

An address by:

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THE KNOCKS IN OUR DEGREES

The knocks in our three degrees are laid down for us in our ritual but where did they come from? Those of us who have looked at the Emulations will note that the candidate in England apparently is admitted on a report, Three knocks.

Brethren I have had a look that this subject to give us some idea of the history of the knocks but in New Zealand the knocks are laid down in our official ritual and after looking at the emulations and reading Bro Harry Can that perhaps the English knocks are different, but I don't know, A great deal has been written on this subject all too often by historians who are so eager to prove their theory right and they tend to lose sight of the fact that the evidence of the knocks go back to prior to 1700.

I would like to read out to you all some of the so called "History" I have been able to read and some of the things that I thought you may like to know, but keep in mind the following is what early Masonic Authors have read into the MS and early minute, and I think they could or have interpreted the early writings to suit their own ends.

Some notes from Knoop, Jones and Hamer about the knocks in 1723.

"When you would enter a Lodge you must knock three times at the Door, and they'll challenge you "

Q How were you admitted into the Lodge ?

A by three great knocks 1727 (From a Masons Confessions 1727)

"Coming to an house where masons may be, he is to knock three knocks on the door a lesser, a more and a more 1727 (From the Wilkinson MS 1727)

At a later stage this last section repeats the knocks but states " Another sign is knocking at any door by two little knocks and a third big one (Sloane MS 1700) Sloane also states other recognition signs "with a handkerchief- they give two little shakes and a big one or in the dark two little haughts and a great one as if they were forcing a bone or lump out of their throat. It is very important to notice that the examples quoted above, either by their date or from internal evidence in the texts, can be shown to belong to a period when only two degrees were known or practised, one for the Entered Apprentice and the other for the Fellowcraft or Master and there is no certain indication that the rhythms described above belong only to the Entered apprentice: they appear to have been used by the Craft generally. We come to the earliest reference to the knocks under the tri-gradal system. Prichard published in 1730 is the first exposure that claims to describe a three degree system

The three knocks appear in the Entered Apprentice Degree:-

Q How you got Admittance ?

A By three great Knocks

There is no explanation of a rhythm , but Prichard's work reference is made to knocks in the third or Masters Degree:-

Ex You're an heroick Fellow: (dictionary describes Heriock as a hero) from whence come you ?

R From the East

Ex Where are you going ?

R To the West etc

Ex How was it lost.?

R By Three Great knocks, or the Death of our Master Hiram

In the narrative that followed these questions made it clear that the second and third knocks were each heavier than the one before.. The same symbolism is preserved in our Ritual to-day in the phrase "To seek for that which was lost"

A further test may be quoted as short MS catechism dated 1740

Q How were you admitted a Mason

A By Three knocks on the door the last a double distance of time from the former and much larger (i.e. two short and one longer and louder). There is later reference to this in the MS "By three solemn Knocks at the Door the last a double distant of time and much larger.. the Junior Prentice takes you by the hand and knocks three times at the door. N.B. the reason for those knocks is not known to Prentices but to the Master which is from Hiram the Grand Master in Solomon's Temple. Being murdered by his three Prentices he was despatched by the third Blow the last Prentice gave him and this was because he would not discover the Secrets to them. (This could account for 3 knocks but where did the so called rhythm come from ?)

Apart from the above, there is particular no English evidence on the subject of knocks between 1730 and 1760 but a great deal of information is to be found in the French texts which appeared in a steady flow from 1737 onwards and since these owed their origins to English practices, their evidence is both admissible and useful. (Carr)

One published in 1737 at the instigation of Herault, Lient Gen of the Paris Police the text appears to be a single ceremony, but contains elements belonging to two degrees, this may have been the custom of the time where the first two degrees were often conferred in a single session. I don't know if it was a combined first and second degree or two degrees being worked in the same night. Wor Bro Colin Heyward in his History of the Bedford Lodge 464 I.C. (1878) at Waipukurau " A Busy First Term, During the (first) nine months of the first Master, a total of 36 degrees were worked, Except for the first regular meeting multiple degrees were worked - apparently separately as the minutes record - numerous calls from labour to refreshment' so it would seem that type of ceremonies were perhaps common in New Zealand in the 1870's" but going back to the French exposure the following text refers to our subject. " after this, the Godfather (i.e. the proposer) goes and knocks three times at the Door of the Reception Room in which the venerable Grand Master of the Lodge is, who answers the three Knocks from within, and orders the door to be opened.."

