

600 YEARS OF CRAFT RITUAL

A STUDY FOR THE ENQUIRING FREEMASON
ARTICLE 2

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By Harry Carr

BRETHREN, many of you will know that I travel vast distances in the course of my lecture duties and the further I go the more astonished I am to see how many Brethren believe, quite genuinely, that our masonic ritual came down straight from heaven, directly into the hands of King Solomon. They are all quite certain that it was in English, of course, because that is the only language they speak up there. They are equally sure that it was all engraved on two tablets of stone, so that, heaven forbid, not one single word should ever be altered; and most of them believe that King Solomon, in his own lodge, practiced the same ritual as they do in theirs.

But, it was not like that at all, and tonight I am going to try to sketch for you the history of our ritual from its very beginnings up to the point when it was virtually standardized, in 1813; but you must remember, while I am talking about English ritual I am also giving you the history of your own ritual as well. One thing is going to be unusual about tonight's talk. Tonight you are not going to get any fairy-tales at all. Every word I utter will be based on documents which can be proved: and on the few rare occasions when, in spite of having the documents, we still have not got complete and perfect proof, I shall say loud and clear 'We think . . .' or 'We believe . ..'. Then you will know that we are, so-to-speak, on uncertain ground~ but I will give you the best that we know. And since a talk of this kind must have a proper starting point, let me begin by saying that Freemasonry did not begin in Egypt, or Palestine, or Greece, or Rome.

BEGINNINGS OF MASON TRADE ORGANIZATION

It all started in London, England, in the year 1356, a very important date, and it started as the result of a good old-fashioned was a great row going on in London between the mason hewers, the men who cut the stone, and the mason layers and setters, the men who actually built the walls. The exact details of the quarrel are not known, but, as a result of this row, 12 skilled master masons, with some famous men among them, came before the mayor and aldermen at Guildhall in London, and, with official permission, drew up a simple code of trade regulations.

The opening words of that document, which still survives, say that these men had come together because their trade had never been regulated in such form as other trades were. So here, in this document, we have an official guarantee that this was the very first attempt at some sort of trade organization for the masons and, as we go through the document, the very first rule that they drew up gives a clue to the demarcation dispute that I was talking about. They ruled, 'That every man of the trade may work at any work touching the trade if he be perfectly skilled and knowing in the same. 'Brethren that was the Wisdom of Solomon! If you knew the job, you could do the job, and nobody could stop you! If we only had that much common sense nowadays in England, how much better off we should be.

The organization that was set up at that time became, within 20 years, the London Masons Company, the first trade guild of the masons and one of the direct ancestors of our Freemasonry of today. This was the real beginning. Now the London Masons Company was not a lodge; it was a trade guild and I ought to spend a lot of time trying to explain how lodges began, a difficult problem because we have no records of the actual foundation of the early operative lodges.

Briefly, the guilds were town organizations, greatly favoured by the towns because they helped in the management of municipal affairs. In London, for example, from 1376 onwards, each of the trades elected two representatives who became members of the Common Council, all together forming the city government. But the mason trade did not lend itself to town organization at all. Most of their main work was outside the towns – the castles, the abbeys, the monasteries, the defence works, the really big jobs of masonry were always far from the towns. And we believe that it was in those places, where there was no other kind of trade organization, that the masons, who were engaged on those jobs for years on end, formed themselves into lodges, in imitation of the guilds, so that they had some form of self-government on the job, while they were far away from all other forms of trade control.

The first actual information about lodges comes to us from a collection of documents which we know as the ‘Old Charges’ or the Manuscript Constitutions’ of masonry, a marvellous collection. They begin with the Regius Manuscript c1390; the next, the Cooke Manuscript is dated c1410 and we have 130 versions of these documents running right through to the eighteenth century.

The oldest version, the Regius Manuscript, is in rhyming verse and differs, in several respects, from the other texts, but, in their general shape and contents they are all very much alike. They begin with an Opening Prayer, Christian and Trinitarian, and then they go on with a history of the craft, starting in Bible times and in Bible lands, and tracing the rise of the craft and its spread right across Europe until it reached France and was then brought across the channel and finally established in England. Unbelievably bad history; any professor of history would drop dead if he were challenged to prove it; but the masons believed it. This was their guarantee of respectability as an ancient craft.

Then, after the history we find the regulations, the actual Charges, for masters, fellows and apprentices, including several rules of a purely moral character, and that is all. Occasionally, the name of one of the characters changes, or the wording of a regulation will be altered slightly, but all follow the same general pattern.

Apart from these three main sections, prayer, history and Charges, in most of them we find a few words which indicate the beginnings of Masonic ceremony. I must add that we cannot find all the information in one single document; but when we study them as a collection; it is possible to reconstruct the outline of the admission ceremony of those days, the earliest ceremony of admission into the craft.

We know that the ceremony, such as it was, began with an opening prayer and then there was a 'reading' of the history. (Many later documents refer to this 'reading'.) In those days, 99 masons in 100 could not read, and we believe, therefore, that they selected particular sections of the history which they memorized and recited from memory. To read the whole text, even if they could read, would have taken much too long. So the second part of the ceremony was the 'reading'.

Then, we find an instruction, which appears regularly in practically every document, usually in Latin, and it says: 'Then one of the elders holds out a book (sometimes "the book", sometimes the "Bible", and sometimes the "Holy Bible") and he or they that are to be admitted shall place their hand thereon, and the following Charges shall be read.' In that position the regulations were read out to the candidate and he took the oath, a simple oath of fidelity to the king, to the master and to the craft, that he would obey the regulations and never bring the craft to shame. This was a direct lift from the guild oath, which was probably the only form that they knew; no frills, no penalties, a simple oath of fidelity to the king, the employer (the master) and to the trade.

