

A VISIT TO AN 18TH CENTURY LODGE

Let us, in imagination, pay a visit to a Masonic Lodge in the 18th Century - say between 1730 and 1800. I must warn you that you may have a little difficulty in proving yourselves Masons, particularly in the earlier part of the period, for you will not have the advantage of a Grand Lodge Certificate to prove your identity until some time in the second half of the century. From the middle of the Century a few individual Lodges issued their own Certificates, but these were never officially recognised by the Craft as a whole and the first Grand Lodge Certificate was an engraved Certificate issued by the Moderns in 1755.

Then you will also have to be careful with what you would today regard as the most changeless of all the ancient landmarks - I mean the test words of the Degrees. At the beginning of the Century the word of the First Degree is believed to have been J and that of the Second Degree B. When Freemasonry suddenly became fashionable, in about 1721, there was, of course, great public curiosity as to its secrets, and it was not long before the journalists of the period endeavoured to satisfy that curiosity, to their own advantage. The newspaper, "The Flying Post," from April 11th to 13th 1723 published an article in the form of a catechism entitled "The Mason's Examination" which purported to reveal the genuine secrets of the Craft and certainly revealed the words which are used by us today. This was followed, from 1724, by a number of books, pamphlets and broadsides which were printed and distributed over the country. Amongst the best-known of these may be mentioned:-

1. A small pamphlet published in 1724 entitled "The Grand mystery of Free-Masons Discover'd."
2. In 1724/5 an Article in "The Post Boy" of which no copy is now known.
3. In 1725, A Broadsheet entitled "The Whole Institutions of Free Masons Opened."
4. In 1726 another Broadsheet entitled "The Grand Mystery Laid Open."
5. Also in 1726 a rare pamphlet quoted by Gould:-

"I remember when I was last in town there was a specimen of their Examinations published in the "Post Boy", but so industrious were the Masons to suppress it, that in a week's time not one of the Papers was to be found; wherever they saw 'em they made away with them. They went from Coffee-house to Coffee-house and tore them privately out of the Books. Those they could not come by so easily they bought, even at the extravagant price of 2/6d and 5/- a paper. By this means there is hardly one to be met with.

"The Free-Masons were prodigiously nettled at the publication of this "Post Boy"; yet according to their united Assurance, they put a good Face on the Matter, and said there was nothing in it; but at the same time, huddled up the affair with all the Privacy imaginable, and presently put out a sham Discovery to invalidate the other."

6. 1730 a Broadsheet, entitled "The Mystery of Free Masonry" (afterwards reprinted as an article in the Daily Journal on 15th August 1730). This was also issued as a Broad-sheet under two other titles, "The Mystery and Motions of Free-Masonry Discovered," and as "The Puerile Signs and Wonders of a Free-Mason."

7. 1730 Also the publication of what came to be the most famous of all the Masonic exposures "Masonry Dissected, a pamphlet by Samuel Prichard." (1st edition 20th October 1730, reprinted in Read's Weekly Journal 24th October 1730). It passed through many editions in the ensuing hundred years and was widely circulated in America.

The Craft affected to make light of these exposures, as is shewn in a Masonic song of the period, published in Anderson's second edition of the Book of Constitutions (1738).

"Then let us laugh, since we've imposed
On those who make a Pother,
And cry, the Secret is disclosed
By some false-hearted Brother.
The mighty Secret, gain'd, they boast,
From Post-Boy, or from Flying-Post."

Yet nevertheless Grand Lodge felt itself compelled to take some action to deal with the situation, as is shewn by the following extract from the minutes of the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge for 28th August 1730:-

"Dr. Desaguliers stood up and (taking Notice of a printed Paper lately published and dispersed about the town, and since inserted in the News Papers, pretending to discover and reveal the Misteries of the Craft of Masonry) recommended several things to the Consideration of the Grand Lodge.

The Deputy Grand Master seconded the Doctor and proposed several Rules to the Grand Lodge to be observed in their respective Lodges for their security against all open and Secret Enemies to the Craft."

