

No  
SAINT 1125 TIVERTON  
PETER'S LODGE





## A complete history of St. Peter's Lodge

There are records of Masonry in Tiverton as far back as **1767**, when **George III** was on the throne and the **American War of Independence** was still eight years ahead. **All Souls Lodge** was instituted on the **24th October 1767**, and the **Warrant was transferred to Weymouth in 1804**.

Freemasonry was not again practised in the borough until the year **1831**, when some of the principal gentleman of the town, who had kept their degree in other Lodges, determined to raise a Lodge in Tiverton. **Lodge of Fidelity**, originally founded in **Rotherhithe**, had its **Warrant transferred to Tiverton in 1831**, where it remained until **1860**. In that year the **Warrant was transferred to Devonport**, where Lodge of Fidelity still flourishes.

Any record of Freemasonry in Tiverton would be incomplete without reference to the Lodge formed by French prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars. Many of the officers billeted on residents willing it receive them were members of Lodges under the Grand Orient and held an irregular Lodge, until their privileges were severely restricted following a successful escape by a number of prisoners.

After the passing of Fidelity, **Masonry was extinct in Tiverton until, in 1865, John Sharland**, who had been a member of that old Lodge, took the initiative in reviving the craft. In conjunction with **Walter Hugo Reed, Dr. Scott, General Morris and Edward Williams** the builder, a petition was forwarded to the Provincial Grand Master praying for a Warrant of Constitution empowering them to form a Lodge. Arrangements were made for use of rooms in the Three Tuns Hotel, which later changed its name to the Lord Palmerston, and for the purchase of jewels and furniture for the Lodge. Brother Sharland, as founder and largest contributor was invited to become the first Master, but declined the honour and induced Brother Hugo Reed to take the office, not only because he was one of the last survivors of the old Fidelity, but was the oldest man in the town. **The Lodge met on the 5th September 1866**, under dispensation signed by the Provincial Grand Master and was consecrated by him on the **24th October 1866**. In that year the modest Reform Bill introduced by Gladstone was defeated and Lord Palmerston, who had such close ties with Tiverton, died the previous year.

When the Warrant of Lodge of Fidelity was withdrawn, the handsome furniture, some of which had been obtained from Lodge No. 92 at Exeter, was scattered far and wide. The Worshipful Master's chair and canopy had been purchased by **Loyal Industry at South Molton**. Brother Sharland heard of this and induced the Master of that Lodge to sell it to St. Peter's.

In January 1867, the Lodge urgently considered the question of premises, for the rooms at the Three Tuns could only be regarded as a temporary expedient. They had before them proposals to erect a new building on a site adjacent to the Infirmary in Bampton Street and, alternatively, to rent a building in Beck Square from Mr. Physick. The capital cost of the former was estimated to be £400; the annual rent of the latter £21.5.0d. It was decided to take the Beck Square offer.

Before the Lodge was able to take possession of its new premises, disagreement with the landlord of the Three Tuns forced a temporary removal to the Athenaeum, where the Lodge fore gathered until the **first meeting in Beck Square on the 21st July 1867**. In its first year the Lodge initiated **24 members** and, despite a difference of opinion as to the election of Master for 1869, it continued to prosper. The Lodge had met in Beck Square for three whole years before the **Provincial Grand Master** (The Rev. John Huyshe) was able to attend to dedicate the building in accordance with ancient form. It was fitting that John Sharland, a founder of the Lodge, should be Worshipful Master and no more than his just reward to have the privilege of being the first member of St. Peter's to be given provincial honours. He was, on the day of dedication, elected **Provincial Grand Treasurer** (not the gift of the Provincial Grand Master BUT elective and by the unanimous choice of the brethren present) for the year and invested with the insignia of his office.

Worshipful Master Sharland described the ceremony of dedication as solemn and impressive-and such it most certainly must have been, for a copy of the programme is still in the possession of the Lodge. The subsequent proceedings have been admirably and vividly described by the Worshipful Master in the following words:-

"At length this imposing function came to an end, and the grand procession to St. Peter's Church took place. A fine band preceded us playing Masonic Tunes- visiting brethren next, then your humble servant as the Worshipful Master, his chaplain by his side, robed and with the bible on a crimson cushion, then the officers of our Lodge and members in due order. Crowds lined the streets and the bells struck out. As every brother wore his Masonic clothing (a sight the oldest inhabitant had not seen before) it was no matter of surprise that the Church on the occasion was well filled. Our banquet at the Athenaeum and was largely attended by the brethren from all parts of the province. Those from South Molton chartered a four-horse break and excited much attention, as they drove through the streets to the Palmerston Hotel."

Let us pause to remember that these happenings in Tiverton occurred less than two weeks before the first shots of the Franco-Prussian War were fired.

