

# UNITED GRAND LODGE OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Official opening of the Masonic Centre in Sydney, New South Wales.

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Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren, I will not take up valuable time by announcing the numerous and varied categories of Masons of so many jurisdictions whom I have the honour to be addressing today: it will be sufficient for a Victorian to admit that Australia has probably never seen such a gathering before, and I would like to add as a Gunner what marvellous opportunities of promotion a well aimed twenty-five pounder shell would create!

The subject which I have allotted myself and from which I will try not to diverge is "Whence come we and whither directing our steps?" Some of it is purely historical and I hope no expert historian of Masonry will pick too many holes in it: the rest, as you will discover, forms the basis of my own personal Masonic philosophy. Differ from it, if and how you will, but leave me my own beliefs. It is our proud boast that the roots of Masonry are lost in antiquity, and the reasons why so many of them have been lost will be described in the course of this address. We speak of Moses as being our first "Grand Master", and more specifically our ritual is based on incidents during the construction of the first Temple at Jerusalem. Just what validity is there in our claim to be the historical or spiritual heirs of Moses and King Solomon? Is it a tenable hypothesis, or just a story based on scriptural mythology and conjured up from a fundamentalist view of the Bible with the imaginative longings of modern man superimposed? A little research and study can establish the reasonableness of such an hypothesis, and I would like very briefly to describe it to you.

Masonry is defined as "A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." The whole of what modern men called "morality" stems from the development of the idea of one spiritual, moral God. Moses is held up to us as the first developer of this idea, and as the first man who actually deduced moral principles from it. The idea had earlier been conceived by that elusive but probably historical figure we call Father Abraham, the first known recorded leader of the ancient Hebrews, though what his actual name was is certainly lost in antiquity.

But it was left to Moses, generations later, to carry the concept of God's chosen people a stage further, and above all to attempt to define the principles of morality which must please a spiritual God of love and mercy. To Moses, as readers of the Old Testament will well know, it was allowed only to lead his people to the Promised Land, and to build no more than an altar of stone to try to symbolise their worship of the one true God.

It was left to Solomon, the first powerful ruler of a settled and organised State of Israel, to build the first Temple. Solomon's was certainly not the first Temple ever built by man: Asia, North Africa and South America are covered with the ruins of more ancient structures dedicated to the sun, animals or long forgotten gods of man's own invention. But the history of the Jewish people amply indicates that Solomon's Temple was the first structure which ever existed on the face of this globe dedicated to the idea of a spiritual God; a God of love, of justice and of mercy; a God, who, of necessity, is veiled in allegory, can be pleased only by morality and

can be illustrated only by man-made symbols. Our Masonic story tells us, and there is no reason to doubt it, that Solomon had available locally the best material for the main structure of his Temple, stone as well as imported timber. Solomon can, therefore, be described as the first "Grand Master" of Masons, in that he was the first man who conceived, and presided over, the construction of the first Temple dedicated to the worship of God, who had chosen for His own purposes the Jews, the Children of Israel.

For the majority of those of us who are of Western European ancestry this idea has come down, developed in the Christian tradition and through the teachings and influence of Jesus. But Judaism was, and is, the original religion of the Most High God, to use a standard Irish Masonic expression, and Mohammedanism was another offshoot of Judaism, just as Christianity had been a few centuries earlier. In Western Europe when its people emerged from the Dark Ages, the same work and the same religious philosophy inevitably became associated throughout the centuries with those masons who were employed to build the greatest and most beautiful stone structures which Europe has given to mankind, namely the medieval cathedrals. What could be more natural than that they should link themselves to a great builder in the biblical past?

As far as the antecedents of English-speaking Freemasons are concerned, the original Freemasons were organised bodies of skilled men engaged, like King Solomon himself, in erecting Temples to the Most High. They congregated around what was known to them as their "lodge", which was possibly their workroom, and certainly their central point for assembly. Each such band of Masons was presided over by a master mason and came to be known by name from its meeting places: we can find numerous points of observance in Masonic Lodges of today traces of which derive from rules of practice and behaviour dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A covenant entered into in 1552 between the freemasons engaged on the fabric of York Minster and the Dean and Chapter, is full of information concerning their "ancient usages" which the ecclesiastical authorities agreed to maintain. Rules were embodied for the direction of the workmen at both labour and refreshment, signals were given to resume their work by an act of knocking; none could be engaged without being tested; and none was admitted save under oath taken on the Holy Book.

