

Mt. Moriah #28
300 Years of Masonry



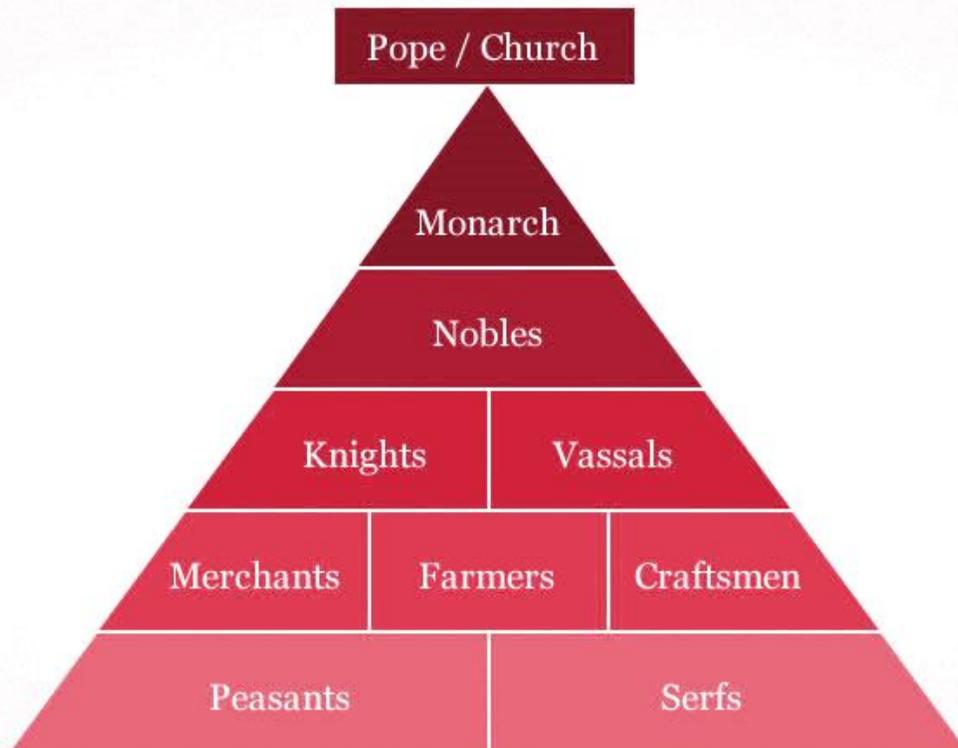
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This past year (2017) marked the 300th year of Free & Accepted Masonry as envisioned by the Premier United Grand Lodge of England. This landmark event occurred in June of 1717, when a group of four London lodges made up of both craftsman and non-craftsman met to create the Grand Lodge of London. At its head it placed, not an operative Mason, but a gentleman, and representative of the upper class of London society. This shift of leadership embodied the move away from operative to speculative Masonry that members of those four lodges were creating; a new organization unaffiliated with the trade of building, and the masonry guild.

The United Grand Lodge of England Beginnings

To understand why Speculative Masonry was the right organization at the right time (and for the next 300 years and beyond) first we need to have a general understanding of preceding European history and development of the craft guilds.

The Middle Ages* is the period in European history from the collapse of Roman civilization beginning in the 5th up to the 15th century (when the Renaissance began in Europe). Although once regarded as a time of uninterrupted ignorance, superstition, and social oppression, medieval times are now thought of as a dynamic period during which the idea of Europe as a distinct cultural unit emerged. During late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, political, social, economic, and cultural structures were profoundly reorganized, as Roman imperial traditions gave way (with the fall of the Roman Empire), to those of the Germanic peoples who established kingdoms in the former Western Roman Empire. New forms of political leadership were introduced, the population of Europe was gradually Christianized, and monasticism was established as the ideal form of religious life.



Historians Note: The historical revisionism of the middle or dark ages can only be seen at a distance of years. Simply put, at that time, from the average person's experience, these centuries were a generally terrible time for European civilization and the majority of the population (as the majority of the people were lower class).

