

EARLY FREEMASONRY.

The first question anyone looking at Early Freemasonry asks is when, why and where did Freemasonry originate. There is only one answer to these questions, we do not know.

There is no definitive history of Freemasonry, indeed modern research suggest that the issues have been clouded by well meaning but ill informed Masonic historians themselves *who deserted critical historical analysis, and failed to distinguish between historical fact and esoteric legend*

Many brethren believe that our Masonic Ritual came down straight from Heaven into the hands of King Solomon himself. There is one problem with this theory, since it is accepted that the language of Heaven is Welsh, who translated into Hebrew and then into ancient English. Attempts have also been made to forge a direct link between Apprentices and Fellowcrafts who built King Solomon's Temple with the medieval guilds and through them to the present speculative masons. *but it can safely be*

concluded that that is not what it was but plenty of evidence to the contrary. The Temple would have been built by Solomon, a non Jew but not like
Those of you who are members of another degree will know that at the

first rebuilding of the Holy Temple three Master Masons from Babylon who had been in captivity there came down to sojourn with the brethren then rebuilding the Temple to assist with its rebuilding. This, *Allegedly to the east* coupled with the *well known* history of the so called "Travelling Masons", in particular the old Roman Colleges which were brought into existence to foster their particular crafts, many of them practising religious rights. The candidates took an oath of admission which included helping their poor, and burning their dead.

There is linked with

There is also the history of the Commacine Organisation, or tradition of Travelling Masons, when skilled Masons, it is said, travelled from place to place on the Continent and in England seeking work and using their membership of the fraternity as an introduction and recommendation to would be employers. The tradition has grown up on these lines. Organised companies

of Masons not only highly skilled but extensively informed in the higher branches of Masonry design and construction obtained, from the Pope an

The candidates had a taste of adorning them with intricate designs & from other fine buildings. Perhaps this authority is not so far fetched as it

may sound, as it must be remembered that the original builders of King Solomon's Temple were Phoenicians or Tyreans and that King Solomon sub-contracted to build the Temple to King Hiram and that the Israelites were themselves an agricultural people who would not have been skilled in

The Phoenicians were also a sea faring race & could read & write

building. It has also been suggested in an old transcript known as the Regius or Halliwell manuscript dated about 1390 in what is probably a

mythical claim, that King Atherstan gave a charter to a Mason Fellowship of

of called hudd natural character. Equally legendary is the story that the Bishop of Winchester, who rebuilt part of his Cathedral in 1209, founded a Masonic Fraternity. None of these Fraternities, if any of them ever existed,

are likely to have been the Association in which the Masonic Companies had

Indeed there is little evidence - later than early 17th their origin. A few Masonic students have admitted to side tracking some

of the problems by claiming that the Speculative Lodges of the 1700's had never had a connection with Operative Masonry and were not the

descendants of Masonic Fraternities, but instead consisted of Bodies of educated gentlemen who had deliberately chosen to call themselves Freemasons,

*Handled
Nagels*

but few, in any, *organisms* are invented, off hand. They are all *come on*

of growth. If we find one of them organised and in working order at a certain date, it is highly probable that it has existed for many years in

a rudimentary or un-organised form. *and there appear to be little evidence of their birth*

1650 little or no

Be that as it may there is between 1400 and 1700 written evidence of the growth of Masonry in England.

By the 16th Century, the word "Lodge" had come to mean an organisation of working Masons set up to regulate their trade conditions and to set up rules and regulations for the protection of Masters and Craftsmen.

In a time when an ability to read and write was rare it would have been necessary for Masters of a Lodge to have a secret mode of recognition as a proof of their abilities, which came to be communicated in a short admission ceremony.

The earliest written evidence of an Operative Lodge in England are the Minutes of the Alnwick Lodge in Northumberland, which go back as far as 1701.

The Operative Masons, in particular Lodges were much stronger in Scotland than in England and Northumberland ^{Wales} is near to the Scottish border, and could have come under Scottish influence.

In tracing the development of Operative Masonry to Speculative Masonry it must be remembered that the Master Mason had a status corresponding with that of a professional man of good standing in the present day. For example at Bury St. Edmunds, a Master Mason received "Board for himself in the Hall as a gentleman, and for his servant as a Yeoman".

