

Individual Research Victoria.

THE SYMBOLISM OF FREE GARDENRY, AND THE LOST DEGREES OF THE KNIGHTS OF GETHSEMANE, AND ST JOSEPH.

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Brethren I thank you for the opportunity to present this paper on the symbolism of Free Gardenry, which through my research has brought to light a further opportunity to find the lost and advanced degrees of ; the Orders of The Knights of Gethsemane and St Joseph.

The writing on symbolism of Free Gardenry has been written before this paper by different Free Gardeners belonging to different Grand Lodges in different parts of the world; of note there has never been a wholly United Grand Lodge from where Free Gardenry was born and from where it subsequently spread, due to the nature of fierce independence of the Lodges and Grand Lodges of various towns and provinces and needless to say borders, in fact Australia has been the only place for a union to occur where, in 1953 the first conference of Grand Lodges of the States of Australia first meet, and from it eventually formed in years to come, the peak governing body, the Grand United Order of Free Gardeners of Australasia.

Records intimate during its infancy that there was a lot of strain and stress, to the new Grand United Order, as the State Grand Lodges, didn't want to lose any financial independence and not to deviate away from their original founding landmarks and rituals from whence they originated. Much like the spread of Freemasonry in Australia from the various Grand Lodges of the United Kingdom, Free Gardenry also came from different locations within Scotland and England, bringing with it some different customs and also different aspects to the ritual. The main surviving rituals today, are that of the Ancient Order, the Grand United Order here. I believe the British Order ritual is still active but seldom used.

When Free Gardenry was at its height of both the fraternal and later Friendly Society in Australia, there was little communication between the organisations from one to another in different parts of the world, truth be told, Australia was alone for a very long time not knowing if and where it was being practised anywhere in the world. Free Gardenry was still being practised by the Ancient Order which never was a friendly society; if a brother was in distress, a gift from the Lodge was presented to him, it was never assumed that you would receive a gift, just because of you financial or work situation. On the other side of the coin the Friendly Societies were able to supply the benefits of insurance and in most cases the burial society benefits, because that was how they set up to run. Notably, the difference in most rituals has been due to the fact the Friendly societies used what we can term the 'Insurance ritual', which was an abbreviated and less symbolical ritual than that of the spiritual and colourful Ancient Order.

Reference can be found in the writing of W.G Mitchell who I will introduce shortly but he writes in 1958 "*Although Free Gardenry has existed in Australia for over 100 years, there is some doubt as to the authenticity of the ritual as practised by us, as to that practised by the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners from whence we emanated. I find, after making extensive enquiries that the ritual in Scotland was given orally from one brother to another for over 140 years, they having no printed ritual. South Africa claims they have the original ritual which is more spiritual than ours*".

We were aware however that the original Grand Lodge charter of the Ancient Order had left Edinburgh in the 1950's and with it moved the Grand Lodge to Cape Town, South Africa. It wasn't until March 2015, which saw the charter being returned to Scotland and with it a new Grand Master

and Grand Lodge, which I can proudly say I was fortunate enough to be there and witness this historic occasion.

Free Gardenry today, can trace its renewal to those members of Freemasonry who didn't want to lose the Order all together in the United Kingdom and even in the United States, by establishing the preservation societies, continuing to preserve and practise the rituals and degree ceremonies and maintain its collections, aprons, jewels, paraphernalia and history, keeping them safe and secure for future generations. In most parts of the world today, the membership of Free Gardenry is wholly comprised of Freemasons, at the time of writing this paper; only 3 of us have a connection with Freemasonry here in Victoria. There are only 3 chartered Lodges left in the World, one in Scotland, ours in Australia and one in South Africa, the rest are spawned from the Preservation Societies.

Tracing back to the 1980's and 90's and due to the Australasian Grand Lodge returning back to the Grand Lodge of Victoria, the history, and publications that we once had are harder to bring to light, they are most likely still sitting in that unopened box in someone's garage or have been lost all together, never the less, we are fortunate enough to have a writer and Free Gardener who I give a lot of credence and thankfulness to for documenting our history here in Australia; the Late, Most Worshipful Past Grand Master of Australasia, Bro.W.G Mitchell J.P; a South Australian, and most conscientious Free Gardener who has left his legacy in the writings of a number of booklets, part of which have been a useful reference to the paper I am able to share with you and expand on.

