

MASONIC MUSINGS

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Welcome to *Issue Sixteen*, the fourth for 2014. In this Edition I print the wonderful address given at Lodge Amalthea's May meeting by WBro David Beagley, PGStdB – *Freemasonry and the Enlightenment*. David Beagley is a Past Master of the Golden & Corinthian Lodge No 7 and Jubilee Lodge No 125 (UGLV), a member of the Correspondence Circle of The Lodge of Research 218 (UGLV), and was *the Kellerman Lecturer for Victoria* at the 2008 ANZMRC Conference. He is a member of the working group that designs and delivers the *Certificate of Masonic Studies* in Victoria, and lectures in Literature and Literacy Education at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

Of course, as usual, a question and answer follows...!

Fraternal regards,
Kent Henderson.

Freemasonry and the Enlightenment

The origins of our Freemasonry, as we are well aware, is a matter of heated argument. Was it Scottish, or English, or go much further back? Is there a direct link to King Solomon, Pythagoras, or Hermes Trimegistus? Did Hiram Abiff even exist? How much influence did the Gothic cathedral builders have, or the Lombard Comacine masters, or the Knights Templar? There is certainly plenty to argue about!

What we can definitely say about the early history of Freemasonry, as we practice it, is that its form and philosophies are largely a product of that vibrant period of European history that we call The Enlightenment or, to be more correct, simply Enlightenment.

In 1784, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant asked “Was ist Aufklärung?”, “What is Enlightenment”, giving the name that would stick to the whole 18th century in Europe. Kant was actually answering the original question that had been put by the Reverend Johann Friedrich Zöllner in the magazine *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin Monthly). Kant argued that "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity." He saw this immaturity as self-inflicted not from a lack of understanding, but from the lack of courage to use one's reason,

intellect, and wisdom without the guidance of another. He declared that the motto of enlightenment should be "Sapere aude"! – Dare to be wise!



Bro. Immanuel Kant

This approach - this challenge to personal identity and understanding - really does define the intellectual turmoil that had been going on in France, Germany, Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, even Russia over the previous 7 or 8 decades. Just think, in 1784 when this question was asked, the French Revolution that would finally sweep the idea of the divine right of kings from Europe was just 5 years away.

The American States had rebelled against British rule 8 years earlier, declaring that the people decided the sovereign authority that would rule them (bit of a comeuppance for Britain, given that it had done the same 140 years earlier when they chopped the head off Charles I). The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, changing nations and their populations from rural, agricultural economies, to industrial, urban factory and machine-driven powerhouses. In 4 years, Australia would become one of the last parts of the great jigsaw of European expansion and colonisation around the world.

In the world of ideas, Diderot's *Encyclopedie* had been working on its aim of changing how people think for some 30 years, and was giving just as much credence to the mechanical arts as to the classic and aesthetic. Mozart was reaching the peak of his powers, replacing the precision of Baroque music with the emotion and enthusiasms of Classical, and helping to make opera the major public musical form. A new form of reading, the novel, was establishing itself as the way to tell stories and printers were churning out books by the thousands. John Wesley was preaching evangelical Christianity and personal religious fervour.

In all facets of European society, the decades of the 18th century were filled with change and challenge, and they created the modern society that we have today. And Freemasonry was an active and typical element in this huge social upheaval, right from the start of the century. From the first Grand Lodge in 1717, through the rapid expansion of lodges in England, Scotland, Ireland and then into continental Europe and the British colonies, through the strident opposition of the Catholic Church and the printed exposures (which

led to the swapping of the 1st and 2nd degree words), the split between the Ancients and Moderns, into the foment of the American and French Revolutions, Freemasonry was active, growing and involved in society.



Bro. Voltaire

But HOW, exactly, was it involved? For that, we need first to consider some **historiography**. The traditional view of history is that it is driven by Great Concepts - the great "isms". Marxism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Racism, Humanism, Feminism, all these 'Isms' have provided a theoretical base from which historians have interpreted the events and issues of the world. This, in turn, creates the assumption that history is a progression of 'big movements' that each have their day. Indeed, these are usually more 'Isms': Capitalism, Imperialism, Communism, Colonialism, Fascism, Sexism, Economic Rationalism. These 'Isms' enable historians to place individual details into a much greater context, to explain how single events can fit a pattern of predictable activities and outcomes, and how the decisions of individual people can be predicted or interpreted as the inevitable consequence of their larger social situations. This is historiography, the examination of HOW the interpretation of history can create understandings and impressions that, in turn, enable further predictions of human activity.

