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A NEW PERSPECTIVE IN MASONIC RESEARCH

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A Wake-up Call

Research is a key element in Masonic activities, but unfortunately in most speculative lodges nowadays its importance usually is overlooked. No doubt a variety of factors contribute to the prevalence of this unfortunate situation, but few if any of those factors provide valid reasons why Masonic research should not be a regular feature in the work of every lodge. Indeed, the dearth of research carried out by members and presented for discussion in speculative lodges is symptomatic of the wider problems confronting freemasonry around the world. In the writer's opinion all of these problems stem directly from a misconception of why modern speculative freemasonry came into existence, what purpose it was intended to serve and most important of all, what it actually is. In essence, freemasonry is a way of life. Notwithstanding a view often expressed, the members of the four speculative lodges that amalgamated to form the first *Grand Lodge of England* in 1717 did not invent modern speculative freemasonry. The brethren of those lodges were progressive thinkers, whose views were in harmony with the spirit of *Enlightenment* of the philosophers of the eighteenth century.

The desire of the brethren who established the first *Grand Lodge of England* was to preserve and put into practical use the moral teachings of the operative free masons, whose wonderful works on ecclesiastical buildings were renowned and for centuries had been an inspiration to the people. The objectives established by the brethren of those four English speculative lodges were reinforced in 1913, when the last four operative lodges in England established the *Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviers, Plaisterers and Bricklayers*, so that their rituals and teachings would not be lost forever. It now behoves all freemasons to revive the spirit and the intentions of those purely speculative freemasons who established the first *Grand Lodge of England*. The fact that lodges of operative free masons had a significant speculative element and included moral instruction is evidenced beyond doubt in their *Ancient Charges* and *Traditional Histories*, copies of which have survived from as early as about 1400. An essential initiative to achieve this objective is the revitalisation of Masonic research with a new perspective.

Perspective

From the point of view of the average freemason, a disincentive to Masonic research has been the tendency of writers to concentrate in detail on aspects relating to the evolution of purely speculative freemasonry since the formation of the first *Grand Lodge of England*. The importance of this field of research is not disputed, but it is not related to the primary purpose of freemasonry and therefore is not of great interest to the average freemason. This type of research lies mainly within the province of lodges established to undertake research, but even in those lodges should not be a primary subject of research. Speculative freemasonry evolved from the historical and moral instructions given in lodges of highly skilled practitioners in the design and construction of all types of buildings and other stone structures like bridges, dams, tunnels and aqueducts. Their instruction was based on practical aspects of the work and incorporated explanations of the use of their working tools and other instruments to convey important moral lessons. The evolution and work of freemasonry in all its aspects provides a history in stone, over many millennia, of the development of the human race from primitive hunter-gatherers to the modern era. The fact that substantial construction materials other than stone have only been used during the last five percent or so of that period is a potent reminder of the vital part played by freemasonry in human development.

Logically the most important objectives of Masonic research, for presentation in lodge by the average freemason, should be to reveal the beneficial aspects of the developments in which freemasonry has had a key role. Such research should not only to illustrate the illustrious history of freemasonry, but also should inculcate the practice of the humanitarian elements that for ten thousand years or more were the foundation of operative free masonry. Archaeology and other sciences are

important tools in this kind of research. Whilst a vast amount of relevant information is readily available in books from libraries, nowadays an almost inexhaustible source of information also is available on the Internet. To illustrate the wealth of subject matter available for research that is of general interest, but also specifically suitable for presentation in lodge, I set out below an outline of the lives and remarkable achievements of the operative free masons from about 3000 BCE until the establishment of the *Grand Lodge of Scotland* in 1736. This kind of material is dealt with in various chapters in my book entitled *The Square and Compasses – In Search of Freemasonry*, which may be referred to and could be used as models for presentation purposes.

Ancient Egypt

Of all the work carried out by the operative free masons in ancient times, the most extensive still in existence are structures from the Egyptian Kingdoms. Moreover, it is probable that more people are aware of the Egyptian temples, pyramids, underground tombs and other structures than of any other ancient works. The earliest known Egyptian structures were the huge brick mastaba tombs of the kings of the Archaic Period from about 3100 BCE to about 2700 BCE. These were followed by the Stepped Pyramid designed by the royal architect Imhotep and built for King Zoser at Saqqara in about 2650 BCE. Imhotep is usually credited with the invention of authentic stone masonry. From the detailed archaeological investigations that have been carried out over the last decade or more on the Giza plateau, on the west bank of the Nile River in the vicinity of Cairo, we are gaining a new insight into the lives and working conditions of those who constructed the three great pyramids of Khufu (Cheops), Khafra (Chephren) and Menkaura (Mycerinus), from about 2500 BCE to 2400 BCE during the Old Kingdom. We now know that the workers were not slaves as usually depicted in extravaganza films.

