



PAPER

History or Mystery? According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: A discussion about the merits of the Traditional History in the Third Degree.

Charlie was looking rather gloomily at his little blue book. Fred, ever solicitous, raised an eyebrow.

'Well' said Charlie.

'Why does Grand Lodge ask that we learn the Traditional History in the Third by heart when you told me that there is little evidence for even a single word of it? Fanciful at its very best you said. Furthermore the First Tracing Board which contains some really good stuff is an optional extra.'

Fred had a quiet smile and ordered two re-fills.

'Sadly it is not for us to question why Charlie. Grand Lodge proposes, a Lodge merely disposes. The First Tracing Board? The reason may be as simple as an Initiate being so swamped by all that he has already heard, he probably switched off even before the Charge. If you added in the Tracing Board he will merely acquire a blank look of non-comprehension. Leave the Tracing Board for a quiet evening when the Initiate is fresh and the Stewards' Bench can perform it as a team effort. He'll learn far more.'

The Third History is another matter. Again, it may be that the 1813 Grand Lodge felt it useful in driving home the signs, tokens and words but I suggest the reason is far more likely to do with honour and integrity.

If an operative mason let slip the secrets of his craft then he knew he would never work again. He was unemployable. For the average 18th century Speculative Freemason tempted to spill the beans, the threat of never again being allowed to seek employment as a stonemason was hardly likely to influence a membership of aristocrats, clergy and country gentlemen. Their response might well have been a unanimous thank goodness for that!

However, while income may not have mattered to them, honour certainly did. Remember that the birth of Speculative Freemasonry was in the days of death by duelling; a gentleman's honour was paramount. Besmirch either him or his womenfolk and you were faced with a catechism of when, where and which weapon; pistol, poniard or epee. If you declined their kind offer, you and your kin would become ostracised by polite society for ever. The similarities with the operative mason are then surprisingly close.

'Roll forward to the Mason of today. If you reveal Masonic secrets to all and sundry at the 'Pig and Whistle' tonight, Grand Lodge will almost certainly never black-ball you or invite you to a duel-at-dawn with the Grand Master. So, what can the Grand Lodge do to ensure Masons respect their vows? Bluntly, they have to place the onus on the integrity of the individual mason, and this is where we come to Hiram Abiff.

In the Traditional History we are told of a master builder who, having solemnly vowed with Solomon and Hiram of Tyre never to reveal the Temple's secrets, had the supreme integrity to prefer death to the dishonour of breaking his vow.'

'But Fred, death is a little over the top; it is not as if we were revealing the Enigma Code' said Charlie.

'But that's not the point is it, Charlie? If you make a vow with your hand on the Bible that you will never reveal certain secrets, however insignificant you may feel they actually are, should you later improperly disclose them you will have demonstrated publicly that either you don't really value the Great Architect, the Volume of the Sacred Law or that freely given vow. Any promise you might later make to a Brother Mason could then equally well be broken at your slightest whim. In short, Charlie, your word become worthless, and you will have become an untrustworthy person.'

'That's rather hard, Fred.'

'Freemasonry is not just a social club, Charlie, it remains a system of morality. For the future of Freemasonry, both club and morality are important. Your Brothers must be able to rely on your integrity.'

'Well I can now see why we shouldn't forget Hiram Fred. Better start learning about him. How does it go?

We left off at the part of our traditional history...'



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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