The Renaissance* (French for Rebirth) was a period from the 14th to the 17th century in European civilization. This period immediately followed (the middle ages), and gradually spread throughout the continent. Renaissance times have been characterized by a surge of interest in classical scholarship and values. The Renaissance also witnessed the discovery and exploration of new continents, the substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the decline of the feudal system and the growth of commerce, and the invention or application of such potentially powerful innovations as paper, printing, the mariner's compass, and gunpowder. To the scholars and thinkers of the day, however, it was primarily a time of the revival of Classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation. **And it is during this time craft guilds began to be recognized by the English authorities.**



Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam

The Enlightenment* was a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries in which ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity were synthesized into a worldview that gained wide assent in the West and that instigated revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition. The goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness. And it is at this time that the idea of speculative masonry could be developed and grow to maturity.

EIGHT ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS

1. Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679)
2. John Locke (1632 – 1704)
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778)
4. Baron de Montesquieu (1689 – 1755)
5. Voltaire (1694 – 1778)
6. Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784)
7. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797)
8. Adam Smith (1723 – 1790)

***The information regarding the “Middle Ages”, “Renaissance”, and “Enlightenment”, was taken from the on-line Encyclopedia Britannica.**



King Solomon's Temple

Craft Guilds

Development of our craft, from 1400 to 1825, was to a large extent dependent on the history and evolution of Great Britain. What we think of as craft guilds first began around 1100 A.D. Over time, the guilds developed specific objectives, as to the trade organization and the quality of their work. This also allowed them to determine wages and costs for services rendered. They kept out the unskilled, set rules, took on apprentices, and settled disputes. And with these controls and secrecy, their work was sometimes referred to as mysteries (of the craft).

Guilds eventually gained in respectability and were accepted by the (English) authorities, so much so that a craftsman could not work his trade without belonging to a guild. And the London authorities eventually issued a law organizing the formation of trade companies from the guilds.

Guilds (probably) started in London, but by the 1400's they had spread into many cities. They covered crafts such as Blacksmiths, Weavers, Saddlers, and Coopers. As time went by, guilds became more affluent. They all

showed strong religious control, offered charity and sickness benefit, and generally protected their trades.

The first evidence of a Mason's guild in London can't be found until 1356. Authority was issued by the Court of Aldermen of the City of London. We do know that in 1376 the masons were recognized by the authorities as "one of the mysteries of London." In 1463 the Worshipful Company of Masons of the City of London erected their first meeting room.



In 1472 a Grant of Arms was received under Letters Patent (see above). And there is documentation of there being a London Company of Masons in 1481. It was not until 1677 that the company was formally incorporated by Royal Charter under the seal of King Charles II giving it power to control the work of masons in the Cities of London, Westminster and seven miles there about. In its beginning, it was organized quite differently from a lodge. It was however, governed by a Master and two Wardens. And there were ceremonies for "entered" and "accepted" members.

By the mid 1600's, there is an assumption that the London Company of Masons consisted of operative and non-operative members. There also is speculation that this trade company was declining. It appears that the inner circle of the company was becoming involved with the philosophical, moral and spiritual aspects of human behavior. This part of the inner fraternity was called the "Acception" (or Accepcon); joining this "Society of Accepted Masons," the new member was said to "come on the Acception," (hence to be accepted). This almost certainly is the origin of "free and accepted."

Another factor contributing to the decline of the London Masons was foreign immigration, which expanded dramatically, and led to even greater cultural dislocation. About this time the Company's authority began to erode with the influx of provincial stone masons required to assist in the rebuilding of London due to the Great Fire of 1666. Perhaps not coincidentally, two of the key figures in the creation of our brotherhood, the Scot James Anderson and Huguenot (Frenchman) Jean Theophile Desaguliers, were both born outside England.



The Great Fire of London 1666

We also need to understand that London had tripled in size during the 1600's and became the largest urban area in Europe and no longer possessed a unified center. Roughly over the previous century (or so) times were very difficult and consisted of civil war, religious persecution (e.g.

Roman Catholic Church / Church of England / Puritanism, etc.), royal familicide, plots, conspiracies, plague, and decimating fire. Even those who once believed in practical magic as a kind of religion had (also) lost their faith (as had so many others).



