

The Masonic Trowel



... To Spread The Cement Of Brotherly Love And Affection, That Cement Which Unites Us Into One Sacred Band Or Society Of Brothers, Among Whom No Contention Should Ever Exist, But That Noble Emulation Of Who Can Best Work Or Best Agree ...



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MASONIC QUOTES BY BROTHERS

Being persuaded that a just application of the principles, on which the Masonic Fraternity is founded, must be promote of private virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the interests of the Society, and to be considered by them as a deserving brother.

[GEORGE WASHINGTON]



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THEORIES OF ORIGIN

Excerpt from Chapter one, *The History of Freemasonry*
by Bro. John Hamill

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R 11 12 PM, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No 2076, UGLE
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When, Why, and Where did Freemasonry originate? There is one answer to these questions: we do not know, despite all the paper and ink that has been expended in examining them. Indeed, the issues have been greatly clouded by well meaning but ill informed Masonic historians themselves.

It is only slightly more than a century ago that British Masonic historians began critically to examine the traditional history of the Craft passed down to them over the preceding century and a half finding that 'history' wanting, they began to search out actual documented evidence of speculative Freemasonry prior to the formation of the premier Grand Lodge of England in 1717. Their research and writing did not put a halt to the writings of what may be termed the mystical or romantic (in the true sense of that word) school of Masonic historians, which had led to even more confusion. Thus there are two main approaches to Masonic history. the authentic or scientific approach, in which theory is built upon or developed out of verifiable facts and documentation; and the non-authentic approach in which attempts are made to place Freemasonry in the context of the Mystery tradition by a correlation of the teachings, allegory, and symbolism of the Craft with those of the various esoteric traditions. To further complicate matters, there are divisions of opinion within the two main schools.

The average freemason derives his initial knowledge of the history of the Craft from the ritual itself. As he progresses through the ceremonies he learns that at the building of King Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem the skilled masons were divided into two classes, Apprentices and Fellows, that they were presided over by three Grand Masters (King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff) who shared certain secrets known only to them. That these secrets were lost by the murder of Hiram Abiff result of his refusal to divulge the secrets and that certain substituted secrets were adopted 'until time or circumstance should restore the former'. The implication in the ritual is that Freemasonry was already established in Solomon's time and has continued as an unchanged system since then. The ritual, however, as the candidate quickly realises, is not literal or historical truth but a dramatic allegory by means of which the principles and tenets of the Craft are handed down.

The first history of the Craft appeared, with official sanction, as part of the first Constitutions compiled and published on behalf of the premier Grand Lodge by the Rev Dr James Anderson in 1723. Anderson's work is largely a legendary history of the builder's craft from Adam in the Garden of Eden down to the formation of the premier Grand Lodge of England in 1717.

Because Anderson's history was published with the sanction of the Grand Lodge it took on the guise of holy writ, the more so as its contents were not challenged by those who had taken part in the events of 1717. So acceptable did his work prove that it continued to be reprinted without alteration, simply being brought up to date, in all subsequent editions of the premier Grand Lodge's Constitutions down to the final edition of 1784. It was plagiarised by the various editors of the eighteenth-century Freemasons' Pocket Companions and formed the basis of the historical section of William Preston's illustrations of Masonry down to the posthumous seventeenth edition of 1861, edited by the Rev Dr George Oliver. There were plans to incorporate it in the 1815, 1819 and 1827 editions of the Book of Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge of England, the published portions of which are entitled Part the Second announcements being made that Part the First would be a history of Freemasonry. Fortunately, it never appeared. As the premier Grand Lodge Constitutions ~ and Preston's 'illustrations' were exported to North America, and the early editions were translated into French and German, Anderson's misinformation was given wide circulation and was to have a profound effect on the Craft's conception of and attitude towards, its history well into the nineteenth century.

In Scotland they found undeniable evidence of the existence of lodges of operative stonemasons, lodges which were geographically-defined units controlling the operative trade with the backing of statute law. They also traced undeniable evidence that these Scottish operative lodges began in the seventeenth century to admit non-operative members as accepted or gentlemen masons and that by the early eighteenth century in some lodges the accepted or gentleman masons had gamed the ascendancy: those lodges became, in turn, speculative lodges, whilst others continued their purely operative nature. The speculative lodges eventually combined to form the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736.

