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# “Wherever Dispersed” – The Travelling Mason in the Nineteenth Century

“Donde se dispersen” – El masón viajero durante el siglo XIX

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## Keywords

Sociability; Charity Networks; Masonic Charity; Brethren; Fraternity.

## Palabras clave

Sociabilidad; redes de beneficencia; caridad masónica; hermandad; fraternidad.

## Abstract

This article addresses the general question, ‘Why did men become, and remain, freemasons during the Nineteenth century?’ It identifies a wide range of motivations, influencing different men, in different places, at different times. However, it draws particular attention to the significance of the support and re-assurance aspects of membership that were given to members during times of insecurity and adversity, as well as the potential for economic and social networking. These aspects were of significance for all classes and occupations but appear to have had particular appeal to those in mobile trades and those undertaking long distance migration or emigration. These issues are explored by a focus on two particularly mobile occupational groups – mariners and miners. Evidence is presented to show that very large numbers in these occupations became masons predominantly to seek informal ‘insurance’ while travelling and to exploit networking opportunities *en route* and at final destination.

## Resumen

La masonería se ha caracterizado por la organización de asociaciones filantrópicas, en especial de ayuda para niños o los hospitales gratuitos. No obstante, la caridad hacia otros masones desde la logia, sea de base informal, personal o de pequeños grupos, carece de mayores estudios socio-históricos, a pesar de haber sido un precedente clave de las instituciones modernas de beneficencia. Por consiguiente, en esta investigación se analizan los “pagos” ocasionales, individuales o grupales de los masones, en efectivo o especie, para socorrer a sus hermanos en situaciones de peligro o necesidad financiera. Este tipo de prácticas se generalizaron a escalas globales, convirtiéndose en uno de los elementos de identificación básicos entre los masones. La atracción masónica de ayudas económicas amplió la expansión internacional de las redes masónicas de ultramar durante el cambio de siglo del XIX al XX.

## Introduction

The development of freemasonry and the modern industrial state went hand-in-hand. From its earliest origins in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, through the British Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and throughout its global diffusion in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

freemasonry was there to create social capital and knit together the new urban societies. The nature of the relationship between the two phenomena has never been explored but it is clear that there were at least several points where freemasonry lent a helpful hand, from facilitating networking and new trust-based relationships between businessmen, to assisting in the great movements of population between country and town and, later, between continents.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the whole of Europe and North America was on the move, driven by economic change and facilitated by a transport revolution on land and sea. Steam ships did for international travel what railways did at home and new postal and telegraphic communications appeared to shrink distance and keep those who moved in touch with families back home. Falling fares –less than £4 to cross the Atlantic as a steerage passenger by the 1860s– created not only opportunities for emigration but also easy return and onward migration<sup>31</sup>. The growth of the United States –through industrialization and the constant western movement of the frontier– created irresistible opportunities for Europe’s ‘surplus’ population, while the expansion of European colonies across Africa, Australasia and the Far East demanded home-country nationals to secure, administer, and exploit their economic potential.

But there was a problem –a big problem. Migration and immigration are highly hazardous activities. As we are constantly reminded today, economic migrants making their way from village to town, and particularly from home to foreign countries, are often subject to misadventure - their transport breaks down, sinks or is involved in accidents; they suffer outbreaks of disease and ill-health; they run out of money for food and accommodation. On arrival they have problems finding jobs and accommodation; dealing with differences in language, culture and religion; settling their families and generally becoming part of their new social environment<sup>2</sup>. Even when they have arrived safely and are settled in, they can be plagued by problems for families left behind.

Today the State, officialdom and numerous well-funded charities do their best to alleviate many of these problems, particularly in the developed world. Rescue services and Coast Guards minister to the survivors of wrecked vehicles and vessels. Government agencies commonly provide food and shelter for those stranded on the road; they attempt to regulate exploitative practices by those that might provide work for new arrivals; and they develop extensive social services arrangements properly to settle and assimilate new arrivals.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, few if any of these ‘safety nets’ existed. In most places governments did little to secure the lives even of their

<sup>1</sup> See John Killick, “Transatlantic Steerage Fares, British and Irish Migration, and Return Migration, 1815–1860”, *Economic History Review* 67, no. 1 (2014): 170-191.

<sup>2</sup> See C.G. Pooley and S. D’Cruze, “Migration and urbanisation in North West England circa 1760–1830”, *Social History* 19, no. 3 (1994): 339-358.

nationals and anyone who fell upon bad times necessarily had to rely on their own resources or those of friends and families –and by the very fact that travellers were far from their home support systems, their lives were at particularly at risk. Certainly the earliest origins of the ‘welfare state’ can be traced to this period. The State had long made limited arrangements for the care of the poor, old, orphaned and disabled, and collaborative friendly and benevolent societies emerged to provide private insurance for ill health, unemployment and death<sup>3</sup> –but again these did little for domestic travellers and virtually nothing for those in international transit.

In this insecure world, Freemasonry offered some unusual and very reassuring benefits. Many of these benefits had been inherited from the older guilds of operatives<sup>4</sup> and were part of a very long-established artisan tradition of helping men on the road or providing a means of ironing-out regional variations in the supply of labour by providing support for ‘tramping’ members. From their earliest origins, many stonemasons had to cope with relatively short-term employment and regularly needed to move, often long distances, between jobs. Some might spend a lifetime constructing a large project, such as a cathedral<sup>5</sup> or castle, but those engaged primarily in maintenance were unlikely to find alternative employment for their particular skills locally. They were in demand, but often at points very far apart. Those that travelled in search of work could expect temporary accommodation, food and other relief from lodges encountered en route as well as advice and assistance in job-finding on arrival<sup>6</sup>.

Travel and movement was part and parcel of the operatives’ life and facilitating it was one of the primary functions of the operatives’ guilds. That tradition carried over strongly into speculative freemasonry and is remains clearly represented in First Degree ritual<sup>7</sup>. Now Freemasonry offered all Master Masons a kind of ‘travel insurance’ while on the move as well as an invaluable ‘resettlement agency’ at final destination. By the nineteenth century, this usually took the form of financial assistance to those Masons and

<sup>3</sup> See E. P. Hennock, *The Origins of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Writing in the late 1790s, John Robinson observed that, “while the manners of society were yet but rude, Brother Masons, who were frequently led by their employment far from home and from their friends, stood in need of.... help, and might be greatly benefited by such an institution, which gave them introduction and citizenship wherever they went, and a right to share in the charitable contributions of brethren who were strangers to them.” *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe carried on in the Secret Meetings of the Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* (Philadelphia, 1798), 23.

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph W. Hobbs, “Travelling Masons and the Cathedral Builders”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 40 (1926): 140-166.

<sup>6</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawn, “The Tramping Artisan”, *Economic History Review* 3, no. 3 (1951): 299-320. These activities were not confined to England and may also have been a factor in promoting Freemasonry in many other European countries. See, for example, M. H. D van Leeuwen, “Guilds and middle-class welfare, 1500-1800: provisions for burial, sickness, old age, and widowhood”, *Economic History Review* 65, no. 1 (2012): 61-90.

<sup>7</sup> See W. Kirk MacNulty, “A Philosophical Background for Masonic Symbolism”, *Heredom* 5 (1996): 17-34.

their families who encountered misadventure during their travels as well as the opportunity to visit or join lodges after arrival. In those lodges they could expect to receive advice and assistance in finding employment, long-term accommodation, local information and a range of other knowledge that would help them settle in. This support would be invaluable for any traveller or migrant in any period and it will be argued here that these closely integrated privileges of membership became widely known, inside and outside of the Craft: that they helped to attract new members, particularly from the more mobile occupational and social groups and greatly facilitated domestic and international migration; that they significantly improved the economic and social lives of Masons and their families after their arrival in new communities; and that they made a significant contribution to the wider construction of social capital and the quality of life in receiving communities, especially in new and rapidly expanding frontier areas.

The discussion will start by looking at the mechanisms for charitable assistance for the travelling Masons and their families, move on to look two large and particularly mobile occupational groups that benefited from migratory support, and conclude by considering how the long-term changes in the nature of freemasonry and the motivations for joining the order have changed over time. Much of what will be said has been outlined before in the work of researchers such as Paul Rich and Jessica Harland-Jacobs<sup>8</sup> but detailed research on Masonic periodicals, and particularly the archival records of lodges in Cornwall, will be used to examine the particular attractions of freemasonry for all of those undertaking regular or periodic long-distance migration at home and overseas.

Before starting, however, it is important to note that Freemasonry was only one of many fraternal and benevolent societies that offered similar facilities during the period. The various branches of the Oddfellows, the Foresters, Rechabites and many other Orders, organised on a national and international scale, also aided travellers<sup>9</sup>, and many Masons joined these organisations for additional help and assurance<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, freemasonry was the first and, with its extensive networks of lodges, probably the most effective in providing help and assistance to the traveller. A letter from the Secretary of the Lodge of Probity in Halifax, Yorkshire in 1816 provides a glimpse into this multifaceted world. He wrote, ‘a Tramp came to be relieved by my workmen and I recollected having seen him there about six months before, on the same errand. He informed me that he had travelled since the time he was here before, nearly all over the Kingdom, also Ireland and part of

<sup>8</sup> See Paul J. Rich, *Elixir of Empire: English Public Schools, Ritualism, Freemasonry and Imperialism* (London: Regency Press, 1989); *Chains of Empire: English Public Schools, Masonic Cabalism, Historical Causality, and Imperial Clubdom* (London: Regency Press, 1991); Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire: Freemasonry and British Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Andy Durr, “Chicken and Egg—the Emblem Book and Freemasonry: The Visual and Material Culture of Associated Life”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 118 (2005): 20-36.

<sup>10</sup> James suggests that once in Australia many Freemasons left Masonry and joined other benevolent societies with more ‘guaranteed’ insurance arrangements. See Bob James, “British Freemasonry-Fact or Fiction?”, *Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research* 99 (2009): 87-98.