The next and most interesting information on the knocks comes in an English version 1766.

"my conductor carefully observed to knock only twice, that I might not hear the sacred number 'till such time as I had seen the light." (different again)

From the E. A. ceremony

"The master gave three knocks, the two wardens repeated them, with the little mallets that hung at their waists. The master made the apprentice's sign, saying "Brethren the apprentice's lodge is shut" with striking three knocks, which was successively repeated.

KNOCKS IN LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND AT UNION.

A brief survey may be summarized as follows:-

1. The use of three knocks in the Craft goes back almost to the earliest of our ritual documents i.e. 1700
2. They were, from their appearance a formal part of admission of a candidate into the Lodge.
3. They were also used as a means of recognition.
4. There is evidence of three equal knocks two short and one long and one long and two short; three growing progressively louder.
5. All can be traced to the time when there were only two degrees being worked.
6. The knocks appear before there is any evidence of formal open and close of the Lodge
7. There is no evidence of different knocks for different degrees, except some lodges used three times three in the third degree, but the rhythms were apparently uniform in all degrees
8. There is no evidence of a standard practice operating in all lodges..

Three knocks were in common practice at a time when only a two degree system was known in the Craft, so that any knocks used in the 3rd degree must have been introduced after 1725.

Despite this seeming absence of evidence on different knocks at the end of the eighteenth century, we know from the minutes of lodges 1809 that by that date there already was a series of questions and answers for the opening and closing of the Lodge in all three degrees., the following were recorded in 1802.

Opening 1st degree, The door test. To see the Lodge close tiled. J.W. gives three distinct knocks on the door, and the tyler answers likewise. At the end of the opening the W.M. gives three knocks and the Wardens two. Closing 1st degree, For door test To see the Lodge close tyled, the JW gives two and one knocks on the door the tyler answers likewise, at the end of the closing the Master gives three knocks and the Wardens two. Opening second degree Door test two and one by J.W and tyler likewise, at the end of the opening the Master 2 and 1 and the Wardens 2 each

THE KNOCKS IN MODERN PRACTICE

The brief survey below is designed to indicate the general principles that are involved, it is not intended to demonstrate that some are correct and others wrong. FOR CANDIDATES

It has been established that three knocks have a Masonic significance, and although other knocks may have been used, the question of what is right or wrong depends on which authority is being used. It is agreed by students and confirmed by ancient practice that in early times the candidate was required to give the three knocks on the door, but in New Zealand one knock.

FOR VISITORS

Many, if not most (English) lodges give a single knock for visitors but Cartwright objects saying a visitor must be a Brother and the tyler would give the knocks of the degree being worked otherwise it would be an alarm

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" The explanation of the knocks quoted is purely mystical and an imaginary one. The knocks have no symbolism. They are used for a practical purpose, namely to prove the Lodge close tiled, and to denote reports and alarms. The difference in the knocks of the three degrees is purely for the purpose of distinguishing one degree from another. and I would like warn against paying too much attention to Masonic writers possessed of vivid imaginations who seek to find symbols where none were ever intended. Perhaps some of the early writers read into the MS and early so called minutes added what they, the authors thought: and what they thought is perhaps not what did happen all those years ago. But perhaps we will never know.

There has been a suggestion that the Knocks are a carry over from the operative Mason checking the stones in the quarry with three knocks

Any papers printed in these transactions, express the opinions of the writers and are not necessary those of the Lodge.