

## The Life and Times of Thomas Dunckerley.

By Bro. Clifford Wyatt.

Margaret Thatcher once said 'there s no such thing as society', and this implies that society is constantly changing. The Newtonian Revolution of the 17th Century was a framework to enable the understanding of nature as something that followed laws. This was adopted by Freemasonry when the candidate is asked 'When were you made a mason?' The answer requires the candidate to believe that the earth orbits the sun. This thesis was continued in the 18 Century and it has been said that this is the Freemasons' Century Society underwent a massive change during this time and with it Freemasonry evolved, eventually producing a 19th Century Freemasonry of a type which is familiar to us today. There is no doubt that Thomas Dunckerley played an important role in establishing Freemasonry during this time, especially in the Provinces.

Before examining his work for Freemasonry let us consider.....

At the beginning of the 'Essex Freemasons' Handbook under the heading 'Masonic Events of Interest to Essex, the first entry is dated 1776-95-This is the period during which Thomas Dunckerley was the Provincial Grand Master for Essex and, it is about this man, the first Provincial Grand Master for Essex that I wish to speak.



RW. Bro. Thomas Dunckerley, PSGW.  
Provincial Grand Master of Essex. 1776-1796.

Before examining his work for Freemasonry let us consider the events of history which took place during his life and played a considerable part in fashioning his life. The year of his life were the formative years of Masonry - the years in which the foundations of the Craft were laid and developed.

In 1715 the Jacobite rebellion had been badly managed and was easily suppressed. As a result the government of the day suspected Jacobites behind every door and the body of Grand Lodge formed in 1717 did not have any personage of position or influence to speak for them. It was partly to publicise the formation of the body that it was decided to hold a Feast in a public tavern and thereby invoke the sympathy of the public. The fact that this was successful can be shown by the appointment in 1723 of William Cowper, Clerk to the Parliaments, as Grand Secretary. With the publication by Dr. Anderson of the Constitutions in 1723 making certain changes of a fundamental nature, the scope of masonry was widened, eg; the entry of Jews and non-Christians.

In Ireland, the famine of 1740 and 1741 was followed by malignant fevers so that whole villiages were laid waste. In 1742 more than 50,000 strolling beggars were to be found in Ireland. There were further famines in 1756-57 resulting during the whole period of more than 12,000 Protestant emigrants coming to London from Ulster. As is now well-known these people formed lodges and their own Grand Lodge, to be called the Antients, and they adhered to the Old Constitution. It was mainly this organisation which, through its enthusiastic Grand Secretary, was responsible for inculcating the competition with the Moderns and thereby stimulating interest in Freemasonry.

The life of an ordinary person in these Georgian times is worth considering in order to set the background to the masonic scene. The daily life of a mason - he was not a poor man - was

one of leisure and for those days, reasonable comfort. It was very cold in the Winter, only smokey coal being available - no matches - candles - and, bathing not a normal custom, for two reasons, the cast iron bath was not invented and there was still a very heavy tax on soap, which had been imposed originally by Cromwell. There were numerous barber shops for shaving the head, as wigs were worn. Sanitation was practically unknown, the 'necessary house\*' as it was called being the yard at the back. Typhoid and dysentery were endemic and there was very little medicine - the cure for a sty in the eye, being to rub it with the tail of a black cat. Their dress consisted of knee-breeches, stockings and shoes, with the coat cut-away and long, the waistcoat being half-way down the thighs. The tricorne or cocked hat with brim turned up was a mark of standing, the poorer classes wearing an uncocked hat with the brim turned down. The hat was worn at meals except in the presence of someone of much superior station, the reason why the Worshipful Master wore a hat - as he still does in America. The gentlemen also wore swords.

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In London where Masonry first flourished there was a population of about one million - the streets were congested - the River Thames was crowded - gentlemen travelled by hackney carriage or sedan chair. The principal meal of the day was dinner at 3,00 pm. which would include roast meat, fowl and game. Oysters and other shell-fish were cheap and sold on the streets to all classes of people. Vegetables were few in variety and meals were concluded with 'plumb' pudding, spelt PLUMB. It was the age of the churchwarden pipe, chewing tobacco soaked in rum and heavy drinking. Drink shops had signs 'Drunk for 1d, dead drunk for 2d«, clean straw for nothing.' A heavy drinker would be called a 'Three bottle man' and the usual drink at table would be port fortified with brandy. A lodge dinner for 12 in 1749 is as follows:-

Ducks.	8.0	Pease, 3qts.,	beans 6 qts.	6.0.
Veal.	6.0	Colliflowers.		2.0.
1 ham.	8.6	Bread.		2.0.
Wine.	1.5.0	Dressing.		5.0
Rum.	8*6	Music.		10.6.
Beer.	7.6	Tarts.		7.6.
Tyler.	2.6.	Servants.		2.6.

