

## **The Rites of Masonry**

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### 1 EARLY OPERATIVE MASONRY

It is clear that early operative masonry developed more or less directly from the **craft guilds** in England. There are of course differing views as to how they developed.

Masons were not alone in having such assemblies or associations. In fact there were forty-seven known craft guilds in London in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Masonic guilds, in fact, were probably among the least prevalent at that time.

The guilds which became the strongest & which survived the test of time were those of a religious character, having various social & benevolent functions. The rise of the guild organizations is strongly linked to the social, economic & industrial development of England during the 11<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of these, the **London Masons' Company**, is known to have had a continuous existence back to at least 1418 AD.

Many of the old operative lodges had **Old Charges** or manuscript constitutions. The possession of one of these was viewed as full and sufficient authority to maintain an independent existence as a lodge. Some 120 of these have been found and analyzed. They date from c. 1390 through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

The **ritual** of the time was simple. It consisted of a prayer or invocation, a reading of historical portions of the Old Charge, typically illustrating the progression of the craft from the Holy Land to England, the story of the **Athelstan-Edwin** assembly at **York**, the oath of fidelity, the reading of the "Charges" and the sealing of the oath on the manuscript. It was not until c. 1640 that evidence of **masonic secrets** in an admission ceremony is found.

### 2 THE GROWTH OF NON-OPERATIVE MASONRY

We find non-operative members being admitted to **operative lodges** as early as 1634. At first only a few "gentry" members joined the simple operative lodges, but by 1646 there was at least one lodge composed entirely of non-operatives.

I imagine that all of you have heard the words; ".. it is not in the power of any Man or Body of Men to make innovation in the Body of Masonry without the Consent first of the Annual Grand Lodge".

T.O. Haunch states that the Grand Lodge itself was an innovation; that independent lodges of free and accepted masons had existed back as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When the four lodges formed themselves into the first Grand Lodge, they did so not to control the degrees or to defend the landmarks, but rather, as they said, "to cement together under a Grand Master as the Centre of Union and Harmony". It is doubtful if any of the participants thought of anything more than a social purpose in getting the lodges together in an assemblage or "grand lodge".

### 3 THE EARLY GRAND LODGE PERIOD

Early speculative Craft Masonry consisted of only two degrees, the **EA** and the **Fellow-of-the-Craft (or Master's Part)** but soon after the formation of the first Grand Lodge, the Master's Part evolved into the **MM** degree and a separate **FC** degree was developed from part of the EA degree. The whole process of the development of speculative Masonry has been one of speculating or exploring the mysterious something which non-operatives found in the primitive Operative ritual and traditions.

The first Grand Lodge was not in a position, or of a mind, to dictate to lodges in general, outside perhaps, of those in the London area. We have no record of the actions of Grand Lodge until 1723 when the first minute book was started, except the writings of Anderson in his 1738 issue of the “New Book Of Constitutions”.

By 1723, however, Grand Lodge was consolidating its position. It had elected its first Grand Master of noble blood and was assuming administrative powers relative to the lodges in and around London. The 1723 Constitutions indicate, however, that Grand Lodge was acting purely locally, in that the Book of Constitutions was for use by the lodges in London and Westminster.

Haunch states that, in England, the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century after 1714 was one of good government, of peaceful economic development, and after the formation of Grand Lodge in 1717, Freemasonry flourished and became very popular.

Pope shows that the number of Lodges in London increased sharply from 4 to 116 from 1717 to 1740, and then dropped sharply to about 75 by 1757. The count then rises again to 160 by 1760. He ascribes this to a number of factors, including:

- the unstable condition in England from 1740 to 1750 which culminated in the unsuccessful Jacobite Revolution of 1745,
- the shift from the former Christian character of Masonry,
- the Papal bull against Freemasons of 1738,
- a period of disfavour of English society toward Freemasonry triggered by the exposures of 1723 and 1730 and
- the four London mock processions by the Scald Miserables between 1741 and 1745.

#### 4 THE EVOLUTION OF SPECULATIVE MASONRY

B.E. Jones points out that the development of the MM degree with its **Hiramic legend** sometime prior to 1730 seemed to have left the Brethren somewhat inconstant, as it appears to leave something to come later. This could account for the rapid rise of the **Royal Arch** which offered what could be seen as the completion of the **Third Degree**. It was probably also a factor encouraging the rise of the **Royal Order** and the **Scot's or ecossais** degrees.

