

WHEN DID THE CRAFT 3-DEGREE SYSTEM ARRIVE?

The following short paper is from the research of the Victorian Lodge of Research No. 218 ULGV Melbourne East. It appeared in their monthly bulletin "Thoughts for the Enquiring Mason" of March 2000, edited by Wor. Bro. Graeme Love.

When one attempts such an exercise one must remember that historic resources while appearing accurate (not that all modern resources are accurate), may be out-of-date due to later circumstances, eg., Poole wrote an excellent paper "Masonic Ritual and Secrets Before 1717" in AQC Vol.37, in 1924. Sadly this was prior to at least two very significant discoveries, hence Poole became out-of-date. The two discoveries were "Edinburgh Register House MS, of 1696 AND the Graham MS., 1726. So, with this in hindsight let us bravely attempt an answer. It must be understood that the Speculative Masons' Three degree system was a complex development, over a number of decades with a varied rate of acceptance, hence a brief summary of dates, times and places can only be proffered. As way of a further explanation, a quote from Hamill, in "THE CRAFT" (1986) pgs. 24,25 is worthy. "... The lack of knowledge of the origins of Freemasonry perhaps explains the strength and continual appeal it still has Whether we shall ever discover the true origins of Freemasonry is open to question If Anderson is correct in claiming that many manuscript records were deliberately burnt in 1720.... it may be that the vital evidence we seek has already been lost."

What evidence (not mythology or traditional history) do we have?

1650-1750 was a critical developmental period for all of Modern Freemasonry. Evolution continued just the same.

1670 Minute Hands invented for Clocks. This can explain "High" and "Low" Twelve in Ritual.

1726 Graham MS., Here for, apparently, the first time a reference to entered, passed and raised. While only a double catechism, and no ritual, could it be that this manuscript represents an evolutionary transition phase which eventually took us from a bi-gradal to a tri-gradal system? This certainly fits with Anderson's 1723 bi-gradal Constitutions.

1730 Prichard's Masonry Dissected; 1) *Enter'd Prentice's Degree*, 2) *Fellow-Craft's Degree*, 3) *The Master's Degree*. Here in "The Master's" degree we have; "Q. Are you a Master-Mason?... Q. What makes a Perfect Lodge of Masters? Q. How was you pass'd Master? Ex... And **M.B.** shall make you free..... R. To seek for that which was lost and is now found E. What was that which was lost and is now found? R. The Master-Mason's Word... Ex. How was it lost? R. By Three Great Knocks, or the Death of our Master Hiram." Reference is also made to the **FPOF**.

Pieynes in *The Builder is Smitten!* considers the **significance to be "...the Death of our Master Hiram"**.

Comment: Here we have a password; FPOF, Death of Hiram, and a Catechism indicating a **THIRD DEGREE**, not Two Degrees plus a Master's part.

1738 Anderson's Constitutions appear to infer a Master Mason's degree in addition to the EA and FC. This would tend to indicate, from an English position, that the transition occurred between the years - 1726 & 1738. **Can we substantiate that point (1726-1738)?**

1744 Saw a French ritual (of three degrees) published having the title "Nouveau Catechisme des Francs-Macons".

1745 "If it is true that the Third Degree was a firm part of the Craft by now, then maybe it was a crude form of the latter version (1770) when Calcott, Hutchinson and Preston had finished with it !! This then became basically the Modern Craft version." So states McLeod in the Introduction to "A Candid Disquisition". Also in that year, to quote Pieynes, sees the first occurrence of the MM T.B.

Conclusion

It would seem, at the present, that the 3rd degree evolved over the period 1726 to c.1745. Believing McLeod, this tallies, except with a refinement occurring up to 1770.

As innovations have ALWAYS occurred in Freemasonry, then it is easy to accept the 1745-1770 refinement period. Yet Pieynes' work is so detailed, I am inclined to believe a 1745 completion of the 3'd degree, especially as it seems to contain most of the current 3rd degree aspects.

Yet what of Rawlinson's MS (C.136?) at the Bodleian library (England) where it refers to Lodge #115, meeting at the Devil Tavern Temple Bar, working a `Scotch Masons' degree in 1733. This degree must have been a 4th degree because it followed the Master Mason!!

Interesting.

References:

- 1) Mandleberg, "The Secrets of the Craft" (Unpublished manuscript - Feb 2000);
 - 2) "The Early Masonic Catechisms" by Knoop, Jones, Hamer. QC Lodge 1975;
 - 3) "The Early French Exposures" Ed. H.Carr, QC Lodge, 1971;
 - 4) "A Candid Disquisition" by W. Calcott, 1769 (Masonic Book Club facsimile 1989 - private publication);
- "The Builder is Smitten!" by R.Pieynes, M.H.Foundation, Belgium, 1994
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