

MASONIC ROGUES AND VAGABONDS

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Brethren, what is Freemasonry? That seems at first glance to be a dumb question to ask members of a Lodge. We are all familiar with the answer given by candidates who are about to be passed to the second degree and who, in preparation, are being questioned about their knowledge of the subject. "A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," they reply. But if you thought the question was dumb, in my opinion the answer is even dumber and is incomprehensible to an outsider. Similar criticisms can be levelled against the specious 'not a secret society but a society with secrets.'

Clearly we need to make changes and in a speech on 19th July 2005 the Pro Grand Master The Most Honble The Marquess of Northampton recognized this. To be accurate, he did preface his speech with the disclaimer that the views were his own and not necessarily those of Grand Lodge. Lord Northampton said in his speech that we have lost **at least** 40% of our members in the last thirty years and that we continue to shrink at the rate of 3% a year.

These figures are reinforced in the Quarterly Communication from Grand Lodge dated 12th March 2008. Here is what was said:

	1998	2008
Number of Lodges	8646	8253
Number of Grand Lodge Certificates issued	10815	8103

A recent survey in the Province of Buckinghamshire in England showed that 30% of all Master Masons stop attending Lodge within three years of being raised. This illustrates the danger, said the Pro Grand Master, of rushing candidates through the three degrees and putting them on the officers' ladder before they have time to contemplate what it all means. But I digress.

To get back to the question I asked at the very beginning of this talk: what is Freemasonry? Lord Northampton is also Deputy Grand President of The Freemasons' Grand Charity and, in that capacity on 5th June 2008 he addressed an open meeting of ladies, gentlemen and Freemasons. In his talk he said that Freemasonry these days is very different to what it was even 25 years ago. We now practise, he said, a policy of openness about what we do and why we do it, and encourage our members to explain their Masonry to anyone who is interested.

He explained to the open audience that the three main principles on which the order is founded are brotherly love, relief and truth, which in layman's language could be described as long-lasting friendships, compassion and integrity, He went on to say that Hitler's determination to exterminate Jews and Freemasons during the Second World War drove the Order underground and we became obsessively secretive about ourselves. This has now changed and with our new ethos of openness we hope to be able to change any misguided perceptions and show those who are not Masons the good things that Freemasonry stands for.

To be fair to the authors of our ritual books, the originals of which are about 250 years old, the word peculiar which candidates are taught to say, is 18th Century English which means restricted to, unique or special. It does not mean, in this context, odd or funny. At this point I gladly acknowledge the assistance provided to me by WBro Bob Gilbert, PPrSGD (Gloucestershire) of the Bristol Masonic Society. Thanks to him I am able to tell you that the full title of the talk this evening is: **MASONIC ROGUES, THIEVES AND VAGABONDS**, which is the title of a talk that Bob Gilbert gave to the Bristol Masonic Society in October 2002 and which was published in Corona Gladiorum. His talk dealt with English freemasons, some of whom I'll mention tonight, but I have added a distinctly South African flavour to the talk and in a moment you'll meet various skollies and skelms. It's an unusual topic, I think you'll agree, but it is founded in my opinion upon a statement by the great French philosopher Voltaire who famously said that history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes. In the course of the next 40 minutes or so I hope that I shall be able to educate and entertain; the two are not mutually exclusive you'll be pleased to know.

In his talk six years ago – and long before Lord Northampton's talk in June this year – Bob Gilbert came up with a much better explanation of what Freemasonry is all about. It is, he said, a society of men, who believe in God, which makes good men better. Sadly however we also know, from reading the Quarterly Communications from Grand Lodge, that some masons are bad men becoming worse. And I want to talk about a few of them tonight, including some crimes committed in South Africa by masons, one of whom was the District Grand Master.

During the past twenty years or so, Grand Lodge has attempted to improve our image by responding to negative criticism. We make a big fuss about expelling brethren who, having been found guilty of criminal offences, were given prison sentences. We used to publish their names and their crimes. There was an occasional murderer, a few GBH cases (Grievous Bodily Harm), and plenty of robberies. But far and away the most common crime was income tax or VAT evasion. Now, we no longer publish the crimes which led to their expulsion and I agree with W.Bro Bob Gilbert when he says that that was the only entertaining part of the Quarterly Communications.