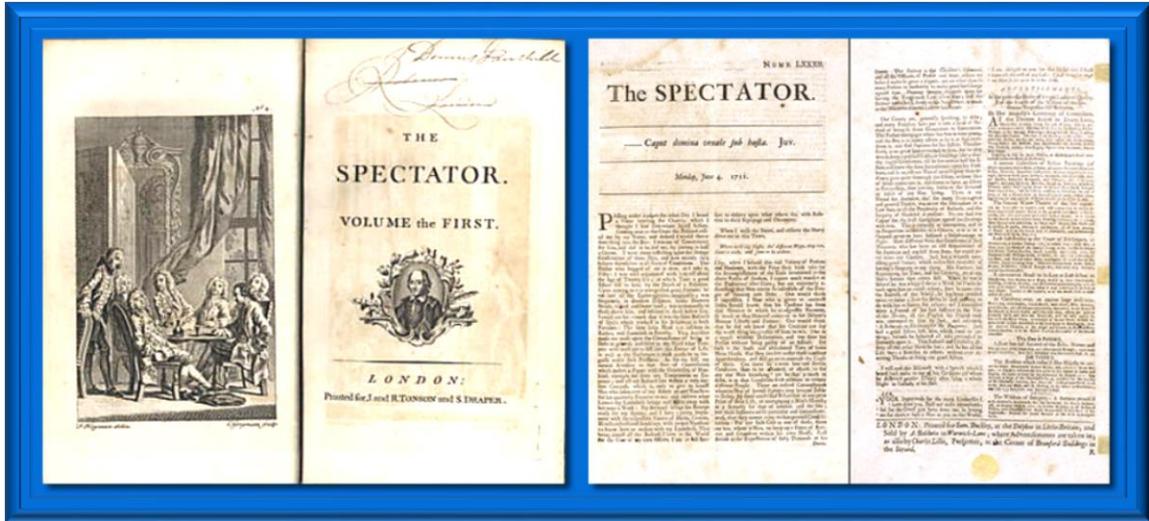
The Great Plague of London 1665-1666

Historian's Note: For more information also see the histories for: Elizabeth I, Charles I, Civil War of 1642, Oliver & Richard Cromwell, Charles II, the Great or Black Plague 1665-66 the Great Fire 1666, James II, William III, Mary II.)

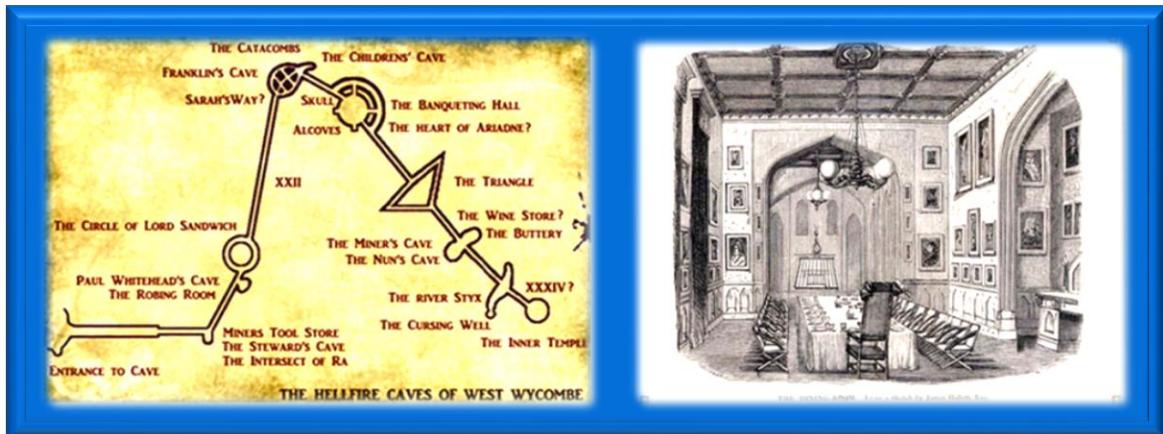
The Void Abhors a Vacuum

Because of these changing events and the consequent societal uproar, the English people felt separated and worse. Factionalism bedeviled this early eighteenth-century cosmopolitan society. Drawing upon cultural models that would shape the eighteenth and nineteenth century European and American cultures, the first speculative masons created a fraternal organization with refined and respectable practices along with enlightened ideas that could reunite London and the world.

In the early 1700's, participation in clubs had become a regular and important part of life among the upper levels of society. The relatively easy mixing of English aristocrats and urban professionals demonstrated natural harmony between the elements of this redefined culture. And those who joined were searching for an enlightened existential meaning to their life.



