

MASONIC MUSINGS

The Masonic Education Newsletter

of Lodge Epicurean No 906 and Lodge Amalthea No 914

Editor: VWBro. Kent Henderson, DipT, GradDipEd, MEd, PGIWkgs

Issue 6 – December 2012

Welcome to *Issue Six* – the last for 2012. This time around we will start with another offering from Bro. Clive Moore, on ‘**Masonic Dining**’ – a follow up on his article on the Festive Board (‘...*And So to Refreshment*’) I printed in *Issue Three*. I then follow on with my piece ‘**The Decline of Masonic Dining in Australia**’ which explains (amongst other things) ‘how and why we have got where we are’! Finally, of course, as always this issue concludes with more ‘Questions and Answers’. Happy Christmas!

Fraternal regards,
Kent Henderson.

MASONIC DINING

Bro. Clive Moore (with a few annotations by Kent Henderson) writes: This talk will tell the fascinating story of Masonic dining. We call our meals festive boards; in this sense a board is a table laden with food, as in the phrase ‘bed and board’. The first recorded Masonic festive boards were held by working stonemasons in the 14th century; usually to celebrate religious festivals but sometimes they may have been purely Masonic gatherings. On these special days the masons would gather in the building under construction or in temporary shelters called lodges; and feast together on roast meat washed down with spiced ale. A surviving 14th century Masonic document laid down how they should behave at a festive board, they should come to the table with clean hands, not speak with their mouths full, and refrain from using the napkins to blow their noses. All still good advice!



An English Festive Board.

Today very few of us are actual stonemasons; but we do use their tools and traditions to illustrate and explain the moral code that is at the heart of our order, which is why we call ourselves Speculative Freemasons. Our speculative forebears are first recorded in the 17th century; they held their meetings in taverns or inns so refreshments were readily available to them. In 1717 the first Grand Lodge met in an alehouse called the *Goose & Gridiron* near St. Paul’s Cathedral; possibly attracted there by the much acclaimed charms of Hannah the barmaid, it also had a skittle alley on the roof! The small rooms in such establishments did restrict lodge membership; so in the 18th century hotels became increasingly popular meeting places, as they could provide bigger rooms and better facilities.

Most festive boards are now held after the actual Masonic meeting has finished, but in those early days the brethren ate, drank and smoked during the meeting itself; not surprisingly their Masonic aprons quickly became stained or damaged and had to be regularly replaced. They would drink lots of toasts, usually accompanied by noisy clapping and stamping. One 1760 account records that people sitting below meeting rooms were often frightened that the building might be shaken down about them; we know of at least one tavern that put in extra structural supports. Some lodges initiated serving brothers solely to be waiters or musicians at their meetings; a Colonel of *Royal Scots Fusiliers* initiated a whole regimental band to provide the music for his installation as Master of a Lodge in Edinburgh.

Their Masonic rituals were shorter than ours. Instead, for much of the meeting the brethren sat around a candlelit table listening to lectures and taking part in catechisms; question and answer rituals to test their Masonic knowledge. The lectures were not just Masonic, but included many learned topics such as architecture; one lodge even dissected a human eye at a meeting. The Old Kings Arms Lodge held a series of such lectures in the 1730s. One given by Bro. Graeme about intoxicating liquors probably had samples to taste, as the minutes record that the brethren were 'greatly delighted' and asked him to speak again on the same subject on no less than three occasions!

Heavy drinking was commonplace in those days and lodge accounts record the purchase of ale, wine and spirits; as well as sugar and lemons to make punch. That said Masons were probably one of the better-behaved elements of society, as they had strict rules to govern behaviour and limit drinking at their meetings. Typical of these rules were the 1760 Bylaws of the Lodge of Antiquity; which stipulated fines for any brother who discussed religion or politics, bet, cursed, was 'disguised in liquor', or hissed at a speaker. In 1786 a Brother in the Mount Moriah Lodge was fined 6 pence for falling asleep in the lodge. Even visitors could be fined – in 1783 the Albion Lodge fined a visitor a shilling for swearing.