Robert Lindsay believed that the Grand Lodge of 1717 began diverging from the ways of Accepted Masonry after the publication in 1723 of the Constitutions in that it removed the original Christian basis for membership and substituted a deistic one, i.e. requiring a belief in “the Religion in which all Men agree”. He states that this was one of the motivations for the formation of the Royal Order in London between 1725 and 1741. The **Royal Order of Scotland** was formed with the assistance of a warrant issued in 1750 by the governing body which was known as **The Provincial Grand Lodge in South England**. The original Royal Order in England seems to have disappeared about the time on the formation of the **Grand Lodge of the Ancients** (1751), and Lindsay implies that these events may have been related.

The early “**Scot's**” or “**Ecossais**” degrees also developed around 1730 to 1740, and probably for similar reasons. Here are two main theories for the origin of these degrees:

- The first is that they originated in England about 1730 and then spread to France about 1735 where they became very popular.
- The second theory is that they developed in France about 1725, partly in reaction to the new theism of English Craft Masonry as indicated in Anderson's Constitutions of 1723.

The first mention of higher degrees in England is that of a **Scots Master Lodge** which met regularly in 1733 at the Devil's Tavern in London. There are other references to **Scotch or Scots' Masonry** in England through 1758. Interest in these degrees seems to have declined after 1740. It has been noted that the higher degrees were tainted in many English minds with a Jacobite flavour.

The **Jacobites** were the supporters of the Stuart pretender to the throne of England. They are known to have been active in the promotion, and perhaps the development, of higher degrees, especially in France. The Jacobite cause culminated in the abortive 1745 revolution.

English Craft Masonry was carried to France soon after the formation of Grand Lodge and the first lodge was founded about 1725. High degree masonry is known to have existed in France since 1737 and there were high degree lodges in Paris about 1742. In addition to whatever motivation that the de-Christianization of Craft Masonry may have produced, there were, in France, two other influences which could have influenced the growth of the High Degrees. These were:

- a difference in national temperament, and
- the fact that, in contrast to England where Masonry appealed primarily to the middle class, Masonry in France was often an upper class activity. These bodies could set their own rules for membership which often included intellectual attainment.

There are hints of what is now known as **Royal Arch** symbolism prior to the formation of the first Grand Lodge. There were many references during the 1720s to Arch symbols and to moveable letters which could refer to early RAM development. In the 1730s, definite references have been found to higher degrees and to Scots Master Lodges. Bernard Jones states that the early "Scots" degrees contained much material which today is found in the Royal Arch and the Mark Degrees. He adds that it cannot be said with certainty that the Royal Arch developed from the Scots degree or vice versa but he thinks that the evidence points to the former.

The first printed reference to the Royal Arch was in 1743 and there is reasonable evidence that a RA ritual was worked in Scotland in the early 1740s. RA ceremonies were worked in Ireland before 1759 and in the USA in 1753.

The rise and growth of the Royal Arch was greatly influenced by the establishment of a rival Grand Lodge, the "**Ancients**". This second Grand Lodge was soon nick-named the "Moderns" because they were charged, not entirely fairly, with making innovations in the Ancient Landmarks, including:

- de-Christianizing the ritual,
- abandoning portions of the ritual,
- ignoring the esoteric installation of the Master, and
- refusing to acknowledge the antiquity of the Royal Arch.

This picture is not nearly so simple when one looks at the Scot's or Ecosais degrees. I mentioned that these were developing in England and France sometime after 1730. The information is very confused as many Rites or systems of higher degrees were springing up in the mid to late 1700's, especially in France. The one of most immediate interest is the **Rite of Perfection** of 25 degrees which seems to have developed between 1750 and 1771. It is from this root that our present **Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite** has arisen.

Coil believes that the **Knight Templar** degree arose in France sometime after 1741, along with the **Rose Croix** and **Kadosh** degrees as one of the continental high grades. It probably entered England

and Scotland in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century via Ireland. **The Early Baldwin Encampment** in Bristol became its initial and leading exponent. Much is unknown about its origin and progress.

The Order in England fell into abeyance upon Dunckerley's death in 1795 until revived in 1804 by the Charter of Confirmation issued by the Duke of Kent. The Order waxed and waned over the next 70 years, becoming first a Grand Conclave and then a Convent General in 1873.

In the United States, a Grand Encampment had been formed in Philadelphia in 1795 but this expired soon after formation. The first one which is still in existence was formed in Providence, R.I. in 1805 and was initially called the **United States Grand Encampment**. In 1816 it dropped the reference to the United States and evolved into the **Grand Encampment of Massachusetts and Rhode Island**. The **National Great Priory of the Dominion of Canada** was formed in 1876.