Researchers of the authentic school also discovered references to the Scottish operative lodges having a Mason's word and secret modes of recognition to enable bona fide operative masons to gam work or sustenance when they removed to the area of another lodge. Assembling these facts they had a case for a gradual transition from operative to speculative.

Or did they? The flaw in their argument was the assumption that because the accepted or gentlemen masons received into Scottish operative lodges were non-operatives, then they must have been speculative masons, or at least there must have been a speculative implication in their acceptance. No evidence has yet come to light to support such assumptions.

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Indeed, the evidence would seem to point to the non operatives simply being honorary members of the lodges in the same way that prominent personalities today are made honorary members of clubs, societies, or institutions with which they have no professional or vocational connections.

When the authentic school came to examine the English records they could find no evidence at all of the existence of operative lodges. In medieval times the operatives' lodge had simply been a hut or lean-to on the site in which they stored their tools and took their refreshment and ease. By the 1600s the guild system, with the exception of the London Livery Companies, was virtually moribund. Nor was there any evidence of an English Mason word or of the English operatives having had secret modes of recognition. Such evidence as they found of non operative or accepted masonry was all in purely non operative, context, and where names occurred which could be checked very few of them had even the most tenuous connection with building or architecture. Accepted masonry (there are still doubts as to whether it can truly be called speculative in the seventeenth century) simply seems to have appeared in England as a new organisation without any prior connections with the operative craft. Despite this lack of substantiation the authentic school put together the Scottish and English gleanings and constructed the operative-transitional speculative theory of the origins of Freemasonry, ignoring the differences and discrepancies between the two sets of evidence. Above all they overlooked, or ignored, the fact that non operative masonry was developing in England when the Scottish operative lodges began to accept non-operatives. If the Scottish operative lodges formed the medium of transition, how could purely non-operative masonry already have existed in England?

The search for a direct link was not confined to the British Isles, nor only dated from the period of the so-called Assembly at York. Attempts were made to give it a classical parentage as a descendant of the Roman *Collegia Fabrorum* or Schools of Masons, implying that 'School' meant the existence of a philosophical or 'mystery' cult attached to the Roman builders. The legend of the Commacine Masters appeared to give a religious foundation to the Craft. It was stated that the masons of the Como area of Northern Italy were so renowned and had such recondite secrets to impart to other operatives that they were formed into an Order by a non-existent Papal Bull and ordered to travel Europe sharing their skills and mystery. Evidence of their actual existence is singularly lacking. The traditions and records of the German *Steinmezen* and French *Companionage* were diligently searched for traces of a speculative element, but none was found. The evidence comes back all the time to the appearance of non-operative masonry in England in the seventeenth century.

The theory of a direct descent from operative Masonry continues to have its supporters, notably the late Harry Carr; but some current researchers working in the tradition of the authentic school are looking now at the probability of indirect links with the operatives. Rather than seeking to prove a direct descent they are exploring the possibility that the originators of speculative masonry clothed themselves in the appearance of an operative organisation or guild to cloak activities and ideas which, at that time, it was impossible to practise openly. The period in which Freemasonry is believed to have evolved, the late 1500s and 1600s was one in which politics and religion were inextricably linked and in which differences of opinion could split families, and eventually led to civil war. Particularly in regard to religion, legal sanctions operated against those who chose not to follow the dictates of the State.

Two possible ideas for the origin of Freemasonry in this period therefore suggest themselves. First, that the originators were a group opposed to the intolerance of State politics and religion who wished to bring together men of differing political and religious views with the common aim of social improvement. Since they found themselves in a situation where such views would be considered subversive there was a total restriction on the discussion of these subjects to outsiders. This feature appears to have existed since Freemasonry originated.

