

PROVINCE OF STAFFORDSHIRE

PROVINCIAL GRAND CHAPTER OF ROYAL ARCH MASONS

Royal Arch Masonry is the most popular and well-established of the orders that create additional scope for Craft Freemasons to extend their Masonic interest and research.

There is a very close relationship between Craft Freemasonry and Royal Arch Masonry. Candidates for Royal Arch Masonry must previously have been initiated into a Craft Lodge. Joining Royal Arch Masonry is a natural path of progression and opens up to members areas of knowledge that are compatible and highly complementary.

The Province has over 1300 Royal Arch Masons. The head of the order is titled 'The Most Excellent Grand Superintendent', who is Excellent Companion David Hampson. The administrative headquarters is at 211 Tettenhall Road, Wolverhampton WV6 0DD, the same address as Provincial Grand Lodge.

Members meet at Convocations of their respective Chapters, of which there are 41 in Staffordshire. The meetings take place at Masonic Halls situated throughout Staffordshire.

Those who join Freemasonry quickly become aware of Royal Arch Masonry. Each Craft Lodge in the Province of Staffordshire has a Royal Arch Chapter representative, whose function is to provide information and advice to any member wishing to extend his Masonic knowledge. Those who become Royal Arch Masons find it to a natural and vital element of their Masonic careers, which also opens up further avenues of Masonic experience and knowledge.

There follows considerable information about the history of Royal Arch Masonry in the Province of Staffordshire, its development and very close relationship with Craft Masonry.

HISTORY OF THE ROYAL ARCH PROVINCE OF STAFFORDSHIRE

CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH CRAFT FREEMASONRY

It is quite possible that the R A ceremony was worked in the Craft Lodges of Staffordshire without a separate R A Chapter being constituted. In the rough

draft Minute Book of St Martin's Lodge from 1807 to 1810, it was found that brethren were proposed in the Lodge for exaltation to the R A and that the Lodge originally 'worked the Royal Arch as an integral and essential portion of the 3rd Degree'.

Although there may have been R A Masons who had been exalted in the Craft Lodges, it is quite clear that there were not a great number of duly constituted R A Chapters working in 1842. In the neighbouring Province of Worcestershire, apparently no Chapter existed until the Chapter of Dudley was constituted with the assistance of St Peter's Chapter in 1844, and when the Howe Chapter No 857 was founded in Birmingham in 1852, on the Petition of St Peter's Chapter, it is recorded that only two Chapters then existed in the Province of Warwickshire, the other being the Chapter of Fortitude No 51.

WOLVERHAMPTON – A MASONIC CENTRE

By 1842, there were 13 Craft Lodges in Staffordshire. The oldest was the Etruscan Lodge No 285, Stoke-on-Trent, which was founded in 1803 and erased in 1847, and the next St Martin's No 115 (now No 98) Burslem, which was founded in 1805 on a Warrant originally granted in 1764 for a Lodge in Wolverhampton. There had also been several Lodges in Wolverhampton before St Peter's was founded in 1834. The first Wolverhampton Lodge, according to Willmore, was constituted on 28th March 1732, the fourth in 1768, and he says that this town "appears—to have been the local centre of our masonic 'forefathers' ". So it was to be for the Royal Arch Masonry in this Province.

THE EARLIEST CHAPTERS

In 1833 the only duly constituted Royal Arch (RA) Chapters in Staffordshire, apparently, were St Martin's Chapter No 115, Burslem (of which more later) and, possibly, the Charity and Concord Chapter No 182, Longton, founded in 1813. The Chapter of Fortitude No 427, Stafford, was not founded until the following year, 1834.

That RA Masonry, however, had a recognised position in the Province of Staffordshire is proved by a report of the proceedings at the laying of the foundation stone of a Masonic Hall at Stafford on 14th September 1833. The Lodges in attendance were the Royal Chartley Lodge of Fortitude 427, Stafford; Noah's Ark 435, Bilston; St Martin's 115, Burslem; Etruscan 285, Stoke-on-Trent; and the Lodge of Hope and Charity, Kidderminster; "and many other Brethren – from the Provinces of Lancashire, Cheshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire were also present."

