

## A WINDOW INTO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OR THE LODGE GOING HABITS OF JAMES WOODFORDE (1740 - 1803).

Presented by VWBro. the Rev. V.G.C. Jones, G.Lec., PM,  
on 1 November 1999.

Some folk like to go to the seaside for a holiday; others (as said one historian) go to the eighteenth century. I can understand this, as I enjoy reading of this era. For twenty years I have been a member of the "Parson Woodforde Society". He was a very ordinary man - a parson, who kept a diary. This diary is what makes him special. He began it in 1759, as an undergraduate at Oxford and kept it up till near the end of his life. He was born on June 16th., 1740 and died on New Year's Day 1803 in his parish of Weston Longville, Norfolk. Raised by his parson father at Castle Cary in Somerset, he went to Winchester School, then to Oxford where he began his diary. Though in the first year the entries were sometimes " ... *had another bottle of my wine..* ", he quickly progressed to write down most things he did, plainly and in a matter-of-fact way (certainly not for publication) and their value lies in exactly this. They ARE so ordinary, that we can be transported right into the 18th. century, with even the weather noted down for us.

For our purposes, the period that interests us lies from 1774 till early 1776, when Woodforde was a member of the Alfred Lodge in Oxford (named after King Alfred, the reputed founder of the University). He was by then an M.A. and a Fellow of New College (so called because it was "new" in the 14th. Century!) and a University Proctor, ie. an Officer whose job it was to uphold discipline. Let us now enter his diary and hear what happened on the day he joined the lodge.

NB: in the text, chequer refers to the College Lounge-bar. The university colleges of Brazenose, Pembroke, Exeter, Oriol, and University College are mentioned. The year is 1774.

*April 21* - I breakfasted, and slept again at New-College. For a new Pr. of Gloves the other Day 0:2:0. I went with Holmes today to the FreeMasons Lodge held this day at the New Inn, was there admitted a Member of the same and dined & spent the afternoon with them. The Form & Ceremony on the Occasion I must beg leave to omit putting down. Paid on Admission for Fees &c. 3:5:0. It is a very honourable as well as charitable Institution & much more than I could conceive it was. Am very glad in being a Member of it. I supped & spent the Evening in the Chequer. Mr. Stinton, one of our Lodge supped &c. with Holmes in the Chequer - he is a very worthy Man. At 11 this Night was called out of the Chequer by Webber, to go with him & quell a Riot in George Lane, but when we came it was quiet - however we went to the Swan in George Lane, and unfortunately met with a Gownsmen above the Stairs carousing with some low-life People - We conducted him to his College - He belongs to University College, is a Scholar there, & his Name is Hawkins, he was terribly frightened & cried almost all the Way to his Coll: & was upon his knees very often in the Street, and bareheaded all the way. He is to appear again to Morrow before Webber. We returned to New-College by 12. o'clock. Mem: Our Lodge is called Alfred Lodge. Mr. Napleton of Braze Nose, Mr. Wood of ditto, Mr. Willett, Mr. Francis of Braze Nose, Dr. Wall, Mr. Rouse of Pembroke, Mr. Holmes, Senior [*illeg*] Mr. Collins the Lecturer, Mr. Rennison who was admitted with me, Mr. Huddesford, Mr. Stinton of Exeter & Mr. Ballanchi &c. dined at the Lodge, as did Will Walond the Organist.

Robert Holmes, a Fellow of New College and later, after Woodforde's death, Dean of Winchester, had first met the diarist in the previous year. According to Woodforde's own entries they were frequently in one another's company and had obviously struck up some form of affinity. Although there is no direct diary evidence, the matter of Woodforde's possible membership of the lodge had first been mooted early in 1774 and was therefore most likely connected with his election to the office of Sub-Warden of his college in December 1773.

Whether or not this is so, the Alfred Lodge minute book reveals that a proposal for Woodforde's membership had been made in January 1774. It is noted that the proposal, made by the then W J W (*Worshipful Junior*

*Warden*), was to be referred to a ballot to be held on the occasion of the next lodge night. This took place on 10 February and, after the voting, the lodge resolved that Woodforde be admitted (April 21st). A fortnight later, on May 5th., Woodforde was passed to the 2nd. degree.

