



## **SIX HUNDRED YEARS OF CRAFT RITUAL**

**by W. Bro. Harry Carr, P.J.G.D. (E.C.)**

*A lecture given on Friday, 7 May 1976 to the Victoria Lodge of Research and Education  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6*

BRETHREN, I travel enormous distances in the course of my lecture duties and the further I go the more astonished I am to see how many brethren believe, quite genuinely, that our masonic ritual came down straight from heaven, directly into the hands of King Solomon. They are all quite certain it was in English, of course because that is the only language they speak up there. They are equally certain that it was engraved on two tablets of stone, so that, heaven forbid, not one word should ever be altered; and most of them are quite certain that King Solomon, in his own lodge, practised the same ritual that they do in theirs.

But, it was not like that at all, and tonight I am going to try to sketch for you the history of our ritual from its very beginnings up to the point when it was virtually standardized, in 1813; but you must remember, while I am talking about English ritual I am also giving you the history of your own ritual as well. One thing is going to be unusual about tonight's talk—tonight you are not going to get any fairy tales at all. Every word I utter will be based on documents which can be proved: and on the few rare occasions when, in spite of having the documents, we still have not got complete and perfect proof, I shall say loud and clear "We think..." or "We believe..." Then you will know that we are, so-to-speak, on uncertain ground; but I will give you the best that we know. And since a talk of this kind must have a proper starting point, let me begin by saying that the story did not begin in Egypt, or Palestine, or Greece, or Rome.

It all started in London, England in the year 1356, a very important date, and it started as a result of a good old-fashioned demarcation dispute. Now you all know what a demarcation dispute is. When the boys in the trade union cannot make up their minds who is going to knock the nails and who is going to screw the screws, that is a demarcation dispute. And that is how it started in 1356 when there was a great row going on in London between the mason hewers, the men who cut the stone, and the mason layers and setters, the men who actually build the walls. The exact details of the quarrel are not known, but, as a result of this row, twelve skilled master masons, with some famous men among them, came before the

mayor and aldermen at Guildhall in London, and, with official permission, drew up a simple code of trade regulations.

The opening words of that document, which still survives, say that they had come together because their trade had never been regulated in such form as other trades were. So here, in this document, we have an official guarantee that this was the very first attempt at masonic trade organization and, as we go through the document, the very first rule that they drew up gives a clue to the demarcation dispute that I was talking about. They ruled, "That every man of the trade may work at any work touching the trade if he be perfectly skilled and knowing in the same." Brethren, this was the wisdom of Solomon! If you knew the job, you could do the job, and nobody could stop you! If we only had that much common sense nowadays in England, how much better off we should be.

The organization that was set up at that time became, within twenty years, the London Masons Company, the first trade guild of the masons and one of the direct ancestors of our Freemasonry of today. This was the real beginning. Now the London Masons Company was not a lodge; it was a trade guild and I ought to spend about three weeks, if you would only stay with me that long, trying to explain how lodges began. The guilds were town organizations. In those days — I am speaking of the 1390s and 1400s — the guilds were favoured by the towns because it was customary for each of the trades to elect two representatives who became members of the Common Council, all together forming the city government.

But the mason trade did not lend itself to town organization at all. Most of their main work was outside the towns — the castles, the abbeys, the monasteries, the defence works, the really big jobs of masonry were always far from the towns. And we believe that it was in those places, where there was no other kind of trade organization, that the masons, who were engaged on those jobs for years on end, formed themselves into lodges, in imitation of the guilds, so that they had some form of self-government on the job while they were far away from all other forms of trade control.

The first actual information about lodges comes to us from a collection of documents which we know as the *Old Charges* or the *Manuscript Constitutions of Masonry*, a marvelous collection. They begin with the *Regius Manuscript* c. 1390; the next, the *Cooke Manuscript* is dated c. 1410 and we have 130 versions of these documents running right through to the eighteenth century.

The oldest version, the *Regius Manuscript*, is in rhyming verse and differs, in several respects, from the other texts, but, in their general shape and contents they are all very much alike. They begin with an opening prayer, Christian and trinitarian, and then they go on with a history of the Craft, starting in Bible times and in Bible lands, and tracing the rise of the Craft and its spread right across Europe until it reached France and was then brought across the channel and finally established in England. Shocking bad history; any professor of history would drop dead if he were challenged to prove it; but the masons believed it. This was their guarantee of antiquity and respectability.

Then, after the history we find the regulations, the actual *Charges*, for masters, fellows and apprentices, including several rules of a purely moral character, and that is all. Occasionally, the name of one of the characters changes, or the wording of a regulation will be altered slightly, but all follow the same general pattern.

Apart from these three main sections, prayer, history and *Charges*, in most of them we find a few words which indicate the beginnings of masonic ceremony. I must add that we cannot find all the information in one single document; but when we study them as a collection, it is possible to reconstruct the outline of the admission ceremony of those days, the earliest ceremony of admission into the craft.

We know, brethren, that the ceremony, such as it was, began with an opening prayer and then there was a "reading" of the history. (Many later documents refer to this "reading.") In those days, brethren, 99 masons in 100 could not read, and we believe, therefore, that they selected particular sections of the history which they memorized and recited from memory. To read the whole text, even if they could read, would have taken much too long. So the second part of the ceremony was the "reading."

Then we find an instruction which appears regularly in practically every document, usually in English, but very often in Latin, and it says: "Then one of the elders holds out a book" (sometimes "the book", sometimes the "Bible", sometimes the "Holy Bible") and he who is to be admitted, places his hand thereon."

In that position the regulations were read out to him and after the regulations had been read, he took the oath, a simple oath of fidelity to the king, to the master and to the craft, that he would obey the regulations and never bring the craft to shame. This was a direct lift from the guild oath, which was probably the only form that they knew; no frills, no penalties, no penalties, a simple oath of fidelity to the king, the employer (the master) and to the trade.