Scotland and he had saved money by it as he was an Orangeman and an Oddfellow. He had been relieved by them and he meant to be made a Mason when he got home, which was in the neighbourhood of Stockport'<sup>11</sup>. In his study of 'tramping Oddfellows', Weinbren shows that in 1842 alone, the Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity paid out £5,200 to migrant workers and during the ten years between 1863 and 1872 the number of individual payments amounted to well over 90,000<sup>12</sup>. At this time, the number of Oddfellows was probably two or three times that of English Freemasons<sup>13</sup> but if the incidence of travelling was similar in both Orders it would suggest that there were many thousands of applicants for Masonic relief each year.

Weinbren also demonstrates that, like the Masons, the Oddfellows also organised effective final destination networking for job finding and other aspects of settlement and local community absorption<sup>14</sup>. What is being discussed here is thus part of a vast pattern of a much neglected aspect of eighteenth and nineteenth century fraternal life.

## Relief

First of all, Masonry as 'roadside assistance'. At his initiation, every new Mason is instructed that 'Brotherly Love' and 'Relief' are two of the Three Grand Principles of Masonry and that, 'should you at any future period meet a brother in distressed circumstances who might solicit your assistance, you will... cheerfully embrace the opportunity of practicing that virtue you have professed to admire'<sup>15</sup>. Charity was the greatest of Masonic virtues, but while Masons were expected to be charitable, they were also told that they might properly receive charity, 'through circumstances of unavoidable calamity and misfortune.' As Preston himself observed, 'When pity is excited, the Mason will assuage grief, and cheerfully relieve distress. If a brother is in want, every heart is moved, when he is hungry, we feed him; when he is naked, we clothe him; when he is in trouble, we fly to his relief... BROTHER, among Masons, is more than the name'<sup>16</sup>. These commitments were not simply to the brethren of the lodge where the promises were sworn, but to all Masons everywhere. Thus Thomas Dunkerley explained, 'Let me travel from east to west, or between north and south, when I meet a true brother I shall find a friend, who will do all in his power to serve me, without having the least view of self-interest: and if I am poor and in distress, he will relieve me to the utmost of his power, interest and capacity.' To notice these obligations is in no way to argue that men became Masons

<sup>11</sup> Thomas W. Hanson, *The Lodge of Probity No.61 1738-1938* (Halifax: Lodge of Probity, 1939), 232.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Weinbren, *The Oddfellows, 1810-2010* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2010), 70.

<sup>13</sup> See Roger Burt, "The Membership of West Cornwall Masonic Lodges during the Victorian Period or Why did Men become Masons", *Transactions of the Leicester Lodge of Research* (2008): 30-35.

<sup>14</sup> Weinbren, *Oddfellows*, 68.

<sup>15</sup> *Emulation Ritual* (1991): 91, 94.

<sup>16</sup> William Preston, *Illustrations of Freemasonry* (London, 1867), 15-16.

simply as a means of giving or receiving charity – there were and are many other motivations involved –but they certainly guaranteed members that, whether at home or abroad, they could always find a good, caring and supportive friend<sup>17</sup>. For heads of family there was the added assurance that these commitments would also relate to the wives and children of Masons who encountered disabling misadventure or death on the road. As the Masonic newspaper *The Freemason* observed, ‘The widow and orphan daughter of a Master Mason takes the place of the husband and father in the affections and good deeds of the Lodge... If travelling at a distance from home, they find themselves sick and in want among strangers, they have but to make themselves known as the widow and orphan daughters of a worthy Master Mason... To you are given all of the advantages of the Society, its shield of protection, its hand of relief, its voice of sympathy.’ A good example of such family support was reported in 1861. The widow of a Mason who had emigrated to Australia but died shortly after arrival petitioned a local lodge in Sydney for the funds to return home with her children. Although the lodge had never actually seen her late husband, they raised over £20 to fund the return journey<sup>18</sup>. Any clear thinking wife contemplating taking her family away from home might well decide that this more than compensated for her husband’s long evenings at the lodge and festive board.

The manner of making application for support if encountering misfortune while travelling was by personal application to individual Masons or the Almoner of the nearest lodge. There was no guarantee of the sums that might be received but in England during most of the second half of the nineteenth century, somewhere between 2/-6d and 10/-6d (half a guinea) was a common sum. This approximated to a quarter to a half of an unskilled labourer’s weekly wage at the time. Since multiple gifts might be received, and since further applications could be made to other Masons and lodges along the road, such sums would be attractive to even the better off members of the Order. Examples of how the system worked can be found widely in contemporary lodge account books, the Masonic press and recorded anecdotes. Thus the Royal Alfred Lodge, meeting at Diss, recorded in its Minute book on March 21st 1871 that, ‘a distressed brother, one George D’Sherinb, a native of La Lippe, Buckenbourg, in Westphalia, having been, with his nephew, shipwrecked in the Bay of Biscay, and lost all he had on board, and travelling through this town, on his way to London, was relieved with a donation of 10s and 6d, having produced his certificate of being a member of the Lodge of ‘Good Faith’, Paris’<sup>19</sup>. Much earlier in the century, with the end of major hostilities at the end of the Napoleonic wars, lodges in the south east of England assisted often assisted soldiers in onward travel to their homes and

<sup>17</sup> It is notable that the concept of reliable ‘friends’, particularly away from home, was extremely important in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and would have been particularly significant for less well-off Masons. See K. D. M. Snell, “Belonging and Community: understandings of “home” and “friends” among the English poor, 1750–1850”, *Economic History Review* 65, no. 1 (2012): 1-25.

<sup>18</sup> *Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror*, March 1861, 167.

<sup>19</sup> *The Freemason*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1878, 253.



families. On the 12th May 1814, for example, Robert Attree, of Brighton's Royal Clarence Lodge, met ten Masons who were returning after being held as prisoners of war by the French at Ostend. They fortunately all carried with them what one private soldier described as his 'passport', the certificate issued by his lodge. Having noted the numbers so that they could later be verified, they were rested, fed and each given five shillings to see them on their way. Three were bound for Gosport in Hampshire, two to Ludgate and Wapping in London, another to Dover in Kent.

The remainder had further to go –to Manchester in Lancashire and Great Yarmouth in Norfolk– and may no doubt have called on other lodges en route for further assistance<sup>20</sup>.

As the generous Masonic charitable commitment to distressed travellers became better known, it both encouraged greater mobility among Masons and acted as a recruiting sergeant for new members. However, it also created increasing problems. Like every welfare scheme, it arguably undermined personal responsibility and encouraged a culture of entitlement and a loss of self-respect, even among the deserving. More particularly, it was claimed that it encouraged indigence and deliberately fraudulent claims. As early as 1816, a letter from the Secretary of the Lodge of Probity in Halifax expressed concern about relieving, 'tramping or itinerant Masons', and complained that, 'Of late we have had many Applications from Tramps, etc., for relief as they pretended they were seeking work<sup>21</sup>.' On the 3rd December 1823 Grand Lodge Quarterly Communications contained a report from the Board of General Purposes alerting lodges to a man calling himself Simon Ramus, who had been using a forged certificate to obtain financial relief, and also noticed Joseph Larkin, who was attempting a similar fraud under the name of Miles Martin<sup>22</sup>. None of this was particularly unusual. Local newspapers across the country frequently reported attempts to obtain personal charity contributions through often-complex fraudulent applications and stories. However, Freemasons, who were often well-off and sworn to brotherly support and charitable giving, appear to have been seen as particularly lucrative and easy targets. From

<sup>20</sup> Royal Clarence Lodge, "Subscription and Account Book 1813-1850", East Sussex Record Office M.S. MAS 9/3/1. See Durr, 'Chicken and Egg' p.29.

<sup>21</sup> Hanson, *Probity*, 232.

<sup>22</sup> The full Minute reads, A Report from the Board of General Purposes was read, stating that an Individual, calling himself Simon Ramus, had been endeavoring to impose upon Brethren, and to obtain pecuniary Assistance, under colour of a fabricated Certificate, stating him to have been a Member of the Lodge no. 353, formerly no. 280, but which Certificate had been detained from him by the Lodge no. 283, and transmitted to the Grand Lodge. And, also, that another Individual calling himself Miles Marton, but supposed to be one Joseph Larkins, had, in a similar manner, been endeavoring to impose upon Brethren, under colour, a Certificate from the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and a certificate from the Lodge no. 145, at Norwich, but which Certificates had been detained by the S.W. of the Lodge no. 779, and transmitted to the Grand Lodge: the Board stated, that they were induced to make this report with a View to guard Brethren against further Attempts at Imposition by those individuals, although their means were, in a great Measure, destroyed by the Detention of the Certificates. These events were referred to by George Oliver in his editorial notes to the 1867 edition of Preston's Illustrations p. 16 in which he also noticed that, 'Masonic imposters are [now] very numerous.'



the mid-nineteenth century, articles and leaders in the Masonic press show a rising tide of concern about a small army of ‘Masonic imposters’, who wandered the country and plagued lodges and individuals as they tried to live off benevolence. If the number of complaints provides an indicator of the scale of the problem, it appears to have come to a peak around the late 1890s and early 1900s.

The general concern and complaint appears to conflate two significantly different types of ‘imposter’. Firstly, there were regular, and perhaps lapsed, Freemasons who had taken to exploiting the system and secondly, there were men who had never been Freemasons but fraudulently claimed membership. The first group were sometimes described as ‘Masons in name, vagrant in act’ and the second as ‘pretend Masons’<sup>23</sup>. The first group were seen by many to be drawn from the rising number of what were thought of as ‘second class’ men being introduced into Masonry – artisans, tradesmen, low grade clerical staff and ordinary workers. These accounted for much of the growth of Freemasonry during the second half of the century<sup>24</sup>, and they were far more likely to become applicants for charity than source of it. They were more likely to wander in search of work, less likely to have made sufficient provision for themselves and their family, and more likely to encounter difficulties as they economised on travel facilities, accommodation and food. Above all, they were more likely to appear ‘improvident’ to the more economically and socially successful groups that still generally ruled Masonry. A good example of this can be found in the complaints that were made about Scottish Masons seeking travelling relief in the North of England and the Midlands during the 1870s. It was argued that the Scottish lodges were particularly lax in letting in ‘unsuitable’ men of limited means by charging very low initiation fees and not requiring men to pay regular lodge dues<sup>25</sup>. In a similar way, the Grand Lodge of England had complained some years earlier to the Grand Lodge of Scotland about the practice of Scottish lodges accommodating unsuitable Englishmen who crossed the border to find what they saw as an easier way into Masonry<sup>26</sup>. Other marginal candidates, who could not find a regular lodge to initiate them, looked to irregular lodges to provide possible back-door entry. In 1859 and again in 1871, for example, the Grand Lodge of England issued warnings about a spurious lodge operating in Stratford, Essex, calling itself part of the ‘Reformed Masonic Order of Memphis, or Rite of the Grand Lodge of Philadelphia.’ Members of this lodge had used their certificates (a facsimile of which was circulated to all English lodges) to try to become joining members

<sup>23</sup> *The Freemasons Chronicle*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1901, 296.

