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#### **THE ENGLISH GRAND LODGE IN CURRENT TIMES.**

by

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This paper is not intended to give a detailed account of the formation and history of the Grand Lodge of England or its relationship to other Grand Lodges in the rest of the world. It purports to give a brief outline of its development and its approach to dealing with questions which the practice of the Craft in our modern society inevitably generate.

English Freemasonry goes back a very long way. The rise, development and organization of speculative masonry, as we know it, took place in the British Isles, and the first attempt at central organization of any sort took place in England with the formation of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 under circumstances which have been well documented and widely known in Masonic circles. That, however, was not the beginning of speculative masonry. According to the noted masonic research authority, Colin Dyer, it had been a movement concerned with a philosophy of the spiritual life of man for an indefinite number of years before that. There are records at Guildhall in London, England, which show that the Mason's Company was in existence in 1375. It was the first "English Gild of the Mason trade" and in 1376 was one of the important City Companies.

The exact date of its foundation is unknown, but the roots of the Fellowship of Masons in England go back much further than that, to the year 1356 when, as Harry Carr in his encyclopedic examination of Freemasonry 'The Freemason at Work' noted, twelve skilled master masons came before the Mayor and Aldermen at Guildhall in London to settle a demarcation dispute and to draw up a code of trade regulations, because their trade had not, until then, "been regulated in true manner, by the government of folks of their trade. in such form as other trades" were. This was the true beginning of mason trade organization in England, which gave rise to the "Hole Crafte & Felawship of Masons", later the London Mason's Company.

Grand Lodge of England was created on 24 June 1717, St Johns Day. There were, initially, four London lodges, which, sensing the potential advantages of centralization and co-operation, chose to amalgamate into one organization and elect a Grand Lodge as a governing body. This was the premier Grand Lodge and came to be known as the "Moderns". They quickly drew more lodges into their fold and by 1723 the original four lodges had increased in number to fifty-two.

The four original lodges were

1. The Goose and Gridiron Ale-House (now the Lodge of Antiquity No 2)
2. The Crown Ale-House
3. The Apple Tree Tavern (now the Lodge of Fortitude and Old Cumberland No 12)
4. The Rummer and Grapes Tavern (now the Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No 4)

The Lodge at the Crown made its last appearance in the Grand Lodge lists in 1736 and attempts to revive it have failed. All the rest of these lodges as is seen from the above, are active today

No 4 of the Founding Lodges (and still No. 4 today) was quite exceptional in the quality of its membership. Harry Carr (ibid) notes that whilst the early Grand Lodge lists for the other three Lodges do not record any member who rated the description of "Esquire", in No. 4, however, the earliest lists include Dukes, Earls, Lords, Barons, Baronets and Knights

The first three Grand Masters, all of them "commoners", all merit the classification of "Grand Originals". They were Anthony Sayer, George Payne and Theophilus Desaguliers. Of these Dr Desaguliers is the best known and most eminent, both in career and as a mason. He was, amongst other honours, elected a Fellow and Curator of the Royal Society, was Chaplain to the Prince of Wales and played a great part in organizing the rituals, procedures and toasts in lodge proceedings. He also originated the formation of a Grand Charity, In 1723 appeared the famous Constitutions written by James Anderson which was to become, in effect, the Bible of Freemasonry, enunciating what were to become some of the now familiar and basic tenets of the Grand Lodge. The premier Grand Lodge of England was not, however, to remain for long the only Grand Lodge in London.

In July 1751, "The Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons according to the Old Constitutions" was founded in London. At that time it consisted of only six lodges with a total membership of some eighty brethren. They were mainly artisans, tailors, shoemakers and painters "of an honest Character but in low Circumstances"; many of them were immigrants from Ireland

or Irish immigrants.

In 1752, Laurence Dermott became their Grand Secretary and held that office until 1771. He compiled the first book of Constitutions of the new Grand Lodge and published it in 1756 under the title of "Ahiman Rezon", the exact meaning or intent of which is obscure. Boasting of their adherence to the "old System free from Innovation", they soon became known as the "Antients" and they thrived. The role that this Grand Lodge played in the development of Freemasonry is important to recognize. The distinguished masonic research authority, Cyril N Batham, has written that "it is no exaggeration to say that the craft ceremonies of today would be much the poorer had it not been for the Antients; in particular, the impressive installation ceremony might be no more than the Master-elect being invited by the outgoing Master to occupy the chair." He goes on to say that the story of the Antients Grand Lodge is to a large extent that of one man, Laurence Dermott, and his book "Ahiman Rezon". His influence was not restricted to England, however, but it may be claimed that the development of Freemasonry in the USA and Canada was influenced by him.

