Lodge was supposedly consecrated in December 1786, to be based at the Sportsman, Castle Street, Caernarfon. No returns were sent to Grand

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[50] Smyth, *Reference Book*, 233.

[51] R. M. C. Jeffrey, *Discovering Tong: Its History, Myths and Curiosities* (Self published, 2007), accessed 13 February 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/content/articles/2007/03/02/slavery__george_durant_feature.shtml

Lodge, however, and there is no evidence of it ever meeting. Curiously, the only letter in the lodge file, dated 1 May 1979, is from Bro. Evans of Wynnstay Lodge No. 3876, who was clearly researching Snowdon Lodge. He identified Bro. Edwards, the first Master of Mona Lodge in Holyhead, as leading the petition, which was confirmed by Bro. Haunch from the Library at UGLE. This lodge never seems to have got started, with Bro. Evans declaring 'I have a strong theory for this.'[52] Sadly, he didn't expand further, and we have a lacuna in the history. Along with others, the lodge was erased in 1809, and the warrant reassigned to a lodge working at Torquay, Devon.[53]

Further evidence of inconsistencies in the Masonic structure of the time comes with the formation of Royal Denbigh Lodge No. 515, which was warranted in 1787 by the Provincial Grand Master of Cheshire, Sir Robert Salusbury Cotton. This would have been due to the absence of a Grand Master for North Wales, but also because Salusbury Cotton had recently owned the large Llewenni Estate outside Denbigh, and had family links with the town. An ancestor, Colonel William Salusbury, had been the key protagonist in the defence of Denbigh Castle on behalf of the King in the Civil War in 1646, a clue to the prefix 'Royal' in the lodge's name. It seems the brethren in the Denbigh area looked generally to Cheshire rather than Shropshire, as they also:

> . . . made an offer to Macclesfield Lodge No. 47, to purchase their old jewels, and, at a meeting of the latter Lodge held in May, 1787, it was agreed that the old jewels should be sent to the Lodge in Denbigh as a present.[54]

The experience of Royal Denbigh fits into the 'chequered and colourful' description of these early lodges. Its first officers came from Chester, and rapidly got the lodge up and running, passing it on to its own Master, Bro. Roberts, whom they had initiated only three months before. With little Masonic experience, and lacking any real direction or oversight by a Provincial Grand Lodge,[55] the Minutes point to a slightly chaotic existence. Bro. Roberts was re-elected three years in succession, but was routinely late, if he turned up at all. There were also various forms of wayward behaviour – drunkenness, brethren walking out of the lodge, lateness, various fines – which give the impression that the lodge was not a disciplined institution. With reducing membership fees were halved in 1790,[56] but the lodge went into steady decline. In arrears with Shrewsbury and London,

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[52] Lodge File, Snowdon Lodge No.494. UGLE Archives: SN 1089B.

[53] Gough Smallwood, *North Wales*, 13.

[54] Ibid.,13.

[55] Not peculiar to North Wales, see Davies, *Freemasonry*, 58 on the same issue in South Wales.

[56] From 20 shillings to 10 shillings, which is approximately equivalent to £50 using the Bank of England inflation calculator, so fees do not appear to have been excessively high. See R. Hammond, *A History of Royal Denbigh Lodge* (Ruthin: Fineline, 2014), 36.

the final meeting came in 1793, although it took until 1811 for the lodge to be erased by Grand Lodge.[57]

There then followed a period where Shropshire began to draw closer to North Wales, probably because of Major Charles Shirreff becoming Provincial Grand Secretary, and later Deputy Provincial Grand Master, for both Provinces. Major Shirreff, a national figure in Freemasonry, had settled in Whitchurch, Shropshire, around 1784. He had tried to get himself appointed as Provincial Grand Master, but had neither the finance or standing to convince Grand Lodge that he was a suitable candidate. In 1786 the post of Provincial Grand Master for Shropshire passed to The Hon. Revd Francis Henry Egerton who, after he had received his patent for Shropshire in 1786, wrote to Grand Lodge in April 1791 requesting also to be made Grand Master for the counties of Stafford, Flint, Denbigh, and Montgomery. By his re-investment with the addition of these neighbouring counties Grand Lodge effectively created a combined Province of North Wales, Staffordshire, and Shropshire, a post Egerton held until 1811. On his succession to the peerage in 1823 as the 8th Earl of Bridgewater, Baron of Ellesmere, he relinquished his clerical and his remaining Masonic appointments in order to devote himself to his academic interests. Although he was Provincial Grand Master for two decades, only two lodges were created during his time, with another five being erased. With the opening balance of three lodges, by the time he left office in 1811 there was again no speculative Freemasonry left in North Wales.

