

= Masonic Hall , Taunton =

The Masonic Hall in Taunton , Somerset , is designated by Historic England as a Grade II * listed building . It was originally built in the early 19th century as St George 's Chapel , the first Roman Catholic chapel open for public worship in Taunton since the Reformation . The building , which forms the end of a terrace , features a series of prominent Ionic pilasters along the front and southern end .

Opened in 1822 , St George 's Chapel served Taunton 's growing Catholic community for over 35 years , before they moved to a larger church which was completed in 1860 . After being rented out for a time , when it was known as St George 's Hall , the building was then sold in 1878 to a company acting on behalf of a group of Freemasons , who purchased it to provide a home for the Unanimity & Sincerity Lodge . It now hosts nine different Lodges of the Freemasons .

= = History = =

= = = Catholic chapel = = =

Prior to the Reformation , Taunton had three Catholic churches ; the Church of St Peter and St Paul , which was part of Taunton Priory , and was destroyed during the Dissolution ; and the Churches of St Mary Magdalene and St James , which both became Anglican . The Roman Catholic Church all but died in Taunton ; one book records that prior to the 19th century , " there were no Papists in Taunton " . In 1787 , a Mission Rector was sent to Taunton . Four years later , Catholic chapels were legalised , and the rector registered a chapel in a house on Canon Street . Upon his death in 1818 , a new rector was appointed ; Rev. Samuel Fisher . The new rector immediately began raising money for a permanent church , which was opened on 3 July 1822 . The building was located on The Crescent , and was dedicated to Saint George . The church seated 200 ; greater than the estimated 120 Catholic resident in Taunton . This new church , known as St George 's Chapel , was the first public Roman Catholic church in Taunton since the Reformation .

Within 35 years , the congregation had swelled , and St George 's Chapel was no longer large enough to serve the Catholics of Taunton . The nearby Franciscan Convent purchased a plot of land adjacent to their own in 1858 , and St George 's Church was opened in April 1860 , to replace the chapel of the same dedication .

= = = Masonic Hall = = =

The chapel building was subsequently let out for various uses , and known as " St George 's Hall " . In 1878 , the hall was purchased by members of the Unanimity & Sincerity Lodge of the Freemasons , and named the Masonic Hall ; it was consecrated by Henry Herbert , 4th Earl of Carnarvon , the Provincial Grand Master of Somerset Freemasons in January the following year . The Unanimity & Sincerity Lodge had originally met in Ilminster after their constitution in 1788 , and moved to Taunton in 1797 , meeting at the London Inn . The owners of the building , though members of the Freemasons had purchased the property as a limited company , and also rented the building to other users : Richard Huish 's School taught their girl 's classes from there , and the cellars were used by a wine merchant .

After purchasing the building , the Masonic Hall Company , in addition to the necessary decorating , also commissioned a builder , William Templemen to carry out a number of structural changes ; the lobby was split into three rooms , to provide a " robing chamber " on one side , and a small waiting room on the other . Beyond the large main hall , what had been the vestry had a temporary partition removed , and a toilet added . The staircase down to the kitchen was moved , and in the kitchen itself a cooking range was installed . In the mid @-@ 1880s , an extension was made to the hall by the same builder ; a two @-@ storey building , of which the ground floor served as a warehouse . The extension replaced a previous building that had been deemed " unfit for repair " . The extension

was completed at a cost of £ 337 and 10 shillings , slightly more than the initial estimate . By 1892 , the hall was no longer being used by the school , now known as Bishop Fox 's , for their girl 's lessons . Further renovations were carried out around that time at a cost of just over £ 180 .

The hall continued to be let out for various social functions , and is currently home to nine lodges of the Freemasons ; Unanimity & Sincerity Lodge , Lodge of St George , Taunton Deane Lodge , Queens College Lodge , Old Aluredian Lodge , Taunton School Lodge , Richard Huish Lodge , Vivary Lodge and the Emergency Services Lodge .

= = Architecture = =

The Masonic Hall sits at the southern end of a terrace . It has a stucco front , with two pairs of Ionic pilasters ; the larger ones frame the building , and appear to support an overhanging cornice with a decorative dentil finish . The smaller pilasters are either side of a large doorway , and are topped by a pediment . The double wooden doors have six panels , and are fronted by six steps which are almost the same width as the building . On the southern side of the building , more Ionic pilasters rise the height of the building , spread between four large windows .

The hall is designated by Historic England as a Grade II * listed building , and is considered to form a group with Numbers 1 ? 11 and 15 ? 20 The Crescent , which are both similarly Grade II * listed , and with the Grade II listed properties ; 21 and 22 The Crescent , Somerset County Club , Dragon Book Shop and Number 14 Bath Place .