<sup>24</sup> See Burt, “Membership of West Cornwall Masonic Lodges During the Victorian Period”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 122 (2009): 39-74; and Margaret Jacob, *The First Knowledge Economy: Human Capital and the European Economy 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> *The Freemason*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1874, 564; 7<sup>th</sup> September 1878, 443.

<sup>26</sup> *Proceedings of the United Grand Lodge of England*, “Minutes of the Board of General Purposes”, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1859. The Grand Lodge of England was particularly concerned about the Scottish practice of progressing candidates through all three degrees of initiation in one evening and requested that Scottish lodges be required to impose on English candidates the same time intervals between degrees as those that pertained in England.

of regular Masonic lodges<sup>27</sup>.

Even when men could prove their regular Masonic status they were often questioned very closely on the cause of the circumstance and if they were thought at all 'improvident' they were turned away. When William Hughan conducted a survey of lodge Almoners on the 'Masonic vagrant' problem in the last years of the century, he was told by some that between one and three and a half were considered not to be 'deserving'<sup>28</sup>. Younger Masons in particular were urged not to be taken in and encourage the practice by making personal donations but to refer applicants to lodge Almoners. The magazine *Masonic Illustrated* declared that, 'It is not the Board of Benevolence, nor the Lodge Almoner who is responsible for the Masonic tramp. It is the private brother who finds it easier to part with five shillings or half a sovereign to get rid of his visitor than to take his name and address and then to make communication in the proper quarter'<sup>29</sup>. In response to the increasing administrative and financial burden that these kinds of claimants made on lodges, some of those in the larger industrial cities came together to provide one common respondent to claimants. The lodges in Leeds for example, established a local Masonic Relief Fund with just one Almoner to whom all travelling Masons were referred. That Fund raised a levy of one shilling per member on all of the lodges in the city, which was sufficient to fund the relief given over two years. In 1901 they recorded 40 acts of relief for 37 distressed brethren. Of those 20 were English Masons, 10 Scottish, 3 Irish and 4 foreign<sup>30</sup>.

Poor and indigent Masons may have been a problem but outright imposters were an unacceptable affront. Some were simply seizing the occasional opportunity – such as a man who had borrowed a certificate from a friendly mason to enable him, 'in an itinerant manner to apply to lodges for relief'<sup>31</sup> –but many others were well-practiced and habitual offenders.

Again, numerous cases were reported in the Masonic press, but the case of the man calling himself J.B. Williams provides a good example. Following the customary procedure of circulating his description, *The Freemason*<sup>32</sup> described him 'of short stature, dark brown hair, no whiskers, carrying an umbrella in his hand, and dressed as the captain of a vessel at sea'. He claimed to have been shipwrecked, first landed in Hamburg and now making passage back to England<sup>33</sup>. Calling on the Brotherhood to aid his return, he carried with

<sup>27</sup> *Proceedings*, "Minutes", 7<sup>th</sup> December 1859 and 6<sup>th</sup> December 1871.

<sup>28</sup> *The Freemason*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1901, 620.

<sup>29</sup> *Masonic Illustrated*, June 1905, 10.

<sup>30</sup> *The Freemason*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1901, 295.

<sup>31</sup> Grand Lodge suspended a member of a London lodge for loaning his certificate for this purpose. See *Proceedings of the United Grand Lodge of England*, Minutes of the Board of General Purposes 4<sup>th</sup> March 1896.

<sup>32</sup> *The Freemason*, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1870, 659.

<sup>33</sup> The shipwrecked story was a good one, difficult to verify in the short term, and helping to explain the absence of a certificate. It was used by Masonic fraudsters everywhere. See, for example, a report of American Masonic imposters in Ireland with similar stories. *The Freemason*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1876, 26.

him a subscription book which purported to include the signatures of some of the Masonic fraternity in Hamburg and elsewhere, and more especially the signature of the British Consul at Hamburg. Back in Britain he paid a visit to a lodge in Berwick-upon-Tweed and called on the Almoner of the district. Not finding him in, and learning that he was away for some days, he forged the Almoner's name in the book and claimed that he had subscribed five shillings to his relief. Armed with this mode of deception, he then called on four Masonic ships' captains in Berwick-upon-Tweed, showed them the list of subscribers, boasting particularly of the Consul's signature. Three of them gave him a half sovereign each. The fourth captain, a Lloyds Agent, was intimately familiar with the Hamburg Consul's signature, and looked up the details of the supposed lost ship. Finding none, he challenged the imposter and he immediately fled.

Williams was lucky and appears to have got away, but many other fraudulent applicants were less fortunate. They were detained, prosecuted for fraud, and sentenced to significant terms in prison. Details of many of these malfeasants during the late 1890s were collected and published by James Pownall. Many/most of them were operating in the high population turnover counties of Northern and Midland England, though he also refers to several fraudulent claimants operating in the South West and elsewhere. Overall, he estimates that there were about 200 almost professional imposters going about the country over a five- or six-year period, though their impact on lodges and individual brethren was made far greater by the velocity of their circulation. To cover their activities they used a wide variety of aliases. Of those that were apprehended, several used 2 or 3 aliases, six had 4 or 5, four had 7 to 9, and one man used 12. Some were reported to operate over wide circuits, taking them three or four years to complete, while often using the same tried and tested stories. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that they received often severe sentences when successfully prosecuted. Prison terms were common, with terms ranging between 14 days and three months –hard labour. Even this, however, seems not to have dissuaded practiced fraudsters who continued to see rich pickings for the taking. John Wilson, for example, prosecuted under several names, received 14 days hard labour at Rochdale in August 1894, 7 days hard labour at Cheadle, Staffordshire in August 1898, 14 days hard labour at Retford, Nottingham in January 1899. Although they rarely made off with more than a few shillings at a time they were hardly likely to receive a sympathetic hearing from Masons such as John Valpy Thomas, Almoner for a lodge in Retford, Nottinghamshire, who was also a Superintendent of Police, or John Morton, Almoner for Huddersfield and district who was the Chief Constable of the West Riding of Yorkshire<sup>34</sup>. As will be seen below, the problem of Masonic imposters was not confined to Britain alone

<sup>34</sup> James William Pownall, *List of Names of Masonic Imposters; and undeserving persons who make a practice of habitually seeking assistance from the Almoners' Funds in different parts of the country* (Ashton-under-Lyne, 1902).

but was even greater in many overseas territories<sup>35</sup>. It is also an issue that would warrant further detailed study. Close observation of the activities of fraudsters could provide a looking-glass insight into the world of genuine individual acts of Masonic charity that are otherwise very difficult to disclose and interpret.

If temporary relief for the traveller was important at home, it was particularly significant for Masons exposed to the dangers of travelling overseas. Distance from the support of relatives and friends, exposure to unfamiliar food and diseases, and the possibility of descending to a level of abject poverty below anything that might be encountered at home, all elevated the level of hazard. In a letter to the Grand Secretary in London, one Australian correspondent observed that, 'a quarter part of the free community have been admitted Masons in England from the prevailing notion of the necessity of being so on becoming travellers<sup>36</sup>.' Lodge of Unity in New South Wales provides a specific example, with its Minute books of the 1840s regularly recording travelling Masons being provided with bed, breakfast and five shillings to continue 'up country' in their search for work<sup>37</sup>. Even in 1890, when the population of the Australasian colonies had expanded very considerably, the incidence of masonic membership and the potential support for travellers remained very high. For example, in that year the white male population over the age of 21 in New Zealand stood at just over 150,000 – the size of a medium sized county town in Britain today. For that population, there were 87 lodges warranted under the English constitution, 50 under the Scottish and 15 under the Irish<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, there are few records of the overall sums paid out for 'tramping' relief, and they undoubtedly varied between lodges and over time, but again it is likely that they were substantial and placed a real burden on many lodges.

An extreme example of the burden that could be placed on lodge members by visiting distressed brethren can be found in California, USA, following the gold rush of 1848/9. Although often poorly equipped and with very few resources, everything went well for the 'Argonauts' until the difficult winter of 1849/50. During those months, large numbers of the miners were compelled to leave the diggings in the high Sierras and retreat to Sacramento. By the time they arrived many were underfed and sick. The Masons among them immediately looked to local lodges to help them out. Overwhelmed by the numbers, and with no municipal government yet in place to provide an alternative service, the lodges came together to set up their own hospital. Unfortunately there was no short-term fix and,

<sup>35</sup> See page 13. *The Freemasons Quarterly Review*, June 1852, 143, commented particularly on the problems already being encountered in Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>36</sup> Library and Museum of the Grand Lodge of England (LMGLE) 21/C/1 (Australia) Freemasonry prospered considerably in the early Australian colonies and played a major role in the development of the economy and civic government. See B. Barrett, *The Civic Frontier: The Origins of Local Communities and Local Government in Victoria* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 27 and 44-6.

<sup>37</sup> James, *They Call Each Other Brother: Secret Societies and the Strange Slow Death of Mateship in Australia 1788–2010* (New South Wales: Private Publication, 2010), 51.

<sup>38</sup> *Proceedings*, "Minutes", 4<sup>th</sup> June 1890.

aggravated by a cholera epidemic that swept the city in 1850 and another bad winter later in the year, the local lodges estimated that they paid out over \$32,000 relieving their brethren, the great majority of whom were foreigners with no connection to them other than their Masonic status. This created severe financial difficulties for some of the lodge members, and they were later to plead their case for contributions to other lodges in California and across the United States.