After Royal Denbigh had been consecrated in 1787, there was a gap of eight years until two new lodges were opened in 1795, the first of which was the Lodge of St Winifred No. 545, to meet at the King's Head in Holywell. Although warranted in 1795, it was late in paying its dues to Grand Lodge, and its first return came in 1799. The lodge obviously grew quickly, with twenty-four subscribing members by 1801, and several new members either joining or being initiated in the first few years. The early returns detail the members and accounts of the lodge, and the support of the Hall Funds in London, but abruptly ceased in 1804.[58] The return of that year lists twenty-two members, so the sudden loss of contact is difficult to explain. Holywell was, and is, an important religious site on the North Wales pilgrims' route, 'The Lourdes of Wales,' and was a centre for lead mining, cotton milling, and the copper smelting industry, important in providing copper sheathing for wooden naval vessels.[59] Despite these advantages, the lodge stopped meeting and was erased in 1829.

Also in 1795 the Lodge of Heddwch a Chymdogaeth Dda ('Peace and Good Neighbourhood') No. 548 was formed at Wynnstay, the first lodge created with a Welsh name, which had reputedly been found inscribed on a church bell at Ruabon. Like the first Wynnstay Lodge this came under the care of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn 5th Baronet

[57] Hammond, *Royal Denbigh*, 10–48.
[58] Annual Returns, St Winifred's Lodge No. 570. UGLE Archives: GBR 1991 AR/1280.
[59] Hence the phrase 'copper bottomed' as a sign of reliability and quality.

as the first Master. This Sir Watkin had many other distractions, including succeeding his father as the Member of Parliament, and being a soldier during the Napoleonic Wars. The lodge moved to Wrexham in 1802, and had been erased, with Snowdon Lodge, for not contributing to the Hall Liquidation Fund at Grand Lodge in 1809.

At first Egerton was quite energetic in his management of the Province, which would be a vast area to cover effectively even today. Born in 1756, the younger son of the Bishop of Durham, in 1786 he had also written to the Grand Secretary requesting to be made Provincial Grand Master for that city, which seems to have been declined. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church College, Oxford, and, clearly a keen scholar in his youth, he became a Fellow of All Souls in 1780, and of the Royal Society a year later.[60] There is evidence that suggests at some point he was initiated into Freemasonry in France,[61] and the earliest records for him at the Moderns Grand Lodge of England come in 1785, when he was named in the warrant as the Senior Warden for Whitchurch Lodge, No. 478, meeting at the White Lion, Watergate Street.[62] Progressing up the ladder, in 1786 he became Provincial Grand Master of Shropshire, and in 1791 inaugural Provincial Grand Master of Staffordshire, to which were then added the three Welsh counties. In this capacity he was present when the Prince of Wales, the future George IV, was made Grand Master in London in 1796,[63] and attended subsequent functions at Grand Lodge.[64]

Grand Lodge Archives hold numerous letters from Egerton to William White,[65] then Grand Secretary, which points to his initial involvement in Provincial business. Both Egerton and Sherriff were prone to write to the Grand Secretary about a variety of matters, including each other, so he was certainly a presence in the early period of his Provincial Grand Mastership. However, at some point in middle age, possibly for health reasons,[66] he moved to Paris, which left little scope to supervise Freemasonry in North Wales. This pattern was also replicated in his clerical career. Although technically a Reverend, holding the rectories of Middle and Whitchurch in Shropshire, these duties were 'performed by a proxy.'[67] Accounts of his life describe various eccentricities, especially over the care of his

[60] 'Francis Henry Egerton, 8th Earl of Bridgewater', accessed 26 September 2016, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Bridgewater,_Francis_Henry_Egerton,_8th_Earl_of.

[61] UGLE Archives GBR 1991 Files 6/B and 6/D.

[62] UGLE Archive reference SN 1051 dated 25th August 1785.

[63] 'Masonic Intelligence', *The Freemasons' Magazine*, 1 May 1796, 61, accessed 6 July 2022, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fmm/issues/fmm_01051796/page/61/articles/ar06100/?highlight=Egerton&from=search.

