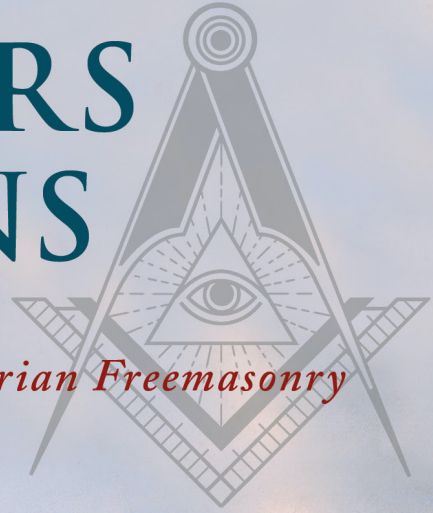


MINERS, MARINERS & MASONS

The Global Network of Victorian Freemasonry



ROGER BURT

EXETER

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& MASONS

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To PACH
WITH LOVE

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PREFACE

This book might look like an exercise in gender studies and in one sense it is. It is exclusively about mature men endeavouring to improve themselves and create some level of security for their wives and families in an insecure Victorian world. But it was not intended to be that. This was an old-fashioned research project that gradually unfolded as it went along and ended in a place which was far from where it started. Parts of the story were published along the way, but this is the story of the journey as a whole. It is an economic historian's attempt to make sense of a complex social issue: it started with only one vague question relating to information flows in a small, out-of-the-way part of England and gradually moved on to a wider international and global stage. It had no initial understanding of the unexpectedly wide range of primary and secondary sources available, and it had no preconceived idea of an audience for the final outcomes of the research or how it might be promulgated. It is therefore very much the work of a late-stage and retired academic historian rather than one of the new school of closely focused and tightly constrained members of that profession. Whatever the strength of its final conclusions it has certainly turned up a wide range of important and previously little noticed issues.

The initial question was conceived in the author's familiar terrain of British mining history. In particular, how did Cornish miners, mine managers and investors network so well in finding jobs and making profitable investments, at home and abroad, in a notoriously high-risk industry? Religion was known to be a powerful connecting force but created few social contexts to promote business activity. Friendly societies and fraternal organisations, however, were well established in the region and brought together men, and sometimes women, from across a wide social spectrum. Of those organisations, the one that was most likely to be used as a vehicle for economic networking was Freemasonry, since it traditionally has been regarded as particularly middle-class and business-friendly. Fortunately, and perhaps surprisingly for a reputed 'secret' society, it was found to have more complete, detailed and available membership records

than any of the others. It became the focus of the research and data was extracted on the membership of Masonic lodges in the mining-dominated western part of the county. This demonstrated that the lodges encompassed the full range of professional, mercantile, trade and public occupations that were conducted locally, and created regular opportunities for the exchange of views and ideas through regular dining and other social interactions. Random comparisons with other lodges elsewhere in the UK demonstrated that the Cornish experience was not uncommon.

Understanding of the scope of Masonic activity led to a second set of questions about why men joined the Order, what it offered them, and how it differed from other benefit and fraternal societies. The answers were many and various but one stood out as being particularly important—the support and facility that membership offered to those with mobile occupations. Once a member of one lodge, a Mason could look for help and support from all lodges and Masons everywhere. At a time of economic crisis in Cornwall, Masonic membership was particularly attractive to migrating miners, and the coastal port lodges were popular for large numbers of mariners, either locally based or simply sailing by. To explore what was on offer in more detail, attention was turned to the scale, nature and scope of Masonic charitable assurance and what form of welcome arriving Masons might receive in distant and foreign lodges.

These questions were first directed to the help and support that Freemasonry offered to mariners, but the main focus returned to miners and managers. The research was initially directed to the structure of lodge membership in frontier mining districts of the United States, which was one of the primary destinations for Cornish labour and managerial expertise. California, Nevada and Montana featured in this enquiry with their lodges demonstrating important support and networking opportunities for new arrivals, and significant advantages for integration into the local host community. The Masonic lodges and their members were also shown to have played leading roles in early community development and the construction of social capital as well as becoming highly influential across a wide range of regional and national affairs. To ensure that this was not simply an American phenomenon, similar analysis was conducted for lodges in the new mining districts of South Africa and Australia, which produced comparable results.

