

# MASONIC MUSINGS

*The Masonic Education Newsletter*

of Lodge Epicurean No 906 and Lodge Amalthea No 914

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## Issue 19 – FEBRUARY 2015

Welcome to *Issue Nineteen*, the first for 2015. In this edition we look at the *Origins of the Ritual*, in the form of a short talk by RWBro Jim Spreadborough, OS, PJGW, Grand Librarian. I also look briefly at *Australia's First Freemason* - oh yes, we know who he was! I also look at *Caves and Masonry*, some old Masonic prints and answer an interesting question!

Fraternal regards and Happy New Year,  
Kent Henderson.

## The Origins of the Ritual

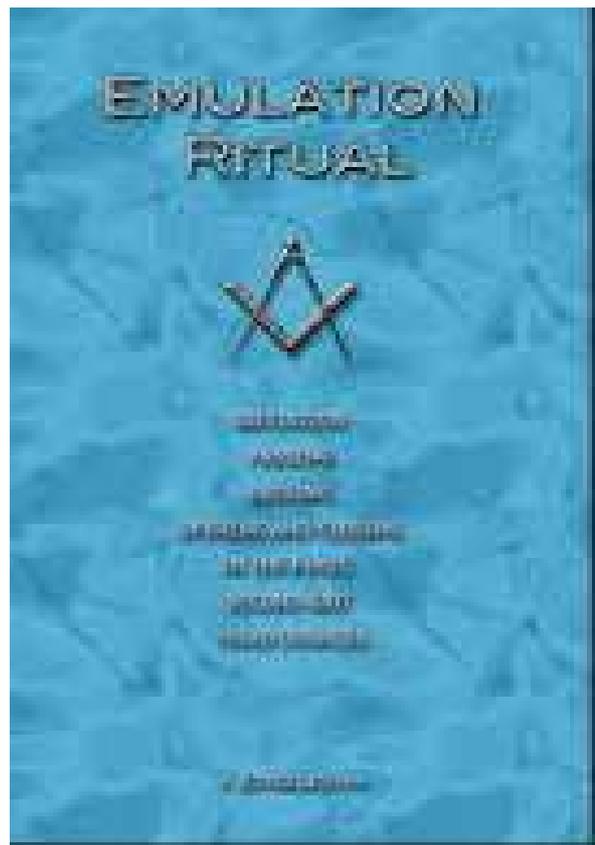
Prior to 1850, much speculation and elaboration of the origins of Masonic ritual prevailed. Speculative Masonry itself was in its apprentice stage both with its appearance and in fact. Its rituals were being refined and much guesswork as to its history rendered the information passed to its initiates, also known as Entered Apprentices, as fanciful as it was inspirational.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Masons often told elaborate stories about the origin of the Craft. Though always well intentioned, they were often "tongue in cheek;" and, it is no wonder that today so many of the organisation's detractors allow ignorance to cloud their view of this venerable institution. Every jurisdiction has a Lodge of Research to investigate and separate theory from documented origins. Masonic scholars work hard to solve the Craft's greatest mystery, the origin of its ritual.

*Masonry was established by King Solomon with the help of Hiram, King of Tyre. Masonry began with Noah and his sons. Adam was the first Grand Master because he was the first man to wear an apron.*

This is the kind of Masonic history which prevailed before historians debunked the tall tales and sought the reality of Masonry in incontrovertible written documents. Masonry undoubtedly existed in our deeper past, with the cathedral builders who worked on the great churches of Europe between 1200 and 1500 AD; these guilds became organized lodges complete with ceremonies and later developed

into Speculative Masonry first established as a Grand Lodge of Masons in London, England on June 24, 1717.



About one hundred old manuscripts located in various places are known as the *Gothic Constitutions* or *Old Charges*. They exist as the earliest written proof of modern Masonry. The most prized is the *Regius Manuscript* which takes its name from the fact that King George II presented it to the British Museum in 1757. Composed circa 1390 AD and written in verse, it is the oldest preserved Masonic writing. The

*Cooke Manuscript*, circa 1400-1410 AD was also written for Masons and contains evidence of having been copied from earlier works.

