

It is a year or two since we included a paper on this subject viz by Wor Bro Davidson in New Zealand. This is from the "Beacon" a Toowoomba Old Lodge of Instruction paper in 2002. Comparisons of the two are well worth making.

Swedish Freemasonry

By RW Bro W S Shaw, PJGW

For anyone to understand Scandinavian Masonry, he must first appreciate the development of the Swedish rite, which in turn requires an insight into Swedish Masonic history. Therefore, we must in this instance depart from our usual alphabetical approach and begin our discussion of Scandinavian Masonry in Sweden.

Sweden

Swedish Masonic history, and Swedish rite.

It would appear that Freemasonry came to Sweden originally from England, via France. The first lodge was founded at Stockholm 1735 and was later named Den Nordiska Forsta - the first Northern Lodge. The early development of the Craft in Sweden is obscure, but almost from the first, the Swedish Craft has been controlled by the Swedish aristocracy. Den Nordiska Forsta (which still works in Stockholm) was erected by Count Axel Ericson Wrede-Sparre, who entered the craft in Paris.

Den Nordiska Forsta was a St John's Lodge working the three craft degrees. The first St Andrew's lodge was erected in 1756, to work the 4th, 5th and 6th degrees. It was called the Den Nordiska Cirkeln - the Northern Circle Lodge.

Thus, the Swedish (or Scandinavian) Rite would appear to date back to the early 1750's. It consists of ten degrees organised into three divisions, plus one supreme degree making eleven in all. The Rite was standardised in the 1770's by a committee headed by Duke Charles of Sudermanland (after wards King Charles XIII).

The First Division consists of the three craft degrees, conferred in what is known as St John's Lodges. Then follows the second division, also three degrees and usually referred to as the Scots degrees. They are conferred in St Andrew's Lodges. The degrees are Elect and Most Worshipful Scottish Apprentice (4th Degree) Very Worthy Fellow of St Andrew (5th Degree) and Illustrious Scottish Master of St Andrew (6th Degree). The 4th and 5th are usually conferred on the same Evening, while the 6th is conferred separately. The minimum time between degrees is twelve months.

A Mason having achieved the 6th degree can then in due course proceed to the third division of degrees. There are four degrees in this division and they are conferred in the Grand Lodge itself, or more normally in Provisional Grand Lodges (usually called Stewart Lodges, or Chapters). The Degrees are: Stewart Brother (7th Degree), Most Illustrious Confidant of Solomon (8th Degree), Enlightened Confidant of St John (9th Degree), and finally, Very Enlightened Confidant of St Andrew, or Knight of the Purple Ribbon (10th Degree). The 7th Degree (Stewart Brother) is basically only a short introductory degree to the Chapter.

Finally at the Pinnacle of the system is the order of King Charles XIII. This forms the highest degree – the 11th degree - called Knights Commander of the Red Cross. This order is totally unique in Freemasonry, as not only is it a Masonic rite, but also a civil order awarded by the King of Sweden (who is always either Grand Master. or Royal Protector of the Order), and its members are expected to wear its insignia in public. Only about thirty Swedish Masons hold this degree, including all members of the Grand Master's Supreme Council.

There is quite a number of procedural differences between the Swedish rite and those of other Masonic systems. In the Swedish Rite, there is only one form of ritual for each of the degrees, and any deviations will not be tolerated. The Master of the lodge has in each of the degrees, an official manuscript before him (rituals, as such, cannot be printed) and he must personally check in every detail, the work of himself and his officers. In order to further ensure the strict uniformity of the work, the Master of each lodge is a permanent appointment until his death or resignation. Before any mason can be considered for the Mastership of a St John's Lodge, he must hold the 10th degree. The other officers of Swedish lodges (including up to four

Deputies Masters and the two Wardens are elected annually, but usually serve at least three year terms. Each Lodge officer has several deputies, and these share the ritual work. This is a necessary precaution as up to the 6th degree lodges meet weekly (except when in recess). Lodge officers generally wear formal dress (as opposed to dark suit for members), and the Master, Wardens, and the Master of Ceremonies wear a top hat in addition. The Wardens, as an old operative practice, are both seated in the west.