On the contrary they were well trained craftsmen, assembled as highly efficient construction teams under the leadership of skilled operative free masons, the accuracy of whose work leaves us in no doubt as to their knowledge and technical ability. The immensity of the work and the speed with which it must have been carried out would be difficult to equal with modern technology and equipment. The workers lived in construction villages adjacent to the work sites - not makeshift dwellings, but permanent stone houses then at least the equivalent of those used on construction sites nowadays. Food, hygiene and medical attention were good and there is evidence that many lived and worked on the same site for many years. There is no evidence of excessive accident or death rates as a result of the working conditions, but there is evidence that skilled medical operations were carried out to overcome the effects of injuries. As yet no records are available that provide specific details of the hours worked in a day or of the meal and rest breaks taken, but nothing has been found that would suggest the workers were driven excessively. Indeed, the evidence strongly suggests that the workers were not driven as brutally as they were during the Classical Era and the Dark Ages of Europe and Great Britain.

Classical Times

The Greek and Roman architecture of the Classical Era is well known. The Greeks are renowned for their several orders of architecture, of which the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian are in the forefront. The Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens is one of the most renowned structures in the world and reflects the ultimate in Greek architecture. It was completed in 432 BCE after fifty years under construction. In Rome the Colosseum was constructed in eight years between 72 CE and 80 CE and the Pantheon, where Raphael was buried, was constructed in four years between 120 CE and 124 CE. They probably are the most famous Roman structures of Classical Times. These great structures of the Classical Era carried on the traditions established in Egypt, but except for the introduction of pozzolanic concrete by the Romans they did little to advance construction methods. Even the true catenary arch, which was used so effectively by the Romans and is often attributed to them, had been used by the Sumerians in the tombs of the Royal Cemetery at Ur, constructed between 2700 BCE and 2370 BCE.

The greatest advances in design and construction during the Classical Era were related to architectural finesse. Among the most spectacular examples of the Classical Era are the temples of Baalbek in Lebanon that were constructed on a *tel* that had been a sacred precinct since ancient times and was converted into a sanctuary in about 1200 BCE. Work on the Roman temples was commenced in about 60 CE and continued progressively on four temples for almost two hundred years. The Temple of Bacchus, begun in about 150 CE and completed in about 200 CE, is of incredible beauty and is

better preserved than any other Roman temple of its size. The Temple of Jupiter is the largest, completed in about 70 CE. It incorporates the largest foundation stones ever used in masonry construction, up to 20 metres long and 4 metres square in cross-section and each weighing up to 800 tonnes. The Temples of Jupiter and Bacchus also incorporate 104 monolithic pink granite columns brought from Aswan in southern Egypt, with shafts up to 16.6 metres high and 2 metres in diameter, each weighing up to 135 tonnes. Another important construction aspect of Baalbek was the use of multiple pulleys attached to Lewis cramps, with each cramp supporting up to 5 tonnes.

Medieval Construction in Britain

Egypt is renowned for its massive, seemingly indestructible pyramids and for its remarkable underground tombs. Although the greatest buildings erected during the Classical Era also are very substantial structures, it is their architectural finesse that typifies their design. Britain is noted for its castles, monasteries and cathedrals, of which some like the York Minster have been in continuous use for almost a thousand years. Of those structures, as in France, it is the height and decoration of the buttressed Gothic style cathedrals, coupled with the slenderness of their design, which highlights the ultimate achievements of the medieval operative free masons in Britain and on the continent of Europe. It is generally acknowledged that the available minutes and other written records of operative and speculative lodges in Scotland go much further back in history than those of England. Nevertheless there is ample circumstantial evidence to show that the working conditions, hours of work and methods used were generally similar in the two kingdoms. For this reason it will be of advantage to refer to relevant events chronologically in relation to Britain as a whole rather than in relation to England and Scotland separately. In this respect it should be noted that most of the references given in relation to English operative free masonry are based on evidence that is primarily anecdotal, whereas those relating to Scottish operative free masonry are mostly based on recorded evidence.

An appropriate starting point for the history of operative free masonry in Britain is the report of the historian Rebold who says that Charles Martel (688-741), *Charles the Hammer* of France, “*at the request of the Anglo-Saxon kings, he sent workmen and masters into England*”. The medieval operative free masons in England regarded Charles Martel as one of their patrons and included him in their *Traditional History*, giving an allegorical account of the establishment of the craft in England and the fixing of good rates of pay at a penny a day. Later the chief steward of St Albans, the successor to the ancient Roman-British town of *Verulamium*, is said to have cherished the masons for their good work, on which account he obtained a charter from the king and his counsel and named the masons as an Assembly, giving them charges and doubling their wages to two pence a day. The town of St Albans is named after the first Christian martyr in Britain, a Roman soldier Albanus, said by the *Venerable Bede* and some earlier writers to have been scourged and beheaded in 303 for having given refuge to St Amphibalus, the priest who had converted him to Christianity.