I also must share how thankful I am to my proposer into Free Gardenry, Bro. Peter Maclean, Immediate Past Most Worshipful Grand Master of Victoria, who I know many of you have had the opportunity to meet at the Lodge of Research in 2013, and hear his recollections and understandings of Free Gardenry.

Peter is an instrumental supporter to me and given me every opportunity to grow as a member of this beautiful and important fraternal order.

Finally, can I mention my friend and now current Grand Master of Scotland for the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, Most Worshipful Brother Gordon Vincent. Through Gordon, I have been able to expand my knowledge in Free Gardenry and its connection with the United Kingdom, and the various National and Independent orders which sprouted (for want of a better word!) from the Ancient Order, and especially being that Scotland is the native home for Free Gardenry. Gordon has been the strongest and one of the most important characters in its recent history of preservation and renewal in Scotland.

Brethren, some would say that Free Gardenry is just another quasi-masonic organisation that has taken the square and compasses, aprons, ritual and done with them what they will. I assure you there is nothing further from the truth, although I can't blame people for thinking this way because there really isn't enough information easily accessible to dispel this misconception. But sadly these people most likely have little knowledge of the way fraternal societies operated at the time of 17th century, and the distance of Australia, from the birthplace of the great fraternities in most cases has hindered research on how these organisations worked both operatively and speculatively and become what we know them to be today.

There is no contesting that in this present day Freemasonry is the juggernaut of the fraternal society world, but still in the 17th century and before, both organisations were developing and jockeying for the prime position, and it is clear at this time Gardeners were Masons and Masons were Gardeners. We are fraternal cousins.

An earlier document published in 1515 -1516 is the list of Livery Companies presented by the Court of Aldermen of the City of London, we find the Worshipful Society of Masons at position 30, and the Worshipful Company of Gardeners at position 66. [Ref: Transactions from the Holden Research Circle 2014], neither organisations ranking in the first or ‘great 12’ livery companies, but still both fraternal sides of the operative still meeting today.

As an aside I was recently in the United Kingdom, and fortunate to spend time in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, where I was able to see the different livery or guild signs and symbols, and how a number of them used the Square and Compasses in one configuration or another to identify their guild or company.



Time has passed and the world around us has changed, the custodians of the Square and Compasses and the public’s association with them, have been left to the care of Freemasonry, this is why I don’t blame the confused when they are presented with the addition of the pruning knife of the Free Gardener.

It is here I present the first three symbols of Free Gardenry, the Square, Compasses and Pruning Knife.

The square and compasses are not instruments of the act of gardening, however, they are the instruments of design, and in establishing the footprint for a garden; for the garden cannot have square borders or the centrepiece cannot have a true circumference with symmetry and order without the square and compasses. For even in Free Gardenry, it is the Great Master Gardener who is the ever powerful Garden Designer, watching above on His design below.

So in Free Gardenry we also ‘square our moral actions in the world, to be square in our actions, to be candid and honest’ by the help of **the square**.

The compasses also encompass us with ‘due submission to the rules of the society, making all members equal and keeping us on the path of rectitude, of moral uprightness and righteousness’.

But it is the **pruning knife** that is the most useful implement of Gardenry, for pruning and engrafting plants and flowers, to rid trees and shrubs of dead wood, which have no value. The pruning knife teaches us to cultivate our minds, by the casting of those vices which are inherent in our nature, and to engraft those virtues of brotherly love and kindly affection to our fellow human beings, shaping our life to be upright and just in all our actions and deeds.

W.G Mitchell writes “*Thus by square conduct in all your dealings, to encompass and steer your course of life, prune and shape your life to be just and upright, you will not only be better members of Society but will uphold the honour, integrity and glorious prestige of Free Gardenry*”.