[64] 'Masonic Intelligence', *The Freemason's Repository* for May 1798, 328, accessed 6 July 2022, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fmm/issues/fmm_01051798/page/42/articles/ar04200/?highlight=Egerton&from=search.

[65] UGLE Archives GBR 1991 Files 6/B and 6/D.

[66] See http://ahistoryblog.com/2012/10/11/francis-henry-egerton-8th-earl-of-bridgewater-1756-1829-privilege-done-right/ accessed 21st August 2016.

[67] 'Francis Henry Egerton, 8th Earl of Bridgewater', accessed 21 August 2016, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Bridgewater,_Francis_Henry_Egerton,_8th_Earl_of.

pampered dogs and cats. He died in Paris in February 1829, unmarried and without heirs. Although he seems to have done little in the long term for Freemasonry in North Wales, his life was not without interest, and he has been described as an archetypal 'educated dilettante.'[68] During his time in Europe he had also collected a great many valuable artefacts and manuscripts, which he donated to the British Museum on his death.[69]

Provincial Grand Masters of a Notional Province II: 1811–1826

After Lord Egerton there was a succession of Provincial Grand Masters largely in name only, there being a hiatus of Freemasonry in North Wales until two new lodges were consecrated in 1826. They also continued the trend of Englishmen appointed by Grand Lodge, despite no obvious interest in the region. The Provincial Grand Master after Lord Egerton was William Wharton Rawlins, Esq., who nominally ran the Province between 1811 and 1814. While little is known of William Rawlins as a personality, he seems to have had an interesting life, being the son of Stedman Rawlins II and Elizabeth Taylor, née Wharton, of St Kitts. He was appointed Ensign in the Coldstream Guards in 1803, but retired a year into his service. He was a resident planter of St Kitts, and married Margaret Bayford at St Marylebone in 1804, which may explain his leaving the colours. According to slave compensation registers he lost control of his estates in the Caribbean to his brother-in-law, and at some point returned to London. This must have been by 1807, as he then became a Grand Steward, joined the Grand Stewards' Lodge, and is shown as living in Englefield Green in Surrey. In 1811 he was appointed Provincial Grand Master for Anglesey, North Wales, which was something of a hollow position, with no lodges to visit. As two of his children were baptized at Gregory by St Paul in 1812, and in Elstree in 1813, his life was clearly centred in London, and he only held this honorary role until 1814.[70]

His successor as Provincial Grand Master was Philip Lake Godsal, Esq., who held the post between 1814 and 1819. He was one of the leading London coach makers of his day, supplying carriages, and finance, for royalty and the gentry in London and beyond.[71] In 1798 Philip Godsal was initiated into Prince of Wales's Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No.4, and by 1801 had been appointed a Grand Steward, as well as serving as President of the Board of Stewards. Although not an aristocrat, Godsal was well connected, attending on the Prince of Wales when he laid the foundation stone of the Covent Garden Theatre in 1813. He was present at the installation of the Duke of

[68] 'Francis Henry Egerton, 8th Earl of Bridgewater', accessed 21 August 2016, http://ahistoryblog.com/2012/10/11/francis-henry-egerton-8th-earl-of-bridgewater-1756-1829-privilege-done-right/.

[69] The collection is known as 'The Egerton Collection,' and is now held in the British Library, accessed 21 August 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egerton_Collection.

[70] Email Snell – Hammond 16 September 2016. Also see Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, accessed 25 August 2016, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25555.

[71] See J. Ford, *Coachmaker: The Life and Times of Philip Godsal 1747-1826* (Shrewsbury: Quiller Press, 2005). UGLE Library BE 68 (GOD) FOR fol.

Sussex as Grand Master of UGLE, and at the farewell dinner for the Duke of Moira as he left for India as Governor General in the same year. In 1814 Godsal was appointed Provincial Grand Master of Caernarfon, and later Provincial Grand Master of Carmarthen (1820–1826). There was little by way of Freemasonry going on at the time, however, and his biographer notes that this appointment '. . . did not appear to require any fraternal, or paternal visits to the lodges of that county,'[72] perhaps without knowing that there were in fact no lodges to visit.

