

A Tale of Two Masonic Chevaliers

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Last November the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305 was presented with an interesting explanation and display of the various orders of Freemasonry and the regalia used by each. The orator, VWBro Ken Edney, PGLec, did not use prepared notes but gave a full ad lib discourse on each order as the regalia was worn and displayed by his co-presenters. As editor of the lodge's transactions and not having any written notes to use, I did some research into the origins of some of the main orders that were presented and came across what I consider to be two interesting Freemasons who were both Chevaliers (or Knights) in the eighteenth century. So with your indulgence I shall digress from the orders themselves into the lives of these two brethren.

First up is **Chevalier Andrew Ramsay** who, amongst other claims, is credited with sowing the seed that led King Louis XV to condemn Freemasonry in France and Pope Clement XII to issue his Papal Bull in 1738 that forbid Catholics to associate with Freemasonry. To learn how this did happen we need to go back to a beginning when a young Andrew Ramsay was engaged as tutor to the infant Bonnie Prince Charlie by King James VIII (the "old pretender"), King of Scotland and the father of Prince Charles. Ramsay had been born and raised in Ayr, Scotland, and had attended Edinburgh University before accepting this tutoring position.

Later, when the Jacobites were forced into exile, Ramsay supported their cause and continued his friendship with Prince Charles. Then, at the age of twenty-eight, he moved to Cambrai in northern France and lived for four years with the noted theologian, Francois Fenelon, who was the Archbishop of Cambrai. It was here that he was converted to Catholicism from his Scottish Calvinist upbringing. He was introduced to the Archbishop's spiritual (some say mystical) adviser, Madame Jeanne-Marie Guyon, one of the founders of *Quietism*, and was persuaded to join her in Blois, France, to become her secretary. Although a Catholic, her *Quietism* movement espoused a universal theology that embraced all religions and her writings raised the ire of the Roman Catholics. She was gaoled under orders from Louis XIV for heretic teachings.

Ramsay then moved to Paris where he spent the rest of his life. In Paris he met Philippe II, the Duc d'Orleans, who admitted him as a member of the Royal & Military Order of St Lazarus and bestowed upon him the title of Chevalier. This latter honour was endorsed by King James VIII of Scotland who was living in Jacobite exile in France under Louis XIV's protection. The King later made Ramsay a Knight and granted him "Nobility" in Scotland.

Philippe II was a son-in-law of Louis XIV and was appointed as Regent to the five year old King Louis XV on Louis XIV's death in 1715. As Regent he ruled France until Louis XV came of age and was instrumental in forming an alliance with France's old enemy, Great Britain, to prevent Philip V, King of Spain, pursuing his claim to be King of France. Philip V was a grandson of Louis XIV of France.

In 1730, whilst visiting England, Ramsay was initiated into Freemasonry in the Horn Lodge in London. On his return to Paris he became an enthusiastic participant in Masonic affairs and was appointed as a Grand Orator. Freemasonry in France had been active for some years but in a piecemeal and haphazard way. Ramsay was an idealist who did not believe that everything wonderful should be reserved for life after death. He wanted to build a Heaven on earth and in Freemasonry he saw a way to do this, so he wrote a paper which was to be delivered as an oration at the conclusion of the initiation degree that explained to candidates the meaning of the degree that they had just taken. It was an allegorical version of the origins of Freemasonry designed to instil a pride in belonging to the new candidate.

This oration, whilst not denying the legends of King Solomon and his Temple, went further to make a connection with the Crusaders. His version had Prince Edward, son of King Henry III of England, lead the Crusader troops back to England where they took the name Freemasons and began promoting the "royal art". From England it spread to France which was now, according to Ramsay, the "centre of the order". Ramsay went on to say that the obligations imposed on the candidate implied that they protect, enlighten and edify their brothers by authority, knowledge and virtue and that they sacrifice all personal resentment so that they make a contribution to the peace and harmony of society. Ideals where the interests of the fraternity shall become those of the whole human race and that humanity learns to cherish one another without detriment to their own country.

Almost overnight France became deluged with so-called "higher degrees". The French brethren refused to believe that their power had evolved from "common workmen" who got their hands dirty by cutting stone. Ramsay's oration had given them an answer and an excuse that provided them with noble ancestors. More than eleven hundred degrees or rites were invented. Most did not survive but the Ancient and Scottish Rite and the Rose Croix degrees did, so we can thank Chevalier Ramsay indirectly for having those degrees with us today.

With this surge of interest in Freemasonry, the Crown and the Catholic Church started to become wary of the power that was instilled in the populace. This led to the King's and the Pope's condemnation of Freemasonry.

Chevalier Charles d'Eon De Beaumont was a very different brother to Chevalier Ramsay. Amongst his many skills were lawyer, diplomat, soldier, swordsman, **spy and cross-dresser**. He was born in France in 1728 as a young man became a legal advisor in the court of Louis XV. The King operated two channels of diplomacy – one was official and the other was secret. Charles d'Eon (as he preferred to be known) became a diplomat in the "secret" chamber and as such was sent to Russia to infiltrate the court of Elizabeth, Empress of Russia. At that time there was a blockade denying French access into Russia by only allowing women and children to cross the border. d'Eon was able to dress and look like a woman and, as such, was successful in entering and gaining much needed intelligence for France. For this he was rewarded with a pension.

He (she) remained in Russia until the Empress's death in 1762, when he was sent to England to draft the peace treaty that officially ended the Seven Year's War between France and England. For this he was created a Chevalier in the Order of Saint-Louis, a military Order of Chivalry. He remained in London and was appointed as the interim acting

Ambassador for France until a new Ambassador arrived. During this time he continued with his spy duties scouting the coastal defences prior to a planned invasion by France, which eventually never happened.

The new Ambassador and d'Eon did not hit it off personality wise, suspected to be because of his cross-dressing and public outings as a woman, resulting in d'Eon being dismissed and ordered back to France. He refused to go and used diplomatic contacts to assist him to remain in England. The French issued an extradition order which was ignored by the English courts. He had meticulously recorded the evidence he had gathered whilst working as one of the King's secret agents and threatened to publish these if he was forced to return to Paris. Eventually the French Ambassador was recalled and d'Eon was allowed to remain in London with an increase in his pension as a reward for not publishing his secret service memoirs.

During his time in the French Embassy in London he had associated with many Freemasons, both in the Embassy and in greater London. He was initiated into a French speaking lodge in London, *La Loge de L'immortalite No 376* (the Lodge of Immortality) in 1768 and was their Junior Warden in 1770. He continued with his cross-dressing in public (but it is recorded that he never did so within his lodge). The Grand Master had stated that "his skirts are his own business" so his forays in public were tolerated by his brethren. There is no evidence that he was homosexual but he may have been "intersexual" having properties from both sexes.

When Louis XV died in 1774, d'Eon negotiated a return to Paris that allowed him to retain his pension in return for handing over all his documents to the court authorities. He also demanded that the French government recognise him as a woman, claiming that he had been born female but raised by his father as a boy so his parents could claim a family inheritance. Louis XVI agreed to this on the condition that d'Eon continued to dress as a woman for the rest of his life.

After ten years in Paris, Bro Chevalier Charles d'Eon returned to London and lived as a woman, boarding with a widow, Mrs Cole, until he died twenty five years later. Upon his death, doctors confirmed that he was indeed a male but had "well formed female breasts".
