

Copyright of this publication is vested in The Hawke's Bay Research Lodge and the author, and anyone wishing to reproduce it in full or in part should first obtain permission from the Lodge Secretary.

**An Address given by WBro. Yasha Beresiner  
To the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No. 305  
1<sup>st</sup>. September, 2000.**

*Dubious Invitation*

*One of the most interesting lodges, from my view point, where I had the privilege of speaking was a military one where the Officers were all in full uniform. I was slightly disconcerted when ten minutes into my lecture, the Junior Warden across the room removed his pistol from its holster and placed in on the pedestal in front of him. I tried to ignore the action and continued speaking when, some minutes later, I noted the Senior Warden doing exactly the same.*

*I stopped talking and turned to the Master 'Is everything in order. Worshipful Master?' I enquired*

*'Oh Yes,' he replied, 'You carry on talking Bro Beresiner, the guns are intended for the Brother who invited you to speak!'*

**BEYOND THE MASONIC VEIL**

*by Bro Yasha Beresiner*

Consider the fascinating thought that this very moment, as we sit here in this Masonic Hall, there are tens of thousands of Masons meeting just like us along our meridian, stretching from Hong Kong and the Philippines to the North and South of the Australian sub-continent. Each day of the week multitudes of Masons meet in every free nation of the world—men as diverse in intellect and culture as you can possibly imagine: law judges and bus drivers, dustmen and politicians, doctors, butchers, bakers, teachers, accountants, clergymen and royalty, and a hundred other trades and professions—Catholics (yes, Catholics are now permitted to join our Craft), Anglicans and Methodists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. All of these Masons are surrounded by what to us is the very familiar furniture and decor of a Masonic lodge room. These men wear aprons and collars just like ours, all practising, in essence, the same ceremonies, sharing the same pleasure and pride in our exceptional institution.

*Why?* What is the magnetism in Freemasonry that draws such diversity of people to form one single worldwide compelling fraternity?

**Ritual**

It could be that we are bound to each other because each of us has experienced the same initiation, a ceremony you have to participate in if you wish to witness it. Those who attack the Craft will claim that Freemasonry is a secret society. Often the rebuttal has been that Freemasonry is not a secret society but a society with secrets. This is merely a play on words. There are only two elements about the Craft that a Freemason undertakes not to divulge: the words and the signs of recognition that lead from one degree to the next. These are the only 'secrets' in Freemasonry. They are traditional and protect the privacy and enjoyment of our ceremonies. Yet, even these words and signs can easily be found in books and literature available in most libraries. It is our own promise not to divulge them that is sacrosanct and an integral part of Freemasonry.

We need to be reminded that the secrets of Freemasonry are intended for the Freemasons themselves. They are not secrets intended to exclude the outsider. The genuine true secrets of a Mason, however, are to be found in the answer to the questions I am raising in this lecture. What is it that makes us, such a wide body of men, so devoted and dedicated to Freemasonry? The

answer to this one true 'secret' can only be discovered by those who become Freemasons in mind and spirit.

For 350 years or more, great men of history have gone through the Masonic initiation ceremony, a ceremony that has changed very little in essence over the centuries: members of royal families in Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and England—the Queen is the current Patron of our Order in England, and we have had members of the nobility and royalty at our head since 1721, when John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, was elected Grand Master of the premier Grand Lodge. King George IV and William IV as Princes of Wales in 1790 and 1787 respectively, graced our fraternity as Grand Masters. More recently H M King George VI was an active Mason and accepted the rank of Past Grand Master on his accession to the throne in 1937, having already been installed Grand Master Mason of Scotland a year earlier.



*Illustration 51*

Royalty throughout Europe has been closely involved with Freemasonry. In England HRH Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (later to become King Edward VII) served as Grand Master from 1874 to 1901. He is here flanked to his right by his blood brother, HRH the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, who succeeded him as Grand Master in 1901 and continued to serve the Craft until 1939. On his left is his son, HRH Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, who was Installed as Provincial Grand Master for Berkshire by his father in May 1890.