Such bylaws and fines were not always sufficient to control excess. The Mariners' Lodge, founded in 1799, had a table laden with wine and spirits in their meeting room and for 6 pence members could take drinks whenever they wished. It was a very merry lodge so soon ran into financial difficulties and it closed down in 1822; but they left us a fascinating record of their history, plus a Masonic jug that apart from the usual Masonic symbols also bears an advertisement for the good beer at the 'Rose & Crown'.

Most 18th century lodges arranged formal dinners to celebrate the installation of a new Master. In 1753 at the annual feast of the Old Dundee Lodge 33 brethren dined on 2 quarters of lamb, 12 fowls, a 231b ham and 2 plum puddings, all washed down by an assortment of alcoholic beverages. After these dinners female relations and lady friends were sometimes invited into the lodge room or an adjoining gallery, where they might receive gifts of white gloves. In the 19th century special ladies dinners and Masonic balls would become very popular; our modern Ladies Festivals developed from those events.



A Festive Board set for a lodge
– Berkshire Masonic Centre, England.

There is a tradition of one early woman Freemason. It is said that in 1711 Elizabeth St. Leger, the 18 year old daughter of Viscount Doneraile, fell asleep in the library of their family home in County Cork. Builders had been working on the dividing wall so when she awoke she could see and hear her father's lodge meeting in the next room.

Frightened by the solemnity of the ritual she tried to slip away, but was caught by the guard placed outside the lodge door. The brethren urgently discussed the matter and decided that the best way to safeguard their secrets was to initiate her as a Freemason. Whatever the truth of this story, she did become a much respected patroness of Irish Masonry.

There have also been cases of deliberate eavesdropping. A 1754 print depicts a chambermaid called Moll, who apparently hid in the rafters above a lodge meeting in Canterbury. Unfortunately she slipped from her precarious perch and as the print shows it were not the secrets of Freemasonry that were exposed! Sometimes less respectable ladies were actually invited in to meetings.

In 1757 Bro. Storey of the Grenadiers Lodge was fined 2 pence for bringing a woman into the lodge; their Junior Warden was also fined 2 pence, but in his case for kissing her!

Membership grew after the creation of the United Grand Lodge in 1813 and meetings started to change significantly. The rituals grew longer, so meetings became more formal and there was less opportunity for conviviality in the meeting room itself; eventually food, drink and smoking were all banned from lodge rooms. Many dedicated Masonic Halls started to open around England, although taverns and hotels were often still used for dining; as formal festive boards after every meeting was becoming the

custom. Other dining customs such as *loving cups* also started to appear around this time, often being copied from the guilds and livery companies.

Although becoming more formal 19th Century festive boards could still be lively events. In 1806 the Premier Grand Lodge asked their stewards to ensure that the dining fees covered the cost of broken glasses and a carpenter to make repairs. Then in 1815, to control over-exuberance, Grand Lodge banned soda water and nuts from their festive boards; what brethren had been doing with them is not recorded!



A dinner setting for an American Masonic Lodge.

Music and singing at festive boards has always been popular and many Masonic songbooks were published. These songs often had toasts built in between the verses and Masonic Fire would be taken with them. Firing is the custom of accompanying a toast with a set sequence of hand gestures, clapping and stamping; including banging your empty glass down hard on the table in imitation of musket or cannon fire. This custom was not exclusively Masonic and probably derived from an old tradition at military or public events of firing cannons or muskets to mark a toast; Shakespeare referred to this practice in *Hamlet*. There were Masonic instances of such real Firing. At a Masonic Feast held near Sunderland in 1775 the toasts were 'drunk with the discharge of a cannon', hopefully not a full size one; although in 1751 a lodge in Cork did use a cannon that could be heard across the whole city.

The first detailed description of Masonic Fire was in a 1737 French Masonic exposure, that used information obtained by Mademoiselle Carton of the *French Opera* in return for her favours. It was described using terms associated with the loading, aiming and firing of a gun; the wine being called

powder and the glasses firearms. Glasses would sometimes shatter when set down too hard during Firing and brethren were fined when this happened. Special glasses were made with strengthened bottoms to reduce breakages; but over time most lodges gave up Firing with glasses, instead adding an extra clap to the sequence to represent the sound of them banging down.

