

A peep into the Victorian Image Collection

Part 5 – Freemasons

By Ron Cosens

The collection consists of Victorian cartes de visite and cabinet cards. The carte de visite (cdv) became popular from 1860 onwards and was joined by the cabinet card (cab) from 1866. By 1905 both formats started to be replaced by portraits in postcard format (pc).

Last time we looked at children with toys, this time we are looking at the other end of the life cycle with a much more serious theme.

Traditionally, Freemasons trace their origins back to the guilds that regulated the qualifications of stonemasons and their interaction with authorities and clients from as early as the 14th century.

The movement is organised into local Lodges that are usually supervised at the regional level by a Grand Lodge: there is no international Grand Lodge.

The main purpose of Masonry is to make 'better men out of good men'. Officers are selected annually and every Masonic Lodge has a Master, two Wardens, a treasurer and a secretary to oversee their internal activities as well as their extensive charitable work. In Victorian times, women were not allowed to take part.

The distinctive masonic regalia is clearly shown in the following photographs and consists of collars, aprons, gloves, badges and jewels, all of which have a special significance to members.

Many Victorian photographers (122 noted so far) advertised their membership by including the Masonic symbol on the backs of their photographic mounts (see top right).

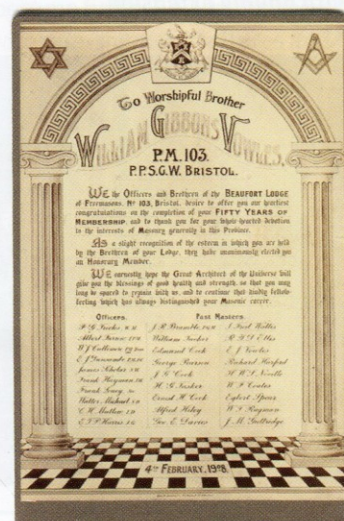
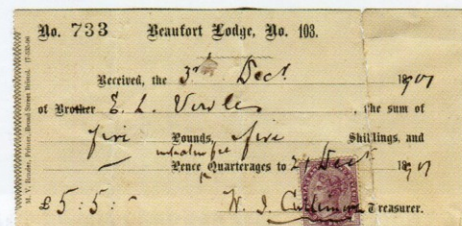
Firstly, let's meet a family of masons from Bristol. In the picture from the mid 1890s (illustrated below), William Gibbons Vowles stands proudly on the left with his son, Edward Joseph Vowles, on the right and with his own older brother in the centre.



Masonic symbols found on the backs of photographic mounts

William was a church organ builder of 14 Victoria Road, Bristol who was presented with a superb scroll on the 4th. February 1908 to commemorate his 50 years within the organisation: at the time he was 83 years old. By 1911 he was a widower and retired and living on a nearby dairy farm with the Petheram family. He died in 1912 aged 87.

Thanks to Marcel Safier for his research into the Vowles family.



Meanwhile, let's enjoy the magnificence of the Masonic regalia as captured by our expert photographic artists working in the mid 1800s to around 1919.

Gallery

NB: All photographs have been dated from studio details; not from knowledge of the masonic uniform nor regalia.



An elderly Mason in a lounge suit with regalia (cdv c1871 Bury)



A younger Mason with several 'jewels' (cdv c1894 Clitheroe)



A Mason in full regalia (cab c1887 Carlisle)



Another fine portrait in uniform (cab 1898 Walthamstow, London W)



A superb platinumotype of Frederick James Rover (cab 1900 London)



A Mason from a Northumberland Lodge (cab c1900 Newcastle on Tyne)

You can find more of these wonderful images on the dedicated page on the PCCGB website:
pccgb.net/a-peep-into-the-victorian-image-collection

further images and information are available from
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or www.cartedeviseite.co.uk