

Let's talk about the WHY

Brethren,

For many years, many capable Brethren have discussed the "HOW" in our WORK. This year we will focus on the "WHY", and the "HOW" will fall into place. Among the first questions an Entered Apprentice faces when they return home is "What happened tonight?", probably quickly followed by "What's with all this SECRETS stuff?" Both really good questions, because they touch the core of "WHO" we are, and "WHAT" we are doing.

So, let's start with the "WHAT HAPPENED", and the answer is the Candidate is the LEAD ACTOR in traditional play. That play has been repeated word-for-word, line-for-line for almost a millennium. There is a timelessness in that moment, the Candidate "touches" a part of HISTORY. Something they likely have never done before, never otherwise would likely have the opportunity to do, and in so doing gain profound understanding. Next, through the scenes of this dramatic event, gain a tangible understanding "morals" in the story...hence the common lesson every child hears "the moral of the story". Some cultures refer to this as an "oral tradition". Think of each Easter in the Christian faith, when what is sometimes called a "Passion Play" illustrates the sacrifice of the "Great Exemplar" for the benefit of mankind. Similar principle, same purpose. To create a shared experience, and lasting communication message for both observants and participants. The same may be said for each of our 3-Degrees and our ceremony of Installation.

As I stated earlier, Freemasonry has existed for nearly a millennium, perhaps longer but that will do for now. Scant physical records exist prior to St John's Day, 24 June 1717 when four London Lodges, which had existed for some time, came together at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard, declared themselves a Grand Lodge and elected Anthony Sayer as their Grand Master. This was the first Grand Lodge in the world. However, the Kirkwall Scroll that hangs in Lodge Kilwinning is carbon-dated to the 15th Century and the Regis Poem, (HALLIWELL MANUSCRIPT) in the British Museum is dated in the 14th Century. Masonry existed long before that, and it is accepted owes its origins to the operative stonemasons who built the great cathedrals of Europe and the Middle East, particularly in the period from 1118 to 1314, when the poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, we know as the Templars. This group exuded the height of their influence from the construction of countless cathedrals, and numerous strategic consistories. (a detailed study of which is beyond my scope, but well worth the exercise for those so minded). Let me add one crucial other date to move us forward to the WHY.

In 1215, the Magna Carta brought the protection of church rights, protection for the barons from illegal imprisonment, access to swift justice, and limitations on taxation. In short it created Parliament (the House of Lords), a system of representative government, albeit that the House of Commons would take another 200 years to materialize.

The King James Version (KJV), also known as the King James Bible (KJB), is an English translation of the Christian Bible for the Church of England, commissioned in 1604 and completed as well as published seven years later in 1611 under the sponsorship of James VI and I. The king's famous statement was that "he could never yet see a Bible well translated in English". Prior to that time, various bible publications were disparate attempts at translation to English, and the scholarly tongues of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, clearly out of the reach of everyday citizens, and thus the meanings and benefits restricted to the clergy and the aristocracy. The King James combined them ALL into one cohesive volume, and in the

“common language”. In short “illumination”, and a direct connection between common individuals and divine precepts of their Creator, without the need of a privileged class to translate its contents. This set the stage for the Petition of Right (1628) and the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) which gave most English citizens a voice in government and before the Courts in what became the foundation for the English system of common law. So, what does all this have to do with SECRETS? In a word PLENTY.

I’ve just walked this group through 600-years of history that began with common citizens having no direct connection with their Creator, no property rights, no legal protections, and little prospect for self-improvement shackled by a brutal class system. Yet throughout that entire time, groups of like-minded men, of varying classes, politics and religious beliefs hoping for a better tomorrow met in secret and found common ground and mutual respect for one another: “Monarch themselves thought it not beneath their dignity to patronize our assemblies and exchange the scepter for the gavel”. And they carried those lessons back with them in their various stations in life. Has they been discovered; the consequences were severe, including forfeiture of life itself. The early operative masons’ secrets consisted of the practical innovations of their craft, which they communicated one to the next in secret and by merit, so as not to enable an imposter to place themselves, their patrons, or the public at risk from corrupt WORK. Noting this span of time, few received literary education save nobility and the clergy, so learning and recognition became physical, hence our dramas and modes of recognition both of which were closely guarded. Concurrently, nobles in the Templar Order and other aristocracy witnessed corruption many forms in privileged society and sought to bring it in check. In short, they found common ground, and mutual benefit. The nobles gained practical lessons from the craftsmen, and the craftsmen though the benefits of what we now call networking, gained the benefits of education and governance. Mutual exchange of SECRETS if you will. Both nurtured the notions of mutual respect and honest dealings. And in this span of time grew the notions of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY. Then as now, the ignorant, the corrupt and the intolerant felt their selfish interests threatened, so our Brethren then as now kept their assemblies safe, and their mutual exchange of teachings only for those who had earned them. During the turbulent centuries since, we have seen that proponents of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY are often the first targets of violence, persecution loss of opportunity, even in recent decades. Were they perfect, hardly, but they tried to be better and carried society with them incrementally. Society is still catching up to our ideals, even in recent years, that began centuries ago, passed through OUR oral tradition, refining good men into better ones through safe and respectful discourse from generation to generation. Then as before we must be on guard for charlatans who attempt to make a mockery of our good intents, and who like the COWANS of old seek to profit at others expense and leave carnage in their wake through their self-serving incompetence.

So now Brethren we have the WHY as it relates into WHAT is happening, WHAT are those SECRETS, and the driving PURPOSE they nurture that continues to adorn common society. As V.W. Bro. Stephen Maizels recently shared to the Mentorship Committee, “The younger generation are not wired like us, and when they seek out more about the Craft their interest is in the WHY, not in the HOW as it was for us. So, we must adapt if we are to find common ground and keep them with us to be open to the HOW”. Brethren the challenge is to meet them on the Level as our forebears did when they came together. Tonight, and in the nights to come we will take those steps together.