

WHY APOLLO?

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Anyone who has delved into Masonic history will probably agree, there are two key periods in the development of the modern craft. The first of these, I would argue, is marked by the establishment of the premier Grand Lodge in 1717 and ends at the end of the 1720s, when the three degrees we now practice were clearly being worked. And the second, was when the two rival Grand Lodges of the 'Ancients' (established in 1751) and the 'Moderns' (the premier), came together under the leadership of HRH the Duke of Sussex, KG, to form the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813. Although clearly seminal periods in the development of modern English Freemasonry, they are also periods of some obscurity.

Not much is known of the membership of the four founding lodges that met and formed a Grand Lodge in St. Paul's Churchyard, on St. John the Baptist's day in 1717. There are in fact no lists of members of any lodges before 1723, a year which also heralded the first recorded minutes of the Grand lodge assemblies. Although there are lists in 1725 and 1730, they are far from complete, and many early lodge records are not extant. The main and obvious document we have from this early time is the first Masonic Constitutions by the Reverend James Anderson, printed in 1723 and dedicated to His Grace the Duke of Montagu. Yet in spite of a lot of research into the background of this Presbyterian Minister, his associations, beliefs and writings, the vast majority of Masons ignore the subject matter contained in the frontispiece of the Constitutions itself.

The frontispiece was engraved by John Pine, of Aldersgate Street, London. It depicts the John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, F.R.S., (Grand Master 1721 - 22), who is pictured centre-left, wearing robes of the Order of the Garter (1719) handing over the Constitutions. The Duke of Wharton (Grand Master 1722 - 23), pictured centre-right, receives the Constitutions from the outgoing Grand Master, and behind these two early grandees appear a number of early Grand Lodge officers. They stand ornamentally on a grid patterned floor, in front of a gallery comprising five sets of piers, representing the five orders of architecture; Composite, Corinthian, Ionic, Doric and Tuscan. Below is the 47th proposition of Euclid, which provides the essential key to creating a square, and of course is worn today by all Past Masters of English lodges. Anderson himself equated Geometry with Masonry, and classically of course, Geometry was viewed as the key to understanding the liberal arts. The crowning glory of the whole piece, is the inclusion of the ancient Greek God Apollo, who rides his fiery chariot symbolically over the guardians of the craft. But who exactly was Apollo?

Apollo was one of the greatest of Greek and Roman deities. He was seen as the principal god of prophecy, divination and of the arts, most especially music, for the muses were directly subordinate to him. He was also a patron of medicine. The ancient Greeks also viewed him as the sun god, in which incarnation, he was known as 'Phoebus' meaning 'bright'. The name Phoebus was attributed to his receipt of the Delphic Oracle from the Titaness Phoebe, and which was famed for its philosophical injunction, 'Man know thyself'. He was the son of Zeus and Leto, and therefore by analogy, Zeus was classically equated with Jahweh, and Apollo has attributes similar to those of Christ. As God of music Apollo invented the lute or cithara, and received the lyre from his half brother Hermes, who was born on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia. The son of Hermes was Asclepius, who inherited the arts of healing from both Apollo and Hermes, but was eventually struck down by Zeus, for daring to bring the dead back to life. His worship was brought to Rome in 293 BC, and the Roman architect Vitruvius tells that every house must have a healing area dedicated to Asclepius.

The significance of the inclusion of this mythological figure, gives us a clue as to what the mysteries of Freemasonry meant to those joining in the 1720s. Whereas today, most people do not speak Greek and Latin, nor understand or know the classical myths, the symbolic aspects of this frontispiece would not have been so lost on the early founding fathers of our craft. It is easy to forget that there were only two English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, and the study of ancient Greek and Latin was an essential part of the curriculum. Many of the early framers of our mysteries were also members of the Royal Society, and polite and genteel society demanded an awareness of classical antiquity and its myths, not as a mere backwater of formal schooling, but rather an essential part of a gentleman's education and social tool-kit. We must also remember that the first known body in 1725, that is known to have administered and practised the Master's degree was a society entitled 'The Philo-Musicae et Architecturae Societas', or 'Society for Lovers of Music and Architecture'. It appears to have been founded in March 1725, and included many Masons among its illustrious membership. As its motto contained the word 'Apollini', it became known as the Apollonian Society, as of course, Apollo was the god of Music. The constitutions of the Society clearly emphasise the close correlation of architecture and music, through a mutual connection with geometry.

