



PAPER

Can you keep a secret? According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: Not a secret society but a society with secrets.

In a much-loved episode of 'Yes Minister', amid a swirl of rumours about their Minister's future, an anxious Bernard asks the formidable Sir Humphrey what will happen. Sir Humphrey lowers his newspaper, leans over confidentially to Bernard and in a quiet conspiratorial voice says:

'Bernard, can you keep a secret?'

'Gosh, yes' replies Bernard.

Slowly returning to his newspaper Sir Humphrey murmurs, dismissively:

'And, Bernard, so can I.'

The Lodge of Instruction had gone well. Good attendance, good questions, good humour; what more could a Preceptor ask for? Relaxed in the Masons Arms, so to speak, Fred reflected idly on the Preceptor's Curse, what he should have said rather than what he actually said. Charlie broke into the reverie.

'Fred, in our Lodge we carefully close the dining room curtains for the Toasts while the staff hover outside waiting; impatient to bring in the coffee, clear the tables, and go home! But why on earth do we exclude them? They've heard that rhythmical crashing and banging for years. Is a Masonic Fire really such a deep secret we still have to preserve it?'

In response to Fred's less-than-eloquent grunt, Charlie continued:

'Many of us saw that demonstration of Masonic Fire in a recent TV programme on Freemasonry watched by Mason and non-Mason alike. I gather Grand Lodge approved it. If the aim of Grand Lodge was to assure the public, we are no longer a secret society then for us to deliberately exclude our waitresses would seem a fool of an idea and hardly aid our cause.'

Fred stirred himself.

*'Remember Charlie, Grand Lodge governs not only our ceremonial but the 'After Proceedings' as well; by recommendations from its Board of General Purposes. If I remember right, in the 2019 edition of **Information for the Guidance of Members of the Craft**, it refers to:*

'Brethren making improper disclosure or use of the signs, tokens and words... render themselves liable to Masonic disciplinary sanction.'¹

All Masons get the booklet. So, did you Charlie. You should read it. It also adds that:

'there is no objection to drinking Masonic toasts in the presence of non-Masons... it also recommends that 'fire' and the Tyler's toast, both of which have their origins in the Masonic Lectures, should not be given on such occasions'²

Charlie was not content. He felt his cause was a good one.

'What makes our Masonic Fire so secret?'

Fred adopted his 'benevolent-Preceptor' approach.

'Can we take it step-by-step? We commence 'Fire' by tracing out an equilateral triangle with our fingers, followed by a Masonry-related series of hand-claps, or bangs of a firing glass to the rhythm of an Entered Apprentice Knocks; never a Fellowcraft. By the way, the triangle is a Masonic symbol, as are the Entered Apprentice knocks. 'Fire' therefore employs two Masonic symbols and must be subject to the very clear guidance given above, and Charlie, that specifically excludes the presence of non-Masons'.

Charlie was not to be patronised, even by Fred.

'So, if Grand Lodge can break the rules then why can't we?'

Fred shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, bluntly, the rules are theirs to make or break and Great Queen Street is free to 'open their doors on Freemasonry' as and when they think fit, and the publicity will be advantageous.'

Fred, slightly uncomfortable, felt Charlie deserved a fuller explanation.

'That way they can assess the programme and the likely audience and ensure better control over how our Masonic secrets are revealed'.

Charlie stubbornly repeated his question:

'If Grand Lodge can break the rules then why can't we?'

Fred opened his hands:

'Grand Lodge cannot guarantee that all Lodges throughout the world will take the same care for the traditions of Freemasonry as they do, especially when non-Masons or the local media are present. The presence of a 'bad apple', or the media taking things out of context, or misinterpreting something in their coverage, can lead to problems. They therefore tell the rest of us to keep to the rules.

In our own Province, the Provincial Grand Master has chosen to use his discretion. If all the members of the catering team are of long standing, he would allow them to carry out their normal duties throughout the after-proceedings. When the team is drawn from casual staff, he would then advise proper caution. The Provincial Grand Secretary will happily advise you.'

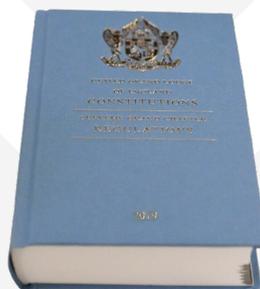
Had Charlie been a potential voter, a canvasser would have put a firm tick in the 'doubtful' column.

'I suppose that's a fair compromise but what was your second point?'

Fred felt a little leadership was therefore called for:

'The second reason, Charlie, is perhaps the more important. With hand on the Bible we have solemnly promised never to reveal any Masonic secrets. If we feel we're free to break that promise we can just as easily break one to a fellow Mason. Our word as a Freemason won't then be worth much, will it?

Respect Grand Lodge's judgement on disclosure of secrets, Charlie, but respect your own integrity even more.'



References

1. *Information for the guidance of members of the Craft*, (2019), *Masonic Secrets*, p. 27, United Grand Lodge of England, London.
2. *Information for the guidance of members of the Craft*, (2019), *Non-Masons at After-Proceedings*, p. 29, United Grand Lodge of England, London.

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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