Preston's Staircase

A Case Study in Changing Masonic Symbolism

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One certainly must wonder if the Masonic ideal that Freemasonry does not change, indeed *cannot* change or be changed, literally applies to Masonic ritual in light of the vast amount of what appears to be change in our ritual over time as evidenced by both historical records and the diversity of contemporary Masonic ritual practices across the globe. Out of many possible examples of change in ritual and symbolism, my particular favorite relates to the staircase in the well-loved Middle Chamber lecture. The earliest mention of the staircase in our lectures notes that it has seven steps symbolizing the number needed to form a perfect lodge. Other early FC lectures entirely omit any reference to a staircase. Instead, the symbolic significance we apply to the staircase in current American ritual used to belong to the numbers needed to compose a lodge, and was communicated as part of the Entered Apprentice degree.

The first known lecturer to apply anything like our modern significance to the staircase was William Preston in the 1770's. Indeed most of the verbiage contained in our current Middle Chamber lecture was originally written by Preston. But Preston's staircase had only seven steps, among other interesting differences. Preston also introduced several other explanations for the numbers which compose lodges of various degrees, apparently based loosely on the forms of lodges used much earlier in the century. But he still employs the older symbolism to explain why a lodge of Fellow Crafts should be composed of five.

The version of the staircase symbolism we employ today came to us from Thomas Smith Webb, the first noted American lecturer whose adaptation of Preston's lecture system set the standard for American style work. It appears, however, that the staircase as we know it today it is not Webb's invention, or at least not entirely. An English Contemporary of the American Webb was William Finch, whose lecture system has many points of similarity with Webb, particularly notable when Webb differs from Preston. Since both Webb and Finch were contemporaries living in different countries, and therefore unlikely to know of each other, we must surmise that both Webb's and Finch's work were based on yet another ritual tradition which contains the American version of the Middle Chamber staircase.

Tracing the story of the stairway symbolism also necessarily involves tracing the history of the symbolism of the numbers needed to form a lodge, and other references to the Seven Arts and Sciences, Five Orders of Architecture, Five Human Senses, and other symbolic associations of the staircase. Since these are so intertwined, it seems best to begin with a discussion of the number of Masons required to form a lodge.

It has long been a point of Masonic tradition that some number of masons are required to form a lodge, usually along with some symbolic items and-or in a certain type of place. This is clearly and amply demonstrated in our ancient dialogue lectures, which also served as test questions, as illustrated below in date order along with the name of the manuscript or book in which they are found.

1696 - Edinburgh Register House Manuscript: (Scottish)

- What makes a true and perfect lodge? Seven masters, five entered apprentices, A dayes journey from a burroughs town without bark of dog or crow of cock
- Does no less make a true and perfect lodge? Yes five masons and three entered apprentices &c.
- Does no less? The more the merrier the fewer the better chear

1700 - Sloane Manuscript. (English)

- A just and perfect lodge is two Interprintices two fellow craftes and two Masters more or fewer the more the merrier the fewer the better Chear but if need require five will serve that is two Interprintices two fellow Craftes and one master on the highest hill or lowest valley of the world without the crow of a Cock or bark of a Dogg.

1723- A Masons Examination (published in the Flying Post newspaper in London)

- What Makes a just and perfect Lodge? A Master, two Wardens, four Fellows, five Apprentices, with Square, compasses, and Common Gudge.

1724 - Grand Mystery of Free-Masonry Discover'd

- How many make a lodge ? God and the square with five or seven right and perfect Masons on the highest mountains or lowest Valleys of the World.

1725 - Institution of Free Masons

- How many makes a lodge? God and the square, w^{t} 7 or 5 right & perfect Masons on the highest mountains or the lowest valley of the world.
- Why do odd Numbers make a lodge? Because all Odds are men's advantages. [meaning unclear]

1727 - A Mason's Confession (Scottish)

- What makes a just and perfect lodge? Five fellow-crafts, and seven entered prentices.
- Where should the mason-word be given? On the top of a mountain, from crow of a cock, the bark of a dog, or the turtle of a dove.

Ca. 1724 – 1740? – The Wilkerson Manuscript

- How many make a lodge? Five free & Accepted Masons met together in place and due form
- How many make a true & perfect Lodge? Seven.
- What do they Consist of? A Master, two Wardens, two fellow Crafts and two Entered Apprentices

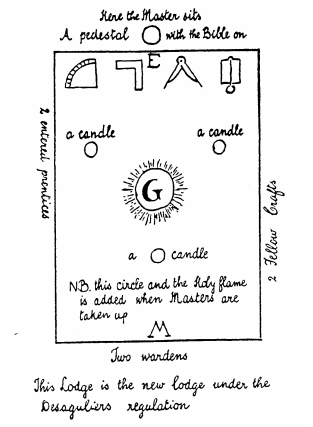
1730 – The Mystery of Free-Masonry (published in the Daily Journal)

- Where was you enter'd? In a Just and Perfect Lodge.
- What makes a Just and Perfect Lodge? A Master, two Wardens, and four Fellows, with Square, Compass, and Common Gudge [Judge = HB?}. N.B. One of them must be a Working Mason.
- Where were you made? In the Valley of Jehosaphat, behind a Rush Bush, where a Dog was never heard to bark, nor a Cock to crow, or elsewhere.

