



The Overy Papers

Good Evening Brethren. This talk was produced with the help of:
"Evolution of Masonic Ritual" by Wor. Bro. Norman Spencer United Masters Lodge,
New Zealand
"Freemasonry through Six Centuries" by Henry Coil Sr.
"The Freemason at Work" by Harry Carr
And the lectures of V,W.Wor. Bro. Barry Thom, P.M. Lodge McLeod #27 of Grand
Lodge of Newfoundland and Labrador

Number 20 - The Evolution of the Masonic Lodges and their Rituals.

As many of you know I have been publishing the latest edition of our Ritual Book with the intention of attempting to make it easier to use.

We use basically the same ritual that we first used in 1912 with the usual exceptions that creep in when a new book was produced and spellings and terms are done from memory.

And so tonight I will talk on how our Lodges evolved from the Operative Masons and how our Masonic Ritual came about. This is mainly for our new Master Masons but older members might find my concepts interesting.

Operative Masons used three grades that had been in existence from the earliest times.

First there were the "indentured apprentices" who were usually bound to a Fellow or a Master, for seven years.

When he had served about three years of his apprenticeship, he was allowed to enter the lodge, and they were admitted with a simple ceremony and given the rank of "Entered-Apprentice".

When he had completed his seven year apprenticeship he became a Fellow or Fellowcraft.

And then there was the Master or Master Mason who was usually merely a Fellowcraft with the administrative ability and skill to operate a business and so employ other workman.

These Operative mason grades were not degrees and the secrets of Identification were the same for all grades.

The oldest known Masonic record is the Regius Manuscript from 1390. In it we find that the meeting was opened with a prayer, and then the legendary history of the Craft was read out.

The candidate was then brought forward; he placed his hand on whatever Manuscript the lodge had in its possession. This was held before him by a senior Brother and the Articles binding Masons together were read out.

He was then given the Charges that were a series of Instructions, Duties, Trade Regulations for the guidance of the members of the Craft, both in their everyday life and in their work as masons.

These were read to the apprentice on his being "entered" so that he could not plead ignorance of them, and again, with certain additions, when he was made a Fellowcraft. The secrets, whatever they might have been, were then given followed by an oath, binding him to secrecy. The ceremony was then complete.

By 1670 there is still no indication of any floor work or of a ceremony for opening and closing a lodge. The ritual was not written down but passed along by word of mouth. Remember most would not be able to read anyway. Each lodge would add or try new things, along the way and if they were happy with the additions, then they were incorporated.

On reading the many previous talks on this subject, I realized something was not quite right, something, was missing. On thinking about it I realized it was the Architect who would have to have had a university education with the knowledge of Geometry and Mathematics. He would not usually have been a mason but a master and would have been in charge of the total building.

I have my City and Guilds of London Institute Certificates. For me there are two levels Part 1 and Part 2, obviously they decided to do away with flashy names for the levels in later years. Part 1 was Basic Aeronautical Practices and Part 2 Aeronautical Practices and Aircraft Maintenance. This covered everything but the initial aircraft design concept, like what Reginald Mitchell had when he designed the Spitfire. Or to put it Masonic terms what Sir Christopher Wren had when he designed St Paul's Cathedral.

It was then I remembered Hiram Abiff who was the "Master Mason" at King Solomon's Temple and he was a goldsmith and then I then realized it was always there but I just did not see it.

So I think it was this hidden grade that was responsible for the initial design and were in charge of the building of the enormous Gothic Cathedrals at the turn of

the first millennium, and that without their intimate knowledge of Geometry and Mathematics, The work would have been impossible.

The geometer, as they were called, is a mathematician whose area of study is geometry and the educational requirements generally would consist of a university degree in Architecture. Geometry and Mathematics.

They would not be a part of the Operative Mason's Lodge system.

It is said that in 1691 Sir Christopher Wren, while he was building St Pauls Cathedral, was "adopted" into an operative masons lodge as an honorary member. It was a way to welcome the boss and they would naturally have sought the patronage of their employer. But by the standards of the day it would have been unthinkable that a gentleman like Sir Christopher Wren would have actually joined a workers lodge.

So now we come to the forming of the "Speculative Masonic Lodges". To advance my concept, at least in England, it was originally formed by members of this missing grade and would have consisted of academics, members of the Royal Society, gentry or the leaders in business or even royalty. These speculative Masonic Lodges had become highly fashionable at the end of the 1600's and were the forerunner of our Masonic Lodge today.

These new "speculative lodges" would have replaced the term grade with degree that usually relates to a secret ceremony of admission and this concept of the degree appeared just after the formation of the first Grand Lodge of England in 1717.

They included secret words, signs, grips etc that would be withheld from those who were not members. Also it was during this early period that the phrase "equivocation or mental reservation" was used and the "Five Points of Fellowship" first made their written appearance in 1696.

It is thought that only one degree still existed at the formation of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 but the arrival of Dr. James Anderson changed everything.

He produced the first Constitution in 1723 and it stated that two degrees were now being worked and as he was doing all this work for free he was openly encouraged to continue.

Later in 1727 the Graham Manuscript first refers to three degrees.

Now this story must sound a little sketchy but you must remember that almost nothing was written down and everything had to be verbally passed along. There were occasions when it was written out only to be destroyed by an overzealous brother, "lest it fall into strange hands".

Then in 1730, Samuel Pritchard published his famous expose', "MASONRY DISSECTED", which provided details of a three-degree system.

The **Entered Apprentice** degree that included three sets of penalties plus the Obligation.

The **Fellowcraft** degree dealt largely with the significance of the letter *G* that stood for *Geometry* and the candidate received the *Sns*, *Tkn* and *Wds*, but no obligation, except perhaps a repetition of the Entered Apprentice one.

The **third degree** had no obligation and was simply the second degree moved up into third place, and expanded to include the details of the Hiramic Legend that had come from the very fertile and imaginative mind of Dr. James Anderson.

Historians of *Masonry* agree that the evolution of the three-degree system was a direct result of the forming of *Speculative Masonry* and it was them that created the second and third degree. This also meant that *Obligations* had to be developed, as well as the necessary rituals to open and close the lodge in the different degrees.

Until 1729 lodges had no numbers but were known by the name of the tavern where they held their meetings.

Master Masonic certificates were not issued in the beginning. One has been found, issued by the Irish in 1746 but it is felt that most were destroyed upon the death of a Brother.

In the beginning, the second and third degree could only be conferred in Grand Lodge, but as new lodges were added to the original four, this became impossible, and within a few years all lodges were allowed to work all three degrees.

By 1723 there were 30 speculative lodges in Grand Lodge of England. The United Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1813 and with it many more changes came about including the ritual known as *Emulation* and this is still in use today in English Lodges.

And as you know we use *BC Antient* ritual and The Grand Lodge of BC and Yukon has also approved the *BC Canadian*, the *Emulation* and the *Australian Rituals*.

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

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