The next to hold the post was the Hon. Henry Grey Bennet, who was Provincial Grand Master from 1819 to 1836. A middle child of Charles Bennett, 4th Earl of Tankerville, he was educated at Eton College, and then served in the 1st Foot Guards before entering Lincoln's Inn in 1798, and Peterhouse College, Cambridge, in 1799, after which he was called to the bar. Bennet was a radical Whig politician, who became MP for Shrewsbury in 1806, only to lose his seat a year later after backing Catholic Emancipation. He was re-elected in 1811 for the same seat, which he held until 1826. During his time as an MP, and

> . . . until blighted by personal tragedies in 1824 and 1825, [he] remained one of the most active and prominent radical Whigs of his time . . . championing the causes of the Peterloo martyrs, the Catholics, and parliamentary and penal reform,[73]

as well as defending Queen Caroline from the King's attempts to prevent her taking her throne on his succession in 1820.

As a prominent politician, it is easy to see that his activities in Parliament would again have precluded him from his duties as a Provincial Grand Master for North Wales. Although two lodges were consecrated in 1826, Flintshire No. 809 in Mold and St David's No. 384 in Bangor, he cannot have had much business with them. His political career came to an abrupt end in 1824, shortly after the death of two of his children:

> This was followed by a continental trip in 1825. His reputation was ruined by the threat of prosecution for importuning a young male servant at Spa in August 1825. Bennet represented himself as the victim of a conspiracy to extort money, but the facts of the case worked against him. When Parliament was dissolved in 1826 his name was linked with that of the homosexual Richard Heber. Bennet remained in exile and gave up his seat in parliament the following year. He and his wife lived near Lake Como in Italy until his death in 1836.[74]

In effect, therefore, he would have been an absentee Provincial Grand Master, busy in London from 1819 to 1824, and then self-exiled abroad until his death in Italy. This

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[72] Ibid, 140.

[73] 'Bennet, Hon. Henry Grey (1777–1836), of Walton-on-Thames', accessed 21 August 2016, http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/bennet-hon-henry-1777-1836.

[74] 'Henry Grey Bennet', accessed 16 September 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Grey_Bennet.

explanation also fits in with his Masonic records.[75] The Hon. Henry Grey Bennett was initiated into Royal Alpha Lodge No. 16, London, in 1818,[76] and very quickly also joined Lodge of Antiquity No. 2, giving his address as Upper Brook Street, London, and occupation as an MP. Given the events detailed above, it is of little surprise that his last payment to Lodge of Antiquity came in 1824, and there is no reference to him after this date. He remained, however, at least in name, Provincial Grand Master of Shropshire, Caernarfon, and Carmarthen until passing away in 1836.

By Its Fingertips: Freemasonry Returns to North Wales, 1826–1851

Despite the absence of the Provincial Grand Master in Italy, and the lack of a Provincial Grand Lodge, by other mechanisms another two lodges were consecrated during his tenure, such as it was after 1824. The first was the Flintshire Lodge No. 809 in 1826, which met at Plas Teg, a Jacobean Mansion outside Mold, from 1827 until 1833.[77] This lodge was founded by local Freemasons, supported by friends from London and others from Cheshire lodges, again reaffirming the short link from Chester to North Wales. Given the wider difficulties facing society after the Napoleonic Wars, this lodge was perhaps destined to fail, with meetings being poorly attended, and sometimes not held at all. No returns were sent to Grand Lodge after 1828, and the lodge was eventually erased in 1838.

Vitally for the future of Freemasonry in North Wales, in the same year St David's Lodge No. 384 was consecrated. It has a traditional history of being '. . . founded at Bangor by brethren engaged in the building of the Menai Bridge,'[78] which is a nice idea, but does not bear too close a scrutiny. St David's was sponsored by Liverpool lodges,[79] with the petition being sent directly to Grand Lodge, in the continued absence of the Provincial Grand Master.[80] The fifteen names on the lodge petition illustrate the wide range of Freemasons then in Bangor, with some Chester Masons being joined by brethren from Lancashire, as well as two from Scotland and six from Ireland. Whilst it might be a romantic vision that the lodge was formed by masons working at the bridge site, moralising on their working tools as they laid levels and fixed stones onto their proper bases, this was not the case. The lodge was founded by a disparate group of British and Irish Freemasons who were temporarily drawn to Bangor during the construction of the new bridge and road, even if few, if any, were directly involved in the project. When the

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[75] Email Snell – Hammond, 16 September 2016.

[76] The numbering from 1894. It was previously number 8 and / or 9. See *Lane's Masonic Records*, Museum of Freemasonry, accessed 13 June 2024, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/lane/record.php?ID=28.

[77] Lodge File Flintshire Lodge No. 809. UGLE Archives: SN. 1791.

[78] Evans, *Fragments*, 15.