It was, I think, Jonathan Swift the Irish poet and philosopher who said that laws are like cobwebs which catch small flies but let wasps and hornets break free. Thank goodness that the cobwebs in Grand Lodge catch and expel errant freemasons but why conceal their identity and crimes? Unless you happen to be in Grand Lodge at a quarterly meeting when the Grand Secretary reads out the names of those brethren who have been expelled, and the crimes for which they were convicted, you will never know whether the men were paedophiles, prostitutes, bank robbers – or worse.

The first rogue I want to introduce this evening was guilty of rebelling against the rules and, says Bob Gilbert, as the First Book of Samuel (1 Samuel 15:23) tells us that 'rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft' he must have been very wicked indeed. He was WBro Ernest Callard of Old Bond Street, London, who fell afoul of the then Grand Secretary Sir Edward Letchworth, who was a formidable man. In 1915 he put forward a resolution to Grand Lodge that Germans should be barred from English freemasonry for twenty years as a protest against their

brutality in Belgium but, instead of waiting for Grand Lodge to respond, he and other members of Royal Warrant Holders' Lodge No 2789 promptly excluded a brother of German birth from the Lodge. With equal promptitude the Grand Master's Council ordered his restoration and, when this was refused, suspended the Lodge. Callard was summoned before the Board of General Purposes to explain himself but he refused to discuss the matter in the presence of a brother of German birth, a certain Brother Goldstein who was a member of the Board. Callard was then suspended from membership of the Craft for contumacy. A lovely word that. It means perverse and obstinate resistance to authority. The name of Callard's Lodge, and his address in London, suggest that he was a supplier of goods to the King. He wrote to Sir Dighton Probyn, Equerry to King George V, hoping the King would intervene on his behalf. The King's late father of course was Edward VII a former Grand Master, but neither George V nor his equerry were masons so the equerry sent the letter on to the Grand Secretary. That enraged Callard who circulated printed copies of all the correspondence to members of the Board and to many London Lodges. He had clearly forgotten that at his initiation he was taught to be cautious.

A less heinous crime is failing to pay Lodge subscriptions. Surely only obstinacy can account for brethren who allow this practice to lead to their exclusion. A prominent mason who was guilty of this was Bro Oscar Wilde who was initiated into Apollo Lodge No 357 at Oxford on 23rd February 1875. For some years he was an enthusiastic mason, being perfected in Apollo Rose Croix Chapter and advanced in the University Mark Lodge. But his enthusiasm waned and he drifted away, unpaid. His later notoriety would in any event have ensured his expulsion from the Craft as it did from the Ancient and Accepted Right.

The Minute Book of the Supreme Council records on 9th July 1895: 'The erasure from the Golden Book of the name of Oscar Wilde, who has been sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour'.

The erasure of Wilde's name probably reflected the deviant nature of his crime – homosexuality between consenting adults was then illegal – as mere adulterers usually managed to escape any Masonic punishment. In 1882 the Revd Alfred Cummings of Truro, who had

'deserted his wife and family and run off with another man's wife' was advised not to come to London to receive the 30th degree until the Supreme Council had investigated the matter. They discovered that his Chapter (Cornwall No 61) had excluded him not for immoral conduct but for failure to pay his dues. This led to an even more heinous sin on the part of the Recorder of another Chapter who had accepted him as a joining member without first obtaining a clearance certificate – a demit as we call it. **Brethren, there are some things that a freemason should not do and that is one of them. It is negligent conduct on the part of any Secretary who fails to obtain a demit from every Lodge of which the applicant for joining membership is or was a member!**

One of the most prominent collectors of Masonic artifacts, books and engravings was Bro Alexander Broadley who was initiated in St. Mary's Lodge 707 at Bridport in 1869. He was then a 22 year old barrister who was about to travel to India to become a Magistrate.

After four years in India he moved to Tunis where he set up practice. He left Tunis in 1893 to return to England and his Dorset home where he died a bachelor in 1916. On the surface, his was an honourable, if unexceptional career, but let's look beneath the surface.