Nearly 200 years earlier, in 1752, George Washington, first President of the United States of America, was made a Freemason in Virginia. Fourteen other American Presidents have followed in his footsteps, including Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson and Gerald Ford. The current President, Bill Clinton, was a member of the Order of de Molay, the American organisation for young boys, with chapters sponsored by Masonic lodges but not necessarily ensuring Masonic membership in the future. In the political and military arenas the names of Masons are innumerable, from Winston Churchill, the Duke of Wellington and Benjamin Franklin, to Thomas Raffles and Giuseppe Garibaldi. The same applies to music and entertainment: Mozart, Haydn and Sibelius, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, Irving Berlin, Peter Sellers, Harry Houdini, and even Casanova, *ad infinitum*. Robert Burns and Rudyard

Kipling, Rousseau, Voltaire and Oscar Wilde, Atatürk, Rothschild, Chagal, Sugar Ray Robinson—to mention just a few—all Masons and all having experienced the same initiation ceremony, just like each one of us Masons in this room. An amazing thought!

Of all these many personalities, the one that has captured my imagination more than any other is the initiation into Freemasonry of Elias Ashmole. He is the earliest recorded speculative Freemason, as we understand that term today. He was initiated at 4.30 pm on 16 October 1646. We can be that precise because there is an entry in his diary in his handwriting, recording the event. The entry states:

1646, Oct: 16, 4,30 p.m. I was made a Free Mason at Warrington in Lancashire, with Col. Henry Mainwaring of Kerincham in Cheshire.



*Illustration 52*

Elias Ashmole: alchemist, antiquarian and astrologer, medical Doctor, lawyer, Royalist captain, Commissioner of Excise, Windsor Herald, founder of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. He was made a Free Mason at Warrington in Lancashire, with Col. Henry Mainwaring of Kerincham in Cheshire at 4.30 pm on 16 October 1646, as recorded in his diary.

Elias Ashmole lent his name to the Ashmolean Museum, founded in Oxford in 1677. His diary, mentioned above, and much of his personal possessions of antiquities, formed the basis of the collection in this important Museum. There is considerable significance to be placed on the fact that a man of Ashmole's stature was initiated into Freemasonry. Born in 1617, Elias Ashmole qualified as a solicitor and later received a Medical Doctorate in Oxford. His interests revolved around alchemy and alternative philosophy, and he authored several books on the subject. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society, a highly prestigious achievement, after he developed his extensive interests in Antiquities and Astrology.

What is absolutely clear is that he had nothing whatsoever to do with stone masons in

their operative or working sense: thus the importance we place on his initiation as evidence of our own antiquity as an institution. The likelihood is that there was no such concept as a lodge, as we understand the term now. Ashmole's initiation will have taken place in a private home, most likely that of his father in law, Colonel Henry Mainwaring, a man of substance and importance, who was initiated with him. Ashmole's record in his diary also details the names of the one Warden and six other Masons present. Not a single one of these individuals, whose details have been searched and traced, had any connection whatsoever with the operative stone masons. Clearly, these men had themselves been made Masons at some time previous to the initiation of Elias Ashmole, and no evidence has emerged as to where that might have occurred. What we can now emphatically state, however, is that speculative Masonry had its beginnings sometime before 1646 in the north of England.

It is interesting to note that in Ashmole's very extensive diaries there is only one additional mention about Freemasonry. On 10 March 1682, very nearly thirty-six years after the first mention, Ashmole received a '*Summons to appr at a Lodge . . . at Masons Hall, London*', and the next entry in the diary states:

[11th] Accordingly I went and about Noon were admitted into the fellowship of Freemasons . . . I was the Senior Fellow among them (it being thirty five years since I was admitted). There were present beside my self the fellows after named. Mr Tho Wise Master of the Masons Company this present year . . . We all dined at the half Moon Tavern in Cheapside at a Noble dinner prepared at the charge of the New-accepted Masons.