1730 –Masonry Dissect'd (Samuel Pritchard's exposure)

- Where was you made a Mason? A. In a just and Perfect Lodge.
- What makes a just and Perfect Lodge? A. Seven or more.
- Q. What do they consist of? A. One Master, two Wardens, two Fellow-Crafts and two Enter'd 'Prentices.
- What makes a Lodge? A. Five.
- What do they consist of? A. One Master, two Wardens, one Fellow-Craft, one Enter'cl 'Prentice.

The Manuscript *Dialogue between Simon and Phillip* of about 1740 contains this diagram (right) of a lodge composed along the lines described in the lectures, namely with A Master, two wardens, two Fellowcrafts, and two Entered Apprentices.



As can be clearly seen from this series of dialogue lecture excerpts covering some thirty years of ritual development, the number of Masons ideally required to form a lodge varied considerably. The numbers five and seven constantly repeat in various combinations. By late in the period, the numbers seemed to settle on a total of five and seven, with seven being a "just and perfect" lodge.

At this point, there is no symbolic reason for why five and seven are chosen. All examples are mute on the subject except, that is, for the nonsensical, probably garbled, explanation given in the Institution of Free Masons. But now that five and seven are the accepted numbers, it is not hard to imagine our forbears casting about for some reason why these numbers are significant.

One Masonic allusion to the number seven was readily at hand in the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. These had long been associated with Freemasonry. They are mentioned in every copy of the Old Charges, or Gothic Constitutions that I have seen, including the most ancient ones, namely the Regius Poem of ca. 1390 and the Cooke Manuscript of the early 1400's and are mentioned in Anderson's constitutions of 1723. The following is the listing from the Cooke Manuscript.

- Ye shall understand that there be 7 liberal sciences, by the which 7 all sciences and crafts, in the world, were first found, and in espwciall for he is causer of all, that is to say the science of geometry of all other that be, the which 7 sciences are called thus.
- As for the first, that is called [the] fundament of science, his name is grammar, he teacheth a man rightfully to speak and to write truly.
- The second is rhetoric, and he teacheth a man to speak formably and fair.
- The third is dialecticus, and that science teacheth a man to discern the truth from the false, and commonly it is called art or sophistry.
- The fourth is called arithmetic, the which teacheth a man the craft of numbers, for to reckon and to make account of all things.
- The fifth [is] geometry, the which teacheth a man all the metcon, and measures, and ponderacion, of weights of all mans craft.
- The 6th is music, that teacheth a man the craft of song, in notes of voice and organ, and trumpet, and harp, and of all others pertaining to them.
- The 7th is astronomy, that teacheth man the course of the sun, and of the moon, and of other stars and planets of heaven.

While long a part of the lore of the fraternity, the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences did not appear to have any symbolic representation until the mid 18th century when they turn up in the EA lectures of the well-known exposures of the 1760's. The earliest of these was titled *Three Distinct Knocks*, which was published in 1760. Shortly thereafter followed *Jachin & Boaz* in 1762, *Shibboleth* in 1765, and *Mahabone* in 1777. These exposures often plagiarize each other, so their lectures are very similar, although each gives some new information not contained in the others. The following material comes from *Three Distinct Knocks* in that part of the EA lecture describing the number needed to form a lodge:

> *Mas.* Why should Seven make a lodge?
> *Ans.* Because there are Seven liberal Sciences.
> *Mas.* Will you name them, Brother?
> *Ans.* Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick, Arithmetick, Geometry, Musick, and Astronomy.
> *Mas.* Brother, what do those Sciences teach you?

Ans. Grammar teaches me the Art of writing and speaking the Language, wherein I learn according to the First, Second, and Third Concord.
Mas. What doth Rhetorick teach you?
Ans. The Art of Speaking and discoursing upon any Topick whatsoever.
Mas. What doth Logik teach you?
Ans. The art of reasoning well, whereby you may find out Truth from Falsehood.
Mas. What doth Arithmetick teach you?
Ans. The Virtue of Numbers.
Mas. What doth Geometry teach you?
The Art of measuring, whereby the *Egyptians* found out their own land, or the same Quantity which they had before the overflowing of the River *Nile*, which frequently us'd to flow to water their Country; at which Time they fled to the Mountains till it went off again, which made them have continual Quarrels about their Lands; for every Man thought he was robb'd and had not his Right, till *Euclid* found out Geometry, and measured every Man his Due, and gave them Plans of each Man's Ground, with the just Quantity that belong'd to him; then they all were satisfy'd; and the same Rule is continu'd in all Nations to this Day.
Mas. What does Musick teach you, Brother?
Ans. The Virtue of Sounds.
Mas. What doth Astronomy teach you?
Ans. The Knowledge of the Heavenly Bodies.

The extended explanation of Geometry in the preceding quote is substantially the same story as found in the Regius Poem of 1390 as well as in other of the Old Charges. The general form also begins to look familiar, although the symbolic association is entirely different.

