



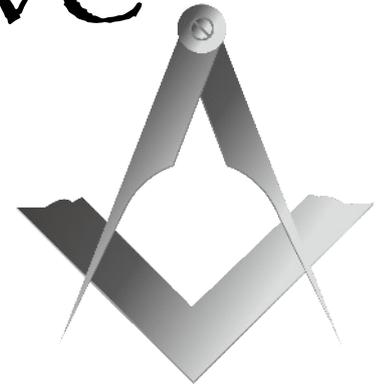
Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Operative Masons



Part One



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The Operative Mason at large – Part One

Masonic brethren have many things in common but views tend to differ somewhat widely about the connection, if any, between the Operative Mason of yesteryear and the Speculative Freemason of today.

Opinions have tended to polarise between those who believe fiercely and sometimes volubly that our lineage can be traced back through the historical figures of King James VI of Scotland, King Athelstan of the Saxons and the Roman architect Vitruvius to the more mystical figures of Euclid, Pythagoras and those three sons of Lamech the brothers Tubal, Tubal Cain and Jabul from whom it is alleged all arts, crafts and sciences were once derived.

Others, perhaps feeling more worldly and street-wise, suggest that the Speculative Freemasonry we recognise today was created only as recently as 1813 when the 'Antients' and 'Moderns' came together and sketched out the words of the three rituals we know and cherish today. These rituals were of course based extensively on the framework provided in 1725-35 by those learned theologians Drs James Anderson and Theophilus Desagulier who had married together the fruits of the Enlightenment with the moral code of current church thinking into three stages or degrees of self-improvement. These were promulgated through the near redundant lodge organisation and terminology of the Operative Masons. These 'Speculatives' supposed that any earlier claims to lineage were merely a harmless conceit. What might be the truth of it all?

During a short series of articles I should like to sketch out what we might reasonably deduce from the historical Masonic papers still in existence. Records from English lodges were of necessity fragmentary and mostly destroyed shortly after the formation of the London Grand Lodge in 1717. Contemporary records from the Scottish lodges however were substantial and, as Scottish practises influenced the northern English lodges, these records often form a useful guide to English Masonry of the day.

There is a body of evidence that suggests that the connection between the 'Operatives' and the 'Speculatives' in reality falls somewhere between the above two poles. The similarity of following characteristics is striking. Both forms of Masonry possess the following in common:

- A fundamental belief in the Divine
- An organisation based on individual and independent lodges
- Equality of all brethren within each lodge
- Use of the Antient Charges
- Strict governance through the democratic election of a Lodge Warden (or 'master') and
- Appointment of key officers such as Almoner, Chaplain, Secretary and Treasurer
- Systematic recording of all procedural and financial affairs
- Charitable concern for those in distress
- Ceremonies of initiation
- Use of the terms 'Entered Apprentice' and 'Fellow Craftsman'
- Use of special signs and words
- Close association of masonry with mathematics, in particular the geometrical basis of architecture.
- Acceptance of a mythical history of Masonic origins, including the symbolism of King Solomon's Temple

Most if not all of these attributes then would have been as familiar to the operative masons about to build Salisbury Cathedral in 1217 as they are to their cousins in Speculative Freemasonry in 2019.

‘But who were the operative masons?. The Masonic family will be described in Part Two’.

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