From this point onwards, the oath becomes the heart and marrow, the crucial centre of every masonic ceremony. The *Regius*, which is the first of the versions to survive, emphasizes this in a particular way and it is worth quoting here. After the reading of the *Charges* in the *Regius Manuscript*, we get these words:

" And all the points hereinbefore  
To all of them he must be sworn,  
And all shall swear the same oath  
Of the masons, be they willing, be they loth"

Whether they liked it or not, if they wanted to get into the craft, there was only one key that would open the door, and that was the mason's oath. The importance which the *Regius* attaches to it, we find repeated, over and over again, not in the same words, but the emphasis is still there. The oath or obligation is the key to the admission ceremony.

So there I have described for you the earliest ceremony and now I can justify the title of my paper, "Six Hundred Years of Craft Ritual." We have 1356 as the date of the beginnings of mason trade organization, and around 1390 the earliest evidence which indicates a ceremony of admission. Split the difference. Somewhere between those two dates is when it all started. That is almost exactly 600 years of provable history and we can prove every stage of our development from then onwards.

Masonry, the art of building, began many thousands of years before this, but, for the antecedents of our own Freemasonry, we can only go back to the direct line of history that can be proved, and that is 1356, when it really began in Britain. And now there is one other point that must be mentioned before I go any further. I have been speaking of a time when there was only one degree. The documents do not say that there is only one degree, they simply indicate

only one ceremony, never more than one. But it cannot have been for the apprentice, or entered apprentice; it must have been for the fellow of craft, the man who was fully trained. The *Old Charges* do not say this, but there is ample outside evidence from which we draw this conclusion. We have many lawsuits and legal decisions that show that in the 1400s an apprentice was the chattel of his master. An apprentice was a thing, a piece of equipment, that belonged to his master. He could be bought and sold in the same way that the master would buy and sell a horse or a cow and, under such conditions, it is impossible that an apprentice had any status in the lodge. That came much later. So, if we can think ourselves back into the time when there was only one degree it must have been for the fully-trained mason, the fellow of craft.

Almost 150 years were to pass before the authorities and parliament began to realize that maybe an apprentice was actually a human being as well. In 1530 we have in England a whole collection of labour statutes, labour laws, which began to recognize the status of an apprentice and around that time, as we might expect, we begin to find evidence of more than one degree. By the end of the 1500s we have actual minutes for two degrees; from 1598 onwards we have minutes of two Scottish Lodges that were practising two degrees. I will come to that later. Between those two dates, c. 1530 and 1598, we have very little evidence, except in one English document, the *Harleian Manuscript*, No. 2054, dated about 1650, but we know that it is a copy of a text of about 1550, which is now lost. The *Harleian Manuscript*, is a perfectly normal version of the *Old Charges*, but tacked on to the end of it is a version of the mason's oath which is of particular importance and I am going to recite it to you, but please remember this is an ordinary version of the *Old Charges*, at a time when the ritual was beginning to grow, and the oath has changed slightly from what it was before. Here it is:

“There is seu<sup>r</sup> all words & signes of a free Mason to be revealed to y<sup>w</sup> w<sup>ch</sup> as y<sup>w</sup> will answ: before God at the Great & terrible day of Judgm<sup>t</sup> y<sup>w</sup> keep secret & not to revaile the same in the heares of any pson but to the M<sup>rs</sup> & fellows of the said Society of free Masons so helpe me God xt:”

Brethren, I know that I recited it too fast, but now I am going to read the first line again: “There is several words and signs of a free mason to be revealed to you.” “Several words and signs ...” plural, more than one degree. And here in a document, that should have been dated 1550, we have the first hint of the expansion of the ceremonies into more than one degree. A few years later we have actual minutes that prove two degrees in practice. But notice, brethren, that the ceremonies must also have been taking something of their modern shape.

They probably began with a prayer, followed by an obligation and then the entrusting with secret words and signs, whatever they were. We do not know what they were, but we know that in both degrees the ceremonies were beginning to take the shape of our modern ceremonies. We have to wait quite a long while before we find the contents, the actual details, of those ceremonies, but we do find them at the end of the 1600s and that is my next theme. Remember, brethren, we are still with only two degrees and I am going to deal now with the documents which actually describe those two ceremonies, as they first appeared on paper.

The earliest evidence we have, is a document dated 1696, beautifully handwritten, and known as the *Edinburgh Register House Manuscript*, because it was found in the Public Record Office of Edinburgh. I deal first with that part of the text which describes the actual ceremonies. It is headed “THE FORME OF GIVEING THE MASON WORD” which is one way

of saying it is the manner of initiating a mason. It begins with the ceremony for the entered apprentice, followed by the ceremony for the admission of the “master mason or fellow craft”, the title of the second degree. The details are fascinating, but I can only describe them very briefly, and wherever I can, I will use the original words, so that you can get the feel of the thing.

We are told that the candidate “was put to his knees” and “after a great many ceremonies to frighten him” (rough stuff, horse-play if you like; apparently they tried to scare the wits out of him) “after a great many ceremonies to frighten him,” he was made to take up the book and in that position he took the oath, and here is the earliest version of the mason’s oath described as part of a whole ceremony.

“By god himself and you shall answer to god when you shall stand nakd before him, at the great day, you shall not reveal any pairt of what you shall hear or see at this time whither by word nor write nor put it in wryte at any time nor draw it with the point of a sword, or any other instrument upon the snow or sand, nor shall you speak of it but with an entered mason, so help you god.” Brethren, if you were listening very carefully, you have just heard the earliest version of the words, “Indite, carve, mark, engrave or otherwise them delineate.” The very first version is the one I have just read, ‘not write nor put it in write, nor draw it with a point of a sword or any other instrument upon the sand.’ Notice, brethren, there was no penalty in the obligation, just a plain obligation of secrecy.