£ 3.7.6.

The character of the people was a mixture of coarseness and elegance and the use of obscene language - even by the ladies. With heavy drinking rife it was usual to save a journey outside to the 'necessary house' for the men to use the fireplace or just the corner of the room - in later Georgian times the dining-room sideboard was fitted with a chamber-pot. Their amusement was, cards, conversation, theatre, coffee-house gambling, trips on the river, the lions at the Tower, taking tea with the lunatics at Bedlam for 2d., cockfighting, football, cricket at Mr. Lord's field and, public executions. There were 97 hangings at Tyburn in 1785\* In 1776, the then Grand Chaplain, the Rev. Dr. Dodd, was hanged for forgery - at that time there were

over 200 crimes punishable by hanging.

The mason of this time would receive his summons by hand from the Tyler and the average size of a London Lodge would be about 12 masons - country lodges would be larger. His masonic dress would consist of white gloves

and a white apron decorated perhaps by transfers which could be bought in the shops.

From the middle of this century until the close other great events of history were taking place - a most eventful time. To name but a few of these:- (a) the beginning of the Industrial Revolution - Watt's steam-engine - the use of steel - the spinning jenny - electoral reform (b) the loss of the American Colonies.

(c) the French Revolution.

(d) political unrest - poor harvests - income tax introduced in 1798.

(e) a time of crushing taxation - high prices - unemployment - misery and starvation.

When the first Grand Lodge was formed in 1717 from a few lodges in London, masonic lodges were but few in number throughout the country and generally far apart. Each was a separate, self-governing body; matters of ritual, procedure and conduct were determined according to tradition or

practice, being handed down from generation to generation by personal instruction and word of mouth alone, there being objection to the recording of ceremonies either in writing or in print.

It is therefore clear, that in the circumstances that prevailed the Grand Lodge was bound from the very beginning to meet opposition from Lodges and from the brethren belonging to them, who regarded themselves as equal in every respect and were loth to submit in any way to an over-riding authority especially where ritual and procedure were concerned. The approximate seventy years of Thomas Dunckerley's life covered therefore a very eventful and formative period in the history of Freemasonry and, he was one of the men who made a great impact on the course of events, which laid the foundations of Freemasonry as we know it today.

He was born on October 23rd. 1724. His mother according to some biographers was a servant-maid in the family of Sir Robert Walpole; according to others, she was the daughter of a physician. His mother's husband is said to have been a porter at Somerset House, which at that time was used, like Hampton Court at the present, as a home for pensioners of the Crown.; but, the facts as to the position of Mr. & Mrs. Dunckerley when Thomas was born are involved in great obscurity. However, there seems to be no doubt that Thomas Dunckerley entered the navy when he was about ten years old, though the first authentic record of his naval career is his appointment on February 19th. 1744 to be the schoolmaster of the Edinburgh, a seventy gun ship in the Channel Squadron. In 1746 he was appointed a gunner, in which capacity he served until 1764, when he was superannuated. Four years before his mother had died in London, and had made a death-bed statement that her son's real father was King George 11, whom she had known while he was the Prince of Wales.

Dunckerley was unable to pursue the matter at the time since though he obtained leave to attend his mother's funeral he had to return at once to his duties on board the H.M.S.

Vanguard, which was then bound for Quebec. On his return to England, George 11 was dead, and, Dunckerley continued to discharge his naval duties without attempting to make his exalted birth known. On quitting the Navy in 1764 he found himself in embarrassed circumstances, owing to his pay being in arrears and his daughter's illness (he married when quite young), so to avoid arrest he sailed for the Mediterranean in the frigate H.M.S.

Guadaloupe, under Captain Ruthven, with whom he was on friendly terms. In 1765 he was put ashore at Marseilles, ill with scurvy; thence he went to Minorca, and made friends with the governor; he was then assisted to return to England, where he arrived towards the end of the

year, and was enabled to discharge part of his debts with money given him by Lord William Gordon, whose acquaintance he had made on board the *Guadaloupe*. His mother's rooms in Somerset House were continued to him, and he brought his family there from Plymouth. At length in 1767 his friends laid the story of his birth before King George III, who allowed him a pension of £100 a year, afterwards increased to £800, from his privy purse. In 1774 he was called to the bar, but does not appear to have practised much, if at all, as a barrister; for soon after he accepted a commission in the South Hampshire Regiment of Militia, in which he served for three years. About this time of his call to the bar Dunckerley removed from Somerset House to Hampton Court Palace, where he occupied rooms until his death, which occurred at Portsmouth in 1795.

