

Ancients & Moderns:

The Two Pillars of Conflict in Masonic Observance

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We have all seen movies about the occult and witchcraft, where, at some point a magic spell is cast. Maybe the purpose of the spell is to summon spirits, good or evil. Or, more commonly, the spell is cast merely to bring about a desired end, hopefully for good. Usually, the spell is read from some ancient, leather-bound grimoire - some highly decorated, dusty old book, held shut by brass clasps. The spell normally requires that a peculiar diagram be drawn on the floor with chalk, or charcoal, which can easily be erased at a later time. Various items are called for, and they are required to be placed around the room in specific places. Candles are always employed -- and not just any random number of candles, but a specific number of candles -- usually an odd number. And they also must be placed in specific points around the room. The person casting the spell is required to dress a certain way, perhaps barefoot. The old book is opened and a formulaic spell is spoken, using archaic verbiage.

What were early Scottish Freemasons thinking? I often wonder what Scottish Freemasons were thinking when they performed their secret ritual a century or so before the Grand Lodge of Scotland was formed. The old Tyler would arrive early and use chunks of chalk and charcoal to carefully draw the lodge on the clay tile floor, following a time-honored diagram that he'd learned from his predecessor, and then arrange the required "furniture" of the Lodge -- furniture both movable and immovable. The brethren solemnly gathered and clothed themselves. Visitors were tested to make certain that they were in possession of the Word. The officers donned their jewels of office and took their stations and places. The Tyler was stationed and the door was sealed. The candles were lit. The old book and instruments were placed before the Master, the ritual was spoken, and the blessings of the Great Architect were invoked. And then ... then the brethren would gaze in wonder as the Symbolic Lodge would appear, almost like an apparition -- fragile, ephemeral, and magical -- like a shimmering, iridescent hologram, there before them in the dim candlelight. The Symbolic Lodge, like a microcosm of the universe, stretching from East to West, and situated between North and South, resting lightly on the circumference of the earth, and temporarily suspended beneath the twinkling starlit canopy of the heavens.

What were they thinking? What did *they* see, in *their* minds' eyes? Were they thinking that they had successfully conjured a microcosm of God's universe? Did they imagine that they were standing on the shoulders of Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler, gazing with wonder at the miracle of God's vast and infinite creation? I think they did. Did the Masons of later centuries lose that vision? And if so, then why did they lose it? And can it be rediscovered?

Scotland's Hermetic Tradition: We don't have the time here tonight to even begin to examine the ways in which the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution affected the evolution of speculative Freemasonry during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Scotland. But, if you have read the works of Dame Frances Yates (*Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, and *The Art of Memory*), David Stevenson (*The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710*), Tobias Churton (*The Golden Builders: Alchemists, Rosicrucians and the First Freemasons*), Robert L. D. Cooper's book *Cracking the Freemasons Code*, or Marsha Keith Schuchard's massive tome, *Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture*, or any number of similar works, then you know that speculative Freemasonry was born in the primordial soup of an hermetic and cabalistic tradition and culture that permeated the court of James VI, Scotland's latter-day King Solomon, the Freemason King. This was a late medieval Scotland, which also stood on the brink of the Scientific Revolution.

It is this mix of Renaissance hermeticism and cabalism, added to the new Rosicrucianism of the seventeenth century and the scientific discoveries of the Renaissance astronomers, that allowed the early Scottish Freemasons to lift the curtain on God's universe and see it as one infinite, well-ordered clockwork mechanism, with the Sun, Moon and stars all moving together like so many parts of a celestial juke box, illuminated by all the colors of the rainbow, emitting a full spectrum of lights and sounds, all emanating harmoniously from the music of the spheres.

A Century of Change: The seventeenth century was a century of change. The first decade of the century was marked by the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 - the last of the Tudor monarchs - and the accession of James VI, King of the Scots, to the English throne, and the two crowns were united under the Stuart dynasty. With the arrival of the Stuart court in London, and Stuart rule in England, also came Scottish speculative Freemasonry into that long, troubled century leading up to the accession of the House of Hanover under George I in 1714, and the subsequent formation of the first London grand lodge in 1717.

It is during this long century that we find the first evidence of accepted (non-operative) Masons in England. In the year 1631, there is a record in the Masons Company of London for paying the Clerk's expenses for traveling to a meeting where Masons were to be "accepted." Later references to what became known as "the accepçon" indicate that it was a lodge separate from the Masons Company of London, very similar to, if not a clone of, the speculative lodges that existed in the burghs of Scotland -- lodges that were separate from, but parallel to, the city-chartered incorporations of Freemasons.