This information has been of considerable importance to Masonic historians. Ashmole's only two scant mentions of Freemasonry in his otherwise greatly detailed diaries are made all the more frustrating for his never getting round to writing the book he had promised, titled *History of Freemasonry*!

### **Origins**

Undoubtedly, this early evidence of our activities, the antiquity of our institution, is a great attraction to many Masons. There are innumerable theories and no final conclusion as to when, where and how Freemasonry began. It would make sense to reach the conclusion that we are descended directly from operative, that is working, stone masons of medieval times. Today we still use the same ancient charges and regulations that applied to operative masons as far back as the late 14th century. The opening pages of the *Constitutions* of the United Grand Lodge of England begin with a *Summary of the Antient Charges and Regulations*. The Secretary of a lodge reads these to every Master Elect, prior to his Installation into the Chair of a lodge. The 15 rules are very similar in essence and principle to the regulations by which operative Masons, as far back as 1400 at least, had to comport themselves.

This theory, that we as speculative Masons today are derived from medieval working operative stone masons, is popularly referred to as the *transition theory* and is a comfortable one, for the want of a better word, for us to consider. The theory visualises a situation where the operative masons working on the building of a cathedral, for instance, invited non-masons to attend some of their functions and ceremonies. These guests, unrelated to the trade of the stone masons, would have been men of the clergy, for instance, attached to the cathedral that was being built. They could be local civic dignitaries and men of wealth and substance who may have been assisting with the financing of the cathedral. Thus, over a period of thirty or more years, the time which it took to build as substantial a structure as a cathedral, the non-masons may well have regularly,

maybe monthly or even more frequently, attended dinners and festivities and may have even witnessed, possibly participated in some small way, at initiations and other ceremonies carried out by the operative masons.

On completion of the work, so the transition theory continues, the operative masons would have moved on to their next undertaking, say the building of a castle in Wales. Those who remained behind, the non-masons who had participated over decades, perhaps, in pleasant and convivial ceremonies, may have now decided to continue regularly the social meetings they had enjoyed over the years. They would have now formed themselves into some sort of an association, deciding to use symbolically the many tools and implements they had witnessed in practice among the operative masons. Anyone who may have wished to join the new fraternity of diners would have to be symbolically 'initiated' into their midst. Thus may have been born the speculative or symbolic Masonry we practice today. There is no evidence to support this *transition theory* and we simply do not know the answer.

What we do know beyond a shadow of a doubt is that on 24 June 1717 four lodges in London met at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard. They formed the Grand Lodge of England, the first Grand Lodge anywhere in the world, and *organised* Freemasonry was launched.

### **Success**

If the success of an organisation could be judged by the opposition it generates to its existence, then Freemasonry began as a successful institution long before its formal launch in 1717. In 1698, nearly two decades before Grand Lodge was formed, a pamphlet headed *To All Godly People, in the Citie of London* was distributed in the streets and coffee houses of London. It warned the reader 'of the Mischiefs and Evils practiced in the Sight of GOD by those called Freed Masons'. It called the Masons a 'Devlish sect of Men' who are the *Anti Christ* and *Evil-doers*. A most virulent attack which, from an historical point of view, is significant. The distribution of such a leaflet would indicate that 20 years before the formation of the first Grand Lodge in the world, Freemasonry was already so well known as to attract the attention of those who objected to it. Sufficiently so to justify the printing and distribution of the leaflet.

Charges against Freemasonry, of one kind or another, have continued to this day, without reasonable justification and thus without any effective success. It is sometimes surprising to find criticisms that began three centuries ago continue today in almost identical form and wordings, but never backed by fact. Could this then be the secret as to what has kept Freemasonry a strong and successful fraternal organisation through the centuries?