From this point onwards, the oath becomes the heart and marrow, the crucial centre of every Masonic ceremony. The Regius, which is the first of the versions to survive, emphasizes this and it is worth quoting here. After the reading of the Charges in the Regius Manuscript, we get these words:

'And all the points herein before To all of them he must be sworn, And all shall swear the same oath Of the masons, be they willing, be they loth'

Whether they liked it or not, there was only one key that would open the door into the craft and that was the mason's oath. The importance, which the Regius attaches to it, we find repeated over and over again, not in the same words, but the emphasis is still there. The oath or obligation is the key to the admission ceremony.

So there I have described for you the earliest ceremony and now I can justify the title of my paper, Six Hundred Years of Craft Ritual. We have 1356 as the date of the beginnings of mason trade organization, and around 1390 the earliest evidence which indicates a ceremony of admission. Split the difference. Somewhere between those two dates is when it all started. That is almost exactly 600 years of provable history and we can prove every stage of our development from then onwards.

Masonry, the art of building, began many thousands of years before this, but, for the antecedents of our own Freemasonry, we can only go back to the direct line of history that can be proved, and that is 1356, when it really began in Britain.

And now there is one other point that must be mentioned before I go any further. I have been speaking of a time when there was only one degree. The documents do not say that there is only one degree, they simply indicate only one ceremony, never more than one.

But I believe it cannot have been for the apprentice, or entered apprentice; it must have been for the fellow of craft, the man who was fully trained. The Old Charges do not say this, but there is ample outside evidence from which we draw this conclusion. We have many law-suits and legal decisions that show that in the 1400s an apprentice was the chattel of his master. An apprentice was a piece of equipment that belonged to his master. He could be bought and sold in much the same way that the master would buy and sell a horse or a cow and, under such conditions, it is impossible that an apprentice had any status in the lodge. That came much later. So, if we can think ourselves back into the time when there was only one degree it must have been for the fully-trained mason, the fellow of craft.

Almost 150 years were to pass before the authorities and parliament began to realize that maybe an apprentice was actually a human being as well. In the early 1500s we have in England a whole collection of labour statutes, labour laws, which begin to recognize the status of apprentices, and around that time we begin to find evidence of more than one degree.

From 1598 onwards we have minutes of two Scottish Lodges that were practicing two degrees. I will come to that later. Before that date there is no evidence on degrees, except perhaps in one English document, the Harleian MS, No 2054, dated c1650, but believed to be a copy of a text of the late 1500s, now lost.

FIRST HINT OF TWO DEGREES

The Harleian MS is a perfectly normal version of the Old Charges, but bound up with it is a note in the same handwriting containing a new version of the mason's oath, of particular importance because it shows a major change from all earlier forms of the oath. Here it is:

There is seu'all words & signes of a free Mason to be reuailed to yu wch yu will answ: before God at the Great & terrible day of Judgmt yu keep secret & not to reuaille the same in the heares of any pson but to the M's & fellows of the said Society of free Masons so helpe me God xc.

Brethren, I know that I recited it too fast, but now I am going to read the first line again:

There is several words and signs of a free mason to be revealed to you . . . 'Several words and signs . . .' plural, more than one degree. And here in a document that should have been dated 1550, we have the first hint of the expansion of the ceremonies into more than one degree. A few years later we have actual minutes that prove two degrees in practice. But notice, Brethren, that the ceremonies must also have been taking something of their modern shape.

They probably began with a prayer, a recital of part of the 'history', the hand-on-book posture for the reading of the Charges, followed by an obligation and then the entrusting with secret words and signs, whatever they were. We do not know what they were, but we

know that in both degrees the ceremonies were beginning to take the shape of our modern ceremonies. We have to wait quite a long while before we find the contents, the actual details, of those ceremonies, but we do find them at the end of the 1600s and that is my next theme. Remember, Brethren, we are still with only two degrees and I am going to deal now with the documents which actually describe those two ceremonies, as they first appeared on paper.

EARLIEST RITUAL FOR TWO DEGREES

The earliest evidence we have, is a document dated 1696, beautifully handwritten, and known as the Edinburgh Register House Manuscript, because it was found in the Public Record Office of Edinburgh. I deal first with that part of the text which describes the actual ceremonies. It is headed 'THE FORME OF GiVING THE MASON WORD' which is one way of saying it is the manner of initiating a mason. It begins with the ceremony which made an apprentice into an 'entered- apprentice (usually about three years after the beginning of his indentures), followed by the ceremony for the admission of the ,master mason or fellow craft', the title of the second degree. The details are fascinating but I can only describe them very briefly, and wherever I can, I will use the original words, so that you can get the feel of the thing.

We are told that the candidate 'was put to his knees' and 'after a great many ceremonies to frighten him' (rough stuff, horse-play if you like; apparently they tried to scare the wits out of him) 'after a great many ceremonies to frighten him', he was made to take up the book and in that position he took the oath, and here is the earliest version of the mason's oath described as part of a whole ceremony.

By god himself and you shall answer to god when you shall stand nakd before him, at the great day, you shall not reveal any pairt of what you shall hear or see at this time whither by word nor write nor put it in wryte at any time nor draw it with the point of a sword, or any other instrument upon the snow or sand, nor shall you speak of it but with an entered mason, so help you god.

Brethren, if you were listening very carefully, you have just heard the earliest version of the words 'Indite, carve, mark, engrave or otherwise them delineate'. The very first version is the one I have just read, 'not write nor put it in wryte, nor draw it with a point of a sword or any other instrument upon the snow or sand.' Notice, Brethren, there was no penalty in the obligation, just a plain obligation of secrecy.

After he had finished the obligation the youngster was taken out of the lodge by the last previous candidate, the last person who had been initiated before him. Outside the door of the lodge he was taught the sign, postures and words of entry (we do not know what they are until he comes back). He came back, took off his hat and made 'a ridiculous bow' and then he gave the words of entry, which included a greeting to the master and the brethren. It finished up with the words 'under no less pain than cutting of my throat' and there is a

sort of footnote which says 'for you must make that sign when you say that'. This is the earliest appearance in any document of an entered apprentice's sign.