After he had finished the obligation the youngster was taken out of the lodge by the last previous candidate, the last person who had been initiated before him.

Outside the door of the lodge he was taught the sign, postures and words of entry (we do not know what they are until he comes back). He came back, took off his hat and made ‘a ridiculous bow’ and then he gave the words of entry, which included a greeting to the master and the brethren. It finished up with the words “under no less pain than cutting of my throat” and there is a sort of footnote which says “for you must make that sign when you say that.” This is the earliest appearance in any document of the entered apprentice’s sign.

Now brethren, forget all about your beautifully furnished lodges; I am speaking of operative masonry, when the lodge was either a little room at the back of a pub, or above a pub, or else a shed attached to a big building job; and if there were a dozen masons there, that would have been a good attendance.

So, after the boy had given the sign, he was brought up to the Master for the ‘entrusting’. Here is the Master, here, nearby, is the candidate, here is the “instructor,” and he, the instructor, whispers the word into the ear of his neighbour, who whispers the word to the next man and so on, all round the lodge, until it comes to the Master and the Master gives the word to the candidate. In this case, there is a kind of biblical footnote, which shows, beyond all doubt, that the word was not one word but two. B and J, two pillar names, for the entered apprentice. This is very important later, when we begin to study the evolution of three degrees. In the two-degree system there were two pillars for the entered apprentice.

That was really the whole of the floorwork, but it was followed by a set of simple questions and answers. The section is headed ‘SOME QUESTIONES THAT MASONS USE TO PUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE YE WORD BEFORE THEY WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THEM’.

It included a few questions for testing a stranger outside the lodge, and this text gives us the first and oldest version of the masonic catechism. Here are some of the fifteen questions. "Are you a mason? How shall I know it? Where were you entered? What makes a true and perfect lodge? Where was the first lodge? Are there any lights in your lodge? Are there any jewels in your lodge?" the first faint beginnings of masonic symbolism. It is amazing how little there was at the beginning. There, brethren, fifteen questions and answers, which must have been answered for the candidate; he had not had time to learn the answers. And that was the whole of the entered apprentice ceremony.

Now remember, brethren, we are speaking about operative masonry, in the days when masons earned their living with hammer and chisel. Under those conditions the second degree was taken about seven years after the date of initiation when the candidate came back to be made 'fellow craft or master'. Inside the lodge those two grades were equal, both fully trained masons. Outside the lodge, one was an employer, the other an employee. If he was the son of a Freeman Burgess of the city, he could take his Freedom and set up as a master immediately.

Otherwise, he had to pay for the privilege, and until then, the fellow craft remained an employee. But inside the lodge they both had the same second degree.

So, after the end of his indentures of apprenticeship, and serving another year of two for "meat and fee" (i.e. board plus a wage) he came along then for the second degree. He was "put to his knees and took the oath anew." It was the same oath that he had taken as an apprentice, omitting only three words.

Then he was taken out of the lodge by the youngest master, and there he was taught the signs, posture and words of entry (we still do not know what they were). He came back and he gave what is called the "master sign", but it is not described, so I cannot tell you about it. Then he was brought up for the entrusting. And now, the youngest master, the chap who had taken him outside, whispered the word to his neighbour, each in turn passing it all round the lodge, until it came to the Master, and the five points of fellowship almost word for word as we have them today, gave the word to the candidate. The five points in those days — foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, hand to hand, ear to ear — that is near enough to yours and mine, but that is how it was at its first appearance. No Hiram legend and no frills; only the F.P.O.F. and a word. But in this document the word is not mentioned. It appears very soon afterwards and I will deal with that later.

There were only two test questions for a fellowcraft degree, and that was the lot. Two degrees, beautifully described, not only in this document but in two other sister texts, the *Chetwode Crawley Manuscript*, dated about 1700 and the *Kevan Manuscript*, quite recently discovered, dated about 1714. Three marvelous documents, all from the south of Scotland, all telling exactly the same story — wonderful materials, if we dare to trust them. But, I am sorry to tell you brethren that we, as scientists in masonry, dare not trust them, because they were written in violation of an oath. To put it at its simplest, the more they tell us the less they are to be trusted, unless, by some fluke or by some miracle, we can prove, as we must do, that these documents were actually used in a lodge; otherwise they are worthless. In this, case, by a very happy fluke, we have got the proof and it makes a lovely story. That is what you are going to get now.

Remember, brethren, our three documents are from 1696 to 1714. Right in the middle of this period, in the year 1702, a little group of Scottish gentlemen decided that they wanted to

have a lodge in their own backyard, so to speak. These were gentlemen who lived in the south of Scotland around Galashiels, some 30 miles S.E. of Edinburgh. They were all notable landowners in that area — Sir John Pringle of Hoppringle, Sir James Pringle, his brother, Sir James Scott of Gala, Galashiels, their brother-in-law, plus another five neighbours came together and decided to form their own Lodge, in the village of Haughfoot near Galashiels. They chose a man who had a marvelous handwriting to be their scribe, and asked him to buy a minute book. He did, a lovely little leather-bound book, (Octavo size) and he paid “ffourteen shillings” Scots for it. I will not go into the difficulties of coinage now but today it would be about the equivalent of twenty-five cents in 1702. Being a Scotsman, he took a very careful note of the amount and entered it in his minute book, to be repaid out of the first money due to the society. Then, in readiness for the first meeting of the lodge, he started off at what would have been page one with some notes, we do not know the details, and he went on and copied out the whole of one of these Scottish rituals, complete from beginning to end.