These exposures also give the five Human Senses as the reason why five form a lodge. Why these were selected as the explanation for five forming a lodge is not entirely clear, since unlike the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, the human senses do not have a previous history in Masonic lore or symbolism. The answer to this puzzle may well be found in what disappears from the lectures when the Five Human Senses are added. The typical formulation of the explanation for five is as follows (From *Jachin & Boaz*, 1762):

- Q: why do Five make a Lodge? A: Because every Man is endued with Five Senses.
- Q: What are the Five Senses? A: Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting, and Feeling.
- Q: What Use are those Five Senses to you in Masonry? A: Three are of great Use to me, viz. Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling.
- Q: What Use are they, Brother? A: Hearing, is to hear the Word; Seeing, is to see the Sign; Feeling , is to feel the Grip, that I may know a Brother, as well in the Dark as in the Light.

This question universally includes the particular Masonic use of hearing, seeing, and feeling. What disappears from our ritual is a set of questions with similar import, namely "What is the day for?" and "What is the night for?". The answers are that the day is for seeing and the night for hearing or feeling with respect to words, signs and grips. We now find Dark and Light instead of Night and Day. So perhaps these references to hearing, seeing, and feeling led to the idea of using all five senses instead of just three. This is mere supposition on my part. But it is certain that when the new usage appears, the older usage disappears.

Once the idea of symbolizing the numbers to form a lodge took hold, it did not stop with five and seven. All the prime numbers up to 11 and in some cases 13 were employed. This can be seen in the complete numbers dialogue in the *Jachin & Boaz* EA lecture:

- Q:Brother, we have been talking a great while about a Lodge; pray what makes a Lodge? A: Right Worshipful, a certain number of Masons met together to work.
- Q: Pray what number makes a lodge? A: Three, Five, Seven, or Eleven.
- Q: Why do Three make a Lodge? A: Because there were three Grand Masons in building the World, and also that noble Piece of Architecture Man; which are so complete in Proportion, that the Antients began their Architecture by the same Rules.
- Q: The second Reason, Brother? A: There were three Grand Masons at the building of Solomon's Temple.
- Q: why do Five make a Lodge? A: Because every Man is endued with Five Senses.
- Q: What are the Five Senses? A: Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting, and Feeling.
- Q: What Use are those Five Senses to you in Masonry? A: Three are of great Use to me, viz. Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling.
- Q: What Use are they, Brother? A: Hearing, is to hear the Word; Seeing, is to see the Sign; Feeling , is to feel the Grip, that I may know a Brother, as well in the Dark as in the Light.
- Q: Why should Seven make a Lodge? A: Because there are Seven liberal Sciences.
- Q: Will you name them, Brother? A: Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick, Arithmetick, Geometry, Musick, and Astronomy.
- Q: Brother, what do those Sciences teach you? A: *(descriptions of the sciences given – see above)*
- Q: Why should Eleven make a Lodge, Brother? A: There were Eleven Patriarchs, when Joseph was sold into Egypt, and supposed to be lost.
- Q: The second Reason, Brother? A: There were but Eleven Apostles when Judas betrayed Christ.

Now where did the Five Orders of Architecture come from? Unlike the five Human Senses, we do find them in some earlier lectures, but without the usual symbolic meaning attached to them.

1723- A Masons Examination (published in the Flying Post newspaper in London)

- How many orders be there in architecture? Five: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Composit or Roman.

1724 - Grand Mystery of Free-Masonry Discover'd

- How many orders in architecture? Five; the Tuscan, Dorick, Ionick, Corinthian, Composit.
- What do they answer? They answer to the Base, Perpendicular, Diameter, Circumference, and Square.

1730 – The Mystery of Free-Masonry (published in the Daily Journal)

- How many orders be there in architecture? There be five, Tuscan, Dorick, Ionick, Corinthian, and Composite or Roman.

While these five Vetruvian orders of Architecture are found early on in Masonic ritual development, we do not see them documented again until Preston in the 1770's. And until Preston, there is no connection with the five orders of architecture with either the numbers to form a lodge or steps in a staircase. Since our record of ritual is far from complete, it could quite easily be the case that some lodges used the five orders of architecture instead of the five human senses without any record of the fact appearing in the few surviving documents. Judging by what is found in Preston's lectures, this does seem to be the case.

The final element to be introduced in our puzzle is the winding staircase. The earliest mention of a staircase is found in Pritchard's *Masonry Dissect'd* of 1730, appropriately enough in the Fellowcraft lecture.

15. Q. How came you to the middle Chamber? A. By a winding Pair of Stairs.
16. Q. How many ? A. Seven or more.
17. Q. Why Seven or more ? A. Because Seven or more makes a just and Perfect Lodge.

This is all the reference made to the staircase. But already we can see where matters are leading.

At this juncture, some additional discussion of Pritchard's exposure is in order. *Masonry Dissect'd* has been described as the most significant exposure in Masonic history for several reasons. First, it contains our earliest explicit example of the Hiramic Legend, as currently given in our ritual. Second, it is the first reference to a fully developed three degree system with separate lectures for each degree. Up until this point, the lecture material is either indiscriminately composed of all degrees, or simply the Entered Apprentice material, particularly the recapitulation of the degree and the form of the lodge. Third, its influence was immense. Not only was it the last word in exposures for a period of some 30 years, but also it was used by Masons themselves as an aid to memory, and is said to have contributed greatly to the stability of Masonic ritual. The Premier or Modern Grand Lodge of England, the one founded in 1717, took no notice of earlier exposures. But they were so severely disturbed by *Masonry Dissect'd* that they took the drastic step of swapping the EA and FC words, among other changes, in an attempt to prevent imposters from attending meetings. This led directly to the formation of a competing Grand Lodge in 1752, namely the so-called Antients, and a subsequent period of discord and argument between the two jurisdictions, particularly over matters of ritual and which were the real Masons.