Now Brethren, forget all about your beautifully furnished lodges; I am speaking of operative masonry, when the lodge was either a little room at the back of a pub, or above a pub, or else a shed attached to a big building job; and if there were a dozen masons there, that would have been a good attendance. So, after the boy had given the sign, he was brought up to the Master for the 'entrusting'. Here is the Master; here, nearby, is the candidate; here is the 'instructor', and he, the instructor, whispers the word into the ear of his neighbour, who whispers the word to the next man and so on, all round the lodge, until it comes to the Master. and the Master gives the word to the candidate. In this case, there is a kind of biblical footnote, which shows, beyond all doubt, that the word was not one word but two. B and J, two pillar names, for the entered apprentice. This is very important later, when we begin to study the evolution of three degrees. In the two-degree system there were two pillars for the entered apprentice.

That was really the whole of the floor work, but it was followed by a set of simple questions and answers headed 'SOME QUESTIONS THAT MASONS USE TO PUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE YE WORD BEFORE THEY WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THEM'. It included a few questions for testing a stranger outside the lodge, and this text gives us the first and oldest version of the masonic catechism. Here are some of the fifteen questions. 'Are you a mason? How shall I know it? Where were you entered? What makes a true and perfect lodge? Where was the first lodge? Are there any lights in your lodge? Are there any jewels in your lodge. The first faint beginnings of Masonic symbolism. It is amazing how little there was at the beginning. There, Brethren, 15 questions and answers, which must have been answered for the candidate; he had not had time to learn the answers. And that was the whole of the entered apprentice ceremony.

Now remember, Brethren, we are speaking about operative masonry, in the days, when masons earned their living with hammer and chisel. Under those conditions the second degree was taken about seven years after the date of initiation when the candidate came back to be made 'master or fellow craft'. Inside the lodge those two grades were equal, both fully trained masons. Outside the lodge, one was an employer, the other an employee. If he was the son of a Freeman Burgess of the city, he could take his Freedom and set up as a master immediately. Otherwise, he had to pay for the privilege, and until then, the fellow craft remained an employee. But inside the lodge they both had the same second degree.

So, after the end of his indentures of apprenticeship, and serving another year or two for 'meat and fee', (ie board plus a wage) he came along then for the second degree. He was 'put to his knees and took the oath anew'. It was the same oath that he had taken as an apprentice, omitting only three words. Then he was taken out of the lodge by the youngest master, and there he was taught the signs, posture and words of entry (we still do not know what they were). He came back and he gave what is called the 'master sign', but it is not described, so I cannot tell you about it. Then he was brought up for the entrusting. And

now, the youngest master, the chap who had taken him outside, whispered the word to his neighbour, each in turn passing it all round the lodge, until it came to the Master, and the Master, on the five points of fellowship – second degree, Brethren gave the word to the candidate. The five points in those days – foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, hand to hand, ear to ear, that is how it was at its first appearance. No Hiram legend and no frills only the FPOF and a word. But in this document the word is not mentioned. It appears very soon afterwards and I will deal with that later.

There were only two test questions for a fellowcraft degree, and that was the lot. Two degrees, beautifully described, not only in this document but in two other sister texts, the Chetwode Crawley MS, dated about 1700 and the Kevan MS, quite recently discovered, dated about 1714. Three marvellous documents, all from the south of Scotland, all telling exactly the same story – wonderful materials, if we dare to trust them. But, I am sorry to tell you Brethren that we, as scientists in masonry, dare not trust them, because they were written in violation of an oath. To put it at its simplest, the more they tell us the less they are to be trusted, unless, by some fluke or by some miracle, we can prove, as we must do, that these documents were actualiv used in a lodge; otherwise they are worthless. In this case, by a very happy fluke, we have got the proof and it makes a lovely story. That is what you are going to get now.

Remember, Brethren, our three documents are from 1696 to 1714. Right in the middle of this period, in the year 1702, a little group of Scottish gentlemen decided that they wanted to have a lodge in their own backyard so to speak. These were gentlemen who lived in the south of Scotland around Galashiels, some 30 miles S.E. of Edinburgh. They were all notable landowners in that area – Sir John Pringle of Hoppringle, Sir James Pringle, his brother, Sir James Scott of Gala (Galashiels), their brother-in-law, plus another five neighboitrs came together and decided to form their own Lodge, in the village of Haughfoot near Galashiels. They chose a man who had a marvellous handwriting to be their scribe, and asked him to buy a minute book. He did. A lovely little leather-bound book (octavo size), and he paid ‘fourteen shillings’ Scots for it. I will not go into the difficulties of coinage now but today it would be about the equivalent of twenty-five cents. Being a Scotsman, he took very careful note of the amount and entered it in his minute book, to be repaid out of the first money due to the society. Then, in readiness for the first meeting of the lodge, he started off at what would have been page one with some notes, we do not know the details. But he went on and copied out the whole of one of these Scottish rituals, complete from beginning to end.

When he finished, he had filled ten pages, and his last twenty-nine words of ritual were the first five lines at the top of page eleven. Now, this was a Scotsman, and I told you he had paid ‘fourteen shillings’ for that book and the idea of leaving three-quarters of a page empty offended against his native Scottish thrift. So, to save wasting it, underneath the twenty-nine words, he put in a heading ‘The Same Day’ and went straight on with the minutes of the first meeting of the Lodge. I hope you can imagine all this, Brethren, because I wrote the history of ‘The Lodge of Haughfoot’, the first wholly non-operative Lodge in Scotland, thirty-four years older than the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The minutes

were beautifully kept for sixty-one years and eventually, in 1763, the Lodge was swallowed up by some of the larger surrounding lodges. The minute book went to the great Lodge of Selkirk and it came down from Selkirk to London for me to write the history.