The earliest surviving record of an initiation in any English lodge is that of the antiquarian Elias Ashmole, who was initiated in October 1646. Additional written references in England to either "the masons word," "Accepted Masons," "Free-masons," and "Freed-masons" appear during the last three decades of the 1600s.

Of course, by the end of the seventeenth century, Scottish lodges had been making accepted Masons for at least a hundred years, and no one really knows for how long before that. The earliest surviving record of an accepted Mason in a Scottish lodge appears in the year 1600, but we don't know when he was initiated. There are few surviving Scottish lodge minutes prior to that, so we can't know when the practice began in Scotland. It has been suggested that the practice may have begun with the promulgation of Scotland's Schaw Statutes in 1598 and 1599, but it may have begun long before that. The practice of keeping accurate records was introduced by the Schaw Statutes, so earlier records simply don't exist.

The Rise of the Moderns: During the eighteenth century, we see the rise of an entirely new strain of Freemasonry - "The Moderns." It should suffice to say that the Moderns and their grand lodge were born in London under the direction of Dr. John T. Desaguliers. I don't need to recite the full history of the formation of their grand lodge in 1717. Most Masons know the short version by heart. That short version is that it was formed on June 24th that year, at the sign of the Swan & Lyre (Goose & Gridiron) in St. Paul's Churchyard by four London lodges, which the Reverend James Anderson, writing in 1738, described as "the four old lodges of London."

But, how old were these four lodges? By the time that Anderson used that description in 1738, these "four old lodges" were at least twenty-one years old, and possibly a handful of years more. Compared to many of the other, newer lodges created after the formation of the grand lodge of 1717, those four lodges were indeed "old," or they could at least be described as older. It's all a matter of perspective.

A Cultural Split: But, it's been suggested that this first grand lodge, which came to be known as "the grand lodge of the Moderns," and which was created by upper-middle class London Masons, was organized as an attempt to distance themselves from the working class members among the other London lodges, the "Ancient lodges." But, probably more to the point, they created this new grand lodge to distance themselves from those Masons with Stuart Jacobite sympathies.

The year, after all, was 1717, which was only two years after the Jacobite Rising of 1715, and only three years after Parliament had awarded the Crown to George I of the House of Hanover. The Act of Settlement, passed by Parliament in 1701, prohibited Catholics from inheriting the British throne. So, when Queen Anne died in 1714, the succession passed to George, the prince elector of Hanover, great-grandson of James VI & I, rather than to Anne's Catholic half-brother, James Francis Edward Stuart, Prince of Wales, and the only legitimate son of the deposed James VII & II, bypassing him and about fifty other Catholic heirs more closely related to Queen Anne. As a result, in what became known as "the Rising of the Fifteen," Jacobite supporters of the House of Stuart rallied in support of the Prince of Wales. Although the Jacobite Rising of 1715 ended in defeat, strong Jacobite sympathies were felt throughout Britain for many years, and some continue the debate to this day.

So, in the handful of years immediately following the Rising of 1715, how would the Crown, and the supporters of the House of Hanover, have looked upon clandestine meetings of a secret organization, meeting in small cabals, or "lodges," as they called them, in the upper floors over inns, pubs and coffee-houses around London? How would the Crown have felt about Freemasons if it knew that the records of their lodges demonstrated beyond a doubt that the origins of this organization were deeply rooted in the cultural attitudes of Stuart Scotland? Would that not have raised their suspicions?

So, from the Moderns' perspective, the solution might be to simply destroy all the lodge record books, unite the four silk-stocking lodges together under a so-called "grand lodge," claim that the fraternity's history began on St. John's Day in 1717, and then claim that you know nothing about those other old lodges meeting across town. Those

Ancient lodges may be rife with Jacobites, but your lodge members are all good supporters of King George. Better still if you could find a member of the nobility to be your Grand Master.

Furthermore, it might be important to streamline the ritual a bit, and demystify it. Take out some of those questionable practices that might be interpreted as occult. Dr. John Desaguliers, in 1719 the third grand master of the grand lodge, had as much to do with this simplification, or what some might call “the dumbing down,” of the ritual practices of the new Modern grand lodge as anyone. It was a natural thing to do, in their mind, so as to purify the Masonic experience of any overtly esoteric interpretation, thereby making it more palatable to the average, London Whig.