From this wide-ranging international investigation it is clear that Freemasonry had a great deal to offer its members—economically, socially, educationally and spiritually. It certainly provides an answer to the question that initiated the project, in that it clearly did provide useful networking opportunities for those connected with the mining industry in Cornwall, both at home and abroad. But it

also goes much further than that. It demonstrates that by increasing information flows, powerfully reinforcing trust relationships, and creating safety nets for those that suffered misadventure, it probably also greatly facilitated the operation of the entire free-market capitalist system.

Of course there were constraints and offsets to these advantages. They were socially sectional—favouring the upper, middle, and artisan classes—possibly to the detriment of the interests of the mass of the working class. Women and the female-dominated trades were unable to enjoy the same benefits. Similarly, secrecy and preference could, and no doubt did, sometimes promote corruption and unfair advantage. All of this is well known and has been documented for centuries. For the first time, however, this investigation creates the evidence to view another side of that debate and to ask whether, overall, Freemasonry was a good or a bad thing?

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Source of Illustrations

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Illustration 2: author's photograph from *Mining World* 22 April 1911 p. 454

Illustrations 3 and 4: courtesy of Druids Lodge of Love and Liberality No. 589, Redruth, Cornwall

Illustration 5: courtesy of Mount Edgcumbe Lodge No. 1544, Camborne, Cornwall

Illustrations 10 and 13: author's photographs from a private collection

Illustrations 11, 12 and 14: author's photographs

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AQC</i>	<i>Ars Quatuor Coronatorum. The Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076</i>
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>FMC</i>	<i>The Freemasons' Chronicle</i>
<i>FM</i>	<i>The Freemason</i>
<i>FMM</i>	<i>The Freemasons' Magazine</i>
<i>FMMM</i>	<i>Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror</i>
<i>FMQR</i>	<i>Freemasons Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JEcH</i>	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
<i>JRFF</i>	<i>Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism</i>
<i>MI</i>	<i>Masonic Illustrated</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Masonic Magazine</i>
<i>MP</i>	Member of Parliament
<i>PGL</i>	Provincial Grand Lodge
<i>PGM</i>	Provincial Grand Master
<i>PUGLE</i>	<i>Proceedings of the United Grand Lodge of England</i>
<i>RMBI</i>	Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution
<i>RMIB</i>	Royal Masonic Institute for Boys
<i>RMIG</i>	Royal Masonic Institute for Girls
<i>TLRL</i>	<i>Transactions of the Lodge of Research No. 2429, Leicester</i>
<i>TMAMR</i>	<i>Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research</i>
<i>UGLE</i>	United Grand Lodge of England

INTRODUCTION

FREEMASONRY:

A GLOBAL INSTITUTION

In Britain at the end of the seventeenth century the old world of continuity and tradition was drawing to a close. Most people still lived their lives and died in the communities where they were born. Everyone knew everyone and they enjoyed the support of their extended families, their churches, and much of their wider community. The work they did and the tools that they used stayed very much the same. Most regions were largely self-sufficient, producing most of the food that they ate and the commodities they consumed. Of course there was a strong commercial economy, based on specialisation and exchange, but the degree and rate of change and development was small compared with what was soon to come. The beginnings of industrialisation were about to change everything, in some areas more slowly than others, but great new national and international opportunities were about to be created. A commercial revolution in international trade expanded markets for materials and manufactures. Britain began to turn away from European to long-distance Atlantic and Eastern markets, and saw a major expansion of commercial shipping. At home, new technology and methods of organising production began to transform many established industries and create new ones. Some industries and localities saw a sudden boost to their fortunes only to be undercut by the next, increasingly frequent, wave of change. Old certainties disappeared as communities were fractured and families were forced to face an insecure future with few reliable indicators for success. The times were very redolent of those being experienced today.

With their old support structures disintegrating beneath them, all members of society needed to find new ones, not just to survive but also to try to take advantage of the opportunities that were opening up. Often forced to move away from existing family and community and establish new lives in the rapidly expanding chaotic and anonymous industrial towns, they desperately need to join together with others in similar circumstance to find some means of mutual

support. Of course, none of this happened overnight. It took almost a century for the full effects of industrialisation to begin to be felt in all parts of the country, but from the outset new forms of popular association began to appear. They emerged not from the 'bottom up' but from the 'top down'. Middle- and upper-class men in expanding urban areas, particularly London, began to discover new forms of association in clubs, coffee houses and taverns, where they could enjoy jovial and intellectual entertainment.¹ A few began to find a home within traditional craft guilds, such as the stonemasons. In some of these multifarious groups, those involved began to swear oaths of mutual trust and support for each other, claim to have identified ancient origins, develop complex customary practices and rituals, and award themselves with grand titles and flamboyant regalia. As they became more firmly established, many began to attract craftsmen, tradesmen and additional working-class members, who were more interested in their potential for mutual support than entertainment. Growth remained slow but gradually different local groups with similar interests and aspirations began to draw together in regional, national and even international organisations