There is no record of the measures which were agreed upon but there is a strong Masonic tradition that the words of the First and Second Degrees were reversed, so that anyone using them in the original order as published in the exposures would immediately be detected as an imposter. It is also said that this was considered by many of the more conservative Freemasons as an unwarrantable interference with the ancient landmarks and that this was one of the causes of the establishment of the rival Grand Lodge of the Antients in 1751.

After publication of Prichard's "Masonry Dissected" in October 1730 reference was again made to the matter in Grand Lodge on 15th December 1730. The minutes record that the Deputy Grand Master Bro. N. Pluckerby, denounced Prichard as an imposter.

"The book is a foolish thing not to be regarded, but in order to prevent Lodges being imposed upon by false brethren or imposters, he proposed till otherwise ordered by the Grand Lodge, that no person should be admitted into any Lodge unless some member of the Lodge, then present, would vouch for such visiting brother's being a regular Mason, and the member's name to be entered against the visitor's name in the Lodge Book."

Here then we have the historical and official authority for the signing of the Tyler's Book.

We will assume then that we have been duly vouched for as regular Masons by a member of the Lodge and that we have signed the Tyler's Book and we can now enter the ante-room of the Lodge. Those of us who have brought our own aprons put them on; those who

have none borrow from the stock kept by the Tyler. The aprons are very different from those in use today, being of plain white skin reaching nearly to the ankles and without rosettes, edging, lining or tassels, and either tying round the neck or round the waist with long cords or tapes. The rank of the wearer is indicated, not by rosettes, but by the position of the triangular flap. The Apprentice wears his flap tucked down behind the apron, the Fellow Craft with the point upwards fastened to the top button of his waistcoat like a bib, and the Master Mason with the point turned down in front like the aprons of the present day.

Later in the Century aprons became much more elaborate and were sometimes made of white silk or satin. Some of them had designs in colour stencilled, printed, painted or embroidered according to the taste and fancy of the wearer.

In the old Operative days it had been customary for the newly-initiated Candidate to pay for new aprons for the whole of the Lodge and this custom had been retained in the early Speculative days. If you will consult the "General Regulations" sanctioned by Grand Lodge in 1723 you will see that Clause VII states:-

"Every new Brother at his making is decently to cloathe the Lodge, that is, all the Brethren present."

As a result of this custom every Lodge was able to keep quite a stock of second-hand, discarded aprons which could be lent to visitors. This custom of the candidate paying for new aprons at each initiation was, however, found to be very expensive for the Candidate, who often had to pay the cost of the banquet after his making. As the custom grew up of having individual aprons for the Master, the Officers and the Past Masters the custom of "clothing the Lodge" at the expense of the Candidate fell into disuse.

Having put on our aprons, we enter the Lodge Room. The shape of the room is rectangular, like our own, but we observe several important differences in the arrangement of the furniture. In the East is probably a dais or platform partly shut in by rails, like the chancel or sanctuary of a church with seats for the Master, the Past Masters and any distinguished visitors. The seats for the Brethren are in the North and South in Columns, with one of the Wardens sitting at the bottom of each column. The Senior Warden sits at the bottom of the North Column and the Junior Warden at the bottom of the South Column. Also in the West are the two pillars J. and B. and we stand between them to give our salute on entering. When we have taken our seats in one of the columns we can look round and identify some of the other peculiar features of the arrangements. In the centre of the Lodge on the floor the Tyler has drawn a design in chalk and charcoal representing the Working Tools and other symbols of the First Degree. Standing at three of the corners of this rectangular design are the three large candlesticks illustrating the three principal orders of architecture. They stand in the form of a "gallows square" and in the centre of the Lodge. Across that square are the extended compasses, represented by the Master in the East and two Wardens in the West.

In the exposure, Prichard's "Masonry Dissected" we see:-

- "Q. Where stands your Master?
A. In the East.
Q. Where stands the senior enter'd Apprentice?
A. In the South.
Q. Where stands your wardens?
A. In the West."

