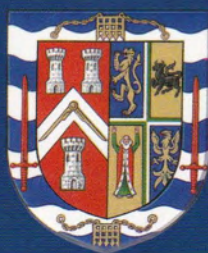


*1st October*

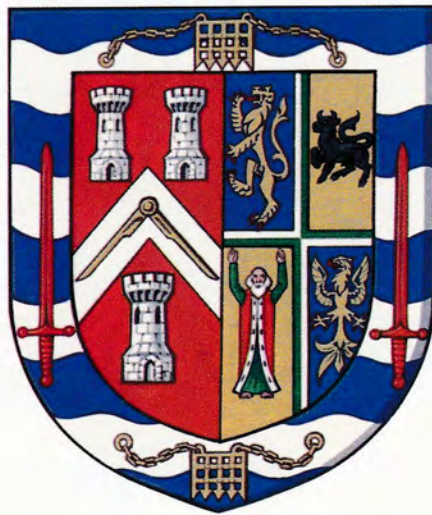


*Inauguration of the Metropolitan Grand Lodge and  
Metropolitan Grand Chapter of London*

*Royal Albert Hall, London  
1st October 2003*



*1st October 2003*



*Inauguration of the  
Metropolitan Grand Lodge &  
Metropolitan Grand Chapter  
of London*



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ROYAL ALBERT HALL

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## London Freemasonry

On 24th June 1717, four London lodges met at the Goose and Gridiron Ale House in St Paul's Churchyard to form the Grand Lodge of England. Speculative lodges were not only found in London at this time: there is evidence of them in Yorkshire and Cheshire. However, it was London lodges which took the initiative to form a Grand Lodge to install a Grand Master and Wardens and to hold an Annual Feast, thereby establishing the first governing body for freemasonry.

The manuscript list of lodges entered into the first Minute Book of Grand Lodge in 1723 illustrates that initially the jurisdiction of Grand Lodge was limited to lodges meeting in London or within the "Bills of Mortality", an area within 10 miles of Charing Cross, but within a few years lodges outside London and those abroad were already acknowledging the authority of Grand Lodge. However, due to eighteenth century conditions of travel, the officers of London lodges tended to attend Grand Lodge in greater numbers than their provincial counterparts and, as such, played a significant role in its government.

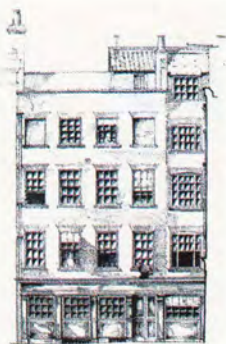
In 1751 a rival Grand Lodge was formed by Irish masons unable to obtain entry to existing lodges. This "Antients" or "Athol" Grand Lodge was also initially an organisation comprising London lodges and its first meeting place was the Turk's Head in Greek Street.

In the revised Book of Constitutions issued in 1815, two years after the Union, London lodges were defined as those meeting within 10 miles of Freemasons' Hall. This included places such as Wandsworth, Chelsea and Putney at a time when they were still country villages. As Professor Prescott has pointed out, this ten mile radius could be seen as forward-looking, allowing the administration of freemasonry to cope with the growth of London but there was also a more practical reason for adopting this definition: London lodges paid higher registration fees and this arrangement helped increase income.

London freemasonry remained outside the Provincial structure which developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Premier Grand Lodge attempted to appoint General Inspectors or Provincial Grand Masters for London Freemasonry in 1767-8 but was prevented by the opposition of London lodges and so London continued to be directly administered by the Grand Master. Between 1851 and 1911 the population within this ten mile radius increased from two and a half million to over seven million. Freemasonry, like other institutions, had to cope with the problems created by this rapid growth. London was administered by the Grand Secretary's office. Initially the Grand Master, the Earl of Zetland



Earl of Zetland



The Goose and Gridiron  
Ale House

## London Freemasonry

(Grand Master 1844 to 1870) vetoed the formation of new London lodges but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many new London lodges were formed which, of course, added to the administrative burden on the central organisation. A comprehensive review of the organisation of freemasonry was undertaken in 1913-1914 which included the proposal to create ten Metropolitan Grand Lodges but the plan fell into abeyance when the 1914-1918 War broke out. Until the creation of the Metropolitan Grand Lodge and the Metropolitan Grand Chapter in 2003, only piecemeal administrative changes actually took place in the twentieth century: in 1971 the ten mile radius from Freemasons' Hall was reduced to five miles and lodges in the border between five and ten miles out were allowed to choose between joining the relevant province or remaining a London lodge.