'MUSICK AND ARCHITECTURE, the Happy produce of Geometry have such Affinity, they Justly may be Stil'd Twin Sisters, and Inseparable; Constituting a perfect HARMONY by Just Rules, Due Proportion, & Exact Symmetry, without which neither can arrive to any Degree of Perfection. A STRUCTURE form'd according to the Nice Rules of ARCHITECTURE, having all its parts dispos'd in a perfect & pleasing HARMONY, surprizes the Eye at every different View, Elates our Fancy's to Sublime Thoughts, & imprints on our Imaginations Vast Ideas. So MUSICK in its effect divine charms every Sence, Transports our Thoughts & Captivates the Soul, & Bury's all Misfortunes in its HARMONY'. [i]

As Geometry was equated with Masonry, the Masonic side was also considered to be of great importance. It would appear that the founders of the society constituted themselves into an irregular lodge to qualify some of their members, in which capacity, they made Masons and passed Fellow Crafts. However, they also appeared to have introduced an important innovation, as some already of the rank of 'fellow' were 'pass'd Masters' in May 1725.

The second great period of Masonic development, came of course almost a century later, when the two rival Grand Lodges of the Ancients and Moderns were finally brought together in 1813. Unfortunately, as is so often the case in Masonic history, the key lodge that was involved, the lodge of Reconciliation, did not leave any minutes as to how they arrived at their concord. However, perhaps once again we can glean clues from the artwork left by the key players involved in this much celebrated Union, such as the Sussex Plate, which today is on display in the Grand Lodge Museum at Freemasons' Hall, London.

This highly extravagant piece of artwork was crafted from one of the many designs submitted to be given as an 'offering' to one of English Freemasonry's most notable patrons. It was presented to HRH Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, KG, first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, on Wednesday 27th April, 1838, to commemorate his twenty-five years in that office. His widow, the Duchess of Inverness, on the death of the Duke in September 1845, subsequently presented it back to Grand Lodge. The base measures approximately twenty-eight inches long by twenty-four inches wide, and the greatest extent of the branches for the lights, covers three feet by two-and-a-half feet. Consisting of solid silver, it weighs an immense 2, 020 ounces and was crafted by Robert Garrard of Haymarket, London in 1837 - 38.

Standing upon four crowned feet, rest a large, slightly elevated, elaborate square base with each corner decorated by a three-branched candlestick, and each light cupped in the form of a lotus leaf. Between each candlestick in the centre of each of the four sides, is a panel surrounded with scroll work and surmounted with olives, ears of wheat and pomegranates, denoting plenty and fertility. Two of these panels depict scenes from the building of King Solomon's Temple. That on the left - Solomon receiving the plan of the Temple from his father, King David; and that on the right - the completion of the Temple at Jerusalem with Solomon dedicating it to God's service. The panel at the rear represents the Act of Union of the Antients and Moderns in 1813 and depicts the two Grand Masters, the Dukes of Sussex and Kent, surrounded by their respective Grand Officers.

On the base rests a circular pedestal which, in turn, sits on a square plinth providing a raising for a circular temple with a tessellated pavement. Seated on the corners of the square plinth are beautiful figures in the classical style emblematic of Astronomy, Geometry, Sculpture and Architecture. One of them has an architect's plan, whilst sculpture is shown with a mallet and chisel having just completed the bust of Socrates (who exemplified devotion to the fine arts and promotion of the moral virtues). Geometry holds a pair of compasses extended upon a terrestrial globe and has the mystic triangle marked on her frontal coronet, while Astronomy has in her hands a telescope and a theodolite and is gazing upward towards the heavens, her head crowned with five stars. The Temple is formed by six corinthian columns which encircle a central altar with a cushion upon which is a volume of the Sacred Law complete with square and compasses. The dome of the Temple is adorned with the twelve signs of the zodiac and its summit is crowned with a small figure, the Hellenic deity Apollo, symbolising the bounteous sun.

[i] See AQC. The Eighteenth Century Lodge as a School of Architecture, by C. Haffner.