This arrangement was continued by many old Lodges right up to the time of the Union in 1813. In 1809 almost the first point to be decided by the "Lodge of Promulgation" was the seating of the Wardens, and our present arrangement dates officially only from that time. Now that your attention has been directed to the matter, you will remember that in the Dining Room we still preserve the 18th Century arrangement with the Master in the East and the Wardens in the West, the Senior Warden at the foot of the South? Column. Sometimes in an old Lodge we hear the challenge by the Master before an important toast "Brother Wardens, how stand the glasses in your respective Columns" and the replies in due course "All charged in the North, Worshipful Master." "All charged in the South, Worshipful Master." When the alteration was made and the Junior Warden sat in the South, the old triangular symbolism of the open compasses was lost, and it was replaced by the square and compasses on the open V.S.L. There was then no necessity for the candlesticks to stand in the form of a gallows square and they were moved to stand by the pedestals of the W.M. the S.W. and the J.W. With the passing of the years Free Masonry became more sophisticated, The floor of the Lodge, formerly bare boards had been covered by a carpet. "Drawing the Lodge" on the floor by the Tyler had been replaced first by a design laid out in white tape and tacks on the carpet and later by a painted floor cloth. When the candlesticks were moved away from the centre of the Lodge the floor cloth was also moved. In some Lodges it was hung on the wall and in others it was painted on wood or canvas and placed against the pedestal of one of the Wardens. There is, however, nothing which actually prescribes that a Lodge should have any Tracing Boards as we now call them, or where they should be placed if there are any.

At the East end of the Lodge, half way between the end of the floor cloth and the Master's chair, is an Altar bearing the Volume of the Law. At the west end of the Lodge, half way between the floor-cloth and the pillars are stands holding the celestial and terrestrial globes, pointing out "Masonry Universal". These will still be found in some old Lodges in the North of England and the North Midlands.

With regard to the officers of the Lodge we notice that the Master is wearing a hat as one of the emblems of his office and that he wears it right through the ceremony except during the prayers. The team of officers is a small one - it consists only of the Master, the two Wardens, Treasurer, Secretary and Tyler. The functions of an Inner Guard are performed by one of the Brethren, usually the Senior Entered Apprentice. There were no Deacons until towards the end of the Century; some Lodges did not appoint any until the time of the Union. Perhaps this would be a convenient opportunity to refer to one of the most important of the Officers - the Tyler. I have already referred to his responsibility for "drawing the Lodge", which would require a fair amount of skill and education. He also had the duty of issuing the "Letters", or summonses, as we should call them today, and delivering them to the Members personally at their addresses. From the Treasurer's records of some of the old Lodges we find that it was customary to have a thousand summonses printed at a time, with the date left blank, to be filled in as required. I was very interested to find, more than two hundred years later, Lodges in South Africa having their summonses printed in the same way, with the date and agenda filled in in ink by the Lodge Secretary. It is, of course, much cheaper than the rather elaborate form of summons adopted by some of our Lodges of the present day, and I am surprised that, as a measure of economy, Lodges in this Country have not revived the custom.

I should now like to give you a description of the Ceremony but this brings us to a very real difficulty in that we must first decide on the approximate date and place of the meeting, and the Grand Lodge to which we owe allegiance. Today you could not tell from the working of a Lodge whether you were in Birmingham or Blackburn, in London or in Lancaster, in Kimberley or in Khartoum, in Cairo or in Congleton, in Walsall or in Windsorton, South Africa. I have attended Lodge Meetings in all those places and although there were tiny points of difference to be observed, they were no more than can be seen between the workings of two Lodges meeting in the same Temple. Today the ceremonial seems as fixed and unalterable as the Temple itself, but to examine the ceremonial of two hundred years (and more) ago is like looking at the trees in a forest of many different kinds, in many different stages of development, often clothed in leaves of different shades and colours, but all having a general family resemblance and, what is even more important to our purpose, all in a state of quiet growth and gradual change.

