



"Sequendo Lampada Disco"
Victorian
Lodge of Research No. 218
United Grand Lodge of Victoria

THOUGHTS FOR THE ENQUIRING MASON

June 2012

The Goat and Freemasonry

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The association of the "goat" with Freemasonry and the origins of the somewhat derogatory term of reference to describe Freemasons as "riding the goat" are like many aspects of the history of speculative masonry - they are lost in the mist of time. Nonetheless, many varied and plausible origins have been suggested over the years.

One frequently cited explanation set in the early days of Freemasonry in England in the 1700's when lodges primarily met in inns and taverns, was that there was a prominent London inn called the "Goat and Compasses". The masonic legend tells that as a Freemasons' lodge was meeting at this inn in the 1700's the association with the mason's compass and the goat were crystallised. Although a plausible explanation it somehow has more of a ring of fable than fact and raises the question of which came first - the lodge at the inn or the inn with the name "Goat and Compass".

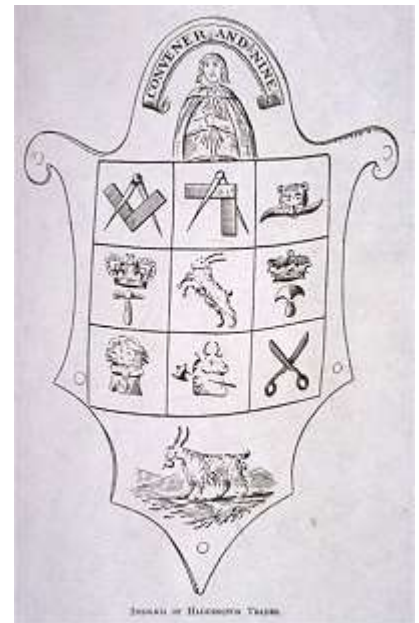
Perhaps the answer lies in the explanation that the phrase "Goat and Compasses" is a corruption of the expression "God encompass us". And if indeed that is the origin of the phrase "Goat and Compasses" then it does offer a possible explanation for its origin, but does not satisfactorily provide an answer as to how the term became associated with Freemasonry. To the best of our knowledge the phrase "god encompasses us" has never been an element from masonic ritual.



Of course the tried and true explanation for the association of Freemasonry with the goat is that it is derived from the shorthand for the "Great Architect of the Universe" - namely GAOTU - again, yet another distinct possibility.

Down a more esoteric path, the five pointed star, the "blazing star", placed with the two points upwards is said to represent a goat, namely the devil. In the 1800's this belief was no doubt fed by Eliphas Levi's depiction of the Knights' Templar Baphomet legend as a Goat.

However a more recent suggestion that has a certain appeal is that the association was originally derived from the images of this particular apron. The provenance of the apron is at this stage disputed however it would appear to be the apron from one of the Friendly Societies (one suggestion is that it is from the Free Gardeners). To the non-Freemason this apron would appear to be a mason's apron due to the inclusion of the square and compasses emblem. So here may be the true origin of the association of the goat with Freemasonry.



References: 1) 'Questions and Answers' by Masters' Past Masters' Lodge No. 130 (NZ)

2) Coil's "Masonic Encyclopaedia". Rev Ed by Allen E. Roberts, Macoy Publishing, Virginia, 1996, ISBN 0-88053-054-5; 3)

Founder/Creator: VWBro G.LOVE

Editor: VWBro Voleme Gear

Comments and contributions to lordbiff@hotmail.com