After 1751 the Antients' and Moderns' Grand Lodges existed side by side, in a spirit of uneasy co-operation, and more often in one of intense rivalry. By the late 1700's, however, there were many prominent Masons who held high rank in both bodies and in the early 1800's efforts were being made, behind the scenes, to effect a union.

Eventually, and with the help of three Royal brothers, all sons of George III, the negotiations proved successful and the Union took place in December 1813. Hence came about the creation of the United Grand Lodge of England which next year will be celebrating its 275th birthday with great ceremony, for the preparation of which steps are already in hand and preliminary invitations issued.

As the Craft developed and expanded, the number of lodges grew in England and appeared in almost every town in every country. At the same time masonry started to develop overseas. Lodges in England, outside London were grouped into "Provinces" and those outside England into "Districts", and today there are something over 8000 lodges under the Grand Lodge of England in the world. My own lodges in South Africa, for example, were in the District of the Transvaal which embraced the whole province of the Transvaal, as well as Swaziland, Botswana and the island of Mauritius. As an aside it is the largest District in English Freemasonry in the world, consisting of 122 lodges.

The establishment or structure of the Provincial and District Grand Lodges follows the pattern of Grand Lodge where there is a Grand Master, a Senior Grand Warden, a Junior Grand Warden etc. Provinces or Districts, as the case may be,

have a Provincial or District Grand Master, an Assistant Provincial or District Grand Master, a Provincial or District Senior Grand Warden and so on. The mode of address to brethren in English Freemasonry is simple. All brethren who are, or who have been through a chair, are addressed as Worshipful Brother throughout their masonic careers except in certain special instances. The Provincial or District Grand Master is addressed as Right Worshipful, since the rank of Provincial or District Grand Master is a Grand Lodge rank which merits address by that title. A Grand Lodge officer, acting or past, above the rank of Standard Bearer, is addressed as Very Worshipful. The Grand Master (at present the Duke of Kent) is addressed as Most Worshipful and the Pro Grand Master, who presides over Grand Lodge when the Grand Master is otherwise engaged, is addressed in the same way.

From the outset, the United Grand Lodge of England was privileged to have very distinguished personages as its Grand Master and, as previously mentioned, as long ago as the reign of George III, the heads of the royal house have at many times presided as Grand Master of the Order. At present HRH the Duke of Kent, the Queen's cousin, is the Grand Master, and next year, when Grand Lodge celebrates its 275th anniversary, he will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of his own installation as Grand Master. He has demonstrated that the office he holds in Freemasonry need not be a sinecure. He has taken an active interest in every aspect of the Craft, and due to this personal interest, a number of issues which, in one way or another have attracted the attention or concern of the brethren generally, have attracted his personal attention.

It should be mentioned here that it has never been the policy of Grand Lodge to intervene directly in details of the regulation of lodge affairs. There is a Constitution and a Ritual,  
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and every incoming master testifies that he will not permit or suffer any deviation from the established Landmarks of the Order. Grand Lodge expects every member lodge to govern itself accordingly and not to make any changes or variations to the ritual or rubric. But the Duke's attitude to two of these issues is worth examining in more detail.

The penalties have become an increasingly vexed problem for Freemasonry over the years. From the first establishment of the rituals they were accepted as part of the degree procedures, but more recently, (a fixed date cannot be established for this) they have become the subject of controversy. The reasons for this are not clear but it must certainly arise from the large number of exposures which have emerged, and which, due to the expansive development of the press, radio broadcasting, television, and the speedier dissemination of news and information throughout the world generally, has meant that an issue arising within a lodge, which normally would have been confined to that lodge, can now be picked up and blown up into a major news report. That information, we must assume, could only have become available from brethren who have broken their vows never to divulge the secrets of the degrees. They have thereby allowed non-masons, or worse, enemies of the Craft, to obtain this information and turn it to their own advantage and to the detriment of the Craft in the eyes of the world. The whole question of secrecy, and the notion of Freemasonry being a secret society, will be raised later in this paper.