### **Blessing in disguise**

One aspect of these attacks on Freemasonry is to be found in what are known as *exposures*—the disclosure of the supposed secrets of the Freemasons. One of the earliest such exposures was Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, first published in October 1730. It was overtly intended to allow any interested person to learn how to gain access to a Masonic lodge by disclosing the secret signs and words of each of the degrees. It gave a detailed account of the ceremonies of the three degrees of Freemasonry in the form of questions and answers, known as catechism.

Although the publication of the book was of great concern to the Grand Lodge at the time, it has proven to be a blessing in disguise for today's students of Freemasonry. There is a very distinct lack of source material available in general about Freemasonry in its early formative years. The only 'official' contemporary publication by the premier Grand Lodge is to be found in Anderson's *Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, published in March 1723. As a source of historical information, however, the book is totally unreliable.

Anderson had been commissioned to write his *Constitutions* on behalf of Grand Lodge, albeit at his own expense. He appears to have taken the available legendary history from the Old Charges, referred to above, and used them as his historical source. Anderson was enthusiastic, and eager to present the newly formed institution of the Freemasons as a society of consequence and great antiquity. Its history, therefore, in the opening pages of the *Constitutions* was intended to be impressive, and is wildly imaginative and exaggerated at best.

In fairness to Anderson, it should be stated that these historic events relating to the Freemasons, tracing their origins back to Adam, no less, were to be viewed as legends, not unlike biblical stories, which are still seen by some as historic records. It is surprising to find, however, that Anderson's 'history' was considered the one viable and reliable source about the origins of Freemasonry, which remained unchallenged until the middle of the 19th century. Although there had been an intention to publish a revised history of Freemasonry together with the new *Constitutions* following the Union of the two Grand Lodges in December 1813, when the *Constitutions* were finally published three years later, there was no sign of the new History.

Thus, without any other source to rely on, the exposures and illicit publications such as Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* serve a useful purpose to the historian. They give us a detailed insight and an account of the Masonic ceremonies practised in English lodges in the first half of the 18th century.

### **Europe**

The publication of Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* coincided with the spread of Freemasonry into Europe. Although in England this pamphlet had been a huge success—in fact so successful that no other exposures were published in England for the next thirty years—in Europe many similar exposures soon began to appear. One of the most interesting of these is a set of eight engravings first published in Germany in 1742. These are commonly referred to as the *Gabanon Prints* because they are dedicated to Gabanon, the pseudonym of Louis Travenol, who was the author of one of the early French exposures.

These are the earliest available illustrations of a lodge in session. A picture speaks a thousand words! Much that is omitted from the written word of the exposures is divulged here in these prints, which show the ceremonies of the various degrees. It is, for example, the first instance and illustration we have of the tracing board we use in our ceremonies and lectures today. The cloth-carpet in the *Gabanon Prints* is placed before the Master's pedestal and explains, *inter alia*, the custom in some jurisdictions of squaring the lodge during the perambulations.

The set of prints were intended as a pictorial representation of our ceremonies rather than any offensive reflection of our activities. The authors could not resist one insult, however. In the last of the eight prints all the Masons in their respective clothing and offices are depicted as animals!

The greatest fascination that outsiders seem to have with our Masonic practices is the detail of our initiation ceremony. Because we state that we treat our ceremonies as private, there have been many extraordinary claims as to how a Mason is initiated. In 1721 the anonymous *Hudibrastic Poem* was published with exceedingly clever though highly offensive insinuations of the activities of Freemasons. They were depicted as drunkards, womanisers and sodomites. So offensive was the language used that, although the poem has been discussed and written about in various publications, it was only in 1994 that a full version was published for the first time, in *AQC* 107. The paper incorporates an excellent and extensive analysis of the poem, written by Bro Wallace McLeod of Canada, who is well known here, being my predecessor on this wonderful ANZMRC lecture tour.