We do not know when it happened but, sometime during those sixty-one years, somebody, perhaps one of the later secretaries of the lodge, must have opened that minute book and caught sight of the opening pages and he must have had a fit! Ritual in a minute book! Out! And the first ten pages have disappeared; they are completely lost. That butcher would have taken page eleven as well but even he did not have the heart to destroy the minutes of the very first meeting of this wonderful lodge. So it was the minutes of the first meeting that saved those twenty-nine golden words at the top of page eleven, and the twenty-nine words are virtually identical with the corresponding portions of the Edinburgh Register House MS and its two sister texts. Those precious words are a guarantee that the other documents are to be trusted, and this gives us a marvellous starting point for the study of the ritual. Not only do we have the documents which describe the ceremonies; we also have a kind of yardstick, by which we can judge the quality of each new document as it arrives, and at this point they do begin to arrive.

Now Brethren, let me warn you that up to now we have been speaking of Scottish documents. Heaven bless the Scots! They took care of every scrap of paper, and if it were not for them we would have practically no history. Our earliest and finest material is nearly all Scottish. But, when the English documents begin to appear, they seem to fit. They not only harmonise, they often fill in the gaps in the Scottish texts. From here on, I will name the country of origin of those documents that are not English.

Within the next few years, we find a number of valuable ritual documents, including some of the highest importance. The first of these is the Sloane MS, dated c1700, an English text, in the British Library today. It gives various 'gripes' which had not appeared in any document before. It gives a new form of the Mason's oath which contains the words 'without Equivocation or mental reservation'. That appears for the very first time in the Sloane MS, and Brethren, from this point onwards, every ritual detail I give you, will be a first-timer. I shall not repeat the individual details as they reappear in the later texts, nor can I say precisely when a particular practice actually began. I shall simply say that this or that item appears for the first time, giving you the name and date of the document by which it can be proved.

If you are with me on this, you will realise – and I beg you to think of it in this way – that you are watching a little plant, a seedling of Freemasonry, and every word I utter will be a new shoot, a new leaf, a new flower, a new branch. You will be watching the ritual grow; and if you see it that way, Brethren, I shall know I am not wasting my time, because that is the only way to see it.

Now, back to the Sloane MS which does not attempt to describe a whole ceremony. It has a fantastic collection of 'gripes' and other strange modes of recognition. It has a catechism

of some twenty-two Questions and Answers, many of them similar to those in the Scottish texts, and there is a note which seems to confirm two pillars for the EA.

A later paragraph speaks of a salutation (?) for the Master, a curious ‘hug’ posture, with ‘the masters grip by their right hands and the top of their Left hand fingers thurst close on ye small of each others Backbone . . .’. Here, the word is given as ‘Maha – Byn’, half in one ear and half in the other, to be used as a test word.

That was its first appearance in any of our documents, and if you were testing somebody, you would say ‘Maha’ and the other would have to say ‘Byn’; and if he did not say ‘Byn’ you would have no business with him. (Demonstrate).

I shall talk about several other versions as they crop up later on, but I must emphasise that here is an English document filling the gaps in the three Scottish texts, and this sort of thing happens over and over again.

Now we have another Scottish document, the Dumfries No 4 MS, dated c1710. It contains a mass of new material, but I can only mention a few of the items. One of its questions runs: ‘How were you brought in?’ ‘Shamfully, w’ a rope about my neck’. This is the earliest cable-tow; and a later answer says the rope ‘is to hang me if I should betray my trust’. Dumfries also mentions that the candidate receives the ‘Royal Secret’ kneeling ‘upon my left knee’.

Among many interesting Questions and Answers, it lists some of the unusual penalties of those days. ‘My heart taken out alive, my head cut off, my body buried within ye sea-mark.’ ‘Within ye sea-mark’ is the earliest version of the ‘cable’s length from the shore’. Brethren, there is so much more, even at this early date, but I have to be brief and I shall give you all the important items as we move forward into the next stage.

Meanwhile, this was the situation at the time when the first Grand Lodge was founded in 1717. We only had two degrees in England, one for the entered apprentice and the second was for the ‘master or fellow craft’. Dr Anderson, who compiled the first English Book of Constitutions in 1723, actually described the English second degree as ‘Masters and Fellow-Craft’. The Scottish term had already invaded England.

The next big stage in the history of the ritual, is the evolution of the third degree. Actually, we know a great deal about the third degree, but there are some dreadful gaps. We do not know when it started or why it started, and we cannot be sure who started it! In the light of a lifetime of study, I am going to tell you what we know, and we will try to fill the gaps.

It would have been easy, of course, if one could stretch out a hand in a very good library and pull out a large minute-book and say ‘Well, there is the earliest third degree that ever happened;’ but it does not work out that way. The minute-books come much later.

HINTS OF THREE DEGREES

The earliest hints of the third degree appear in documents like those that I have been talking about – mainly documents that have been written out as aide-memoires for the men who owned them. But we have to use exposures as well, exposures printed for profit, or spite-, and we get some useful hints of the third degree long before it actually appears in practice. And so, we start with one of the best, a lovely little text, a single sheet of paper known as the Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscript, dated 1711, found among the papers of a famous Irish doctor and scientist, Sir Thomas Molyneux. This document is headed with a kind of Triple Tau, and underneath it the words ‘Under no less a penalty’. This is followed by a set of eleven Q. and A. and we know straight away that something is wrong! We already have three perfect sets of fifteen questions, so eleven questions must be either bad memory or bad copying – something is wrong! The questions are perfectly normal, only not enough of them. Then after the eleven questions we would expect the writer to give a description of the whole or part of the ceremony but, instead of that, he gives a kind of catalogue of the Freemason’s words and signs.