Slow but steady growth in the eighteenth century became an explosion in the nineteenth century, when industrialisation sharply gathered pace. Groups offering mutual assistance to their working- and lower-middle-class members proliferated: from trade unions, to co-operative societies and a host of benevolent, or friendly, societies. As Durr explained, they all derived from:

an ideology of interdependence, its practical manifestations being giving and receiving, relieving and being relieved, supporting and being supported, either singularly or collectively, in money or in kind; that which social theorists call reciprocity.²

They differed considerably in the emphasis that they placed on these various activities but they all shared a common acknowledgement of the weakness of the individual and the strength of the group to which they bound themselves. It was an observation that came to be shared by families everywhere and, by the end of the nineteenth century, mutual societies of one form or another counted millions of members across the Western world and were the principal means of providing elementary social insurance and entertainment for those that could afford them—principally the upper working class and middle class—everywhere.

The economic, social and political conditions that had called forth mutuality began to change again from the early twentieth century. The evolution of the welfare state, the expansion of commercial personal insurance, alternative forms

of entertainment, improved systems of communication and a host of other factors gradually eliminated the need for them. Their membership went into decline and most have either closed, diversified to other commercial activities, or continue only as a rump of their former selves.

This story has attracted considerable attention from historians over time and the general outline is well known. The literature covers most aspects of mutuality, from clubs and co-operatives to trade unions and friendly societies³, and has clearly outlined their development and organisation. However, much remains to be done, particularly in terms of the details of their membership and activities, the reasons for joining, comparative costs and benefits, and general social and economic impact. More particularly, one large and undoubtedly important mutual organisation has been mostly left out of the general discussion, notably the Ancient and Accepted Order of Freemasons and its kindred internal associated orders. The reasons for this are unclear, particularly given the important influence that the Order is commonly accepted to have had, both past and present. In most respects, Freemasonry was little different from most of the other large friendly societies that prospered in the nineteenth century. It offered its members very similar systems of moral improvement, financial assurance as well as effective reciprocity in aid, assistance and advice. Its omission from the debate becomes even more inexplicable when viewed from the vast Masonic archival base, which is more complete, well maintained and more accessible than that for any friendly society. Similarly it has a large, though not very visible literature, published principally in the transactions of several lodges of Masonic research.⁴ It was an organisation which, more than any other, embraced the most influential members of the Victorian and Edwardian world, at home and across the Empire—‘the men that mattered’ in industry, commerce, politics, culture and society—and to ignore it is to avoid one of the most important forces shaping that world.

Freemasonry was organised much like the other great mutual societies, such as the Independent Order of Oddfellows or the Ancient Order of Foresters, although it is more accurate to say that they were organised on a pattern similar to Freemasonry, since it was the older of the orders and possibly the inspiration for them. Members belonged to separate ‘lodges’, where each lodge provided entertainment through the practice of ritual and the wearing of regalia, and gave its members a sense of security in times of life crisis, such as illness, misfortune or death.⁵ However, Freemasonry distinguished itself from friendly societies in terms of what it promised its members. Whereas the latter collected actuarially calculated subscriptions to provide *insurance* for specific risks such as illness, unemployment and death, Freemasonry provided open-ended charitable

assurance in the event of any of the exigencies of life, but only on the condition of the tested needs of the brother and his family. This decision to maintain charity by assessment rather than guarantee may have cost Freemasons some members, but it enabled the Order as a whole to avoid the costly medical tests and complex actuarial calculations which became essential to ensure the financial viability of friendly societies. The comparative costs and advantages of Masonic and friendly society membership will be discussed in more detail below.⁶

The origins of modern 'speculative' Freemasonry are now commonly seen as evolving from the lodges of operative stonemasons in the late seventeenth century.⁷ By the early eighteenth century a number of entirely speculative lodges had emerged in various parts of the country and moves were undertaken to bring them together under a London-based Grand Lodge around the beginning of the 1720s. Notwithstanding internal conflicts and a later split between two Grand Lodges—known as the Ancients and Moderns—the number of local lodges increased rapidly and by the end of the eighteenth century could be counted in their many hundreds in most parts of England and Wales. Those in Ireland were similarly organised under the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1725 and those in Scotland, under the Grand Lodge of that name, in 1736. Freemasonry spread to a number of European nations from the 1730s and they, in their turn, warranted many other lodges. The rift in English Freemasonry was healed by the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in December 1813 and the number of lodges warranted, both at home and in colonial possessions and other countries overseas, increased at an accelerating rate to around three thousand by the end of nineteenth century.