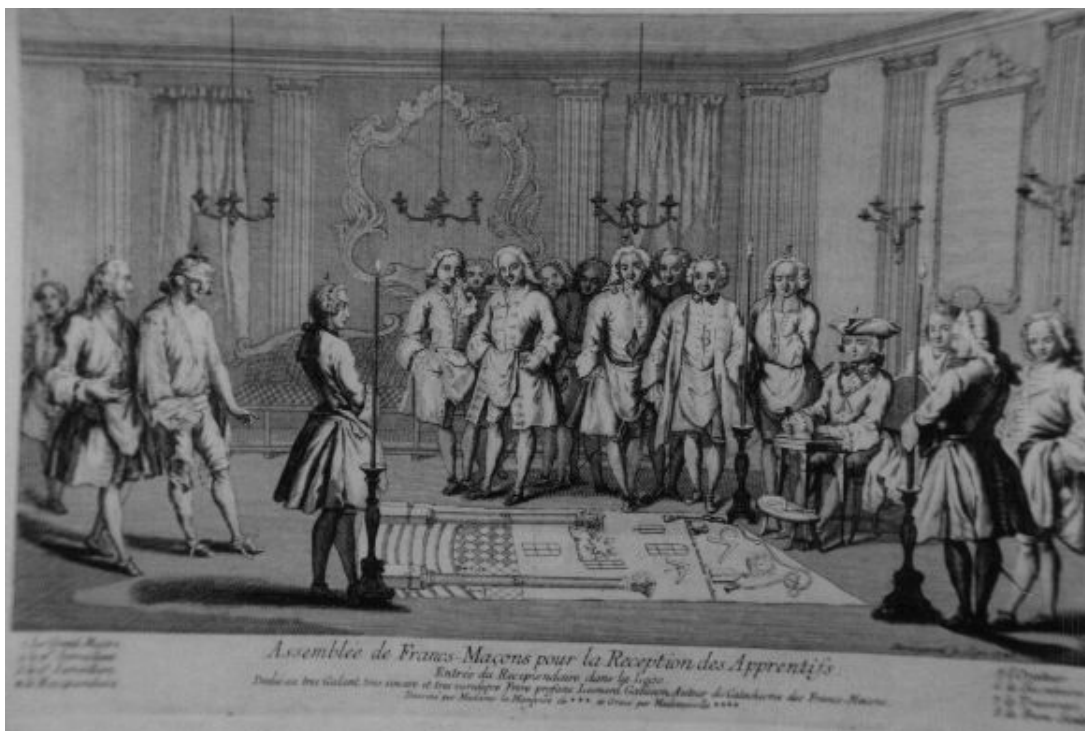


Illustration 53

First of the six *Gabanon* Prints: the first degree in 1742 being conferred in Germany. The print has been mistaken as being of French origin because it is titled and dedicated in French to Leonard Gabanon, pseudonym of Louis Travenol, a contemporary French author of Masonic exposures.

*Reproduced by kind permission of the United Grand Lodge of England*

Following on the poem, a great number of distasteful illustrations were published, supposedly descriptive of our ceremonies. The engravings invariably depict the initiation ceremony of a candidate in lurid terms. The most frequent of these is a series of satirical prints, from the 1750s onward, illustrating candidates being branded, for instance, with the letters FM on their exposed posteriors!

### Satire & fun

Not all of the satirical depictions of Freemasons show them in a negative light. The most famous engraver of the 18th century, William Hogarth, was himself made a Freemason in London about 1725. he engraved several prints with Masonic themes. The most important and well known of these is titled *Night*, one of a set of four prints known as *The Times of Day*, published in 1738.

In it the Master of the lodge, who has been identified as Thomas de Veil, a London Magistrate, is being escorted home by the Grand Tyler. The Master has clearly enjoyed a most successful evening, as he appears to be drunk! From a window above, the contents of a chamber pot are being poured onto the head of de Veil. This has been interpreted as an intended slur, in light of the known animosity between de Veil and Hogarth, who both belonged to the same lodge.

