Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire

20 Every Day Questions on Freemasonry

WBro Tony Costello
1. **Q. Why do we have two ashlars, but three degrees?**
   A. After a few moments thought, we might reasonably consider that the first two degrees deal with stonemasonry and building whereas the 3rd degree is of a more abstract nature with no construction taking place. However there was a third aslar referred to in earlier catechisms, called the PERPEND aslar. This is an oblong stone with square sides which is placed so that it goes through the wall showing a faced end on each side. It serves to bond or bind together each part of the wall. In a Lodge room, this stone was placed in the East before the Master’s chair thus reminding him that part of his duty was to hold or bind the Lodge together.

2. **Q. Why do we set off with the left foot?**
   A. This probably comes from a military influence. To begin an orderly movement of a group, that is anything above one, it would be necessary for all to step off with the same foot. If as a soldier carrying a heavy weapon, or an official possibly carrying a staff or badge of office, usually in the right hand, for the sake of balance it is necessary to step off with the left foot. If you are unsure about this try lifting a sack of potatoes in your right hand and setting off with your right foot. What happens next will clearly demonstrate the necessity of setting off with the left foot!

3. **Q. Where does the term ‘Worshipful’ originate?**
   A. It is a title of reverence or respect found in many organisations, orders, public officials and within the legal system. Worshipful means honour (as of Your Honour), honourable or honoured. It is applied in our own system to designate a brother who has reached the highest position within a lodge – that of Master.

4. **Q. What is the Origin of Red Aprons for Stewards**
   A. In 1723 six brethren were selected by the Grand Wardens, on instruction from The Duke of Montagu (Grand Master), to act as Stewards and assist in the organising and running the festival banquet. The following year that number rose to 12 and nine years later the appointed Stewards began to decide their own successors. It became a much sought after position as it was decided that future Grand Officers would be selected from Past Grand Stewards. In 1731 the Masonic Regulations approved a red apron for Grand Stewards who formed their own lodge which changed its name to Grand Stewards Lodge in 1792. After the Union the Board of General Purposes stated that Grand Stewards of the year would be nominated from ‘Red Apron’ lodges, be members of Grand Lodge for one year only and wear the previously agreed red aprons. The rank of Steward in Lodge and Provinces followed suit.

5. **Q. Have Freemasons always worn black ties?**
   A. No we have not. The attire at lodge would be varied and appropriate for the brother’s station and purse through the 18th and early 19th centuries. Gradually a suit becoming the norm worn and with a tie (although these varied in style) The standard black tie becoming common place after the first World War as a mark of respect for
fallen brethren. So the answer is that it became common place from 1918 but is now becoming less frequent following the introduction of Festival, Lodge, Provincial and Grand Lodge ties.

6. Q. Why are the Master & Wardens situated in the East, West & South?  
   A. The first explanation is that they were not always so. The Master was always in the East being the source of knowledge. The Wardens were seated in the west, facing the WM. as is still the case in some constitutions. In squaring the lodge we follow the sun in a clockwise manner, in common with many orders and ancient religions. The sun illuminates the East, South & West and as the SW closes the work at the end of the day (with the sun setting in the West) and the JW being responsible for refreshment. The JW being placed in the South would agree with organising the mid-day break in work.

7. Q. Where did our collars of office originate?  
   A. The collars worn by officers of the Lodge were originally a less glamorous affair and purely for displaying the jewel of office. A Grand Lodge resolution from June 1727 ordered Masters and Wardens to wear their jewel of office suspended from a white ribbon. Some fifteen years later a French exposure describes the collars as tailored to a triangular shape. This is probably a fashion which was later copied in England. As for the pale blue colour, it is suggested that this was chosen to contrast with the Oxford blue of Grand Lodge. Rules 260 - 262 of the Book of Constitutions clearly describe the colours and collar width which is generally four inches.

8. Q. Why is the SW asked if everyone has had their due?  
   A. At the closing of the Lodge, the Senior Warden is asked whether every brother had had his due. Here the word ‘due’ or ‘dues’ refers to the paying of wages and in some rituals this is substituted with the phrase ‘have the brethren received their wages’. In an operative lodge, the Master would not have been involved with the day to day running of the project at a ‘hands on’ level. The warden would be today’s equivalent of Foreman, project manager and clerk.