However, they took pride that, 'no sick destitute and suffering brother had been permitted to suffer or die in their midst, uncared for<sup>39</sup>.' Around the same period, but for less specific reasons, many Canadian lodges complained bitterly of the charges on their limited means resulting from the 'numberless claimants' and 'indigent Brethren' arriving from Britain<sup>40</sup>.

Again there are no overall estimates of the sums paid out in the provision of emergency relief, but, as is so often the case, looking at those that tried to subvert the system provides some suggestion of its scale. In the North America 'masonic imposters' were particularly numerous and their number grew rapidly during the last decades of the century. The problem was at its worst in the Frontier West where conditions were stacked in favour of fraudsters. Everyone was a 'foreigner', or at least, from far away: they came from different constitutions with slightly different signs and passwords: certificates could easily have been lost or forged. The biggest problem however, was checking whether they were currently paid up members of their home lodge and had not been excluded. The opportunity was there for a free-for-all and everyone suffered. The Oddfellows, the Foresters, the Druids' and every other fraternal and benevolent society with international links<sup>41</sup> and emergency finance for travellers had their own problems. The Oddfellows even suspended relief for all but domestic members. But if the Freemasons Quarterly it to be believed, 'it was the Masons that suffered the most'<sup>42</sup>.

To tighten their procedures, the lodges tried a two pronged approach. Firstly, many began to issue special 'travelling certificates', authenticating the holder and demonstrating his currently paid up status. This was as useful for the legitimate travelling mason in a suspicious world as it was for the receiving lodges. Secondly, the North American Masons began to experiment with a system of national reporting of suspicious persons and already proven frauds. In 1877, for example, the Masonic Lodge of Relief in Baltimore, Maryland, circulated a poster to other lodges warning of an English Masonic imposter going by the name of Herbert Sydney. Claiming to be a portrait painter from Langthorne Lodge, Stratford, in Essex, he had successfully obtained money in Baltimore over several weeks

<sup>39</sup> See *The Freemason Quarterly Review*, June 1852, 131, and Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 65.

<sup>40</sup> *The Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1856, 170; July 1857, 527.

<sup>41</sup> See James, *Brother*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> August 1900, 72.

and would no doubt soon try to attempt the same swindle elsewhere<sup>43</sup>. In 1885 such arrangements were put on a more regular footing when a number of Masonic organizations met in Baltimore to organize the General Masonic Relief Association of the United States and Canada, in order “to establish a central organisation for the purpose of facilitating the discovery and exposure of persons travelling about the country and imposing upon the charities of Masons<sup>44</sup>.” They accumulated a central register of the names, appearances, stories, and sometimes photographs, of imposters, which were speedily distributed by telegram. These were circulated in monthly up-dating ‘Warning Circulars’ to subscribing lodges<sup>45</sup> that no doubt saw them as a sound money-saving investment. Over the 27 years from 1885 to 1912, the circulars recorded 4,833 ‘unworthy cases’ including many multiple offenders<sup>46</sup>. Adding those to unknown and unreported frauds produces an average number of attempted frauds numbering several hundred each year. This would have been only a very small fraction of the total number of applications made by genuine Masonic claimants. Imposters can only survive when they have the cover of large numbers of legitimate applicants. They can only prosper if the sums paid out were sizable. They will only risk the considerable penalties they might suffer (months of imprisonment for fraud were common) if they think that they will not be caught. If the numbers of imposters that are actually apprehended are large, then the number of legitimate claimants is likely to have been enormous<sup>47</sup>. All of these comments might be applied to all of the numerous countries that experienced Masonic migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was a global problem for a global organization<sup>48</sup>.

So far, Masonic benevolence to travellers has been seen as ‘re-active’ – waiting for those in distress to seek relief – but it was also sometimes ‘pro-active’, in contributing sums to assist the less well-off to seek better fortune in other areas. Such generosity was partly designed to ensure that migrants did not become relief dependent when actually on the road and partly to fill a common Masonic charitable desire to assist men in restoring their own independence rather than to maintain them as charity dependent. Partly also, like the old operatives guilds, to reduce ‘surplus’ population in some areas. Again, the Masonic press provides good examples of these motivations. In 1847, for example, the Freemasons Quarterly Review called on all English lodges, ‘to assist their poor brethren who are leaving their native country in search of employment and homes’ because they ‘often arrive

<sup>43</sup> *Masonic Imposter Broadside* (Baltimore, MD: D.K. Osbourne & Co., 1877). Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library, Van Gorden-Williams Library and Archives, Lexington, Mass. A2002/118/1.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Croteau, “Brotherly Deception”, *Cabinet* 33 (Spring 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Lodges subscribed on a per capita membership basis of a few cents per member.

<sup>46</sup> Croteau, “Deception”.

<sup>47</sup> *The Album of Masonic Imposters* (Masonic Relief Association, 1903) features 156 of the imposters, drawn from the circulars to that date. Available in the Van Gorden-Williams Library and Archives.

<sup>48</sup> The Freemason 24<sup>th</sup> August 1895, 478. See also Pownall, *List of Names*, which makes reference to an American seeking assistance in England.



as cases of real distress<sup>49</sup>.’

Equally, a few years earlier the same paper printed an obituary of John Fearn, a tailor, who had been assisted to emigrate to Ohio in the United States by his brethren in Old Newstead Lodge no. 55 in Nottingham and with a grant of £20 from the Board of Benevolence. It had been hoped that a change of climate would restore his health and the ability to support his wife and seven children, but sadly he died within months. To their credit, his new brethren in America gave him a full Masonic funeral and extended their protection to his family<sup>50</sup>. Some years later, and in a similar vein, *The Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror* reported that during the summer recess a member of a lodge in Deptford, near London, finding himself in suddenly reduced circumstances, successfully solicited local brethren for financial aid to emigrate to America. He received over £10 in voluntary donations over a few days and left immediately, not delaying to make formal application to the Lodge of Benevolence<sup>51</sup>.

This sort of activity chimed well with the national mood in the second half of the nineteenth century. There was a widespread view that migration should be used both to reduce areas of over-population at home and to provide much-needed human resources to exploit the potential of a rapidly expanding Empire. Local and regional ‘Emigration Societies’ were formed across the country to help finance and organize the migrants, with women and children often being identified as being particularly needed in the colonial frontier areas<sup>52</sup>.

Freemasonry was not to be left out. Many lodges made contact with their local societies and ‘receiving’ lodges, particularly in Canada, became pro-active in looking for immigrants. In the 1860s, the Grand Lodge of England proposed to alleviate the burden on the Royal Masonic School for Girls by assisting some of their number to emigrate, and across the Empire Masons encouraged movement, not just from Britain but between the colonies. In London, the Grand Lodge encouraged the development of new ‘Imperial Lodges’ from the 1880s, which were specifically designed to bring together visitors from the colonies with those who might be considering future outward movement. Job and opportunity finding, familiarization and settlement assistance were a focus of their activities<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> December 1847, 123.

<sup>50</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> September 1840, 65.

<sup>51</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> October 1868, 14.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, *The Female Middle-Class Emigration Society 1862-1886 and The Women’s’ Emigration Society 1880-1884*. See also J. Bush, ‘The right sort of women: female emigrators and emigration to the British Empire 1890-1910’, *Journal of South African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1994): 385-409.

<sup>53</sup> Harland-Jacobs, *Builders*, 248-252.

## Access

So far attention has been focused on the relief of the ‘poor and distressed mason’ as he travelled, alone or with his family, along regional, national and international highways. But freemasonry offered the migrant far more than that. In particular it offered access at final destination – access to informed and reliable members of the local community who could advise on where to find work and reliable service providers; access to entertainment, fellowship, and private spaces of refuge in sometimes tumultuous towns and ports; and access to respectable family members who could help your own family to settle in. For most migratory Masons, this was the principal advantage of membership. Relief was insurance for unexpected emergencies, hopefully never to be called upon. The need for effective networking at final destination, however, could make or break the success of any venture. It seems fairly clear that Masonic lodges became widely known for their influential networking potential, both within and beyond the craft. Detailed research on lodges in West Cornwall and elsewhere has shown how mobile groups, such as mariners and miners, targeted Masonic membership before or during migratory events and that lodges across the country were happy to accommodate them by fast-tracking impromptu initiations. Indeed, it has been argued that for many men, the desire to gain access to Masonic networks was the principal motivation for joining<sup>54</sup>.

Mariners, both naval and mercantile, joined freemasonry in large numbers from the earliest days of Freemasonry. Numerous naval lodges were active by the mid-eighteenth century and were one of the principal vehicles for spreading masonry around the country and overseas.

Attention here, however, will be focused on the many civilian lodges located in the coastal towns of Britain as well as some lodges in ports overseas<sup>55</sup>. Nearly all of them were actively recruiting mariners from their consecration and by the end of the eighteenth century this occupational group had become one of the largest represented in the Order<sup>56</sup>. It covered a wide range of men, from the captains of vessels, through engineers, mates and boatswains, to ordinary seamen and lowly stewards. By far the most common group described themselves as ‘ship’s master’ or ‘master mariner’, suggesting the upper professional/social end of the category. In modern terms, they might be described as ‘managerial’. However, some caution needs to be exercised here since ‘ship’s master’ could cover everything from a lone fisherman to the captain of an East Indiaman. In all of the

<sup>54</sup> See Burt, “Membership”, 63-68; and Burt, “Freemasonry and Business Networking During the Victorian Period”, *Economic History Review* LVI, no. 4 (2003): 664.

<sup>55</sup> There is no full listing of these lodges but a large number are included in K. Cochrane ed., *A Collection of Histories of Lodges with a Nautical Connection, Together with Summaries of the Various Grand Lodge Histories* (Privately Published, 1989) UGLE Library and Museum A 50 COC.

<sup>56</sup> Cochrane, *A Collection*. Cochrane was mainly interested in naval lodges but also list some mercantile lodges.

English lodges so far considered, this group greatly outnumbered other ‘non-managerial’ mariners.