Westminster Abbey archives of the fourteenth century likewise bear testimony to the presence among the workers of lodges of Freemasons, and some evidence can be found in nearly all the great medieval ecclesiastical centres. Our Grand Lodge Library in London contains volumes by numerous authors, notably John Aubrey and Sir William Dugdale, writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which refer to Masonic organisations as being "ancient". Elias Ashmole, after whom the world famous Ashmolean Museum at Oxford is named, has left a record that he was initiated in a Lodge in Warrington, Lancashire, on the 16th October 1646. But he was no builder, and we have now come to the point where the operative Masons first take in the speculative -and in quite a short time are swallowed up by them.

The critical year for the whole revolution of modern, organised Masonry as we know it throughout the world is 1717. It is instructive to look at the historical background of this period to try to deduce exactly why Masonry became formalised when it did, and then developed so rapidly. Britain at that time presented a picture of enormous contrasts. The Hanoverian dynasty was safely ensconced on the throne. The succession was secure; Marlborough's successive battles had reduced the France of Louis XIV to a point where it could no longer menace the stability of Britain, or keep her out of the trade routes of the world. British civilisation was entering a period when it reached its artistic peak. The physical evidence of

the time, in palaces and country houses, furniture and magnificent paintings, shows that we were approaching a period of elegance and world-wide renown seldom equalled in any country before or since. Political peace and stability were entering a phase unknown to previous history since the fall of Rome, and the modern machinery of popular, elected parliamentary government was just beginning to be worked out by agreement rather than by violence. One of the greatest pioneers of modern Masonry -and least reliable of historians - James Anderson, a Presbyterian clergyman in London, could write in 1723, "the freeborn British Mason, disentangled from foreign and civil wars, can enjoy the good fruits of peace and liberty", and went on to compile the first Book of Constitutions of Freemasonry. Against this background the life of the vast mass of the ordinary people was poor, nasty, brutish and short. The merciless satires which have come down to us from Hogarth and the authors of the "Beggar's Opera" illustrate life as it was known to the majority of ordinary people. It was thus an age of savage contrasts. Moreover, in an age which saw the dawn of elegance, and entitled itself "The Age of Reason", religion and morals were generally at a low ebb. But there were men of morals and ideals in many walks of life who were inspired by the grandeur, challenged by the sordidness, and for the first time allowed, by the absence of tyrannical government, to concentrate their minds on endeavouring to improve the lot of their fellow men. This may seem to us now just a commonplace, but in fact before the early Georgian period in England it was an idea that had rarely occurred to anyone and, even when it had, few had been in a position to do anything constructive about it.

One product of this new age was a tremendous upsurge in growth of social clubs and intellectual gatherings in towns where all kinds met to discuss everything in a way that had never occurred since the rival philosophies of ancient Greece; nearly all the great English learned societies were formed in the first half of the eighteenth century. It, therefore, followed naturally from the conditions of the day that Masonic Lodges, fossilised remnants of medieval bodies whose ancestry had long been lost in history and whose operative functions had disappeared, should attract the attention of people of standing as ready made forums for intellectual, social and, let us make no mistake about it, convivial activity - though it had been a long and often imperceptible process from operative to free and accepted or speculative masonry.

The exact number of Lodges in London in 1717 is uncertain, but there were definitely four, and of them quite a lot is known. They were the original four Lodges who met together in 1716 at a pub called "The Apple Tree" and decided to form themselves into an overall ruling body, which they decided to entitle "The Grand Lodge". Having elected the oldest living Master Mason amongst them into the Chair, they held a feast on St John the Baptist's Day, 24th June 1717, and formally elected Anthony Sayer as "Grand Master".

