

CHEVALIER BARTHOLOMEW RUSPINI, 1728-1813

Bartholomew Ruspini was the son of Andreas Ruspini of Grumello, a noble and ancient Italian family. He was born at Romacoto, near Bergamo, 39 miles north-east of Milan, in 1728. Having resolved to study surgery, he attended the hospital at Bergamo. On June 18, 1758 he was, by secret ballot, unanimously admitted to the profession of surgery. Nevertheless, he decided to specialise in dentistry as a branch of surgery. With this object in view, he straightway proceeded to Paris, then the recognised centre for such training. It is evident that Ruspini proved himself to be an apt and eager pupil, gaining a marked degree of skill in the science and practice of his chosen specialty. Imbued with innate culture and ambition, it is not surprising to learn later that he (a scholar-dentist) became eminent in several directions. It would appear that he came to England in 1759, and very soon, he allied himself with, and continued to play an enduring role in, Freemasonry.

At this stage, it ought to be emphasised that it was customary in England in the mid-eighteenth century for dentistry to be practised, as a sideline, by blacksmiths, hairdressers, corn-doctors, cuppers and innumerable empirics. Despite such conditions, Ruspini styled himself a surgeon-dentist. His earliest known advertisement appeared in Boddley's Bath Journal, April 16, 1759, (advertisement being the accepted thing in the profession in those days). Doubtless he chose Bath because it was then at its zenith, due mainly to Richard (Beau) Nash, whose activities were responsible for attracting royalty and outstanding leaders of society. He was however resident in Bath for the season only, where he hired rooms at 2 and 3 Queens Square.

On 20th November, 1759, he was balloted for in the Bear Lodge, Bath (now the Royal Cumberland Lodge, No. 41). and three balls appeared in the negative drawer. It is nevertheless clear

that this was not attributable to dubiety as to his integrity. As far as can be ascertained, he, at regular intervals, visited Bath and Bristol, besides other cities of Great Britain and Ireland. In the History of Freemasonry in Bristol (A.C.Powell and J. Littleton, 1910) we find that he was on April 7, 1762, Initiated into the Bush Lodge N. 116. Evidence is available that he was not then permanently resident in this city. On June 24th and November 2nd 1762, his quarterages to that Lodge were paid through another hand. He must, however, have been in Bristol on St. Johns The Evangelist's Day of the following year, because his quarterage was paid by himself direct. His advertisements continued to appear regularly in both Bristol and Bath newspapers.

It seems that, besides being a skilled dentist, Ruspini had the further advantage of letters of introduction and commendation from influential Italian and French families to leaders of society throughout Britain. These would ensue his entree to the highest social circles. Further, news of his success in Bath, Bristol, Ireland and other places, as well as his integrity and repute in Freemasonry, preceeded him to London. It would appear that he settled there in 1766 under the patronage of the Dowager Princess of Wales (mother of George III) and several distinguished personages. He practised in his leasehold house, at 32 St. Albans Street - then a short road extending from St. James's Market to Pall Mall and intersected by Charles Street. Ruspini's house was opposite Carlton House, it occupied a site roughly about what is now the Waterloo Place.

In 1768, Bartholomew published a Treatise on the teeth, which passed through thirteen additions. In discussing disorders arising from teething and their treatment, he stressed the importance or prevention in order to avert serious constitutional disturbances. From this chapter alone, there is overwhelming

evidence of an inherent love of children; twenty years later, this was exemplified in a strikingly practical form, which persists to the present day.

In 1769 he became a Joining Member of Morning Bush Lodge No.13, meeting at The Pauls Head, Cateaton Street, this Lodge is now 'The Lodge of Emulation No.21.

