

The Relationship Between Lodges and Grand Lodge

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We wish to thank Bro. A. W. Wood for allowing MSA to extract this Short Talk Bulletin from a much larger paper (of the same title) delivered to United Master's Lodge #167 in July 1990. This is a Lodge of Masonic Research in Auckland New Zealand. Bro. Wood is a past master and now secretary of the Lodge.

The relationship between constituent Lodges and their Grand Lodge is extremely important. We hope this STB will help to clarify that relationship. – Editor

The first Grand Lodge was formed in London, shortly after the suppression of the Jacobite rising in 1715. Anderson's New Book of Constitutions of 1738 records that a few lodges at London finding themselves neglected by Sir Christopher Wren, thought fit to cement together under a Grand Master as the Center of Union and Harmony, viz. (here follow details of the four lodges at the Goose and Gridiron, Crown, Apple-Tree, and Rummer and Grapes).

They and some old Brothers met at the said Applerree, and having put into the Chair the oldest Master Mason (now the Master of a Lodge) they constituted themselves a GRAND LODGE pro Tempore in Due Form, and forthwith revived the Quarterly Communication of the Officers of Lodges (call'd the Grand Lodge) "resolv'd to hold the Annual ASSEMBLY and Feast, and then to chuse a GRAND MASTER from among themselves, till they should have the Honor of a Noble Brother at their Head."

The first meeting was held at the Goose and Gridiron Ale-house on 24 June, 1717, and Antony Sayer was elected and installed as Grand Master, before the brethren proceeded to dinner. The Grand Master commanded that the Masters and Wardens of lodges meet the Grand Officers every quarter in Communication. In fact the Grand Lodge only met annually for the feast for several years. Nevertheless, each meeting was called a Quarterly Communication, at whatever interval it met, and the Grand Lodge of England still maintains a quarterly Communication. The brethren who established the Grand Lodge claimed, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Anderson reported that they claimed, to be reviving the Grand Lodge. In his somewhat imaginative history of the Craft, Anderson mentions several assemblies of masons, but there is no real evidence that there had ever before been such a thing as a Grand Lodge.

Probably they had in mind the annual gatherings of the great London Companies, and wanted to establish something similar for themselves.

These box societies, masonic or otherwise, usually admitted new members with some form of ceremony, and had secret means of recognition. They met for social occasions, and carried out at least some form of charitable work for their own members. Most of them, like the guilds before them, were purely local in character.

Masons from very early times had been accustomed to travel in search of work, and to expect assistance from lodges wherever they found one. Dr. Robert Plot in *The Natural History of Stafford-shire* written in 1686 mentions the peculiar customs of the Masons, the fact that they had admission ceremonies and secret means of recognition, and the right to claim assistance from brethren anywhere in the country.

Whether the founding lodges revived or formed Grand Lodge, there can be no doubt that they did not intend to establish an authoritarian body that would undertake the government of the Craft. Had such a thought occurred to them, most of them would almost certainly have voted against the proposal.

However the four founding lodges may have viewed the matter, it was inevitable that when such a body existed, it should come to be regarded as the head of the Craft. At first its jurisdiction was limited to the cities of London and Westminster, a comparatively small area, but gradually it began to receive requests for recognition from further afield. Probably the first sign of this authority was in the formation of new lodges.

Modern Grand Lodges

What is the purpose of a Grand Lodge today? First and foremost it is an organization that can guarantee the regularity of the lodges under its control. Without the authority of the Grand Lodge, no mason traveling in another Grand Jurisdiction could hope to be received into lodges in the course of his travels. A primary function is diplomatic recognition. The necessary consequence of this function is that the Grand Lodge must ensure that all of its lodges are regularly formed and managed, and that they continue to adhere to the Ancient Landmarks .

Few Grand Lodges have attempted to define these Landmarks. Masons would probably differ in any list they might produce, but I doubt if many would have difficulty in recognizing things which clearly transgress those Landmarks. In case of doubt, Grand Lodge must decide whether a particular custom does or does not conform to the Landmarks, and by so doing it prevents any small group from taking over a lodge, and ensures that its Lodges remain regular, and therefore acceptable to other Grand Lodges.