In the Procession to St Mary's Church, which was formed with much ceremony, with trumpeters and banners, after the members of those Lodges and the Past Provincial Officers, and in a place of honour before the Present Provincial Grand Officers, marched 'Members of Royal Arch Chapters, two and two'. The reference to members of R A Chapters in this procession

supports the suggestion that the R A may have been worked in the Craft Lodges. This had certainly been done from very early times in the Ancients Lodges, although this was supposed to have ceased at the Union of the Modern and Ancients Grand Lodge in 1813.

THE PROVINCE IN 1842

Supreme Grand Chapter has no record of any Chapter working in Staffordshire in 1842, although it is now established that St Martin's Chapter had not then ceased to exist; and the Chapter of Fortitude No 427, Stafford, which held its last recorded meeting on 31st December 1839, was alive if dormant. Indeed the Perseverance Chapter at Newcastle, attached to the Sutherland Lodge of Unity No 674 (now No 460), may also have been in existence. Supreme Grand Chapter apparently recognised the existence of the Chapter of Fortitude, as it accepted the endorsement of the Petition for St Peter's Chapter by that Chapter under date 15th February 1842. The Petition was then backed in the name of 'the Principals and Officers of the Chapter of Fortitude 427, holden at Stafford'.

THE PAST MASTER'S DEGREE

The Petition was duly approved and countersigned by the Hon George Anson, Prov Grand Master, Staffordshire, and a certificate is added testifying the consent and approval of the WM, Officers and Brethren of St Peter's Lodge No 607, held at the Star and Garter Inn in Wolverhampton 'in open Lodge assembled', and is dated 7th February 1842. There is no record of this in the Minutes of St Peter's Lodge. But on 31st October 1842 (just 3 weeks before the First Meeting of the Chapter) the Lodge held a Lodge of Emergency 'for the purpose of passing the Chair' certain brethren to qualify them to be exalted to 'the sublime degree of Royal Arch Mason' and Brethren were elevated to the Past Master's Degree. Against this minute appears the note: "No such Degree recognised by the Constitution" and in the Centenary Souvenir of St Peter's Lodge this note is attributed to W Bro H C Vernon, who was later Prov Grand Superintendent.

Originally, the Degree was only conferred on Installed Masters and it was to evade this restriction that a sort of degree of 'Virtual Past Master' was conferred on Brethren who had not been Master of a Craft Lodge. References to 'Masters' Lodges' are stated to have been found as early as 1733. They appear generally to have been attached to regular warranted Lodges, and in most cases they are noted as holding their meetings on Sundays. It now seems to be accepted that the RA, which was an integral part of the Third Degree, was kept separate and distinct as 'an Order' within the Third Degree, and was originally only conferred on Installed Masters, or Masons who had passed the chair. This qualification was removed on the Union of the Grand Chapters, and the only qualification required by the R A Regulations was that a candidate must have been a Master Mason for 12 months, which period has since been reduced to four weeks.

THE ROYAL ARCH PROVINCE OF STAFFORDSHIRE 1850

Notwithstanding what is said earlier regarding Supreme Grand Chapter Records, the 1850 Year Book lists 5 Chapters in Staffordshire (there is no information as to what happened to Charity and Concord Chapter No 182), namely:

115 St Martin's, Burslem

St Martin's Lodge (now No 98) was No 130 under the Antients Grand Lodge, worked the Royal Arch within the Lodge from 1807. In accordance with the Royal Arch Regulations of 1817, the Royal Arch members of the Lodge petitioned Grand Chapter for a Charter which was granted on 5th August 1822 sanctioning the formation of the St Martin's Chapter attached to the St Martin's Lodge. The Grand Chapter Registers list companions exalted or joining in 1821-28 and 1833-41. The last registration was on 21st July 1841, after which nothing further was received from the Chapter but in the 1850 Year Book it is shown as meeting in the White Hart Inn, Burslem. In 1878 a note was written into the Register "Defunct for many years".