The series of prints are a wonderful reflection on aspects of Freemasonry of the period. They convey, in Hogarth's inimitable style, an atmosphere of the period that can rarely be defined in words.

We now come to the crossroads in English Masonic history: in July 1751, five lodges consisting of Irish Freemasons founded the *Antients* Grand Lodge as a rival body to the existing premier

Grand Lodge. Their strong Irish origins and influence led them on a course of divergence of ritual and practice which was distinctly different and quite innovative, in comparison to the traditional practices of the older Grand Lodge of 1717. Very soon after its establishment, the *Antients* were under the rule of their Grand Secretary, Laurence Dermott, a most extraordinary and accomplished Freemason. He succeeded in dubbing the premier Grand Lodge of 1717 the *Moderns*, whilst his new Grand Lodge—formed some 35 years later—retained the distinction of being called the *Antients*, terms that have remained in use to this day.



*Illustration 54*

William Hogarth's most famous Masonic depiction is entitled *Night*. It is one of a series of four prints first published in 1738 from *The Times of Day* and depicts Sir Thomas de Veil, Master of the Lodge, in a state of drunkenness being guided home by Andrew Montgomerie, Tyler to Grand Lodge.

*Reproduced by kind permission of the United Grand Lodge of England*

The competition between the two was fierce, and continued for over half a century. Finally, with the start of the new century, signs of the possibility of a reconciliation began to appear and in December 1813 the heads of the two opposing Grand Lodges, who happened to be Royal

Brothers, the Duke of Kent at the head of the *Antients* and the Duke of Sussex Grand Master of the *Moderns*, brought to a formal close the animosity between the two Grand Lodges with the appointment of the Duke of Sussex as the first Grand Master of the newly formed United Grand Lodge of England. It explains why we use this title today.

### **Finally**

So we come back to my original practical question. What is it that has made Freemasonry such a successful and long lasting institution worldwide? Is it its antiquity? Its resilience? Or maybe its exclusiveness or the air of secrecy—as fallacious as that may be—associated with it. The universal appeal of Freemasonry may lie in that every man who joins the society is able to find within it some aspect—a niche, so to speak—that is of particular satisfaction to his own needs and field of interest. It could be the ritual, or mysticism, the history and antiquity, or the theatricals and spirituality. Sometimes it is no more than simple, plain social contact. There is no single answer.

If one was to ask for a straightforward reply to the simple question, ‘What is Freemasonry?’ the answer would have to be just one single word: *Charity*. Not merely the charity of our pockets, as important as that is, but the charity of our hearts, the genuine and sincere sentiment shared by us all, that of brotherly love, relief and truth.

To end this paper, I would like to quote one short paragraph from the ritual that is often recited in our lodges after all the proceedings have terminated and we are about to leave the lodge room:

... you are now about to quit this safe and sacred retreat of peace and friendship and mix again with the busy world. Midst all its cares and employment forget not the sacred duties which have been so frequently inculcated and strongly recommended in this Lodge. ... that by diligence and fidelity to the duties of your respective vocations, by liberal beneficence and diffusive charity, by constancy and sincerity in your friendship, by uniformly kind, just, amiable and virtuous deportment, prove to the world the happy and beneficent effects of our ancient and honourable Institution.

How wonderful this world would be if we could all put into daily practice outside the lodge room such splendid, wonderful sentiments.

### ***Bibliography***

HAMILL, John & GILBERT, Robert: *Freemasonry, A celebration of the Craft*, London 1993.

HORNE, Alex: ‘Elias Ashmole’ in (1952) *AQC* 78:

LENNHOFF, Eugen: *The Freemasons, The History, Nature, Development and Secret of the Royal Art* (in German, 1934) Middx 1978.

MACNULTY, W Kirk: *Freemasonry—A Journey through Ritual and Symbol*, London 1991.