Despite the fact that a staircase is mentioned by Pritchard in 1730, none of the 1760's exposures have any mention of a staircase in their versions of the Fellowcraft lecture. The candidates proceed directly from pillars to doors. In fact, the whole of the FC lectures, even in Pritchard, are notably without the rich symbolism that we find today, and consequently are quite short compared to the EA or MM lectures. The EA lecture at that time was the longest of the lectures, being the most ancient and therefore most replete with symbolism. The MM lecture, of course, contains the lengthy Hiramic legend. The FC lecture contained mostly a discussion of the pillars and the letter "G" along with an abbreviated rehearsal of the first section ceremony, most of which is a repeat from the EA. Such, apparently, was the state of the lectures in the 1760's when William Preston was raised and began his study of the dialogue lectures.

Preston, by his own admission, was a sponge for various workings of the lectures. He was also in the publishing trade, renowned as a literary stylist and editor for some of the most notable authors of his day, not to mention a scholar of ancient Greek literature. Like many masons of his day, Preston firmly believed that Masonic ritual was established by King Solomon some three thousand years before. With his literary eye, Preston regarded the state of Masonic lectures as being highly degenerate from the standard of elegance that would have been expected from King Solomon. So not only did he set about collecting what he thought to be the most ancient lecture material, he re-wrote it in the suitably elegant language familiar to us today. In his mind, he was not innovating anything, but rather restoring the ritual to something approximating its original grandeur.

Under Preston's hand, all the lectures gained significant weight, as it were, both from the inclusion of so many diverse usages, and most importantly from the excessive verbosity of his literary style. The prime beneficiary of Preston's efforts was the Fellowcraft lecture.

One notable change that Preston made was to include in the Fellowcraft lecture not only one, but two explanations of why five should form a lodge of Fellowcrafts. This he moved from the traditional EA lecture. In fact, nowhere in his EA lecture does Preston make reference to the number of masons required to form a lodge. And he is the first to associate five with a lodge of Fellowcrafts instead of simply one of the numbers needed to form a lodge of any degree. Since a lodge consisted of a Master, two Wardens, two FC's and two EA's or seven in total, the removal of the EA's would leave five. Preston uses both the Five Human senses and the Five Orders of Architecture to explain why a Fellowcrafts' lodge is composed of five, undoubtedly combining the usages of various London lodges investigated by Preston and his associates. The complete text of Preston's explanations is given below in all its exquisite wordiness.

Section II
Clause 4--Orders in architecture.

Why do five scientifically hold the Lodge?

To the five orders in architecture the number required to hold the Lodge scientifically refers. In these orders the principles of symmetry and proportion are traced; hence in the seminaries of craftsmen they have always been viewed striking objects of study and invitation.

Name the five orders in architecture.

The Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composed, are the names by which they are distinguished.

In what does the excellence of those orders consist?

In the judicious arrangement of their several members, ornaments and proportions, their chief excellence consists. So that the whole when taken together is understood to form one beautiful, perfect, and complete whole.

Whence are these orders traced?

From the first formation of human society, order in architecture is traced. When men wandered from natural rocks and caves in search of food and subsistence, shelter from the inclemency of the weather set their invention afloat, and induced them to raise temporary huts, by placing trees on end and laying others across to support the covering. The hoops or bands which connected these trees at top and bottom, served as a sort of grace to the pillar, and gave birth to the original idea of the base and capital of columns; an idea which the united exertion of talents and ingenuity and invention matured to perfection; and afterwards completed in the marked characters of the five orders.

To what do these give rise?

To delicacy and figure; strength and durability; wisdom and elegance; these orders have given rise; and in their construction and application have gradually displayed genius and invention.

Explain the Tuscan order.

The Tuscan order, being the most simple and solid, ranks first in order; it was invented in Tuscany: its column is seven diameters high; and its capital, base and entablature have few mouldings. The simplicity of its construction has rendered it eligible in all places where solidity is the main object.

Explain the Doric.

The Doric order is the most ancient, and was invented by the Greeks. Its column is eight diameters high; and it has no ornaments, except mouldings, either on the base or capital. The frieze is distinguished by triglyphs and metopes; and the triglyphs compose the ornaments of the frieze. This order is the best proportioned, and from its solid composition has a preference in all structures where strength and a noble but rough simplicity are required.

Explain the Ionic.

The Ionic order bears a mean proportion between the most solid and delicate orders. Its column is nine diameters high, its capital is adorned with volutes, and its cornice has dentils; there is delicacy and

figure displayed in this pillar; which was invented by the Ionians. The famous temple of Diana at Ephesus is said to have been of this order.

Explain the Corinthian.