[79] Its mother lodge is Merchant's Lodge No. 241 in Liverpool.

[80] E. H. Jones, *A Short History of St. David's Lodge No.384, from 1827 – 1927* (Bangor: Jarvis and Foster,, 1927), 14.

bridge was finished, and business opportunities declined as the workforce moved on, most of these founder members were quick to depart from Bangor.[81]

Despite this the lodge grew and moved between taverns to accommodate the growing membership. The lodge history is clear, though, that they 'suffered greatly from lack of experienced guidance . . .[with] no Provincial Grand Lodge to which to turn for advice. The nearest lodge was at Chester.'[82]

As a result the lodge worked hard to maintain itself without outside assistance from outside. For the first seven years of its existence, though, St David's was busy, peaking at thirty-six members in 1829, even if there was the usual round of disciplinary issues which seem to have bedevilled these early lodges. There was a series of suspensions in 1828, and two members were expelled in 1832 after an altercation in the bar of the Waterloo Hotel after the June St John's Day lodge meeting. Things went into serious decline after 1834, and between 1838 and 1851 there were five years without any meetings being recorded in the Minutes, reflecting the wider economic and social unrest throughout Britain.

The 'years 1834–45 were among the most troubled in the history of Wales,'[83] and the St David's Lodge became perilously close to following all its predecessors and closing. Several attempts were made to resurrect the lodge in the 1840s, aided by visiting Freemasons working on Stephenson's 'tubular bridge', which was built between 1846 and 1850 to carry the new railway over the Menai Strait. Luckily for the lodge's history, despite gaps between meetings, it had continued to send some annual returns to Grand Lodge and was fortunate not to be erased. An explanation for this leniency comes from the 'desperate plight of the country as a whole,'[84] with Grand Lodge avoiding having to erase lodges wherever possible. On application for their centenary warrant in 1926, Grand Lodge confirmed that St David's had not met in 1838, 1840, and 1841, and had been resurrected at an emergency meeting in 1842. As the Grand Lodge Registers showed some returns were made, and dues paid: 'As the break in continuity is so small, the Grand Master's Council may consider that this be overlooked, and the prayer of the Petition [for a centenary Warrant was] granted.'[85] A piece of luck for St David's, with the lodge's 150th anniversary history pointing to various external reasons for the lodge struggling:

> . . . years of bad trade and social unrest...the Chartists presented their 'national peti-
> tions'; that the 'physical force party' rioted in Llanidloes and elsewhere; that Anti-
> Corn Law agitation was afoot; that the people were stirring to a new conception of the

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[81] *St. David's Lodge No. 384, 1827–1977: 150th Anniversary Booklet*, (Colwyn Bay: Circular Press, 1977), 11–13. UGLE Library: BEW 166 (384) SAI.

[82] Ibid, 22.

[83] Davies, *History*, 358.

[84] Jones, *St. David's Lodge*, 26–7.

[85] Letter from the Assistant Librarian UGLE to St David's Lodge No. 384, dated 4 October 1926. Lodge File St David's Lodge No. 384. UGLE Archives: SN 1793.

rights of labour . . .The period embraces the Hungry Forties – a time of almost gaunt famine in many parts of the country.[86]

Circumstances were not aided by the death of the Worshipful Master in 1849, as well as the intermittent working of the lodge. St David's managed to survive until 1852, when news reached Bangor of the appointment of Sir Watkin, 6th Baronet, as Provincial Grand Master. A Past Master of the lodge quickly held an (irregular) emergency meeting in his house, and new life was breathed into the lodge by the editor of the *North Wales Chronicle*, who visited with other senior brethren, and on the same night became both a member and Master.[87]

St David's claim for lack of any supervision by a Province is wholly justified. After Henry Grey Bennet's departure in 1836 there then seems to have been an interregnum until the next Provincial Grand Master received his patent in 1843. This was not unique at the time, with East Lancashire also having no Provincial Grand Master between 1830 and 1846.[88] The next appointment to North Wales was Sir Andrew V. Corbet, Bt., who headed the Province, by then consisting of the one lodge (itself barely meeting), from 1843 to 1852. He lived from 1800 to 1855, and, although again there is little on record about his life, we know he was initiated in 1820 into Salopian Lodge No. 262 in Shrewsbury.[89] Listed as an 'Esquire of Acton Reynold in Shropshire', he was Master of Salopian Lodge in 1825, but then left the lodge in 1827. He re-joined a decade later, giving his address as Shrewsbury, and continued to pay his subscriptions until the year he died. Once more there is evidence that there continued to be a lack of engagement, as a note in the *Historical Supplement* records that at some point 'he returned his patent and refused to act.'[90]

