

The Regular Freemason

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This STB was extracted from a paper written by Bro. Michel Brodsky and published in Vol.106-1993 of Ars Quator Coronatorum (Transactions of Quator Coronati Lodge # 2076) This Paper describes the process by which Freemasons are deemed to be "regular" in English Lodges – Editor

Man, being a social animal, establishes very specific peculiar relationships between himself and those whom he encounters during his life: family, schools, business, church, sports clubs and Freemasonry are groups in which such relationship~ arise. They mature as his age increases; from a child dependent on parents he progresses to being a father and a grandfather. Similarly, the Freemason develops from an Entered Apprentice through degrees and offices until becoming the senior member of his lodge. If viewed within an historical perspective, there can be observed the transformation in these relationships when they are subjected to the changes in environment of the society in which we live.

The term 'Regular Freemason' represents a complex set of relations delineating the common field which binds the individual Freemason and organized Freemasonry. The boundaries of the field are expressed by 'landmarks', a distinctive word whose exact and comprehensive meaning, though never authoritatively defined or taught, can only be understood by a 'regular Freemason'.

Whichever theory of origin of Freemasonry is preferred, one may assume that, prior to the establishment in 1717 of the first Grand Lodge, the operative modes of recognition were sufficient to establish the quality of a visiting brother and indeed his right to visit and to obtain assistance in case of need. Freemasons in a given locality would know each other well. Visiting brethren had to prove themselves before being admitted into a lodge or petitioning for help, though it is conceivable that, as more lodges were established, some form of written recommendation may have been carried by those traveling far from home. The caution exercised toward a visitor, aimed both at the protection of the societies of Freemasonry and at the exclusion of Cowans and impostors from the benefit of charity, is evidenced in the first ritual texts In the early Masonic catechisms there are questions which a visitor had to answer before he could be admitted to a lodge. As soon as lodges began to work (independently, if the 'operative' option is favored) it was necessary to determine that he was a Freemason and that his

lodge and its members could be acknowledged as regular. When, through intervisitation. Ties between lodges became more formal, and as lodges gave allegiance to the Grand Lodge, it had to be understood by all that masonic duty included extending charitable assistance to a visiting brother.

Because in the eighteenth century there was neither social security nor personal or medical insurance, the problem of assistance to needy brethren was one that the young Grand Lodge of England had to tackle within its limited financial ability. Funds granted by the General Charity had to be directed exclusively to members of the regular Craft. This was possibly a contributing factor in persuading lodges to accede to the premier Grand Lodge and a place on its register offered at least a moral guarantee of reciprocity.

Changes in attitudes and the evolution of English society between 1640 and 1715 created a climate of opinion in which religious; tolerance. the transfer of political power from the King to Parliament, and the appearance of an executive capable of decision making created conditions in which Freemasonry could appear openly and grow. It included the coexistence of a large number of diverse denominations who had to comply with governments opposed to a monopolistic religious solution. Consequently many dissenters were tolerated as long as they did not represent a threat to the stability of the State. The concepts developed during the Civil War of the 1640s were translated into positive legislation, such as the imposed use of the English language in the Courts of Justice. On the other hand some laws were repealed such as those which led to censorship. Here was the foundation of modern democracy and it enabled Freemasons to meet openly and to associate themselves in a confederation of Lodges known as a Grand Lodge.

When the first ephemeral masonic lodges met in the middle of the seventeenth century a period of serious civil upheaval their status must have been precarious. The use of secret modes of recognition may have been borrowed from the operative craft with some of their symbols to protect the personal safety of the brethren as well as their workings. After the Jacobite rising of 1715 England was reasonably free of civil strife. This enabled Freemasonry to come into the open as an organization in 1717. Its survival required some specific conditions. among them an acknowledgment by the public and the State that though the society claimed to possess exclusive secrets its purpose was not to cover religious or political conspiracies. Those secrets enabled the society to exclude 'cowans and intruders' from its meetings

The concept of the 'Regular Freemason' originated with the need to protect the fraternity as a lay institution with its own charitable activity and to restrict access to private meetings assembled only for the purposes of Freemasonry The process called for internal legislative action by the Grand Lodge and the 'General Regulations' compiled in 1720 by George Payne then Grand Master. are included in the 'Constitutions of the Free-Masons' published under the editorship of James Anderson in 172s. They accurately define the relationship between the

lodge and the brethren, between the private lodges and Grand Lodge and between the Grand Lodge and the Grand Master. Of special interest are:

VIII. If any Set or Number of Masons shall take Upon themselves to form a Lodge without the Grand-Master's warrant. the regular Lodges are not to countenance them, nor own them as fair Brethren.... This does not require comment and is still valid today.

XIII. They shall also consider of the most prudent and effectual Methods of collecting and disposing of what Money shall be given to or lodged with them in Charity, towards the Relief only of any True Brother fallen into Poverty or Decay; but of none else: ...

This establishes the qualification of petitioners for such charity.

The Constitutions of 1723 describe the base necessary for the government of the Craft but circumstances change and new rules were from time to time adopted by Grand Lodge. Some years later, the first edition being out of print, a 'New Book of Constitutions' was compiled and edited by James Anderson in 1738. The concept of the 'Regular Freemason' is not formulated as such but is implicit, as is demonstrated in:

VIII. (as modified on 31 March 1735)... The Grand Lodge decreed, that no Person so [clandestinely] made, nor any concerned in making him, shall be a Grand-Officer, nor an Officer of a particular Lodge, nor shall any such partake of the general Charity if they should come to want it.

No other definition of a 'Regular Freemason' was written during the next century and a half. While the obligations of Freemasons under the Grand Lodge are inherent in Article I of the 'Charges' in the 1723 Book of Constitutions, the concept of the 'Regular Freemason' in Grand Lodge rules is easier to define by omission than by affirmation. In 1755 Grand Lodge acted positively, prompted-we may assume-by the need to protect its Charity and to exclude from its provisions the members of the newly-formed Grand Lodge of the Antients. Thus:

"24 July 1755. Ordered that every Certificates granted to a Brother of his being a Mason shall for the future he sealed with the Seal of Masonry & signed by the G:S. for which Five Shillings shall be paid to the Use of the General Charity." And a year later there was another resolution:

"13 August 1756. Ordered that a Copper Plate be engraved for printing the Certificates to be granted a Brother of his being a Mason & that a Dye he cut & an Engine made wherewith to seal the same in consequence of the Order of the Q:C, held the 24th day of July 1755 so that the whole expense thereof do not exceed Twelve Guineas.

Ordered that the Treasurer do pay any Sum not exceeding Twelve Guineas for the said Plate Dye & Engine."

From this date onwards a 'Regular Freemason' is easy to identify. He is in good standing with his lodge, and he regularly pays his dues, and the lodge contributes as decided from time to time

by Grand Lodge-the specified sums to the General Charity and sends an annual list of its members to the Grand Secretary. These conditions, when fulfilled, enable the traveling brother to receive a printed and scaled Certificate identifying him as a fit and proper Freemason who will be welcomed in any lodge within the authority of the Grand Lodge of England. A similar procedure was enforced by the Grand Lodge of the Antients.

To this day, an English Freemason who carries a Grand Lodge Certificate, pays his dues and abides by the Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge of England is deemed a 'Regular Freemason'. He is entitled to visit any regular lodge and he enjoys all the privileges of membership of the Craft.

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