The reason, of course, is a simple one. There was no standardized ritual and until the year 1717 there was no sort of centralized administration for the Craft. Each Lodge therefore did as it liked with regard to the matter of ceremonial. Today, despite the very precise words of the Obligation in the First Degree forbidding the recording of our secrets in permanent form, we have such a flood of printed rituals and explanatory treatises that we have come to accept them as an essential part of Freemasonry and to forget that Grand Lodge refuses to recognise any of those rituals as having any official authority or endorsement.

Time does not permit me this evening to deal with the birth and growth of our Masonic ceremonies and I must therefore confine myself to stating that down to the early part of the 18th century it is very doubtful whether there were three separate and distinct ceremonies resembling those which are worked today. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that many Freemasons may have passed through only one ceremony, in which they received the "Mason Word" and the modes of recognition and that it was only the enthusiast who sought for more Masonic light.

In our Masonic visiting, if we are "Moderns" we can only visit "Modern" Lodges - if we are "Antients" we can only visit Lodges of the Antients or Athol Grand Lodge. For a description of the ceremony, I must refer you to two of the "exposures" to which I have alluded so many times this evening which give detailed accounts of both ceremonial and secrets.

The title page of one of these reads "Jachin and Boaz" "(Containing a circumstantial account of all the proceedings in "Making a Mason" with the several obligation of an Entered Apprentice Fellow Craft and Master, and also the Sign, Grip, Password and Lecture of each Degree, with the ceremony of The Mop and Pail. By a Gentleman belonging to the Jerusalem Lodge; 5th Edition 1764)". Opening it, we read:-

"The Candidate is also learnt the Step, or how to advance to the Master upon the Drawing on the Floor, which in some Lodges resembles the Grand Building, termed a Mosaic Palace, and is described with the utmost Exactness. They also draw other Figures, one of which is called the Laced Tuft, and other the Throne beset with Stars. There is also represented a perpendicular Line in the form of a Mason's Instrument, commonly called the Plumb-Line; and another figure which represents the Tomb of Hiram, the First Grand Master who has been dead almost Three Thousand Years. These are all explained to him in the most accurate manner and

the Ornaments or Emblems of the Order are described with great Facility. The Ceremony being now ended the new-made Member is obliged to take a Mop out of a Pail of Water brought for that purpose, and rub out the Drawing on the Floor, if it is done with Chalk and Charcoal. Then he is conducted back and everything he was divested of is restored, and he takes his Seat on the Right Hand of the Master. He also receives an Apron, which he puts on, and the List of Lodges is like-wise given to him."

This description deals with a Lodge of the "Moderns" under the Grand Lodge of 1717. The ritual of a Lodge under the Grand Lodge of the "Antients" founded in 1751 is described in an exposure called "The Three Distinct Knocks" Here are some extracts from the 1760 edition of that work.

"The Master stands in the East with the Square about his Neck, and the Bible before him, which he takes up and walks forward to the West, near the First Step of an oblong Square, where he kneels down in order to give That Solemn Obligation to him that has already Knelt down with his Left Knee bare, bent upon the First step; his Right Foot forms a Square with his naked Right Hand upon the Holy Bible." The description continues a little later. "The explanation of the following figure, which is all the Drawing that is used in this sort of Masonry called thr Most Antient by the Irishmen. It is generally done with Chalk or Charcoal on the Floor, that is the Reason that they want a Mop and Pail as often as they do; for when a Man has been made a Mason, they wash it out, but People have taken Notice and made game of them about the Mop and Pail; so some Lodges use Tape and little Nails to form the same thing and so keep the world more ignorant of the matter. This Plan is drawn upon the Floor, East and West. All this Figure is washed out with a Mop as aforesaid, as soon as he has received the Obligation. Then a Table is put in the Place where this Figure was, and they all sit round it, but every Man sitteth in the same place as he stood before the Figure was washed out, viz: The Master in the East, the Senior Warden in the West etc.