The Corinthian order is the richest of the five orders; and was invented at Corinth by Calimachus. Its column is ten diameters high; and its capital is adorned with two rows of leaves, and eight volutes which sustain the abacus. The frieze is ornamented with curious devices, and the cornices have dentils or simple modillions. This order is deemed the masterpiece of art; and is generally used in stately and magnificent buildings. Calimachus is said to have taken the hint of the capital of the column from the following circumstance. Accidentally passing by the tomb of a young lady, he perceived a basket of toys, covered with a tile, which was placed over an acanthus root, having been left there by her nurse. As the branches grew up they encompassed the basket, till, arriving at the tile, they met with an obstruction, and bent downwards. Calimachus, struck with the object, set about imitating the figure; the base of the capital he made to represent the basket, the abacus, the tile, and the volutes, the bending leaves.

Explain the Composite.

The Composite order was contrived by the Romans, being compounded of the other orders; its capital has the two rows of leaves of the Corinthian and the volutes of the Ionic order. Its column has the quarter round of the Tuscan and Doric orders, is ten diameters high; and its cornice has dentils or simple modillions. In the construction of this pillar, strength, elegance, and beauty are united.

Of the number of these pillars, how many are truly ancient?

Three.

Name them.

The Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

What do these three represent?

These differ materially from each other, and equally show invention and particular character. The Tuscan and Composite orders have nothing but what is borrowed and differ only by accident: the Tuscan being plainer than the Doric; and the Composite more ornamented, if not more beautiful, than the Corinthian.

Explain these orders.

In these three orders we trace the gradual progress of science. In the Doric column we behold the emblem of strength. In the Ionic, the emblem of shape and figure; and in the Corinthian, the emblem of wisdom and united talents. To the industrious craftsman, these orders prove a grateful feast. In ancient times men were ignorant of the art of proportioning the various parts of a building; and though they used columns; they cut them at hazard; without rule or principle. The temple built at Argos, in honour of Juno, by Doras the son of Helen, and grandson of Dericalion, was found by chance to be constructed according to the taste and proportions of the Doric order. And the form of this building was afterwards adopted in the construction of other edifices. When Ion, the nephew of Doras, was sent by the Athenians into Asia with a colony, he siezed on Caria, where he founded many cities and the new inhabitants began to build temples after the model of the temple of Juno at Argos. Ignorant of the proportions of columns, they determined to make them sufficiently strong to support the edifice; but at the same time, agreeable to the sight; hence they gave to the column the same proportion as they found between the foot of a man and the rest of his body; according to their ideas, the foot made a sixth part of human height, which made them give to a Doric column, including its capital, six onts diameters: that is they made it six times as high as it was thick. The seventh diameter was afterwards added. The Ionians tried to throw more delicacy and elegance into their edifices; they took the same method which had been adopted in the composition of the Doric, but instead of taking for model the body of a man, they took that of a woman, to make the columns of the new order more plain and agreeable, they gave them eight times as much height as they had diameter. They also made chandelings among the trunks, to imitate the foldings of the robes of women. The volutes of the capital represented that part of the hair which hangs in curls, on each side of the face; and to these columns the Ionians added a base. The Corinthian order was not invented till long after the others, and the origin of it has already been explained.

Thus we have defined the reason, which is scientifically given for the number that is requisite to form the Lodge, which is regularly held; and while such subjects engage the attention of craftsmen, their time and talents can never be more usefully employed.

Clause 5-External senses.

Why is five morally considered the number for holding the Lodge?

In allusion to the five external senses, this number morally refers, as from these senses originates our ideas of colour, sound, hardness, extension, and motion.

Name those senses.

They are named and classed in the following order. Hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting.

Wherein does their excellence consist?

In confirming the documents of nature, which are always true and wholesome, they enable us to distinguish the power and effect of nature's works; and ascertain the occasion on which the mind is led to form simple notions into abstract thoughts; and may be considered as the first principles or elements of human knowledge.

How are they considered?

These senses are the channels by which the objects of human knowledge are conveyed to the mind, and like signs in the natural language, they have the same signification in all climates, and in all Nations. They are the gifts of nature, and the primary regulator of all our active powers, and by them we become conscious of the distance, nature, and properties of all external objects.

Explain Hearing.

Hearing enables us to distinguish sounds; and to enjoy all the perfections of harmony, melody, and music. As the greatest and most important part of our knowledge must be derived from the information of others, our happiness is rendered more complete by this sense, enabling us to share all the benefits of social intercourse, and mental improvement. In the reciprocal communication to each other of our thoughts and intentions, our purposes and desires, we not only participate in the pleasures of society; but our reason is capable of exerting its utmost power and energy.

Explain Seeing.

This sense enables us to distinguish objects of different kinds; and to view in an instant of time without change of place or situation, all the agreeable variety which is displayed in the landscape of nature. The rays of light, which administer to this sense, are the most astonishing parts of inanimate creation, and render the eye, with all its appurtenances, the masterpiece of nature's work. By seeing, we find our way in the pathless ocean, traverse the globe of earth, determine its figure and dimensions, and delineate any region or quarter of it. By this sense we measure the planetary orbs, and make new discoveries in the sphere of fixed stars; nay more, should the tongue be taught to lie and dissemble, by this sense the countenance will display the hypocrisy to the discerning eye. The structure of the eye evinces the admirable contrivance of nature for performing its various motions, and clearly demonstrates the infinite power of a supreme Creator.

Explain Feeling.

Feeling enables us to distinguish the different qualities of bodies, such as heat and cold, hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, figure, solidity, motion, and extention. These qualities, by means of certain corresponding sensations of touch, are presented to the mind as real extern.al properties; and the conception, or belief of them is invariably connected with these corresponding sensations, by an original principle of human nature, which is peculiar mystery far beyond human enquiry.