He gives this sign (EA demonstrated) for the EA with the word B

He gives ‘knuckles, & sinues’ as the sign for the ‘fellow-craftsman’, with the word ‘Jachquin’. The ‘Master’s sign is the back bone’ and for him (ie the MM) the writer gives the world’s worst description of the FPOF. (It seems clear that neither the author of this piece nor the writer of the Sloane MS, had ever heard of the Points of Fellowship, or knew how to describe them.) Here, as I demonstrate, are the exact words, no more and no less:

Squeese the Master by ye back bone, put your knee between his, & say Matchpin.

That, Brethren, is our second version of the word of the third degree. We started with ‘Mahabyn’, and now ‘Matchpin’, horribly debased. Let me say now, loud and clear, nobody knows what the correct word was. It was probably Hebrew originally, but all the early versions are debased. We might work backwards, translating from the English, but we cannot be certain that our English words are correct. So, here in the Trinity College, Dublin, MS, we have, for the very first time, a document which has separate secrets for three separate degrees; the enterprentice, the fellowcraftsman and the master. It is not proof of three degrees in practice, but it does show that somebody was playing with this idea in 1711.

The next piece of evidence on this theme comes from the first printed exposure, printed and published for entertainment or for spite, in a London newspaper, The Flying Post. The text is known as a ‘Mason’s Examination’. By this time, 1723, the catechism was much longer and the text contained several pieces of rhyme, all interesting, but only one of particular importance to my present purpose and here it is:

‘An enter’d Mason I have been, Boaz and Jachin I have seen; A Fellow I was sworn most rare, And Know the Astler, Diamond, and Square: I know the Master’s Part full well, As honest Maughbin will you tell.’

Notice, Brethren, there are still two pillars for the EA, and once again somebody is dividing the Masonic secrets into three parts for three different categories of Masons. The idea of three degrees is in the air. We are still looking for minutes but they have not come yet. Next, we have another priceless document, dated 1726, the Graham MS, a fascinating text which begins with a catechism of some thirty Questions and Answers, followed by a collection of legends, mainly about biblical characters, each story with a kind of Masonic twist in its tail. One legend tells how three sons went to their father’s grave. To try if they could find anything about him for to Lead them to the vertuable secret which this famous preacher had They opened the grave finding nothing save the dead body all most consumed away takeing a greip at a ffinger it came away so from Joynt to Joynt so to the wrest so to the Elbow so they Reared up the dead body and suported it setting ffoot to ffoot knee to knee Breast to breast Cheeck to cheeck and hand to back and cryed out help o ffather ... so one said here is yet marow in this bone and the second said but a dry bone and the third said it stinketh so they agreed for to give it a name as is known to free masonry to this day ...

This is the earliest story of a raising in a Masonic context, apparently a fragment of the Hiram legend, but the old gentleman in the grave was Father Noah, not Hiram Abif.

Another legend concerns ‘Bazalliell’, the wonderful craftsman who built the mobile Temple and the Ark of the Covenant for the Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness. The story goes that near to death, Bazalliell asked for a tombstone to be erected over his grave, with an inscription ‘according to his diserveing’ and that was done as follows:

Here Lys the flowr of masonry superiour of many other companion to a king and to two princes a brother Here Lys the heart all secrets could conceal] Here lys the tongue that never did reveal.

The last two lines could not have been more apt if they had been, specially written for Hiram Abif; they are virtually a summary of the Hiram legend.

In the catechism, one answer speaks of those that . . . have obtained a trible Voice by being entered passed and raised and Conformed by 3 severall Lodges ...

‘Entered, passed and raised’ is clear enough. ‘Three several lodges’ means three separate degrees, three separate ceremonies. There is no doubt at all that this is a reference to three degrees being practised. But we still want minutes and we have not got them. And I am very sorry to tell you, that the earliest minutes we have recording a third degree, fascinating and interesting as they are, refer to a ceremony that never happened in a lodge

at all; it took place in the confines of a London Musical Society. It is a lovely story and that is what you are going to get now.

In December 1724 there was a nice little lodge meeting at the Queen's Head Tavern, in Hollis Street, in the Strand, about three hundred yards from our present Freemasons' Hall. Nice people; the best of London's musical, architectural and cultural society were members of this lodge. On the particular night in which I am interested, His Grace, the Duke of Richmond was Master of the lodge. I should add that His Grace, the Duke of Richmond was also Grand Master at that time, and you might call him 'nice people'. It is true that he was the descendant of a royal illegitimate, but nowadays even royal illegitimates are counted as nice people. A couple of months later, seven of the members of this lodge and one brother they had borrowed from another lodge decided that they wanted to found a musical and architectural society.

They gave themselves a Latin title a mile long – Philo Musicae et Architecturae Societas Apollini – which I translate, 'The Apollonian Society for the Lovers of Music and Architecture' and they drew up a rule book which is beautiful beyond words. Every word of it written by hand. It looks as though the most magnificent printer had printed and decorated it.

Now these people were very keen on their Masonry and for their musical society they drew up an unusual code of rules. For example, one rule was that every one of the founders was to have his own coat-of-arms emblazoned in full colour in the opening pages of the minute book. How many lodges do you know, where every founder has his own coat-of-arms? This gives you an idea of the kind of boys they were. They loved their Masonry and they made another rule, that anybody could come along to their architectural lectures or to their musical evenings – the finest conductors were members of the society – anybody could come, but if he was not a Mason, he had to be made a Mason before they would let him in; and because they were so keen about the Masonic status of their members, they kept Masonic biographical notes of each member as he joined. It is from these notes that we are able to see what actually happened. I could talk about them all night, but for our present purposes, we need only follow the career of one of their members, Charles Cotton.