In some of this explanation you may see, feel or hear a resemblance to the ritual you know, especially with how the operative tool is explained and then how we contemplate the use of the symbol in our lives and actions (certainly in Free Gardenry today's Mason would be very comfortable in the ritual and script in the way in which the Lodge opens), but once again I assure you, most Fraternal societies who met behind closed doors, only in the company of members present, during the 17th century period and in that area, all had this very similar ceremony and is why we see, hear the connection to one another.

Free Gardenry in and around Melbourne had established its own halls in Melbourne, Collingwood and Bacchus Marsh, which they used for their exclusive purposes, although today we do share a Freemason's Lodge room; which brings me to the Lodge room and its symbolism.

The Lodge room, in which we meet in, is a replica of the House in the Forest of Lebanon, or King Solomon's Palace, it was erected by King Solomon in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and its name owing to the cedars of Lebanon, used in the construction of the building. To reach the house we must pass through the **Garden Gate** and along the Narrow Path to the lodge room situated in the midst of the forest of Lebanon, where we are taught many things transmitted to us by the Great Master Gardener, King Solomon.

The **Garden gate** is a symbol of security, protection and permission, the Garden gate protects the



secrets of Free Gardenry from the profane, it protects the operative work, the flowers, shrubs, and wildlife all that which is vulnerable in the natural world; it is also the symbol of permission, to pass through it represents you are prepared to walk the straight walk or narrow path that leads to the Lodge room; *“Walk ye the straight and narrow path which leadeth to eternal life”*. By no means does this suggest Free Gardenry is the path of Salvation, it does mean that walking that straight path in Life you will meet the Almighty in the Earthly Paradise above. The Garden gate closed reminds the Free Gardener that as the gates close to lock the Garden; we too must close ourselves to lock the secrets of Free Gardenry.

In Free Gardenry, all the allegory is directly related to events in the Bible. For in the first degree, we meet the Apprentice Gardener Adam in the Garden of Eden, in the Second degree we learn of our Bro Noah and his work after the great flood, and finally, in the third degree, we are taught the wisdom of King Solomon the Master Gardener. The reasons for what we say, what we do, and why we call it so, directly relate to passages in the Bible. There is no myth or legend, nothing is lost, the art of Gardenry continues as it has done since Adam was instructed by the Almighty, to dress and keep the Garden of Eden.

This brings me to the next symbol which I would like to share with you, the **Trio Triangle**. The most important symbol equally as important as the Square, Compasses, and Pruning knife is the Trio Triangle.



I must use a little caution in its explanation. In the Ancient Order this symbol is draped on the Master's pedestal, it can be seen on buildings in Scotland significant to Free Gardenry and where gardeners have operated, it has been used on certificates as the seal of a Free Gardeners Lodge, and it justly takes its place on the current Grand Lodges Apron in Victoria, and was the only symbol used on the Grand Lodge Aprons in Victoria dated 1896

[Ref: Grand United Order of Free Gardeners Facebook page www.facebook.com/freegardeners].

With the trio triangle; none of the 3 parts are complete without the aid of other, never is one part on its own, and no one can know the parts thereof without three clean brothers cordially recommending him. When combined they form the 4th triangle, the watchword of all Free

Gardeners. This symbol culminates the whole of Free Gardenry, its allegory and the exemplars of each degree. In fact much like the all seeing eye, the Trio Triangle is a very ancient emblem. To the Orthodox Greek it represents the trinity, to the Egyptians, it represents the 3 Great Lights of Heaven, the Sun the Moon and the Stars and showing their influence over nature and to the Gardeners it represents Adam, Noah & Solomon who our ceremonies are chiefly based.

One symbol that hasn't been used in Free Gardenry in Australia for reasons unknown are the **3 circles**, one circle within another. This symbol is practised still with the Ancient Order of Scotland, and at the point of obligating the candidate where he kneels on the 3 circles and on three squares of a Gardeners apron. This holds evidence that some customs and practices were either lost or didn't make their way to Australia, or have been removed altogether, but the symbols itself are very evident in a lot of Free Gardenry particularly on the much longer and heavily embroidered aprons, in drawings and paintings. I am happy to tell this Lodge of Research that with the help of Brother Gordon Vincent, the Order, in Australia will once again find them in our Lodge room. The explanation of these encapsulates the duty of the apprentice and the promise of GOD.