The *Cooke Manuscript* begins with the Masonic practice of invoking the blessing of Deity and ends with the familiar "Amen, so mote it be." It contains a legendary history of the craft and the guild's regulations or charges. These Ancient Charges form the basis of our present day rituals and include the following directions.

The initiate was instructed to take his oath while his hand was "under the holy booke" or "upon the booke." It was his duty to "keep the counsel of his fellows truly", "not to commit adultery with a fellow's wife, daughter or servant", "not to supplant a master or fellow in any of their work." He was not to take an apprentice unless he be "freeborn, come of good kindred, and whole of limb" and to "slander no Mason behind his back." He was to "come to Assembly if it is within fifty miles if he have warning." These Charges were to be read at each assembly of Masons and were often accompanied by lectures on the history of the craft or some appropriate Masonic subject. Later, these requirements were adopted in every well governed Lodge and much of what goes on in Masonic Lodges today stems from the manner in which these requirements were observed from that time.

signs and words used to identify one Freemason to another were kept strictly secret and unwritten, while the charges are considered public and unrestricted. They were often repeated from memory to accommodate the layman who was more commonly illiterate. This was a time when reading and writing was considered to be the exclusive privilege of the wealthy and powerful. Pomposity and decadence was supported by maintaining the working class in a state of darkness. Freemasons challenged the established practices by sharing information amongst themselves without regard to birthright or politics. We often see the same forces at work today from those who deny others the use of their freewill to seek the opportunities that Masonic education has to offer. Open discussion of the events that Masons share serves to overcome these suspicions.

Though modern Masons consider the ritual to be unchangeable, this was not true in 1717. The original services were brief and simple

consisting of the administering of the oath of secrecy regarding the words and the giving of the charges which, as previously stated were public. No standard existed and each individual lodge with their independent Master would perform the ceremonies according to their individual tastes and preferences.

As one gifted Master or Masonic lecturer would frame a passage of appealing beauty, it would become accepted and passed along by word of mouth to other lodges. It was a slow evolution and it was decades before any standardisation or uniformisation was considered and sought after. Today there are eight variant rituals in England that are utilised and accepted as "regular." In the United States there are as many versions as there are States. In the Australian Constitutions they are all basically the same, with only slight differences.



During the 1600's, Scottish Freemasons evolved a series of ceremonies whose central theme was the adoption of the Grand Masonic Word. As trade secrets were important to the craft, it was important that no "cowans" receive them. The secrets were communicated on the "five points of fellowship," which modern Masons now recognise as the special stance which they take to receive them from one another. There was a central ceremony which has now been developed modernly as the Fellowcrafts degree.

The Grand Masonic Word itself antedated 1598. There is much superstition and speculation which surrounds it as the fearful fail to understand a word *too sacred to pronounce*. It was revealed to the initiate following an examination or "catechism" so

that each Mason might know that each was duly vested with the secret. Even today, admittance to a Lodge of Masons is predicated upon a member's examination, in lieu of another Mason's vouch or declaration that he has sat previously in lodge with the member seeking admittance.

Knowledge of any single element of the ceremonies will not gain him admission. By Masonic Law, any Mason wishing to enter a lodge must declare himself first to the Tyler, who guards the door with a drawn sword in his hand. If unknown and unvouched for, he must submit documentation and be reviewed by members appointed by the Master. This custom derives from the building of King Solomon's Temple where there were guards placed at the south, east and west gates to guard not only against those who wish to enter, but to see that no one passed back out without the Master's permission. Hence the response to an inquiry which dates from this period, "by certain signs, tokens, and other points of entry."