Under these circumstances the brethren of St David's had already begun to agitate to get a suitable Provincial Grand Master appointed. Sometime in 1844

> a deputation from St. David's Lodge, Bangor, waited on the DPGM of Cheshire at the Cestrian Lodge, praying that they be permitted to petition the GM of England to appoint him PGM for Caernarfon.[91]

The Deputy PGM, Bro. Maddock, managed to sidestep this request, on the grounds that with only the one lodge in North Wales there would be insufficient brethren to form a Provincial team. The other reason was possibly the planned future initiation of a far better candidate for the post, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 6th Baronet of Wynnstay. As

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[86] Jones, *St. David's Lodge*, 18.

[87] Evans, Fragments, 16.

[88] Smyth, Reference Book, 233.

[89] Email Snell – Hammond, 16 September 2016.

[90] Email Snell – Hammond 6 June 2022.

[91] 'Masonic Intelligence', *Freemasons' Quarterly Review*, March 31, 1845, 100. accessed 5 July 2022, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fqr/issues/fqr_31031845/page/103/.

well as being the largest land-owner in Wales, he was, amongst other things, an Oxbridge-educated Conservative MP, Master of Hounds, Colonel of Yeomanry, and future ADC to Queen Victoria. Sir Watkin was initiated and then passed to the second degree in Cestrian Lodge in Chester on the same day, 27 December 1844, at a meeting that also hosted the Provincial Grand Lodge of Cheshire. In responding to his toast he 'expressed his willingness to assist in opening Lodges, and establishing the Craft in North Wales.'[92] Cestrian Lodge then held another special meeting in June 1845 to pass Sir Watkin to the third degree, an account of which records that:

> Our Masonic friends of North Wales will hail the results of this meeting with feelings of pleasure, as the refulgent rays of Masonry are about to enlighten this long neglected part of the empire, by having a P. Grand Master appointed to preside over North Wales in the person of Brother Sir W.W. Wynn.'[93]

It would seem that there were obstacles to the creation of a unified Province of Shropshire and North Wales, which led to a seven-year delay until his appointment in 1852.[94] St David's became increasingly frustrated at the lack of Provincial governance, and at their twentieth anniversary meeting in 1846 they even went as far as to agree that a committee be assembled to petition UGLE that they be designated the Provincial Grand Lodge of North Wales.[95] Understandably this seems to have gone nowhere,[96] and the prediction from June 1845 was finally to prove correct, with the appointment of Sir Watkin in March 1852 as Provincial Grand Master heralding the start of the Province's modern era. It was at this meeting we first see the appointment of Officers of a Provincial Grand Lodge,[97] and, from September 1852 the Province began regular annual meetings in their current form.

Why was North Wales the Masonic 'Dog that Didn't Bark?'[98]

Reviewing the history of the Province, it is easy to see this period, the first 125 years from 1727 to 1852, as one of uneven beginnings and decline. There were only eleven lodges consecrated in North Wales during this time, ten of which were to be erased. This can be summarized below:[99]

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[92] Ibid, 103.

[93] Ibid, 100.

[94] 'Provincial – Salop and North Wales', *The Freemasons' Quarterly Review*, 31 March 1852, 109 – 110, accessed 21 July 2022, https://masonicperiodicals.org/periodicals/fqr/issues/fqr_31031852/page/118/.

[95] Jones, St David's, 38.

[96] The Carmarthen Lodge of Perfect Friendship No.167 tried the same trick for South Wales in 1769, with similar results. See Davies, Freemasonry, 47.

[97] As a point of interest, even though he had returned how own patent, Sir Watkin's immediate predecessor, Sir Andrew Corbet, was present at his installation. See The Freemasons' Quarterly Review, 31 March 1852, 110.

[98] Prescott, British Problem.

[99] Updated version of a table in Evans, Fragments, 2 and Williams, North Wales, 31.