As one historian wrote: “Up to 1750 the century is that of [Alexander] Pope, [Jonathan] Swift, [Daniel] Defoe and [Henry] Fielding, ... in politics of [Robert] Walpole and the Whigs, who placed and kept the Hanoverians on the throne. It was the period of rationalism and materialism, when any form of ‘enthusiasm’ was suspect, and imagination subordinated to good sense. Pope was the poet of this cult of reason, of the curbing of emotion by the conscious mind ... so that in his work we shall find no eagle flights of imagination.” (Halliday, F.E.; *An Illustrated Cultural History of England*; 1967, Thames & Hudson; p. 193.)

For good or ill, Dr. Desaguliers’s new grand lodge, with its more mundane interpretation of Masonic forms and ceremonies, was outwardly part of that rational cultural shift. Nevertheless, within the fraternity, there continued to be small pockets with a tendency toward the metaphysical and spiritual. Like the black “yin,” which contains the small white dot of its counterpart “yang,” so too the rational Modern’s grand lodge had a small subconscious desire to accept more of the esoteric elements of the Ancients’ tradition. And this brings us to the acceptance of the Third Degree.

The Third Degree: The official history of the grand lodge of 1717 has always held that the Third Degree first appeared about ten years after the formation of the first grand lodge, and that it first appeared in London. However, as a side note, I would remind you that the Five Points of Fellowship, which allude to one of the significant elements of the Third Degree, first appear in Scottish catechisms before 1717. [Note: The Edinburgh Register House MS. (1696), the recently discovered Airlie MS. (1705), and the Chetwode Crawley MS. (c. 1710), all include catechisms that give the Five Points of Fellowship.]

I’m not suggesting that this is undeniable proof of the existence of the Third Degree in Scotland, but it does provide us with evidence of the Third Degree, and that evidence is clearly Scottish. Similar written evidence may have existed in England at one time, but, historians have never found one surviving English lodge record, nor one surviving English lodge minute or minute-book prior to the formation of the grand lodge of 1717.

Now, I can make a good case for the Third Degree as the first High Degree. Obviously, the Third Degree is a high degree because, after all, it is higher than the First or Second. For me, the element that gives the Third Degree more kinship with the later High Degrees is the drama of the Degree that plays out in the second section, which is the Mason’s first introduction to what he will later discover in the High Degrees of the Scottish Rite. But, we now consider the High Degrees to be those degrees beyond the Third, and beyond the craft lodge, and that has been our definition for the last two and half centuries.

The High Degrees: If the first evidence of the Third Degree is to be found in Scottish catechisms, then is it any surprise that the earliest Fourth Degree would also be a Scottish degree? The earliest surviving record of a degree beyond the Third appears in the year 1733, when the term “Scots Master” is used in connection with regular meetings of Lodge No. 115 at the Devil’s Tavern at London’s Temple Bar.

- 1733 - The earliest mention of the term “Scots Master” is in connection with regular meetings of Lodge No. 115 at the Devil’s Tavern at Temple Bar in London in 1733. (This appears in Rawlinson’s List of Lodges. The lodge met twice a month and is mentioned in three contemporary documents as “a Scots Masters Lodge.”)
- 1734 - In Pine’s 1734 engraved list of lodges, the same Lodge No. 115 listed above (at the Devil’s Tavern) is listed as “a Scotch Masons’ Lodge.”
- 1735 - On 28 October 1735, the Lodge at the Bear Inn in Bath records that “a Lodge of Masters met extraordinary” at which the Master, both Wardens and nine brethren were made “Scots Mast’ Masons.”

Ramsay’s Oration: I’d like to point out here that the several surviving references to the Scottish Masters Degree that occur during the early 1730s all appear before the now famous Oration given by the Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay (c. 1681-1743). Many Masonic writers are guilty of stating that the creation of the *Ecossais* degrees, or the Scottish High Degrees, was the result of *Ramsay’s Oration*, written in 1737. Ramsay, a native of Scotland, a Knight of the French Order of St. Lazarus, and, in 1724 and 1725, tutor to the two sons of the exiled James III (“The Old Pretender”), the son of Britain’s exiled King James II. The older of the two sons of James III

was Charles Edward Stuart, known to his followers in Scotland as “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” and the leader of the Scottish Rebellion of 1745.