Let's leave Masonic Fire there and return to the development of the festive board as a whole, as the 19th century closed they had reached their zenith as elaborate dining events. Having become formal dinner-suited affairs, with up to ten course meals, many wine takings during the meal, and long toast lists with Firing afterwards. The music and singing were often provided by professional entertainers, sentimental ballads and classical pieces were especially popular – Haydn, Mozart and Sibelius were all Freemasons.

Some 19th Century dining customs continued into the early 20th Century and can still be found at English festive boards today; but social change and modern tastes, coupled with rising costs, have progressively led to less formality, shorter menus and fewer toasts. This has also been the case in Australia generally. A popular feature of modern festive boards is the charity raffle.

The prizes are generally wine or chocolates but some lodges are more adventurous. At the Aldgate Ward Lodge in London many of the prizes were seafood, including bags of cockles; but the strangest prize I have come across was at a meeting of the Wiltshire Lodge of Agriculture in the 1980s. The winner was handed a long white tape which led out of the door, when he wound it in there was a live goose on the end for his Christmas dinner!

Perhaps the most extraordinary festive board ever was held at London Olympia in 1925 to raise funds for a new Freemasons' Hall in London. Over 7000 brethren paid 17 guineas each to dine, they were seated at over 3 miles of tables and served by 1360 waitresses using 86,000 plates and glasses. The waitresses were 'Nippies' from the Joe Lyons teashops, who were coached in from as far away as Leeds. More bizarrely, in 1946 a Masonic journal advertised the sawing of a woman in half as a festive board entertainment; hopefully this was the time-honoured conjuror's illusion rather than some dire penalty for a woman being present!

THE DECLINE OF MASONIC DINING IN AUSTRALIA

Bro. Kent Henderson continues: Festive Boards in Australia are somewhat similar to English norms. In some states they are called 'The Refectory' or 'The South' – this refers to the fact that, ostensibly, a Lodge's Junior Warden is in charge of refreshment (his role is to *call the brethren from Labour to Refreshment and from Refreshment to Labour, that profit and pleasure may be the result*). The Junior Warden sits in the South in the Lodge – hence the name. 'The South' is the common title used in Victoria.

Prior to the Second World War in Australia, Festive Boards comprised full banquets, the costs of which were met from member's lodge dues (as is lodge 'dining' in almost all lodges today). In those days annual dues were 'around six guineas', as was the initiation fee. The average weekly wage in those times was also 'around six guineas' – thus it cost 'a week's wage' to become a Mason, and the same annually to maintain membership. In 2010, the average weekly wage in Australia was around \$1200. If lodges, post Second World War, had kept up with inflation, then today lodge dues would be in excess of \$1000 per year (which, incidentally, they are in Europe – where, very largely, membership numbers have not decreased comparatively).

The question can be asked – *Would not this reduction in value mean lower dining standards?* The answer is clearly in the affirmative, and this was a driving factor behind the creation of Lodge Epicurean, Lodge Amalthea and its kin. The 'death knell' of pre-World War II *quality dining* was the huge influx of new members – very largely returning servicemen – who joined Freemasonry in Australia (and elsewhere) in the post war years.

They were seeking, it is surmised, a continuation of the camaraderie of their war service. This massive influx saw membership in Victoria, for example, peak in excess of 100,000 Freemasons in the early 1960s. Anecdotally, another factor attracting members was the opportunity of 'having a drink' after lodge. It was not until 1966 in Victoria when the *Six O'clock Swill*, as it was called (were hotels closed at 6.00pm), was abolished. This was, reportedly, another factor in Masonic membership diminishing in the late 1960s and 1970s – no longer did you have to 'go to lodge to get a drink'...