One of the consequences of this historiographical approach is that these “Great Isms” require “Great Influences” and, so, a typical, traditional interpretation of Freemasonry in the French Revolution, for instance, sees it in conspiratorial terms. After noting such figures as Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Danton, Abbé Sieyès and Lafayette, the simple logic is often “These men were Freemasons. These men were leaders of the Revolution. Therefore, Freemasonry led the Revolution.” The same logic can, and is, applied to the American War of Independence with Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Paul Revere.

I would like to argue that the opposite is, in fact, the case. Freemasonry was a major player in the 18th century precisely because virtually all its members were **NOT** Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Franklin, Washington or Paul Revere, or even Mozart, Haydn, Goethe or Sir Joseph Banks. They were ordinary, everyday people who found an interest in ideas and followed it in their ordinary, everyday lives. However, first let us look at what makes this period of thinking so distinctive and tumultuous, and consider not only how Freemasonry played a part in this thinking, but how the principles and tenets we profess today are direct products of this time.

If the 18th century was a period of change, then what changed? I would like to focus on three major features now commonly associated with The Age of Enlightenment that are also exemplified in Freemasonry. They are Deism (the definition of God as a Supreme Being), Individualism and the challenge to traditional authority, and the search for Knowledge.

The Inquisitor is a fine novel by Sydney author Catherine Jinks, a medieval murder mystery along the lines of Ellis Peter’s *Brother Cadfael* stories. However, unlike Cadfael and his modern forensic methods, the monk in *The Inquisitor* who is called on to solve the particularly brutal murder applies the beliefs of his time - the 13th century - and therefore has to list Satan as one of the prime suspects in the case.

Prior to the 18th century, the Christian world view had God as an active and interventional force in society, as was His antithesis Satan. This view allowed those social forces that spoke on God’s behalf to entrench themselves in power and influence. By declaring that their authority to rule came from God, monarchs were unquestioned. By presenting and interpreting the words of God, the Church could demand contributions and accumulate immense wealth. So, for centuries, the divine right of kings and the canonical authority of the Church provided a stable foundation for social structure. The King ruled through the nobility and the commoners did what they were told. Similarly with the Church, the Pope ruled through the bishops and the commoners did what they were told. Of course there were many instances over these centuries where individual kings and popes were challenged and overthrown, but they were immediately replaced by more of the same. The structure was largely unchallenged.

The change began in a mixture of politics and science in the 16th century during what we call the Renaissance. In England, Henry VIII wanted a divorce, as we know, but the Pope would not give him one, so Henry simply declared that the Pope did not speak for God or the Church, and set up an alternative, the Church of England. Luther, Calvin and other religious thinkers felt the same in relation to the Church’s wealth and worldliness. This would probably have remained one of the regular challenges to an individual pope, had not some scientists also been publishing some new ideas. Copernicus and Galileo had been looking at the stars through the new-fangled telescope and, despite the best efforts of the Church, it soon became obvious that the Earth was not the centre of Creation but a relatively minor planet orbiting the Sun in a huge universe.

Then a few years later people like Isaac Newton found that the whole celestial and terrestrial process actually ran itself, through immutable laws like gravity, motion, inertia and acceleration. God was not there as the interventional Divine Puppet Master pulling the everyday strings - it all ran like clockwork (another new invention of the time!).

So, with the politics of the Protestant Reformation challenging the authority of the Church to speak for God, and the scientific discoveries challenging the theology of the active intervening God, a new definition was needed. There was still no question that God might not exist, but HOW did He exist? The new discoveries of science had to be integrated, as well as the capacity of people on earth to make these momentous decisions. Therefore, the traditional Christian God of Pope, kings, Church, cathedrals and bishops, inquisitions and heresies, Crusades and old power, became the Great Watchmaker of the Mechanical Universe, the entity that built it all, set the parameters, wound it up and let it go.

This is the Deistic view of God as Creator, Law giver and ultimate authority, but largely non-interventionist. From this view, we (as people) have the capacity to make our own decisions and our own mistakes, and we certainly have been working on that ever since!