In his *Oration*, Ramsay asserted that the founders of the fraternity “were not simple workers in stone,” but crusader knights “who vowed to restore the Temple” in the Holy Land, in imitation of the ancient Israelites, who, “while they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other, they held the sword and buckler.” The Masonic historian Robert F. Gould (1836-1915) erroneously attributed the rise of the High Degrees to the Chevalier Ramsay. In his *History of Freemasonry*, Gould wrote, “What is designated as Scots Masonry was unknown before the date of Ramsay’s speech, but it appeared shortly afterwards.” But, as we’ve seen, the Scottish Master’s Degree had been conferred in England, if not elsewhere, for several years before Ramsay wrote his Oration. Even then, whether Ramsay ever delivered his Oration before any assemblage of Masons, it was not published until after 1740.

Scottish Master after 1737: After 1737, we find additional references to the Scottish Master’s Degree: in 1740 in London and in Bristol, and then in two lodges in Berlin in 1742:

- 1740 - Lodge No. 1 of the Modern’s grand lodge met on 17 June in London and nine members of the Lodge were made “Scotch Master Masons.”
- 1740 - The following month, at the Lodge No. 137 at the Rummer, in Bristol, it was ordered and agreed that “Bro. Tomson and Bro. Watts and any other member of this L. that are already Master Masons may be made Scotch Master”
- 1741 - The German Masonic historian, J. G. Findel, in his *History of Freemasonry*, referred to a lodge of French Masons working a Scots degree in Berlin in 1743, which had been opened two years earlier.
- 1742 - On 30 November, St. Andrew’s Day, six members of the Lodge of the Three Globes, were authorized to establish a Scottish Lodge under the name Lodge of the Union “to let its younger brethren aspire after the higher or so-called Scottish Masonry.”

A Triple Coincidence: It’s about this time period, in the mid-1740s, that something very strange happens. Actually, three things happen. And the coincidence of these three things happening at about the same time is worth noting.

- First, references to the Scottish Master’s Degree in London and England cease. We find no references to the Scottish Master’s Degree in England after the mid-1740’s.
- Second, on 11 December 1743, we find the first reference to the Degree of *Maitres Ecossais*, the Scottish Master’s Degree, in France. After that, references to the term Scottish Master becomes increasingly common in France.
- And third, a new degree, possibly a fifth degree, makes its first appearance in the British Isles.

The Royal Arch Degree Appears: This new degree, the Royal Arch Degree, makes its first appearance in the year 1743, in a Dublin newspaper, where an article reported a St. John’s Day parade in which there was “The Royal Arch carried by two excellent Masons.” This is the first and earliest surviving reference in print to the term “Royal Arch.” Shortly after that we begin to find the Royal Arch Degree becoming the predominant Fourth Degree in London and throughout the English-speaking world.

- 1743 - In *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, dated 10-14 January, an article reported that Youghall Lodge No. 21 celebrated St. John’s Day with a parade in which there was “the Royal Arch carried by two excellent Masons.”
- 1744 - Fifield D’Assigny published in 1744, at Dublin, Ireland, a book titled *A Serious and Impartial Enquiry into the Cause of the Present Decay of Freemasonry in the Kingdom of Ireland*, in which he stated that the Royal Arch Degree was conferred in Dublin “some few years ago,” and had been brought there from the city of York.
- 1746 - Laurence Dermott (1720-1791), later Grand Secretary (1752-1771) of the Ancient Grand Lodge at London, stated that he received the Royal Arch Degree at Dublin in 1746.
- 1752 - The earliest Masonic record referring to the Royal Arch Degree is to be found in the minutes of 4 March 1752 of the Grand Committee for the organization of the Ancient Grand Lodge, where a complaint was lodged that two men, who were referred to as “leg of mutton Masons,” had initiated a number of others for the cost of a supper, and those whom they pretended to make “Royal Archmen” had not the slightest idea of that secret.
- 1753 - The first unquestioned minutes of a lodge conferring the Royal Arch Degree by that name are those minutes of the Lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia, for 22 December 1753.

So, what happened to cause the disappearance of the Scottish Master's Degree from the lodges of England, while it was making its first appearance in France? Was it simply the appearance of a newer, more popular, degree, that of the Royal Arch? If so, then why didn't the Royal Arch Degree supplant the Scottish Master's Degree in France as well? In fact, so-called "Scottish Masonry," or *Ecosais* Masonry, far from disappearing in France, as it did in England, actually increased in popularity in France, and eventually gave rise to what we now know as the Scottish Rite.

The Masonic encyclopedist, Henry Wilson Coil, stated "The Royal Arch is distinctly of the *Ecosais*, Scots Master, Cryptic, Ineffable type...." It is the esoteric elements of the Scottish Masters Degree, what we know as the Royal Arch Degree in both its Scottish Rite and York Rite versions, that caused the Masons on the continent of Europe to regard Scottish Freemasonry more highly than the Masonry of the Moderns lodges of London.