Another unique feature of Scandinavian Freemasonry is the Brodraforeninger (Brother Societies) or more literally - Fraternal clubs, although they are quite formally structured. They are sometimes formed in population centres where St John's Lodges exist, but when they come to be erected in smaller towns that they serve a particularly valuable function. In these smaller population centres, too small to support a lodge they serve as lodges of instruction. Of course, they form the same function in larger centres where they exist. The fraternal have a prescribed ritual, and elected officers. They hold lectures, and instruct in the workings of the Swedish rite, but they do not normally have the function of actual degree conferment. Of course, members of Fraternal must be members of a St John's lodge as well.

The Swedish rite as now outlined, is worked in Norway, Denmark and Iceland and to some extent in Finland, as well as Sweden itself. In all these Masonic jurisdictions, save the difference of language, the workings and forms of the rite are virtually identical. All eleven degrees are worked in full, and progress from one degree to the next is slow being far from automatic. Regular attendance, and a high proficiency are needed before any brother can advance. Indeed, many years are required before a mason under the Swedish Rite reaches the highest degrees.

Each division of degrees under the Swedish Rite enjoys a certain amount of autonomy, but they are all the nevertheless under the rule of the Grand Master and his Supreme Council. The current system appeared in Sweden in its final form about 1810, when the chapter degrees were fixed in the system. In 1811, the 11th degree was added to complete the rite. As mentioned earlier, the conferment of the 11th degree in Sweden is the prerogative of the king; but in the other Scandinavian jurisdictions the Supreme Council decides upon preferment. It should be noted that in all Scandinavian countries, except in Finland under the Grand Lodge of Finland, freemasonry is completely Christian, and the candidates must profess the Christian Faith to gain admission. In Sweden, there is a certain amount of truth in saying that the Craft is largely a subsidiary of the Swedish Crown.

The Royal connection with the Swedish Craft began in 1770 when King Gustavus III and his two brothers, Duke Charles (afterwards King Charles XIII), and Duke Frederick Adolphus, were initiated. The Grand Lodge of Sweden (Den Svenska Store Landslogen) had been formed in 1760. Duke Charles soon appears to have become Grand Master and in 1774, he formed a new St Andrew's Lodge, whereupon the Swedish Rite was basically formed into the system that is worked to this day. Duke Charles remained as Grand Master after he ascended the throne as King Charles XIII, and until recently, all successive Swedish Kings have been Grand Masters. The current Swedish King, Charles XVI Gustavus is High Protector of the Order; while his uncle Prince Bertil and the Duke of Halland is Grand Master.

Notes for Visitors

Visitors wishing to attend a Swedish Lodge should, in the first instance, call at the Masonic Temple in Stockholm. The giant Masonic Temple building in Stockholm is probably the most magnificent Masonic structure in the world. It was built originally as a palace and later given over to the craft. Dating from the 1660's it is a three storey structure, with two wings, thus forming a U shape. It houses administrative offices, The Grand Temple, various other Temples, a library and a museum. A wrought iron Fence with iron gates extends from one wing to the other across its frontage. The inside is that of magnificent opulence, featuring great frescoes, black marble columns and ornate decorations. A tour of the Beat Palace must form the highlight of any Mason's visit to Stockholm and this can be arranged at the Grand Lodge Office.

As the Swedish Rite system is largely quite different to the forms of English speaking Masonry, intervisitation arrangements are unusual and must be discussed at some length. Obviously, there is no problem for a regular Craft mason visiting a St John's Lodge, which likewise works the three Craft degrees, albeit in a Continental form., However as with Continental Masonry generally, some small reversals in the ritual content of the Entered Apprentice and the Fellowcraft degrees restricts intervisitation. in terms of English speaking masons to those holding the Master Mason Degree. In short there is no problem in a regular Master Mason turning up unannounced at a Scandinavian St John's Lodge and seeking admission. Of course, the usual formalities as discussed near the beginning of this guide are applicable.

