

## **KNOCKS IN THE CRAFT DEGREES**

The following is a very recent paper by Allan Wakeham P.D.G.M. who has submitted that he has found any further exploration of the subject too complicated. He has asked if any of our members might be able to add to the subject. We will bring up the matter at our forthcoming meeting but readers are invited to submit their thoughts to the editor. Email addresses for ease of communication are set out on the cover.

*"Can you give the meaning or explain the symbolism of the knocks in the Craft Degrees and the reason for the changing rhythms that we use in the different ceremonies"*

Although every Freemason is familiar with the various knocks in the Craft Degrees, nowhere is he taught anything about them, and believe me, what appears to be a simple question takes a lot of research to find an adequate answer.

As the Christian influence was strong in Masonry for a long period, it was by no means unlikely that the triple knock originally carried with it an allusion to the Triune God, but there is a wholly Masonic explanation of giving three knocks.

One writer has suggested that there are three obstructions and three doors (one door real and two, not imaginary, but symbolical) to be negotiated by the Candidate. There are three distinct knocks to obtain admission and three distinct knocks to pass each obstruction.

To study the introduction and development of the knocks in the various ceremonies, we must look back to the early catechisms and exposures from the earliest in 1696 up to 1825, and there were numerous exposures in that time span. These cover the period during which the rituals underwent their greatest development and changes and we can see that there has been little fundamental change in the area under study since that time.

When considering the early references to ceremonial practices such as knocks, we must bear in mind that the early English examples up to and including Prichard's "Masonry Dissected" in 1730 were only catechisms and did not contain much descriptive information explaining the way the ceremonies were performed.

It was not until the middle of that century that the French exposures started to describe the ceremonies in detail.

In the ceremony of consecrating a church in the 13th Century, the Bishops procession made three circuits of the church, the Bishop knocking on the door after each of them but being admitted only at the third knocking.

We know that the knocks and rhythms were used to identify masons in public before 1730, some examples being: (a) Two little coughs and one great one (b) Use of a handkerchief when blowing the nose and giving two little shakes and one big one (c) To call a Mason by knocks on a door or some object if in a gathering of people.

Today we take for granted the important part the various knocks take in ritual opening and closing of the Lodge but there is little evidence of formalised openings and closings until the middle of the 18th Century. The first reference to the use of knocks in the Opening appears in 1747.

By the time of Preston's lectures and the Union in 1813 the rhythms of the knocks had been standardised to the various degrees.

The symbolic knocks at the Wardens in the South and West afford a further area of interest. There are those that believe these knocks are the modern symbolic remnants from the days when the Brethren were seated around a table and the candidate knocked on their shoulders from behind in order to gain admission to the table. This part of the ceremony dropped out of the Second and Third degree but remained crystallised in the First degree.

So what is the symbolism of these knocks? Brethren have sought to see in the knocks on the door all sorts of symbolism, some of which is of early date. The interpretation of the symbolism of these three knocks is probably best expressed in the following text:-

Saint Matthew's Gospel - Ask and it shall be given to you., Seek and Ye shall find; Knock and it shall be opened unto you"

In the French exposures of 1742 and 1744 we find:

**WM:** How were you made a Mason

**A :** By three great knocks

**WM:** What is the meaning of those three great knocks

**A :** Knock and it shall be opened unto you; Ask and it shall be given; Present yourself and you shall be received.

There were many exposures at this time with little variation of wording and basically the same idea: I sought in my mind, I asked of my friend; He knocked, and the door of Masonry became opened to me.

The early exposures seem to suggest that the variations in rhythm were used because the reason for them was not known to the Apprentice. In an extremely rare work, " Le Mayon Demasque" 1751, it states that the Conductor knocked only once so that the Candidate did not hear the sacred number until he had seen the Light. May be this is the first reference to an ALARM, but this is only my view. In theory, Candidates for Passing and Raising give the best knocks they know i.e. E.A. knocks for Passing and F.C. knocks for Raising.

As early as the exposure "Masonry Dissected" in 1730 we find evidence of the Third Degree and the Hiram Legend wherein the symbolism of the three knocks was associated with the three blows that disposed of HAB. Today this symbolism is largely unknown.

A visitor must be a qualified Brother or else the Tyler should not give a report. Hence the knocks should be those of the Degree in which the Lodge is open. Any other knock would be an alarm.

Another unusual knock in the English Constitution is when the WM gives two knocks to summons the Tyler to come into the Temple to be invested. This knock is not answered by the Wardens. Strictly it is irregular. While the obvious reason for the knock being given so loudly is that the Tyler can hear it and know he is summonsed to enter, he can not do so until the IG opens the door, so it would be simpler for the WM to ask the IG to call in the Tyler without knocking at all.

A brief survey of evidence accumulated thus far about the knocks in the 18th Century and at the Union may be summarised as follows:-

1. The use of the three knocks in the Craft regardless of rhythm goes back to the earliest of our rituals, about 1770.
2. They were from their first appearance a formal part of the admission of a Candidate into the Lodge.
3. They were used as a means of recognition.
4. There is evidence of three equal knocks, one long and two short, and two short and one long.
5. All the above can be traced to a time when only two degrees were known or practised.
6. The knocks and variations appear long before there is any evidence of formal "Opening" or "Closing".
7. There is no evidence of "differentiated" knocks for different degrees except where some Lodges used 3 times 3 in the Third Degree but the rhythms were apparently uniform in all degrees.

There is no evidence of a standard practice operating in all Lodges.

The question of right or wrong depends on which Authority we follow. It is generally agreed by responsible students and confirmed by ancient practice that originally the Candidate himself was required to give the knocks on the Lodge door.

UGLQ says:

The knock of attention given by the WM is answered by the SW and JW.

The knock of the Degree is repeated by the SW, JW, IG and Tyler.

I was always taught that the WM knocks once to confirm a motion and this is not repeated by the Wardens, but others argue that the WM never knocks alone, so I leave you with that thought.

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