Every Man has a Glass set before him, and a large Bowl of Punch, or what they like, is set out in the Centre of the Table, and the Senior Deacon charges (as they call it) in the North and East and the Junior Deacon in the South and West, for it is their Duty so to do, i.e. to fill all the Glasses. Then the Master takes up his Glass and gives a Toast to the King and the Craft, with Three Times Three in the 'Prentice's, and they all say Ditto and drink all together, minding the Master's Motion. They do the same with the empty Glass that he doth, that is, he draws it a-cross his Throat three times and then make Three offers to put it down, at the Third they all set their Glasses down together, which they call "Firing". Then they hold the Left-hand Breast high and clap Nine Times with the Right, their Foot going at the same time:

"When this is done they all sit down."

First, you will note that this is not after a banquet, in the dining room, but in the Lodge Room, in open Lodge.

Secondly, you will note the very accurate description of what we call "Masonic Fire", and this might be a convenient opportunity to explain the "fire" is one of the traditional peculiarities of the Craft not only in England but throughout the world. I have been reading an old French ritual of 1737 dealing with a system called "Adonhiramite Masonry" which contains a description which closely

follows the one which I have just read to you. As the atmosphere in the Lodge in those days was rather free and easy the Brethren in jocular mood applied special names to the articles on the table. Thus the glasses were called CANNONS, the bottles CASKS, red wine was called RED POWDER white wine STRONG POWDER, and water WHITE POWDER. Bread was called STONE, the lights STARS, the plates TILES, the knives SWORDS and the salt SAND. The Ritual says:-

The First Toast

The W.M. knocks once. followed by the Wardens; the Master says "Bros. Senior and Junior Wardens pray dress and load the guns for the first toast." The S.W. says "Brethren in my column in all your degrees and qualities, dress and load your guns for the first toast which our W.M. is about to propose." The J.W. makes a similar announcement to the Brethren in his column. When he has finished the company load their weapons with red powder as heavily or as lightly as each thinks fit, then, when the bottles have been put down the master says "Bros. Senior and Junior Wardens are all the guns loaded and dressed?" The Wardens observe and report to the Master who then stands to order, all the company do the same and the Master then proposes the first toast concluding by asking the Brethren to fire their weapons and to give fire, good fire and perfect fire. The Senior and Junior Wardens repeat the request in their respective columns. The W.M. then gives the following orders "Right hand to your weapons - Present - Fire" and they drink. He then says "Present arms" and the company imitating the W.M. move their glasses in the shape of a triangle three times and then in three movements put their glass loudly on the table. Then they clap three times thrice with the hands and then cry three times "Hurrah." The whole of this is done with absolute precision so that the glasses all produce one single crash.

Up to the year 1755 the Brethren even used to smoke in Grand Lodge. In the Book of Constitutions for 1756 you will see that it is recorded at the Quarterly Communications held 4th December 1755. "It was unanimously agreed That no Brother for the future shall smook Tobacco in the Grand Lodge at the Quarterly Communication or Committee of Charity, till the Lodge shall be closed." You will remember that Lodges used to meet at Taverns and the Brethren were allowed not only to smoke in open Lodge as they are today in many of the Lodges in the U.S.A. - but also to eat and drink. Porter was a favourite beverage in the early days but punch became the fashionable drink later in the Century and the number of Masonic punch bowls in our Masonic museums testifies to the great popularity it attained. At first the food provided consisted of what we should today call light refreshments only, such as bread and cheese and sandwiches and fruit. At first there was only one dinner a year, known as the Annual Feast, which would probably be equivalent to our Installation Meeting. Later in the century we find entries in the Lodge Minute Book like these:-

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| 1763 | October 13 | Resolved "That there is no eating in the new Lodge Room nor Drinking Porter." |
| 1767 | April 23 | Resolved "That for the future the Brethren of this Lodge should assist the R.W.M. when he returns Thanks for Drinking his Health. Carried Nem Con." |
| 1770 | April 26 | Resolved "That a Supper be provided every Lodge Night in the next Room and that each Bro. that sups pay 6d each." |
| 1788 | October 23 | The Brethren of the Lodge having this Night been presented with an Elegant China Bowl (decorated with the Emblems of Masonry) by Br. Baverstock, they returned him Publick and Sincere Thanks by |

Drinking his Health with Three Times Three."