Another major function is in organizing and managing the charitable side of the Craft. Charity has been a feature of Freemasonry from the very beginning of its organized existence. What is

now the Fund of Benevolence in England was started under the name of the General Charity in 1727, and by 1731 all the lodges which had accepted the government of the new Grand Lodge were already paying into a central fund for the relief of poor masons and their families. Masonic Homes, scholarship funds, hospitals, drug and alcohol abuse programs, childhood illness clinics are all examples of charities handled at the Grand Lodge level through Grand Lodge. In short, Grand Lodge administers the various charities which masons subscribe to, which are not controlled by independent boards.

Regular organised meetings of Grand Lodge are a feature of Masonry under all jurisdictions, and have been from earliest times. Many masons are critical of the Annual Communication as a waste of time and money. I believe that such meetings, not only for the transaction of masonic business, but also for the exchange of views and for social purposes are valuable, and help to strengthen the fraternal bond.

The power to constitute a new lodge belongs to Grand Lodge, the function of consecrating it is vested in the Grand Master.

Grand Lodge's legislative function is to pass laws for the good government of the Craft, and in its executive capacity, to administer them. It also has power to determine in its judicial capacity disputes over masonic matters, and to discipline members who transgress the rules. This is no different from the powers of any other club or society. In carrying out those functions, Grand Lodge appoints Executive Boards, appoints and employs officers, maintains records, and of necessity levies fees to pay for its work.

In the interests of reasonable uniformity, it lays down rules as to regalia, and ritual, the way in which its lodges are governed, the term of office of the Master, and the records the lodge must keep. All Grand Lodges have rules covering most of those points. Some rules are matters of masonic tradition, some are inserted, for example, because they provide a simple rule book for the guidance of secretaries and treasurers, most of whom are not professional record keepers.

Purpose of Craft Lodges:

The original purposes of lodges of non operative masons were to offer support and encouragement in time of difficulty, to provide a vehicle for charity, and to dispense financial help where needed, to encourage good principles, and to meet the need of all men for congenial society. I do not think the purposes are any different today.

There are many reasons why different men join, or remain in lodge, but I think that there are several which all of us will recognize.

For most, the ritual is a continual source of joy. It is generally good, and sometimes superb prose, something that today we are starved for. The Church no longer supplies it, radio sometimes, and television and modern literature almost never. Yet the appeal of good writing is

revealed at any meeting in the breathless hush when one of the great charges is well delivered, or the injunction to charity, or the address to the Master at the Installation. (as examples)

Where, today, does the average man receive any instruction in ethics and good conduct? From the Church, if he attends, probably, from radio sometimes, but from television and modern literature, with their emphasis on evil, degradation, lust and violence, almost never. Contrary to what we are led to believe in the press, television, and literature, the majority of people prefer good to evil, seek to do the best they can, enjoy the beauty of the world, weep when they must, and laugh when they can. Yet virtue does not spring full armed in the soul of man. It is learned, as the prophet tells us, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little, and in that way Masonry leaves its imprint on the souls of the men who listen to, and try to observe its precepts.

Another need for most is the opportunity to do something for others. I believe that lodges should be putting more emphasis than they do on the charitable work of the Craft.

We have not kept pace with the times, and much of the apathy that exists in lodges is quite simply because we have drifted, and have not presented worthwhile challenges to our brethren.

Like the societies from which we sprang, we should be careful to offer comfort and support to our brethren and their families in time of trouble and affliction. This is not the duty of the Almoner, in exoneration of the rest of us, but a duty imposed by our membership in the Craft. Each of us should make sure that we are aware of the troubles of our fellows, and ever ready to pour the healing balm of consolation into the bosom of the afflicted, and to drop a tear of sympathy over the failings of a brother.

At a different level, masonry is a means of self improvement. Most of us are not orators, and all will remember the trepidation when first we raised our voices at instruction. To learn to speak so that we are heard, to think on our feet, and not be paralyzed by nerves when called upon to say a few words is surely a worthwhile use of time.

Finally, all men need relaxation and social life. Why did masonry prosper in the fifties and sixties? Surely because men enjoyed their masonry, and spoke enthusiastically about it so that others wanted to join. Let us bring the fun back into masonry. Let us enjoy the present time, without looking over our shoulders at a vanished past, or dreading a future which may never come. If we learn to make our gatherings pleasant and enjoyable social occasions, which we remember and talk about with pleasure, it is just possible that the world will once more seek to join us, because it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity.