

The Masonic Certificate.

It is probable that from a very early date a written certificate of membership was given to a freeman, whenever required, but the first regular presentation of such documents by Grand Lodge of England from 1755.

This certificate was of smaller size than ^{that} now in use, of an unpretensions but effective design, and is known as the 'Cartwright No.1' Certificate.

In 1785 the same engraver produced a new plate with slight differences in wording, known as the 'Cartwright No.2'.

This remained in use until 1799, when a plate practically identical with the last named was engraved by I. Cole, and hence known as the 'Cole' Certificate, which lasted until 1809.

The 'Ancients' Grand Lodge first issued official certificates about 1766, the design of which was entirely composed of letters, some in Latin and English, on a small oblong piece of parchment. The certificate being designed by Laurence Dermott is most appropriately named the 'Dermott' Certificate, but has also been described as 'Universis' from its first word.

This certificate continued in use until about 1792, when a certificate similar to that in use by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, was designed and issued by Thomas Harper, then Deputy Grand Secretary, and should be named the 'T. Harper' certificate. It is also distinguished by the seal being affixed on a diagonal paper.

With two small retouchings to the plate this lasted until 1810 when Kennedy engraved a similar but finer plate, to which the seal was affixed on a square of paper, parallel to its sides. This was the 'Harper & Kennedy' certificate which remained in use until the union in 1813.

Meanwhile the Regular Grand Lodge had in 1810 issued the handsomest of all English certificates, which from the prominent feature of the design is known as the 'St. Pauls' certificate. This with slight variations in the heading continued in use until the Union, and was then adopted by the United Grand Lodge and utilised until 1819. The rarest variety of this type is that granted during parts of the years 1814-15 when, pending the selection and completion of a new seal for the United Grand Lodge, H. P. A. The Duke of Sumner, as Grand Master, allowed his own private seal to be used.

In 1819 the present, or 'Three Pillars' certificate was introduced, the seal and place for signature being over the left and right pillars.

In 1820 the places for seal and autograph were removed to the sides as now used, and except for the headings, which necessarily varied with each Grand Master there has been no important change to the present time. The issue of certificates by private lodges, which obtained for many years and produced many beautiful and interesting examples, is now forbidden - except for 'Clearance' and 'Honorary' Membership.

In many lodges the ceremony of presenting the certificate is made interesting and impressive by the Master, or an officer deputed by him, delivering the following explanatory address:-

Brother --

Having passed through the three Degrees of Craft Masonry you are now entitled to receive the Certificate issued by the Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England.

The first systematic granting of such Diploma dates from the reign of George III. By order of the quarterly Communication of July 24th. 1755. a copper plate was ordered to be engraved for printing the certificate, to be granted to a brother on his being made a Mason. 'A die was cut, and an engine made wherewith to seal the same'.

For more than half a century our certificates varied in size and style; the design of this parchment dates from 1819, and is known as the 'Pillars Certificate'

I have pleasure in presenting this certificate to you in open Lodge; (hands certificate to Candidate) please examine it whilst I explain its meaning.

Because our Grand Master is a Prince of the Blood Royal, the document is surmounted by the Royal Arms.

You will observe that the main space in the design is divided by a column. This is of the Ionic order, and signifies Wisdom; the wisdom of S.K. of I. in building, completing and dedicating the Temple at Jerusalem to the service of T.G.A.O.T.U.

Flanking the central pillar are two others, that on the left is of the Doric order and denotes strength; the strength of H.K. of C. in supporting Solomon with men and materials. That on the right is of the Corinthian order and denotes Beauty, referring as it does to the beautiful work of H.A.B. and his skill in adorning the Temple.

These three Pillars rest on the black and white flooring of the Lodge, which latter symbolises Light and Darkness of the joys and sorrows of our chequered existence.

On the floor are the three great though emblematical lights in Freemasonry: viz the V.S.L. the S-- and the G--. You will also find the working tools of the three Degrees, the Tracing Boards, the rough and perfect Ashlars representing the ignorant and the skilled Mason, and finally the Celestial and Terrestrial Globes pointing out Masonry universal.

As regards the wording, in the left hand panel is a declaration in English, and in the right hand panel a translation into Latin to all whom it may concern that the brother referred to in the text has been regularly received into our Order. Not only is the date of his admission recorded Anno Domini, but also Anno Lucis or the year of Masonic Light which preceded the Christian Era by four millenaries.

In testimony that the brother's name has been registered on the Books of the Grand Lodge of England, the V.W. Grand Secretary has inscribed his name and affixed the seal of Grand Lodge.