Regardless, a principle reason for the membership decline was a fall in standards, particularly in dining. Across Australia, the Craft went from pre-war 'fine dining' to the 'cold sausage rolls and limp sandwiches' of most lodge Festive Boards today. With masses of candidates joining post World War II, and thus masses of increased income courtesy of initiation fees and expanding membership, lodge secretaries saw no need to increase lodge dues over time – they were effectively artificially held down and did not increase with inflation or rising costs generally. This was okay while the 'good times' rolled – but when membership started its inexorable decline and candidates became harder and harder to find, lodge income reduced proportionately. There were only two options – raise dues or decrease standards. The latter option, tacitly, seemed the only viable one – although in my view it was quite self-defeating over time.

Thus dining standards constantly fell – to the sad level in most Australian lodges today. Of course, the compounding factor was that as standards fell, so more and more Masons – who expected better – voted with their feet. Today, Masons in lodges are only members because they accept these low standards – all those that would not have long since departed. The problem is further exacerbated when new members join these lodges. If you dress up a businessman or professional man in a dinner suit and then subject him degree work (these days) of often doubtful quality, and then take him to a Festive Board and regale him with 'long, boring speeches' and food he would not serve at home except at a child's birthday party – you then wonder why his membership is short lived! Of course, with Lodge Epicurean and Lodge Amalthea and their kin, we have reversed this unfortunate state of affairs – with very great success.

While on 'long, boring speeches' – it is worth returning to look at English Masonic Festive Boards in a little more detail. While it has declined numerically, English Masonic membership has not gone down to anywhere near the extent, comparatively, as has been the case in Australia. One reason for this is, most probably, that the quality of Masonic dining in England has been largely maintained post Second World War. Unlike in Australia where – *traditionally* – dining has been paid for by the lodges (i.e.: effectively by members through their lodge dues), in England all lodge dinners

are 'pay as you go' and currently £30-£40 for a lodge dinner is unexceptional. This does deliver a reasonable quality.

On the downside, English Festive Boards usually do deal with an 'exorbitant' number of toasts. Let us look at the full *Toast List*:

1. The Queen and the Craft
2. The Grand Master, MWBro. HRH the Duke of Kent.
3. The Pro Grand Master
4. The Deputy Grand Master
5. The Assistant Grand Master, and Grand Officers present and past
6. The Provincial Grand Master
7. The Deputy Provincial Grand Master
8. The Assistant Provincial Grand Master/s, and Provincial Grand Officers present and past
9. The Worshipful Master
10. The Visitors/Guests
11. Absent Brethren
12. The Tyler's Toast

There are yet other toasts that sneak in as well, on occasions. Of course, a response is only given if one (or more) recipients are present. Certainly at an Installation Dinner, at least, that will be more than a few...



A Ladies Dinner in England.

The Toast List at Victorian Festive Boards is less extensive, mainly because we do not have Provincial Grand Lodges in this State. Even so, our Toast List (The Queen and the Craft, the Grand Lodge, the Master, the Visitors, and Tyler's Toast) is predicable and if regularly heard (as you do) is very repetitive. In my long experience, Masters who respond to the *Visitor's Toast* invariably parrot virtually the same words that most Masters before them have said ('Visiting is the life blood of Freemasonry', 'I'd like to thank the ladies for the flowers', etc). Of course, at Lodge Epicurean and Lodge Amalthea we have largely done away with toasts and responses.

It is worth noting that lodge dinners (as opposed to 'Festive Boards') are very common across the Masonic world. Virtually all

European Lodges hold a quality dinner after meetings, for example. The Americans are a bit different. The Festive Board, on the English model, has never been part of American Masonry. It has been asked – *Why is that the case?* The simple answer is that American Masonry was born and developed (from England) in the 18th Century and was well established with its own customs prior to the Union of the *Antients* and *Moderns* onto the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813. English lodges today and those that descend from England AFTER 1813 (such as those of Australian Masonry) follow post-1813 English practices. By 1813 the Americans had long since followed their own course.

....and the development of English Festive Boards as they exist today is certainly post-1813. After a typical American lodge meeting, there is no dinner of any sort. Many lodges will have what is usually called a 'collation'. This is a brief, very light supper – but certainly with no toasts or anything similar. An American lodge may hold a dinner in association with the annual Installation of Master – not necessarily on the same day; but again, no toasts, usually.