The very common enthusiasm of master mariners to become Masons has been discussed elsewhere<sup>57</sup>, but a few examples of the numbers joining may be in order. ‘Old Dundee’ Lodge, no. 18, meeting at Wapping at the centre of the then port of London, was exceptionally well placed to admit mariners and introduced a special category of ‘sea members’ as early as the mid-eighteenth century. By 1810 more than three quarters of 485 lodge members gave that as their occupation<sup>58</sup>. In the actual port of Dundee in Scotland, Lodge Ancients no. 49 was equally active with mariners and during the third of the nineteenth century, somewhere between a third and a half of all of its initiates were drawn from maritime professions<sup>59</sup>. The numerous small ships involved in the Baltic and North Sea trades also produced large numbers of members for lodges such as Phoenix no. 94 and Palatine no. 97 in Sunderland as well as many other ports in the north east of England.

Similarly, in the South West, the Lodge of Love and Honour no. 75 in Falmouth, Cornwall, was strategically located to recruit mariners involved in the Atlantic and long-distance trades. During its years of peak recruitment 1853-1861, the latter lodge initiated and progressed 25 mariners, recruited from across Britain and northwestern Europe, mainly by holding emergency meetings. Most of these lodges rarely saw their maritime members after initiation and did not include them in the regular lists of members<sup>60</sup>. For their part, the stay-at-home ‘core’ members of the lodge were prepared to fill the offices and run its affairs, largely financing their activities from the initiation and membership fees of the seafarers.

At the level of the local lodge, this was regarded as a mutually beneficial arrangement for all concerned. However, Grand Lodge did not always see it the same way. They became concerned that seafarers were being treated as semi-detached masons, with lodges failing to make sufficient efforts to collect subscriptions and make proper returns. In 1876, for example, the Grand Secretary took the Secretary Love and Honour to task for failing to collect, and pass on, the usual 6d per member per quarter for Benevolence, and dismissed any suggestion that the lodge had been given a special dispensation not to collect it<sup>61</sup>. Similarly, some years earlier, the Board of General Purposes took action against Royal Kent Lodge of Antiquity no. 20 in Chatham, for initiating new members but not including them in returns or paying registration fees. They estimated that they had done this for more

<sup>57</sup> See Andrew Prescott, “The Cross-Currents of the Union”, *Transactions of the Leicester Lodge of Research* 122 (2013-2014): 158-168, for the particular role of Swedish mariners.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Heiron, *Ancient Freemasonry and the Old Dundee Lodge, No. 18* (1921), 241. Dunkerley had held membership in this lodge as a sea member before transferring to regular category.

<sup>59</sup> John Belton and Robert Cooper, “Scotland’s Masons: Membership & Occupations of Freemasons 1800-2000”, in *Researching British Freemasonry 1717-2017*, eds. Andreas Onnefors and Robert Peters (Sheffield: Lectures in the History of Freemasonry and Fraternalism Vol. 3, 2010), 99-126.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Heiron, *Old Dundee*, 238.

<sup>61</sup> *Love and Honour Lodge Returns*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1876.

than 15 years for upwards of 50 members and that Royal Kent now owed Grand Lodge £35 in unpaid subscriptions<sup>62</sup>. The problems of applying the same administrative arrangements for residential lodge members to itinerant masons plagued Secretaries, Grand and local, throughout the nineteenth century.

If mariners were going to enjoy so little of what are usually regarded as the main attractions and benefits of Masonry, why did they want to join and why were lodges so eager to receive them? In the context of the argument being developed here, they wanted to join not because they wanted the support and pleasures of a local lodge, but because they wanted to be able to access a whole global network of lodges; to be sure of a welcome and the support of other Masons everywhere; to be able to access trusted business and information network wherever they dropped anchor; to find sanctuaries of calm familiarity in often anarchic ports; and perhaps, particularly in the case of some foreign applicants, to find a backdoor way into freemasonry which they could not access at home. They aspired to become part of what was clearly a very large and very economically and socially productive ‘brotherhood of the sea’.

These attractions of Masonry can be illustrated from the annual membership returns and correspondence from three lodges based variously in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Pacific, all operating with Warrants from the United Grand Lodge of England. They were Union Lodge no. 588, based in Floriana, Valletta, Malta<sup>63</sup>; St. Andrew’s Lodge no. 732, working in Sydney, Nova Scotia; and Yokohama Lodge no. 1092, working in Japan. What did new arrivals find when they visited one of these lodges? Firstly, they encountered men very like themselves. The numbers of master mariners that were actual members varied somewhat –being higher in Union than in Yokohama Lodge– but all included other skilled professionals, such as first and second officers, marine engineers, surgeons and pursers, as well as occasionally ‘ordinary’ seamen, such as mariners, stewards, ships’ carpenters, boatswains.

They were a good place to look for, and perhaps find, additions to their crews. Secondly, they could find seagoing and market intelligence from the constant comings-and-goings of members and visitors. Many had already ‘tramped’ around large parts of the world and could report directly on the conditions found. For example, Robert Colls, a master mariner, who joined St. Andrew’s in 1848, presented a certificate that was stamped to show that he had recently visited lodges in Tahiti and Montevideo. Small numbers of naval personnel would also add diplomatic information to this and they often enjoyed an input from Consular officials, such as the American Consul in Union Lodge and the British

<sup>62</sup> *Proceedings*, “Minutes”, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1876.

<sup>63</sup> There were three other English lodges working in Malta during the last part of the Nineteenth century - St. John and St. Paul Lodge no. 349, Zetland Lodge no. 515, Wayfarers Lodge no. 1926 – all of which also met in Valetta and consisted almost entirely of naval and army personnel. Union Lodge was the only civilian lodge.

in Yokohama. In all of these lodges they could find entertainment and conversation on familiar issues and fellowship with likeminded men. Thirdly, the ‘stay-at-home’ core of the lodge –the merchants, agents, customs officers, clergymen, tailors, sail makers, physicians etc.– would provide a reliable way in to the local economy and community, arranging for repairs and new cargo, re-victualing, and simply providing for personal services and accommodation.

Just like Love and Honour in Penzance, this core membership appears to have been small compared with the total numbers being initiated and joining the lodge. In Yokohama, for example, the regular paid up membership in 1885 was just 19, which was considerably less than a third of those who had been initiated and joined in the previous ten years. All of the lodges appear to have been very much in the business of welcoming anyone who wished to be initiated, regardless of social status, with Union Lodge being the most active in recruiting master mariners. Such active recruitment also produced a clamour for the dispatch of Grand Lodge certificates for those that urgently wanted to be on their way again.

As with the lodge Secretaries in Cornwall<sup>64</sup>, the Secretary for St. Andrews Lodge wrote in May 1854 to ask the Grand Secretary to, ‘transmit without delay’ four certificates because, ‘I have had to appease the impatience and complaining of these brethren, who have expressed great dissatisfaction about the matter’<sup>65</sup>. Sometimes such matters were eased by members returning to England, such as George Holmes of St. Andrews, who was ‘now in Budleigh Salterton, Devon’ –but nevertheless needed it urgently, ‘because he is uncertain how long he will remain’<sup>66</sup>. Yet others demanded replacement certificates for those of members that, for example, had been, ‘lost in a shipwreck’, ‘lost while travelling with Bedouins and Arabs’; ‘lost in a fire on a goods train from Cairo’<sup>67</sup>. On occasion, some lodges issued their own temporary certificates, vouching for the carrier’s Masonic status.

In a world where a Mason was always effectively a visitor, formal masonic credentials were an even more essential ‘passport’ for identification than they were for the domestic itinerant. Different jurisdictions might have different signs and passwords making it difficult to pass the ‘tests’ which might substitute for a certificate at home. As early as 1788, for example, Artillery Lodge in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was issuing letters of introduction for members, recommending them, ‘to all Regular and Warranted Lodges around the Globe wherever Providence may please to direct him.’ Soon, however, Grand Lodge certificates became the standard currency and correspondence between lodge Secretaries and Grand Lodge became full of requests for their urgent dispatch. Pleading letters recounted how the newly made Master Mason was ‘about to sail’; had been obliged

<sup>64</sup> See Burt, “Membership”, 65-66.

<sup>65</sup> Lodge returns correspondence, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1854.

<sup>66</sup> Lodge returns correspondence, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1853.

<sup>67</sup> Union Lodge returns correspondence, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1858; 13<sup>th</sup> March 1865; 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1865.

to sail before receiving it and needed it sent on; or the original certificate had been lost or destroyed. For example, in 1856 the Secretary of Love and Honour sent on a letter from newly raised James Rymes declaring that, 'being a Ship's Master and visiting foreign nations, I feel much at a loss not being forwarded my certificate – having been in the coast of Africa ever since I got the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree.' Similarly in 1863 the Secretary of Union Lodge in Malta forwarded a message from Edward Petts asking for the swift dispatch of his certificate because, "I am leaving for the West Indies for several years and should have my certificate before I leave to enable me to attend a lodge, as I wish to become more enlightened in Masonry<sup>68</sup>." By 1876 the Secretary of Love and Honour was making use of telegrams to press the urgency of his cases.

Miners were also a large and diverse group. Like mariners they consisted of both managerial and non-managerial categories, but the non-managerial category of ordinary miners was far greater than that among mariners. The other major difference between the two groups was that while the mariners were almost universally a continuously footloose group, wanting little more from Masonry than occasional emergency assistance and continuous long distance networking potential, miners in West Cornwall divided almost equally between a 'stay at home' group and those that undertook episodic migration. The attractions of Masonry for the 'stay at home' group were similar to those of any set of men. These have been described elsewhere as the five 'r's' –ritual, rank, respectability, reputation and recreation<sup>69</sup> or, as Weinbren has suggested, to gain self-confidence, self-discipline, new skills, affection, solidarity, and perhaps to promote closer links between religion and social welfare<sup>70</sup>. For the several hundred that were considering migration, however, the motivations appear to be very similar to those of mariners, and Masonic lodges were in an excellent position to exploit their interest. Several forces were coming together to create this moment. Firstly, the local mining industry began a long terminal decline from the late 1860s and, with limited alternative employment, many saw some form of outward movement as inevitable. Secondly, the skills that mine managers, engineers and miners had acquired at home were in increasing demand in the world's new mining districts. Thirdly, the Cornish community was well informed about the opportunities abroad by the letters and personal reports of family members that had gone earlier<sup>71</sup>. Fourthly, the Masonic lodges in the declining mining districts were often a particular focus for returnee visitors who could make personal recommendations on places to go and people to see. Fifthly, many of those returning to Cornwall had experience of the role of Masonic lodges in overseas mining districts and knew them to have members of substance and influence. In

<sup>68</sup> Lodge Returns, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1856 and 17<sup>th</sup> November 1863.

