



## PAPER

### Free... or accepted? According to Fred & Charlie



**Summary:** Free and accepted from operative through speculative to the present day.

Charlie was suffering from a shock to the wallet. The Treasurer had just made him aware that his online bank had failed to pay his subs and that he, *'would be most grateful for a cheque or cash, thank you so much, Brother.'* On the detour home via *The Masons Arms* he exploded into a not-so-quiet chunter.

*'Why...'* he demanded of an amiable and inoffensive Fred, *'do they call it Free-Masonry?'*

*'What's free about it? Twenty quid for the meal, ten for the raffle, seven for the wine, a fiver for the auction, fifty a head for the Ladies' Night... and they still want that one hundred plus for the Subs.'*

Fred responded patiently that the local golf club was over six hundred, plus the green fees and the bills from the Nineteenth Hole.

*'What's not to like about Freemasonry?'*

Happily oblivious, Charlie continued chuntering, but after a wistful *'... and the beer costs over three quid a pint.'*

He suddenly emerged from his soliloquy to ask:

*'Just why are we called Freemasons anyway, Fred? The chaps spin so many yarns.'*

They settled in a quiet corner of *The Masons Arms* and Fred agreed that if there were ten Preceptors locked in a committee room, it is likely you would hear eleven explanations.

After a pause he reflected that it was perhaps all a matter of history.

### History

Fred went on to amplify his theme.

*'Freemasonry of any sophistication had only started in this country after the arrival of the Normans in 1066. There were few if any home-grown stone masons of any skill, so William the Conqueror brought with him a Master Builder, William of Sens. He came with his own craftsmen and new ideas. The Gothic style for one, and Salisbury's 'floating spire' for another. It followed that all our early masonic terms were either in Norman French or Latin. The cementarius (wall builder), lathomus (carver) and masoun (mason) are typical examples.'*

*Some say that the French words for brother 'frere' coupled with 'masoun' (frere-masoun) would to English ears sound just like free-mason. It is an imaginative idea but sadly supporting evidence is in short supply.'*

Fred paused.

*'One begins to sympathise with our ten incarcerated preceptors', he mused.*

*'So much depended on the whim and education of the scribe at the time.'*

*'So, what was the significance of the various terms used over the centuries, mason, frere-masoun, free-mason, freeman-mason, freestone mason, Freemason? We perhaps get an early hint from the associated Mediaeval crafts and guilds. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the terms Free-Carpenters, Free-Butchers, Free-Vintners, Free-Sewers etc. were in widespread use. Free seemingly was a term common to the mediaeval craft and Guild structure. Certainly three levels of deference were recognised. Firstly, the highly respected Master, Wardens and Past Masters of the Guild; secondly, skilled craftsmen who had set up in private business and were subject to the Guild's regulation; and thirdly, fully qualified tradesmen who were independent of the Guild's regulations and accordingly 'free' to choose employment as when and where required. The wide interchangeability of the term masons and freemasons on these mediaeval records certainly give support to this understanding.'*

Fred summarised.

*'The earliest reference to a free-mason (then spelt 'ffre-mason') was in 1392. While both mason and free-mason are mentioned as present on site in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century records of Eton College, Eton seem to make no distinction between the quality of work for payment of masons or free-masons. If distinction must be made then the term mason could well be applied to a craftsman directly employed by the site's Master Mason; the free-mason was perhaps from the third tier of the Guild structure and hired to support a seasonal or temporary expansion of the building programme.'*

## **Free-stone**

*'What about freestone-mason?'* asked Charlie.

*'This was commonly, but confusingly, also shortened to 'free-mason',* replied Fred.

*'Many authorities quote its use in Kent, presumably during the construction of Canterbury Cathedral. Local records distinguished between 'hard hewers', men who worked the hard stone for pillars and load bearing structures, and free-stone masons. Highly skilled men who carved the lime-stone brought in from Caen in Normandy for the Cathedral's statues, gargoyles, delicate foliage and the highly intricate window bars of the rose and Gothic windows. A free-stone mason possessed the sublime talent to create beauty out of the humblest of materials. He was both highly skilled as a mason and as a talented sculptor; in effect he was top of the tree and walked tallest on any building site. Any organisation with masonic connections might well seek this high status.'*

## Free and Accepted

While carrying back the refilled glasses, Charlie hummed a few bars of the Apprentice's song to himself.

