



Provincial Grand Lodge of

MARK MASTER MASONS OF KENT



Charles Purton Cooper, QC (1793-1873)

*the first Provincial Grand Master
of the Mark Province of Kent*

by V W Bro Alan Eadie, PGJO

Charles Purton Cooper, QC, MA(Oxford), LL D(Louvain and Kiel), DCL, FRS, FSA, MRSL, MRAS, MRIA and corresponding member of the Royal Academies of Lisbon, Munich, Berlin, Brussels, etc. Who was this first Provincial Grand Master of the Mark Province of Kent? A perusal of his academic post-nominals amply illustrates he was an extremely well educated individual with many international connections. C. Purton Cooper was born in 1793, the son of Charles Cooper, linen draper of St. Dunstan's, London. His activity and industry were very great and he became a voluminous writer of legal books and papers. Purton Cooper became an outstanding lawyer and antiquary, yet after a life of great industry and scholarship, he died abroad in comparative obscurity. Purton was educated at Wadham College, Oxford, where he graduated on the 7th December 1814 with a double first class honours degree. He was awarded his Master of Arts on the 5th July 1817. He was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in Michaelmas term 1816, and after practising with success as an Equity Draughtsman, he was appointed Queens Counsel in 1837. He was also the Queen's Sergeant for the Duchy of Lancaster from 1834 until his death in 1873.

In 1834 Purton presented to Lincoln's Inn Library two thousand volumes on civil and foreign legal works, having previously presented a hundred and fifty volumes of American Law Reports. He became a Bencher of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn in 1836. He was Treasurer in 1855, and in 1856 he was appointed Master of the Lincoln's Inn Library. Purton fought enthusiastically for legal reform and this attracted the attention of Lord Brougham, Lord Chancellor in Lord Grey's Whig Government, by whom he was introduced to the Holland House Circle and the Heads of the Whig Party. Lord Brougham appointed him Secretary to the Second Record Commission on the 12th March 1831. A post he held until the 20th June 1837, when it lapsed on the King's death. Purton bought and printed so many books that Commission's debt, over and above its authorised budget of £400,000, rose to some £24,000. At one time Purton's position was so prominent that Lord Holland recommended him for the post of Solicitor-General, but alas he was not successful as, Mr R.M. Rolfe, afterwards Lord Cranworth, was appointed.

Purton was a prolific writer of legal publications. His principal works being:

- An Account of the Parliamentary Proceedings relating to the Practice in Bankruptcy, Chancery, and the House of Lords – 1828.
- Notes, etc., in French on the Court of Chancery – 1828; 2nd edition 1830.
- Notes on Registration and Forms in Conveyancing – 1831.
- An Account of the Most Important Public Records of Great Britain, and the Publications of the Record Commissioners: Together With Other Miscellaneous, Historical and Antiquarian Information – 2 volumes 18321. (*This classic work was last reprinted by 'The Lawbook Exchange' in 2004.*)
- Speech for Rev. C. Wellbeloved in the Case of Lady Hewley's Foundation; Attorney-General v Shore – 1834.
- Notes on the Act for Regulating Municipal Corporations – 1835.
- Select Cases decided by Lord Brougham in the years 1833 and 1834, edited from His Lordships original MSS – 1835.
- Reports of Cases decided by Lords Cottenham and Langdale, and by Vice-Chancellor Shadwell in 1837 and 1838, with notes 1838-41.

- Reports of Cases in Chancery decided by Lord Cottenham – 1846.
- Letter to the Lord Chancellor on law defects in the custody of lunatics – 1849.
- A pamphlet on the Reform of Solicitors' Costs – 1850.
- Letter to Sir George Grey on the Sanitary State of St. George's Parish – 1850.
- A pamphlet on the condition of the Court of Chancery – 1850.
- A pamphlet on the Masters in Chancery.
- A pamphlet on the House of Lords as a Court of Appeal.
- Chancery Miscellanies under his editorship Nos.1-13 – 1850 and 1851.
- Parliamentary Miscellanies under his editorship Nos. 1-20 –1851.
- A Letter on the Pope's Apostolic Letters of 1850, 1851.
- A pamphlet on the Government and Irish Roman Catholic Members –1851.
- Reports of Cases & Dicta in Chancery from MSS, with notes Nos.1-7 – 1852.
- Memorandum of a Proposal to Classify the Law Reports, Boulogne – 1860.
- A similar Proposal for Digesting the Statute Book, Boulogne – 1868.