<sup>69</sup> Burt, "Membership", 62.

<sup>70</sup> See Weinbren, "Freemasonry and Friendly Societies", in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, eds. Henrick Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 387-406, who suggests that these were common motivations for joining friendly and benevolent societies of most descriptions.

<sup>71</sup> See Philip Payton, *The Cornish Overseas* (Alexander Associates, 1999).



other words, rather like mariners and sea-going lodges, miners knew mining lodges, at home and overseas, to be excellent sources of information and to offer worthwhile networking opportunities into local economies and communities. Some indication of the value that that potential miner-migrants saw in Masonic membership can be derived by looking at the costs of becoming a Mason relative to their current income in Cornwall and the cost of shipping fares. In Cornwall during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most miners earned between 16 shillings (£0.8) and £1 per week. The cost of steerage passage to America was about £3. The cost of receiving all three degrees of initiation was a little over £7<sup>72</sup>. In other words, applicants expected a return on the equivalent of income from two months' work and valued initiation and membership as highly as the cost of a return trip to the United States.

While men were eager to seek initiation, the inland Cornish mining lodges, like the coastal lodges, were happy to accommodate them, even when they were about to leave and might not return for some time. The lodges bestowed degrees in emergency meetings and Past Masters were often among the proposers of men of whom they knew little other than their desire to become masons before they left the country<sup>73</sup>. Again a financial motive might be inferred.

Initiation fees of seven guineas would no doubt have been attractive to lodges struggling to survive in depressed and shrinking communities. In some lodges a quarter or more of their income came from members overseas, some of whom had been gone for more than ten years, and at least one lodge historian has concluded that they were, 'virtually in the business of exporting Freemasons'<sup>74</sup>.

The evidence for many of these observations was again derived from lodge membership returns, correspondence with Grand Lodge and lodge Minute Books. Three lodges in the centre of the mining district provided a good sample. They were Boscawen no. 699 in Chacewater; Druids' Lodge of Love and Liberty no. 589 in Redruth; and Tregulrow Lodge no. 1006 in St. Day. Their membership records for the period between the 1860s and the end of the century reveal a structure both different from, but also very similar to, that of Love and Honour. On the one hand, all three lodges closely reflected the structure of their local economies - here extractive rather than maritime. Also, as in Love and Honour, they all had a solid core of middle class professional and mercantile groups - lawyers, medical men, accountants, public officials, merchants and tradesmen - who not only serviced the main extractive activities but also provided for the everyday needs of the local community.

<sup>72</sup> Return of Rates of Wages in the Mines and Quarries, 1890-91 BPP [c.6455], 43; Killick, "Transatlantic", 191; W. J. Hughan, *By-Laws and Regulations of the Lodge of Love and Honour no. 75* (Falmouth, 1877).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Boscawen, "Minutes Book", January 1866.

<sup>74</sup> See Geoffrey Stobie, *Boscawen Lodge no. 699: A History 1857 to 1994* (Privately Published, 1995), 5. The process went on into the twentieth century.

However, unlike Love and Honour, the three inland lodges had a very large working class contingent. While the maritime activities of Falmouth were reflected in the almost exclusive recruitment of a 'managerial' class of 'master mariners', the Chacewater, Redruth and St Day lodges saw working miners considerably outnumber mine managers and engineers.

Similarly, while the exposure of Love and Honour to overseas experience was largely limited to the delivery of degrees to passing mariners and the provision of advice on the best local service facilities, the three inland lodges saw large numbers of resident members with extensive international migratory experience and the regular introduction of new members who planned to leave but probably also to return and sustain a long-term relationship with their mother lodge. The most interesting of these were the hundred or so that gave their occupation as 'gold miner'. There was no commercially mined gold in Cornwall and to use this as their job description implies that they had returned after a previously successful visit to gold mining districts overseas and probably intended to return to them. Circumstantial evidence would also suggest that while abroad they had seen the advantages of Masonic membership and wanted to seize the opportunity to acquire their 'passport' before they again left home<sup>75</sup>.

All three lodges also regularly received visitors from mining districts across the world. During the 1860s and 1870s these came mainly from the principal gold and silver mining districts of Australia, Mexico and California and Nevada in the United States – particularly the well-established Cornish enclaves around Nevada City and Grass Valley in California and the Virginia City/Comstock area of Nevada. These remained important during later decades but now visitors increasingly arrived from new developing mines in Idaho and Montana as well as South America, and particularly South Africa<sup>76</sup>. By comparison, exposure to visitors from other parts of Britain was less common. There was some regular interchange with lodges like Bedford in Tavistock, which drew on the copper mining communities in the Tamar valley, but very few appeared from further afield<sup>77</sup>. Overall the exposure of members of the mining lodges, like the maritime lodges, to constant international experience helped to foster an outward looking perspective in Cornwall unlike most other parts of the UK – an internationalism that gave the county the reputation of 'West Barbary', connected more to the trans-Atlantic world than to the rest of Britain<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> In many mining districts, Masonic membership was reserved for established residents but an established Mason would have visiting rights.

<sup>76</sup> For lists of visitors and joining members to these and other lodges, see Burt, "Freemasonry", 683-5.

<sup>77</sup> See for example, Boscawen Lodge Minutes Books, 11 Volumes, 1857-1990, Cornwall Record Office, Truro. AD 1576.

<sup>78</sup> See Lawrence L. Price, "'West Barbary': Or Notes on the System of Work and Wages in the Cornish Mines (1891)", reprinted in *Cornish Mining: Essays on the Organisation of Cornish Mines and the Cornish Mining Economy*, ed. Burt (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1969), 111-206.

Like Love and Honour and the maritime lodges overseas, the Secretaries of the mining lodges also constantly bombarded Grand Lodge for the urgent dispatch of Grand Lodge certificates because the new brethren were ‘going abroad’, ‘about to emigrate’, ‘leaving the country in a few days’ etc.<sup>79</sup>. In Feb 1893 the Secretary of Tregulow Lodge followed the precedent of Love and Honour in pressing the urgency of his case with a telegram, asking for no less than eight certificates because the brethren were ‘leaving Friday morning for Africa’<sup>80</sup>. It is remarkable that the Grand Secretary’s office was usually able to comply, given the level of staffing at the time. It is also testament to the efficiency of the Post Office that letters and documents could be delivered within 24 hours to and from this distant part of the country.

There is no doubt that these ‘passports’ were as essential to the miners as the mariners. They faced the insecurities of travel –from home to port; long distant ocean shipping; difficult overland travel to points of final destination; primitive conditions, disease and social anarchy in frontier mining communities. Many of these problems were eased by the development of railways and steam ships during the period, which made travel faster and more secure, but they never went away. Miners were also worried about parents, wives and children left at home and how they would fare if the flow of funds that they regularly sent were interrupted or cut off. When they finally found work at their destination it was a particularly hard and hazardous trade. At every point they took great comfort from having the help and support of the far-flung Masonic network available to them.

The stories of opportunity that miners heard at home may have encouraged them to become Masons, but were their hopes and expectations fulfilled when they finally arrived in distant mining camps? To answer this question, research has been conducted on the membership of a number of lodges in the Western United States, Australia and South Africa. This has produced a wide range of findings that will be discussed in detail elsewhere but attention here might be directed to the overall conclusions for three lodges that were operating in towns on the great Comstock silver deposit in north western Nevada in 1870. This was one of the largest and most important mining districts in the U.S. West at the time and received large numbers of immigrants and migrants from across the world<sup>81</sup>. The lodges were Virginia City and Escorial Lodges, based in Virginia City and Silver Star Lodge, in nearby Gold Hill<sup>82</sup>. Details of their membership have been reconstructed from the lists of members printed in the annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Nevada, and by the use of personal details, in terms of age, occupation, origin, etc., that were given in the

<sup>79</sup> Druids’ Lodge returns.

<sup>80</sup> Tregulow Lodge returns.

<sup>81</sup> See Ronald M. James, *The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> An informal meeting of Masons took place in Virginia City as early as 1860 but it was not until 1863 that Virginia City Lodge was established, with a warrant from the Grand Lodge of California, which claimed jurisdiction at the time.

United States censuses. Not all members could be traced in the censuses but a reasonable sample has been obtained. Boscawen, Druids' and Tregulow all received visitors and incoming members from this district and it might be assumed that most members were accordingly reasonably well acquainted with the conditions there.

What would they have been told – what would they have found? Firstly, they would have found that as new arrivals in the district they would be the norm and not outsiders. In these early years, the entire population was restless, constantly moving from one district to another looking for the best prospects. Equally, the membership of the lodges –all established during the very first years of settlement– maintained a high velocity of circulation. The lodges were accordingly excellent hubs for gathering information – not just local but for all parts of the West. Secondly, the people that they met were very much like themselves –young and adventurous, mainly in their late 20s and 30s, and mainly single men. As time went on, the proportion of married men in the lodges gradually increased, probably faster than the community as a whole.

Thirdly, and this time unlike the wider host population, the lodge members were almost universally white, protestant and English speaking. Roughly two thirds of the lodge members were American born, but around a third were foreign, with the great majority of those coming from the British Isles, Germany and Canada. There were no members of the large Chinese, Mexican, Latin American, African American, Native American communities and very few from southern Europe. Today those lodges would be seen as racist and elitist but for the in- coming Masons from north western Europe they represented an embrace from what were, at the time, the 'men that mattered' in the community. The lodges were welcoming and familiar and no doubt offered what some would have seen as a haven in a highly multi-ethnic/multi- cultural turmoil of people.