*May 5-* I breakfasted, and slept again at New-college. Cooke Senr. breakfasted with me this morning. I went the Home Progress this morning at 10. None of our Fellows attended me being wet. I had most of the College Servants with me. For a Pr. of Gloves at Treadwells 0:2:0. Sent a Letter this morning to my Sister Jane. I dined & spent the afternoon at the New-Inn at our Lodge there - I was promoted higher - Mr. Cox was admitted a Free-Mason to our Lodge. For some Fees at my Promotion 1:1:0. Mr. Napleton, Mr. Wood, Mr. Maud, Mr. Stinton, Mr. Lucas, Mr. Cooke, Dr. Wall, Sir George Beaumont, Mr. Trenchard, Mr. Cox, Mr. Huddesford, Mr. Holmes, Mr. Francis, Mr. Rouse, Signor Lates (*the Italian master*), Mr. Ballanchi, present. Will. Walond the Organist also present. At 7. o'clock in the evening we broke up. From the Lodge I went with Holmes to the Catch Club at the Mitre, where we supped & spent the evening & were highly delighted with their Catches. We went there as Friends to Mr. Walker our Chaplain. There were present Mr. Orthman the Steward, Dr. Hayes, Mr. Huddesford, Mr. Walker, Mr. Walond, Mr. Morgan, Mr. Piddington, Mr. Jeanes of our Coll: &c. &c. For my Supper and other things paid there 0:1:6. We broke up about 11. o'clock.

Note that they worked both a 1st. and a 2nd. degree. Woodforde was there from early afternoon till 11 pm. A month later he was raised, going on 9th. June to a lunch meeting to his lodge, which met at the New Inn. Then on June 14th he bought his MM apron before being raised on June 16.

*June 9-* I breakfasted, supped & slept again at New-College. I took a Walk this morning up the Hill being heavy & dull. Going over the temporary Bridge 0:0:1. I dined at our Lodge to day at the New Inn. Paid my Quarterly Subscription to the same 0:13:0. For a Liceat for Generals to day received 0:0:6. Took a Walk this evening with Brother Wood & Brother Stinton round Christchurch Walk. Had a Letter this Evening from my Sister Pouncett.

June. 14 - I breakfasted, dined, supped & slept again at College. Had a very good new Harpsichord brought to my Room this morning, which I hired of Brother Walond. Mem: Quite a new Harpsichord made by Messieurs Kirkman in London & made this Year 1774. Gave two Men that brought it to my Room 0:1:0. For a Masons apron of Miss Nicholls, white Leather, lined with white silk S. silver Tassills paid her 0.13:0. For Wine this afternoon in MCR [*Masters' Common Room*] 0:0:6. For granting a Liceat for Generals received 0:0:6. Poor Piddington our Chaplain departed this Life this morn' and I hope for a much better one. Pray God grant it. He had been ill a long Time, an uncommon complaint, a swelling of the Heart, which would beat some Times so great as to throw a Mans hand off[f] from the Part. I went to Chapel again this evening and after Prayers went down into our bowling Green & stayed at Bowls with Oakely & Jeffries against Bathurst & myself - we lost every Game we played. I lost in the whole 1:0:0. For Porter this Evening in the Chequer 0:0:6. Gave my Taylors Boy this Horning 0:0:6.

*June 16-* We had a Lodge held at the New Inn this morning at 9. o'clock, where the Members breakfasted together. Brother Cox and myself were made Master Masons. Five more were admitted apprentices & rose to Crafts. For being rose I paid 1:1:0. For a Medal for the said Degree of Master 0:10:6. Brother Rawbone was made a Member of our Lodge. I lent Rawbone to pay part of his Fees 1:1:0. A Master was balloted & chose for the ensuing Year & the Person was Napleton the present Master. We did not adjourn till near two o'clock. I dined, supped & slept again at College. For Wine to Day 0:1:6. For a Liceat for Generals to day received 0:0:6.

I went to Chapel again this evening at 5. o'clock. I shewed the College to some Company who were with Mr. Bowerbank of Queens Coll: this evening after Prayers.

Note the marathon meeting on June 16th. Lodge Alfred voted on the next Master of the lodge, admitted five EA's., who were then passed to FC's., and as if that were not enough, raised two brethren! At the next meeting (a mandatory one, on St. John's Day - June 24th), the officers were nominated.