When he finished, he had filled ten pages, and his last twenty-nine words of ritual were the first five lines at the top of page eleven. Now, this was a Scotsman, and I told you he had paid “ffourteen shillings” for that book and the idea of leaving three-quarters of a page empty offended against his native Scottish thrift. So, to save wasting it, underneath the 29 words, he put in a heading “The Same Day” and went straight on with the minutes of the first meeting of the lodge. I hope you can imagine all this, brethren, because I wrote the history of “The Lodge of Haughfoot” the first wholly non-operative Lodge in Scotland, 34 years older than the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The minutes were beautifully kept for sixty-one years and eventually, in 1763, the Lodge was swallowed up by some of the larger surrounding lodges. The minute book went to the great Lodge of Selkirk and it came down from Selkirk to London for me to write the history.

We do not know when it happened but, sometime during those sixty-one years, somebody, perhaps one of the later secretaries of the lodge, must have opened that minute book and caught sight of the opening pages and he must have had a fit. Ritual in a minute book! Out! And the first ten pages have disappeared; they are completely lost. This butcher would have taken page eleven as well but even he did not have the heart to destroy the minutes of the very first meeting of this wonderful lodge. So it was the minutes of the first meeting that saved those twenty-nine golden words at the top of page eleven, and the twenty-nine words are virtually identical with the corresponding portions of the Edinburgh Register House Manuscript and its two sister texts. Those 29 words are a guarantee that the other documents are to be trusted, and this gives us a marvelous starting point for the study of the ritual. Not only do we have the documents which describe the ceremonies; we also have a kind of yard-stick, by which we can judge the quality of each new document as it arrives, and at this point they do begin to arrive.

Now brethren, let me warn you that up to now we have been speaking of Scottish documents. Heaven bless the Scots ! They took care of every scrap of paper, and if were not for them we would have practically no history. Our earliest and finest material is nearly all Scottish. But, when the English documents begin to appear, they seem to fit.

They not only harmonize, they often fill in the gaps in the Scottish texts. So I am not only discussing Scottish ritual and, when it is necessary, especially for the early texts, I shall say whether they are English or Scottish.

Within the next few years, we find a number of valuable ritual documents, including some of the highest importance. The first of these is the *Sloane Manuscript*, dated c. 1700, an English text, in the British Museum today. It gives various “gripes” which had not appeared in any document before. It gives a new form of the mason’s oath which contains the words “without Equivocation or mentall Resarvation.” That appears for the very first time in the Sloane Manuscript, and brethren from this point onwards, every ritual detail I give you, will be a first timer. I shall not repeat the individual details as they reappear in the later texts, nor can I say precisely when a particular practice actually began. I shall simply say that this or that item appears for the first time, giving you the name and date of the document by which it can be proved.

If you are with me on this, you will realize and I beg you to think of it in this way — that you are watching a little plant, a seedling of Freemasonry, and every word I utter will be a new shoot, a new leaf, a new flower, a new branch.

You will be watching the ritual grow, and if you see it that way, brethren, I shall know I am not wasting my time, because that is the only way to see it.

Now, back to the *Sloane Manuscript* which also contains the points of fellowship, but the *Sloane* also gives the missing word that went with the five points, and I am going to ask one of your Past Grand Masters to help me, while I demonstrate it. So, hand to hand and the rest of it, as it was in those days, c. 1700, foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, ear to ear and the word was “Maha- Byn”, half in one ear and half in the other. Watch me brethren (demonstrate) and that, brethren, is how it was used at its very first appearance. You would say ‘Maha’, if you were testing somebody, and the other boy would have to say “Byn”, and if he did not say “Byn” you did not do business with him.

I shall talk about several other versions as they crop up later on, but I must emphasize that here is an English document filling the gap in the three Scottish texts, and this sort of thing happens over and over again.

Now we have another Scottish document, the *Dumfries Manuscript*, dated c. 1710. It contains a mass of new material, but I can only mention a few of the items.

One of its questions runs: “How were you brought in?” “shamefully, with a rope about my neck.” This is the earliest cable-tow; and a later answer says the rope “is to hang me if I should betray my trust”. *Dumfries* also mentions that the candidate receives the “Royal Secret” kneeling “upon my left knee”.

Among many interesting questions and answers, it lists some of the unusual penalties of those days. “My heart taken cut alive, my head cut off, my body buried within ye sea-mark.” “Within ye sea-mark” is the earliest version of the “cable’s length from the shore.” Brethren, there is so much more, even at this early date, but I have to be brief and I shall give you all the important items as we move forward into the next stage.

Meanwhile, this was the situation at the time when the first Grand Lodge was founded in 1717. We only had two degrees in England, one for the entered apprentice and the second was for the “master or fellow craft.” Dr. Anderson, who compiled the first English *Book of Constitutions* in 1723, actually described the English second degree as “master or fellow of craft.” The Scottish term had already invaded England.

The next big stage in the history of the ritual, is the evolution of the third degree. Actually, we know a great deal about the third degree, but there are some dreadful gaps. We do not know when it started; we do not know why it started, and we cannot be sure who started it. In the light of a lifetime of study, I am going to tell you what we do know, and we will try to fill the gaps.

It would have been lovely, of course, if one could stretch out a hand in a very good library and pull out a large minute book and say "Well, there is the earliest third degree that ever happened," but it does not work out that way.

The minute books come much later.

The earliest hints of the third degree appear in documents like those that I have been talking about - mainly documents that have been written out as *aide memoires* for the men who owned them. But we have to use exposures as well, exposures printed for profit, or spite, and we get some marvelous hints of the third degree long before it actually appears in practice. And so, we start with one of the best, a lovely little text, a single sheet of paper known as the *Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscript*, dated 1711, found among the papers of a famous Irish doctor and scientist, Sir Thomas Molyneux. This document is headed with a kind of Triple Tau, and underneath it the words "Under no less a penalty." This is followed by a set of eleven questions and we know straight away that something is wrong! We already have three perfect sets of fifteen questions, so eleven questions must be either bad memory or bad copying something is wrong! The questions are perfectly normal, only not enough of them. Then after the eleven questions we would expect the writer to give a description of the whole or part of the ceremony but, instead of that, he gives a kind of catalogue of the freemason's words and signs.