Fourthly, while the notorious fighting, gambling and whoring of the anarchic mining camps may have been an attraction to some of the younger Cornish miners, the quieter more respectable environment of the lodge would also have appealed to the many who came from the stricter non-conformist religious backgrounds at home. Wives in particular might have seen lodges as a safer place for their husbands to be –financially, morally and medically.

Fifthly, the lodges' membership provided links to almost every part of the local economy. Over time, as the mining towns matured and many of the earlier arrivals took root, the lodges developed an expanding core of members who played a major role in town affairs. Mining related activities were the dominant group, with all grades of men, from prospectors and self- employed adventurers, to paid workers in larger ventures, craftsmen (such as blacksmiths and carpenters), teamsters, foremen, engineers, managers and mine owners –all of the contacts that would be needed to find a job, identify those offering the best conditions, and ease a way into the local community. The principal non-mining groups were those engaged with running the urban economy –mainly those in mercantile and retail

activities, legal, medical and financial professionals, and public employees, and hospitality and service providers.

Agriculture and husbandry were virtually invisible –there were no cowboys. Of course, not all new arrivals wanted to be a miner or stay a miner. The wide range of these other occupations meant that the lodges could accommodate newcomers whatever their background and intended future. It is notable that of the two returning American-made Masons seeking to become joining members of Boscawen Lodge in the early 1870s, one was a blacksmith and the other gave his occupation as innkeeper.

Sixthly, as the egalitarian occupational structure of the lodges suggests, the lodges gave access to all levels of wealth in the local community. Like the Cornish mining lodges, they were mainly ‘blue collar’, made up of the upper working class and lower middle class members, but in the American West they also embraced those that had made good locally and sometimes become extremely well off. This made it easy for incomers to find their own level in new social relationships but also to access financial resources if they were needed.

Fortunately it is possible to put some statistics to this. The American census of 1870 permitted those being enumerated to provide estimates of their total worth, in terms of a general assessment of their personal and estate assets. Only around a quarter of the lodge members made such a return to the census and the figures given need to be treated with considerable care. However, they do provide a general guide. Of the one hundred that made a return, a third declared combined assets of less than \$1,000 and more than half less than \$2,000. That suggests that most were far from wealthy but doing reasonably well, gradually accumulating property and some savings. However, at the other end of the scale, 14 declared combined assets of more than \$10,000 and three of them, more than \$100,000. Without doubt the mining districts were places where men could make good and the lodges were the place to meet those that had done so. As far as it is possible to measure, the lodge members as a group appear to have been better off than the average for the population. It is unlikely that freemasonry itself had made them richer, but the opportunities that it provided for help, advice and networking no doubt improved opportunities for current and future advancement.

Nothing that has been said here was unique to the Comstock district of Nevada. Random sampling of lodges in the copper district of Michigan’s Keweenaw Peninsular and the frontier gold mining towns of California and Montana, as well as in Bendigo, Australia, all produces much the same story<sup>83</sup>. It was often remarked in mining districts across the

<sup>83</sup> See Burt, *The Role of Fraternal Organisations in Migration and Informal Labour Organisations in Mining Communities: Cornwall, the Keweenaw, and California Compared* (Michigan: Michigan Technological University, 2014), <http://digitalcommons.mtu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=copperstrikesymposium>; Burt, “Masonic Networking by Migrating Cornish Miners”, in *Gold and Blue: Freemasonry and Community in Bendigo 1854-2004*, ed. David Beagley (Bendigo: Holland House, 2004), 13-18. See also F. Cusack, *Bendigo: A History* (Bendigo: Lark and McClure, 2002), 185, for the building of the Masonic hall in Bendigo

world that established Cornish mine managers and engineers always preferred to recruit 'Cousin Jacks' when any new positions became available at their mines. While regional and family affiliations were no doubt strong, it might equally well be concluded that they were just as likely to be favouring 'Brother Jacks'. The close links between the Cornish, mining and freemasonry continued everywhere and, indeed, appear to be symptomatic of new mining districts globally, irrespective of place and time. Certainly they were very clear in South Africa during the first decade of the twentieth century<sup>84</sup> and when the Northern Rhodesia copper belt began to develop rapidly from the early 1920s<sup>85</sup>, Masonic lodges were quickly established in towns like Kabwe (then Broken Hill), by Cornish mining personnel with names like Polmear, Treloar and Hosken. They brought together largely managerial and engineering brethren from many different Masonic constitutions, and became hubs for new mining personnel arriving in the country. With such influential connections it is not surprising that they were sometimes able to persuade the mining companies that Masonry was a 'good thing' and that they should be assisted financially in the construction of lodge buildings<sup>86</sup>.

Before concluding, it is important to address the possible objection that the choice of mariners and Cornish miners skews the case for the importance of travel and migration in recruiting men for freemasonry – that these groups were untypical, exceptionally mobile and peculiarly attracted to Masonry. It may be that they were particularly mobile but there were many other itinerant groups that also seem to have been well represented in lodges across the country. Commercial travellers are an obvious example. They were represented in every lodge in West Cornwall and no doubt found Masonic membership a useful mechanism for identifying and meeting potential customers. A random sample of lodges and years across England and Wales turns up two in the 1860s and 1870s in Bedford Lodge no. 282, meeting in Tavistock, Devon; five in the 1870s and 1880s in Philanthropic Lodge no. 107 meeting in King's Lynn, Norfolk; two during 1871/3 in Royal Jubilee Lodge No. 72, meeting in Fleet St., London; one in 1877 in Sir Watkins' Lodge no. 1477, meeting in Mold, Denbighshire; one also in 1877 in Aberystwyth Lodge no. 1072, meeting in Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire; two in the 1880s in St. Peter's Lodge no. 1024 meeting in Maldon, Essex; four during 1902/4 in Earl Spenser Lodge no. 1420 meeting in Battersea; and two or three in Lodge of Probity no. 61 in Halifax in every decade of the second half of

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in 1873, one of the most impressive buildings in Australia at the time. Material on the California and Montana lodges has not yet been published, but see Ralf Mann, *After the Gold Rush: Society in Grass Valley and Nevada City, California 1849-1870* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) and Thomas J. Dimsdale, *The Vigilantes of Montana* (Montana, 1864) for background.

<sup>84</sup> See Richard D. Dawe, *Cornish Pioneers in South Africa* (St. Austell: Cornish Hillside Publications, 1998), 277.

<sup>85</sup> Francis L. Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copper Belt 1899-1962* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971).

<sup>86</sup> See A. M. L. Entzinger, *History of English Freemasonry in Zambia* (Ndola: Private Publication, 1971), 32.



the century<sup>87</sup>. It is notable that Masonic lodges, such as St. John's no. 70 in Plymouth, often met in local commercial hotels, which were the common haunt of commercial travellers<sup>88</sup>.

In English lodges overseas, the clustering of commercial travellers appears to have been even more pronounced. In Bendigo, Victoria, Australia, for example, 24 commercial travellers joined Zenith, Golden and Corinthian Lodges during the 1860s, 70s and 80s and in nearby Ballarat six joined Yarrowee Lodge alone in the 1880s. By the turn of the century the numbers of Masonic commercial travellers in Britain had become sufficiently large for specific 'Commercial Traveller' lodges to be established in Liverpool (no. 2631, in 1896), London (no. 2795 in 1899), Preston (no. 3493 in 1910) and Newcastle (no. 3700 in 1913). These examples take account only of those who specifically gave their occupation as 'commercial traveller' – many others might have adopted the wider and general description of 'agent' or 'merchant' and they proliferated in large numbers everywhere. One particularly famous example of this was the well-known Masonic historian William Hughan. During his enormously productive life-time he travelled extensively and joined, or was given membership of, numerous lodges, being variously described as a warehouseman, commercial traveller, draper, and merchant. If only a small proportion of these large generic groups were itinerant, the overall numbers of Masons availing themselves of the assurance and access facilities of the Craft would have been of major significance.

Clearly the core membership of the vast majority of Masonic lodges was not geographically mobile. Even during the period of rapid industrialisation, most people lived and died in their home town or district. Stability was far greater than it is today. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the many that did move were aware of the benefits that being a freemason could bring, were often eager to obtain membership, and that many lodges were more than happy to oblige them, whatever their status. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that men who became Masons in such a perfunctory way had only mercenary intentions towards the Order. Many, perhaps even most, remained members for many years and made major contributions to the development of lodges and their associated communities across the world. They helped to create 'social capital', through involvement in local government, the administration of justice, the construction of schools, hospitals and various forms of social care<sup>89</sup>. Without doubt many took their Masonry very seriously, throwing themselves fully into lodge life –often taken far more seriously and 'life-embracing' than in England –and finally departed under a tombstone boldly recording their erstwhile Masonic identity.

<sup>87</sup> Hanson, *Probity*, 351-378.

<sup>88</sup> See *Exeter Pocket Journal* (1857): 213 and C. P. Hosgood, "The Knights of the Road: Commercial Travellers and the Culture of the Commercial Room in late-Victorian and Edwardian England", *Victorian Studies* 37, no. 4 (1994): 519-47.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Graeme Turpie, "Freemasons in the Community", *Beagley, Gold and Blue*, 53-59.

## Conclusion

Freemasonry is commonly portrayed as an ancient and unchanging institution. Ancient it may be, but unchanging it certainly is not. Its basic philosophical aspirations, secrets, and organisational structure may have stayed the same but everything else has adapted constantly to the evolving social and economic world that it lives in<sup>90</sup>. Most particularly, the memberships of lodges, and the motivations for joining, have responded to the increasing financial security provided by an emergent welfare state and a transport and communications revolution that has broken down the isolation of local communities and put the providers of goods and services in more direct touch with each other. Today lodges are no longer simply the product of closely defined communities but consist of members often drawn from wide geographical areas, facilitated by modern improvements in road, rail and public transport facilities. Visiting between lodges has grown more popular on a local and regional basis but welcoming from more distant parts –particularly international visitors– has probably become less frequent. Multiple lodges in larger towns now often broadly divide themselves by occupation, social class, ethnicity, recreational activity or some other basis. They have generally lost their once powerful influence in politics and economic affairs as they are no longer seen to have major relevance to professional advancement. Today men become Freemasons mainly for social interaction and entertainment among friends. Once a member of a lodge they are encouraged to learn and practice ritual and to advance through its offices. If they enjoy ritual they may seek membership of innumerable side-Orders and many/most will aspire to the higher Provincial and Grand Ranks. They are motivated by closely focused ‘intra-Masonic interests’– pleasure, progression and enjoyment within a closed society, still largely shut away from the everyday world.