There is also talk in the earlier documents of "mysteries". This must not be confused with the modern meaning of the word. It did not then imply secrecy, but in ancient English or Norman French, it implied any work of skill. Of course, any skill had its secrets, but they were matters of craft theory, or practice, or technics, they were not esoteric mysteries. It is easy to see how a word originally implying nothing more than a craft came to mean a secret craft, and just as a trade kept its secrets from the public gaze, so the senior workers in that trade would tend to keep their secrets from their juniors until such time as it was though expedient to communicate them. So it came about in the course of time that many a craft that had been a mystery to start with had, in fact, become a ^{code} ~~code~~ or system of mystery ~~and~~ and secrets which everybody seeking to join it had to solemnly swear to keep inviolate ^{ate}

4
The most exquisite modern Mason to be had transitional Mason that made free masons grow out of operative mason

I do not suppose our ancient brethren were any different from workers today when it came to moonlighting, so that your Cathedral builder would accept a commission to build a house for a wealthy merchant or wealthy stagecoach dealer or whatever the 17th Century equivalent of a wealthy

plastic manufacturer
garage proprietor was. As I have previously stated a Mason would have been of equal social status as his employer, and the practice grew of inviting non-Masons to join Operative Lodges, just as a prominent citizen might be invited to join or become an honorary member of a sports club without any ability to participate in that sport.

I am a V.P. of the Council. I have no fear - 99% would be content with the thought of my sign with a A.B.A.R

We now come to the first documentary evidence of non-operative Masons.

On the 16th October, 1646 Elias Ashmole, a well known diarist and contemporary and correspondent of Pepys, and a founder of the Ashmolean Library in Oxford records, "October 16th 1646 4.30 p.m. I was made a Freemason at Warrington in Manchester with Col. Henry Maitwaring". He then records the names of those who were then in the Lodge. We know that one, at least, was an Operative Mason and the inference is that there were others also.

The Ashmole Diary does not again refer to Freemasonry for nearly 36 years, when he records "March 10th 1682. I received a Summons to appear at a Lodge to be held at Masons Hall, London. At about noon there were admitted in the Fellowship of Freemasons" and here he mentions six names many of whom will be found in the records of the building of St. Pauls Cathedral, and were well known contractors, and one was known to be the chief importer of stone into London at that period.

This shows the very close association existing between the newly merging system of Speculative Masonry and some of the more prominent Operative Masters of the day.

It is interesting to note that Ashmole records "We all dined at the

My very sincere apologies on behalf of the committee
to the fact that I am not very welcome by the club
Perhaps an exact letter for specific lodge is due

The detractor of this class say
that even today the class

distinctions are less regret

if one went on a building site

one would find many good

hearted men glad to see work

and food of their dogs but

would they really welcome

into their midst an

antiquary, a surgeon and the

professional man of good sound

points

Copyright Worcestershire Masonic
Library and Museum Trust

Half Moon Tavern in Cheapside at a noble dinner paid for by the newly accepted Masons". This was in accordance with the practice going back, at any rate in Scotland, for hundreds of years. Further a candidate was not then said to be initiated, he was admitted or accepted. The omission of all reference to Freemasonry for 36 years suggests that he had nothing to do with Freemasonry during that period, but it should be noticed that he was summonsed to attend the Lodge, and he could hardly have been summonsed had he not maintained some connection. One explanation is that Ashmole had a great affection for Litchfield where he was born, and it so happened that Sir William Wilson, the well known Senior Mason and sculptor of the statue of Charles the Second in Litchfield Cathedral, was accepted into Freemasonry on the occasion of his visit, and it could well be that he was summonsed or invited to witness his friend's accoution.

In 1688 Randle Holme a Deputy Garter King of Arms writes in 1688 "I cannot but honour the fellowship of the Masons because of its antiquity, and the more as being myself a member of that Society called "Freemasons". There is good reason to believe that Holme was made a Freemason at a Lodge in Chester around 1665. Preserved in the British Museum is a list giving the names of 27 persons. There can hardly be a doubt that this was a list of Members of the Lodge of Chester. Of the 27 persons about six were Masons by trade and 15 Members of other branches of the building trade.