Upon moving into the area of a St Andrew's Lodge, the visitation situation becomes a little bit more complicated, but not much. It was agreed in the late 1950's in an informal concordant between England and Sweden that English Royal Arch masons could visit St Andrew's lodges in Sweden and that Swedish masons holding the 6th degree could visit English Royal Arch Chapters. It must be added that the usual documentary evidence be presented each way, as the ceremonies and modes of recognition are dissimilar in each system. As a further result, qualified masons visiting from either system to the other may be required to take an obligation of secrecy. In short, again, provided the forms just discussed are observed, a qualified mason (ie a holder of the Royal Arch Degree) will encounter no difficulty in visiting in Scandinavia up to the 6th degree. However, when we enter the realms of the Chapter degrees of the Swedish Rite, the ground becomes less certain. There does exist a loose and tacit arrangement between the English Great Priory (Knights Templar), and the English Supreme Council (Ancient and Accepted Rite) with the Grand Lodge of Sweden concerning inter-visitation with the Swedish Chapter degrees. While there are certain philosophical links between the 8th and 9th degrees of the Swedish Rite and the degrees of the Great Priory (Knights Templar and the Knights of Malta), the forms of each 'side' are not close enough to allow inter-visitation as a general rule. Similarly, there are problems associated with the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. However, when English Supreme Council considers admitting Swedish masons to its Rose Croix Chapters and those of its higher degrees, it is guided by the following comparisons. The 18th (Rose Croix) degree is seen as equivalent to the 8th degree of the Swedish Rite; the 30th degree as equivalent of the 9th Swedish degree; the 32nd degree as equivalent to the 10th Swedish degree and finally the 33rd degree as equivalent to the 11th Swedish degree.

It must be strongly emphasized that these comparisons are only a rough guide. Knight's Templar and Rose Croix masons cannot simply arrive at the Grand Lodge of Sweden and expect admission as a visitor to its Chapters. Masons from either jurisdiction who are properly qualified and who have a genuine interest in such a visit, must seek approval through their own Great Priory or Supreme Council well in advance of intended visit. Permission must be obtained from both sides and it is certainly not automatic. Each individual case is treated on its merits. Qualified masons must not under any circumstances directly approach the Grand Lodge of Sweden concerning visiting Chapters, but must make all enquires through their own appropriate Grand Body.

It can now be noted that the Supreme Councils (Scottish Rite) of Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the United States (Southern and Northern Jurisdictions) exchange recognition with the Grand Lodge of Sweden. These are the only bodies of this nature outside Scandinavia with which the Swedish Grand Lodge deals, therefore, qualified masons under these allegiances are probably in a position to visit Swedish Chapters, but doubtless on the same terms as just discussed concerning the English bodies. It is useful to add, that as a rule, all Scandinavian Grand Lodges working the Swedish Rite act in concert on matters of inter-visitation and so all procedures just detailed are to be observed by qualified masons seeking to visit chapters of the Swedish rite in Norway, Denmark or Iceland.

Sweden currently possesses 39 St John's Lodges (craft), of which two work in Stockholm, and four in Finland (see under Finland). There are twenty St Andrew's Lodges and eight Provincial Grand Lodges (chapters) which have administrative, as well as degree conferment functions. There are also about sixty Brodraforeninger (Brother Societies), the function of which has already been discussed. Many Swedish Lodges have large memberships, with one St John's lodge in Stockholm having in excess of 500 members. The Swedish Grand Lodge, unusually for one that is widely recognised, is governed by a Supreme Council, consisting of the Grand Master and eighteen members. Doubtless, the unique character of Swedish Masonic system accounts for its governmental practices.

Dress for Swedish lodges is a dark or black suit, white shirt, black or grey tie, and black shoes. The vast majority of lodge meetings start at 6.30PM punctually. A charity collection does take place during lodge meetings. Dinner always follows a lodge meeting and a nominal charge is payable by all attending (and this will normally include visitors). There is not, however, any formal toast list, but informal speeches may be made under the direction of the Master of Ceremonies. Visitors may be called upon to speak. Those wishing to dine with a lodge after a meeting should give the Grand Lodge as much notice as possible.

Swedish regalia consist of a sash., variously inscribed, to denote the rank and degree held by its wearer. Regalia is available for loan to visitors, but visitors are most welcome to carry and wear their own. All lodges, of course, work in Swedish, but English is widely spoken or at least understood by a large number of Swedish freemasons. Language problems, therefore, will be slight.