In some American states it is not unusual to hold a dinner when a Third Degree is performed – and typically this is held in the middle of the ceremony! Half way through the Third Degree the lodge will be 'called off' and the dinner held. After dinner, it is back to the lodge room to complete the ceremony! Of course, we would never dream of doing such a thing – aside from the fact that 'after a few drinks', one might consider, the charges delivered in the second part of the ceremony could be a bit shaky! Indeed – unless you appreciate that in almost every state in America alcohol is not permitted in association with any lodge meal or supper – it is simply not permitted on Masonic premises. This is slowly changing in some States.

So, the vast majority of American lodges are what we would call 'Temperance Lodges' – no booze! Indeed there were, historically, a significant number of 'Temperance Lodges' in Victoria that had no alcohol at their festive Boards. There were some lodges too, where beer was only brought out 'after the Visitor's Toast' or something similar – although the true answer to this practice was as much about minimizing the costs on lodge funds as to diminishing the alcoholic intake of members. Needless to say, 'Temperance Lodges' have long since gone – I doubt if any still exist, as such, in Victoria.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

To what extent were old Customs and Symbols abandoned at the time of the Union of the two English Grand Lodges in 1813?

This is an interesting question which was dealt with by WBro T Haunch in his Prestonian Lecture for 1972 – “it is not in the Power of any Man...”.

WBro. Haunch states that the fundamentals of the system of Freemasonry remained unchanged. It is possible to gain some idea of the variations which must have existed in the English Craft by comparison with the workings of the Irish, Scottish and to some extent the American Constitutions.

American printed *Monitors* and *Lodge Manuals* provide interesting evidence on these points. Since they were derived in the first instance from English practice or publications originating in England before 1813 they give an indication of features which disappeared from English Craft Masonry at or shortly after the Union. American publications sometimes include engravings of the emblems and symbols involved.

Among these will be found many of those which appear on pre-1813 English Jewels and Regalia, Masonic pottery and porcelain, furniture, tracing boards, emblematic charts and certificates and so on, but no longer figure in the English Craft Degrees. To quote but a few examples by way of illustration:

- The Trowel, emblematically for the spreading of the cement of brotherly love and affection

What is the significance of the Five-Pointed Star in Freemasonry?

It is an ancient talisman and the design was frequently used by Operative Masons as a Mark engraved on stones in ancient buildings (i.e. a Mason's Mark). The Five-Pointed Star is stated to refer to:

- The five who hold a Lodge.
- The Five Senses — Seeing, Hearing, Feeling, Tasting and Smelling, indicating perfect health of body and mind.

The Five-Pointed Star is sometimes referred to as the *Pentalpha*, meaning five letter As – which, if arranged in a circle

- The Beehive, the emblem of industry, whose example urges man to add to the common store of knowledge so that he does not become a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society
- The Hour-glass and Scythe, emblems respectively of human life and of time, serving to remind us of the transitory nature of our existence here on earth
- The Pot of Incense, an emblem of that most acceptable sacrifice, a pure heart; and many others.

Then there are sundry features such as the *Middle Chamber Lecture* with its homilies on the Five Noble orders of Architecture and the Five Senses of Human Nature — Hearing, Seeing, Feeling, Smelling and Tasting — which originally appeared in print in Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*. The Five Senses did not survive the Union in England, and the Five Noble Orders remain in the ritual passing references only (they are still more fully described in the Craft Lectures).

It seems then, that what the Lodge of Reconciliation (which settled the ritual after the Union) aimed to do, and what in a large measure it succeeded in doing, was to cut through the thicket of the accretions of the years to get back to the heart of things, and re-establish English Freemasonry on the basis of 'Pure Antient Masonry'.

with the vertices outwards, form a Five-Pointed Star. According the *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* it is a Pythagorean symbol, but is not mentioned in Masonic ritual, and seems never to have been a Masonic emblem.

The Blazing Star in the centre of the Mosaic Pavement is a quite different symbol. The claim by some Brethren that the Five-Pointed Star refers to the Five Points of Fellowship seems to be an attempt to find an explanation for something which has most probably found its way into Freemasonry by accident.