*June 24* - I breakfasted, supped & slept again at New-College. Master Sen'r breakfasted with me this morning. For a Liceat for Austins this morning received 0:10:0. For 6 Sonatas of Phil!. Hayes's to Mr. Rawbone 0:10:6. Went to our Lodge at one o'clock being St. Johns Day at the New Inn, this Day being our grand Festival. We had 27. ... Mr. Napleton chaired as Master, and he nominated Dr. Wall Sen'r Warden, & Brother Velley Junior W. Mr. Stinton Chaplain & Mr. Maud Secretary & Mr. Francis Treasurer. [On blotting-paper opposite:] We had a very elegant Dinner & did not break up till eight o'clock-Six Brethren rose to Master Masons.

John Napleton, later to become a Canon of Hereford and a leading reformer of the university system Woodforde so much enjoyed, was made R W M - "chaired" as Woodforde put it. Dr. Wall (Martin Wall - the future Professor of Clinical Medicine) became W S W, and Thomas Velley of St. John's the W J W. To round off the occasion six of the members were raised to the degree of Master Mason. Woodforde was no longer the "new boy".

For the next few meetings, the Lodge went on steadily ..

"... We joined for a Lobster for Supper, & it being a very fine one we gave for it 2 Shillings - N.B.

We had him broiled for Supper with some Butter & very good it was. ..."

and on Aug.29th., Woodforde goes to see a new Organ at the Lodge-room " . It is a very handsome good Organ & very loud. ... ".

As Woodforde was away on holiday for most of September and October, no Lodge meetings were recorded by him then, but he did write that he went to Lodge at New-Inn in the afternoon of 10th and later went on to a music recital "to Mr. Munro's benefit". A Lecture on Masonry was given on November 24th., by Brother Wood.

At this meeting he was introduced to a Mr. Hooke. As a Fellow he had come to New College to solicit support to be elected to a "living" (a parish). But, as Woodforde records in his diary for that date ..

"... He is not well pleased in the gentlemen's objecting to his being a Candidate for Ridley's Living."

The Fellow, Hooke, was interested in the Norfolk Living (parish) of Weston Longville, vacant since the death of its incumbent, Dr. Gloster Ridley, BCL, DD, in early November. Woodforde also was interested in this Living and on December 15th. 1774, an election took place between him and Hooke for "presentation to the living" - worth £300 a year. The Fellows of New College, in whose "gift" the Living was, voted for Woodforde over Hooke by 21 votes to 15. Woodforde took up the position in June 1776, remaining there for the remainder of his life.

Meanwhile, Diary entries for 1775, take place. We can try to discern just how Woodforde is doing as a mason and his lodge is functioning as a lodge:-

*February 23-* Kempson & Suzzerof [*a Russian*] made Apprentices & Fellow Crafts. From the Lodge went with Brother Stinton to Exeter Coll: where I supped & spent the evening in the Com: Room. Several odd Members in Exeter Com: Room at Whist and Chess - They scarce spoke to me.

*March 9-* ... at the New Inn being our Lodge Meeting to day - 28 Members present - Wight with four more admitted Apprentices & Crafts ....

The following entry is quoted for Local Colour (life in the 18th. century) :-

*March 13-* I breakfasted, dined, supped & slept again at Coll: Cooke breakfasted with me this morning. At half past eleven this morning went with Cooke to see George Strap hanged - who was hung about a Qr. before one o'clock near the Castle. He confessed (just as he came out of the Castle) the Crime for which he suffered, but not before. He pulled up his Cap two or three Times to delay. A Methodist prayed by him in the Cart for some Time under the Gallows - He seemed full hardy. It is said, that he declared Yesterday, if he had only his Liberty for one Qr. of an Hour, he would employ it in murdering of his Wife. I think I never saw such Sullenness & Villainy in one Face. Jack Ketch [*the name given to every hangman*] kissed him twice before he went off[f]. His Body was carried to Dr. Parsons's to be dissected, and anatomized pursuant to the Sentence. I do believe that there were

more than six Thousand Spectators present when he was hanged. I took to two Gentlemen there for wearing different Capes to their Coats, than the Coats were of. ...