This institutional history of Freemasonry has been discussed at some length elsewhere,⁸ however, and will not be considered in any detail here. Instead the focus will be on the much less researched issue of the activities of members in lodges and of Freemasonry as a whole in society. It will address four main questions: Who were the men that became Freemasons? What were their motivations in seeking membership? What did Masonic membership do for its members? What did Freemasonry do for the communities in which they lived? Those questions are posed not simply for the United Kingdom but for many other lodges and communities globally. If they are to be considered in some detail, however, there must be significant constraints on the selection of the communities to be studied. It is clearly not feasible to attempt the enquiry for millions of Masons, spread over seven continents, for more than half a century. To find preliminary answers, this investigation has focused on the functioning of one small but containable number of occupationally specialised communities, principally in Britain, but also the United States, Australia and South Africa,

during the second half of the nineteenth century. They are the maritime and metal mining communities of West Cornwall and their counterparts in ports and mining districts overseas.

The study area was further refined by taking account only of those lodges operating with warrants from the United Grand Lodge of England and their daughter Grand Lodges overseas. This encompasses all of the lodges operating in Cornwall, but does not include those warranted by the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland that were also common in many overseas mining areas.⁹ Every Masonic lodge under the United Grand Lodge of England (hereafter the UGLE), across England and Wales and throughout the Empire, made an annual return of their membership, giving the names and addresses as well as age and occupation on initiation or joining. A complete set of these returns is held in the Library and Museum of the UGLE in London and, in principle, it is possible to identify every man who became a Mason under this constitution since the early eighteenth century.

The choice of this particular study group resulted from previous work which had suggested that Cornish metal miners, managers and investors appeared to have enjoyed efficient informal networking opportunities, locally and internationally, that seemed to have produced positive returns for business and job finding.¹⁰ Similar opportunities also appeared to be available to mariners and those involved in the maritime trades. Of course, other fraternities and societies—of which there were many in Cornwall and elsewhere—might have played a similar role, but familiarity with mining and maritime communities suggested that Freemasonry may have had particular significance. Mining and coastal towns everywhere had seen the construction of Masonic halls and they were commonly among the largest and most impressive buildings erected by the communities. Size and quality matter as a physical expression of strength and influence, and only the church appeared as a rival of equal status. Similarly, the graves of the ‘great and the good’ of communities everywhere commonly and boldly claimed a Masonic identity as one of the few and most treasured pieces of iconography on headstones.

The study starts, in Chapter 2, with a broad outline of the economic development of Cornwall during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It considers the long-term profile of the development of Freemasonry in the county, particularly during the years of rapid expansion from the 1840s to the end of the century. It looks at both the basic ‘craft’ lodges (in America, ‘blue’ lodges) to which all Masons must belong and goes on to explore the growth of various internal ‘side’ orders and the role of the Cornish Provincial Grand Lodge, which co-ordinated local matters. It then goes on to explore the demographic structure of those lodges.