427 Chapter of Fortitude, Stafford

This Chapter was chartered on 6th November 1833 and attached to the Royal Chartley Lodge of Fortitude No 427 (erased 1850). The Grand Chapter Registers list exaltations and joining from 1833-39, after which a note was made stating 'last recorded meeting 31st December 1839. Records lost'. The Chapter continued to be listed in the Freemasons' Calendar meeting at the Great Junction Inn until the Lodge was erased in 1850. Although no meetings of that Chapter are recorded after 31st December 1839, the Principals continued in office, as is proved by their signing the Petition for St Peter's Chapter on 15th February 1842; and the fact that five Companions were exalted in that Chapter during the year 1839 does not suggest that the Chapter would be allowed to lapse in the same year.

607 St Peter's Chapter, Wolverhampton

This Chapter, chartered on 4th May 1842, is now the St Peter's Chapter No 419. The number change from 607 to 419 was a result of the closing up of Lodge numbers in 1863, Chapters automatically taking the new number allocated to the Lodge to which they were attached. In the 1850 Year Book, 254 Chapters are recorded with a lower number than 607.

660 Sutherland Chapter, Burslem

This Chapter was chartered on 1st May 1844 and attached to Sutherland Lodge No 660 (now 451). The Grand Chapter Register has entries for 1844-47, after which there is a note stating 'Erased by Grand Chapter 7th August 1861'. The last Register entry is dated 18th August 1847. Its meeting place was the George Hotel, Burslem.

674 Chapter of Perseverance, Newcastle-under-Lyme

This Chapter was chartered on 7th February 1844 and attached to the Sutherland Lodge of Unity No 674 (now 460). It is not certain at what date that Chapter was founded; according to information, the By-laws of that Chapter were signed by E Comp W H White, the Grand Scribe E, in London on 27th January 1845 and it is possible that the Chapter may have been in existence for some years before that date. The Grand Chapter Registers have entries from 1844-78 and 1882-83, the last entry being dated 13th February 1883. The Chapter was erased by Grand Chapter 3rd August 1898. It met at the Castle Hotel, Newcastle.

In reading the records of the above Chapters, it seems obvious that the object of setting up a Provincial Grand Chapter was to arrest the waning enthusiasm for Royal Arch Masonry in this Province, which it must have done, for all the Chapters that were Consecrated after that date are still working the Royal Arch with enthusiasm. Of the Chapters that were represented at the first Meeting, only one is still in existence, St Peter's Chapter No 419 (formerly 607).

OTHER 19TH CENTURY CHAPTERS IN THE PROVINCE OF STAFFORDSHIRE

The other 19th century Chapters still flourishing in the Province are, in order of their date of Consecration:

539	Vernon	1852
418	Staffordshire Knot	1857
624	Abbey	1864
482	St James'	1865
546	Etruscan	1873
1060	Marmion	1875
726	Royal Chartley Chapter of Fortitude	1881
456	Dove	1887
662	Dartmouth	1895
1941	St Augustine's	1896

THE FIRST GRAND SUPERINTENDENT, EXCELLENT COMPANION H C VERNON

The circumstances in which E Comp H C Vernon was designated first Most Excellent Grand Superintendent are not clear but it is assumed that, as he was the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of the Province, and a very active Mason, he was the obvious choice for that office. The reason for holding the Meeting at Newcastle-under-Lyme instead of under the Banner of St Peter's Chapter, Wolverhampton, which was much nearer to Hilton Park, the home of E Comp Vernon, is not known. Two explanations are that in 1849 a Provincial Grand Lodge meeting was cancelled at Wolverhampton and held at Newcastle-under-Lyme because of the cholera plague which had then struck Wolverhampton and its districts, resulting in the death of 1500 people, or it could be because he was a member of the Sutherland Chapter, which met at the Castle Hotel, Newcastle, and he preferred to hold the Meeting under the Banner of the Chapter where he had or was occupying one of the Chairs, although he was also a member of St Peter's Chapter.