Turning now to Dunckerley's masonic career we find that he was initiated on January 10th. 1754 in the Lodge meeting at the Three Tuns, Portsmouth, then No. 31» this Lodge took the name of the Lodge of Antiquity about 1788, and was finally erased in 1838. In 1760 he obtained a warrant for a lodge to be held on board the *Vanguard*, in which ship he was then serving. In 1761 the *Vanguard* sailed for the West Indies, and Dunckerley was appointed to the *Prince*, for which ship a lodge was warranted in 1762, probably also at the instigation of Dunckerley, who seems to have taken this warrant with him when he left the service, for in 1764 the Lodge is described as being on board H.M.S. *Guadaloupe*'. This Lodge was brought by Dunckerley to London and, in 1766 is entered as meeting at a 'private room, Somerset House, Strand 1, while next year it is called 'Somerset House Lodge at ye King's Arms, New Bond Street 1; in 1774 it amalgamated with the Old Horn Lodge, one of the Four Old Lodges.

In 1768 the Lodge which had been held on board the *Vanguard* was revived in London, with Dunckerley as its first Master and, exists to the present day under the name of the 'London Lodge No. 1081. In 1767 he was admitted a joining member of the present Lodge of Friendship, now No. 6, which was then meeting at the Sun and Punch Bowl, High Holborn, and frequently attended and presided at its meetings until 1770, when he was made an Honorary Member.

In 1785 Dunckerley was instrumental in establishing a Lodge at Hampton Court, named the Lodge of Harmony, now N 285

In 1787 he was elected a member of the Prince of Wales' Lodge No. 259» but did not take much part in its affairs.

While still serving on board the *Vanguard*, Dunckerley held a roving commission from the Grand Lodge of England to inspect in<bb the state of the Craft wheresoever he might go, and by virtue of this in 1760, while at Quebec with his ship, he installed Col. Simon Frasier as Prov. G. Master of Canada.

He was a zealous supporter of the Hall Loan, or fund raised for the building of Freemasons' Hall, and in 1787 he changed his loan into a gift as also did the London Lodge and the Lodge of Harmony.

In 1767 he was appointed Prov. G. Master of Hampshire, a post which he held until 1776, when he resigned, but was re-appointed in 1786; in which year the Isle of Wight was made a separate Province, though only containing one Lodge - and, Dunckerley was appointed Prov. G. Master. It was in 1767 that his name first appears in the minutes of Grand Lodge... 15th. April, 1767, Thomas Dunckerley, P.G.M. for the County of Hampshire. Prior to this appointment the office of Provincial Grand Master was virtually dormant in England. The advent of Thomas Dunckerley and the enthusiasm he brought to bear on his new duties doubtless awakened the authorities to the knowledge that it was possible for a Provincial Grand Master to be of great service in consolidating Freemasonry under the 'Moderns' Grand Lodge.

It is about 1776 that the first recorded connections between Thomas

Dunckerley and Essex are found. A letter, dated 22nd. May, 1776 from B. Didier of Harwich to Dunckerley, refers to 'the Lodges in your Province of Essex'. In the Grand Lodge minutes of 25th. May, 1776, recording the Dedication of Freemasons' Hall, London, Thomas Dunckerley was listed as being among those present and as 'P.G.M. for Essex'. There are three other instances recorded of Thomas Dunckerley's connection with Essex, which are as follows:-

(1) 10th. July, 1776.

A letter from Dunckerley to the Grand Secretary (j. Heseltine) from Hampton Court Palace, beginning, 'I set out for Essex the 13th. inst., and as I have not yet received my Warrant of Deputation, shall call at your house that Day...'

(2) 15th. July, 1776.

Dunckerley to the Grand Secretary following up the last and saying he will now call for the Lodge Warrant 'next Saturday the 20th. inst. and, at the same time would take my Warrant of Deputation, both of which I hope will be ready',

(3) 13th. November, 1776.

In the Grand Lodge minutes, Dunckerley was again listed as P.G.M. for Essex among those present.

A Patent of Appointment, dated 22nd. November, 1786, was issued to Thomas Dunckerley appointing him P.G.M. for the Counties of Dorset, Essex, Gloucester, Somerset and Southampton, together with the City and County of Bristol and the Isle of Wight. In the absence of any surviving record of Dunckerley's Warrant of Deputation for Essex, it would appear that he must have received this some time in or after July 1776. It is not possible to pronounce precisely upon this, since the Masonic titles and terms then in use did not always have the same usage as today.