1st Circle; That I may walk around the world and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow.

2nd Circle; That I may walk with due respect to the lodge which I belong.

3rd Circle; When the Angel of the Lord stood with one foot on dry land and the other on the sea, he called with a loud voice:- "As long as the earth remains, day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest shall never cease".

I have made brief mention of the symbolism of the Apron and the symbolism that is displayed on it, let me explain this further. The Aprons are one of the most beautiful, interesting, and at times colourful parts of Free Gardenry, they relate directly back to the Garden of Eden and also to our operative Gardeners. Scripture tells us the following in Genesis 3, Verse 7, 'And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons'. As Adam was the first Apprentice Gardener and he wore an apron of fig leaves, so must we as speculative Gardeners wear them too. The length of the Gardeners apron is a distinguishing feature, different to those of Freemasonry and other fraternal organisations, and covers more than the humble fig leave did for Bro, Adam.

The Apron its self is longer than it is wide. To the operative gardener, he would have owned two aprons; one to wear to work, and one to wear to his Lodge. His working apron would have been of a dark coloured heavy cloth, which would have covered him from just below his chest, right down to his ankles, and would have protected his clothing from the dirt and foliage, his knees from the ground, and also likely to provide some warmth from working in the elements, this apron would have been also used to carry his equipment, bulbs, or the weeds removed from the beds and dead shrubs etc..

His second apron is the apron by which he shows to the world his membership in the Gardeners Lodge.

In almost every case these long and beautifully embroidered aprons were made by the gardener's wife or mother and embroidered by her. The craftsmanship in these aprons is astounding; the preservation societies in Scotland and the United States are fortunate enough to have originals. These long and embroidered aprons are the 'tracing board of Free Gardenry'. They communicate many of the symbols pertaining to the positions within the Lodge and also of the degrees themselves.

The aprons used in Australia, haven't been of the heavily embroidered nature of the chest to ankle length aprons of the former Gardeners, although in our collection suggests there was a system set to

differentiate between Grand Lodge and a general Lodge, we still have the aprons of 1896 with trio triangle directly in the middle which have now been retired, the Grand Lodge now wear the much longer apron with a semi-circle bib, with the Square compasses and pruning knife, all seeing eye, the initials P G H E, the Trio Triangle, and on some aprons Noahs Ark. While an Apprentice, Journeyman or Master Gardener, not in an office wears a plain blue cloth apron.

Some of the symbolism on the aprons refers directly to the degrees and its allegory. The letters P G H E, are the initials of the four rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden. Pison; signifying changing extension of mouth, Gihon; signifying the valley of Grace, Hidekel; signifying a sharp voice our sound and Euphrates; signifying fruitful and plenteous.

The all seeing eye, I am happy that you would know its meaning, and the Ark directly relating to the second degree and the story of Bro. Noah.

Brethren I hope this part of the paper you have found interesting giving you a deeper glimpse into some of the symbolism of Free Gardenry, and what it means to those members practising the Craft around the world.

I now wish to share with you the second part of this paper on the lost degrees of, The Knights of Gethsemane and St Joseph.

In W. G Mitchells book of 1958 titled 'Key to the Diploma, History of Society, Aims. I find a brief but yet significant statement that there were higher degrees worked in Free Gardenry. Trust me when I say this brethren, it was like a Eureka moment when I found this passage but seamlessly sent straight into despair when no one in the Lodge was aware of it or had heard of it.

W.G Mitchell writes ... *"Every Lodge had its own annual "walk" at which each member appeared in resplendent "Tile" hat, black suit carrying a bunch of flowers. High degrees were the Knights of Gethsemane and of St. Joseph, the rites of the Knights of Gethsemane being conducted on a carpet designed to illustrate the geography of the "Garden of Eden". These degrees were administered in recent years in Lanarkshire, Scotland. The regalia consisted of a sash and apron and many of the aprons were embroidered and ornamented very beautifully by the wives of the proud owners"*.

