

The Masonic Hall 42 Castle Street, Farnham.



A Brief History.



"The doors we open and close each day decide the lives we choose to live".

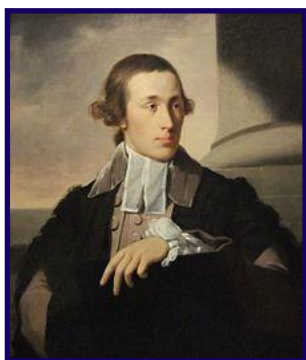
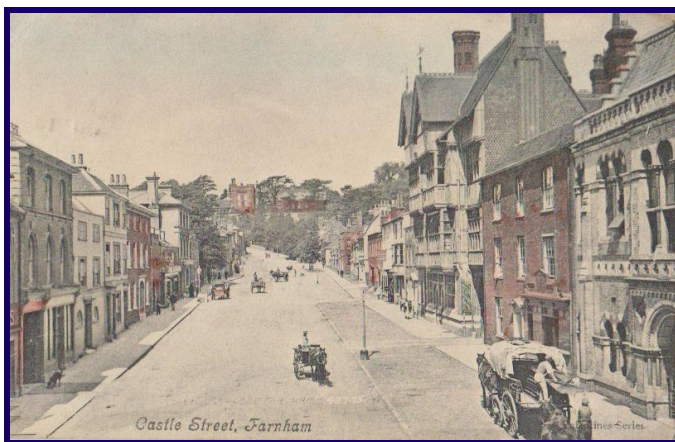
The original structure of 42 Castle St. was an outbuilding or barn belonging to Farnham Castle, seat of the Bishops of Winchester. It was built before the English Civil War (1642 - 1648). The Castle twice changed hands and eventually became the headquarters of the Parliamentary Army of the West; the building was then used as extra barrack accommodation for the Roundhead troops.

It continued its use as a barn or coach house for the Castle until acquired from the Church by a William or Thomas Baker of Castle Hill, who rebuilt it as a 'Musick House' in 1753 in which he installed a large organ. In 1800 Mrs. Hall, a residuary legatee of Mr. Baker presented the Parish Church with a handsome full toned organ, which was erected in the west gallery near the tower. It was later removed to the Chancel Chapel off the aisle. This may well have been the same organ.



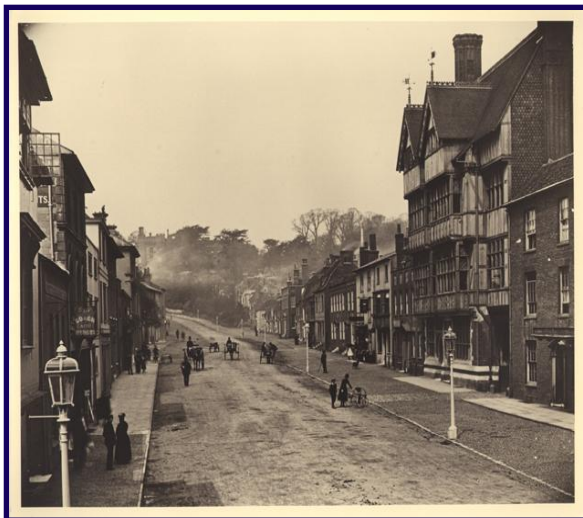
The external appearance of the building has changed little since 1753 and remains as it would have looked to the young William Cobbett as he

passed on his way to work as gardener's boy at the Castle in the 1770's. At the northern end is a fine arch, now bricked up, whose original doors now form the entrance to the Dining or 'S.R.Carter' Room so named after a much loved mason who did much to improve the premises.



In 1813 the building was bought by Bishop Brownlow North for use as a National or Church of England School under the National School Society and subscriptions were raised to fund the conversion and start the school. From 1820 it was certainly known as 'The School' and by 1829 it had 124 boys and 144 girls. However plans for a new school were started in 1833 and by

1860 a new National School had been built next to St. Andrew's Church.



In 1864, an Art and Industrial Exhibition were held in the school rooms and amongst the exhibits was a bible on which Queen Victoria took her

coronation oath. In 1877 a charity was formed and the building became known as 'The Working Men's or Castle Street Institute'. The hall was also used for Church meetings.





In 1909 the trustees offered the property for sale. It was put up for sale by auction by a Mr. J. Alfred Egger at his sale room, 74 Castle Street, on Friday, May 28th, 1909. It was recommended as being eminently suitable for a Museum and Library, Furniture Store or a **MOTOR GARAGE!** Mr. A. J. Nash, the auctioneer, bought No.42 for £350 and the proceeds were donated to the new Church House building fund. About this time Surrey County Council had become interested: cookery classes for girls were held and boys took carpentry lessons from the late Harry Sanders, who for many years was both an urban and county councillor. Several former pupils recall those days: one, in particular, remembers that the building was in a very ramshackle condition with gaping cracks between the floor boards which some

boys tried to enlarge with their chisels in order to pour sawdust into the concoctions being prepared by the girls below.

In 1944 Councillor C. E. Borelli negotiated to purchase the institute but the deal was not completed. He would have offered it to the town as a museum for "assembling and preserving those irreplaceable possessions which mark the history and prehistory of this ancient town". The priceless gifts included the collection made by Mr. William Stroud, 40 years master at Farnham Grammar School, for the former Young Men's Institute museum in South Street.



Local Masonic lodges had for some time been seeking a permanent home and in 1946 a private company was formed to buy the Institute from Mr. Grahame Nash. It became the Freemasons' hall in 1951. The first lodges to meet there were St Andrews Lodge which

was termed the "Mother Lodge of Farnham" (1864), Waverley lodge (1925) and Castle Lodge (1948). As Freemasonry developed in Farnham these lodges were

followed by the Old Farnhamians lodge (1953), William Cobbett Lodge (1963), Fearnhamme Lodge (1985), Azor Lodge (1987) and Hale Lodge (1988). Border Lodge, administered by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Hampshire also shares the premises.

A lot of redecoration has taken place over the years since 1951, a great deal by members of the various local lodges. An organisation of the local lodges going under the ugly acronym of CLAWCO (the letters stood for the names of the lodges and the Ladies Club) supported the Hall in its early day as a home to Freemasonry. CLAWCO must be given a lot of the credit for the present good condition of the Hall. The organisation ran various social occasions such as dances, and on one evening a Race Night.

In 1993 subsidence caused the building to twist and begin to collapse. A large sum of money was required to restore and make the building safe. Fortunately, a large proportion of the expenditure was covered by insurance.

The hall is also made available for meetings of the Ladies Club and the Castle Street Residents Association.

This building is now home to Ten Masonic Craft Lodges and various other orders including Mark Master Masons, Royal Ark Mariners, Holy Royal

Arch, Knights Templar, and our two newest groups, Farnham Council - Allied Masonic Degree and the West Surrey Installed Masters Lodge which was consecrated on May 19th 2015.



If you would like to know more about Freemasonry in general or especially in Farnham then please feel free to enquire in the first instance to the person who gave out this leaflet or email us at;

openday@farnhammasoniccentre.co.uk

With acknowledgement and gratitude for the use and information gained from the following sources; The Museum Lecture notes of the late J.S Mitchell.

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