The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745: Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia identifies about sixty different degrees beginning with the word "*Ecosais*," with most, if not all, to be found among French and other continental Masonic rites and systems. But, in the English system, the word "*Ecosais*," or "Scottish," disappeared in the mid-1740s.

The knowledgeable Mason is by now of the realization that the Scottish Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 also coincides with these other occurrences, and of course, that was the obvious catalyst for the disappearance of the Scottish Master's Degree from the streets of London, not to mention its rise in popularity among the Scottish Jacobite exiles in Paris and their French allies. I believe its obvious that the disappearance of the Scottish Master's Degree in England was simply the result of a sense of English animosity directed at all things Scottish, as well as a healthy fear of Hanoverian scrutiny brought to bear on anything, or anyone, Scottish.

From "A French Innovation" to the "Completion of the M.M. Degree: Brother A.C.F. Jackson, in his book *Rosé Croix*, states, "... by the 1740s, the high degrees were tinged in many English minds with a Jacobite hue. Any chance that they might have spread ended when the '45 Rebellion, led by the Pretender Charles Edward, threw England into a mild panic." It is no mere accident that the disappearance of the Scottish Master's Degree in England and the simultaneous appearance of the English Royal Arch Degree, coincide with the Scottish Rebellion of the 1740s. I believe that the two degrees are essentially one and the same, and that the name of the degree was simply changed in order to make the Scottish Master's Degree palatable to English political sympathies, shedding its unsavory Scottish identity and any perceived attachment to the Scottish Royal House of Stuart.

There has always been a tendency, on the part of English Masonic authors, to eschew and denigrate the *Ecosais* degrees as merely "French innovations," completely disregarding the fact that their own Royal Arch Degree, always rejected by the Moderns' grand lodge of 1717, was the original, prototypical *Ecosais* degree, embraced by the Ancient Grand Lodge, and eventually fully embraced by the new United Grand Lodge in 1813 as it was declared to be "the completion of the Master Masons Degree." So we see the first high degree go from a mere "French Innovation" to the heralded "completion of the Master Mason's Degree." What a difference the removal of the "Scottish" label made to ensuring the Degree's acceptance.

CONCLUSION: What we see, beginning with the accession of George I and the House of Hanover, followed quickly by the formation of the grand lodge of 1717 - the Moderns grand lodge - is a struggle between the older, more esoteric and metaphysical Freemasonry born in Stuart Scotland, on the one hand, and a newer, more simplified and mundane version Freemasonry, on the other hand, stripped of much of its esoteric interpretation and made more suitable for the rational London gentlemen of the eighteenth century.

Let me assemble two lists representing these two pillars of Freemasonry:

<u>Ancients</u>	<u>Moderns</u>
Scottish (and Irish)	English
Stuart	Hanoverian
Jacobites (and Tories)	Whigs
Esoteric	Mundane
Philosophical	Rational
<i>Ecosais</i>	Royal Arch
Scottish Rite	York Rite
Secret	Open
Tiled	Public

Of course, these are all generalizations, and none of the elements of either column are entirely exclusive of at least some of the elements of the other. For example, among the Masons of the Moderns grand lodge there were

many who were drawn to the Royal Arch degree of the Ancients. And, in spite of the rational theme of the York Rite degrees we still find elements of the esoteric and philosophical.

These two opposing factions, are like the two halves of the human brain - one half: esoteric, philosophical, spiritual, perceptive; and the other half: exoteric, logical, rational and practical. We find these same opposing factions, the Ancients and the Moderns, in conflict with each other within our own grand lodges, our own lodges and even within ourselves.

Freemasonry is often criticized by outsiders as being “a religion,” and of course we know it isn’t, and we deny it vehemently. But, at the same time, for many of us, it’s the spiritual aspects of the fraternity’s ritual and ceremonies of initiation that we find the most rewarding. How many of us enjoy the simple practical, rational lessons of the York Rite degrees, but on the other hand are drawn to the beautiful and philosophical rituals of the Scottish Rite.

These two Masonic pillars of conflict are nothing new, but have characterized Freemasonry’s split personality for three hundred years. And it is these two pillars of conflict that we see in conflict with each other today when our lodges meet with criticism for attempting to return to the more ancient, esoteric and philosophical model of the pre-grand lodge era.

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