

Architecture and Masonry

As we are all aware there is a considerable inter-relation between the two.

Historically there exists a wealth of examples to explore.

May I make it clear that it is not my intention, or within my capability, to embark on a deep philosophical paper which would have pretensions to shatter centuries of deeply considered interpretations on the subject of Architecture and Free Masonry by numerous intellectuals - which I hasten to add - I am not.

This is a talk on the more simple aspects, readily offered to the W.M., principally to occupy you and hopefully keep you awake until it is time to retire from "labour to refreshment", and in view of your enthusiasm for the latter, I will not keep you too long.

When I was endeavouring to bring together a few thoughts for this talk and trying to remember a quotation from my Student days relating to the definition of Architecture, I came across a paper I wrote in 1950 on Henry Yevrele, Master Mason. In the bibliography was reference to Jones and D. Knoop and their book "Introduction to Freemasonry".

It was to be 18 years before I knew anything about Freemasonry - when I joined.

I find it fascinating that in 1950 I was endeavouring to make an operative link between Architecture and Freemasonry and now 42 years on I am considering the speculative link between Freemasonry and Architecture from a different point of view.

Those authors, D. Knoop and G.P. Jones' definition of Freemasonry from the Masonic Historians point of view was that "it would appear to be the organisation and practices which have from time to time prevailed among medieval working masons and their 'operative' and 'speculative' successors from the earliest date from which such organisation is traceable down to the present time".

I would define Architecture as the art or science of building.

An architect is a designer and is skilled in the Art of Building.

The quotation I was searching for was by Henry Wotton Knight and he said "In Architecture, as in all operative arts, the end must direct the operation. The end is to build well. Well building hath three conditions :- "Commoditie, Firmness and Delight".

There lies the relationship between Architecture and Masonry and there is great Architectural content within Freemasonry.

An Architect is a creator.

The Great Architect Himself is a Masonic metaphor.

The operative Mason relies on his tools and skills to create buildings, the formation of structures for a specific use, in forms which are structural, to make it stand up, consisting of foundations, columns, beams, walls and roof and ornaments to adorn the structure and to beautify the building.

It is all these aspects that we as Masons have adopted within our Speculative Masonry and somewhere every part can be found.

However, there is I believe, a danger, very often found in writers of Masonry, of making or creating Masonic allusions to buildings where there are none.

A great amount of our Masonic images can be found or, belong to other orders and design.

The Masonic Content must be clearly recognised and understood, but as I said in my opening remarks - it is there together with a spiritual belonging.

Having dug up, so as to speak, Henry Yevele from my student past I propose to look at the Medieval builders and the ties with our Masonry as we know it.

The roots of our Masonic Symbolism.

The Tools and Ornaments of our Masonic Lodges.

First let us look at those Medieval masterpieces of buildings.

The great Cathedrals. From Norman simplicity in the 11th and 12th Centuries through to the 15th Century of the Perpendicular Style. No one entering a Cathedral cannot but be aware of a sense of awe, of scale, of Spiritual Presence.

It is well summed up by that Master Mason Henry Yevele, when in 1391, felt he expressed the spirit of the Gothic in his work when he said "and I built my Nave and I determined that there should be no mistake about what it was or what purpose it was meant to serve. It should be a new thing and a good thing. A vast, clean building raised by a powerful people, certain of what they believed in, great and immeasurably lofty pillars should raise their shafted heights to Heaven undistracted and should know when they got there, a great hall of prayer which should teach men to be simple and show them that in simplicity there could be greatness. There is nothing eccentric about my nave, it leads them simply and calmly upward.....". This related to Canterbury Cathedral and I believe is interpreted within our Free Masonry.

Now there may be no direct Masonic symbolism within these buildings, not as the period of Enlightenment in Europe, the spirit and aims of the 18th Century intellectuals who built buildings, created works of art and music founded on the Symbolism of Masonry, to which I will refer later. Our affinity is with the Masons who built those early structures.

The only tenuous connection of our Medieval buildings were that they were Temples to God and that they evolved from the Temple of Jerusalem, there might be the Symbols of the Route and Journey of our Masonic Rites from West to East, by a the pronouced axial route. If you look hard enough you can interpret symbolism in anything.

However the Medieval Cathedral served as a Temple of Memory reminding the Pilgrim of the Temple of Solomon, Biblical stories, and in itself explains the complexity of the building within its carvings, decorations, stained glass windows, painting vividly the stories of Christian Belief.

Memory also forms an important element within Free Masonry.

Let us return to our Medieval builders "The Masters" and our strong symbolic links.

Have you considered how they built these superb buildings with the primitive tools and practices that they had available.?