*'What exactly is the difference then, between a Free and an Accepted Mason, Fred? Aren't they one and the same thing?'*

Fred shrugged. *'As we've seen the years between the 13th and the 17th centuries are full of different terms for what we can only assume was one and the same thing. Cementarius, mason, free-mason were all alternative descriptions for an operative mason on site. Similarly, 'accepted', 'adopted', 'speculative' all seem to be alternative names for a type of philosophical Masonry, very different from that of the craft guilds. Let me give you some examples.*

*The first recorded admission of a 'gentleman of leisure' into an operative lodge was the Laird of Auhinleck into Edinburgh Lodge on 8th June 1600 for reasons then unpublished.*

*Further south we find that in 1620 the Lodge of Acceptation in London admitted seven members of the pre-eminent London Company of (operative) Masons. Later, Nicholas Stone, who was the King's Master Mason in the mid-seventeenth century, was made Master of the London Company of 'ffremasons' [sic] in 1633 and 1634. Presumably he would be welcomed automatically into any operative lodge he chose. However, he wasn't enrolled by the 'Accepted Masons of the Acceptation Lodge' until 1639. That Stone was a leading master mason is clear; that he had to wait his turn to be accepted into this other branch of masonry is also clear. It would seem reasonable to deduce that the 'Accepted Masons' of the Lodge of Acceptation followed not a practical but perhaps a more speculative path, as in Scotland.*

*There is some confirmation. Following a change of name about 1620, the 'London Company of ffree-masons' (original spelling) became the Worshipful Company of Masons. Their inventory check included a book of constitutions from the Lodge of Acceptation, suggesting that the Acceptation was the philosophic twin of the operative London Company. This was apparently confirmed when these constitutions were later adopted by Dr Anderson for his Antient Charges in the 1723 and 1738 Constitutions of the 1717 Moderns Grand Lodge.'*

*'That's all a little confusing,' said Charlie, 'but I gather the Free and Accepted Mason in our song must simply refer to a young man free from allegiance to any higher authority, but who has now been accepted into the more speculative branches of masonry.'*

*'Bullseye' said Fred.*

## Masonry is free

Charlie sat for bit, taking it all in, but eventually broke his silence, *'Well, what has all this historical stuff got to do with what we recite in the Temple? That 'First' tonight comes to mind.*

*Masonry is free and requires freedom of inclination; he comes of his own free will and accord; he is free and of mature age; you freely offer yourself; he would give freely... there must be tons of other examples. Isn't it this emphasis on our personal freedom, not all your old history, that gives us our name?'*

Fred eyed his companion carefully, *'What are those three Degrees all about, Charlie?'*

Charlie thought for a moment or two.

*'Well... the First is about living in harmony with one's neighbour, the Second is about living in harmony with one's own gifts or nature, the Third is living in harmony with one's Creator in this life and beyond.'*

*'Nearly' said Fred, 'but close enough. If you can achieve all three by life's end you will have lived a perfect, a balanced, in fact a beautiful life.'*

*'Let's go back to my Freestone-mason. He takes a rough lump of stone, hewn from the quarry, he cuts it to size, then with great care he slowly, oh so slowly, fashions it into a bunch of grapes, a radiant rose window, or a weeping Madonna with tears on her cheeks. Charlie, he has fashioned out of a lump of rough sandstone or limestone a thing of great beauty that will inspire over the ages.'*

*When you entered the Lodge Room for the very first time, you were figuratively that lump of rough stone, that rough ashlar. Given your own determination and the guidance Freemasonry offered, you have the opportunity to fashion your life amongst those that you love into that shining example, that smooth ashlar, which will inspire all men to remember their joy in knowing you and value just what your friendship has given them.'*

*I said given your determination. For that determination to flower, your spirit must be free to make the decisions, beholden to no one, influenced by neither society nor politics. Your decisions must from your own conscience, no-one else's. If you are not free to obey your own conscience, then the precepts of Freemasonry sadly cannot guide you and you will have missed a lifetime's opportunity.'*

### **Afterthoughts**

*'That's a lot to take in' said Charlie.*

*'Let's see if I've got the drift. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries stone workers were first called cementarius or lathomus or masoun. These all became anglicised as the one word, mason.'*

*By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, builders on a site could also be described as masons and free-masons. The difference was probably that, as skilled craftsmen, the former worked just for that Master Mason; the latter were free to seek employment anywhere.'*

*The first members of a lodge who were not tradesmen appeared in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, possibly in Scotland. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, London possessed a Lodge of Accreditation, which was almost certainly purely speculative. Men who were admitted to a speculative Lodge from then on became known loosely as Accepted Masons. The Lodge principles and regulations were very probably the source of Anderson's Constitutions for the London Grand Lodge of Speculative Masons.'*

*A free-stone mason worked in softer stone and from a rough slab could produce work of great beauty. He was also an artist and so such a freemason was held in very high regard.'*

*The analogy was so close to the speculative concept of enhancing a mason's moral awareness through its several degrees, converting the rough ashlar to the smooth, that this would be the understanding of the term Freemason used in the title of Pure and Antient Craft Freemasonry.'*

*'How's that, Fred?' said Charlie.*

*'Another bullseye. I should take up darts before you lose your touch' smiled Fred, draining his well-earned glass.'*



## 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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