9. Q. Why is a candidate’s trouser leg rolled up?  
   A. The trouser leg rolled up is a source of amusement to the non-masonic world, but which trouser is rolled up, depends upon which knee he is to kneel when taking his obligation. In ancient times an obligation would be taken kneeling on the ground and it was considered right that nothing should become between the person taking the obligation and the earth.

10. Q. What is the connection between Freemasonry & the Forget-me-not?  
    A. A common myth is that German Freemasons wore a small forget-me-not badge as a way of recognising a fellow brother. However the truth is one of coincidence-Adolf Hitler joined the German Workers Party in 1919 and by 1920 had galvanised it to a popular political party (Nazi). Freemasonry had strong roots and traditions in Germany, but was not favoured by Adolf Hitler. The Grand Lodge of Germany produced a small lapel pin for its delegates, choosing a different badge each year. In
1926 the badge chosen was a forget-me-not. From 1934 the Nazi party arranged annual street collections or donations from the public. A small badge was presented in exchange for a donation. The badge design was changed each year to determine those who had contributed. By chance the 1938 street collection badge was the same forget-me-not badge given to Grand Lodge delegates in 1926. At the end of the war, Grand Master Vogel ordered a number of these badges, following his visit to a new lodge formed in the town where the badges were made and gave these badges wherever he travelled as a badge of friendship. It became accepted as the emblem of German Freemasonry, but only after the war. The idea that it was worn during the war throughout Germany is a common myth. The badge would most certainly be recognised by the Nazi authorities with unfortunate consequences.

11. **Q. Why do we acknowledge two St. Johns?**

A. It’s a short question but could entail a long answer for there have been differing views. Historically, the dedication of the Mason Craft to St. John first appears after the religious Reformation of the mid-16th century. Mason’s lodges held other saints in veneration before then, among them the Virgin Mary and the Four Crowned Martyrs (who had been stone-carvers). The reformed religions in England, Scotland and Ireland held St. John the Evangelist in high regard because of his closeness to Christ and powerful gospel-message of love.

The day formally dedicated to his remembrance was 27th December in mid-winter, a good time for feasting and to mark change. Hence new Masters of lodges were often elected on or about that day. 1599 in Scotland is the earliest surviving record of this practice, but officers in lodges were often appointed for six months. Conveniently, in mid-summer, the feast of St. John the Baptist fell to be celebrated, and this too was used to enjoy and mark change. Hence both St Johns became associated with the Mason Craft in the British Isles. The veneration of the Virgin Mary and the Four Crowned Ones continued in the Roman Catholic countries of Europe. Fanciful romances have been woven around St. John the Evangelist and Freemasonry, and ritual based on this is still used in some parts of America. A circle with two parallel lines touching each side can often be found on older first degree Tracing Boards. The device originally alluded to St. John the Evangelist completing by his learning that which John the Baptist had begun, drawing a line parallel. When the Craft was de-Christianised in England the explanation was changed to an Old Testament one, and from the mid-19th century the traditional annual processions of Masons to Church on St. John’s Day to hear a suitable sermon was discouraged.

12. **Q. Did we have three risings before the existence of Prov. GL?**

A. The risings appear to be of Continental origin, seen in France from around 1745, and formed part of the formal closing of the Lodge. The question would have been asked if any brother had a point to make, once only, but gave all members an opportunity to comment. The English Constitution to this day makes no reference as to their form but three risings has become common practise since the Union in 1813.
13.Q. Who was Hiram Abif?

A . Hiram Abif is first mentioned in a Masonic context in James Anderson’s ‘Constitutions’ published in 1723. Anderson devotes a quite extraordinarily long and detailed footnote to an explanation of Hiram. By this we may surmise that Hiram Abif, by 1723, was considered a very important figure in Masonic Tradition, even though it has long been considered by many scholars that the Third Degree was not brought into being until the 1720’s. The figure of Hiram Abif, who was sent by King Hiram of Tyre to King Solomon to assist in the Temple works, is mentioned in two places in the Jewish bible. Unfortunately the two texts differ, and are not identically explicit as to what he did, or how he ended his days. Hence there is plenty of doubt as to any true historical facts about him. There is also no agreement as to what the title, or name, ‘Abif’ signifies. The text in the second book of Chronicles (Chap.2, v.13-14) speaks of Hiram as being

‘A cunning man, endued with understanding...the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him....