As the number of lodges increased both in London and elsewhere in the nineteenth century, Freemasons' Hall became too small to accommodate all those who were entitled to attend Grand Lodge. This problem was only solved after the 1914-1918 War when, with The Duke of Connaught as Grand Master, the site in Great Queen Street was extended and a larger hall was built.

Lacking the provincial system with its graded series of offices, London masons also lacked a London-wide honours system which could be used to mark long and meritorious service. This was rectified in 1907 when the establishment of London Rank was announced: the first recipients receiving their honours in 1908. In 1939 at the desire of the Grand Master, the Duke of Kent, the designation was altered to London Grand Rank. Equivalent honours were provided for London Royal Arch masons in 1924 (redesignated London Grand Chapter Rank in 1939).

Charity has been a significant part of freemasonry since its earliest days when individual lodges would support members who might have fallen on hard times. When the first Grand Lodge set up a central charitable fund, London lodges played a major role. The Committee of Charity was established in 1727 and its membership comprised the Grand Officers (then only the Grand Master, his Deputy, the Grand Wardens and Past Grand Masters), and the Masters of Lodges "within the Cities of London and Westminster", reflecting the predominance of London lodges at that time. The central charitable fund of the Antients Grand Lodge was called



The Royal Albert Hall Lodge No 2986 jewel



City Centre Lodge No 5787 jewel showing a view of St Paul's Cathedral



The Tower Lodge No 6159 jewel showing the Tower of London

## *London Freemasonry*

the Stewards' Lodge and was similarly constituted. It was not until the Union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813 that lodges outside of London became involved in charitable administration. The successor charitable body, the Fund of Benevolence, was managed by a Committee or Lodge of Benevolence comprised of all present and past Grand Officers and the Masters of all lodges. (This structure proved unwieldy and was subsequently amended.)

London has always been the centre of political, social and business life and was also the headquarters of freemasonry and so it is not surprising that the other Masonic charities originated in or close to London although their focus was national. The Royal Masonic Institution for Girls, established in 1788, was located in London (originally at Somers Place East between the present Euston and Paddington railway stations and then at St Georges Fields and Wandsworth) until the early twentieth century. The first building for a boys' school funded by the Royal Masonic Institution for Boys was in Lordship Lane, Wood Green in North London. The first Asylum for Aged and Decayed Freemasons, precursor of the RMBI, was at Croydon and the Royal Masonic Hospital was located first in the Fulham Road and then at Ravenscourt Park in West London.

London Masonry has contributed to charitable funds through Grand Lodge dues, part of which is payable to the Grand Charity, through support for organisations such as the London Grand Rank Association and the individual charities and, of course, through individual lodge and chapter benevolent funds. This diffuse pattern of giving has meant that it has not been possible to measure the enormous amount of charitable funding which London lodges and chapters have contributed over the years. London lodges have not generally taken part in the Festival system whereby individual provinces focus their charitable efforts on a particular Masonic charity for a number of years. However, in 1998 London lodges sponsored a Festival for the New Masonic Samaritan Fund, the newest of the charities, which raised over £10 million. The London Masonic Charitable Trust has now been established to act as a local channel for donations from London lodges and chapters to two non-Masonic charities chosen each year, to provide benevolent provision for distressed London masons and their dependants and to create an identity for London's charitable contributions. The Greater London Fund for the Blind and the National Asthma Campaign were amongst the first non-Masonic charities supported.

The formation of a Metropolitan Grand Lodge and a Metropolitan Grand Chapter on 1st October 2003 is truly a historic occasion for London and for Freemasonry but London's role in the Craft has always been significant and will certainly remain so.

Written by Diane Clements, Director of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry



The Royal Masonic Institution for Girls at Wandsworth.  
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