Purton was appointed by the Public Records Commission to locate all significant State records in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, describe their physical condition and summarise their contents. This extraordinary body of material includes such landmarks as The Statutes of the Realm, The Exon Domesday and the Red Book of the Exchequer. Purton fulfilled this daunting task with enviable skill. What is more, he added detailed annotations that discuss the significance, reception history, provenance and other notable features for each record. First published more than 175 years ago, this study remains, to this day, an incomparable guide to such records of the State.

Between 1850 and 1857 Purton also published a printed list of no less than 52 pamphlets, written, edited, or printed by him on a range of political topics. Purton also played an active part in Kent public affairs. He was the Whig Candidate for Lambeth in 1850, but withdrew from the contest. He unsuccessfully contested Canterbury



Denton Court, Home of C. Purton Cooper, QC (*Photograph courtesy of Mrs Angela Green 'by kind permission of Mr and Miss Gosling'*)

in August 1854 and again in March 1857. In 1855 he was proposed as a Candidate for West Kent, but declined to stand. He lived at Denton Court, a Tudor Mansion, near Canterbury, see photograph below. Denton is just off the A2 halfway between Canterbury and Dover; although Denton is actually in the District of Dover.

Purton Cooper was also a Council member and a Trustee of The Camden Society for the Publication of Early Historical and Literary Remains. Other Council members were:- HRH The Duke of Sussex, KG, FRS, FSA; the Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury; the Rt. Hon. Lord Lyndhurst, LL D, FRS, Lord High Chancellor; the Most Hon. The Marquess of Northampton, DCL, FSA and President of the Royal Society with the Rt. Hon. Lord Francis Egerton, MP, being the President of the Camden Society.

Purton enjoyed a leading legal practice in the Court of Vice-Chancellor Knight Bruce, but unfortunately he openly quarrelled with that Judge, quitted the Court and lost his practice. His business consequently fell off and disappointment and difficulty overcame him. He endeavoured, without success, to obtain Government assistance for a project for digesting and sifting on a settled scheme for all the Law Reports down to that date. In due course he was obliged to retire to Boulogne, France, in 1860, where after unsuccessfully endeavouring to carry on his projects of legal reform, he eventually died of paralysis and bronchitis on 26th March 1873.

So much for Purton's distinguished legal career. What is known of his masonic career? Purton states, in his main masonic publication, described in detail later, that he was initiated in 1821. The Maidstone, Rochester and Chatham Journals of the 28th June 1853, reported on Purton's Installation as the Craft Provincial Grand Master of Kent, at Folkestone on 20th June 1853. This newspaper article confirms numerous brethren from British Lodge No.8 were in attendance, and Purton himself was a member of that Lodge. From this it has been established he was initiated on the 21st May 1821, in British Lodge No.8, his occupation being recorded as a Barrister. Purton never reached the position of Master of this a Red Apron Lodge, and never served the office of Grand Steward. Purton later joined United

Industrious Lodge No.34, now No.31, at Canterbury in 1852.

The newspaper report said that the Installation day in 1853 was remarkably favourable, and at an early hour the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages thronged into the town. The Provincial Grand Lodge was opened, and that part of the ceremony, to which the public was not admitted, was performed in the Guildhall. At one o'clock the Procession was marshalled; headed by different Kentish Lodges, with their Standards and Banners. The principal were those of Maidstone, Margate, Gravesend, Chatham, Ramsgate, Dartford, Sheerness, Dover, Hythe, Folkestone and Canterbury. The visitors included many Grand Officers of the United Grand Lodge of England. Among the visitors, a Hindu, a fine-looking man, in the costume of his country, attracted much attention. There were also present members of French Lodges, in their peculiar clothing. The procession moved through the principal streets, which were crowded, to the Church, which was full. After the usual service of the day, an anthem was sung, written for the occasion by Brother How, composed and arranged for three voices by Brother Phepps, the Provincial Grand Organist. The Rev. David Jones, the Provincial Grand Chaplain, also preached an impressive sermon.