Dr. Robert Plot, Secretary of the Royal Society in 1682 and the first *Reader* registered in Chemistry at Oxford wrote in "The Natural History of Staffordshire" in 1686:-

*Read photobk
 D. W. Plot see 1 legal
 note etc*

see over:-

The Scarborough Manuscript refers to a Lodge held there on the 10th July, 1705 when several brethren were admitted into the Lodge. In the same year we find a reference to a Lodge held at York, which was attracting to itself a membership of many influential men. This same Lodge met at Bradford in 1717 on which occasion 18 gentlemen were admitted.

Highwell manuscript of the W. L. 1748

From allusions in the general literature of the day, notably The Tatler in 1709 and 1710, it is obvious that by that time Freemasonry was already well known and was being referred to in ordinary conversation, and by the dawn of the 18th Century there were certainly scattered throughout the English Counties Lodges and Fraternities of Freemasons which were surviving on a wide spread system derived from an Operative Craft which was ~~not~~ moribund.

a. 1700

The learned men who came into Freemasonry in the 1600's would meet practical men skilled in the use of stone workers tools, the Masons and Operative Freemasons. None of these would be men of education and building, and of practical processes comprise at one time considerable "speculative work" what would now mostly be called theory. The newcomers would mentally dub the men who backed up their practice with theory speculative, and as the accepted Masons built up a knowledge of their symbolic craft they distinguished themselves from stone masons by calling themselves Speculative. Generally speculative will mean theory, and from that ~~speculative~~ on philosophy or esoteric doctrines.

The first Grand Lodge was founded in London in 1717 when four London Lodges banded together for the proper regulation of the craft, and the first Minutes were published in 1717.

1726 Page 61

The first Grand Lodge was
 founded in London in 1717
 when four London lodges
 banded together to regulate
 freemasonry in London. There
 seems to be little doubt
 that initially it was almost
 an opportunity for members
 of London lodges to meet together
 socially.

In 1720 a change began to
 discernible **John** 1st Duke of Montagu
 acted as the first Grand Master
 and Grand Lodge began to meet
 more regularly with executive power
 as a regulatory body. In 1723

William Cowper Clerk of the Parliament was
 elected the first Secretary of Grand
 Lodge and official minutes began to be
 kept.

The first Grand Lodge was
 founded in London in 1717
 when four London lodges
 banded together to regulate
 freemasonry in London. There
 seems to be little doubt
 that initially it was almost
 an opportunity for members
 of London lodges to meet together
 socially.

In 1720 a change began to
 discernible **John** 1st Duke of Montagu
 acted as the first Grand Master
 and Grand Lodge began to meet
 more regularly with executive power
 as a regulatory body. In 1723

William Cowper Clerk of the Parliament was
 elected the first Secretary of Grand
 Lodge and official minutes began to be
 kept.

The year 18 in England was a
 great age of clubs and coffee houses
 and in many ways organized Masons
 was little different from the other
 clubs and societies which the esoteric
 lodge meetings were held in a
 private room in an inn or tavern
 and there was little difference between
 the actual meeting and the
 social hour. The treasurer was of the
 the Hundred of the Inn (then known to get
 paid) eating drink and smoke
 would take place throughout the
 meeting. (18) Treason has manifested
 of the secret and respectful feel were
 not slow to introduce fear for
 any misdeed, for it was the
 to 2 per cent a day (1650 to
 year 1660) - not inconsiderable
 sum when the average wage of a laborer
 was one shilling a week

There for we have
for an attack at
the body. falling
asked "what the
loose was engaged in
solid business -

a not unusual occurrence
when meeting at a particular
was common, so

being disguised in about
as they turned over and under
escape in modesty of
long use - swears

the improper dressed at
one loose minute

20 members present

at the end of 100

£3 the end of year

and spent £10

The history of the mason

in the 18 is disguised of a

local level ground

between men's lives

(at the time was still)

small good lodge - But some

W B M Name is almost clearing us

from the speaker who go

a too long so we will

learn that ground as the

subsequent second what to

small to

was as little that

you to the had way - who

you receive the 119

Copyright Worcester and Museum Trust