The four original London Lodges responsible for this movement play a unique and honoured place in Masonic history. Unfortunately one of them ceased to exist in 1737 and all trace of it has been lost; but the other three, through various changes of name and number, still exist on the register of the United Grand Lodge of England, and they are now No.2, the Lodge of Antiquity; No.4, Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge; and No.12, Lodge of Fortitude and Old Cumberland. It is interesting, too, to note that these grew Out of the old Lodges of "operative" Masons, and in their early days in most of them the majority of their members may still have been operative Masons. They were all, until that historic moment in 1717, entirely self-governing, yet, according to their hallowed tradition, "holding fast to the ancient customs and old charges".

In further studying this story we discover why so much of what must have been written down has also disappeared, and why so much that we would like to know can never be discovered. In 1720 George Paine, the Grand Master for the year, being a civil servant of strong and energetic character with a tidy administrative mind, drew up the first regulations and founded the first definite body of laws for the guidance of the newly formed Grand Lodge. To assist in this work he appealed to all known Lodges to send in whatever documents they did possess, even including the ancient minutes of operative Lodges, where these existed, so that a proper basis for the rules of Grand Lodge could be drawn up. Some Lodges were so horrified by what they regarded as this shocking breach of secrecy that they burned what records they did have rather than surrender them to this new upstart self-styled higher authority. Paine, however, proceeded in his design, was supported by other Lodges who had joined those forming the original Grand Lodge, and ordered to be written down the basic set of Constitutions for Lodges which is still practised throughout the world.

The two most important administrators and organisers of early Grand Lodge days in England were James Anderson, whom I have already mentioned, and John Desaguliers. Desaguliers was born Jean Theo Desaguliers at La Rochelle and was brought to England as an infant of two years by his father, a Huguenot pastor, in 1685. He graduated from Christ Church, Oxford, in 1710, was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1714, and was for many years the Minister of the French Protestant Church in London. He was the instigator and a member of the original committee appointed in 1725 to organise the General Charity, and five years later initiated the Standing Committee to regulate and dispose of charitable funds which is the direct ancestor of all present Boards of Benevolence throughout the Craft. He designed the first distinctive clothing and jewels of Grand Officers from which our modern ones have developed.

The first Book of Constitutions, as ordered by George Paine in 1720, was drawn up finally in 1723 by James Anderson, and was based upon his study of the rare and uncoordinated records of the various Craft guilds of the late fourteenth century which were available to him, and upon his own genius for invention.

One of the great features of this period was Anderson's insistence, himself a Christian clergyman, on "the Universality of Masonry" - in other words, that to be a Mason required a belief in the eternal God, and a dedication to the moral principles, but not necessarily an adherence to Christian practice and theology. The operative Lodges, having for centuries been closely associated with religion, were of course closely associated with the Christian faith. It should be remembered too that there were no Jews in England from their ejection by Edward I, who reigned from 1272 to 1307, till Cromwell re-admitted them in the 1650s. It is greatly to the credit of Anderson, Desaguliers and others that they pointed out that the entire origin of Masonry is not Christian but Jewish; that there is not a recorded character in Masonic ritual who is not Jewish; and the Jews, like Mohammedans and many others, worship the same "spiritual" God as Christians do. Had this broad and enlightened view not carried the day, clearly Masonry could not make claim to universality, nor could much of the development of Masonry in non-Christian countries ever have taken place. It is a curious fact that the two pioneers who did most to regularise and organise English Masonry were a Frenchman and a Scot, both of them Ministers of the Gospel, but neither of the Church of England "as by law established": is there a moral to be drawn from this? We have now reached historical times and records: the past has been a matter of theory and personal preference, but form myself I believe the origin and foundation of Freemasonry as we know it to have been what I have

described, summed up as a gradual take-over by the educated classes - a smaller minority than it is today - of what remained of the old operative Lodges with their fine traditions of service to the Queen and the Craft, but now no longer in a position to serve their original purpose. We do not know how many of such Lodges there were scattered over England - it is even said that some existed in the original American Colonies before 1717 - but many of our early Lodges almost certainly originated before that date and gradually joined up with Grand Lodge as already going concerns. In my view the rapid spread of Freemasonry is only explicable on the basis that like was attracted to like and not that the original four Lodges almost at once hived off new Lodges all over the country.