Broadley was an odd and cantankerous man. In Dorset he was known for his uncouth habits – such as urinating from his carriage into the street when the need arose. Actually, let's not be prudish. He was charged with pissing in the street. The Victorians, although prudish, were often quite vulgar. Piss is an old Middle English word derived from the French pissier. Broadley took umbrage at Walter Spencer, a local bookseller, when he became too fat to squeeze between the piles of books in Spencer's shop. He was an enthusiastic freemason, active in many degrees and holding high office in some. In 1879 for example he was appointed Deputy District Grand Master for Malta.

But within him there was a vicious streak. When he was in India, the Government of Bengal was petitioned by numerous Indians who complained that he was using forced labour, taking bribes, imprisoning people falsely and that he was generally debauched. The Government took a decidedly dim view of his activities – especially

his close association with one Gujadhur Pershad, a man suspected (with justice) of “unnatural offences.” He was removed from the list of Civil Servants and at this point he moved to Tunis, only to be suspected of too great an interest in little boys. But as there was no hint of financial impropriety in his life, Grand Lodge left him alone to further his Masonic career. I sincerely hope that would not happen now.

Senior masons do not seem to be exempt from foibles. Captain John George Smith was at one time Provincial Grand Master for Kent but in 1783 he was the subject of a disciplinary hearing by Grand Lodge. He was charged with the offence of “making masons in a clandestine fashion in the King’s Bench Prison.” This he freely admitted, arguing that many masons were in prison there and that it was right and proper to hold Lodge meetings there. He justified this action because, at the time, he was Worshipful Master of Royal Military Lodge 371 which, like many military lodges at the time, had a travelling warrant. The Lodge is still going strong by the way in Canterbury although its number has changed.

Because regiments were likely to be posted to any parts of the far flung empire, and because they would often be away for 20 years or more, the Worshipful Master was entitled to take the warrant with him and open the lodge at the Regiment’s new location. However, Capt Smith was duly expelled from freemasonry for various offences. Curiously, the offences for which he was in prison in London were not the cause of his expulsion.

Here in South Africa, George Richards, the first District Grand Master of the Transvaal, received his patent on 1st January 1895 and was inaugurated on 30th April 1895. He was charged with High Treason along with 63 other members of the Reform Committee who were planning to overthrow the Government of President Kruger by means of the infamous Jameson Raid. With the help of Cecil Rhodes and Dr Leander Starr Jameson, a detachment of the British South Africa Police (BSAP) was waiting on the Bechuanaland Border for the signal to attack Johannesburg. Unfortunately there were delays, and it is said unkindly that some members of the Regiment were bored and started drinking. When the final order to attack came some of the Troopers were so drunk that they cut the fence wires instead of the

telegraph wires. In consequence, on 2nd January 1896 the Boers were waiting for Jameson and his Troopers at Doornkop near Krugersdorp. The raid was an ignominious failure.

Two other members of the Reform Committee were members of my mother lodge and our Worshipful Master's mother lodge – Gold Fields 2478. They were Solly Joel, one of the founders of JCI and an American, John Hays Hammond, who was a distinguished deep level mining engineer from California. He had acquired his skills during the Californian gold rush and was working for Cecil Rhodes' company Consolidated Gold Fields at a salary of £75 000 a year.

Hammond, Solly Joel, George Richards, the District Grand Master of the Transvaal, and 61 other members of the Jameson Raid Committee were arrested at the Rand Club on the evening of 9th January 1896. Dinner at the Club that evening must have been rather spoiled when President Kruger's Chief of Police arrived with a warrant of arrest. The Chief of Police was a man called Charles Pietersen who was also a member Gold Fields Lodge. One conspirator was not at Rand Club but conscientiously presented himself at Pretoria Gaol the following Sunday. However the tronkbewaarder would not let him in as it was against his religious principles to work on a Sunday. He was told to come back the next day, which he did, and he was then let into the tronk.

Now, how does a Mason arrest his District Grand Master on a charge of High Treason? It's not in the ritual. Nor, in spite of what the new Master is told at his Installation, is the answer in the Book of Constitutions. The anonymous author of the famous words: "... for you will find that there is scarcely a case of difficulty can occur in Lodge in which that book will not set you right..." had clearly not encountered this problem before. Except perhaps for the American Civil War, Pietersen's situation was unprecedented. I'll come back to Pietersen in a moment as he later had his own personal problems.