His eldest son, James Bladen Ruspini, born April 14th 1768 was in 1887 made a partner in his father's practise in Pall Mall, and, from then onwards shared with him the honour of being surgeon-dentist to the Prince of Wales. Why Bladen should have been chosen for his son's name is problematical, the Ruspinis of subsequent date believe that a relationship existed between the Bladen and Orde Families. Thomas Bladen, son of William Bladen of York was M.P. for Styning 1727-734; and Ashburton 1734-1741. His second son also joined his fathers practise, and the only other son to practise dentistry William, embarked on a practise of his own at St. Pauls Curchyard.

Ruspini served as a Grand Steward in 1772 and joined the Stewards Lodge in that year, "declared off 18th April 1781" but is entered on the 1784 list of that Lodge as "No Member", but from 1785 onwards his name re-appears, until we find the entry, "Discontinued" February 10th, 1796, his Annual Subscription of one guinea being regularly paid.

In December of 1776 he became a member of the Lodge of Antiquity No.1. In January of the following year he was a petitioner and founder of the Lodge of Nine Muses No.380 now 235.

We find a pathetic incident concerning a friend of Ruspini - the eminent preacher Dr. William Dodd (1729-1777), appointed in 1763 chaplain to the King. Ruspini had invited Dodd to dine with him at his home, and he arrives earlier than the appointed time. Shortly, two "arms of the Law" appeared and

charged Dodd with the criminal offence of forgery. The doctor, having apologised to his host for the necessity of departing so abruptly, desired that he should not wait dinner for him. Later another friend of Ruspini's called to inform him that Dr. Dodd had been committed to Fleet Prison. In spite of 100,000 signatures to a petition for clemency, he was hanged at Tyburn amid widespread expressions of sympathy.

His sons James and George were both educated at Westminster School, being admitted in 1779 and 1780 respectively. In the 1780's, Bartholomew Ruspini presented to the Hospital at Bergamo a complete set of the most up-to-date surgical instruments. Aimed at being the best procurable, he commissioned his esteem friend, William Bromfield, one of the surgeons at St. George's Hospital and surgeon to her Majesty's household, to select them for him. The records of this Lombardy hospital expressed, in laudatory terms, the gratitude experienced for such a munificent gift.

In 1785, Bartholomew Ruspini published a pamphlet of forty-four pages on a styptic, which he had recently discovered. Several editions were published, and that of 1791 was dedicated to George III, the styptic was in widespread use by the medical profession and the public.

In 1787 he either suggested the formation of, or was a founder of the Prince of Wales Lodge No. 503 now 259, and in April of that year he joined it. He was Master in 1788 of the Lodge of Rural Friendship No. 435, meeting at Hampstead, which later amalgamated with that of the Nine Muses. He was also made Master of the Royal Lodge in 1778. In 1788 he joined the fraternity of the Antients, becoming a member of (Athol No.1), now the Grand Masters Lodge No.1., and doubtless played no little part backed by his influence at court, in healing the

breach between the Morderns and Antients Grand Lodges. In 1789 he joined the Lodge of Regularity, and another Lodge of which he had great interest in was St. Albans now No.29 of which he was elected Treasurer in 1782 and Master the following year. He attended fairly regularly between 1782 -1790, but in the next four years he only made one appearance in the Lodge, although he remained a subscribing member until 1796.

He and the Prince of Wales were the first two members of the Prince of Wales Lodge. This particular Lodge consisted exclusively of those who had been honoured with appointments under His Royal Highness or were closely attached to his person and interests. Ruspini was elected first Treasurer, and, in 1791, Grand Sword Bearer. He held both positions (re-elected annually) until his death. He served on the Lodge of Promulgation and in negotiations for the Union, something he was not to see consummated as he died on December 4th 1813.

On March 25th, 1788, his renowned benevolence and influential opportunities crystallised in the founding of an outstanding charity, "The Royal Freemasons Charity for Female Children". A Committee of eight member were appointed, six of these were member of the Prince of Wales Lodge No.503. They moved rapidly for by December of that year a large house was ready for occupation of the Matron and staff, and fifteen children between the ages of five to ten. The original purposes of the founder were to safeguard the daughters of indigent Freemasons from dangers and misfortunes; and to qualify them to fill useful - not menial - stations in life. To this date, these aims have been scrupulously observed, subject of course to such material changes and modifications as time, opportunity and the influx of additional funds have permitted and justified.