So great was the need to band together that more than 2,000 clubs were formed. As noted in the most popular periodical at that time, the Spectator (authored by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison), “Man is a Sociable Animal,” wrote Addison in a 1711 published story, “and, as an Instance of it, we may observe, that we take all Occasions and Pretenses of forming ourselves into those little Nocturnal Assemblies, which are commonly known by the name of Clubs.” “Whenever a set of Men find themselves agree in any Particular, tho’ never so trivial, they establish themselves into a kind of fraternity, and meet once or twice a Week, upon the account of such a Fantastic Resemblance.”



Map to Hellfire Club

Beefsteak Club Dining Room

The reason for joining a particular club could go from the ridiculous to the sublime. As Addison suggested, a club could be found for a wide variety of uses, from dissipation and blasphemy, like the famous Hell-Fire Club

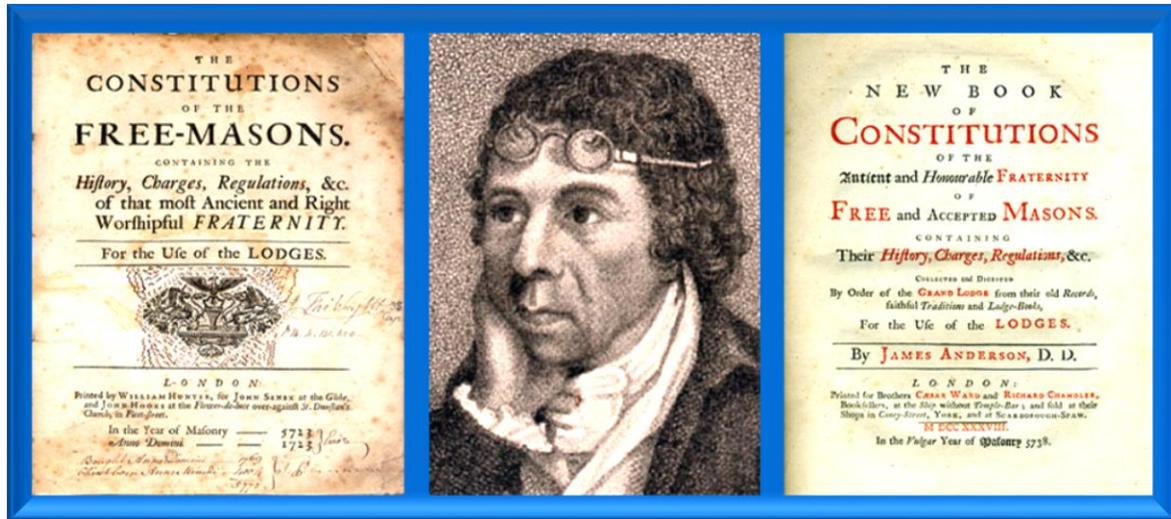
headed by the Duke of Wharton (which Brother Benjamin Franklin attended), to simple eating and drinking, like the Beefsteak Club (which may have been the most popular of the time and versions of it exist today). Many of these clubs (including our speculative Masons) promised to enrich both the metaphysical wellbeing and intellectual knowledge of those who gathered.

The Premier Grand Lodge of England

The communal and kinship bonds that had held together village life proved no longer adequate in a world of increased social diversity and widened cultural horizons. Britons in London had moved past the narrow world of the local church parish, but not yet not within the circles of the elite and court society. The club, and in its stepchild the speculative Masonic lodge, found a means of recreating the close ties of local friendship and convivial fraternity in a larger cosmopolitan society. Whereas in June of 1717, a group of four London lodges, made up of both operative craftsman and speculative non-craftsman met to create a The Grand Lodge of London.



Amid weakened parochial (church) ties, clubs created small, select groups that helped order the new economic, political, and social life. Masonry went even further, articulating ideals that most clubs paid homage to only implicitly with words. To the closed door that expressed a club's exclusivity, Masons added a guard with a drawn sword, as well as an extensive initiation that decisively marked the distinction between the lodge and the outside world. Instead of the informal rules of most clubs, Masonry created a Book of Constitutions. And by 1723, Masonic regulations filled eighteen printed pages of its Constitutions.