It is not clear how the DGM reconciled his membership of the Reform Committee with the charge delivered to an entered apprentice at his initiation: "...to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties, by never proposing or at all countenancing any act that may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society; by paying

due obedience to the laws of any state which may for a time become your place of residence or afford you its protection..."

On 28th April 1896 Judge Gregorowski (himself a mason) sentenced the four main conspirators to death – Lionel Phillips, John Hays Hammond, Frank Rhodes and George Farrar. The other 60 received two years imprisonment, a fine of £2 000 each and banishment from the country for three years.

While he was in prison John Hays Hammond had a special visit from another American, Samuel Clemens who was better known, of course, as Mark Twain. Hammond said that he was surprised that the Authorities had let him in, to which Mark Twain replied that getting in to prison was easy; getting out was the problem, as Hammond was soon to discover. Mark Twain, by the way, was a member of Polar Star Lodge in St Louis, Missouri so no doubt he and Hays Hammond exchanged Masonic greetings.

(Digressing for a moment, are you aware of the origin of Mark Twain's pseudonym? It is said that the crew of the Mississippi paddle steamers would throw overboard a knotted rope to measure the depth of the water and avoid running aground. "Mark one, mark twain, mark three" they would cry as the heavy rope sank to the bottom of the river. Mark twain was the two fathom mark.) One fathom = six feet for those are you who are not matelots.

But to return to the four main conspirators, President Kruger later commuted the death sentences and substituted fines of £25 000 each. It is believed that Cecil Rhodes paid all the fines which amounted to more than £300 000. There were many who thought that Dr Jameson himself should have been hanged but President Kruger was too wily or 'slim' for that. He sent Jameson and his troopers to England for trial and to embarrass the Imperial Government. On 17th July 1896 Jameson was sentenced in England to 18 months imprisonment. John Hays Hammond later went on to become Vice President of the United States in 1910.

When the Second Anglo Boer War started in October 1899, Charles Pietersen left Johannesburg and joined the NMR, the Natal Mounted Rifles. He was promoted to Corporal at the battle of Talana, survived

the siege of Ladysmith and was commissioned in French's Scouts, a regiment I imagine like the Selous Scouts – the crème de la crème.

He had a good war as they say in the Army and his Queen's South Africa Medal had seven clasps. However, he later ran into financial trouble as I discovered a few years ago when I was researching a talk on the occasion of the 1000th meeting of Clifton Lodge No 2748, of which Pietersen was Charter Master.

But before we come to his financial problems it's worth reading a very moving address by Pietersen to the members of Clifton Lodge in April 1902 when the Boer War had ended and Lodge meetings resumed.

Here is what the minute book says: "The Worshipful Master, WBro C C Pietersen, assisted by the Wardens opened the Lodge in the first degree. The Master feelingly welcomed the members and said that during the period of recess the country had passed through the horrors of war. Many of the members had experienced the privations attendant on siege and battle, yet he was pleased to say that no member of the Lodge had fallen a victim, or had been incapacitated through wounds. The Lodge regalia had been found intact, excepting the Banner which had been mutilated. He trusted that the Lodge would never again be placed in recess for a similar reason, and that a feeling of gratitude to the GAOTU would be deeply implanted for favours vouchsafed."

Now many old Lodges have skeletons in cupboards. At the time of Gold Fields Centenary in 1993 I was researching and writing some mini biographies of the early members. Gold Fields' Secretary was a man called Robert Moss who was Company Secretary of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Sadly, he stole some money from the Lodge and was excluded. He was replaced as Lodge Secretary by....Charles Pietersen. Having researched his background, I felt as if I knew him well even though 100 years had elapsed.

So imagine my surprise when, in researching a talk for Clifton Lodge, I came across the summons for a meeting of Clifton in June 1909. "Item 3. To consider the advisability of excluding WBro Charles

Pietersen PM from Clifton Lodge (vide Rule 210 Book of Constitutions).” Rule 210 does not exist in that form now but it referred to misconduct.