The physical danger working high up on a cantilevered platform of poles and rough planks, primitive ladders, no safe guards. The equivalent height of a modern 10 storey building.

If you stepped back to admire the perfection of your work halfway up a cathedral you did not live long enough to see the finished product.

There was a greater risk in those days of meeting your Maker than completing the Temple to His Glory. But there was skill and perfection.

Fortunately there were no Local Planning Authorities who, in their ignorance could refuse planning approval.

Had there been you would not have any of these beautiful buildings that have lasted for centuries and continue to give us so much joy.

The Masons

There were 3 stages in the training of Masons. The Apprentice, the Journeyman and Master and they were trained in a quarry or on site.

Freemasons or Freestone Masons working fine grained stone such as limestone or sandstone were of various degrees of skill. They would prepare the work and a good mason would carve the intricate work having a high degree of precision which then had to be assembled.

The normal squared ashlar would be set by rough masons or layers or a Cowan (Uninitiated, one of the profane), one not permitted to work with lime or use a trowel - they did not have the word.

A Freemason of exceptional skill could become a Master Mason in charge of a building also designing or supervising.

Master Masons like Yevele in the employment of the King received rewards and profits and were paid about one shilling a day together with a Furred Robe equal to that of the Esquires of the Household.

Until 1354 London had no Guild or Fraternity. Again Yevele was influential in founding this Order and elected one of its first members.

So we start to see the foundations and our connections with the Medieval Masons and their Fraternities, formed to protect their skills, their standards and their secrets.

At the end of the 16th Century honorary members were admitted to the Societies of Freemasons. They were Scholars of Architecture and they were given knowledge of the operative Masons' secret signs and instructed in the Legends of the Craft and participated in the social gatherings. A more than likely probability of the start of Freemasonry as we know it today.

The Freemasons Lodge was originally a simple timber structure, sometimes stone, with a roof adjoining the building being erected, the workshop for the masons preparing the stone, a place to store tools, a place to meet and eat.

It was also a term for a group of masons working on a particular building or within a district or area.

It established rules for terms and conditions of apprenticeship, assigned marks and collected and distributed funds for the relief of distressed masons.

All the things we recognise in our Masonry.

Marks or Tokens, means of recognition that we adopt.

Geometry was, or is, the Key of the Finesse and Perfection of Architecture of buildings, a liberal art which, studied and applied, provided exactness and may be considered the root of Masonry.

So we draw together the main elements of Masonic History.

Geometry, Architecture, Masons.

Tools of the Mason

A brief word on the tools of the operative Mason.

You all have a considerable knowledge of them and their speculative application.

But there are a few misconceptions.

The Gavel

It is a stonemason's hammer. Often confused with mallets.

It has a pointed head with a cutting edge for breaking off corners of rough stone.

Mallet

Has a round head. Used with the chisel for dressing stone.

The Heavy Maul

Used in the 3rd Degree, is for setting the stone in lime mortar.

Lime Mortar

Mortar, tempered and slaked, was applied by the mason with a trowel and formed a bonding agent to the masonry.

Cowans were not allowed to work with the trowel or use lime.

As you know, the trowel is the symbol of the Master Mason.

Mortar was an important symbol in Continental Masonry. It was considered as a bonding agent. Tempered and slaked, it is supposed to indicate that passions and fiery temperaments are under control. Untempered mortar indicates that lessons of the craft have not been fully assimilated.

The trowel, being a triangle, is an emblem of cryptic Masonry.

The Tracing Board

Not as we know it in present day architecture.

To the Medieval Mason it could be a flat stone or a board with parchment on which the Master Mason laid out details for the craftsman.

From the Latin Tractus meaning a drawing or a 'Track'.

Gothic Tracery is derived from this.

In Speculative Masonry it developed as an emblem.

Pillars and Columns

Not a very interesting subject in itself but has important associations with Free Masonry from the time of the Temple of Solomon.

Let me first endeavour, Architecturally, to define the difference between a pillar and a column. Even dictionaries get it wrong.

A Pillar is a vertical, isolated, free standing member, supporting some structure over. It is not necessarily circular and does not conform to the Orders of Architecture.

A Column is that part of the Order of Architecture that is an upright member. Circular, polygonal or square but, it comprises a base (except the Doric Order) a shaft and capital. The whole supports an entablature.

The 2 pillars of Masonic Legend or the medium by which the secret knowledge was saved from destruction by fire and water.

NOT the same as the 2 columns of King Solomon's Temple.

Spiral columns, garlanded or decorated in the Solomonic form and later in the Baroque form are associated with Freemasonry, especially in Europe and depicted on Lodge designs, as also the broken or truncated column associated with death and funery.