The Treasurer's Cash Book often contained some entries which would arouse some comment on the part of the auditors at the present day :-

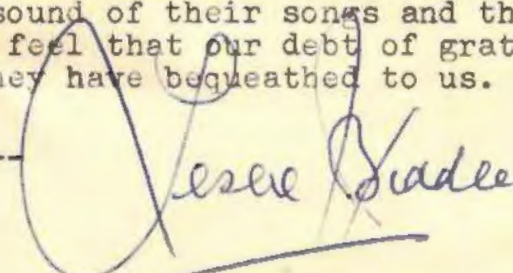
1762	Pd Bro. Dobbie for 4 China Bowls for this Lodge	£5. 0. 0.
1763	Paid Bro. Maddon for Lemons	£1.15. 0.
do.	do. for nutmegs	2. 1.
1764	Pd for fruit	15. 6.
1768	Pd for Lemons and Oranges	12. 6.
	Pd for 12 China Bowls	£1.15. 0.
1772	Pd for 2 Cork Screws	2. 6.
1788	" " a Copper Tea Kettle	15. 0.
1790	Table Cloth for the use of the Lodge	14. 6.
	30½ yds Bordered Green Cloth for the Lodge Tables	£5. 6. 6.
1807	August. Pd Bro. F.Simpson for his expenses attending one afternoon at the London Coffee House (at Ludgate Hill) when the Pipe of Port was bottled and the Corks sealed by him	10. 6.
	By Cash paid Leech and Dellamore of the London Coffee House in full for a Pipe of superior Old Port of the Vintage 1802	£115. 0. 0.
	Cash paid them also for Bottling, Corks, Wax and for 2 Cellarmen binning it in the Lodge Cellars	£2. 2. 0.
1810	Dec.27 By Cash paid Messrs. Aislabe, Eade and Standing in full for a Pipe of Old Port Wine	£120. 0. 0.
	By Cash paid for 52 Dozen Bottles Corks etc	£11.16. 0.

A pipe of port equals about 58 dozen bottles of wine so that our Brethren of 1807 seem to have consumed 58 dozen - 696 bottles, in a little over three years, in addition to prodigious quantities of Rum, Hollands Gin, and Brandy in the form of steaming Punch. It is therefore not surprising to find among the Bye-Laws of one of the Lodges of the period :-

"No.12 No Brother shall enter this Lodge disguised in Liquor nor use Light or Indecent Language or Behaviour while the Lodge is open."

The Brethren, of course, between the Lectures and the many Toasts had various Masonic Songs, the words of which were all regularly printed in the Book of Constitutions. As you know even today we look forward to the ringing of the Entered Apprentice's Song and the Master's Song and so on, but in the 18th Century the choice was very much wider. Occasionally the Brethren must have shewed some lack of discretion in their choice of songs and in other matters. As late as 1813 the Westminster and Keystone Lodge had a Bye-Law No. 21 "That if any Brother (in the time of Lodge Hours) shall be detected in the vile habit of profane cursing and swearing or uttering any obscene or immoral discourse or attempt to sing any immodest or obscene song, he shall for every such offence be fined not more than Five Shillings nor less than One Shilling at the discretion of the Master and Wardens."

Well Brethren, our time has gone and we must leave our 18th Century Brethren sitting round the Lodge Room at their Green baize covered tables working the Lectures, pulling at their churchwarden pipes in an atmosphere thick with tobacco smoke and the heady perfume of the steaming punch bowls. As the sound of their songs and their laughter fade away we cannot help but feel that our debt of gratitude is deep indeed for the great legacy they have bequeathed to us.


 Jesse Stadel