Second, that the originators were a group, probably Nonconformist in character, opposed to State domination of religion who did not seek the overthrow of the established religion but rather the promotion of tolerance and the creation of a society in which men were free to follow their consciences in matters of religion. There is a common aim in both groups: the promotion of toleration and the consequent creation of a better society. The use of allegory at this time was a common didactic technique: what more appropriate allegory for a creation of a better society could be devised than the erection of an actual building. There was even a biblical metaphor to hand - the building of King Solomon's Temple. Once such an allegorical framework had been established it was a logical step to adopt the guise of a builders' organisation or guild. Thus Meetings became lodges, the principal officers became a Master and Wardens, and the working tools of the stonemason were utilised both for their practical uses and as symbols.

An alternative indirect theory has recently been put forward which approaches the origins from the charitable rather than the philosophical aspect. This sees Freemasonry as a development of the growing self-help movement in the seventeenth-century. With no State Welfare system, those who fell sick or on hard times had to rely on local charity and the rigid working of the Poor Law. Different groups of trades began to make their own arrangements. Meeting convivially in inns and taverns, they kept a box into which members paid, dues' at each meeting and from which members could draw money in times of need. From this practice they became known as Box Clubs. Initially they were

reserved to members of a particular trade, and there is evidence that they used primitive initiatory rites. It also seems that, like Scottish operatives lodges, the Box Clubs began to admit members not connected with their particular trade. The possibility has been raised that Freemasonry originated as just such a Box Club for operative masons which later began to admit members of other trades.

The possibility that Freemasonry was still basically a trade-orientated society at the time of the formation of the premier Grand Lodge in 1717 was raised by Henry Sadler. He suggested that a struggle for control took place in the early 1720s between the original trade orientated members and those brought into the lodges under the influence of Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers and others and that truly speculative Freemasonry did not emerge until the latter group had won control and had begun to transform Freemasonry from a benefit Society into a 'system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'.

Some have sought the origins of Freemasonry in Rosicrucianism, either as a British manifestation of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood or as a breakaway group from the mainstream of Rosicrucianism.' This is not the place to discuss the existence or non existence of a Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Whatever the truth of that is, the Rosicrucian idea has continued to weave its way in and out of European thought since its emergence in the early 1600s. The only factors common to both Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry are the central idea of the creation of an ideal society and the use of allegory and symbolism to impart this ideal to initiates. There the similarity ends. There is no common pool of symbolism and both developed along different paths. There is no evidence to show a common origin or the development of one out of the other. Much has been made of the fact that Elias Ashmole, the first recorded non operative initiate, was also interested in Rosicrucianism; but nothing is said about the other known accepted Masons who had no Rosicrucian connections (real or imagined), or about the claimed Rosicrucians who had no links with accepted Masonry.

The non-authentic school has four main approaches, which might be categorised as the esoteric the mystical, the symbolist; and the romantic. All four approaches have two factors in common: a belief that Freemasonry has existed 'time immemorial' and an apparent inability to distinguish between historical fact and legend. The esoteric and mystical schools are in fact concerned with the transmission of ideas and esoteric traditions, in itself a valid line of research; but in doing so they convert similarities between groups widely separated in time into evidence of a continuing tradition handed down from one group to another, a sort of esoteric apostolic succession. They also tend to have unorthodox ideas on the nature and purpose of Freemasonry endowing it with mystical, religious and even occult implications which it has never possessed.

Those who follow the esoteric approach take the principles, rituals, forms, symbols and language of Freemasonry, trace similarities in other groups (ignoring the fact that the principles and many of the symbols are universal and not peculiar to Freemasonry), and assume that these similarities are not fortuitous but deliberate and are therefore evidence of a linked tradition. They place great emphasis on the additional degrees, investing them with a spurious antiquity, and read a great deal more into their esoteric content and symbolism than was ever intended.

Viewing Freemasonry in all its diverse branches as a coherent initiatory rite, which it is not, the esoteric school compares it with other initiatory rites, finds similarities, actual or imposed, and assumes an intercommunication. John Yarker is probably the major figure of this school. His magnum opus, *The Arcane Schools* (Belfast, 1909) is a monument to misapplied scholarship. It reveals not only the breadth of his reading but also his inability to digest, or in some cases understand, what he had read. On the surface he appears to be working in the authentic school and makes much use of documentary' evidence. Close examination shows that he was uncritical in his use of sources, accepting tradition, folklore, and legend as fact yet denying actual documented facts.