In the records of the Musical Society we read that on 22 December 1724 'Charles Cotton Esq'. was made a Mason by the said Grand Master' [ie His Grace The Duke of Richmond] in the Lodge at the Queen's Head. It could not be more regular than that. Then, on 18 February 1725 '... beiore We Founded This Society A Lodge was held ... In Order to Pass Charles Cotton Esq'. . . .' and because it was on the day the society was founded, we cannot be sure whether Cotton was passed FC in the Lodge or in the Musical Society. Three months later, on 12 May 1725 'Brother Charles Cotton Esqr. Broth'. Papillion Ball Were regularly passed Masters'.

Now we have the date of Cotton's initiation, his passing and his raising; there is no doubt that he received three degrees. But, regularly passed Masters' – No! It could not have been

more irregular! This was a Musical Society – not a lodge! But I told you they were nice people, and they had some very distinguished visitors. First, the Senior Grand Warden came to see them. Then the Junior Grand Warden. And then, they got a nasty letter from the Grand Secretary and, in 1727, the society disappeared. Nothing now remains except their minute book in the British Library. If you ever go to London and go to Freemasons' Hall you will see a marvellous facsimile of that book. It is worth a journey to London just to see it. And that is the record of the earliest third degree. I wish we could produce a more respectable first-timer, but that was the earliest.

I must tell you, Brethren, that Gould, the great Masonic historian believed, all his life, that this was the earliest third degree of which there was any record at all. But just before he died he wrote a brilliant article in the Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, and he changed his mind. He said, 'No, the minutes are open to wide interpretation, and we ought not to accept this as a record of the third degree.' Frankly, I do not believe that he proved his case, and on this point I dare to quarrel with Gould. Watch me carefully, Brethren, because I stand a chance of being struck down at this moment. Nobody argues with Gould! But I dispute this because, within ten months of this date, we have incontrovertible evidence of the third degree in practice. As you might expect, bless them, it comes from Scotland.

Lodge Dumbarton Kilwinning, now No 18 on the register of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, was founded in January 1726. At the foundation meeting there was the Master, with seven master masons, six fellowcrafts and three entered apprentices; some of them were operative masons, some non-operative. Two months later, in March 1726, we have this minute:

Gabriel Porterfield who appeared in the January meeting as a Fellow Craft was unanimously admitted and received a Master of the Fraternity and renewed his oath and gave in his entry money.

Now, notice Brethren, here was a Scotsman, who started in January as a fellowcraft, a founding fellowcraft of a new Lodge. Then he came along in March, and he renewed his oath, which means he took another ceremony; and he gave in his entry money, which means he paid for it. Brethren, if a Scotsman paid for it you bet your life he got it! There is no doubt about that. And there is the earliest 100 per cent gilt-edged record of a third degree.

Two years later, in December 1728, another new Lodge, Greenock Kilwinning, at its very first meeting, prescribed separate fees for entering, passing, and raising.

PRICHARD'S MASONRY DISSECTED

From then on we have ample evidence of the three degrees in practice and then in 1730 we have the earliest printed exposure which claimed to describe all three degrees, *Masonry Dissected*, published by Samuel Prichard in October 1730. It was the most valuable ritual

work that had appeared until that time, all in the form of question and answer (apart from a brief introduction) and it had enormous influence in the stabilisation of our English ritual.

Its 'Enter'd Prentice's Degree' – by this time ninety-two questions – gave two pillar words to the EA, and the first of them was 'lettered'. Prichard managed to squeeze a lot of floor-work into his EA questions and answers. Here is one question for the candidate: 'How did he make you a mason? Listen to his answer:

With my bare-bended Knee and Body within the Square, the Compass extended to my naked Left Breast, my naked Right Hand on the Holy

Bible: there I took the Obligation (or Oath) of a Mason.

All that information in one answer! And the next question was, 'Can you repeat that obligation' with the answer, 'I'll do my endeavor', and Prichard followed this with a magnificent obligation which contained three sets of penalties (throat cut, heart torn out, body severed and ashes burned and scattered). This is how they appeared in 1730. Documents of 1760 show them separated, and later developments do not concern us here.

Prichard's 'Fellow-Craft's Degree' was very short, only 33 questions and answers. It gave J alone to the FC (not lettered) but now the second degree had a lot of new material relating to the pillars, the middle chamber, the winding stairs, and a long recitation on the letter G, which began with the meaning 'Geometry' and ended denoting 'The Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe'.

Prichard's 'Master's Degree or Master's Part' was made up of thirty questions with some very long answers, containing the earliest version of the Hiram legend, literally the whole story as it ran in those days. It included the murder by 'three Ruffians', the searchers, 'Fifteen Loving Brothers' who agreed among themselves 'that if they did not find the Word in him or about him, the first Word should be the Master's Word'. Later, the discovery, "the Slip", the raising on the FPOF, and another new version of the MM word*, which is said to mean 'The Builder is smitten'.

There is no reason to believe that Prichard invented the Hiram legend. As we read his story in conjunction with those collected by Thomas Graham in 1726 (quoted above), there can be little doubt that Prichard's version arose out of several streams of legend, probably an early result of speculative influence in those days.

But the third degree was not a new invention. It arose from a division of the original first degree into two parts, so that the original second degree with its FPOF and a word moved up into third place, both the second and third acquiring additional materials during the period of change. That was sometime between 1711 and 1725, but whether it started in England, Scotland, or Ireland is a mystery; we simply do not know.

Back now to Samuel Prichard and his *Masonry Dissected*. The book created a sensation; it sold three editions and one pirated edition in eleven days. It swept all other exposures off the market. For the next thirty years Prichard was being reprinted over and over again and nothing else could stand a chance; there was nothing fit to touch it. We lose something by this, because we have no records of any ritual developments in England during the next 30 years – a great 30-year gap. Only one new item appeared in all that time, the ‘Charge to the Initiate’, a miniature of our modern version, in beautiful eighteenth-century English. It was published in 1735, but we do not know who wrote it. For fresh information on the growth of the ritual, we have to go across the Channel, into France.