The School was called the Royal Cumberland **Freemason** School, It owes its name to the fact that at the time the Duke of Cumberland was Grand Master and its first patroness was the Duchess of Cumberland. The school was originally located in Somers Place East. In 1934 her late Majesty, Queen Mary, opened the magnificently appointed buildings in Rickmasworth. This charity showed the way for the magnificent series of Charities we have today.

The early management consisted of overseers, Ladies whose duties included inspection of the premises and supervision of education and employment. The medical staff consisted of two physicians, three surgeons, an apothecary and surgeon dentist Bartholomew Ruspini, all served in a voluntary capacity. From 1788 to 1790 he was the orphanage's first treasurer, on relinquishing this office he proposed as his successor Viscount Dudley, who was duly elected; at the same meeting Ruspini was appointed a life governor.

On April 2nd 1789 he became the Chevalier Ruspini, due to the Honorable Order of Knighthood and Dignity of Count of the Sacred Palace of the Lateran, having been, without solicitation from any quarter, conferred on him by Francis, Duke Sfortia. It was generally awarded as a mark of distinction to those in the service of the pontifical government; also to strangers who professed the Roman Catholic faith. It was however, conferred on Ruspini (an Anglican) in recognition of his renowned benevolence and generous hospitality to foreigners, distinguished and impecunious alike. In fact, he is the only Freemason ever to have received this papal distinction. This was no frivolous honour may be gauged from the fact that Charles Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England, authorised the entry of Ruspini's diploma and title of Chevalier of the Golden Spur in the Register of Nobility at the Heralds' Office together with arms, bearings, motto and additional

escutcheon in the College of Arms. The title became extinct in the death of his son Bladen in 1883.

The Ruspini Family numbered nine, James, George and William (already mentioned as having practised dentistry) and another son and five daughters. He died as mentioned earlier in this article in December, 1813, at the advanced age of 85 years at his home, 32, St. Albans Street, Pall Mall. He was interred in St. James's Churchyard, Piccadilly, on December 19th. An affecting scene was the presence of all the Orphanage children wearing black cloaks in testimony of respect to the memory of the founder.

As a surgeon-dentist, his abilities were generally acknowledged as eclipsing his contemporaries - not all that surprising in view of his sojourns at Bergamo and Paris. Innate culture, hospitality, vivacity and generous outlook on life proved enduring assets to one destined to move in the highest circles. It is interesting to realise that the medical faculty accepted him as one of themselves. Although his sound training so entitled him, nevertheless, in the eighteenth century, the reverse was often the case when a practitioner deserted a surgical career in order to devote himself to the then lowly vocation of dentist.

As to his connection with Freemasonry, it has been officially recorded that to the end he enjoyed the love and respect of his brother Masons; also, that he was one of the kindest characters of his age.

"The memory of the Chevalier will long be revered by his family friends; and his loss will be deeply deplored by the unfortunate, whom he was in the habit of consoling, and by the indigent, whose wants he was ever ready to relieve....."
(taken from the obituary, which appeared in the European Magazine 1813).

He passed as a gentleman among gentlemen, when that distinction meant considerably more than it does today.

The following has been compiled from the following references.

A.Q.C.'s. Vol. **28** and **29**.

Grand Lodge 1717-1967.

Chevalier Bartholomew Ruspini, 1728-1813, Surgeon Philanthropist, Surgeon-Dentist. A Contribution to Dental History, by J. Menzies Campbell, D.D.S., L.D.S., F.I.C.D., F.R.S.E., read at the fifth Annual General Meeting of The Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, October, 23rd, 1953.

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