Another legend says that Gordianus, the Roman emperor in 238, sent many architects into England where they constituted many lodges and instructed the craftsmen in the true principles of freemasonry. It also says that when Carausius was emperor in Britain from 287 he loved the craft and appointed Albanus as the Grand Master of Masons who employed the fraternity in building the palace at *Verulamium*. Despite the obvious discrepancies in the dates mentioned, it has been established that architecture and the craft were first encouraged in England during the third century and that the earliest operative free masons came from Europe. Reverting to the *Traditional History* of English operative free masons, it concludes with the legend of an Assembly held at York in 926 during the reign of King Athelstan, whose younger half-brother Edwin is often called his son. It is reputed that Edwin had learnt geometry and the mason's craft and prevailed upon the king to issue a *Charter* for the free masons and a *Commission* for them to hold an annual Assembly. Although no record of the Assembly has been found, a tradition handed down for many centuries usually has some basis in fact. In any event it is known that the continuing association of York with free masonry began with the conversion to Christianity of the Northumbrian king, Prince Edwin, by his Kentish wife. He was baptised on Easter Day 627 by the first Bishop of York, Paulinus, in a wooden chapel on the site of the present Minster.

The friendship between France and Scotland, the “*Auld Alliance*”, began in 1134 during the reign of David I of Scotland and a note on its influence is relevant. In 1294 Philip IV of France seized Gascony, which the British king Edward I ruled under the title of Duke of Aquitaine. Edward called on John Balliol, king of Scotland, to provide England with military and financial assistance to expel the French

from Aquitaine. With the support of a council of twelve Scottish notables assembled at Scone in July 1295, Balliol rejected Edward's demands and expelled all English estate holders from Scotland. Balliol then resumed the negotiations for a formal alliance with France, discontinued in 1166 during the reign of "**The Lion**", William I, King of Scots, as a result of which the two governments signed a treaty in October 1295. One of the earliest initiatives arising from the friendship between France and Scotland was the involvement of the **Travelling Masons** of France in the design and construction of the Abbey of Kilwinning, which was founded by the Constable of Scotland, Richard de Morville, in about 1150 on the site of a church built in the sixth century by St Wynin, an Irish monk. Richard de Morville is reputed to have founded Dryburgh Abbey in the same year on the site of the sixth century sanctuary of St Modan. The French **Travelling Masons** introduced the lifting device into Scotland they called the **leveor**, which the Scottish operative free masons called the **lewis**, probably an adaptation of the Latin word **leuis** meaning to **levitate**, with which the master masons would almost certainly have known from their need to hold discussions in Latin with the clergy.

Some researchers are of the opinion that the increase in wages attributed to Albanus in the **Traditional History** was the increase that came into effect after the bubonic plague reached England in 1348. As a result of the unprecedented demand for labour in the aftermath of the **Black Death**, a **Statute of Labourers** was enacted in England in 1350 to regulate wages and prevent extortionate pricing, but no reference was made to working conditions or to the required hours of work. In this respect the **Statute of Labourers** differs significantly from the earliest **Charters of Incorporation** and related **Trade Regulations** promulgated in Scotland. The **Statute of Labourers** fixed the wages of a master freestone mason at four pence per day and of other masons at three pence per day. However there is some evidence supporting the assertion in the **Traditional History** that wages had been fixed at two pence per day much earlier than when the increases were prescribed in the **Statute of Labourers**. For example, the earliest of the **Westminster Fabric Rolls**, that of 1253, records the average wage for masons as one shilling and ten pence per week, whilst that of 1271 records that an expert master mason received two shillings and six pence per week.

In England the majority of the operative lodges worked under the immediate control of a religious establishment, such as a cathedral, often for periods extending over several generations of their work forces. For example, work on the York Minster was carried out progressively for about 250 years. The lodges also were under the guardianship of craft guilds, originally in the form of religious fraternities organised to protect the interests of skilled workers in the various trades. In Scotland there were many more operative lodges, but they were much smaller and more mobile than their English counterparts. The mason trade in Scotland originally revolved around individual lodges working independently, although the many territorial lodges were gradually organised under the supervision of head lodges that were not always in large towns. The Wars of Independence disrupted Scotland from 1286 to 1371, causing extreme poverty and forcing the Mason Guilds to amalgamate with the organisations of other crafts, but without destroying their continuity. It would be appropriate to mention here that there is no record of Scottish operative lodges generally having a **Traditional History** similar to that of their English counterparts, although in later times some Scottish lodges working near or over the border with England adopted the English version. In Scotland the operative free masons had the "**Mason Word**" which they guarded jealously.