FURTHER EVIDENCE FROM FRANCE

The English planted Freemasonry in France in 1725, and it became an elegant pastime for the nobility and gentry. The Duke of So-and-So would hold a lodge in his house, where he was Master for ever and ever, and any time he invited a few friends round, they would open a lodge, and he would make a few more Masons. That was how it began, and it took about ten or twelve years before Masonry began to seep down, through to the lower levels. By that time lodges were beginning to meet in restaurants and taverns but around 1736, things were becoming difficult in France and it was feared that the lodges were being used for plots and conspiracies against government.

At Paris, in particular, precautions were taken. An edict was issued by René Hérault, Lieutenant- General of Police, that tavern-keepers and restaurant- keepers were not to give accommodation to Masonic lodges at all, under penalty of being closed up for six months and a fine of 3,000 livres. We have two records, both in 1736-37, of well-known restaurants that were closed down by the Police for that reason. It did not work, and the reason was very simple. Masonry had started in private houses. The moment that the officials put the screw on the meetings in taverns and restaurants, it went back into private houses again; it went underground so-to-speak, and the Police were left helpless.

Eventually, Hérault decided that he could do much more damage to the Craft if he could make it a laughing-stock. If he could make it look ridiculous, he was sure he could put them out of business for all time, and he decided to try. He got in touch with one of his girl-friends, a certain Madame Carton. Now, Brethren, I know what I am going to tell you sounds like our English News of the World, but I am giving you recorded history, and quite important history at that. So he got in touch with Madame Carton, who is always described as a dancer at the Paris opera. The plain fact is that she followed a much older profession. The best description that gives an idea of her status and her qualities, is that she slept in the best beds in Europe. She had a very special client&le. Now this was no youngster; she was fifty-five years old at that time and she had a daughter who was also in the same interesting line of business. And I have to be very careful what I say, because it was believed that one of our own Grand Masters was entangled with either or both of them. All this was in the newspapers of those days.

Anyway, Hérault got in touch with Madame Carton and asked her to obtain a copy of the Masonic ritual from one of her clients. He intended to publish it, and by making the Masons look ridiculous he was going to put them out of business. Well! She did, and he did. In other words, she got her copy of the ritual and passed it on to him. It was first published in France in 1737, under the title *Reption d'un Frey-Maçon*. Within a month it was translated in three London newspapers, but it failed to diminish the French zeal for Freemasonry and had no effect in England. I summarise briefly.

The text, in narrative form, described only a single two-pillar ceremony, dealing mainly with the floor-work and only fragments of ritual. The Candidate was deprived of metals, right knee bare, left shoe worn 'as a slipper' and locked in a room alone in total darkness, to put him in the right frame of mind for the ceremony. His eyes were bandaged and his sponsor knocked three times on the Lodge door. After several questions, he was introduced and admitted in the care of a Warden (*Surveillant*). Still blindfolded, he was led three times round the floor-drawing in the centre of the Lodge, and there were 'resin flares'. It was customary in the French lodges in those days to have a pan of live coals just inside the door of the lodge and at the moment the candidate was brought in, they would sprinkle powdered resin on the live coal, to make an enormous flare, which would frighten the wits out of the candidate, even if he was blindfolded. (In many cases they did not blindfold them until they came to the obligation.) Then, amid a circle of swords, we get the posture for the obligation with three lots of penalties, and details of Aprons and Gloves. This is followed by the signs, tokens and words relating to two pillars. The ceremony contained several features unknown in English practice, and some parts of the story appear to be told in the wrong sequence, so that as we read it, we suddenly realise that the gentleman who was dictating it had his mind on much more worldly matters. So Brethren, this was the earliest exposure from France, not very good, but it was the first of a really wonderful stream of documents. As before, I shall only discuss the important ones.

My next, is *Le Secret des Francs-Maçons* (The Secret of the Freemasons) 1742, published by the Abbé Perau, who was Prior at the Sorborme, the University of Paris. A beautiful first degree, all in narrative form, and every word in favour of the Craft. His words for the EA and FC were in reverse order (and this became common practice in Europe) but he said practically nothing about the second degree. He described the Masonic drinking and toasting at great length, with a marvellous description of 'Masonic Fire'. He mentioned that the Master's degree was 'a great ceremonial lamentation over the death of Hiram' but he knew nothing about the third degree and said that Master Masons got only a new sign and that was all.

Our next work is *Le Catechisme des Francs-Maçons* (The Freemasons' Catechism) published in 1744, by Louis Travenol, a famous French journalist. He dedicates his book 'To the Fair Sex', which he adores, saying that he is deliberately publishing this exposure for their benefit, because the Masons have excluded them, and his tone is mildly anti-Masonic. He continues with a note 'To the Reader', criticising several items in Perau's work, but agreeing that *Le Secret* is generally correct. For that reason (and Perau was hopelessly ignorant of the third degree) he confines his exposure to the MM degree. But

that is followed by a catechism which is a composite for all three degrees, undivided, though it is easy to see which questions belong to the Master Mason.

Le Catechisme also contains two excellent engravings of the Tracing Boards, or Floor-drawings, one called 'Plan of the Lodge for the Apprentice-Fellow' combined, and the other for 'The Master's Lodge'.

Travenol begins his third degree with 'The History of Adoniram, Architect of the Temple of Solomon'. The French texts usually say Adoniram instead of Hiram, and the story is a splendid version of the Hiram Legend. In the best French versions, the Master's word (Jehova) was not lost; the nine Masters who were sent by Solomon to search for him, decided to adopt a substitute word out of fear that the three assassins had compelled Adoniram to divulge it.

