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GRAND LODGE CERTIFICATE.

Before proceeding to explain the Grand Lodge Certificate at present issued to Freemasons the Brethren will no doubt be interested to know the practice adopted in early days in connection with the issue of such Certificates.

The earliest reference made of Certificates was contained in a document issued in 1663 of which the following is an extract:

"Additional Orders and Constitutions made and agreed upon at a General Assembly, held on the Eighty day of December 1663.

That no Person hereafter, which shall be accepted a Free-Mason, shall be admitted into any Lodge, or Assembly, until he hath brought a Certificate of the Time and Place of his Acceptation, from the Lodge that Accepted him, unto the Master of that Limit and Division, where such Lodge was kept, which said Master shall enroll the same on Parchment in a Roll to be kept for that Purpose, and give an Account of such Acceptations, at every General Assembly".

There are no specimens available of any Certificates that may have been issued under this Order.

Nothing further seems to have transpired for nearly a Century for it was not until the year 1755 that the question of the issue of Certificates again came under review.

At a meeting of the Grand Lodge of Most Antient & Honourable Society of Free and accepted Masons under the constitution of England (organised in 1717 and later known as the "Moderns") which was held at the Devils Tavern, Temple Bar on the 24th. July 1755, the following minute was passed:

"Ordered that every Certificate granted to a Brother of his being a Mason shall for the future be sealed with the seal of Masonry, and signed by the Grand Secretary for which 5/- shall be paid to the use of the General Fund of Charity".

The matter was further considered by Grand Lodge in the following year and at a meeting held on the 13th. August 1756 it was:-

"Ordered that a Copper-Plate be engraved for Printing the Certificate to be granted a Brother of his being a Mason; and that a Dye be cut and an Engine made wherewith to seal the same; in consequence of the Quarterly Communications held on the 24th. July 1755 so that the whole expense do not exceed twelve guineas."

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It cannot be said when the first Certificate was issued under these Orders, but probably not until 1757. The oldest specimen known is dated 1767.

The wording on the seal was "The seal of the Grand Lodge of Masons, London, with the motto "Relief & Truth".

On a reclining stone at the base of the Certificate is engraved a copy of the minute of Grand Lodge dated 24th. July 1755.

On the top is depicted a "Flying Angel" and figures representing "Faith, Hope & Charity" being engraved on the body of the Certificate it became known as the "Three Graces" certificate.

In 1810 another certificate was introduced with slightly altered wording and modification of design.

The "Flying Angel" at the top of the former Certificate was replaced by the heading:-

"Grand Lodge of England - His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, Grand Master".

In the design a view of "St. Pauls Cathedral" is engraved at the bottom of the certificate and it became known as the "St. Pauls" certificate.

The foregoing refer to the certificates issued by the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns).

The "Grand Lodge of Most Excellent and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons according to the old constitutions" (established in 1753 and then known as the "Antients") also granted certificates to Masons who were members of Lodges under their jurisdiction.

The original certificates issued in about 1766 - by the "Antients" were known as the "Universis" certificates.

They were without design and read:-

I do hereby certify that Brother - is a regular registered Freemason in the Lodge No. In the - and has during his stay amongst them behaved himself as became an honest and worthy Brother as appears by the Lodge certificate to me.

In 1791-2 a certificate with a design shewing three pillars with figures of "Faith, Hope & Charity" and a "Flying Angel" at the top was introduced.

This certificate was known as the 1st. Angel certificate.

In addition to the issue of these certificates by the "Antients" many private Lodges issued certificates of membership when required and these were sometimes written on any scrap of paper available and frequently the



blank leaves of a minute book were used for the purpose - These would generally be for the use of Masons travelling to prove their identity and facilitate their entrance into other Lodges.

At the Union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813, the heading of the "St. Pauls" Certificate, adopted by the Moderns in 1810 was altered to read "United Grand Lodge of Antient Free & Accepted Masons of England."

The personal seal of the Duke of Sussex was used on the first Certificates issued after the union until the present seal of the United Grand Lodge was introduced.

This "St. Pauls" Certificate was issued from 1813 to 1819 in which latter year the present Certificate was approved, but the "Antients" during that period, continued to use the Certificates they already had in force.

We now come to the existing Certificate which came into general use in 1819 and has, since that time, been issued to all Freemasons.

The wording of this Certificate is as follows:-

"To all whom it may concern.  
These are to certify that our brother - - who hath signed his name in the margin hereof was regularly initiated into Free Masonry on the - - in the - - Lodge No. - - and has been regularly advanced to the second and third degrees and that he is duly registered in the books of this Grand Lodge accordingly."

In Testimony whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed the seal of the Grand Lodge at London this

This Certificate shall not entitle a Brother to admission to any Lodge without due examination.

The outstanding feature of the design is the engraving of three Pillars and the Certificate is therefore known as the "Pillars" Certificate.

The pillar in the centre like the Master's Pillar in the Lodge, is of the Ionic Order adopted by Freemasons as an emblem of Wisdom and has allusion of S.K. of I., and his wisdom in building, completing and dedicating the Temple at Jerusalem to God's service. The Pillar on the left, like the pillar of the S.W., is of the Doric Order, emblematical of Strength, - the strength of H.K. of T. in supporting K.S. with men and materials. The right-hand Pillar, like that of the J.W. is of the Corinthian Order, the emblem of beauty, and has reference to H.A., for his curious and masterly workmanship in beautifying and adorning the Temple. The bases of these three Pillars rest on the black and white Mosaic Pavement of the Lodge, symbolising light and shadow, or the joys and sorrows of man's chequered existence.

On the Pavement are depicted the three great Emblematical Lights in



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Freemasonry, the V. of the S.L., the S. and G. The S. may also be taken as representing the first of the three Movable Jewels of the Lodge of which the other two, the L. and P.R. are represented; as also the H.M., with which the L. and P.R. are associated in our traditional history.

The three Immovable Jewels of the Lodge, viz:- The Tracing Board and the Rough and Perfect Ashlars, are also shown, their uses and significance being fully explained in the fifth section of the first lecture. Certain of the remaining Working Tools and the Celestial and Terrestrial Globes, which point out that Masonry is universal are in addition depicted.

As regards the wording, in the left panel is a declaration in English, and in the right-hand panel a Latin translation or paraphrase certifying "to all whom it may concern" that the Brother named has been regularly received into Freemasonry and, in due course, admitted to the second and third degrees.

The date of the initiation is recorded Anno Lucis, i.e., in the year of the era of Masonic Light, which preceded the Christian Era by four thousand years. In testimony that the brother's name has been duly registered in the Books of the Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Secretary has subscribed his name and affixed the seal of Grand Lodge. On the seal are the Latin words Audi, Vide Tace. or in English, Listen, Observe, Be silent. A final clause states that the Certificate does not entitle a Brother to admission to any Lodge without due examination, but examination alone does not entitle to admission without the production of this voucher should it be demanded.

To the Brother to whom it is issued, therefore, this document is of unique value. It testifies that Grand Lodge recognise that the foundation stone placed in the N.E. part of the Lodge, has been well and truly laid. It is a means of Masonic identification; a proof of membership in case of accident or misfortune; and a passport when visiting a foreign Lodge where the signs may differ somewhat from our own. And, just as no Lodge is "Regular" without the production of the Warrant of Constitution entrusted to the keeping of the Master, so no individual Mason should be without his Grand Lodge Certificate on any occasion of Masonic importance while its production is an essential condition for acceptance as a Joining Member of any Lodge or as a Candidate for admission to the Supreme Degree of the Royal Arch.