Explain Smelling.

Smelling enables us to distinguish odours, all of which convey different impressions to the mind. Animal and vegetable bodies, when they are exposed to the air, are continually sending forth effluvia of vast subtlety, both in the state of life and growth; and in the states of fermentation and putrefaction. These volatile particles probably repel each other and scatter themselves in the air, till uniting with other bodies to which they bear a chemical affinity, and form new concretes. These effluvia being drawn into the nostrils, along with the air, are the means by which all bodies are smelled, the organ of this sense. seems therefore to have been planted by nature in that canal through which the air continually passes in aspiration and respiration.

Explain Tasting.

Tasting enables us to make a proper distinction in the choice of food. Everything that enters into the stomach must undergo the scrutiny of this sense, and by it we are capable of perceiving all the changes which the same body undergoes, in the various compositions of art, as in cookery, chemistry, and in pharmacy. From the construction of this organ, as well as that of smell, it seems to have been evidently intended by nature to guard the alimentary canal against unwholesome or nauseous food.

How many senses of this number are truly essential?

Of these senses, three are essential in the practice of our art.

Name them.

Hearing, seeing, and feeling.

Why are they essential in the art?

Because without the use of these senses, the sns. ts and ws in the separate degrees would not answer the purposes for which they were originally intended. Were such impediments permitted to subsist amongst Masons, the general plan of this system would be rendered abortive.

What is the proper use of these senses?

Through the medium of these senses we can only form just and accurate notions of the operations of nature; and when we reflect on the means by which these senses are gratified, we become conscious of the existence of external objects and attend to them, till they become familiar objects of thought. Without the organs of the senses, the mind must have remained destitute of knowledge. The impressions that are made in these organs by external objects furnish the occasions on which the mind, by the laws of its constitution, is led to perceive the qualities of the material world, and to exercise all the different qualifications of thoughts of which it is capable. Without these impressions it would have been impossible for us to have arrived at the knowledge of our faculties. The senses therefore being the immediate channel of communication with the mind, familiarize the understanding to the common affairs of life, and prove the means by which our real discoveries in science and philosophy are made.

What advantage do we derive from this study?

The various operations of the mind are so difficult to unravel, and reduce to their original principles; that the most judicious have failed in the attempt to analyze them. The fabric of the mind, as well as that of the body, is both curious and wonderful: the faculties of the one are adapted to their several ends, with equal propriety, and no less wisdom than the organs of the other. In the structure of the mind is displayed the inconceivable wisdom of an almighty Power, and from its extensive influence over every branch of science, well merits the peculiar attention of craftsmen. By anatomical dissection we become acquainted with the body; but by the anatomy of the mind alone we can discover its powers and principles. In the arts which have the least connection with the mind, its faculties are the engines which we must employ, and the better we understand their nature and use, their defects and disorders, we shall always apply them with the greater success.

Illustrate the whole.

To sum up the measure of God's transcendent goodness to man, we need only observe, that memory, imagination, taste, reasoning, moral perception, and all the active powers of the soul, present such vast and boundless fields for philosophical disquisition, as far exceeds human enquiry. We will, and we act, in consequence of that will: but how we will, how we act, are mysteries known only to nature and to nature's God, to whom we and all are indebted for creation, preservation, and every blessing we enjoy.

Thus we have given the reason, which is morally assigned, for the number required to form the Lodge which is regularly held. While the seminaries of craftsmen are appropriated to the amelioration of men; and the cultivation of sciences and philosophy, partial prejudices will subside, and illustrious characters never be wanting to sanction the proceedings of the craftsmen.

As can be clearly seen from the preceding extensive quotation, much of the exact wording we now find in the Fellowcraft lecture applying to the five steps was originally used by Preston to explain why five forms a lodge of Fellowcrafts. The actual wording used by Webb was not Preston's coded lecture material translated above, but rather the openly published descriptions from the 1792 edition of Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*. Both Preston and Webb clearly understood that much of this material was additional explanation, or rather illustration – hence the title of his book, not actually part of the lecture itself. So both felt free to openly publish large portions of it in their books, which became known as monitors. This is why the material is in plain, un-coded language in our ritual cipher today.

Now what about Preston's staircase? Undoubtedly some lodges must have preserved the use of the staircase found in Pritchard's 1730 exposure. But instead of saying, as Pritchard does,

that the staircase has seven or more steps because seven or more forms a perfect lodge, Preston applies the Seven liberal Arts and Sciences to the seven steps of the staircase.

Section IV
Clause 6--Staircase.

When they passed the columns, where did they arrive?

Having passed through the porch, at the entrance of which the two sacred columns were reared, the skilled craftsmen came to a winding staircase, that led to the middle chamber, where Solomon had ordered all the gifts of merit to be conferred. On every step of that staircase was stamped the name of a different art, and over each art was appointed a superintendent, to try the merit of the claimants in that art.

Who guarded the staircase?

At the bottom of the staircase was posted an ingenious craftsman to whom all who approached must submit their claims.

What was the duty of this craftsman?