Yarker was firmly convinced that Freemasonry had existed amongst the medieval operative stonemasons and that they had had a complex series of degrees embracing the Craft and many of the additional degrees. He believed that their system had declined and that its 're-emergence' in the eighteenth century was a revival but in a perverted form. To accept Yarker's thesis we would have to accept that the medieval stonemasons were men of great intellectual prescience, comprehending ideas which did not enter Western philosophy until after the Renaissance. Yarker saw Freemasonry as the culmination or summum bonum of all esoteric systems. Having failed to 'purify' the existing system, Yarker introduced, from America, the Antient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry. A combination and reduction of the ninety seven degrees of the Rite of Misraim and ninety-five degrees of the Rite of Memphis, the Antient and Primitive rite was a pot-pourri of Egyptology, Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, Cabala, Alchemy, Eastern Mysticism and Christianity. It perfectly sums up the eclectic and uncritical mind of its chief promoter in England. The Rite barely survived Yarker's death.

The mystical school is perhaps best represented by the Rev George Oliver and A. E. Waite. Oliver was a fervent pre Darwinian fundamentalist who firmly believed that Freemasonry was Christian and had existed in one form or another since the beginning of time. In some ways he could have been the progenitor of the authentic school. He avidly read any

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Masonic book available to him, collected whatever scraps of evidence he could but like Yarker, he was uncritical in his reading and prone to invention where evidence was lacking. Waite, like Oliver, believed that Freemasonry was essentially Christian in origin and character. He believed that Freemasonry had its origins in the guild system but that it had been transformed into a mystical system, its rituals, particularly of the additional degrees, conveying secret knowledge in the tradition of the Mysteries. His disorganised New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, with its heavy emphasis on existing and defunct additional degrees, was critically savaged by the authentic school when it was published in 1921.

The symbolist school seeks the origins of Freemasonry in a comparison and correlation of symbolism and ritual language and tries to link in a lineal descent various religions, cults, mysteries and societies with Freemasonry. Like the esoteric school, this line of research has a certain validity, but as the anthropology of symbolism not as the search for the origins of Freemasonry. The incidence of certain symbols, gestures and terminologies had led this school to compare Freemasonry with Median religions, Mayan ceremonies, Mithraic and Aboriginal rituals, Egyptian temple paintings, Indian castemarks. . . . The problem is that Masonic symbols are not peculiar to Freemasonry but are in instances universal. Included in the symbolist school are those who have sought the origin and authors of Masonic ritual by combining the works of well-known writers to find examples of 'Masonic language'. The most outlandish was probably Alfred Dodd, who convinced himself that Shakespeare (be he Shakespeare, Bacon or Marlowe) composed the Craft ritual. The romantic school are in one sense following the Andersonian tradition, implicitly believing in the direct connection between operative and speculative Masonry, whether it goes back to Adam, Solomon, or the medieval builders. They differ from the authentic school by the refusal to acknowledge, or possibly their ignorance of: the many ways in which Freemasonry has altered and developed during the period for which records exist. They are quite ready to believe that the ritual, either its basics or its complete detail, has been practised time immemorial.

The lack of knowledge of: and variety of approaches to, the origins of Freemasonry perhaps explain the strength and continual appeal it still has. The lack of any official dogma, and even in England of any standard, centrally controlled ritual or interpretation of the ritual which all lodges must accept, means that the individual member can make as little or as much meaning as he wishes. Whether we shall ever discover the true origins of Freemasonry is open to question. The records of medieval buildings have been fully scoured but religious, local and family archives are largely untapped. If Anderson is correct in claiming that many manuscript records were deliberately burnt in 1720 'by some scrupulous Brothers that those papers might not fall into strange hands' it may be that the vital evidence we seek has already been lost.

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A Mason is not necessarily a member of a lodge. In a broad sense, he is any person who daily tries to live the Masonic life, and to serve intelligently the needs of the Great Architect.



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