*An American Degree Ceremony in progress*

From the *Edinburgh Register House Manuscript* we have "The first is to heill and conceal; second, under no less pain which is then cutting of your throat....for you must make the sign when you say that." The five points of fellowship is further demonstrated ending with a primitive version of the penalty of our modern first degree obligation. Early Scottish operative societies had two ceremonies. One for "prentices" and the other for "fellows of the craft." There were, however no uniform lectures though certain traditions grew up around *the word*. Two prominent speculative Freemasons, Dr. James Anderson, a Scotch Presbyterian Minister, and Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers, and Episcopal Clergyman, contributed much to the organisation of the earliest Grand Lodge of 1717. They were directly responsible for removing the prerequisite for a Christian belief in Freemasonry thereby opening the beauties of

the Craft to all men, freeborn, of good character, and well recommended. Thus was established the noblest of Masonic tenets, the universality of mankind, and the Brotherhood of men. In 1723, Dr. Anderson published his *Constitutions of Freemasonry* from which he drew inspiration from both *The Regius* and *Cooke Manuscripts* and thereby established the *Code of Masonic Law* which governs lodges today.

During this period, speculative Freemasonry was being exported both to Europe and America. In France it proliferated into scores of degrees, while back in England, according to modern Masonic scholars, two degrees were being practiced. There was yet to be developed a Master's degree. The initial degree of "Prentice" contained the primitive version of the current lecture regarding Geometry. It later became divided into two degrees of admission and passing and assumed the significance that Masons assign it today.

The addition of the Master's degree, initially bestowed upon those called to preside, came from the introduction of the Hiramic Legend. Most likely, this story was first developed as a miracle play. Religious drama and folklore were popular entertainments in Medieval times and we know that this story developed over several centuries. The story of Hiram, King of Tyre was most likely referred to in lodges for a half a century before 1717. In 1723, Dr. Anderson makes no mention of it in the *Ancient Charges*, but in a revised edition in 1738 he refers to this figure "whom they decently interr'd in the Lodge near the Temple, according to ancient usage."

In 1730, Samuel Prichard published an expose' entitled "Masonry Dissected." As with every published intrusion into the privacy of the lodges much of what is quoted is rubbish. Even today as pretentious individuals seek to harm the organisation, much misinformation is disseminated. However, Prichard's book is useful as it contains the first proof of the use of the Hiramic Legend in the third degree.

Hiram is mentioned in the King James Bible (I Kings and II Chronicles) as he is further mentioned in the *Cooke Manuscript* of 1400-1410. However the *Graham Manuscript* discovered in 1936 and dated 1726 supposes an interesting origin in the legend of Noah. A valuable secret died with Noah and his sons agreed to exhume his body from the grave to

retrieve it. "Agreeing beforehand that if they did not find the very thing itself, the first thing they found was to be to them a secret." It then goes on to describe the condition of the body as the Brothers discovered it and their attempts to lift it from the grave. This text seems to be stolen directly from Masonic material, its authenticity curious to say the least.

Speculations on the Hiram story, supposing its pre-fifteenth century origin suggest that it is an allusion to political events of the day. The murders of Thomas a'Becket in 1170, or Jacques de Molay in 1314 or even Charles I in 1649 have been suggested. The Scottish Jacobites, who supported Charles, were numerous in Masonic membership. The production of this play undoubtedly lent itself to a most personal revelation in the hearts of those who saw their futures jeopardized by the cowardly destruction of these noble men.

In 1751 a group of Lodges, expressing alarm at the many innovations that the Grand Lodge was permitting, established a new order known as the "Ancients." As a satire they referred to the Grand Lodge as "Moderns." This new Grand Lodge quickly demonstrated success due to the energies of their Grand Secretary, Lawrence Dermott. In 1756 he published a book of Constitutions entitled *Ahiman Rezon*. In 1772, William Preston published "Illustrations of Masonry" which served as an excellent ritual for the Craft. Though beautiful in character, the lectures it contained took hours to perform. It was the practice then, to spread out the use of lectures in degrees amongst several meetings. Later, these

comments were edited to a format which could be delivered in a single sitting.