Let me read from the minutes of the meeting. “The Wor Master then made a lengthy statement with regard to WBro Charles Christien Pietersen, Past Master of the Lodge, who was summoned to the Lodge to answer a charge of unmasonic conduct; after which the Secretary read the correspondence in which WBro C C Pietersen admitted his guilt but pleaded that a starving wife and family was the cause.

The WM, proposed a resolution that WBro Pietersen be excluded for unmasonic conduct in that, while Secretary of the Lodge, he misappropriated the sum of £37-16 - 0, funds of the Lodge. He proposed the resolution with the greatest sympathy for WBro Pietersen’s position, but justice demanded that punishment be meted out. The JW seconded with deep regret and the resolution was put to the meeting and carried unanimously.”

That explains something I came across in 1993 when rummaging through the records in the dungeons downstairs in Park Lane. Those of you who have been down there will know that the old Lodges kept letter books in which copies of handwritten correspondence were kept. Some of Pietersen’s personal correspondence was mixed up with the Lodge stuff, including a rude letter from a creditor pressing for payment. Pietersen had replied:

Sir, it is my invariable practice at the end of each month to put all my bills in a hat and draw out three for payment. If you persist with your impertinence your bill will not be put in the hat at all.

The creditor was an undertaker. Obviously Pietersen had suffered a family bereavement. The undertaker – in robust fashion, for remember that Johannesburg was a mining town (and isn’t it still?) - replied immediately:

Sir, if you want to help my business, just drop down dead, failing which **PAY UP!**

The Worshipful Master was, of course, quite right to insist upon the exclusion of Charles Pietersen who was also excluded from Gold Fields Lodge. In addition, he was forced to resign as District Grand Secretary. But before we become too judgmental let me remind you of one of the first degree lectures explaining the symbolism of the mosaic pavement. Here's an extract from the 5th section of the first degree lecture:

“As the steps of man are trod in the various and uncertain incidents of life, and his days are variegated and chequered by a strange contrariety of events, his passage through this existence, though sometimes attended by prosperous circumstances, is often beset by a multitude of evils; hence is our Lodge furnished with mosaic work, to point out the uncertainty of all things here on earth. Today we may travel in prosperity; tomorrow we may totter on the uneven paths of weakness, temptation and adversity...”

Adverting to the Jameson Raid, how do you define a traitor? Is he one who ends up on the losing side? During the American rebellion of 1776 to 1783 one prominent freemason changed sides. Benedict Arnold, a native of Connecticut, fought bravely on the side of the British and rose to the rank of Major-General. In 1780 he placed loyalty over treachery and tried to surrender West Point Academy to the Crown. He failed but he fought on against the rebels until 1781 when he left for London where he died in 1801. He had been a regular visitor to Solomon's Lodge No 1 at Poughkeepsie in New York State but on 16th May 1781 the members of Solomon's Lodge decided that the name of Benedict Arnold be obliterated from the minutes of the Lodge as a traitor. But in London a blue commemorative plaque on the wall of his old home in Gloucester Place records him, rightly, as a patriot.

And what about George Washington? Suppose the rebellion had failed and England had retained her American colonies. Would we then have seen the minute book of Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia, with the name of the rebel-in-chief George Washington struck out and labelled “**traitor?**” If you examine a \$1 American bank note you will see how much the United States admired Washington. The dollar bill is also full of Masonic symbols.

Let's now move on quickly to one or two more recent Masonic rogues or, more correctly, one or two masons who were rogues and whose names were published prominently in the newspapers. On 31st May 2002 George Twite, who was described as a leading Norfolk mason and Bank Manager and as the Worshipful Master of Ceres Lodge 2879 at Swaffham, was sentenced to six weeks in jail for stealing pension money from an 83 year old woman he had befriended. It seems inconceivable that he could have stooped so low.

In the same year, on 13th September, the Western Morning News splashed on its front page the news that Philip Jolyon Huxtable, a Barnstable solicitor, had been struck off by the Law Society for embezzling £2 000 000 of clients' money. In 2004 he was sent to prison. He had recently been appointed an Assistant Provincial Grand Master of Devon. A few years earlier, P L Cooke, the Treasurer of the Provincial Grand Charity of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire had stolen £48 000 of the Charity's money.