He gives this sign (E.A. demonstrated) for the E.A., with the word B....

He gives this sign (S. of F. demonstrated) for the fellowcraftsman, with the word Jacquin. (Spell it) This (S. of F. repeated) not this (Hailing sign - demonstrated): that came fifty years later. And for the master (M.M.) he gives the world's worst description of the five points of fellowship. I am going to demonstrate it, with the help of my good friend on the front row there, and I am going to give you the exact words.

Brethren, the words are amusing, although there is no doubt about what they mean. Here, as I demonstrate, are the exact words, no more and no less than what I say: "Squeeze ye master in ye backbone" (Notice brethren, a proper hug.) "Put your knees between his and say "Matchpin." That, brethren, is our second version of the word of the third degree. We started with "Mahabyn", and now "Matchpin", a word horribly debased. Let me say now, loud and clear, nobody knows what the correct word is. It was probably Hebrew originally, but all the early versions are debased. We might work backwards, translating from the English, but we cannot be certain that our English words are correct. So, here in the Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscript, we have, for the very first time, a document which has separate secrets for three separate degrees; the Enterprentice, the fellow-craftsman and the master. It is not proof of three degrees in practice, but it does show that somebody was playing with this idea in 1711.

The next piece of evidence on this theme comes from the first printed exposure, printed and published for entertainment or for spite, in a London newspaper, *The Flying Post*. The text is known as a "Mason's Examination". By this time, 1723, the questions had multiplied

enormously. It was quite a long catechism and it contained several pieces of rhyme, all interesting, but only one of particular importance to my present purpose and here it is:

*“ An enter’d Mason I have been,  
Boaz and Jachin I have seen;  
A Fellow I was sworn most rare,  
And Know the Ashler, Diamond, and Square:  
I know the Master’s Part full well,  
As honest Maughbin will you tell.”*

Notice, brethren, there are still two pillars for the F.A., and once again somebody is dividing the masonic secrets into three parts for three different categories of masons. The idea of three degrees is in the air. We are still looking for minutes but they have not come yet.

Next, we have another priceless document, dated 1726, the *Graham Manuscript*. In the course of one lengthy answer, the candidate refers to “those that have obtained a trible Voice by being entered, passed, raised and Conformed....”

(Nobody knows what Conformed means in this context) “Entered, passed, raised and conformed by three severall lodges.” “Entered, passed and raised” is clear enough. “Three several lodges.” It means three separate degrees, three separate ceremonies. There is no doubt at all that this is a reference to three degrees being practised. But we still want minutes and we have not got them. And I am very sorry to tell you, that the earliest minutes we have recording a third degree, fascinating and interesting as they are, refer to a ceremony that never happened in a lodge at all; it took place in the confines of a London Musical Society. It is a lovely story and that is what you are going to get now.

In December 1724 there was a nice little lodge meeting at the Queen’s Head Tavern, in Hollis Street, in the Strand, about three hundred yards from our present Freemasons’ Hall. Nice people; the best of London’s musical, architectural and cultural society were members of this lodge. On the particular night in which I am interested, His Grace, the Duke of Richmond was Master of the lodge. I should add that His Grace, the Duke of Richmond was also Grand Master at that time, and you might call him “nice people.” It is true that he was the descendant of a royal illegitimate, but nowadays even royal illegitimate are counted as nice people. A couple of months later, seven of the members of this lodge and one brother they had borrowed from another lodge decided that they wanted to found a musical and architectural society.

They gave themselves a Latin title a mile long — “Philo Musicae et Architecturae Societas Apollini” — which I translate, “The Apollonian Society for the Lovers of Music and Architecture” and they drew up a rule book which is beautiful beyond words. Every word of it written by hand. It looks as though the most magnificent printer had printed and decorated it.

Now these people were very keen on their Masonry and for their musical society they drew up an unusual code of rules. For example, one rule was that every one of the founders was to have his own coat-of-arms emblazoned in full colour in the opening pages of the minute book. How many lodges do you know, where every founder has his own coat-of-arms? This gives you an idea of the kind of boys they were. They loved their Masonry and they made another rule, that anybody could come along to their architectural lectures or to their musical evenings — the finest conductors were members of the society — anybody could come, but if he was not a Mason, he had to be made a mason before they would let him in; and because

they were so keen about the masonic status of their members, they kept masonic biographical notes of each member as he joined. It is from these notes that we are able to see what actually happened. I could talk about them all night, but for our present purposes, we need only follow the career of one of their members, Charles Cotton.

In the records of the musical society we read that on December 22, 1724 "Mr. Charles Cotton, Esq. (I am quoting word for word from the records) was made a Mason by the said Grand Master." *i.e.* His Grace, the Duke of Richmond, in the Lodge at the Queen's Head. It could not be more regular than that. Then, on February 1725 "...before we founded this society, a Lodge was held in order to pass Charles Cotton Esq." and because it was on the day this society was founded, the Musical Society that is, we cannot be entirely sure whether he was passed fellowcraft in the lodge, or in the musical Society. We go on for another three months and "On May 12, 1725, Bro. Charles Cotton Esqr. and Bro. Papillon Ball were regularly passed Masters." These are the exact words. Now we have the date of Cotton's initiation, his passing and his raising: there is no doubt that he received three degrees. But "regularly passed Masters." No! It could not have been more irregular! This was a Musical Society — not a lodge! But I told you they were nice people, and they had some very distinguished visitors. First, the Senior Grand Warden came to see them; then the Junior Grand Warden. And then, they got a nasty letter from the Grand Secretary and, in 1727, the society disappeared. Nothing now remains except their minute book in the British Museum. If you ever go to London and go to Freemasons' Hall you will see a marvelous facsimile of that book. It is worth the journey to London just to see it. And that is the record of the earliest third degree. I wish we could produce a more respectable first-timer, but that is the earliest.