The "Moderns" established a Lodge of Promulgation which honed the teaching skills of Masons and brought their ritual more in-line with the Ancients. In 1813 a reunion between the two was made possible as by then this organization had eliminated most of the innovations which had been objected to in 1751.

In 1797, Thomas Smith Webb published a *Freemason's Ritual and Illustrations of Masonry* which was used as the ritual for Masonry in America. Based on the earlier work of Preston, the ritual it contains has changed little to that which is used today. Most of the ritual used in Australian Constitutions stems from the *Emulation Ritual* as worked in the majority of English Constitution lodges, although there are several Irish and Scottish influences in the various Australian rituals.

Today our rituals stand as some of the greatest material in literature. It is a noble conception from the mind of Man and serves to teach the recipients some of the finest standards that a man should choose to live his life by. So long as the soul of Man aspires to fulfil its destiny in heaven, the teachings, ideals, and philosophy of Freemasonry will serve to instruct. It is given to every Freemason to preserve its *Ancient Usages and Charges* inviolate, and pass them to the awaiting generations with pride and excellence.

## Who was Australia's First Freemason?

Actually, it was the first (arguably...) Englishman to set foot in Australia - Sir Joseph Banks. This remarkable man had his family roots in Lincolnshire and became a famous explorer and naturalist, sailing in 1768 with Captain James Cook on the *Endeavour*, exploring the uncharted south Pacific, circumnavigating the globe and visiting South America, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia and Java. It was Banks who helped arrange the ill-fated expedition of Captain William Bligh which led to the famous *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

Banks was born at Westminster on 13 February 1743, a wealthy young squire of

Revesby in Lincolnshire, and his link with Horncastle is that he helped set up a local hospital in the town. He was also an active Mason in the Province. In Gould's History of Freemasonry, Banks is mentioned as being a member of Old Horne Lodge No. 4 – now Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No. 4, a time immemorial Lodge.

Although the date of his initiation cannot be verified, it has been confirmed that it was prior to 1769. He was also a member of Witham Lodge No. 297, which today is the oldest Lodge in Lincolnshire, and remained on its register until his death on 19 June 1820.

His passion for botany began at school, and from 1760 to 1763 he studied at Christ Church, Oxford, inheriting a considerable fortune from his father at this time. In 1766 he travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador, collecting plants and other specimens.

He became a member of the Royal Society in the same year, later becoming its longest-serving President in its 347-year history – holding the office consecutively for 42 years.



*Joseph Banks*, by Thomas Phillips, c1808-09  
State Library of New South Wales

He was successful in obtaining a place on what was to become Cook's first great voyage of discovery between 1768 and 1771, during which time the Endeavour proceeded up the east coast of Australia and through the Torres Strait, charting the area in the process.

Banks was interested in plants that could be used for practical purposes and that could be introduced commercially into other countries. On his return from the Cook expedition, he brought with him an enormous number of specimens and his scientific account of that voyage and its discoveries aroused considerable interest across Europe.

It was Banks who proposed that William Bligh should command two voyages for the transportation of bread fruit and plants –

including the voyage of the Bounty – which led to the mutiny in April 1789 involving 12 crew members led by Christian Fletcher. Banks became an influential figure in New South Wales, founded in 1788 with the arrival of the first fleet, choosing the governors.

He was to recommend Bligh for the governorship, which ended in the latter's deposition from the post following what became known as the Rum Rebellion in 1808.

Banks's eminence as a leading botanist was honoured by having the genus *banksias*, comprising about 75 species in the protea family to be found in Australia, named after him.

A distinguished scholar, he promoted the Linnaeus system of Latin classification of botanical specimens. In 1793 his name was given to a group of volcanic islands near Vanuatu in the Pacific, which were explored and named after him by Captain Bligh in gratitude for the earlier help he had given him.