You can see how this Great Watchmaker is, thus, easily defined as the Great Architect of the Universe, the Grand Geometrician, The Most High, and how this definition may be applied to any monotheistic religion - Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and so on. And therefore, from its early days, Freemasonry did! As a result, it was one of the very first public institutions in Britain to admit Jews on an equal footing to Christians, though not without some dissent. The arguments over the de-christianising of the ritual soon after the creation of the mother Grand Lodge in 1717 still come up now and then. Yet, as our ritual is so strongly based in the Old Testament, it is difficult to argue against it. Freemasonry saw, and sees, God as the Deity of ALL men.

Those first moves to a codified ritual demonstrating this Deistic view in the 1720s and 30s are very interesting in that Anderson and Desaguliers, the key contributors, were both Anglican clergymen, so their theology by this time allowed this new way of seeing God, and it also shows why the Roman Catholic Church was so quick to condemn the Craft.

You can see, therefore, how this move to a Deistic religious view leads us directly to other key features of this century of Enlightenment - the Challenge to traditional authority by Individualism, and the desire by these individuals for Knowledge. What made the people of the 18th century different to those of the 17th? What made them so prepared to accept and promote these new ways of looking? Well, actually they were not all that different really, not in Britain at least. It was more that they now had time to stop and think about these ideas, and the capacity to discuss and develop them.

Challenge had been a major feature of British society through the 17th century but the decades of on-and-off civil war had tended to keep the general population a little preoccupied. The rise of parliamentary power against Charles I leading to his overthrow and beheading, the civil war and the republic under Cromwell, the reinstatement of the monarchy under Charles II, then the religious wars between James II and his sister Mary and her husband William of Orange, Anne's brief reign and succession by a minor German prince in George I rather than the Scottish and Catholic James Stuart all took place in a 70 year period to 1715 - one person's lifetime! So is it any wonder that philosophical discussion was not a major feature of ordinary public life until the dust settled?

By George's accession, English society needed and desperately wanted stability. So, when just 2 years later 4 lodges met to form a Grand Lodge of Speculative Freemasons, the atmosphere was ripe to contemplate all the turmoil and challenge that had dominated public life and, so, people did.

The Age of the Enlightenment was, above all, an age of 'genteel sociability', where clubs and societies, coffee houses and salons gave people, especially the newly prosperous and newly literate 'middle classes,' the opportunity to mix, to exchange ideas and to discuss the new concepts of science, politics, religion and social values that seemed to be blossoming everywhere.

This was the search for knowledge - the middle class wanted to know and to understand this

world that was offering them so much potential. Outram (1995), in a nicely named chapter, “Coffee houses and Consumers: the social context of the Enlightenment”, notes these

new institutions and organizations where ideas could be explored and discussed. Some of these institutions, like masonic lodges, learned academies and societies, were formal affairs, whose membership was carefully controlled. Others, such as public lectures, coffee houses, lending libraries, art exhibitions, operatic and theatrical performances, were nearly all commercial operations, open to all who could pay and thus provided ways in which many different social strata could be exposed to the same ideas. (p. 15)

Several points to note here: middle classes, the public and coffee. This new social stratum, the “middle class” was just finding its way. As industrialisation changed economies from a land-owning basis to a business enterprise form, then shopkeepers, traders, entrepreneurs, lawyers, clerks, accountants and all the individual careers that keep this system going found that they had independent, personal income and the leisure time to use it for more than just survival.

Let us not underestimate the power of tea, coffee and chocolate in all this. These were new luxuries that had been drifting into Britain through the colonial expansion of the previous century and were about to be part of a flood as the Empire grew. Now they had a market - a clientele who had the time, inclination and money to sit and chat - and so coffee, tea and chocolate houses sprang up in all the cities. So did opera houses, theatres, libraries, lecture rooms and Masonic lodges - in fact, just as this lodge does with its regular consideration of intellectual issues in a convivial atmosphere. People wanted change because the world of the immediate past had been so tumultuous, but they also wanted stability and time to settle things down. So, in true British stereotypical form they chatted, over a cup of tea, or arranged a lodge meeting, and the socially levelling effect of these shared institutions subtly became accepted.