This is from King James’ version of the Bible. The word ‘cunning’ in those days simply meant ‘knowledgeable and skilled’. From the description Hiram Abif was a veritable Leonardo da Vinci and that is how we should regard him masonically.

The text in the first Book of Kings (Chap 7, v.13-14) speaks of Hiram being –

‘A widow’s son of the tribe of Napthali, and his father was a man from Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work’

The Kings’ account gives credit to Hiram for all the works of the Temple made of brass, including the two pillars. The Kings’ account (v,15-50) does not give him credit for the stonework or the woodwork. However, while the Chronicles account likewise mentions Hiram (Chap.4, v.11-17) as making the brass items, the context also implies his important part in the construction of the building overall.

In the Craft we should view Hiram Abif in exactly the same terms as James Anderson wrote in 1723 –‘of the most accomplish’d Mason upon Earth’

‘This divinely inspired Workman maintain’d this character in erecting the Temple, and in working the Utensils thereof, far beyond the performance of Aholiab and Bezaleel, being also universally capable of Masonry.

14.Q. Who decided & why that the Masonic calendar precedes the common era calendar by 4000 years.

A The figure of the common era plus 4000 was introduced to Freemasonry by James Anderson in early Constitutions and followed by the letters A.L.,(Anno Lucis) meaning the year of light. The addition of 4004 to the year of the common era
originates from calculations by Bishop Usher, who considered that on October 22nd 4004 years before the birth of Christ was the creation of the World. We can only assume that Anderson wished to avoid confusion by adding the figure of 4000. The dating of documents with extra 4000 years became commonplace within Freemasonry, although the word Lucis (light) was often exchanged for other Latin words meaning Stonecutters, Masonry or Freemasonry.

15. Q. Why do we vote in lodge with an outstretched hand, when Rule 59 of the Book of Constitutions stipulates voting with a raised hand?
   A. Rule 59 does clearly state that voting in Grand Lodge will be by raising one hand. There is no definite proof of the origins of extending the arm horizontally, but it may well be from use in private lodges, where it was necessary only to show a hand above the table. This method of voting is so firmly entrenched that many Grand Officers voting in Grand Lodge use the outstretched hand.

16 Q. What is Time Immemorial?
   A. Time Immemorial is generally used to denote distant time beyond memory. The date of formation of the four original lodges of Premier Grand Lodge is unknown and as such they are referred to as Time Immemorial Lodges. This must not be confused with the legal definition of before 3rd Sept 1189 (Being the coronation of King Richard 1st).

17 Q. When is a lodge just, perfect and regular.
   A. A Lodge is JUST when the VSL is present and open. PERFECT when at least five brethren are present and REGULAR when the warrant is present.

18 Q. In a ballot do two black balls always permanently exclude?
   A. No. The Book of Constitutions rule 165, states that three balls exclude, however private lodges may decide for themselves whether one, two or three balls exclude. A point often overlooked is that the rule allows lodges to place in their bye laws what period should elapse before that candidate may be balloted for again.

19 Q. Why do we refer to Freemasonry as the Craft?
   A. Early stonemasons organised themselves into a craft guilds, which protected their interests in many ways. The word craft here meant their art, calling, trade or skill. Most trades had their guilds for craftsmen and traders.

20 Q. Why are the Wardens’ columns raised and lowered?
   A. The raising and lowering of the columns to indicate that the Lodge is working or closed first appears being recorded in 1760 with no mention in earlier exposures. This subsequently became the habit and formerly adopted at the time of the union in 1813. As to why, we can only speculate, but Harry Carr offers the explanation that as Lodge work and refreshment took place around the same table, it became a visual signal as to when the Lodge was called from labour to refreshment and refreshment to labour.
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