I must tell you, brethren, that Gould, the great Masonic historian believed, all his life, that this was the earliest third degree of which there was any record at all. But just before he died he wrote a brilliant article in the *Transactions* of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, and he changed his mind. He said, "No, the minutes are open to wide interpretation, and we ought not accept this as a record of the third degree." Frankly, I do not believe that he proved his case, and on this one point I dare to quarrel with Gould. Watch me carefully, brethren, because I stand a chance of being struck down at this moment. Nobody argues with Gould! But I dispute this because, within ten months of this date, we have incontrovertible evidence of the third degree in practice. As you might expect, bless them, it comes from Scotland.

Lodge Dumbarton Kilwinning, now No. 18 on the register of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, was founded in January 1726. At the foundation meeting there was the Master, with seven master masons, six fellowcrafts and three entered apprentices; some of these were operative masons, some non-operative. Two months later, in March, 1726, we have this minute:

*"Gabriel Porterfield who appeared in the January meeting as a Fellow Craft was unanimously admitted and received a Master of the Fraternity and renewed his oath and gave in his entry money."*

Now, notice brethren, here was a Scotsman, who started in January as a fellowcraft, a founding fellowcraft of a new lodge. Then he came along in March, and he renewed his oath, which means he took another ceremony. And he gave in his entry money. And brethren, if a Scotsman paid for it you bet your life he got it! There is no doubt about that. And there is the earliest 100% gilt-edged record of a third degree Two years later, in December 1728, another

new Lodge, Greenock Kilwinning, at its very first meeting prescribed separate fees for entering, passing, and raising.

From then on we have ample evidence of the three degrees in practice and then on 1730 we have the earliest printed exposure which claimed to describe all three degrees, *Masonry Dissected* published by Samuel Pritchard in 1730. It was the most valuable ritual work that had appeared until that time, all in the form of question and answer (apart from a brief introduction) and it had enormous influence in the stabilization of the English ritual.

Its "Enter'd Prentice's Degree" — by this time 92 questions — gave two pillar words to the E.A., and the first of them was "lettered." Pritchard managed to squeeze a lot of floor-work into his questions and answers. Here is one question for the candidate: "How did he make you a mason?" Listen to this answer:

*With my bare-bended Knee and Body within the Square, the Compass extended to my naked Left Breast, my naked Right Hand on the Holy Bible: there I took the Obligation (or Oath) of a Mason.*

All that information in one answer! And the next question was: "Can you repeat that obligation?" with the answer, "I'll do my endeavour." and Pritchard followed this with a magnificent obligation which contained three sets of penalties, (throat cut, heart torn out, body severed and ashes burned and scattered to the winds of heaven). This was their first appearance all together and they were not separated in English documents until 1760.

Pritchard's "Fellow-Craft's Degree" was very short, only 33 questions and answers, and it gave J--- alone to the F.C., (not lettered) but now the second degree had a lot of new material relating to the pillars, the middle chamber, the winding staircase and a long recitation on the letter G, which began with the meaning "Geometry" and ended denoting "The Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe" Pritchard's "Master's Degree or Master's Part" was made up of 30 questions with some very long answers, containing the earliest version of the Hiram Legend, literally the whole story as it ran in those days, including the murder, the discovery, "the Slip", the raising on the F.P.O.F., and a new word, "M.....". (The form, now in common use, ending with ".....ah".) Before I go any further, I must go back to the *Graham Manuscript*, 1726, which I mentioned earlier. At the end of its catechism, instead of describing a ceremony, the writer gives a collection of legends about Biblical characters, each story with kind of a masonic twist in its tail. One of them is about three sons who went to their father's grave "to find ....a vertuable secret which this famieous preacher had." They opened up the grave, and found the body "almost consumed away." Eventually, they raised it on the five points of fellowship and one of the sons said, "Here is yet marrow in this bone." This story, in 1726, is the earliest raising within a masonic context, but my reason for repeating the story here, is that the gentleman in the grave was not Hiram, it was old father Noah. This story was written a full four years before the Hiram legend made its appearance and it shows that our Hiram legend did not come into the ritual all ready-made; it was the result of at least two or three separate streams of legend.

But the third degree was not a new invention. It arose from a division of the original first degree into two parts, so that the original second degree with its F.P.O.F. and a word moved up into third place, both the second and third acquiring additional materials during the period of change. That was sometime between 1711 and 1725, but whether it started in England, Scotland, or Ireland is a mystery; we simply do not know.

Back now to Samuel Prichard and his *Masonry Dissected*. The book created a sensation; it sold three editions and one pirated edition in eleven days. It swept all other exposures off the market. For the next thirty years *Prichard* was being reprinted over and over again and nothing else could stand a chance; there was nothing fit to touch it. We lose something by this, because we have no records of any ritual developments in England during the next thirty years — a great thirty-year gap. Only one new item appeared in all that time, the “Charge to the Initiate” a miniature of our modern version, in beautiful eighteenth century English. It was published in 1735, but we do not know who wrote it. For fresh information on the growth of the ritual, we have to go across the Channel, into France.

The English planted Freemasonry in France in 1725, and it became an elegant pastime for the nobility and gentry. The Duke of so-and-so would hold a lodge in his house, where he was Master for ever and ever, and any time he invited a few friends round, they would open a lodge, and he would make a few more masons.

That was how it began, and it took about ten or twelve years before Masonry began to seep down, through to the lower levels. By the time lodges were beginning to meet in restaurants and taverns, around 1736, things were becoming difficult in France and it was feared that the lodges were being used for plots and conspiracies against government.

At Paris, in particular, precautions were taken. An edict was issued by René Herault, Lieutenant General of Police, that tavern-keepers and restaurant-keepers were not to give accommodation to masonic lodges at all, under penalty of being closed up for six months and a fine of 3000 livres. We have two records, both in 1736-37, of well-known restaurants that were closed down, for that reason, by the Police.