Chapter 3 begins a detailed exploration of the demographic structure of the lodges' membership. Using data on age, occupation and residence from lodge returns, it investigates the social structure of lodges and the interrelationships of their membership. This section concludes that men from a very wide range of occupational and social classes were attracted to the lodges, and that many appear to have joined for the specific purpose of protecting or improving their economic circumstances, both at home and abroad. Limited comparisons with lodges in other parts of England suggested that the experience of the Cornish lodges was not unusual and was broadly similar to that in many other parts of the country.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider the numerous offerings of Freemasonry and why men became and remained members. These motivations were no doubt intimately connected in different combinations for different men but it has been convenient here to classify them under separate headings and divide them into two broad groups. Chapter 4 looks at those aspects of Freemasonry that both improved the quality of life of its members as well as providing reassurance in times of adversity. Thus, membership was perceived to improve reputation and respectability; to widen the range of influential friendships within the community; to provide morally improving entertainment and education through the learning and practice of ritual; and, for the many men enthused by the contemporary nostalgia for a mystic past, an offer to reveal the 'lost secrets' of ancient societies. Similarly, when life had its pitfalls, Masonic assistance—from other brethren, lodge funds, regional and national charities—provided an invaluable safety net. In dealing with these latter issues, lengthy consideration is given not just to Masonic benevolence but to how it compared with the offerings made by some of the major friendly societies. Chapter 5 continues the study of the 'usefulness' of Masonic membership by looking in detail at how it advantaged those engaged in particularly vulnerable mobile and hazardous occupations. Here, a discussion of miners is joined by an in-depth look at the advantages of Masonic membership for mariners, many of whom have also been identified in Cornish lodges. Like miners, mariners worked in close-knit, all-male groups, in a dangerous occupation and they enjoyed strong communal bonds. These chapters conclude that for large numbers of men Freemasonry was seen to provide significant protection against the consequences of misadventure during travel, and important opportunities for reliable information and job finding at the point of arrival.

Having established a significant role for Freemasonry in facilitating labour mobility, Chapters 6 and 7 investigate what migrant Masons might encounter when they visited or joined overseas lodges. Chapter 6 uses the same method

that was used for investigating the structure of lodges in Cornwall to explore the composition of lodges in mining communities in California, Nevada and Montana in the USA. It finds high levels of socio-economic similarity and highly advantageous networking opportunities. Chapter 7 makes further investigation and comparisons with mining lodges in Australia and South Africa, and arrives at similar conclusions. Everywhere Masonic membership had much to offer itinerant miners and any other migrant who wished to become part of a mining community.

Discussion to this point is concerned primarily with what Masonic membership could offer to the individual. Chapter 8 moves on to consider what Freemasons and Freemasonry offered to the wider communities that hosted them. Examples are given of major Masonic acts of charity; their civic engagement and assistance in the creation of social capital; their effect on social cohesion; the general benefit to society of the moral improvement of their members; and increased economic efficiency resulting from improved information flows and stronger trust relationships in business. The latter issues are particularly difficult to assess and must be offset by the increased opportunities for conspiracy, narrow sectional advantage, exploitation and other forms of rent-seeking behaviour. These have been much discussed in anti-Masonic literature, however, and have not been explored in any depth here.

Chapter 9 concludes with an overview of the role of Freemasonry in helping to shape the lives of miners, mariners and other involved mobile occupations. It then moves on to take a broader view of fraternities, friendly and benevolent societies as a whole in facilitating the process of industrialisation and globalisation from the late eighteenth century. The rise and fall of mutuality almost exactly paralleled the trajectory of western industrialisation and its interconnections call for much closer study than has so far been appreciated. What directions might most profitably be studied in the future?

CORNWALL AND CORNISH FREEMASONRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Background

Cornwall is a peninsular arranged on a roughly east-west axis protruding into the Atlantic. Even its eastern border is mainly a watery one, delineated by the Tamar River and its steep valley. Until the mid-nineteenth century the county was effectively an island, with communications to the rest of the country faster and more efficient by sea than by land. It developed an identity and culture to match, as much outward-looking to other parts of the world as to the rest of the nation. Some saw it as a kind of ‘West Barbary’.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the county divided economically roughly into two halves, separating around Truro. The eastern district was principally agricultural and unchanging until the development of some mining activity near St Austell and in the Tamar Valley from the early nineteenth century. The western district was very different, being focused on commercial mining and shipping activities from an early period, and probably becoming the nation’s most fully industrialised area by the end of the eighteenth century. With tin-mining traditions stretching back more than two thousand years and a great boost from copper mining starting from around 1710, it had produced a population far beyond the supporting capacity of local agriculture and one which was mainly wage-dependent—‘proletarianised’—by the end of the eighteenth century. Those not directly employed in mining were heavily involved in servicing the mines and their owners, investors, managers and workers. Local industries smelted and refined most of the tin and lead produced: they supplied mining machinery and materials, from explosives to ore crushers, and they were among the world leaders in the development of, and application of, steam engineering.