If you will examine the seal you will see that it contains in Latin that excellent maxim of the Craft, which exhorts a Brother to hear, to see and remain silent.

A final clause states that the possession of this certificate does not entitle a Brother to admission to any Lodge without due examination, neither, it should be added does examination give entrance without the production of this certificate, should it be demanded.

To the Brother to whom it is issued this Parchment is therefore of unique value. It testifies that Grand Lodge considers that the foundation placed a few months ago at the North East Part of the Lodge has been well and truly laid. It is a means of Masonic identification, and a proof of membership in case of unforeseen calamity or misfortune. It is a passport when visiting a Foreign Lodge where the signs differ somewhat from our own.

As no Lodge is regular without the Warrant entrusted to its Master, so should no individual Mason neglect to take with him his certificate when attending any special Masonic function.

Yet Brother --- your certificate as it is at present is incomplete as Grand Lodge requires that you affix your usual autograph in the margin. From that signature there must be no subsequent deviation. For this purpose you will go to the north of the Lodge to the Secretary's table and sign your name in the presence of the Brethren.

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Further interesting information on foreign and other certificates is given in the chapter devoted to this subject in 'Things a Freemason should know' by W Brod. F. J. W. Crowe; and those who are specially interested may see that unique collection in the Grand Lodge Museum & Library, London, which has been presented by that Author after nearly thirty years of effort.

THE ARMORIAL BEARINGS ON THE MASTER MASON'S CERTIFICATE

By W. Bro. E.H. Cartwright, P.G.D.

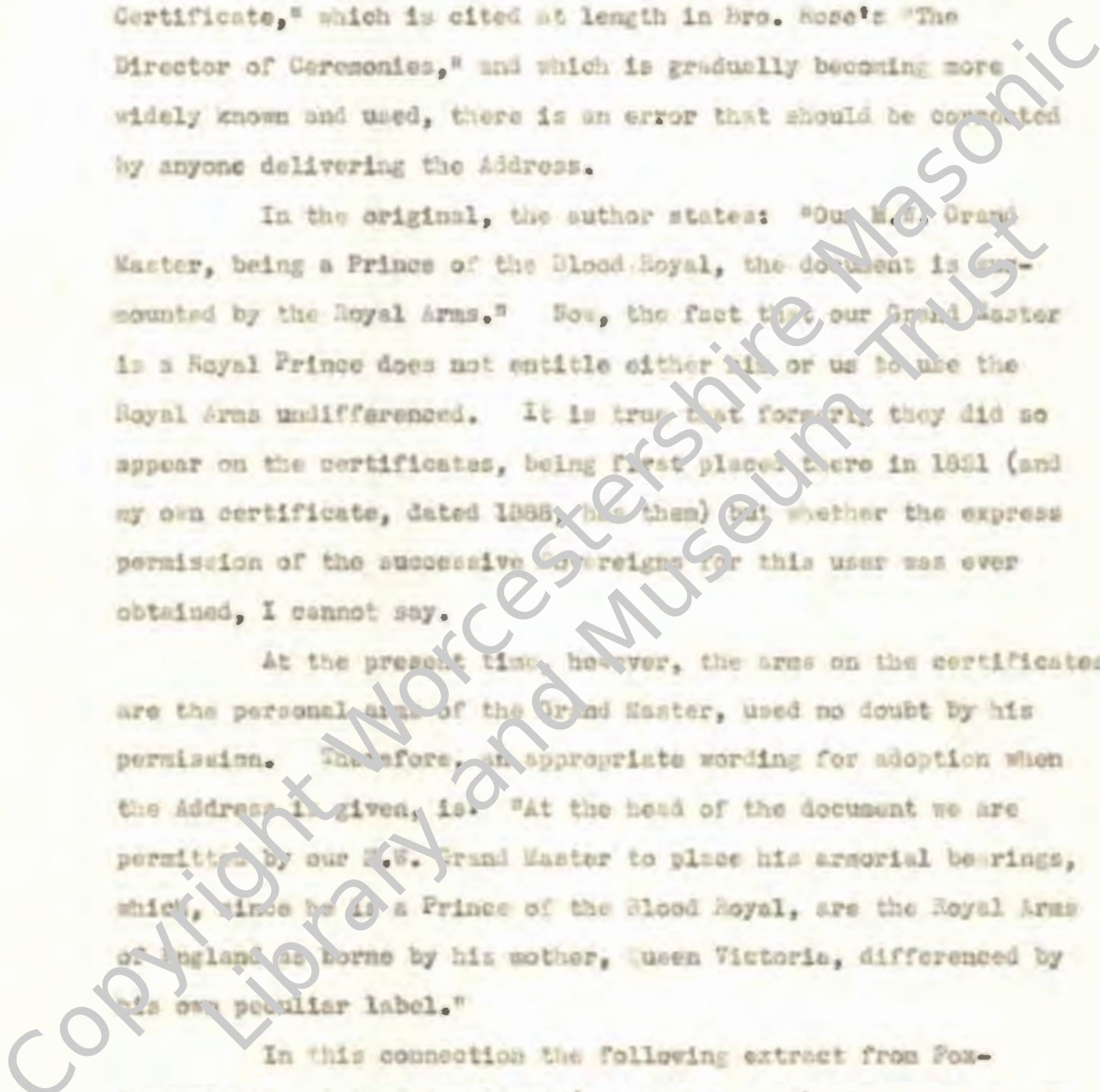
In the "Address on the Presentation of a Grand Lodge Certificate," which is cited at length in Bro. Rose's "The Director of Ceremonies," and which is gradually becoming more widely known and used, there is an error that should be corrected by anyone delivering the Address.