What did they chat about? This is where the Challenge and Individualism part comes in. Ideas like Deism certainly were part of it, along with the new scientific discoveries (Desaguliers was not only a clergyman, and the 3rd Grand Master, but also a friend of Isaac Newton’s, and a scientific pioneer who gave lectures in pneumatics, hydraulics and early steam engines). General challenges to authority were certainly in there too. Opera was definitely not the rather exclusive and stylised art form of today, but often closer to our cabaret, stand up comedy and political satire performances. Consider the great operas of Mozart from the mid to late 18th century. So many of them deal with challenges to authority: Figaro parodying the foolish excesses of the aristocracy, *Don Giovanni* similarly attacking the immorality that so often accompanies wealth and power, and there are clear Masonic messages in the need for learning in *The Magic Flute*, and the role of the wise master/mentor in *Magic Flute*, *Così fan Tutti* and *Abduction from the Seraglio*.



Bro. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Politics definitely was part of these conversations and discussions. After all, while there was now a monarch back on the English throne, the Civil War had entrenched the Parliament and elected government as the actual day-to-day rulers of the land. Here is a clear Masonic connection; our lodge governance structure is largely the political system of 18th century Britain. We have (in theory) a single monarch as the head of state (the Master) who has the capacity to be all powerful,

but he is chosen by his constituency to be their sovereign and, in practice, follows a constitution and is dependent on the good will of a group of ministers (the Secretary, DC, Treasurer etc.). This is also why the spread of Freemasonry from Britain to mainland Europe was seen by many of those rulers to be so revolutionary; France, Austria, Prussia, Russia were all still autocratic monarchies. As men (and women) joined lodges where these ideas and structures were not only discussed, but also practised, and each of them (no matter how humble their origin) had the capacity to rise to be the Master, the monarch, of that lodge, and they practised politics by voting, following a constitution, considering candidates, it would not take long for them to start questioning “It works in lodge, why shouldn’t it work in society?”

The Public was becoming a force. German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in the 1950s coined the phrase, “the public sphere” to describe these people of the 18th century. He explored the actions and thoughts of ‘little people’ who would not normally attract the attention of historians. Not the generals or explorers, or politicians or monarchs, or the great writers or thinkers whose actions and names resonate down the years. Habermas looked at the audiences of those thinkers and writers, the attenders of the salons, the readers of the books, and postulated how their thinking and reading and polite intellectual discourse could have wrought great social changes.

Recent historians such as Margaret Jacob and Steven Bullock have taken this further in their studies of Freemasonry. The Public changed in the 18th century from being the passive audience of the displays of power and wealth of monarchs and churches (pageants, statues, cathedrals etc.) to being the thinkers and active agents of ideas and change.

They expressed themselves in pamphlets and books, they chatted in lodges and lectures, they sought out opportunities to learn and show that learning. Jacob and Bullock argue that these ordinary people were the real revolutionaries of the Enlightenment because they WERE ordinary.

Chatting calmly and quietly in lodges meant the ideas of fraternity, equality and benevolence became integrated into the mainstream of social life and quietly, subtly became the norm. Throughout the century the tenets of Freemasonry became integrated into ordinary, everyday life.

Freemasons did not lead the storming of the Bastille; they did not need to, because those revolutionary principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity had been long established in the people through lodges, salons, lecture rooms and coffee houses.

This is why the mid-century movement known as “Enlightened Despotism”, where European monarchs such as Frederick the Great of Prussia, and Maria Theresa of Austria attempted to modernise their countries, was doomed to failure. These monarchs were still trying to order and demand the changes as supreme rulers, when their societies had already moved on from that principle. Maria Theresa is often seen as the model for the villainous Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, as she tried to ban Masonic lodges, while her son the Emperor Joseph, who allowed them, was the Master Sarastro. Mozart and the librettist Schikaneder were both Freemasons in Vienna at this time.

Freemasonry provided an opportunity for ordinary eighteenth-century people to consider Great Ideas. They could discuss them, they could experience their reality and practise their social enactment. They could take a vocabulary of concepts and symbols out of the lodge and into their daily lives. Virtually all of them remained ordinary people, but their experience and practices and vocabulary could enable ‘the Public’ to assume that fraternity, equality and benevolence were desirable and normal social virtues.

Of course these qualities had been appreciated before, and of course Freemasonry cannot claim sole ownership of them. But at a time when weaknesses in traditional systems of government, social structure and beliefs were building great tensions in the societies of Europe, Freemasonry provided an opportunity, if a brother wanted, to explore alternatives.