I am going no further with the expansion of Freemasonry: on this subject to the making of many books there is no end - and to go on will be a weariness to the flesh: but I hope that I have said enough to show you, one and all, that the idea of Grand Lodge germinated in London, England: that even if - which we gladly admit - there are older Lodge records still extant in Scotland, the first controlling body came into being in the City of London in 1717 as the mother Grand Lodge of all, with the saving exception that Ireland and Scotland are our younger and very dear sisters. I do not believe that the philosophy of Anderson and Desaguliers in the early eighteenth century was much different from our own in the latter part of the twentieth: eternal verities do not change any more than landmarks. To me the eternal verities of Freemasonry are summed up in the 15th Psalm with its accent on Truth, the parable of the Good Samaritan for Relief and St Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians for Brotherly Love: but I would like to expand on these three Grand Principles and to invite you to ask yourselves, as I ask myself from time to time, whether and to what extent you practise them. It may be easier to answer that question if we remind ourselves of the definition of these principles given in the First Lecture.

First, BROTHERLY LOVE. "By the exercise of Brotherly Love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, the rich and poor, created by One Almighty Being, and sent into the world for the aid, support and protection of each other. On this principle Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and by its dictates conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance."

If this principle is put into practice, we receive the privilege of aid, support and protection and we assume the duty to give likewise; at the same time we eliminate all divisive prejudice arising from differences in race, colour, class and creed: how difficult but how challenging.

Secondly, RELIEF. "To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, particularly Masons, who are linked together in one dissoluble chain of sincere affection; hence to soothe the unhappy, sympathise in their misfortunes, compassionate their miseries and restore peace to their troubled minds, is the grand aim we have in view: on this basis we establish our friendships and form our connections." We all know that Charity is "that virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemason's heart"; but this principle goes much further. We do not only discharge this duty by giving money; it is a much wider concept, involving compassion, which enables us to recognise the needs of others even though they be unexpressed. We can put this principle into practice without spending a halfpenny, but not without giving of ourselves unstintingly, looking for no reward.

Thirdly, TRUTH. Truth "is a divine attribute and is the foundation of every Masonic virtue; to be good men and true is a lesson we are

taught at our Initiation; on this grand theme we contemplate, and by its unerring dictates endeavour to regulate our lives and actions. Hence, hypocrisy and deceit are, or ought to be, unknown to us, sincerity and plain dealing are our distinguishing characteristics, whilst the heart and tongue join in promoting each other's welfare, and rejoicing in the prosperity of the Craft." It is not enough to contemplate the V.S.L., considering it the unerring standard of truth; we have to translate its precepts into action. As Masons we cannot accept a half-truth or a compromise; we demand the highest standards in all our dealings with others. Again, what a challenge. If we practise all our grand principles, then the world will know that a Mason "is one to whom the burdened heart may pour forth its sorrow, to whom the distressed may prefer their suit, whose hand is guided by justice and whose heart is expanded by benevolence". BUT the world knows nothing of the sort at the moment. The world regards us as a secret society essentially concerned with the welfare of Masons and their dependants and possessing very few principles. Young men ought to be clamouring to join us, but they are not doing so, not because they cannot afford to but because they are given no sufficient indication of what we stand for - our system of morality and our concern for the whole human species.

I am convinced that Masonry requires from us a positive and not a passive role. To be worthy of our principles we must do something in the short span allowed to us to improve the society in which we live; we cannot properly sit back and leave the task to others. All of us are, of course, bound by the constraints of our obligations. Conditions vary greatly around the world and even between those parts which are represented here today. It would, therefore, be foolish for me to attempt to propose detailed actions we could all take. But I believe I can and should remind you of a well known and age old admonition which receives a good deal of attention in our rituals. Brethren, I refer to Precept or to use a more modern word - Example. If we - all of us - really practised the Principles and tenets of our Masonic Arts: if we truly lived them to the full in our public and private lives and in the administration of our Lodges, and even our Grand Lodges, then surely that part of the world with which we are connected would become a better place. Masonry must thereby attract to itself - as it has in the past - numbers of men who think as we do. Inevitably our influence will spread, and you and I, Brethren, must surely agree that that could only be to the benefit of mankind.