The duty of this guard was not only to receive, examine, and arrange the claims, but to refer the candidates, who delivered them, to the superintendent, who was appointed to enquire into the abilities of each claimant. By this arrangement all attempts at imposition were prevented, and the merits of the industrious were duly honoured and rewarded.

Of how many steps is it said, did this staircase consist?

This staircase is said to have consisted of seven steps.

To what do those steps refer?

In reference to the seven liberal arts, one or other of which was considered as an essential qualification for preferment: every candidate was tried, and approved, in the art, in which he excelled, by the superintendent of that art; who was pledged to display his powers, and illustrate his excellence on the step, which was allotted to his profession.

How were these arts used?

These seven arts, which were marked as objects of merit, were thus named and arranged: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy, and in these arts the professors were appointed under Royal commission, to exemplify at stated periods their skill and talents.

Grammar, the First step. On the first step, there the Grammarian usually displayed, the excellence of his art. He taught the proper arrangement of words, according to idiom or dialect; and how to speak or write a language, with justice and accuracy, according to reason and correct usage.

On the Second step, the Rhetorician displayed the powers of his art. He taught the mode of speaking copiously, and fluently, on any subject; not merely with propriety alone, but with all the advantages of force, and elegance; wisely contriving to captivate the hearer by the strength of argument, and beauty of expression.

On the Third step, the Logician exerted his talents, he taught the art of guiding reason discretionarily, in the general knowledge of things; and how we were to direct our enquiries at the truth: instructing his disciples to infer, deduce, and conclude, on a regular train of argument, according to certain premises laid down, or granted; and to employ their faculties of conceiving, reasoning, judging, and disposing in true gradation, till the point in question should be finally determined.

On the Fourth step, the Arithmetician distinguished his skill: he taught the powers and properties of numbers, by letters, tables, figures, and instruments, giving reasons and demonstrations, to find any certain number whose relation to another number was already known. To every mechanical branch or profession he recommended the virtues of his art.

On the Fifth step, the Geometrician displayed the superiority of his science: he treated on the powers, and properties of magnitude in general, where length, breadth, and thickness were considered. He taught the architect to construct his plans; the general to arrange his troops, the engineer to mark out ground for encampments the geographer to give us the dimensions of the world, delineate the extent of seas, and specify the divisions of Empires, kingdoms and provinces; and the astronomer to make

his observations, and fix the duration of times, and seasons. In short he proved Geometry to be the foundation of architecture, and the root of mathematics.

On the Sixth step, the Musician displayed his eminence, he taught the art of forming concords, and to compose delightful harmony by a proportion and arrangement of acute, grave, and mixed sounds. By a series of experiments he evinced the power of his art, with respect to tunes, and the intervals of sound only; and in his enquiry into the nature of the concords and discords he fixed the proportion between them by numbers.

On the Seventh step, the Astronomer vies to excel, he taught the art of reading the wonderful works of the Creator in the sacred pages, the celestial hemispheres; by observing the motion, measuring the distances, comprehending the magnitudes and calculating the periods, and eclipses of the heavenly bodies. The use of the globes, the system of the world, and the primary law of nature, were the subjects of his theme, and in the unparalleled instances of wisdom and goodness that were displayed through the whole of the creation, he traced the omnipotent Author by his works.

What were the effects that were derived from this establishment?

The effects of this establishment were at that time sensibly felt, under the sanction of the wisest Prince that ever reigned; the most eminent artificers were collected, instructed, and improved; talents and ingenuity were encouraged and protected; knowledge was spread and disseminated, and works of eminence were produced, which stand unrivalled in the annals of history and fame.

Thus we have endeavoured, in illustrating the passage to the middle chamber of Solomon's temple, to introduce a system of education, which marks the existence of our profession, and justly entities our skilled votaries to approbation and esteem.

This is now the first time that the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences are applied to the staircase. Preston also invents an entirely fictitious, and un-biblical set of characters to populate his staircase and impose a test of merit. It is sensible, however, considering that in Preston's system, the candidate subsequently passes only one guarded door, and that the description of Jeptha's battle with the Ephramites is given earlier in his lecture. English ritual of the present day still has guards at the stair and at the door rather than two doors. The careful reader will also note that the wording once again is not exactly as we use. The same explanation also applies, that Webb used the published descriptions from Preston's 1792 edition of *Illustrations*. So in both cases, we currently use descriptions originally written by Preston, although not exactly the same ones he used in his own lectures.

So how did we get from Pritchard and Preston's seven step staircase to a 15 step staircase? It appears that this was not entirely an innovation by Webb. There exists an English contemporary of Webb, namely William Finch, who worked a Fellowcraft lecture with a fifteen step staircase. The relevant portion of Finch's lecture is given below:

46. *Where did they then [pass] to, Up this winding stair case.*
47. *Consisting of how many S . . . s, ((no answer given, but can guess from further questions)*
48. *Why three, Because that number R . . . s a L. (Rule)*
49. *Why five, H . . . s a L. (holds)*
50. *Why seven, Makes it perfect.*
51. *Why eleven, In allusion to our Saviour's Aposles [sic], for when Judas betrayed his Lord and Master, there were only eleven remaining - - - likewise a second reason, in allusion to the antient Patriarchs, for when Joseph was sold by his brethren to the Ishmaelites, there were only eleven remaining.*
52. *Who are the three that r . . e a L., The Master and Wardens.*
53. *Why does three r . . . e a L. In allusion to the three grand Masters which bore sway at the building of K. S. T., which were SKI HKT HAB.*
54. *Who are five that h . . . d it, [Answer omitted, through a typographical error in numbering the questions and answers. Emulation, Browne, and , Vancouver has: "The W. M., two Ws., and two F. Cs."]*