E Comp H C Vernon was not only a Senior Grand Warden of the United Grand Lodge of England but was also Assistant Grand Sojourner in Supreme Grand Chapter and he might have sensed that Royal Arch Masonry in this Province was on the decline, as it certainly was. It seems that the Provincial Grand Master at that time, Colonel Hon G Anson, MP felt that H C Vernon was the right person to occupy this high office and recommended his name to Supreme Grand Chapter. His appointment, made in 1848, was a very wise choice and a very happy one.

ANCIENT RECORDS CHART PROVINCIAL PROGRESS

Fortunately, all the Provincial Grand Chapter Minute Books since 1850 have been preserved.

The minutes of the first Provincial Meeting are very concise but the proceedings were not so brief as it would seem and the full report, as given in the Freemasons Quarterly Review at that time, is set out in E Comp Stevens' book. The report commences:

'Royal Arch – A Quarterly Convocation was held at Newcastle under Lyme on 21st May 1850 of the Chapter of Perseverance No 674, when, after the regular business of the Chapter has been finished, a Provincial Grand Chapter was held by Henry C Vernon Esq., who, after his Patent of appointment had been read, was installed as the Grand Superintendent of Staffordshire, by the M E Comp A A Leveau, Past Grand Director of Ceremonies of the Supreme Grand Chapter of England. After this ceremony was concluded, the Companions were admitted and the Grand Superintendent proceeded to elect and invest the following officers for the ensuing year:

E C Geo Baker, Past Z, No 660

J W Harris, Past Z, No 607

J Hallam, H, No 674

Provincial Grand Haggai

Provincial Grand Joshua

Scribe Ezra

Geo A Vernon, Z, No 607
Thos Ward, Z, No 674
John Hicklin, Past H, 660
W Hargreaves, J, No 674
C S Clarke, Past Z, No 607
W Dutton, No 674
G T Caswell, No 607
W K Harvey, No 674
C Trubshaw, No 675
T Mason No 674
W Cartwright No 674
H Hall No 674
W Swann No 674

Scribe Nehemiah
Principal Sojourner
1st Assistant Sojourner
2nd Assistant Sojourner
Treasurer
Registrar
Sword Bearer
Standard Bearer
Director of Ceremonies`
Organist
Steward
Steward
Janitor

The formation of a Provincial Grand Chapter for Staffordshire is a new era in Masonry and will effect much good, not only in this but in the neighbouring provinces. It was through the instrumentality of E Comp Leveau, in 1844, that a R A Chapter was opened at Newcastle by whose perseverance and indefatigable exertions this Chapter has been brought into a high state of working discipline. For three years, he remained First Principal. He has now resigned the chair to H C Vernon, the newly appointed Grand Superintendent of the Province.'

The minutes state that Companion Cartwright, who was the Director of Ceremonies in Provincial Grand Lodge, read a 'Warrant' from the Supreme Grand Chapter, but this must refer to the Grand Superintendent's Patent. Although M E Comp A A Leveau was a Grand Chapter Officer, it is quite clear that the Installation of E Comp H C Vernon as Grand Superintendent was a mere formality, there being ample evidence that this was the practice until the latter end of the nineteenth century. It was some years before the Grand Superintendent of this Province was installed by a representative of Grand Chapter. Up until then, the installation of a Grand Superintendent, or a Provincial Grand Master, almost certainly consisted of reading the Patent and a ceremonial placing in the Chair.

There is no indication of how many companions were present but it will be seen that the Officers came from the three Chapters at Wolverhampton, Burslem and Newcastle, and two of them were later to become Grand Superintendents. So, with the minimum of fuss, pomp and record, the Royal Arch Province of Staffordshire came into existence, being the 18th Province. (There are now 46). The Provincial Grand Chapter did not meet again until 1854, by which time we had a new Grand Superintendent and another Chapter, Vernon No 539.