Seals of Cause

After the Wars of Independence and despite the continuing efforts of the English Parliament to suppress all travelling bands of craftsmen, lodges of freemasons in Scotland gradually rebuilt their own organisation, which gained in power as the Merchant Guilds declined. The Masons and Wrights of Edinburgh obtained a "**Charter of Incorporation of Freemen-Masons and Wrights of Edinburgh**" from the Burgh in 1475, called a **Seal of Cause**, when **Trade Regulations** also were promulgated. This **Seal of Cause** probably is better known than most, even though it was not the first occasion when laws were enacted for the governance of the Craft in Scotland. There were at least six **Seals of Cause** similar to that of Edinburgh granted in various localities of Scotland by the end of the seventeenth century. The **Seals of Cause** and their associated **Trade Regulations** covered all relevant aspects of the Craft's activities. For example, one of the stipulations was that apprentices must serve a term of seven years, after which they were required to be examined by four "**searchers**" and found proficient before being admitted to membership of the craft and entered in the books.

An earlier enactment of importance was made in Dundee. When David, the Earl of Huntingdon, returned from the Crusades he established a residence in Dundee and founded the Abbey of Lindores in 1178, which he presented to a church dedicated to the Virgin, "Our Lady". In 1248 a granddaughter of the Earl founded a nunnery in Dundee and then in succession a residence for the Red Friars, a residence for the Black Friars, a nunnery for the Grey Sisters and finally a cloister for the Sisters of Magdalene. Thus for many years Dundee was an important centre of activity for operative free masons, who formed a lodge under the name of "Our Lady". It is not known when the lodge actually came into existence, but it is recognised as the earliest authenticated instance in Scotland of a lodge dedicated to a patron saint. Of importance in the present context is that the Town Council of Dundee enacted laws for the governance of the craft from 1424 to 1457 and the lodge became the recognised local authority for the standard of workmanship. For example, a building agreement entered into in Dundee in 1536 stipulated that the work must be carried out according to the "*auld use and consuetude of Our Lady Luge of Dundee . . .*"

Contemporary written records of Our Lady Lodge of Dundee show that in that period in Scotland work in summer commenced at 5:00 am, paused for breakfast at 8:30 am and recommenced at 9:00 am. Work then continued until a longer break was taken for the main meal, called dinner, at 11:30 am. After dinner work resumed at 1:00 pm, paused for lunch at 4:00 pm, recommenced at 4:30 pm and finished at 7:00 pm. Thus a total of eleven and one half hours per day were worked during the summer. However, during the winter when days were short, work continued from daylight to dark without any break for food. There is no reference to any pause for refreshment, so presumably if a drink was required during winter it had to be taken without a break. All of the available evidence indicates that the hours of work in Scotland were similar to those then being worked in England.

The Schaw Statutes

Despite the disruptions caused by the Reformation, operative masonry continued to be active in Scotland and gained in strength. William Schaw drafted the *Schaw Statutes* in 1598. The king of Scotland, James VI, had appointed William Schaw as Master of Work and General Warden of Masons in 1583. The *Schaw Statutes* incorporated everything legislated for in the earlier *Seals of Cause* and the *Trade Regulations* and were extended in 1599 to provide an elaborate code of organisation and procedures within a regional structure. A copy of the *Schaw Statutes* of 1598 is appended for information. At that time in Britain generally the statutory wages of a master were twelve pence per day or six shillings per week; a clerk of works four shillings per week; a setter three shillings and eight pence per week; and a mason three shillings per week in summer months and two shillings and six pence per week in winter months. These wages will help in assessing the severity of the penalties established by the *Schaw Statutes*. Another aspect of particular interest is the item dealing with the erection and care of scaffolding, which is the oldest official regulation on the subject. It is the strictest rule in the entire code because it does not impose a fine, but precludes any master in breach of the regulation from ever again having charge of any work in his own right

The St Clair Charters

A note on the *St Clair Charters* is an appropriate conclusion to this brief outline of operative masonry. With the permission of William Schaw and the approval of five widely scattered lodges, the first *St Clair Charter* of 1601 authorised William St Clair the Laird of Roslin whose forebears had "*for ages been the patrons and protectors of the Mason Craft in Scotland*", but whose patronage had been allowed to fall into abeyance, to purchase from the King "*liberty, freedom and jurisdiction*" over all Masons of the Burghs and Sheriffdoms of Scotland. Seven lodges approved the second *St Clair Charter* of 1628 for William St Clair, the son of the former, confirming and elaborating the first, but Charles I of England, son of James VI of Scotland, ignored it and appointed Sir Anthony Alexander as Master of Work and Warden General in 1629. A later William St Clair of Roslin was elected first Grand Master Mason of the Grand Lodge of Scotland when it was established in 1736.