1723 Constitutions

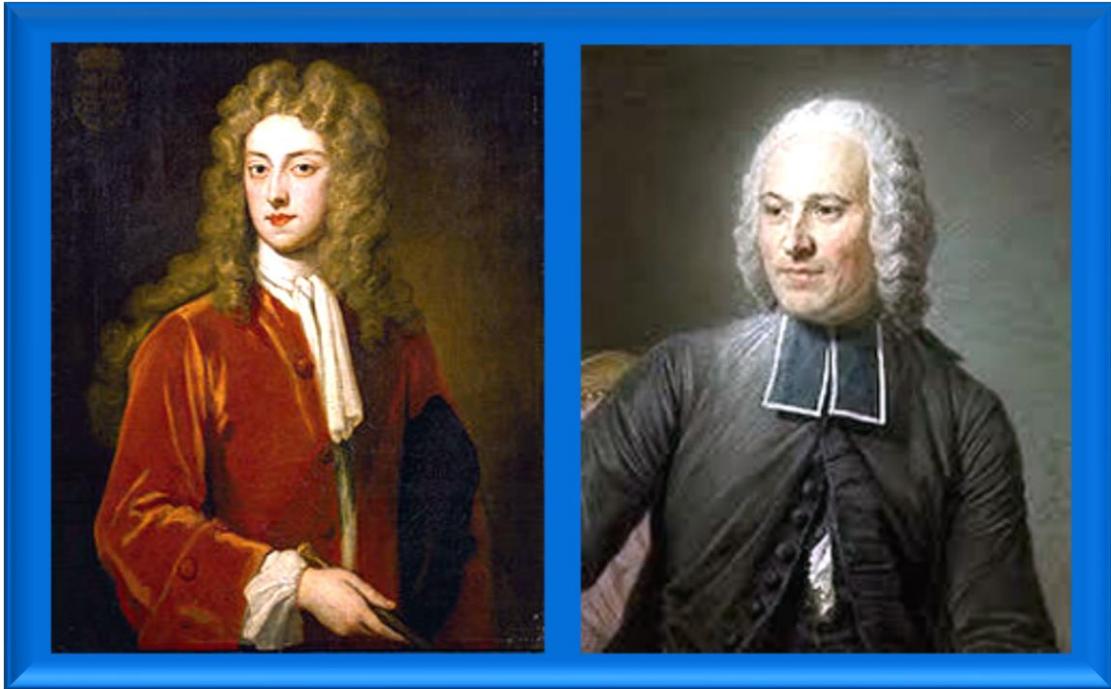
Reverend James Anderson

1738 Constitutions

Masonry's clearest enunciation of club ideals lay in its formalization of brotherhood. Masons gave greater definition and consistency, extending and exploring the meaning of ties between their members, with emphasis on brotherhood. According to the 1723 Constitutions, the fraternity offered a "Center of Union" in a world of perpetual distance.

The early 1720's marked the beginning of a great speculative Masonic expansion. In 1724, the grand lodge extended its reach beyond London, and approved lodges in Cheshire, Bristol, Hampshire, Norfolk, Somersetshire, and Sussex. By 1725, the grand lodge supervised some 70 lodges, and began creating subordinate provincial grand lodges for more direct oversight of those new lodges. But London lodges still dominated in 1735, with more than 100 of the total 140 lodges in England. (Additional information: <http://denverconsistory.org/books/TheFourOldLodges.pdf>)

An important factor in the growth and popularity of the masonic lodge lay in its unrivaled claim to the aristocracy and elite. One of the four founding lodges forming the grand lodge in 1717 was Westminster's Horn Tavern Lodge. The Duke of Richmond, a lodge master, described the group in the 1720's as "being for the most part persons of quality and Members of Parliament." Besides the Duke, the group also claimed nine other noblemen, as well as Grand Master Jean Theophile Desaguliers, four baronets and knights, three other men labeled "Honorable," and twenty-four noted as "esquire" as part of the seventy-one members listed in 1725.