PROVINCIAL GRAND CHAPTER OF STAFFORDSHIRE

CHAPTERS AND WHERE THEY MEET

No	Name of Chapter	Place of Meeting
98	Burslem	Shelton
347	Noah's Ark	Dudley Port
418	Staffordshire Knot	Shelton
419	St Peter's	Wolverhampton
451	Sutherland	Shelton
456	Dove	Uttoxeter
460	Sutherland of Unity	Newcastle-u-Lyme
482	St James's	Handsworth
526	Honour	Wolverhampton
539	Vernon	Walsall
546	Etruscan	Shelton
624	Abbey	Burton-upon-Trent
662	Dartmouth	West Bromwich
696	St Bartholomew	Wednesbury
726	Royal Chartley of Fortitude	Stafford
966	St Edward's	Leek
1039	St John's	Tamworth
1060	Marmion	Tamworth
1520	Earl Shrewsbury	Cannock
1587	St Giles	Cheadle
1914	Kidsgrove	Kidsgrove
1941	St Augustine's	Rugeley
1942	Minerva	Shelton
2474	Hatherton	Walsall
2582	Lewisham	Warley
2706	Staffordshire 1 st Principals	Stafford
2848	Victoria	Wolverhampton
3827	Ceramic	Shelton
3934	Jasper	Shelton
3995	Mercia	Walsall
4237	Edwina	Warley
4281	Izaak Walton	Stafford
4463	Regis	Warley
5079	Faith and Works	Wolverhampton
5389	Eccleshall	Eccleshall
5490	Old Denstonian	Uttoxeter
6887	Queeselet	Erdington
7411	Wolverhampton Schools	Wolverhampton
7821	Dormston	Wolverhampton
8029	Thomas Telford	Wolverhampton
8355	North Staffs Round Table	Shelton

**GRAND SUPERINTENDENTS IN AND OVER THE PROVINCE OF
STAFFORDSHIRE**

	<u>Member of Chapter</u>	<u>Date</u>
Henry Charles Vernon	660 now defunct, 419 and 187 Bristol	1849
Col George Augustus Vernon	607 now 419, 278 & 255	1853
William Kenright Harvey	418	1864-7
No further appointments until:		
Colonel George Singleton Tudor	419	1871
Col Alexander Clement Foster Gough	419	1889
Lt Col John Allen Bindley	624	1892
William Heneage, 6 th Earl of Dartmouth, GCVO, KCB, VD, TD	662	1904
Major Thomas James Richardson	482	1937
Rev Preb Arthur Thomas Surman Talbot	482	1942
William, 7 th Earl of Dartmouth, GCVO	3995	1952
Rev Preb Harry Baylis MA	662, 347 & 3995	1958
John Ralph Wellings	419 & 3995	1974
Ronald Arthur Stevens	5079 & 419	1980
Hugh Bergh Ellis	451	1985
John Robbins	7411 & 419	1999
David Hampson	6887 & 2706	2003

DEPUTY GRAND SUPERINTENDENTS

John Ralph Wellings	419 & 3995	1973
Ronald Arthur Stevens	5079 & 419	1978
Hugh Bergh Ellis	451	1981
Roy Le Poidevin	456	1985
John Robbins	7411 & 419	1988
Kenneth George Rhead	546 & 2706	1999
David Hampson	6887 & 2706	2002
Kenneth George Rhead	546 & 2706	2003

AND TO CONCLUDE – THE FUTURE

Royal Arch Masonry in Staffordshire continues to prosper. It provides a great deal of pleasure and commitment for its members, who openly honour and practice the principles of Fellowship, Integrity and Charity.

If you require any further information, please contact the Provincial Grand Scribe E (The Secretary) for the Province of Staffordshire, namely:

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