

**FREEMASONRY IN BRIDGWATER —
OPENING OF THE FIRST LODGE — THE CRAFT
AND THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY MOVEMENT
— OPENING OF A SECOND LODGE.**

FREEMASONRY appears to have been established in Bridgwater in the year 1764; at any rate, no trace can be gained of it at an earlier date. In the year mentioned the lodge "*Perpetual Friendship*" (No. 135) was established under a warrant granted by the Grand Lodge of England, the Hon. Cadwallader Lord Blayney being Grand Master of England at that time. The warrant is still extant. In 1781 another lodge was formed in the town, bearing the somewhat striking name "*Liberty and Sincerity*," No. 369. It flourished for some years, but was finally removed to Wellington, where it ceased to exist in 1828.

The first matter of public interest in which the Masons of Bridgwater are found using their influence for good is one which reflects both honour and credit upon the craft. In the month of April, 1789, the question of the abolition of slavery seems to have caused a great stir in the town (as stated in our general history), and a body of Masons acted in conjunction with a committee of townspeople to collect subscriptions in aid of the funds required for the movement.

In April, 1798, voluntary subscriptions were being solicited to aid the Government in defending our shores, and prosecuting the war against what was then termed "*our most inveterate enemy the French*," and the Freemasons of the town subscribed liberally to the funds.

In July, 1814, they played an even more agreeable part in public matters, joining the Mayor and Corporation in a procession to King Square, to hear the Town Clerk read the Proclamation of Peace between Great Britain and France. On the following Sunday they again joined the Mayor and Corporation to attend a thanksgiving service at St. Mary's Church, where a special sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Wollen from Joshua xxiii., 9.

The year 1820 seems to have been a period of distress in the town, probably owing to the hard winter, and the Masons were very liberal in voting a sum towards the alleviation of the hardships of their poorer brethren. Again, in June, 1822, the cry of the "*distressed Irish*" was not heard in vain.

In 1824 they assisted at the laying of the foundation stone of some new public

building in the town, but oddly enough the name of the structure is omitted from the records. It must have been either the Assize Hall or the Market-house, most probably the former.

The annual Provincial Grand Lodge of Somerset was held at Bridgwater on July 15, 1887, when an interesting presentation was made to Brother R. C. Else, of this town, "*in recognition of his long-continued services in the cause of Freemasonry in the Province of Somerset.*"

The place of meeting of the defunct Lodge "*Liberty and Sincerity*" is unknown. The old "*Swan*," which stood on the Cornhill (on the spot now occupied by Lewis, bootmaker, and Fisher, bookseller), was the meeting-place for the members of the lodge "*Perpetual Friendship*" from 1764 till 1791, when it was decided to remove to the "*Lamb*" Inn (now the "*Duke of Monmouth*"), probably through the demolition of the famous old Cornhill hostelry. It seems, however, that the "*Lamb*" did not possess sufficient accommodation for the brotherhood, for in April, 1791, a committee was appointed to superintend the building of a new lodge-room, which at the time of writing may be seen in ruins. It was upon this historic spot that the mystic brethren met for 74 years, or until 1866, when the Lodge removed to the "*Royal Clarence*" Hotel, where it is still located. The lodge-room at the "*Lamb*" had a private entrance from St. Mary-street, and above the doorway may still be seen a shield bearing the words, in raised letters, "*Masonic Hall.*" At the restoration or re-building of the old "*Lamb*" inn, in 1888, this Masonic doorway was not only allowed to remain, but was renovated and improved in appearance.

The records contain many names still represented in the town — Joseph Ralls, George Westcott. Robert Bryant (two of this name, one a doctor and the other a grocer), James Parsons, William Ford, Dingley, Pollard, &c. Some names have gone from amongst us — Holloway, Royal, Cogle, Tyler, and John, Lord Percival.

It may be mentioned that with regard to the Lodge "*Liberty and Sincerity*," evidence of its existence was discovered in the minutes of the "*Perpetual Friendship*" Lodge, and traced through the records of the Grand Lodge of England. The fact of its existence and connection with the town is confirmed by a letter from the Grand Secretary, now in the possession of Mr. John MacGowan.