It did not work, and the reason was very simple. Masonry had started in private houses. The moment that the officials put the screw on the meetings in taverns and restaurants, it went back into private houses again; it went underground so to speak, and the Police were left helpless.

Eventually, Herault decided that he could do much more damage to the craft if he could make it a laughing-stock. If he could make it look ridiculous, he was sure he could put them out of business for all time, and he decided to try.

He got in touch with one of his girl-friends, a certain Madame Carton. Now, brethren, I know what I am going to tell you sounds like our English *News of the World*, but I am giving you recorded history, and quite important history at that. So, laugh with me, because it is a good story! He got in touch with Madame Carton, who is always described as a dancer at the Paris opera. The plain fact is that she followed a much older profession. The best description that gives an idea of her status and her qualities, is that she slept in the best beds in Europe. She had a very special clientele. Now this was no youngster, she was fifty-five years old at that time and she had a daughter who was also in the same interesting line of business. And I have to be very careful what I say, because it was believed that one of our own Grand Masters was entangled with either or both of them. All this was in the newspapers of those days.

Anyway, Herault got in touch with Madame Carton and asked her to obtain a copy of the masonic ritual from one of her clients. He intended to publish it, and by making the masons look ridiculous he was going to put them out of business.

Well! she did, and he did. In other words, she got her copy of the ritual and passed it on to him and he immediately published it in a salacious French newspaper. Within a month, it was translated in three London newspapers. But, if the publication had any effect at all, it was purely momentary. The title of this pamphlet was *Reception d'un Frey-Maçon* (The Reception of a Freemason) — and its contents are extremely interesting.

It was written in narrative form, including many items that had not appeared in our English texts. It described the blindfolded candidate, locked up for an hour in total darkness, to put him in the right frame of mind for the ceremony.

It describes the knocks on the door, the perambulations round the lodge and the resin flares. It was customary in the French lodges in those days to have a pan of live coals just inside the door of the lodge and at the moment the candidate was brought in, they would sprinkle powdered resin on the live coal, to make an enormous flare, which would frighten the wits out of the candidate, even if he was blindfolded. (In many cases they did not blindfold them until they came to the obligation). Then we get the posture for the obligation with three lots of penalties, and details of aprons and gloves. This is followed by the signs, tokens and words relating to two pillar names, all told as part of a single ceremony. All this is sadly mixed-up, and as we read it, we suddenly realize that the gentleman who was dictating it, had his mind on much more worldly matters. So brethren, this was the earliest exposure from France, not very good, but it was the first of a really wonderful stream of documents. As before, I shall only discuss the important ones.

My next, is *Le Secret des Francs-Maçons*, (The Secret of a Freemason) 1742, published by the Abbé Perau, who was Prior at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris. A beautiful first degree, all in narrative form, and every word in favour of the Craft. His words for the E.A. and F.C. were in reverse order (and this became common practice in Europe) but he said practically nothing about the second degree. He describes the masonic drinking and toasting at great length, with a marvelous description of "Masonic Fire". He mentioned that the Master's degree was "a great ceremonial lamentation over the death of Hiram," but he knew nothing about the third degree and said that Master Masons get only a new sign and that was all.

Our next work is *Le Catechisme des Francs-Maçons* (The Freemasons' Catechism) published in 1744, by Louis Travenol, a famous French journalist. He dedicates his book "To the Fair Sex," which he adores, saying that he is deliberately publishing this exposure for their benefit, because the masons have excluded them, and his tone is mildly anti-masonic. He continues with a note "To the Reader," criticizing several items in Perau's work, but agreeing that *Le Secret* is generally correct. For that reason (and Perau was hopelessly ignorant of the third degree) he confines his exposure to the M.M. degree. But that is followed by a catechism which is a composite for all three degrees, undivided, though it is easy to see which questions belong to the Master Mason.

*Le Catechisme* also contains two excellent engravings of the Tracing Boards, or Floor-drawings, one called "Plan of the Lodge for the Apprentice-Fellow" combined, and the other for "The Master's Lodge."

Travenol begins his third degree with "The History of Adoniram, Architect of the Temple of Solomon." The French texts usually say Adoniram instead of Hiram, and the story is a splendid version of the Hiram legend. In the best French versions, the Master's word

(Jehova) was not lost; the nine Masters who were sent by Solomon to search for him decided to adopt a substitute word (M) \* out of fear that the three assassins had compelled Adoniram to divulge it.

This is followed by a separate chapter which begins with the layout of a Master's Lodge, a description of the "Floor-drawing," and the ceremony of opening a Master's Lodge, which includes a curious "Master's sign" that begins with a hand at the side of the forehead (demonstrate) and ends with the thumb in the pit of the stomach. And now, brethren, we get a magnificent description of the floorwork of the third degree, the whole ceremony, so beautifully described and in such fine detail, that any Preceptor could reconstruct it from beginning to end — and every word of this whole chapter is new material that had never appeared before.

Of course there are a number of items that differ from the practices we know, but now you can see why I am excited about these French documents. They give marvelous detail, at a time when we have no corresponding material in England.

But before I leave *Le Catechisme*, I must say a few words about its picture of the third degree Tracing Board or Floor-drawing which contains, as its central theme, a coffin design, surrounded by tear drops, the tears which our ancient brethren shed over the death of our Master Adoniram.

On the coffin is a sprig of acacia and the word "JEHOVA," "ancien mot du Maitre", (the former word of a master), but in the French degree it was not lost. It was the "Ineffable Name," the unpronounceable Name, and in this version, the very first at that time, it gives the word "Jehova" on the coffin.

The diagram, in dots, shows how three zigzag steps are to be made by the candidate in advancing from West to East, and many other interesting details too numerous to mention.

The catechism, which is the last main item in the book, is based (like all the French catechisms) directly on Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, but it contains a number of symbolic expansions and explanations, the result of speculative influence.