Place	Lodge Name	First Number	Warranted	Erased	Duration
Dolgellau	Dolgellau	194	1743	1780	37 years
Holywell	St David's	286	1761	1787	26 years
Welshpool	Welshpool	142	1766	1775	9 years
Holyhead	Mona	415	1768	1799	31 years
Ruabon	Wynnstay	415	1771	1789	18 years
Caernarfon	Snowdon	494	1786	1809	23 years
Denbigh	Royal Denbigh	505	1787	1811	24 years
Holywell	St Winifred	545	1795	1829	34 years
Wynnstay	Heddwch	548	1795	1809	14 years
Mold	Flintshire	809	1826	1838	12 years
Bangor	St David's	384	1826	N/A	196 years

The reasons for the tentative development of Freemasonry in North Wales, with only St David's in Bangor surviving beyond 1838, and then only just, requires explanation. The lack of Provincial oversight was clearly a factor, as was poor communications and transport.[100] Whatever the cultural background, in the eighteenth century roads across North Wales were genuinely poor. There was no equivalent route that was to become Telford's London to Holyhead turnpike road, required after the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800, and completed in 1826. Before this traffic to Ireland had had to go the long way around the mountains, first to Chester, then along the north coast and across the Menai Strait by ferry, and transport was largely done on horseback. The economy was localized and agrarian, with limited areas of primary industry, such as coal mining in South Denbighshire, copper works on Anglesey, and smelting in Holywell. In the latter part of the century roads were improved and canals were dug, but it was not until the Menai Strait was bridged in 1826 that the Province was opened to faster modes of transport.

Having said that, the explanation of the decline given at the start of this article – poor communications between disparate towns – cannot explain the whole picture, as other Provinces, such as Lancashire, faced similar challenges. In their case, however, although also suffering from erasure of short-lived lodges, the development of large towns and seaports at the start of the industrial revolution, such as Manchester and Liverpool, was key. This allowed for mutually supporting lodges to open in the expanding urban areas, encouraged by local men being appointed Provincial Grand Masters, who operated Provincial offices from established private lodges in their towns. They were also granted

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[100] This, and the erasing of a Province's first set of lodges, was not unique to North Wales. See H. S. O'Neill, 'Chichester Freemasonry – The First Three Hundred Years', *AQC* 130 (2017), 257–260.

dispensation to open lodges under their own authority, which created a very different dynamic in the growth of Freemasonry in Lancashire when compared to North Wales.[101]

Despite these challenges some lodges were working for a period, even if some, such as Royal Denbigh, were inactive for some eighteen years before being officially erased. The failures of the lodges in Holywell and Holyhead seem to suggest other factors were at play, as they survived for over thirty years. The Holywell case is surprising, given that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the town was an important religious site, as well as a busy mining and manufacturing centre, with ore from Amlwch being shipped there as part of the booming copper industry.[102] During the same period Holyhead was also developing as a port and principal route to Ireland, which makes the closure of the lodge there in 1799 perhaps just unfortunate timing, as the town was to expand at the start of the nineteenth century after the establishment of the union.

Outside Masonry the impact of the French Revolutionary Wars would clearly have had an effect on both the people and the economy, with high inflation and issues with food supplies prompting changes in agricultural practices. Taxes were increased, people were enlisted and commissioned, and economic problems would have impacted the towns of North Wales, with limited trade and dependence on agriculture. As well as economic factors, which would have been common to most Provinces, other histories point to social and cultural issues,[103] such as Freemasonry being English-speaking at a time when the Welsh language dominated in parts of Wales. Another narrative suggests that the 'historical evidence confirms that at this time Freemasonry had little appeal or attraction to the Welsh middle classes or for the intellectuals in the community,'[104] who were more interested in Welsh language and culture, than what might at first appear to be an English pursuit. Freemasonry was also connected to the established church (which still held a system of tithes hated by chapel goers),[105] which was at odds with the non-conformist tradition in Wales, that had become increasingly predominant in the newly industrialized towns.[106] It is also the case that other fraternal or friendly societies that

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[101] See N. B. Cryer and W. Read 'Freemasonry in Lancashire Prior to the Union', *AQC* 95 (1982), 87–109.

[102] Davies, *History*, 315–7.

[103] Prescott, 'The British Problem'.

[104] Williams, *North Wales*, 15.

[105] The role of religion and language in the restricted growth of Freemasonry in Wales is an area for future research, which was raised in comments on Bro. Davies's paper (see *AQC* 129 (2016), 83) on South Wales. The issue of church tithes led to the infamous 'tithe wars' of the 1880s, of which the most violent example came in Denbigh in 1887 (Davies, *History*, 439–400). At the time Royal Denbigh Lodge had had numerous Anglican clergymen as members, and Past Masters, including a future Lord Bishop of St Asaph.

