



PAPER

Ownership According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: The rights and responsibilities of every member of the Lodge.

As it was a long walk home Fred suggested they had a preparatory night cap. Charlie sat in silence for a while before slowly admitting that he hadn't enjoyed the evening. The atmosphere in the Lodge Room and at dinner had been very tense. The Secretary and the Director of Ceremonies clearly had had words before the evening and were somewhat waspish even with the Worshipful Master. Altogether it was not a good advertisement for brotherhood. Newer members felt out of it, and could well consider an evening at home was the more attractive.

Fred paused and sucked on his pint. Finally he admitted that the, largely self-perpetuating, Lodge 'engine room' of Treasurer, Secretary and Director Ceremonies (aka *The Troika*) had been in office for far too long. They had vast experience of Masonry in general and the Lodge in particular, had contacts in Province, and were almost irreplaceable; in short, they believed they owned the Lodge and sadly had been able to make other members believe that too.

'How on earth can we ever change things?', mused Charlie.

'Well who do you think holds the power in the Lodge?' asked Fred, slightly mischievously.

'The Master?' responded Charlie.

Fred just laughed.

'Well, the Troika then!' Fred slowly shook his head.

'The Lodge Committee?' ventured Charlie cautiously.

There was a further shake.

'Then who?' demanded Charlie, a little irritably.

Fred said not a word but slowly pointed a finger at Charlie's chest. *'You. A Lodge is not a social club, It's a brotherhood in which each and every brother pays the same subscription, has precisely the same vote, be he Entered Apprentice or Grand Officer, and has exactly the same responsibility for the wellbeing of his Lodge.'*

'But what can an individual possibly do if the Worshipful Master and his Lodge Committee have already made a decision?' said Charlie.

'Firstly, young Charlie, you must understand what it means to be a Freemason', said Fred kindly.

'I repeat, it is a brotherhood of equal members. No Brother can make a decision affecting a fellow member without seeking his prior approval, so no one pressure group or Committee can have any executive power over other Lodge members; this is written into the Constitutions (Rule 154). The Lodge Committee may of course consider any topic put to it, but it can only recommend a solution to the members. It is then up to the Brethren to approve it, or otherwise. The assembled Brethren of the Lodge are the ones with power. They and they alone possess ownership of any Lodge.'

Fred continued: *'Of course, the Master has certain special responsibilities in this regard. He can approve a programme of ritual and delegate to others those parts he doesn't wish to perform himself; a way in which he can make a major contribution to sharing ownership. He can enable as many as possible of his newer Brethren or members out of office to be given a part on the floor during his Year. Senior Masons just repeating their party pieces are not helpful, it's time to let the new voices have a turn. If a Brother has a poor memory, we can involve him in toasts to the officers or visitors, and help him feel the Lodge is his home too.'*

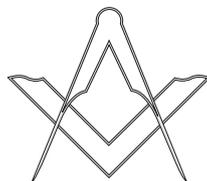
Charlie was silent for a spell but then reflected: *'I can see how delivering part of the Master's ritual can give a feeling of ownership, being part of the team and so on, but how exactly can a junior Mason make his voice heard? The Agenda is full of off-putting terms: notice of motion, proposing, seconding, black and white balls, Any Other Business; it is all very confusing. I just wouldn't know when to stand up and speak. Another thing, none of the newer members is invited to the Committee meetings. We just don't know what might have been discussed or what else is going on.'*

Fred nodded but said that many Lodges today invite all their members, young or old, new or experienced, to their committee meetings. This number is increasing. Everyone has a right to a view.

Fred refilled their glasses. *'Always remember that the Lodge belongs to you as much as to anyone else. You have a duty to make sure your point of view is heard. If a number of you feel strongly then raise the matter under the Agenda item especially put there for members to express their views, Any Other Business. It is courteous to let the Secretary know if you are going to speak, but not essential. If you have a proposal (or Motion) then say what it is about and that you would like to discuss it at the next meeting. By this means the next Agenda will go to every Brother and, if they want to come in and support you, now they have adequate notice.'*

'All Brothers are equal. We have equal votes, equal opportunities, equal rights and, this is so important, an equal responsibility to ensure the well-being our Lodge. The votes of all the members outweigh the votes of any committee, or any other pressure group. You have a voice and you have a vote, use them both, Charlie; use them wisely, but use them often! That way you will playing your proper, active, part in the life of our Lodge.'

Charlie swallowed hard. *'Freemasonry obviously isn't a free-ride, Fred. I promise I'll sit up and take-notice from now on!'*



Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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Fred and Charlie character drawings courtesy of Eddie Wildman.

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