



Nugget

Landmarks of Freemasonry

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Landmarks of the Freemasonry explored.

Summary

A discussion on what the constitutes 'Landmarks in Freemasonry'.

Keywords

Landmarks, Freemasons, Book of Constitutions

The Landmarks of Freemasonry

The words 'a Landmark in Freemasonry' are those often heard during the course of Masonic ceremonies. However, what are the Landmarks? It is most likely that few Freemasons will be able to tell you. The United Grand Lodge of England's Book of Constitutions only mentions Landmarks four times.

- Rule 4: *The Grand Lodge possesses the supreme superintending authority etc... always taking care that the Ancient Landmarks of the Order be preserved.*
- Rule 55: *(of irregular Propositions): If it shall appear to the Grand Master that any resolution contains anything contrary to the Antient Landmarks of the Order, he may refuse to permit the same to be discussed.*
- Rule 111: *Every Master Elect, before being placed in the Chair, shall solemnly pledge himself to preserve the Landmarks of the Order.*
- Rule 125 (b): *(related to the admission of visitors): it says, in part, that: No Brother shall be admitted unless..., he has been initiated into a Lodge in which a belief in The Great Architect of the Universe professed, as this belief is an essential landmark of the Order.*

However, nowhere does it stipulate what the other Landmarks are. There is no list to be found in any of the literature or in the ritual, but they are supposed to be so important! However, that has not restricted speculation on the subject. The late Harry Carr considered the following:

'A landmark must have existed from the 'time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary' and 'a landmark is an element in the form or essence of the Society of such importance that Freemasonry would no longer be Freemasonry if it were to be removed'.

If the three qualifications are used strictly to test whether certain practices, systems, principles, or regulations can be admitted as Landmarks, it will be found that there are actually very few items that will pass this rigid test.

Nevertheless, the tendency, even among prominent writers who try to compile lists of landmarks, seems to be to incorporate items which actually come under the heading of regulations or customs or principles, and tentative lists of landmarks range from five to fifty-odd separate items.

The Antient Landmarks were in fact one of the big talking points between the two Grand Lodges, the Antients and the Moderns, prior to the Union of 1813 without actually being defined and itemised. However, in this case we have a small clue in that the Grand Lodge of Wigan was formed of Lodges in Liverpool and Wigan which did not agree with the Union and continued working as Antients Grand Lodge. Correspondence dated around 1820 to the United Grand Lodge complained that: *'The new rules concerning the Royal Arch conflicted with the Antient Landmarks'*. (i.e. of the Antients Grand Lodge prior to the 1813 Union). This was primarily related to the Antients practice of working the Royal Arch degree within a Craft Lodge.

The following is suggested as a list of acceptable Landmarks which would conform to the two-point test:

- That a Mason professes a belief in a God (A Supreme Being) i.e. GAOTU
- That a Volume of Sacred Law is an essential and indispensable part of the Lodge, to be open in full view when Brethren are at labour.
- That a Mason must be male, free-born, of mature age and of good character.
- That a Mason, by his Tenure, owes allegiance to the Sovereign and to the Craft.
- That a Mason believes in the immortality of the soul.

The first four on the list are derived from the Ancient Charges.

Robert Macoy, in his Dictionary of Freemasonry states:

'Of the nature of the landmarks of Masonry, there has been some diversity of opinion; yet the conviction has become settled that the true principles constituting landmarks are those universal customs of the Order, which have gradually grown into permanent rules of action and originally established by competent authority, at a period so remote that no account of their origin is to be found in the records of Masonic history and which were considered essential to the preservation and integrity of the institution, to preserve its purity and prevent innovation'.

Finally, many Grand Lodges, especially in the USA, have listed landmarks from as few as 3 to 54 and Macoy settled for 25.¹

References:

¹ Macoy Robert (1869) *'General history, cyclopedia and dictionary of Freemasonry'*, Masonic Publishing Company

##END##

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Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study. Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

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