I thought to myself could these be those long beautifully embroidered aprons and sashes I have seen in the pictures? Sadly it seems not. However what we do have is the Lecture of St Joseph. A most detailed and complicated lecture, which both Bro. Gordon Vincent and myself are confident is the reason why the degree never really took hold.

As a Free Gardener, an advanced degree called the Knights of Gethsemane of course really resonates with me, as I'm sure it would with many. The setting of the Garden of Gethsemane and the story surrounding it in the Bible really offers the chance to learn allegorically a story of prayer, perseverance, steadfastness, loyalty, trust and ultimately betrayal. Can you hear the ritual asking you the message from Jesus **"Could you not keep watch for one hour"**? Can you see the Knights actually being the Disciples of Christ?

The St Joseph lecture is where we have actual writing of the lecture and what was communicated; the following is an excerpt from the original document.

Joseph is the Head of this Degree – He being a man of God and Sublime Husbandman, who saved Egypt from famine. He was endowed by God in noble trust and resolution, with quiet perseverance and careful prudence, which enabled him to combat with the calamity that was before him and to dispense to a famine stricken people the bread of life. He was an eminent historic type of Christ in his persecution and sale by his brethren in his resisting temptation. In his humiliation, exaltation

and the fullness of forgiving love, he endured many grievous trials, but by energetic action at length was crowned with --- victory.

The lecture is divided into four lectures with the number 7 being the reoccurring number.

I can only surmise that a candelabra with 7 candles is lit.

The first part of the lecture explains the 7 points in this degree, the Quorum of Husbandmen Gardeners, the 7th Day, the 7 Years of Plenty, the 7 Years of Famine, the 7th or Sabbatical Year, the 7 times 7 Years and the 7 Pillars.

The second part of the lecture explains the 7 Churches of Asia, the 7 Spirits, the 7 Stars, the 7 Golden Candlesticks, the 7 Lamps of Fire, the 7 Horns, and the 7 Eyes.

The third part of the lecture explains the Seven Twelves or Heaven Jerusalem; the 12 Blessings, the 12 Tribes of Israel, the 12 Apostles, the 12 Gates, the 12 Angels, the 12 Foundations and the 12 Fruits.

The fourth and final part of the lecture explains the 7 Senses, the 7 Steps, the 7 Things Hateful to God, the 7 Virtues of Faith, the 7 Virtues of Wisdom, The branch upon one stone shall be 7 Eyes and the 7 Sayings of Christ on the Cross.

Finally, we have in our care a most historical charter that is being held safe by one of our members. It almost completely contradicts my writings in this paper but shows another lost degree or advanced order. The title reads The Unity Lodge of Royal Arch Free Gardeners, Dundee Scotland.

In the name of God Everlasting Amen. Be it known to all travellers Westward from Eden that the Unity Lodge of Royal Arch Free Gardeners , Dundee Scotland, in meeting assembled have received a petition signed by brothers Thomas Nicholson, James Armstrong, Joseph Chatham, Benjamin McMahon, George Mennie, John Dangerfield, praying to grant a charter in the usual form for holding a Royal Arch Lodge in Melbourne, Australia under the same name and title Melbourne's First Number One Royal Arch Lodge... dated this fourth day of September in the year of our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Eighty Four and of Gardenry Five thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight.

And so brethren our search now continues and expands to find the ritual and practises of the Royal Arch Free Gardeners, and how this can relate to the story of Free Gardenry, but I'm sure you will agree some truly fascinating fraternal history right here in Melbourne.

I hope this talk has been informative, bright, and lets you walk away knowing a little bit more about Free Gardenry here and across the world, and the lost degrees which people are in a diligent search of. I am pleased to say the Order is expanding and new members are enjoying the association of being a Free Gardener. And in the not too distant future, a Lodge will bloom again in Sydney and Adelaide, only time will tell.

Finally in the words of a friend and brother Provincial Grand Master for the Ancient order in South Africa, Vernon de Villiers, *"WATCH brethren for we may not know when the Lord of the Vineyard cometh"*.

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