As Masons we are charged at Initiation never to lose" sight of the allegiance due to the sovereign of our native land" and the early brethren paid heed to this charge. On the 22nd January 1872 a Lodge of Emergency was called for the sole purpose of adopting and signing loyal addresses to H.M. The Queen and H.R.H. Albert, Prince of Wales, on the occasion of the latter's recovery from serious illness. The Addresses engraved on vellum and beautifully illuminated were signed by the brethren.

In 1873, the brethren provided funds for a portrait of our first Master, Worshipful Brother Reed, to be painted by a local artist Mr. George Fare. The portrait was presented to Worshipful Brother Reed in open Lodge and he requested that it should hang in the Lodge for as long as the Warrant remained within the borough of Tiverton. This can be seen over the Ante Room

It was in the year **1873** that the Lodge, following the lead set by Loyal Industry, South Molton and other Lodges, held its first "**after--lodge meeting**" or supper as we know it to-day. It appears that the Stewards were not only charged with providing and serving the meal, but wholly responsible for ensuring that the cost thereof did not exceed the available funds. There is no record of the Catering skill of these brethren, but the profits in the years 1891-1893 amounted to **£7.16.8d** and required the addition of only **£5** to purchase the **magnificent pillars** which adorn our Lodge room.

A Petition was sent in June 1875 to Grand Mark Lodge requesting a Warrant to hold a Mark Masters Lodge in Tiverton, the Annual rental to be £1.

In the year 1889, the lease of the Lodge premises was renewed for a period of 21 years and enabled the brethren to undertake substantial repairs to the assembly room, ante-room and cellar.

Twice within the space of a year the Lodge again demonstrated its affection for the Monarchy. In May 1900 a message was sent to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, congratulating him on his escape from assassination and only nine months later a loyal address was sent to him, expressing sorrow at the great loss both he and the nation had sustained by the death of Queen Victoria.

The Member of Parliament for Tiverton, **Lionel Walrond**, was **Initiated** in November 1904 passed to the degree of a **Fellowcraft** the following month and raised to the sublime degree of a **Master Mason** in January 1905. From then until 13th February 1907 when he was appointed Junior Warden he attended the Lodge on **four** occasions only. During his year in that office he made only **two** subsequent attendances and was not again present until the 8th September 1909 after his appointment as Senior Warden in absentia the previous February. Special dispensation was necessary before he could be installed as **Master on the 9th February 1910**. Worshipful Brother Walrond's meteoric rise to the Chair of King Solomon in the space of 5 years and after only attending Lodge on fourteen occasions must be without parallel and surely there is no other example of a Master occupying the Chair once during his year of office and conducting **not a single ceremony**.

On the **13th September 1916 the Lodge celebrated Jubilee**, when the Provincial Grand Master and other officers of Provincial Grand Lodge were present. As the country was then engaged in war with Germany it was not practicable adequately to commemorate the occasion.

Minutes of proceedings for the period 1914-1918 give the impression that the Great War made little impact upon the Lodge, but behind each reference to loss sustained by a brother lay great personal grief shared by the brethren in true masonic fashion. The records show that the brethren were liberal in their donations to charities for the relief of Masons and their dependents who suffered as a result of the war; but perhaps the most prominent feature was the frequency of emergency meetings called to initiate, pass or raise a brother about to embark for service abroad. The great activity in this respect had the effect of materially improving the Lodge finances, a deficit in 1915 becoming a substantial surplus in 1918. Very early in the war the brethren were faced with a conflict of loyalty when they were asked to exclude from the Lodge all brethren of alien birth.

From very early days the heavy cost of repairs to the Lodge premises was a constant source of concern and the initial decision not to erect our own Masonic Hall was constantly regretted. The natural reluctance to embark upon extensive repairs and improvements within a few years before the expiry of a lease resulted in

heavy expenditure at a later date. A sub-committee formed in 1922 to look into the question of acquiring the Beck Square premises recommended that the matter should not be pursued and it was not until **1925 that the Lodge finally purchased the building and adjoining cottages for £1200**. The sum of £718 was spent immediately on alterations and redecoration and less than two years later further expenditure of £312 was incurred for repairs to the fabric of the Lodge building and cottages.

In 1965 the Beck Square premises were sold to the Borough Council for redevelopment and our new home here in Castle Street was dedicated 3rd September 1966 by the **Provincial Grand Master for Devonshire** Right Worshipful C. A. Crews assisted by the **Deputy Provincial Grand Master** W. Bro. W. A. Kneel and the **two Assistant Provincial Grand Masters** W. Bro. Dr. F. Watt and W. Bro. C. R. Browne, with other eminent provincial officers.

The Lodge has been well served by the brethren who planned and carried out the move and future generations will praise their good work.

For over fifty years the growth and strength of masonry in the district was centred on St. Peter's, but in 1920 **Saint Andrew Lodge** was established in Cullompton. This was followed in 1925 by the **Vale of Culm** in Uffculme and **All Souls** in Tiverton in 1948.