John II Duke of Montagu

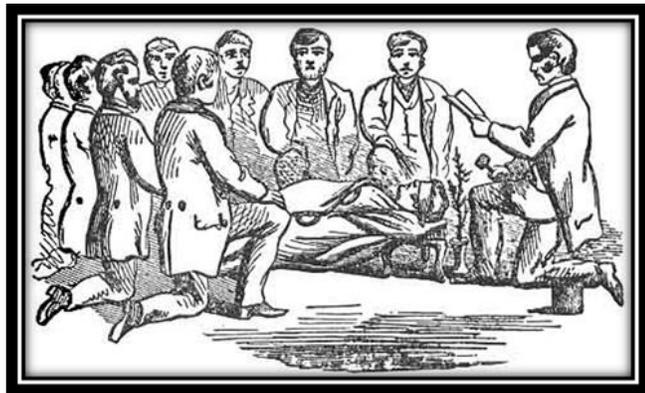
Jean Theophile Desaguliers

Masonic association with aristocrats was immortalized in James Anderson's revised Masonic Book of Constitutions of 1738. To it he added a revealing history of speculative Masonry's earliest days. His account focused on installation of noble grand masters beginning in 1721. He noted that when the members elected John, the duke of Montagu, they expressed great joy at the prospect of once again being patronized by noble Grand Masters ("as in the prosperous times of Freemasonry"). Although three men had previously been grand master before Montagu, Anderson ended his history with a separate roster of noble grand masters that enabled the duke to head the list.

Aristocratic endorsement and the reputation that masonry gained were important to Anderson because it reinforced a final element in the creation of the speculative fraternity. Masonic ideas and identifications asserted high social standing, but only actual patronage by elite groups could validate these claims. The high status their membership conferred on Masonry provided an important part of its appeal over the next century (members of the royal family, such as George IV served as grand master in these years).

Following the years after the grand lodge's inception, non-operatives also transformed many of the traditional masons craft lodges. And the grand lodge took on authority quite different from previous trade and guild practices. We should note that not all of the British lodges agreed with (many of) these changes. These "disagreeable" Masons eventually became known as the Antients or Ancients. Eventually, this was a group the new speculative masons, then known as the Moderns, would have to compromise with.

The Moderns created histories that stressed the speculative Masons continuity with the past. The rituals previously connected to antiquity changed dramatically, from those linked to the actual trade of masonry. Despite these developments, the speculative brother's purpose remained the same as the operative mason; to link to the ancient world through the builder's experience, and embrace their metaphysical mysteries as brothers.



The Master Mason degree (or third degree) was another (Moderns) change to the operative mason's tradition of there being only two levels in the craft (Entered Apprentice and Fellow of the Craft). This began around 1723 and its history and meaning are somewhat unclear. Given only by the grand lodge in its earliest years, it may have originally been intended for lodge masters. But by 1730, the Master Mason degree was being given by speculative masonic lodges to any approved and willing Fellow Craft brother.

With success, the Grand Lodge of London expanded its power. It became a separate institution, with its own officers (no longer four individual lodges, each with their own Masters and members). In 1721, the grand lodge

claimed the right to control the creation of new lodges, issue charters and to serve as the final authority in all Masonic matters. Eventually, they claimed authority over all Britain and America. As the thirteen colonies were under British control, the Grand Lodge of England issued the original Masonic charters. However, there still were other masonic lodges created in the American colonies, attributable to various well-meaning but unsanctioned organizers, as well as numerous military lodges.