Unquestionably, the selection of suitable candidates is accepted as being of paramount importance for the maintenance of the honour and dignity of the masonic order. At the same time, however, so many lodges, in their anxiety to ensure that they have a 'working' at the next meeting, will go to endless lengths to ensure that they have a candidate, and in consequence do not adequately examine the necessary qualification for membership of the potential initiate. The obligation is on every member of the lodge, and in particular of the master, to ensure that the candidate will appreciate the objects of the order and the duties he is about to undertake, are heavy, and cannot be

sufficiently stressed. As will be noted below, writings are available for the candidate to read and ask questions on before he enters the order. Furthermore, it is the solemn duty of the candidate's proposer and seconder to guide him along his masonic career right up to the time that he is able to take the chair of King Solomon in the lodge.

Above all, the candidate must understand that he is not joining a secret society. He is joining a society which has secrets, but these are limited to certain signs and words of recognition. He must understand that, above all, admittance into Freemasonry will bring him stature in his society as well as giving him a new direction in the acquisition of knowledge in both the esoteric and practical fields

Many masons, inviting friends or acquaintances to join the masonic order, feel constrained to deny the potential candidate any knowledge of Freemasonry for fear of revealing the so-called 'secrets' of the order. Every lodge member should be made aware of the availability of booklets which are available, and which they can hand the potential candidate, detailing what he should know about the order, so that when he does join, he is fundamentally aware of the purposes, aims and objects of Freemasonry.

It must be admitted that for a non-mason to hear by some circumstance of the blood-curdling penalties attendant upon becoming a Freemason must lead him to wonder at the objects of the Order and at the motives which would urge any person to join it. At the same time the impact on the candidate himself, hearing the penalties for the first time, must be considerable, and whilst he clearly comprehends that the penalties being recited are not about to be put into solemn effect, there is undoubtedly a sense of shock, and he must wonder how much else of the ritual is not equally metaphorical

An attempt to remedy this situation, which has always been the Duke's concern, was simply to alter the wording of each degree obligation so as to refer to the penalties as 'traditional' penalties, but this did not adequately resolve the situation as it was too easy for the extra word "traditional" to be disregarded or forgotten. In consequence, the ritual was recently revised to eliminate entirely any reference to a penalty in the obligation and to introduce an additional sentence, after the completion of the obligation, explaining how the signs derive themselves from traditional penalties

Another matter in which the Duke took a hand was in the matter of secrecy with respect to the Craft. The accent, over the many years of its history, on the secrecy attaching to Freemasonry, led to a suspicion amongst the public, and in particular amongst those who were not able for one reason or another to join the Craft, that if the order was so secret, there must be some dark and evil goings-on at the meetings. There was talk of devil worship, strange religious rites, black magic and of pernicious

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influences being peddled in political and secular circles

Very recently, in England, there have been accusations, for example in the Police Forces, that masons were influencing high appointments or, conversely, getting non-masonic officials removed from office in order to accommodate brethren of the Craft. Accusations of this kind, and numerous attacks of different natures, have been directed against the Craft since the earliest days of its establishment but the policy has always been to refuse to enter into public argument on the charges so laid and to let the merits of Freemasonry speak for themselves. The Duke was at pains to point out that as long as there was the notion of a 'secret' society, Freemasonry would always remain suspect. and yet, anyone wanting to read about Freemasonry, even to study and understand the ritual, can obtain this knowledge without any trouble, as bookstores and libraries contain any number of volumes on the subject of Freemasonry and these can be purchased or borrowed by the public at will. Therefore, the object is for all to think of the Craft as a "society with secrets" and to discourage the

notion that Freemasonry is a "secret society" in the accepted sense of that term.

As pointed out above, historically, Freemasonry has always been the subject of attack, and this pattern will no doubt always continue. But the true speculative mason, as Colin Dyer points out, "thinks about the craft and meditates and contemplates on its meaning for him. Those who call themselves freemasons are not operative masons; they are free and accepted, or speculative. This definition places speculative' as an alternative name or description to 'free and accepted'. The craft has acquired the qualifying 'free and accepted' as a matter of history, but those who choose to become members of it are bound by this alternative title to do more than just remain passive members, they should think about the underlying principles of the society they have joined"

The burden of this presentation deals with operative aspects of Freemasonry. John Ladd, writing in 1770, said that "speculative knowledge is that which arises from contemplation; it is inferred and confirmed by a due reasoning from principles" and William Preston, at about the same period wrote: "Operative Masonry directs our works to perfection, speculative to happiness" These observations in effect sum up the distinction between speculative and operative Freemasonry, and what the United Grand Lodge of England strives for and hopes the brethren of the Craft will absorb and practice.

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