In the emergent small industrial towns of the early and mid-nineteenth century freemasonry was very different. The membership of lodges was closely local, tending to reflect most aspects of the economy in its immediate vicinity. They embraced all of the major occupations and professions and most of the class divisions from the gentry to the upper working class.

Only the lowest sections of the unskilled working class appear to have been excluded and that probably because of their inability to afford membership rather than outright rejection. Their members were predominantly practicing Christians, largely affiliated to the Church of England but with significant numbers of dissenters. There was very little ethnic mixing.

Lodges met monthly, usually on the night of the full moon to facilitate travel

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<sup>90</sup> See Robert A. Gilbert, “Whither or Wither – A Personal View of the Future of English Freemasonry”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 118 (2005): 233-242, for a perceptive overview of recent changes and possible future directions.

through unlit streets, and although they enjoyed a festive board, monetary constraints on working class members often confined major celebrations to installation meetings. Side Orders were as yet few and far between – in Cornwall, Royal Arch and Mark were the only ones to make major headway before the end of the nineteenth century - and they were available only in the larger towns<sup>91</sup>. Their membership was restricted largely to financially better-off middle class members. The concept of ‘Past’ rank had not yet evolved<sup>92</sup>, the higher echelons of the Order were confined to an elite social group<sup>93</sup>, and there was little prospect of progression for most outside of their own lodge.

Instead of the modern focus on simple closed-door social interaction and entertainment, most nineteenth century lodges found their *raison d’être* in the conduct of more practical useful affairs. In a time before electronic communications and with limited circulation of newspapers, the lodge was often a rare ‘information exchange’ for local, national and international affairs, where first-hand experience could be substituted for rumour<sup>94</sup>. It was also the place to find reliable business partners. The latter was particularly important at a time when business was done on a hand-shake and it was essential to be sure of the honesty and reliability of business partners. Masons were sworn to fair dealing and their participation in public parades<sup>95</sup> was no doubt partly encouraged by the opportunity for individuals to demonstrate that they were part of a group that effectively referenced and guaranteed their honesty. Such backing from leading members of the community would be especially useful for those in positions of particular trust, such as agents, accountants, and lawyers, as well as practitioners in high risk trades, such as surgeons and ships’ pilots. It is not surprising that a quick check against Kelly’s Directory of Cornwall for 1883 shows that half of the mine agents in Redruth in that year were members of Druids’ Lodge and that eight of the 28 ships pilots working from Falmouth were members of Love and Honour.

Today such motivations are frowned upon. Candidates are warned against seeing Freemasonry as a vehicle for business connection or personal advancement. In the context of the nineteenth century, however, they were perfectly rational and sensible objectives and generally worked to the good of the individual, the economy and society as a whole. Modern management theory stresses the importance of reliable networking systems for efficient information flows and ‘trust’ is emphasized as the basis for reliable decision making and commercial contract<sup>96</sup>. Together they ‘reduce transaction costs’ making the

<sup>91</sup> Burt, “Who were the Mark Masons? A Look at Some Lodges in West Cornwall during the Victorian Period”, in *Marking Well*, ed. Prescott (London: Lewis Masonic, 2006), 171-180.

<sup>92</sup> See John Mandelberg, “Grand Rank”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 126 (2013).

<sup>93</sup> Aubrey Newman, “Freemasonry in Leicestershire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Comparisons and Contrasts”, *Transactions, Leicester Lodge of Research* (1998): 33.

<sup>94</sup> Harland-Jacobs has referred to the particular role of freemasonry in channelling information about imperial affairs and fostering the concept of a citizen of the Empire. *Builders*, 240-252.

<sup>95</sup> See John S. Wade, ““Go and Do Thou Likewise”: English Masonic Processions from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries”, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 122 (2009): 75-120.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, E. L. Khalil, *Trust* (Cheltenham, 2003).

conduct of business more efficient, and assist in the growth of economic activity. This was particularly important in the late nineteenth century when business was done on the basis of personal acquaintance and a ‘hand shake’. Some historical evidence for this was provided in a recent analysis of the performance of 412 companies quoted on the London Stock Exchange between 1895 and 1902. It was found that those quasi-private companies with Masonic managers or directors generally found it easier to obtain credit than other similar enterprises and that they tended to produce higher profits<sup>97</sup>. However, it was not entirely a win-win situation. The same study also suggested that in larger public companies, where there was a separation of the interests of management and shareholders, Masonic managers were often ‘non-value-maximizers’, more interested in extending their networks than generating profits. This, of course, does not chime well with the claims of many anti-Masonic writers, that cozy Masonic deal-making lead to corruption, the exclusion of non-Masons, and the extraction of excessive profits. Clearly there was a wide range of experience, but the evidence suggests if Masonic influence (and, indeed, that of other powerful social networking systems) can be focused on positive business- and socially-friendly activities, it can work to the considerable overall benefit of the economy and community. The evidence from West Cornwall in the nineteenth century certainly suggests this was so. By smoothing the path of migration it played a major role in assisting the region to adjust to sharply changing economic conditions and ensured that many families were able to sustain, and often much improve, their economic condition.

In the world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, freemasonry offered the itinerant worker two invaluable advantages –assurance in the event of mishap during the journey, and access to those that could help to ensure the success of their journey. They would be aware that those who they met were sworn to be charitable, to treat them honestly and fairly, and to provide such help and support as they could. They would effectively have a best friend that they had never met, or, as the advertisement for The Cosmopolitan Masonic Calendar put it, find ‘brothers’ not ‘strangers’ in the most remote of places<sup>98</sup>. No one who could afford the cost of membership would sensibly forego it, and there were plenty of lodges happy to organize it for them. The very fact that so many working men were prepared to spend as much as two month’s wages on initiation immediately before they left provides a clear indication that they were aware of this and it was the existing lodge members that conveyed the information. In west Cornwall at least, there was probably better intelligence of what was really going on in developing mining districts

<sup>97</sup> Fabio Braggion, “Managers and (Secret) Social Networks: The Influence of Freemasonry on Firms Performance”, *Journal of the European Economic Association* 9, no. 6 (December 2011): 1053-1081. See also Braggion and Lyndon Moore, “The Economic Benefits of Political Connections in Late Victorian Britain”, *Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 1 (2013): 142-176, in which the recruitment of politicians (most of whom would have been Freemasons) as the directors of firms is shown to have had a beneficial effect on some share prices.

<sup>98</sup> *The Freemason*, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1878, 599.

around the world than on the London Stock Exchange or Foreign Office. Constant comings and goings of sea captains and mining men from all corners of the world armed potential emigrants with reliable information on labour markets and the best travel arrangements – while brothers who had gone before them provided guaranteed helpful reception arrangements on arrival. It is notable that these Cornish lodges were already performing a role in the early century which the London based system of ‘imperial lodges’ did not begin to replicate until the 1880s and after<sup>99</sup>.

While the secrets and aspirations of freemasonry may remain the same, everything else, ritual included, has adapted constantly to the world around it. It is travelling on a long road, starting with stone mason operatives in the seventeenth century<sup>100</sup>, gradually widening its embrace to all local craft, commercial and professional interests in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and then abandoning its functional economic activities in the twentieth centuries.

Now it has become focused almost entirely on closed and introspective social-esoteric interests, as technology and government intervention has rendered many of its earlier activities irrelevant. Is that where the evolution stops? There is a tendency for contemporaries at any point in history to see the past as an inevitable progression to a current point of truth and permanence. They are always wrong. Evolution continues and freemasonry must, and will, change if it is to survive. However, if the institution is to retain its identity, those changes must not drift far from its original founding principles –and those principles were, and still are, essentially about mutual self-help. Every Mason takes an obligation to assist his brethren to the best of his abilities. It is one that is derived from the ancient guilds of operatives, underpinning a concept of the survival and progress of the individual through communal support –a kind of corporate guarantee for men and their families in a risky world. As Durr has explained, they derived originally from an, ‘ideology of interdependence, its practical manifestations being giving and receiving, relieving and being relieved, supporting and being supported, either singularly or collectively, in money or in kind; that which social theorists call reciprocity<sup>101</sup>.’ Unfortunately, the significance of these vows has been gradually eroded. Firstly, because the role of the local lodge where they were taken has been diminished, as new transport and communications systems put men in regular touch with people they hardly know. Secondly, because of an increasing fear of social opprobrium for perceived conspiracy and favoritism. Thirdly, because personal charitable commitments have been ‘out-sourced’ to the great Masonic charitable institutions. While the latter undoubtedly perform a magnificent function, raising far more

<sup>99</sup> See Harland-Jacobs, *Builders*, 251.

<sup>100</sup> See David Stephenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 9 and Trevor Stewart, *Harry Carr’s Memorials of the Haughfoot Lodge Newly Reworked* (Septentrione Books, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> Durr, “Chicken and Egg”, 29.

money than ever could or would be achieved by individual lodges, they have produced a disconnect between the giver and the receiver. Charity has been anonymized. It is no longer about a Mason fulfilling his obligation to a brother, but contributing to a general fund that is distributed as much outside of the Craft as within it. For many, charitable contributions have become little more than a 'tax' collected during and after lodge meetings. It is time to re-emphasize the originating principle of Masonry, that good advice, a helping hand, loyal support, and a friendly face could, and perhaps should, be the greatest act of charity that one brother can show to another. Similarly, where improved networking and sound trust relationships benefit economic and social progress, they should not be sacrificed to the current fashion for equality, fear of elitism, and demands for constant open inspection by the state. Freemasonry should be proud of the enduring values displayed in its origins and not compromise them for current fashions.

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