And so we come to the last of the French exposures that I must deal with today *L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons Trahi* (The Order of Freemasons Betrayed) published in 1745 by an anonymous writer, a thief ! There was no law of copyright in those days and this man knew a good thing when he saw it. He took the best material he could find, collected it into one book, and added a few notes of his own. So, he stole Perau's book, 102 pages, the lot, and printed it as his own first degree. He said very little about the second degree (the second degree was always a bit of an orphan). He stole Travenol's lovely third degree and added a few notes to that, but nothing important. But in the Catechism, the questions and answers, he did add a few important questions; I shall deal with those in a moment.

Of his own material, there is not very much; chapters on the masonic cipher, on the signs, grips and words, and on masonic customs. He also included two improved designs of the floor-drawings and two charming engravings illustrating the first and third degrees in progress. His catechism followed Travenol's version very closely; he did add four questions

---

\* The form now in common use, ending ".....sc".

and answers (seemingly a minor contribution) but they are of high importance in our study of the ritual:

- Q. *When a Mason finds himself in danger, what must he say and do to call the brethren to his aid?*  
A. *He must put his joined hands to his forehead, the fingers interlaced, and say 'Help, ye Children (or Sons) of the Widow ' Brethren, I do not know if the 'interlaced fingers' are used in the U.S.A. or Canada; I will only say that they are well known in several European jurisdictions, and the 'Sons of the Widow' appear in most versions of the Hiramic legend.*
- Q. *What is the Password of an Apprentice?*  
A. T...
- Q. *That of a Fellow?*  
A. S...
- Q. *And that of a Master?*  
A. G...

This was the first appearance of passwords in print but the author added an explanatory note: These three passwords are scarcely used except in France and at Frankfurt on Main. They are in the nature of catch words, introduced as a surer safeguard (when dealing) with brethren whom they do not know.

Passwords had never been heard of before this date, 1745, and they appear for the first time, in France. You will have noticed, brethren, that two of them appear to be in the wrong order, and, because of the thirty-year gap, we do not know whether they were being used in England at that time or if they were a French invention. On this puzzle we have a curious piece of indirect evidence, and I must digress for a moment.

In the year 1730, the Grand Lodge of England was greatly troubled by the exposures that were being published, especially Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, which was officially condemned in Grand Lodge, and, as a precautionary measure, Grand Lodge reversed the words of the first two degrees around that time. The reversal led to a great deal of trouble later on, but they remained in reverse order until 1809. You will have noticed, brethren, that each of the French exposures I have quoted hitherto, gave the words of those two degrees in reverse order and now, when the passwords first make their appearance, in France, they also appear in reverse order. Knowing how regularly France had adopted — and improved — on English ritual practices, there seems to be a strong probability that the passwords were already in use in England (perhaps in reverse order), but we have not got a single English document to support that theory.

So brethren, in 1745, we have the ritual fully developed. All the principal elements are there, and, when the English exposures began to appear again from 1760 onwards, the best of the French material had already been embodied in our English practice. But it was still very crude and a great deal of polishing needed to be done.

The polishing began in 1769 by three writers: Wellins Calcutt and William Hutchinson, in 1769, and William Preston in 1772, but Preston towered over the others. He was the great expounder of Freemasonry and its symbolism, a born teacher, constantly writing and improving on his work. Around 1800, the ritual and the lectures (which were the original catechisms, now expanded and explained in beautiful detail) were all at their shining best. And then with typical English carelessness, we spoil it.

You may know, brethren that from 1751 up to 1813, we had two rival Grand Lodges in England (the original, founded in 1717, and the rival Grand Lodge, known as the “Antients,” founded in 1751) and they hated each other with truly masonic zeal. Their differences were mainly in minor matters of ritual and in their views on Installation and the Royal Arch. The bitterness continued until 1809 when the first steps were taken towards a reconciliation and a much-desired union of the rivals.

In 1809, the original Grand Lodge, the “Moderns,” restored the reversed words to their original places, and the Lodge of Promulgation was formed to vet the ritual and bring it to a form that would be satisfactory to both sides. That had to be done, or we would still have had two Grand Lodges to this day! They did an excellent job, but a great deal of material was discarded and it is fair to say that they threw away the baby with the bath-water. The beehive, the hour-glass, the scythe, the pot of incense etc., which were in our tracing-boards in the early nineteenth century have disappeared. We have to be thankful indeed for the splendid material they left behind.

I must add a note here for brethren in the U.S.A. You will realize, that until the changes which I have just described, I have been talking about your ritual as well as ours in England. After the War of Independence the States rapidly began to set up their own Grand Lodges, but your ritual, mainly of English origin — whether Antients or Moderns — was still basically English. Your big changes began in and around 1796, when Thomas Smith Webb, of Albany, N.Y., teamed up with an English mason, John Hanmer, who was well versed in Preston’s lecture system.

In 1797 Webb published his *Freemason’s Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry*, largely based on Preston’s *Illustrations*. Webb’s *Monitor* adapted from our ritual when, as I said, it was at its shining best, became so popular, that the American Grand Lodges, mainly in the eastern states at that time, did everything they could to preserve it in its original form; eventually by the appointment of Grand Lecturers, whose duty it was (and is) to ensure that the officially adopted forms remain unchanged.

I cannot go into details now, but from the rituals and monitors I have studied and the ceremonies and demonstrations I have seen, there is no doubt that your ritual is much fuller than ours, giving the candidate much more explanation, interpretation, and symbolism, than we normally give in England.

In effect, because of the changes we made in our work between 1809 and 1813, it is fair to say that in many respects your ritual is older than ours and better than ours.

Transcription note: this text, with corrections for consistency and style, is taken from a scanned text file of the original typed transcription of W. Bro. Carr’s lecture given to the Victoria Lodge of Education and research, British Columbia. The lecture was a redaction of his paper published in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* vol. 81 (1968) pp. 153-80.