55. *Why do five h . . . d a L., In allusion to the five noble orders in Architecture.*
56. *Name them, Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite, or Roman Order. (lengthy explanation omitted)*
63. *There is a farther [sic] reason why five h . . . d a L., In allusion to the five external senses.*
64. *Name them, Hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting. lengthy explanation omitted)*
76. *Why do seven make a L. perfect, Because K. S. was seven years and upwards in building the Temple of Jerusalem.*
77. *There is a second reason, In allusion to the seven liberal Arts and Sciences.*
78. *Name them, Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.*

Finch has a staircase of three, five, and seven steps because three rules a lodge, five holds a lodge, and seven makes it perfect. Three rule a lodge because of the three Grand Masters who built KST. Five hold a lodge because of both the Senses and Orders. And Seven makes it perfect because of the Sciences. All that is required to transform this into our current working is to eliminate the numbers for a lodge and collapse the other meanings directly onto the stairs. This apparently is the step accomplished by Webb, in all likelihood following Preston's lead.

It impossible that Webb copied Finch since Webb taught his system beginning some five years before Finch published his coded lectures excerpted above. It is unlikely that Finch copied Webb since Webb left no written record of the details of his working except for his monitor which was merely a copy of Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* in any case. The two men, although rough contemporaries, never left their home countries so could not have communicated directly. Indeed, they were probably not even aware of eachother's existence. The only likely explanation for their convergence in lectures must be that both were in touch with an otherwise undocumented ritual system that varied still further from Preston's. In all likelihood this was the ritual of the Antients.

The staircase symbolism outlined by Finch is not far from the typical working of the United Grand Lodge of England today. Although the UGLE does not have a single standard working in all its lodges, the most widely used rituals give this description in the second degree tracing board explanation (From Taylor's ritual):

> They then passed up the winding staircase, consisting of three, five, and seven or more steps; Three to rule a lodge, five to hold a lodge, and seven or more to make it perfect. The three who rule a lodge are the W.M. and the two Ws.; the five that hold a lodge are the W.M., the two Ws., and two F.Cs.; the seven that make it perfect are the two E.As. added to the former five. Three rule a lodge because at the building of K.S.T. there were but three Grand Masters who bore sway, namely, S.K. of I., H.K. of T., and H.A.; five hold a lodge in allusion to the five noble orders of architecture, which are the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite; seven or more make a perfect lodge because K.S. was seven years and upwards in building, completing, and dedicating the temple at Jerusalem to God's service; they have likewise a further allusion to the seven liberal arts and sciences, namely, Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.

No detailed explanations are given. Moreover, note that five refers to the Orders, not the Senses, which indicates to me that there were indeed lodges who used the orders rather than the senses through the middle of the 1700's, and that is why Preston used both in his explanation.

So now we have a complete tour of staircase symbolism, it seems appropriate to offer some comment on the nature of change in our ritual. What we see in this, and many other

examples of change in symbolism expressed in the ritual, is that Myth, Tradition, and popular interest of a particular period are incorporated by way of explanation. It is a process outlined by the noted Masonic scholar, Alexander Horne, in his thorough discussion of the progress of Solomon's Temple symbolism. In this case, we have the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences as an ancient part of Craft tradition. As the lecture portions of the ritual expanded in the early 18th century, this traditional aspect of Masonic tradition was employed to justify the various occurrences of the number seven elsewhere in our symbolism.
The Orders of Architecture were likewise a matter of interest among Masons, although not of as great an antiquity as the Arts and Sciences. Medieval operative masons practiced the Gothic style, while interest in the Classical orders was from the classically educated gentry of the period beginning in the 17th century.

There is also the pull of utility. The Entered Apprentice lecture was becoming excessively long, while the Fellowcraft languished as a minor degree devoid of significant meaning. By removing the Arts and Sciences, Orders of Architecture, and human senses from the Entered Apprentice lecture and including them in the Fellowcraft, Preston was able to balance the length of the lectures, filling the relative vacuum of the Fellowcraft with expanded discussion of the rearranged material.

It is also essential to note that practically all of the developments in ritual practices and symbolism during the 18th century were accomplished by the common consent of the Craft, not the decree of any central authority. Changes caught on and spread because masons at large thought them useful and appealing. And since the brethren of those days were used to the independent contemplation and discussion of Masonic symbolism during lodge meetings, this was viewed as entirely their own concern. So there was plenty of room for individual lecturers such as Preston, Webb, Browne, and Finch to develop and teach their own particular systems. In every case, however, these independent lecturers did not necessarily think of themselves as innovators, since they were concerned primarily with the lectures, not the actual first section ceremonies themselves, and their efforts were grounded in actual Masonic traditions, which they expanded upon and sought to illustrate.

The result of the combined efforts of the various brothers, both known and anonymous, who over the years have labored over the lectures and their symbolic content has resulted in a body of work that has inspired contemplation and produced great satisfaction among the craft for many generations.