The only exception to this internal focus was the significance of the maritime trades. Ports all around the coast supported important fishing activities and the coasting trade. A few, such as Falmouth and Penzance, acted as strategic first

and/or last points of call, and also delivered repair and provisioning for shipping involved in the long-distance deep-water trades to the Americas, Far East and Mediterranean. With none of the western industrial areas more than ten miles from the sea—and many far less—the two economies became closely intertwined, with a particularly close symbiotic relationship developing through the exchange of Cornish copper for South Wales coal during the mid-nineteenth century. Everywhere the mining and maritime economies interwove with each other, from the mining communities' periodic involvement in fishing as an essential supplement to diet, to its adoption of maritime terminologies in the day-to-day conduct of its affairs: investors known as 'adventurers', mine managers as 'captains', financial officers as 'pursers', the depths of shafts measured in fathoms.

As British industrialisation progressed, so too did the demand for Cornish minerals and by c.1850 the mining industry stood at a near all-time peak. There were at least 150 deep mines at work in the county, probably employing around 40,000 men, women and children. The numbers dependent on the industry—from supplying industries, professional services, food production, retail, transport, etc.—was at least twice that size. However, storm clouds were already beginning to gather. Lead and silver output was already in sustained decline with the exhaustion of some of the previously most productive deposits, and copper—the most important staple—was seeing increasing competition from cheap imported foreign ores. Imports of copper ore, principally from Chile but increasingly from Cuba and Australia, had started in the 1830s and grown rapidly by the mid-century to more than half as much as domestic production. Similar problems were also developing for tin, with rising imports from the East Indies.

For the moment all seemed fair and the industry remained buoyant until the end of the decade, but then things began to deteriorate rapidly in the face of what had now become a rising torrent of imports. Cornwall looked to the Government for protection but the growing influence of metal manufacturers and the steadfast pursuit of free trade policies put this beyond reach. Between the late 1850s and 1890 imports of copper ore and part wrought metal—particularly the latter—increased almost three times and copper prices, not yet buoyed by the demands of the forthcoming electrical age, fell by half. Between 1860 and 1870 copper production in the county shrank to just a third of its previous level and by the late 1880s it had stopped almost entirely.¹ Lead mining, a much smaller sector, held on into the late 1870s but then also fell sharply in the face of increasing foreign competition. Only tin managed to hold up. Imports also rose sharply, but so too did demand from the rapidly expanding tinplate industry and prices were little different in the 1880s than they had been in the 1850s. However, working costs were steadily rising with the increasing depth of

Table 1 Copper, Tin, Lead and Iron Miners Employed in Cornwall, 1851–1901

Date	Total Number of Miners
1851	30,454
1861	31,847
1871	21,282
1881	13,005
1891	9,986
1901	7,366

Source: Census data

operations and the number of mines in production gradually dwindled. By the end of the 1890s there were less than thirty tin mines operating in the county and less than ten were operating on any significant scale.

With this sharp contraction of the industry in little more than thirty years, employment fell dramatically (see Table 1). The mining contraction and job losses were spread across all of the mining areas within the county but were, of course, most serious in the western district. They also impacted badly on the support and ancillary industries as well as the urban infrastructure. Hayle took a particularly heavy blow with the closure of large and long-established copper-smelting and engineering works. In all coastal towns, the maritime trades suffered badly from the contraction of mining activity, with a decline in associated import and export activity. They also felt the detrimental effects of a shift from the coasting trades to internal rail transport as well as the increasing marginalisation of Cornwall as the first and/or last port of call in the long-distance trades, as shipping moved from sail to steam.

For those left without work there was little to do other than relocate. Local agriculture and china clay production, both of which increased significantly in their output, could soak up only a small part of the displaced labour, while the declining traditional industries of neighbouring Devonshire, such as woollen cloth production, created few nearby opportunities. The entire south-western region that had once led the nation into industrialisation was now leading it into de-industrialisation. Movement would have to be long-distance and long-term—either within Britain, to the rapidly expanding industrial areas of the North, Midlands, South Wales and London, or overseas.

This was not a new challenge for the Cornish. Miners work a finite resource and depletion of known deposits requires a constant search for new ones. Men, women and older children, working both underground and on the surface,

were constantly on the move and limits to how far they could travel in a day to-and-from work meant that population centres were constantly moving and changing. It has been suggested that one of the reasons for the rapid expansion of Methodism and other dissenting sects in the county was that the Church of England had failed to keep up with these movements, stuck to its old parish structures and left many 'new' communities unprovided with spiritual care.

These long-established patterns were supercharged from the early nineteenth century. The mining industry was revolutionised by a new generation of mining entrepreneurs, using capital mainly derived in London, to break out of regionally confined activities to establish national and international operations. John Taylor, for example, took Cornish miners and mine captains to his lead and copper mines in Wales and the Midlands, and by the 1820s was employing large numbers in his Mexican operations.² Around the same time, many other British investors took advantage of the collapse of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule in South America to reinvigorate mining in Mexico, Chile and Brazil, again staffing them largely with Cornish mining and managerial expertise.³ In the 1840s and 1850s the Cornish joined in the rush of people from all nations to the newly discovered gold fields of California and Australia.⁴ Long before domestic events began to oblige the Cornish to migrate, a tradition of continuous short- and long-term movement was heavily ingrained in the culture.⁵

However, what had been a steady trickle turned into a flood after the 1850s. Emigration to existing destinations continued to increase and attractive new destinations were found in Southern Africa and India.⁶ Cornwall saw outward migration—domestic and international—on a scale unparalleled in any other part of England and Wales. While the rest of the country experienced steady population growth—nearly doubling between 1851 and 1900—the numbers in Cornwall declined by around 10%. It is possible that around 200,000 men, women and children left the county during those years, with the great majority being young males (see Table 2). Most of those that left were probably young males, twenty to thirty-nine years of age. The outflow of this group slowed down during the last years of the century but it left its impact in the form of a falling birth rate and rapidly rising average age of the population. The average age of males over twenty years within the population of the county increased by ten years over the period 1851 to 1911, from just over forty-nine to fifty-nine.

The only other part of the British Isles to see a similar, but much larger, decline in numbers was Ireland. Here outward migration reduced the population by half between the mid-1840s and the end of the century. In both cases the causes were similar in terms of the collapse of a regional resource base, but the consequences for their populations was much different. While the Irish fell into

Table 2 The Population of Cornwall, 1851–1911

Date	Cornwall Males	Cornwall Females	Cornwall Total	Eng. & Wales Total
1851	172,193	184,448	356,641	17.9m
1861	174,148	190,700	364,848	20.1m
1871	167,839	190,517	358,356	22.7m
1881	153,015	173,360	326,375	26.0m
1891	147,460	171,123	318,583	29.0m
1901	149,937	172,397	322,334	32.5m

Source: Census data

abject poverty and were forced to flee by conditions at home and to endure penury abroad, the Cornish exodus took more of a form that would be described today as economic migration. The same foreign mines that were producing the flood of cheap imports that undermined their domestic industry also created an insatiable demand for their skills and experience abroad. Opportunities for high earnings appeared as the result of a succession of discoveries of major new mining fields in Australia and the Americas, Africa and the Far East. Similarly, at home, the expansion of coal and metal mines in other parts of the country offered new opportunities.⁷ This meant that for many, if not most, of the Cornish miners thrown out of work, leaving the county became not so much an issue of permanent emigration as periodic short-term migration or even ‘commuting’ to a constantly changing range of employers. With such wide exposure to an international job market it is not surprising that the remaining mine owners often complained about shortages of labour in Cornwall and an inability to reduce wages as part of cost-cutting measures. Overall, notwithstanding its very significant problems, Cornwall remained fairly buoyant during the difficult years at the end of the century, as attested by the vibrant intellectual communities of the major towns with their Royal Institution, Royal Polytechnic Society and Royal Geological Society, as well as the building of an entirely new cathedral in Truro in the 1880s.

With such insecurity and uncertainty, but still some cash surplus beyond daily needs, the emerging fraternal and benevolent societies of the late eighteenth century offered an attractive means of providing some future security and maybe movement and job-finding assistance. State welfare provision was parsimonious and degrading, commercial insurance developing only slowly and mutuality offered the only immediate and effective solution. Those in the most hazardous and threatened occupations were most likely to join but all could benefit, either

Table 3 Mutual Society Participation Levels in Two Mining Communities in the Late 1880s

Camborne		Redruth	
Oddfellows	275	Oddfellows	316
Foresters	106	Foresters	244
Rechabites	54	Rechabites	240
Freemasons	56	Freemasons	83
Total	491	Total	883
All Males 20+	3201		2300
Participation Rate	1 in 6.5		1 in 2.6

economically or socially. Thus, tradesmen, those involved in retail and hospitality, merchants and even professionals, providing legal, financial and medical services, could all see benefits. The balance of motivations no doubt differed between them but the overall outcome was the same.