In the period up to the end of the Lent term, 8 April 1775 - and just before Woodforde set off upon his first visit to Norwich and Weston Longville - he had attended five more lodge meetings, missing only that held on 6 April, when he was busy entertaining visitors from Somerset. Apart from his usual listing of names Woodforde reveals that one new member was a Russian he calls "Suzzerof" and "Sufferof", whose name was rather more accurately rendered as "Suverov" by the Oxford register when the University granted him the degree of M.A. by diploma on 2 June of that year. He was one of twelve Russians sent to study at Oxford by Princess Catherina Dashkova, a friend of the Empress Catherine II. Woodforde also recorded a slight change in the masonic regalia favoured by the lodge, when the blue "ribbands", from which hung suspended the medals worn by the Master Masons, were changed to white. Yet another entry reveals the surprising fact that Robert Holmes, so frequently in attendance at lodge meetings, and who had introduced Woodforde, was not himself a member! He was not, in fact to become one until long after Woodforde had left Oxford for good. He was, undoubtedly, a member of another lodge.

*March 16- ....* This was an extraordinary Lodge to Day and we all paid our Shares for our Dinner &c. - Myers, Calley, Suzzerof, Wight, and Knightley advanced to Masters.  
*March 23 - ...* I dined and spent the Aft: at our Lodge at the New Inn. ... We all changed our blue Ribbands to which our Medals hang, for white Ribbands - this the 1st. Time.

The next entry to look at refers to FINES, which were the rents charged by the College for occupiers of their properties - the THIRTEEN were the inner governing body of the College.

*June 29-* I breakfasted, dined, supped & slept again at Coll: There was a Meeting of the House this morning at 12 in the Hall, to look over the Fines for 1775 &c. - Master Sen'r was also presented by the Society to the Living of Pawlers-purie [*Pawlers Pury*] in Northamptonshire - Bathurst Sen'r was also presented to the Livings of both Witchinghams & Madder-Markett in Norwich. After the Meeting in Hall, there was a meeting of the thirteen in the Audit house to pass Qrs. Accounts. The Warden dined with us in Hall to day. Immediately after Dinner there was an extra-ordinary Lodge at New-Inn, at which Dr. Wall & self attended At 6. o'clock Dr. Wall & self attended a meeting of the thirteen in the Audit House again. Whilst Dr. Wall & self were at the Lodge, it was proposed in the Sen: Com: Room by Dawbeny & Jeffries, & carried by a great Majority, that Mr. Masters & Mr. Bathurst, should not treat this evening for their Livings as usual, but give five Guineas or so, to the Library, or for Plate. I cannot say but I was much displeased at it. It was proposed in the thirteen and carried by a great Majority that Mr. Green of London thoroughly repair our Organ in Chapel according to his Proposals. As neither of the gentlemen that were presented to College Livings - The Junior Com: Room treated with Arrac Punch this evening and sent their Compts (*compliments*) to the Senior People desiring their Company - but none but Cooke, Swanton & Thorpe went as reported. In the Night there was a great Riot in College by the Junior People - who broke down Dawbenys Doors, and broke Jeffries's Windows.

*October 19-* At 10 o'clock this morning came on the Election in the Convocation House for the presenting a Person to the Living of South Petherwin in Cornwall, vacant by the Death of the late Dr. Borlace, Vicar of the same, the Presentation belonging to this University. The Candidates were only two, Mr Sheffield of Worcester College & Mr. Barnard of Corpus Christi College. For Mr. Sheffield there were - 176 Votes. For Mr. Barnard there were - 225 Votes. Therefore the latter was declared duly elected. I voted for Mr. Sheffield as he wants it most. ... Gave Goodenough the under Secretary 0:2:6 for writing out a List of the Brethren on Vellum....

*November 16-* ... Very busy in the morning in preparing myself to preach a Latin Sermon before the University which I intend doing very soon.

*December 11- ....* An extraordinary Lodge to settle the Accounts held to Day at the New Inn at which I attended. The Principal Person, Mr. Modd the Treasurer, by whom the Lodge was desired to be called, did not attend, as he dined with the Head of Corpus....

This letting down of the lodge by the treasurer, by not turning up for the special meeting called at his request, illustrates the cavalier fashion by which some members treated their lodge. It was noted that lodge attendances were not usually great - 12 to 16 seems average. Often the meetings seem little more than social occasions. The brethren spent some six hours at the New Inn at Lodge - from Dinner, say 2 or 3pm., till 8 pm or so. The entry for January 25th., 1776 shows purchase of a black ribbon - a member must have died. I then give the entry for the following day, as an example of a dinner held at College, (this time Brasenose) with the prodigious catering at the time.