This is followed by a separate chapter which describes the layout of a Master's Lodge, including the 'Floor-drawing', and the earliest ceremony of opening a Master's Lodge. That contains a curious 'Master's sign' that begins with a hand at the side of the forehead (demonstrate) and ends with the thumb in the pit of the stomach. And now, Brethren, we get a magnificent description of the floorwork of the third degree, the whole ceremony, so beautifully described and in such fine detail, that any Preceptor could reconstruct it from beginning to end – and every word of this whole chapter is new material that had never appeared before.*

Of course there are many items that differ from the practices we know, but now you can see why I am excited about these French documents. They give marvellous details, at a time when we have no corresponding material in England. But before I leave *Le Cat&hisme*, I must say a few words about its picture of the third degree Tracing Board or Floor-drawing which contains, as its central theme, a coffin design, surrounded by tear drops, the tears which our ancient brethren shed over the death of our Master Adoniram.

On the coffin is a sprig of acacia and the word 'JEHOVA', 'ancien mot du Maitre, (the former word of a Master), but in the French degree it was not lost. It was the Ineffable Name, never to be uttered, and here, for the first time, the word Jehova is on the coffin. The diagram, in dots, shows how three zig-zag steps over the coffin are to be made by the candidate in advancing from West to East, and many other interesting details too numerous to mention.

The catechism, which is the last main item in the book, is based (like all the early French catechisms) directly on Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, but it contains a number of symbolic expansions and explanations, the result of speculative influence.

And so we come to the last of the French exposures that I must deal with today *L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons Trahi* (The Order of Freemasons Betrayed) published in 1745 by an anonymous writer, a thief! There was no law of copyright in those days and this man knew a good thing when he saw it. He took the best material he could find, collected it into one

book, and added a few notes of his own. So, he stole Perau's book, 102 pages, the lot, and printed it as his own first degree. He said very little about the second degree (the second degree was always a bit of an orphan). He stole Travenol's lovely third degree and added a few notes including a few lines saying that before the Candidate's admission, the most junior MM in the Lodge lies down on the coffin, his face covered with a blood-stained cloth, so that the Candidate will see him raised by the Master before he advances for his own part in the ceremony.

Of his own material, there is not very much; chapters on the Masonic Cipher, on the Signs, Grips and Words, and on Masonic customs. He also included two improved designs of the Floordrawings and two charming engravings illustrating the first and third degrees in progress. His catechism followed Travenol's version very closely but he did add four questions and answers (seemingly a minor contribution) but they are of high importance in our study of the ritual:

Q. When a Mason finds himself in danger, what must he say and do to call the brethren to his aid?

A. He must put his joined hands to his forehead, the fingers interlaced, and say 'Help, ye Children (or Sons) of the Widow'.

Brethren, I do not know if the 'interlaced fingers' were used in the USA or Canada; I will only say that they were well known in several European jurisdictions, and the 'Sons of the Widow' appear in most versions of the Hiram legend.

Three more new questions ran:

Q. What is the Password of an Apprentice? Ans: T

Q. That of a Fellow? Ans: S

Q. And that of a Master? Ans: G

This was the first appearance of Passwords in print, but the author added an explanatory note:

These three Passwords are scarcely used except in France and at Frankfurt on Main. They are in the nature of Watchwords, introduced as a surer safeguard (when dealing) with brethren whom they do not know.

Passwords had never been heard of before this date, 1745, and they appear for the first time, in France. You will have noticed, Brethren, that some of them appear to be in the wrong order, and, because of the 30-year gap, we do not know whether they were being used in England at that time or if they were a French invention. On this puzzle we have a curious piece of indirect evidence, and I must digress for a moment.

In the year 1730, the Grand Lodge of England was greatly troubled by the exposures that were being published, especially Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, which was officially condemned in Grand Lodge. Later, as a precautionary measure, certain words in the first two degrees were interchanged, a move which gave grounds in due course for the rise of a rival Grand Lodge. *Le Secret*, 1742, *Le Catechisme*, 1744 and the *Trahi*, 1745, all give those words in the new order, and in 1745, when the Passwords made their first appearance in France, they also appear in reverse order. Knowing how regularly France had adopted – and improved – on English ritual practices, there seems to be a strong probability that Passwords were already in use in England (perhaps in reverse order), but there is not a single English document to support that theory.

So Brethren, by 1745 most of the principal elements in the Craft degrees were already in existence, and when the new stream of English rituals began to appear in the 1760s the best of that material had been embodied in our English practice. But it was still very crude and a great deal of polishing needed to be done.

The polishing began in 1769 by three writers – Wellins Calcutt and William Hutchinson, in 1769, and William Preston in 1772, but Preston towered over the others. He was the great expounder of Freemasonry and its symbolism, a born teacher, constantly writing and improving on his work. Around 1800, the ritual and the Lectures (which were the original catechisms, now expanded and explained in beautiful detail) were all at their shining best. And then with typical English carelessness, we spoiled it.

You know, Brethren, that from 1751 up to 1813, we had two rival Grand Lodges in England (the original, founded in 1717, and the rival Grand Lodge, known as the 'Antients', founded in 1751) and they hated each other with truly Masonic zeal. Their differences were mainly in minor matters of ritual and in their views on Installation and the Royal Arch. The bitterness continued until 1809 when the first steps were taken towards a reconciliation and a much-desired union of the rivals.

In 1809, the original Grand Lodge, the 'Moderns', ordered the necessary revisions, and the Lodge of Promulgation was formed to vet the ritual and bring it to a form that would be satisfactory to both sides. That had to be done, or we would still have had two Grand Lodges to this day! They did an excellent job, and many changes were made in ritual and procedural matters; but a great deal of material was discarded, and it might be fair to say that they threw away the baby with the bath-water. The Beehive, the Hour-glass, the Scythe, the Pot of Incense etc, which were in our Tracing Boards in the early nineteenth century have disappeared. We have to be thankful indeed for the splendid material they left behind.

Studies for the New Freemason.

This booklet was prepared and type-set by Bro. J.S. Donaldson, Secretary of Hawick Lodge No. 111, Scotland for the education of the enquiring Freemason.