Across Cornwall, large and small towns began to see the establishment of 'lodges' of one description or another, often in multiple numbers (see Illustration 1). Looking more closely at particular communities, Table 3 shows the major societies and orders operating in the central mining towns of Camborne and Redruth in the last two decades of the century, with an indication of the number of their members in the late 1880s. Although the figures should be taken only as approximations⁸—differing slightly between years and including some other variables—they do suggest a very high participation rate among all adult males and that a very general search for increased security and support in facing the vicissitudes of life was high on the agenda of all of those families that could afford it.

The general role and distribution of mutual societies across Cornwall will be returned to below, in Chapter 4, but this discussion will focus attention on the particular contribution of Freemasonry. Although one of the smallest of the orders it was arguably the most influential in urban communities and many saw it as the keystone of the whole structure of mutuality. It was the earliest, most exclusive, and probably the most inspirational for the structure and organisation of other societies and orders. It was also not invisible or insignificant in numbers, since at least one in ten of those fraternal members in Redruth, for example, was a Mason.

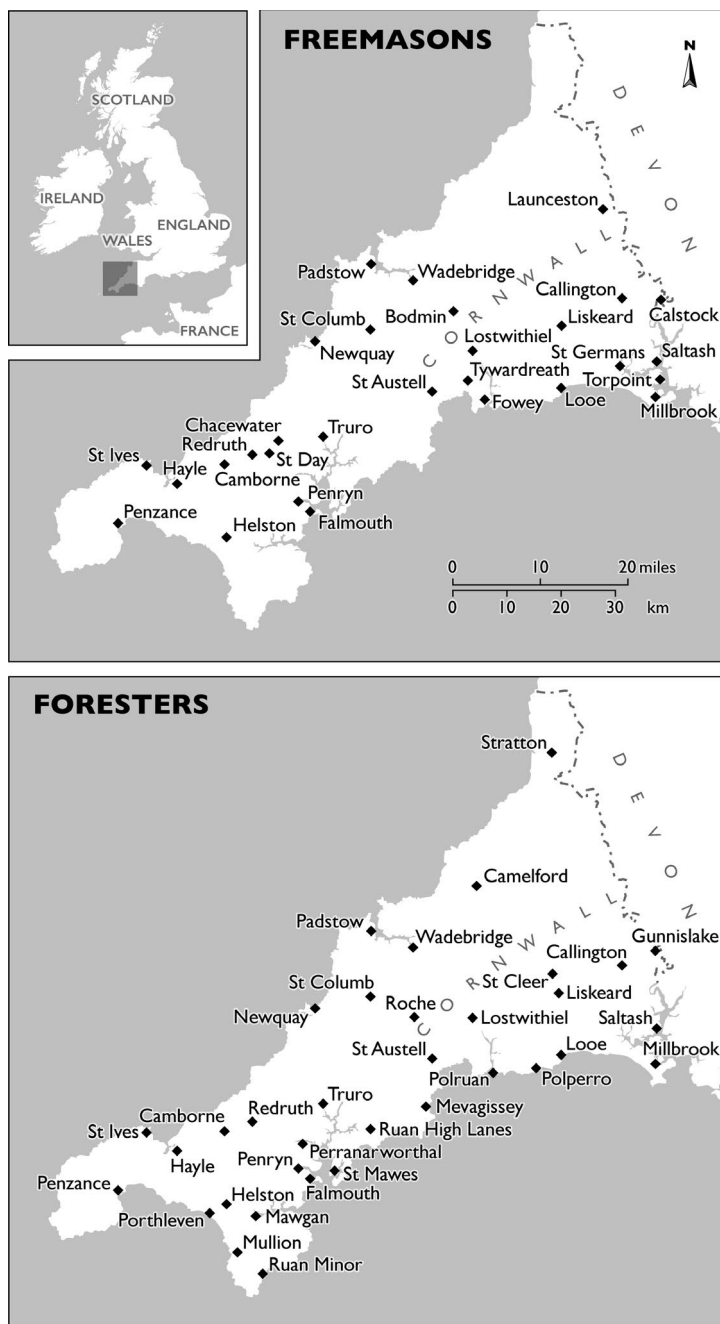


Illustration 1 Maps Showing the Distribution of
Fraternal Organisations in Cornwall, c. 1890

The Freemasons, Oddfellows (Manchester Unity), the Foresters and the Rechabites were the only major societies operating in Cornwall during the nineteenth century. Several had many