In the original, the author states: "Our W.M. Grand Master, being a Prince of the Blood Royal, the document is surmounted by the Royal Arms." Now, the fact that our Grand Master is a Royal Prince does not entitle either him or us to use the Royal Arms undifferenced. It is true that formerly they did so appear on the certificates, being first placed there in 1831 (and my own certificate, dated 1888, has them) but whether the express permission of the successive Sovereigns for this usage was ever obtained, I cannot say.

At the present time however, the arms on the certificates are the personal arms of the Grand Master, used no doubt by his permission. Therefore, an appropriate wording for adoption when the Address is given, is: "At the head of the document we are permitted by our W.M. Grand Master to place his armorial bearings, which, since he is a Prince of the Blood Royal, are the Royal Arms of England as borne by his mother, Queen Victoria, differenced by his own peculiar label."

In this connection the following extract from Fox-Davies's "The Art of Heraldry" (pp. 348 and 349) may, perhaps, be of interest, at any rate to some readers :-

"The Royal Arms are not personal. They are the sovereign arms of dominion, indicating the sovereignty enjoyed by the person upon the throne. Consequently they are in no degree hereditary, and from the earliest times, certainly since the reign of Edward I., the right to bear the undifferenced arms has been confined exclusively to the sovereign upon the throne.



.....The differencing between members of the Royal family is now done by means of labels, (and) a separate warrant under the hand and seal of the Sovereign is issued to the different members of the Royal family, assigning to each a certain coronet and the label to be borne over the Royal Arms, crest and supporters. These warrants are personal to those to whom they are issued and are not hereditary".

The armorial bearings that were assigned to H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught are the Royal Arms differenced by a label of three points argent, the centre point charged with a Saint George's Cross and each of the other points with a Fleury de lazure. This label is, of course, also placed on the crest and on the supporters.

Incidentally, it seems likely that in his new edition Bro. Rose has excised the sentence in reference to the seal of Grand Lodge: "On this seal, if you examine it closely, you will see certain Hebrew characters. They read: 'Kodesh la Adonai,' meaning 'Holiness to the Lord.'" and has substituted a simple allusion to the motto of the Craft.

THE SKIRRET.

Reference to the Grand Lodge Certificate suggests advice to a point of some slight interest in connection therewith. The address says that the Working Tools of the three degrees are represented in the design. But in fact the implement that we now know as the skirret is not to be found there. The question naturally arises: how is its absence to be explained?

The implement to which we give the name was not used by the old operative mason at all. When laying out foundations he stretched his cord between a couple of "plotting pins" (simple iron stakes), round one of which the cord was wound when not in use. I believe the modern implement first came into use among gardeners (who call it a "line and reel"), though owing to its convenience, it is now not infrequently employed by builders.

In a MS. ritual of 1828 belonging to Lodge 108, which is believed to be a copy of an earlier MS. written by a Brother who attended on six occasions the demonstrations of the Lodge of Reconciliation, it is stated that "the tools of a S.M. are the skirrett line, chalk, pencil and compasses."

It seems, therefore, at least possible that in those days it was the "skirret Line (i.e., the whitened cord) that was considered the essential thing, and that the implement round which it was for convenience wound (and to which the name "skirret" became transferred) was regarded as a mere accessory of no symbolic import, and therefore not worthy of being depicted in the design of 1818.

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