But one of the most spectacular crimes and consequent punishments occurred in 1775. It involved the Revd Dr William Dodd who was appointed Grand Chaplain within a month of his initiation in St Alban's Lodge No 29 in April 1775. Dodd was very much a society cleric who lived way beyond his means. He indulged in riotous living and tried, by way of bribery, to add the fashionable and rich church of St George's, Hanover Square, London to his multiple livings. In those days it was not uncommon for a Vicar to control a number of churches and receive numerous stipends. He would appoint a young curate, at minimal cost, to look after the churches. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to acquire St George's Hanover Square and for his pains he was struck off the list of royal chaplains. To contemporary satirists he was known as Dr Simony. Simony was the practice of selling ecclesiastical privileges and pardons. In a Masonic context it would be the outrageous equivalent of a District or Provincial Grand Master, selling District appointments to the highest bidder.

In 1776 Dodd, as Grand Chaplain, delivered an oration from the steps of the new Freemasons' Hall, which was widely published. A year later another address by Dodd received even more publicity, which

was not surprising as it was delivered from the steps of the scaffold at Tyburn. In those days executions were public and Tyburn was at the foot of Edgware Road, very close to Marble Arch. His impassioned speech was on his own behalf because he was about to be hanged. He had forged a bond for £4 200 in the name of his patron, the Earl of Chesterfield. The forgery was discovered and he was tried and found guilty. In spite of numerous petitions for mercy, including one from Dr Samuel Johnson, he was hanged on 27th June 1777. At the time the then Bishop of Bristol, The Right Rev Thomas Newton, expressed surprise that Dodd had been executed for forgery. When asked why, the Bishop replied: "He has been hanged for the least of his crimes."

I'll close off this talk by looking at some big villains. The most recent is Kenneth Noye who was convicted of the murder of Stephen Cameron on the M25 and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2000. Noye was a career criminal who had previously been sentenced to fourteen years for handling gold bullion stolen in the Brinks-Mat robbery at London's Heathrow Airport. He was a member of Hammersmith Lodge No 2090 which he had joined in 1977 – the year in which he received a suspended sentence for handling stolen goods and unlawful possession of a shotgun. A nasty bit of work who, you will be happy to hear, is no longer a member of the Craft.

The final two characters were murderers who left freemasonry at the end of a rope. The first was Frederick Henry Seddon who was initiated in Stanley Lodge No 1325 in Liverpool and who was a joining member of Stephens Lodge No 3089 in London. He was convicted of the murder, by arsenic, of a rich old woman whom he had persuaded to change her will and leave everything to him. His next notable Masonic appearance was in 1912 before Bro Mr Justice Bucknill who was Provincial Grand Master for Surrey. However there was no partiality and Seddon was found guilty and sentenced to death. But before the judge put on the black cap Seddon protested his innocence and, giving the entered apprentice's sign, declared before the Great Architect of the Universe that he was innocent. It had no effect on the sentence but when the judge's clerk went to see the judge in his Chambers after the trial he found him, "... fully robed with his head in his hands, his eyes red from weeping..."

Then there was another solicitor, Bro Herbert Rouse Armstrong who was a member of Loyal Hay Lodge No 2382 at Hay on Wye where he joined Bro Cleese in practice. His Masonic career progressed and he became Master of his lodge. And then two things happened. First was the death of his wife in 1921. And second was his botched attempt to poison a fellow member of his lodge, a Bro Martin, who had joined a rival practice in the town. The body of Mrs Armstrong was then exhumed and she was found to have been poisoned with arsenic. Armstrong was charged with her murder and, given his local standing and his wide circle of Masonic friends and colleagues; it was believed locally that he would be acquitted. Not so. Forensic evidence was given by four brethren and others bore various witness. The trial was long. For many years it held the record as the longest murder trial in England and eventually Armstrong was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was denied the dishonour of being the first freemason to be hanged for murder but he was the first English solicitor so to suffer.

Thank you for listening. All I can do now is to urge all of us to live up to the moral code of Freemasonry. I hope you have enjoyed the talk but, if not, I have at least kept you out of mischief for the last 45 minutes or so!

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