It was the fact that virtually all Craft brethren were **NOT** Voltaire or Benjamin Franklin or George Washington that made this influence so great. These men would have been Great Figures in any case; their intellects, their charisma, their actions saw to that. But the ordinary brethren of the eighteenth-century made Freemasonry and the tenets it promoted a part of the everyday social fabric. It was not a Revolution, or a Conspiracy or a Great Ism. All of these require challenge and confrontation. It was simply that these ordinary brethren chose to make their Freemasonry a part of the daily lives of ordinary people.

And today, how much do we make the tenets of Freemasonry part of the everyday social fabric of OUR society? We have as much religious strife and war as the 17th and 18th century, if not more. Should we offer our view of the Great Architect as a unifying view? We have a new and far-reaching public forum for chatting and sharing of ideas - the internet. - just as the Enlightenment had the public press and printers. Do we use it to offer those ideas outside the lodge? Things have not really changed that much since the time of the Enlightenment, so we really should learn from the lessons and achievements of that time.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Why are we said to be Antient, Free and Accepted Masons? And why are Masons called Speculative?

The Operative Masons were skilled artisans and expert Craftsmen. There is considerable argument about the word 'free' in our title. The following suggestions have been made: (1) They were free to pursue their labours without too much interference. (2) They were free men - not in captivity or slaves - not

serfs. (3) After qualifying as Craftsmen they were free of the guild or trade organization which enforced apprenticeship rules, and could work where they liked. (4) They were workers in free-stone which is any stone which can be cut, smoothed and carved in any direction.

Many writers consider that the Freemason was such because of his skilled knowledge and special abilities which set him free of the restrictions imposed on those less well qualified in those times. Unlike almost every other Craftsman the mediaeval Mason was called upon to build anywhere regardless of town regulations, and it is possible that this knowledge and abilities set him free of those *Conditions, Rules and Customs* and gave rise to the term 'Free' Mason.

On the other hand it is known that in Scotland in the mid-sixteenth century the prefix applied to those Craftsmen who were free to exercise their trades by virtue of due service and qualification, hence such terms as 'free mason' and 'free carpenter'.



Operative Masons from an Egyptian tomb

The late Bro Douglas Knoop considered that the term was originally an abbreviation of 'Freestone Mason' and this is the generally accepted opinion among the best authorities.

A Freestone Mason was he who cut and shaped the finer kinds of stone (called *freestone*) - this required more skill than the 'rough mason' possessed. He worked the rough stone of inferior quality.

The word 'accepted' carries a special meaning. During the later years of Operative Masonry many thoughtful men sought membership in the Operative Lodges of the day, not with the idea of practising Operative

Masonry, but to partake of the learning to be had from such an association. These men were admitted into the Craft as 'Accepted' Masons to distinguish them from Operative Masons.

The word *speculative* is used in the sense that the Masonry of today is theoretical and not concerned with practical building. Its goal is the pursuit of knowledge, not the construction of edifices. Speculative Masonry began with the practice of admitting to membership in Operative Lodges men who were not practical builders or stone cutters but who were interested in the moral, ethical and philosophical teachings of the Fraternity.

The word *Antient* applied to the *Antients* Grand Lodge (founded in 1751) which was originally formed as a rival to the original Grand Lodge of England (founded in 1717), known as the *Moderns*.

When the two Grand Lodges merged to become the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, the word Antient was deliberately kept in the designation - thus the full title: *The United Grand Lodge of England of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons*.

All Grand Lodges which derive from England post 1813 almost invariably use the same title - thus the *United Grand Lodge of Victoria of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons*.

It is different in the United States of America. As will be appreciated, a very large number of lodges were chartered in America long before the creation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813. These lodges either had an Antients charter or a Moderns Charter. Similarly, many American state-based Grand Lodges were founded before 1813.

Generally speaking, where most existing local lodges were of Antient origin, the new Grand Lodge became *Ancient, Free and Accepted* (such as the *Grand Lodge of North Carolina of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons*) whereas those of Moderns origin just became *Free and Accepted* (such as the *Grand Lodge of New York of Free and Accepted Masons*). Of course, the Americans spell the word Antient as Ancient...