

## Origins of Provincial Grand Lodges within Irish Freemasonry

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**I**n the year of the lord, 2018, within the masonic province of Antrim and Down both Provincial Grand Lodges, commence their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversaries and celebrations throughout 2018. To this end, the following text provides a insight of the origins of Provincial Grand Lodges within Irish Freemasonry, to present times.

In the latter half of the 1860's the Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes spent some time researching, preparing and presenting a special report on the future role of Provincial Grand Lodges within the ambit of The Grand Lodge of Ireland. Up until the year 1868, Provincial Grand Lodges met in a number of Provinces throughout the island of Ireland, but most of these had come into existence, at different times, and were not integrated into a cohesive whole.

After much consideration, it was agreed that the Island of Ireland should be divided into thirteen separate Provinces and that the City of Dublin, the County of Dublin and the town of Bray shall not be included in any Masonic Province but shall continue under the superintendence of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

Our Irish Constitution, within the Island of Ireland was divided into thirteen Provincial territories, as follows: -

1/. The City of Londonderry, the County of Londonderry (excepting thereout the Town of Magherafelt) shall still, as heretofore meet at the City of Londonderry. Rt Wor Bro Noel Drain P.G.M. and his team are working on some proposals for their 150th Anniversary jewel, and we hope that they will incorporate their fascinating Provincial Grand Lodge crest, as illustrated in the stained-glass window in The Main Lodge-room in The Bishop's Palace, Londonderry.

2/. The County of Antrim together with the Town of Magherafelt, shall constitute The Masonic Province of Antrim, and the Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet in the Town of Belfast. The previous designations of South Antrim and North Antrim shall be abolished. For those interested in these historical snippets, it is interesting to note that in 1868, Londonderry was acknowledged to be a City whereas Belfast is described as a Town.

3/. The County of Tyrone, and the County of Fermanagh shall constitute The Masonic Province of Tyrone and Fermanagh and the Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet in the Towns of Dungannon, Omagh and Enniskillen. Our illustration above is an example of The Belleek Masonic Dinner Service, one of the rarest forms of Masonic China in the collector's market. Tyrone and Fermanagh have struck a 150th Anniversary jewel, and after recent discussions with Rt Wor Bro Maurice Lee, P.G.M. of Tyrone & Fermanagh, I remain confident that we will shortly add an example of same to the Irish Freemasonry archive. In the meantime, I am grateful to Wor Bro Ross Hussey for sending the above digital photo of the example that he has in his collection, another excellent example of an Anniversary Jewel.

4/. The County of Monaghan, the County of Armagh and the County of Louth shall constitute The Masonic Province of Armagh and the Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet in The City of Armagh and the town of Dundalk alternatively. We are not yet aware if the Brethren in Armagh intend marking this significant milestone in the history of their Grand Lodge. We shall await their response with interest.

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5/. The County of Down shall constitute The Masonic Province of Down, and the Provincial Grand Lodge shall meet alternately in the Towns of Newry and Downpatrick. Rt Wor Bro Roger Matthews P.G.M. of Down and his team have produced an elegant commemorative jewel to mark their 150th Anniversary.

6/. The County of Longford, the County of Cavan, the County of Westmeath (excluding thereof the Town of Athlone) and the County of Meath shall constitute the Masonic Province of Meath, and the Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet at the Town of Mullingar.

7/. The County of Mayo, the County of Sligo and that part of the County of Roscommon lying North of a line drawn from Castlereagh to Termonbarry (not including these Towns) shall constitute the Masonic Province of North Connaught. The Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet at the town of Sligo.

8/. The County of Galway, that part of the County of Roscommon lying south of a line drawn from Castlereagh to Termonbarry (including these Towns) and the Town of Athlone shall constitute the Masonic Province of South Connaught. The Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet at the Town of Ballinasloe.

9/. The Kings County, The Queen's County and the County of Kildare shall constitute The Masonic Province of The Midland Counties. The Provincial Grand Lodge shall meet at the Town of Portarlington.

10/. The County of Carlow, the County of Wexford and the County of Wicklow (with the exception of the Town of Bray) shall constitute The Masonic Province of Carlow, Wicklow and Wexford. The Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet in the Towns of Carlow and Wexford alternatively.

11/. The City of Waterford, the County of Waterford, the County of Kilkenny and the Towns of Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir shall constitute The Masonic South-Eastern Province. The Provincial Grand Lodge thereof shall meet at the City of Waterford.

This is a little known yet fascinating part of our Irish Masonic History, showing the approach taken by Grand Lodge to rationalise the formation of Provincial Grand Lodges throughout the Island of Ireland. Some knowledgeable Brethren may already know that there were earlier Grand Lodges such as Cary and Dunluce, North Antrim Northern and Southern, Belfast Massereene and North Down, to name but a few. And of course, the earliest of our overseas Provinces- New Zealand was constituted in 1859, by The Duke of Leinster, who set out that this Province should meet in Auckland, New Plymouth, Thames and Dunedin, at the regular meeting places of the Lodges concerned.

Despite the enthusiasm of some of our Provincial Grand Lodges, the Resolution to form the Masonic Provinces was only promulgated by The Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes at their meeting on the 2nd April 1868 and then signed into our Statutes by the Deputy Grand Master on the 24th April 1868.

It would have taken a further couple of months to come into effect, and it will be interesting to see from the individual Provincial Grand Lodge Minutes, when and where these new Masonic bodies were Located and Constituted. I would however be surprised if any of these Provincial Grand Lodge bodies came into being before (at the earliest) September 1868, when I image that most Anniversary celebrations will take place.

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