The **Royal & Select Masters** or **Cryptic Rite** was the last of the major rites to be organized. The **Select Master** degree evolved from the earlier degree called the **Select Masons of 27** which was contained in the rituals brought to this continent about 1762 by Stephen Morin as a side degree of the Rite of Perfection. The **Royal Master** degree is unknown before about 1804 and Coil quotes Gould as stating that the earliest authoritative account of the working of the degree was in 1807.

The first Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters which has survived to today is that in Connecticut which was formed in 1818 although there was an earlier attempt in New York State in 1810. Robertson states that the first three Councils of Royal and Select Masters were formed by a charter for the Grand Council of the State of Maine, dated May 18, 1867. These three Councils immediately proceeded to form themselves into the **Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters for New Brunswick**.

The **Order of the Red Cross of Constantine** was formed in England in 1865 by Robert Wentworth Little with the assistance of W.H. White (Grand Secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England) and W.J. Hughan (a famous Masonic historian). While its initial progress was slow, it attracted a host of devoted adherents. Within 8 years, over 100 conclaves had been formed and by 1880 six new Sovereign Grand Conclaves had been formed.

**The Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia**, or Freemasons' Rosicrucian Society, was formed in 1866 in England. The founder members were again Robert Wentworth Little and W.J. Hughan, with the further assistance of Dr. Woodman and Dr. Wynn Westcott. Dr. Westcott was a member of Quatuor Coronati which was seen as a genuine research lodge. This brought status to the new society which was seen as doing genuine masonic research.

The SRIA was an offshoot of a Scottish society which in turn had come from a pre-existing body in England. The SRIA is the oldest body having a continuous existence calling itself Rosicrucian. It has always been Masonic and has never had anything to do with the AMORC organization which sells so-called Rosicrucian lessons and magazines by mail.

The SRIA draws its membership from those masons who take a real interest in the Craft, that is:

- who want to know the philosophy that underlay it,
- the purpose of the ceremonies,
- what the symbolism means and
- everything else connected with it other than just socialising.

In common with the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine, this Order is restricted to members of the Christian faith, that is those who can say they “believe in the Trinity, and are believing members of the Christian faith”.

The Order of the **Allied Masonic Degrees** was founded in England in 1879 in order to control the many “additional” degrees which had developed by that time but for which no stable governing body existed. It absorbed a number of degrees which had formerly been controlled by:

- The Grand Lodge of St Lawrence at Rochdale, Lancashire with a number of subordinate lodges,
- The Mother Tabernacle of the Order of Hight Priesthood at Manchester with some subordinate Tabernacles,
- The Ancient and Honorable Order of Knights of Constantinople and its English Councils,
- a Council of Knights of the Red Cross of Babylon which had been revived about 1862 at Rochdale,
- The Grand Tylers of Solomon or Masons Elect of 27 was added in 1892.

In 1897 the control of the degrees now known as the **Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests** was ceded over to the Grand Council of Allied Masonic Degrees by the Illustrious Order of Knights Grand Cross of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, back in North America, the **Sovereign College of Allied Masonic and Christian Degrees for the Western Hemisphere** was formed in 1892 by Hartley Carmichael from degrees he acquired in Scotland. It soon changed its name to **of America** and later removed the words **and Christian**. It was Carmichael; who gave the **Grand Tylers of Solomon** degree to the Grand Council of AMD of England in 1892.

The Sovereign College was very successful until the death of its founder in 1901, following which it languished until it was absorbed by the **Grand Council of AMD of the USA** which was formed in 1932.

The **Order of David and Jonathan** was carried to New Amsterdam in North America around 1658 by Dutch settlers of Jewish origin. Masonic concordant bodies worked the short side-degree under various titles such as “Brotherly Love”, “Jonathan and David”, and finally “**The Secret Monitor**”. First references to the degree in the USA are circa 1866.

The degree was taken to England in 1887 by Dr Zacharie, a PGM from California. He formed two Conclaves which then formed themselves into Grand Conclave on June 17, 1887. The Grand Conclave extended the ritual and added two more degrees, one of which pertained to the chair of Supreme Ruler. There are now more than 300 Conclaves and there are daughter Grand Conclaves in Australia and New Zealand. There are now three Conclaves of the OSM in Canada which are working toward forming their own Grand Conclave in about 4 years. These are located in Ottawa, London and Toronto. (**The Grand Conclave of the O.S.M. of Canada** was founded in 1997.)

Although the HRAKTP degree had been ceded to the AMD in England in 1897, the degree became dormant except in one Council which had continued to confer that degree under a time immemorial warrant. In 1922 the Grand Council of AMD renounced any authority over it and in 1923 the present **Grand College of the Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests of England and Wales and its Territories Overseas** was formed.