The procession having reformed, returned through a different part of the town to the Guildhall, where the newly-installed Provincial Grand Master, the business of the day having been transacted, closed Provincial Grand Lodge in due form. Later a banquet was served at the Pavilion Hotel, at which many brethren were present. Many, however, were compelled by their avocations to leave previously for London and other places. Suitable Toasts were drunk with great enthusiasm. Nearly fifty years have elapsed since such a Masonic Festival has been held at Folkestone. Nothing of the kind has ever passed off more happily. It is said that the Provincial Meeting next year would be held at Sheerness or Canterbury; but the choice of the place at which the Meeting is held rests with the Provincial Grand Master.

The Craft Annual Meeting in 1854 did indeed take place at Sheerness. However a most unusual event took place before the actual Provincial Annual Meeting was duly opened. Namely that Adams Craft Lodge held an emergency meeting for the sole purpose of communicating the Chair Secrets to the Provincial Grand Master, R.W. Bro. C. Purton Cooper. The Provincial Grand Secretary, Bro. Charles Isaacs performed the Ceremony and Bro. John Staples Keddell, ProvGSW designate, of Adams Lodge, presented the Provincial Grand Master. This clearly corrected a technical oversight when Purton was installed as Provincial Grand Master, the previous year, when he had not then, been through the Chair of any Lodge.

One of Purton's first actions as Provincial Grand Master was to establish the state of Freemasonry in his Province by means of a survey and return from the Secretary of all Lodges in Kent. This return requested details of the number of meetings and ceremonies performed; charities the Lodge had subscribed to, and details of the returns made to Grand Lodge and to the Clerk of the Peace. At the same time the Worshipful Masters of all the Lodges were

asked to submit suggestions to advance the state of Freemasonry in the Province. Purton was present at the 1854 Girls School Annual Festival but it was only on his arrival, finding a number of senior brethren absent, that he realised he had to propose the Health of Lord Londesborough. His training as a barrister stood him in good stead and he ably acquitted himself. He spoke about how long speeches were usual in the Court of Chancery but they should be as brief as possible here. He referred how masonry was expanding with Lodges in Turkey and other parts of Asia. Indeed he did not despair of one day seeing the Emperor of Russia himself being made a Mason!

Purton was eventually exalted on 5th May 1854 into British Chapter No.8, and was First Principal of that Chapter in 1858. He was appointed the Grand Superintendent of the Provincial Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Kent in 1858. He was previously advanced into Mark in Bon Accord Lodge on 11th April 1856. Grand Mark Lodge was constituted on 23rd June 1856. The following year on 10th June 1857, Lord Leigh, the Grand Master of the newly formed Grand Mark Lodge was authorised to constitute Mark Provinces and Provincial Grand Masters, with Kent being included in the first batch of eight Provinces. On 11th December 1857 Grand Mark Lodge confirmed the Grand Master had constituted Kent and appointed Charles Purton Cooper, QC, as its Provincial Grand Master. Charles Purton Cooper had, of course, been Provincial Grand Master for the Craft Province of Kent since June of 1853. Andrew Prescott, on page 22 of 'Marking Well', states support for the 'Masonic Observer' group came from men who were afterwards to be concerned in the establishment of Mark Grand Lodge, such as the lawyer and erstwhile secretary of the Records Commission, Charles Purton Cooper, PGM for Kent. A footnote confirms that Purton Cooper was also a prolific contributor to the Freemason's Magazine.

Purton Cooper was also a Founder and Primus Master of Leigh Mark Lodge No.11, Erith, in September 1857. Other Founders and Wardens of Leigh Mark Lodge No.11 were Thomas Bisgood, Craft Deputy Provincial Grand Master (1853 to 1859); and John Harvey Boys, Craft Deputy Provincial Grand Master (1859 to 1860). Despite such a high calibre membership the Leigh Mark Lodge foundered shortly thereafter. There is virtually nothing recorded about the Mark Province of Kent during Purton's term of Office, but with Leigh Lodge very quickly falling by the wayside and the only other Mark Lodge being Adams Mark No.6, at Sheerness, constituted in 1857, but becoming dormant at the end of 1858, for some ten years; this is hardly surprising.