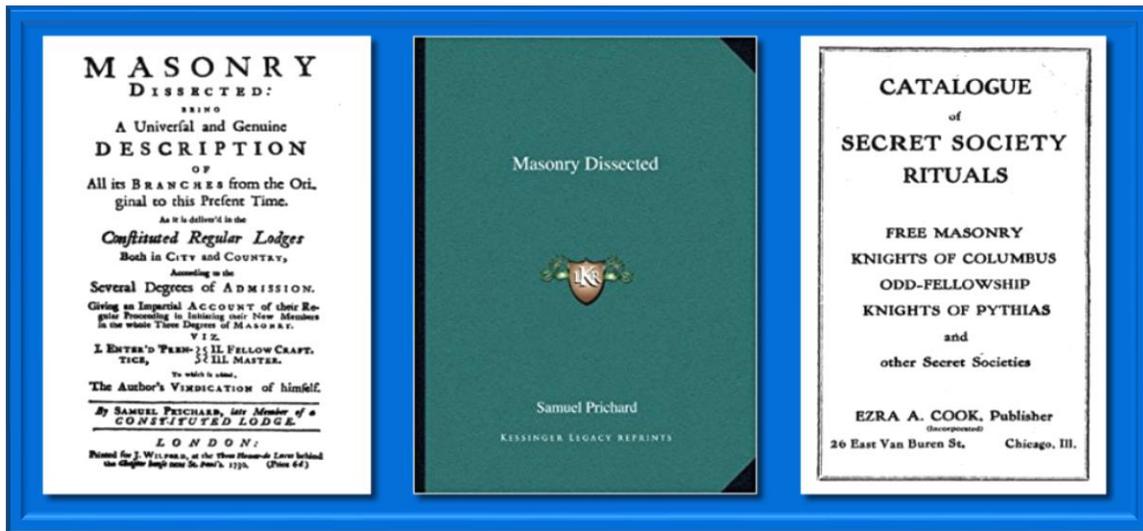
The newly expanded authority of the Grand Lodge of London required explanation. Previously, English lodges had no superintending authority at all. Even guilds, the legally sanctioned bodies in English operative masonry exercised power only within the limits of its locality. Innovating speculative brothers cited historical precedents for their authority. In one example, they used the traditions of medieval national assemblies (for the craft of masonry). Members also revised legends contained in earlier histories, so that a number of English Kings, Solomon, and even Augustus Caesar were posthumously given the title of Grand Master. (By the time of the 1738 Book of Constitutions, speculative Masons referred to the June 1717 meeting as merely the resumption of Grand Lodge assemblies.)

During this time, their rival group the Ancients also began to issue charters. The Ancients (primarily Scots & Irish) believed the Moderns grand lodge practice of courting the aristocracy flew in the face of their ancient heritage as a guild of the workingman. In addition, the Ancients believed that the Moderns had made too many changes and innovations to the ritual ceremonies, straying too far from their origins.

The rivalry between the Ancients and Moderns in England was not reconciled until 1813. At that time the two groups unified by mutual agreement and became the United Premier Grand Lodge of England. It is important to note that in the colonies, this rivalry was solved earlier at the end of the American Revolution, as each (now) State formed its own governing Grand Lodge, with control of all lodges in its jurisdiction.

It should also be noted that with great success came scorn and disclaimers. Starting in the 1720's at least half a dozen articles and pamphlets were created to expose masonic rituals and secrets. Perhaps most notable was

Pritchard's "Masonry Dissected," published in 1730. This account proved so popular and apparently accurate that the grand lodge was forced to make changes to prevent an influx of illegitimate masons. The attention given these secrets also inspired a variety of imitators, ranging from jesters to organized groups claiming a more authentic Masonic tradition.



Examples of attempts to Destroy Masons

Operative Masons also attempted to assume the high reputation of the speculative group. Both Scottish and Irish Masons set up grand lodges that claimed the same powers as the Moderns. The lodge in York, made up of non-operatives as well as craftsmen, sought special status. Although still attached to the masons craft, York members in 1725 asserted they had formed a grand lodge before the London body. Drawing upon an old tradition found in some manuscript constitutions of an alleged medieval national Masonic convention in York, the "new grand lodge" claimed authority over all English Masonry. These pretensions were unsupportable and the York grand lodge only survived to 1750. Strangely, the supposed legend of the precedence of the York grand lodge later became of mythic significance for later American Freemasons - who often stylized themselves Ancient York Masons.

I will end my dissertation of our fraternity's origin and early years. Above there is more than sufficient material regarding Masonic history (for this year's Historian's Report). I hope you found it interesting and more than enough to ponder and discuss.

I could not have written this essay without the detailed information contained in the books below (and the occasional help of some very good Masonic Internet websites).

Revolutionary Brotherhood - Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, Steven C. Bullock, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London

Solomon's Builders - Freemasons, Founding Fathers and the Secrets of Washington, D.C., Christopher Hodapp, Ulysses Press, Berkley, California

Over 300 Years of Masonic Ritual, Martin Gandoff, Lewis Masonic an imprint of Ian Allan Publishing, Addlestone, Surrey, England

William S. Jennings

December 23, 2017

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Graphics of Masonic Coins Honoring 300th Anniversary
Created by Brother William S. Jennings