I have endeavoured to deal with some of the basic nuts and bolts of Architecture and Free Masonry.

The 17th and 18th Centuries are possibly the most interesting and physically active period of Free Masonry and Architecture, especially in Europe and are really the subject of a whole talk in themselves.

First the Renaissance Hermetic tradition limited to Egyptian Mysticism - the application of secrets and symbols is found rooted in Freemasons symbolic interpretation. A link to Egyptian Architecture and Ancient Egyptian wisdom. The method of learning and memorising our secrets by association used the study of a building and its layout and detail.

Cowley in 1647 of his Mistress spoke of her "parts becoming to him". The art of memory applied in a manner preferable to Architecture - but liable to some distraction.

In 1688 Jacobite Freemasons took the Craft abroad.

In England Freemasonry became Hanoverian and the popularity of the Architect Inigo Jones, with his Palladio Style was accepted.

At this period architecture was seen as a means of establishing a just ordered system. The Temple being considered the greatest achievement of architecture.

(Conversely, especially in France and Germany, we see the influence of Freemasonry into architecture.

Cube

The Escorial near Madrid built in 1594-84 for King Philip II was probably derived from Villapandos' version of the Temple.

Ledoux designs exemplified simplified architectural form. He designed a city called Chaux (lime) in which the massive gun foundry was pure geometrical design with huge pyramids at each corner. Spherical lodges, even a Temple of Sexual Instruction as a neo-classical design (a brothel to us).

There was also the revival and re-introduction of Egyptian architecture, again the simplicity of shape without ornament, related to Neo-Classical style.

Freemasons' belief in Egypt as the source of Skill and Wisdom.

Peter Henderson
The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland in 1901 is an example of this Egyptian influence, that is the building. NOT the poor or non-existent association or representation we have in modern Temples.

Freemasons Hall 1775-6 Thomas Sandly

Sir John Soane.

ART was influenced by Freemasonry.

Music and stage sets as depicted in those admirable lectures by W.Bro. Mike Jarrat on Mozart's Zauberflöte (Magic Flute) music.

The stage sets themselves are worthy of a lecture in the relation they have with Egyptian Architecture, particularly Schinkel's designs for the 1816 production. Lequeu's later designs for the trial by fire and water are Architecturally most Extraordinary.

These Egyptian designs are indivisible from the music.

Modern productions have no meaning without the association.

Gardens and Cemeteries

These also in the 18th Century evolved from Masonic thinking.

The monopoly of the Church of the dead was broken.

Church Yards had become foul, repugnant places for internment.

As a result in this period of enlightenment, the garden cemetery was conceived. Fields of rest with tree lined routes. Formal layout. Neo-Classical buildings and tombs.

The combination of Architecture with Death within the English Landscape tradition had strong Masonic links.

In England in 1825 Freemasons were involved in founding the Liverpool Cemetery of St. James with Neo-Classical Greek Revival Temple as a Morgue.

They also made a profit. 8% dividends were made.

Not a bad return on the dead.

I shall finish with a rather sad story about one of our Medieval forbears. A Distressed Mason.....

A workman was missing from his post as a labourer on the building of a Cathedral.

The Master Mason sent a craftsman to establish the reason for his absence and he found the absentee in a rather sorry state and he asked the scholarly craftsman to write a letter for him to explain why he could not work.

This the letter.

MASTER - My humble regrets that I am unable to be present to carry out my duties due to an alarming and severe accident occasioned to my person. The circumstances of which are as follows :-

While carrying out my duty of hauling stone and materials by means of a rope, pulley and basket to the masons working high up the building, which had continued without problem until, having pulled the basket to the top, the masons emptied it and then refilled it with rubble from the work to be disposed of.

They shouted to me to take hold of the rope and be prepared to lower and then pushed the basket off the platform.

That is when it happened Master.

The basket was over-filled and much heavier than me and as a consequence, fell to the ground, I, still holding on the rope, shot up into the air.

The basket hurtling to the ground struck me a severe and damaging blow as I continued upward.

My head struck the scaffold and pulley causing damage to my head.

I hung on Master for fear I would fall to the ground and kill myself.

The basket on striking the ground spilled some of its contents.

I at the top was now much heavier than the basket on the ground.

As a result I fell towards the ground, the basket giving me a further severe and damaging blow on passing.

I crashed onto the ground breaking my leg and arm and foolishly in my weak and faint state I let go of the rope.

The basket, high up at the top, half full of rubble, had nothing to restrain it and therefore crashed down on top of me as I lay prostrate on the ground, causing me further severe injuries.

Master, I regret I am unable to work at present, but hope to return shortly

Yours fraternally,