*January 26, 1776* - Very hard Frost - some Snow - ENE. By far the coldest Day yet. By the Thermometer 12 Degrees colder than Yesterday. Afternoon & Night - the same. bitter cold all the day. ENE. Between 8 and 9 this morning went to Braze-nose College to Napletons Rooms, went with him immediately to their Chapel to Prayers, sat next to the Principals Seat - After Prayers I went into their Bursary and breakfasted with Napleton, Clever, Radcliffe & a Stranger. We had Chocolate, Coffee and Tea for breakfast - Their Bursary is very handsome the room immediately over the Gate-way. Being the Sen'r Fellow in Coll: I went to Brase-Nose in a Visitatorial Capacity and did nothing at all, only received for my trouble as usual 0:0:8. Some of us go every Quarter on the same Account. Was invited also to Dinner there and I went at 3 and dined & spent the Afternoon in the same Room with Napleton who is Bursar, Clever, Radcliffe, Bower the Stranger mentioned above, Dr. Wall and Lucas of our College - We had a very elegant Dinner. First Course Cod & Oyster Saucer, Rost Beef, Tongue & boiled Chicken, Peas Soup & Roots - The second Course, a boiled Turkey by Mistake of the Manciple which should have been roasted, a brace of Partridges roasted, 4 Snipes & some Larkes roasted, also, an Orange Pudding, Syllabubs & Jellies. Madeira & Port Wines to drink & a dish of Fruit. Dr. Wall, myself and Lucas came away about 7. Great Quantity of very fine Plate made use of there. Coming from Braze-Nose this morning lost one of my gold Buttons out of the Sleeve of my Shirt....

The following entry shows the LAST time Woodforde attended a Lodge at Oxford or anywhere else. He Makes no comment other than, as usual, to record the bare facts.

NB: "dilapidations" refers to money needed to bring the parsonage at Weston Longville up to standard ready for his arrival in Norfolk.

*February 8* - Morn' stormy - W. Afternoon ditto. ... Sent a Letter to day to a Mr. Francis, Attorney at Law in Norwich, to desire him to settle dilapidations with Mrs. Ridley or sue her for the same as I have not heard from her for a long Time. Paid my Barber Fell the remaining Part of his Bill due to him this morning of 1:19:6. I dined & spent the afternoon at our Lodge at the New-Inn. Brethren present, Wall RWM, Napleton WPM, myself Chap:, Barton WSW, Stinton WJW, Willes, Huddesford, Cooke, Modd, Rous, Birt, Rawbone, Wight, Knightly, Myers, Salmon, Lates, Goodenough, Fiennes & Starkey Visitors. Fiennes belongs to the Union Lodge at Exeter. For Wine this evening in Chqr. 0:0:6.

By this time, Woodforde was aged 35 - he was never to marry, but was wanting to get settled down into a parish. He never went to a lodge again, though there were two lodges in Norwich, just nine miles to the north-west. Nor did he visit any London lodge on the times he passed through that city en route to the relations in Somerset, where he paid the occasional lengthy visit.

Woodforde's association with the Alfred Lodge had lasted for a little less than two years. He had attended some two dozen meetings during that time and had named over 60 members of the university who, at one time or another in that period, had also been freemasons. A round half dozen or so had been as assiduous in their attendance as had Woodforde himself. For the majority, however, intermittent appearances seemed sufficient. One of the members most frequently present was Thomas Stinton of Exeter college, who had been made W J W in 1775. He was destined to inherit the mantle of Napleton and Dr. Wall by becoming R W M although this would not be until 1781, five years after Woodforde's time. But not for long - when Stinton took over, the Alfred Lodge was upon its last legs. It ceased to function during his second year of office (1782).

It is apparent that Woodforde never visited another lodge. The present-day custom of visiting does not seem to have been the practice of most of the members of the Alfred Lodge. Maybe this is one reason why it did

not survive past 1782. Also, it is questionable to what extent they nurtured those many new masons admitted over the years. Most seem to have seen Lodge merely as an adjunct to a good social life, although they praised its ideals. So :- lack of visiting, insufficient masonic growth, an overdone social life, lack of awareness of the beneficent aspect of the Order (though all members contributed per the mandatory Levies) - all these caused the failure of Masonry in Woodforde's life, and the extinction of his lodge.

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- iii. **Woodforde at Oxford** - Ed. by W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley. Published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, for the Oxford Historical Society in 1969.

Those interested in the Parson Woodforde Society can obtain further details from the Membership Secretary:-

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Membership is currently UK£25 a year for those overseas.