Previously to the Prov. G.Mastership of Dunckerley in 1776 the four lodges in Essex had been under the supervision of the Grand Secretary. By about 1785 the lodges in his care were Nos. 30, 51, 205, 402 and 4-11. In this year there was a Grand Lodge for Essex held at the Red Lion, Colchester, on the 19th. May, in honour of Her Majesty's birthday. Notice of this was given by Richard White, Prov. G.Secretary and the tickets for the feast were to be had at the bar of the 'Red Lion', price 5/-» In 1788 the Prov, Grand Lodge of Essex held its meeting at the 'White Hart', Bocking, and the brethren were ordered to wear cock'd hats in the Procession to Church< The year before, 1787i the Chelmsford Chronicle reported that:-

'Yesterday being the Anniversary of Her Majesty's Birthday, the brethren of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons assembled at the 'White Hart', where a Grand Lodge was held in honour of the day by Thomas Dunckerley, Esq., P.G.M. for the County. A Grand Procession was formed to the church and an excellent sermon given by the Rev. Bro. Milbourne Peter Carter. A liberal collection was made for the poor and an elegant dinner provided for the fraternity'.

Other mentions of Thomas Dunckerley in Essex occur at various times, namely:-

August 16th. 1793 at Chelmsford.

Over 100 brethren assembled to consecrate the Lodge of Good Fellowship at the Saracens Head. Afterwards there was procession to church (about 11.00 am.) made up as follows:-  
A band of martial music.

2 Tylers with drawn swords.

Masters, Officers, Brethren of visiting lodges.

W.M. of Good Fellowship Lodge carrying a waxlight in an

elegant inlaid candlestick, 3 feet high.

Other masters carried other lights and the procession ended with the W.M. of Colchester Lodge carrying the Book of Constitutions on a velvet cushion covered with royal blue silk. The text of the sermon at the service was St. John Ch.8. Verse 32... 'And ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you Free1.

In June 1793, Dunckerley's successor, George Downing was invested at The Black Boy. Here at 9»00 am. 100 brethren assembled, where a public breakfast was provided. At 10.00 am. the Lodge was opened in the presence of 160 brethren (the lodges of Essex hasi petitioned H.H.H. the Prince of Wales to appoint George Downing of Lincoln's Inn and Ovington) and afterwards 180 brethren proceeded to church and a collection of £12 was made; the day ended with a dinner in the Shire Hall.

Once he had removed to Hampton Court he gradually dropped out of active interest in the London lodges and devoted most of his time to extensive travel throughout his Provinces, constituting many lodges.

He retained his love of the Craft until the end of his life. His constructive work during a critical period did much towards ±SL bringing peace and reconciliation between the Antients and the Moderns, which gained for him the respect and confidence of a large number of notable contemporaries and in particular those brethren in the Counties he served so zealously as Provincila Grand Master. Grand Lodge recorded its thanks on the 22nd. November, 1786, when it was resolved:-

'That the rank of Past Senior Grand Warden be granted to Thomas Dunckerley Esq., in grateful Testimony of the high sense the Grand Lodge entertains of his zealous Exertions for many years to promote the honour and interest of the Society'.

He died at Portsea on the 19th. November, 1795, and was buried in St. Mary's Church, now the cathedral church of Portsmouth.

#### References.

Thomas Dunckerley, His Life, Labours and Letters..... by Henry Sadler.

Brehtren who made Masonic History..... by Edward Newton.

#### The Royal Arch.

Thomas Dunckerley had an exemplary career as propagator of R.A.Masonry in the Provinces. He was the first to hold the rank of Grand Superintendent and the eighteen provinces over which he presided have already been specified, Essex in 1776; having the distinction of being the premier. From 1776 he was thus both Provincial Grand Master and Grand Superintendent of this Province. In the former capacity he inaugurated four Lodges, Unity 496 at Colchester, Social 505 and Good Will 491 at Braintree and Good Fellowship at Chelmsford and in his latter role constituted three Chapters to complement them. Unity Chapter i«o. 12 was constituted in the same year 1776, as the Lodge of that name and the Warrant was granted to Thomas Dunckerley. It was erased with the Lodge in 1791

In 1791 Dunckerley was elected Grand Master Z in the Grand and Roayl Chapter and he presided over it until May 1792. In 1791 Dunckerley wrote to Sir Benjamin Craven appointing him Deputy Grand Superintendent of Essex Royal Arch Masons, a rank since unknown until recently revived,

M.S.Comp. Thomas DunckiBley wrote on the 9th. October 1795 from his death bed to the Recorder of Grand Chapter 'most solemnly surrendering the office of Superintendent of the several Counties etc. and every other Office named in the Grand Chapter. He died on the 19th. November 1795.

No Grand Superintendent xvas appointed to succeed Dunckerley but his successor as Prov.

Grand Master, Bro. George Downing, who was a zealous Royal Arch Mason as well as a Barrister undoubtedly held a watching brief.