The inventor Robert Stevenson also honoured Banks by naming a schooner after him which accommodated the artificers during the building of the Bellrock lighthouse in the Firth of Forth off Scotland's east coast, when Banks was vice-president of the Board of Trade during the passage of the Bill for the lighthouse through parliament. He was further honoured when the City of Lincoln provided a tropical plant house themed with plants reminiscent of his voyages.

He was created a Baronet in 1781, was appointed to the Order of the Bath in 1795 and became a Privy Counsellor in 1797. George III appointed Banks as honorary director to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Banks promoted the careers of many scientists, sending many of them abroad to find new plants and extend the collection at Kew Gardens. A truly remarkable man was the first Freemason to set foot in Australia and a fuller biography will appear in my forthcoming book *250 Famous Australian Freemasons*.

## Caves and Masonry

As older members of Lodge Amalthea and Lodge Epicurean will recall, a few years ago we travelled to the Naracoorte Caves in South Australia and worked a 2nd Degree underground in the *Blanche Cave*. The Sydney Lodge, with whom we are warmly associated, has previously worked a Degree Ceremony in the *Lucas Cave* at the world famous Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains. Indeed, after the huge success of our recent Tasmanian adventure, we are looking at having a weekend away to Sydney

and the Jenolan Caves in November 2016, whence we shall to hold the November Meeting of Lodge Amalthea underground!

But holding a lodge meeting is a cave, while obviously uncommon, is not unique. The photo below, taken on 12 November 1897, is of the Grand Lodge of Arizona meeting in the cave - actually a 'mine' of the *Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Co.* at Bisbee, Arizona. Many thanks to WBro Brendan Kyne for forwarding it to me.



## Question and Answer

**In a lodge room recently I noticed horns on the corner of the Master's Pedestal. What is the meaning behind this?**

Some of our Lodge Rooms have Horns on the Master's and Warden's pedestals. Some lodge rooms have horns on the Masters Pedestal only. There are four horns, one on each corner of the top of the Altar. First the altar.

This item of furniture varies from constitution to constitution in as much that some constitutions incorporate, as one item of furniture the Altar and the Masters' Pedestal.

Additionally, while many constitutions situate their Altar in front of the Master, others situate it in the centre of the Lodge Room.



"Altars were erected by primitive man long before temples. Altars do not need the shelter of a temple *BUT*; no temple is complete without an Altar. Since the earliest days of mankind, the Altar has been the focal point of prayer, sacrifice, devotion and dedication".

On the Altar, with its four horns, rests the Volume of the Sacred Law with the square and compasses displayed. The three lesser lights are placed in proper position around it. Altars were anciently of two kinds; incense burning, and sacrifice. The idea behind both was propitiation of the Deity. Altars being places of refuge, a slave or criminal who fled to, and grasped the *horns of the altar* was deemed under the especial care of the Deity.

"The *horns of the altar* were not, as some suppose, animal horns, but were simply the four corners of the altar which were somewhat raised and figuratively called

*horns*, their purpose being to hold the animal carcass or other offering in place".

It is interesting to note that there were altars in many late 18th century lodges. St. Augustine calls the altar *Mensa Domini*, the Lord's Table, or Holy Table, to signify that it was mystical and spiritual, and had no relation either to the sacrifice of the Jews or the idolatries of the Gentiles. There were no altars mentioned in descriptions of Lodges in the early 18th century.

Mackey states quite clearly the Masonic symbolism of the Altar thus: "It is an altar of sacrifice, for on it the candidate is directed to lay his passions and vices as an oblation to the Deity, while he offers up the thoughts of a pure heart as a fitting incense to the Grand Architect of the Universe" and "...The form of a Masonic altar should be ..... in imitation of the Jewish altar, four horns, one at each corner".

## Ancient Prints

These four old *Masonic Prints*, which are of German origin, are most interesting. I am not going to comment further...although if any reader is moved to ask a question concerning them, I will endeavour to answer it in a subsequent *Masonic Musings*..!