Purton Cooper is often mentioned in the Freemasons' Magazine for 1859, as the Craft Provincial Grand Master. An extensive report on the Annual Grand Lodge Festival taking place on the 27th April 1859, lists Purton as being in attendance. Interestingly the last Toast was to 'The Ladies in the Gallery', a tradition that has now faded away. Purton Cooper is mentioned as affixing his signature to the By-laws of the newly formed Lodge of Instruction of the Royal Navy Lodge No.621, now No.429, at Ramsgate, to which Purton signified his intention of becoming a member. The Royal Navy

Lodge have not been able to confirm Purton's membership of their Lodge of Instruction, but he did visit the Lodge in October 1853 and the Minutes record that he explained the object of his visit and gave a concise history of Freemasonry. There were nearly 100 present at the Consecration of Wellington Lodge No.1086, now No.784, at Deal on June 18th 1859. Brethren assembled at Walmer Castle Hotel and processed to the Assembly Rooms where the Lodge was consecrated. The Grand Master had appointed S.B. Wilson, PGD to consecrate the Lodge in the presence of C. Purton Cooper, PGM. The Brethren then adjourned to the Town Hall for the banquet. The PGM presided but was compelled immediately afterwards to leave for London. Purton was also listed as being present at a Special Grand Lodge Meeting on 23rd June 1859, to consider items carried forward from the previous Grand Lodge Meeting with Purton contributing to the discussion about the Grand Secretary's salary.

Despite Purton's prolific legal publications his main masonic publication was only a 48-page pamphlet entitled "Specimens of a series of SHORT EXTRACTS from Brother Purton Cooper's Letter and Memorandum Books for the years 1859 to 1868". This pamphlet was not published for sale and only 50 copies were ever printed. It does however indicate the wide range of masonic matters that occupied his mind in the latter part of his life; as well as the numerous and varied subjects that prompted him to submit contributions to the Freemasons Magazine. Subjects such as:-

How a Candidate who has been a Pagan should be obligated; On Masonic Oaths; Mahomedan Lodge and Christian Brother; Voltairianism and Spinozism; High Grades in Freemasonry; Words of the Duke of Sussex; Christianity and English Freemasonry; Atheists and Freemasonry; French Masons and the Name of God, Mirabeau and Freemasonry; French Constitutions; Homosibi Deus; etc. The very first, and most intriguing, entry in this publication of 'Short Extracts' reads: "*Monsieur *** you will sooner persuade the English Freemason to plant the Upas Tree in his garden, than you will persuade him to admit Atheism into his Lodge*". Doubtless those reading this will be familiar with the Upas Tree? Whilst another quotation amply illustrates that Purton was a man well ahead of his time: "*Every Sack of Coals that Man burns brings his Planet nearer the epoch of another transformation – September 1863*".

A report on the Centenary of the Grand Masters Lodge No.1, lists Purton present as a visitor. One of Purton's ambitions as Provincial Grand Master of Kent was that every Lodge in his Province should be a Life Governor of the two Masonic Schools. Ten of the fourteen Lodges in the Province had achieved this by 1858. It had always been Purton's habit to read everything that was written relative to the management of the Order. Up until 1858 it had always been the practice to open Provincial Grand Lodge within a private Lodge. When it was brought to his attention that the private Lodge was thus never able to close; Purton saw how illogical this was, and immediately changed the practice so that Provincial Grand Lodge opened up independently.

Surprisingly, for such a distinguished individual, it has not

been possible to identify a photograph, copy of a portrait, or any sort of image, of Charles Purton Cooper, QC. Although at the Craft Provincial Meeting in 1858, Purton himself presented a lithograph portrait of Bro. Joseph Ashley, PM of the Royal Kent Lodge of Antiquity No.20, and popular PastDepPGM, in recognition of his past services. The following sources have confirmed they do not hold an image of Charles Purton Cooper, QC:-Lincoln's Inn Library; Great Queen Street Library and Museum; The Kent Masonic Library and Museum Trust; Canterbury Reference Library; The Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone; The Royal Society; The National Portrait Gallery; The British Museum; The Victoria & Albert Museum – their Word and Image Department incorporates the National Art Library and the Museum's Prints Drawings, Paintings and Photographs Collections. *Do you know where a photo or image of Charles Purton Cooper, QC, is held? If so, the author would be delighted to hear from you!*

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