[106] Again, not only in North Wales. See Davies, *Freemasonry*, 66.

allowed proceedings to be conducted in Welsh,[107] such as the True Ivorites or Oddfellows, fared much better during this period, with a higher membership and public profile.[108]

This era also seeded the conditions for the growth in Freemasonry after 1852, which fits into the wider picture with England,[109] not least the significant demographic changes between 1770 and 1850, with the population doubling in size and an economy less based on agriculture.[110] The 1840s had also seen an expansion in the importance of coal and steel, which stimulated the creation of a railway system that transformed Wales. The resurgence of the Craft after 1850, therefore, can in part be aligned with the middle of the nineteenth century being a 'turning point' in the fortunes of Wales.[111] Changes in population, improved transport infrastructure, better education and public health, the creation of professional police force, and a general industrialization led to modernization across the country.[112] A new class of industrialists, and associated professionals, arose to change the simple class structure of landed gentry and the rural population, creating a more fertile demographic for Freemasonry to build on. The population were also shifting from rural to urban, with increased immigration from England to the newly industrialized towns, which is where the next raft of lodges was formed.

As always, however, along with events personalities also play an important part in any history. Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 6th Baronet of Wynnstay, was a national figure, and the key player in the encouragement of the renaissance of Freemasonry in North Wales after 1852, and is deserving of a paper on his own account. Finally, this history also points to the question of the justification of Provincial anniversaries. The Province of North Wales could legitimately celebrate four different dates: its first conception in 1727, continuous private lodge working from 1826, continuous Provincial Grand Lodge working from 1852, or its creation as a separate Province in 1885. Given that Freemasons love their history, 1727 will probably win out.

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[107] The first Welsh language lodge in North Wales, Cyfrinfa Cynan No. 10013, was consecrated on 20 January 2023. Dewi Sant Lodge No. 9067 had opened in 1983 in South Wales, with an aspiration to be fully bilingual. Whilst it could 'call off' the meeting and perform demonstrations in Welsh, to be regular it had to work the ritual in English. The lodge overstepped this rule, and was suspended by the ProvGM in 1992. After representation to the UGLE this suspension was reduced, but the lodge struggled to survive, and still had no remit to work in Welsh. A Welsh language ritual was finally approved in 2019, and permission given for one lodge in each of the four Welsh Provinces to work *yn Gymraeg* ('in Welsh'). The first installation ceremony performed in Welsh took place in September 2021, at Gyfrinfa Dewi Sant, Rhif 9067.

[108] Prescott, 'The British Problem'.

[109] Newman, 'Contribution of the Provinces', 79–80.

[110] Davies, *History*, 310.

[111] Ibid. 385–6.

[112] Prior to this Welsh industry, and particularly coal and iron, was concentrated in South Wales, which influenced the development of Freemasonry. See Davies, *Freemasonry*, 65–66.

LIST OF PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTERS

1727 – 1852

Captain Hugh Warburton	1727 – 1734
Sir Edward Matthews (or Mansel)	1735 – 1741
William Vaughan	1741 – 1774
George Durrant	1774 – 1791
Rev. Francis Henry Egerton, 8th Earl of Bridgewater	1791 – 1811
William Wharton Rawlins	1811 – 1814
Philip Lake Godsal Esq	1814 – 1819
Hon Henry Grey Bennett	1819 – 1836
Sir Andrew V. Corbet Bt	1843 – 1852

2076
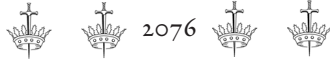
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Rob Hammond is a North Wales Mason, having been initiated into Royal Denbigh Lodge No. 1143 in 2012. Born and bred in neighbouring Cheshire, after studying PPE at Oxford, with nothing better to do he joined the Army in 1991. Initially an infantry officer, he served in Norway, Kenya, and Bosnia with the UN in 1994, before transferring to become a military educator. In that capacity between 1996 and 2001 he served in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, and Sierra Leone, the latter becoming a lifetime academic interest and the subject of an article in *AQC* 135.

He completed his MA at Lancaster University in 2004 and left the army in 2007 after his final operational tour in Iraq. He then became an Associate Lecturer with the Open University, for whom he still works, and at the time of writing is just completing his PhD thesis titled Freemasonry and the Political History of Sierra Leone: 1890 – 1992. Living on his wife's family sheep farm, when he's not working indoors, he's working outdoors.