

Masonry as Moral Education

W. Bro. Graham Fletcher

Freemasonry gives its members the opportunity to educate themselves with the assistance of those more skilled amongst our fraternity. It is certainly a pity that much of the spirit with which the Craft was founded appears to have 'faded' away, and that many of our Brethren seem neither interested by, or capable of, exploring the deeper meaning of the ritual. That we should make a serious effort to 'get back to basics' (or for 'radicals' - our roots) is an aim which touches upon wider problems in society in general.

Early Masonic meetings sometimes included lectures and demonstrations of scientific and artistic topics which enabled Brethren to gain insights into the hidden Mysteries of Nature and Science, and it is very likely that some members felt that the subjects discussed went a little 'over their heads'. The conditions of entry to the craft have never included any requirement relating to intellectual and academic ability, nor should they.

Whilst I personally feel that we should be doing more to promote the philosophical and metaphysical concepts which underlie Freemasonry, I would oppose any attempt to make the Craft into an elitist academic 'ivory tower'. I am not familiar with the way that the Royal Society operates as we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century, but I suspect that it too has altered. They certainly appear to be less exclusive, more 'populist' in trying to reach 'ordinary people.'

If any organisation is to be 'more extensively serviceable' to the broader society in which it operates, it cannot do so by becoming internally focused. It is often argued, with justification and empirical evidence, that Western Culture no longer values a 'Liberal Education', preferring the material benefits of training people to become efficient participants in the economy. 'Pure' intellectual enquiry - as opposed to applied research for industrial and other profitable purposes - has little popular support, hence we see the crisis which has now beset our Universities, in which no government can confidently expect public support for funding 'blue skies' research.

From the earliest days of 'education' in nursery and primary schools, our children are taught skills and techniques thought to be most useful to them in earning a 'living' on completing their 'education'. Culturally, children with intellectual ability and curiosity are discouraged, labelled 'geeks' and ill served by a system which is designed to ensure that almost all attain basic competences, rather than developing each individual to the fullest extent of their own capabilities.

Teachers no longer have the time, resources, nor - in many cases - the skill or motivation to help students prepare to study intellectually difficult subjects. University Physics departments have been eroded,

and at the same time a policy of attempting to award fifty percent (not five percent) of our children a degree at the end of their 'education' has led to accusations of 'dumbing down' and the 'devaluation' of qualifications. Sadly there has also been a tendency for those who do achieve exceptional ability in 'difficult' subjects to be unable to find employment in a field in which they can apply their knowledge and skills. We now have young Ph.D qualified physicists working as fast food burger flippers.

Our society has 'secularised' and despite the popularity of many 'fringe' belief systems, it is extremely unlikely that a philosopher such as Bertrand Russell, AJ Ayers or JP Sartre will gain the level of acclaim and respect they reached in the last century. Popular Celebrity in 2009 is hardly the type of 'distinctions among men.... as a reward of merit and ability' we find described as highly necessary in our ritual.

Masonic equality was not thought of as aiming towards some kind of 'lowest common denominator'. Unfortunately the tendency of modern liberal democracy is to make civilisation operate according to the preferences of the majority of people, rather than to trust that some type of elite, distinguished by merit and ability, will organise civilisation in the interests of 'what is good for the people'.

We do not live in a society driven by aspirations for excellence in moral philosophy in those elected to lead us. The great majority of people tend to desire as much material reward as they can get in return for as little effort as possible. This equation is not congruent with the way that the GAotU runs the Universe. To anyone who thinks deeply about the things we are encouraged by the ritual to consider, the assumptions of the great majority of people appear to be stupid. This is not the fault of the great majority. They are stupid because they have not had a liberal education, because governments have never thought that the ability of the populace to think deeply is anything near as important as their ability to earn money for the National economy.

Other, previous, civilisations have risen in the past, eventually declining and falling when all concern for the moral welfare of their citizens was supplanted by the provision of bread and circuses.

Are we decadent? There have been thinkers who would have speculated that it was so throughout the whole history of Freemasonry. It also seems that there is some revival of popular interest in the Moral judgement of our leaders, with the issues of banking bonuses and MP expenses at the fore (behind the winners of X-Factor and Strictly Come Dancing) in our media circus. Perhaps we shall soon have to struggle for bread.

If we are to change our membership, it should not be by chucking out those who do not learn from the Craft in favour of the scholars. Those of us who believe we understand should be helping our other Brethren to see these things for themselves, within the compass of their attainments.

Southchurch Masonic Study Circle



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You are cordially invited to our meeting at.
We look forward to seeing you and don't forget,

**The Saxon Hall, Aviation Way,
Southend on Sea, Essex, on Thursday
18th March 2010 at 8pm.**

guests are welcome.
Secretary: **Bro. Pierre Waddoups.**

AGENDA

- 1 **To welcome visitors and prospective new members.**
- 2 **To receive apologies for absence.**
- 3 **To read and if approved, confirm the Minutes of the previous Meeting .**
- 4 **Matters arising from the Minutes.**
- 5 **Objects of Masonic Interest.**
- 6 **Annual General Meeting.**
 - a) **Treasurer's Report.**
Membership figures.
Stisted Summer Fete.
 - b) **Talks' at the Steward's and Secretary's Lodge.**
 - c) **Election of Chairman.**
- 7 **Talk. By W.Bro Clifford Wyatt on the Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin)**
- 8 **Questions and Answers.**
- 9 **Any other Business.**
- 10 **To close the meeting**

From your Secretary

Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these all things are subject, but eternal Love. –Shelley.

Congratulations go to our Chairman, W/Bro. Mark Perkins, who has been admitted to that pantheon of Metropolitan Grand Officers, after being honoured with the rank of, Metropolitan Grand Inspector.

This has now created a vacancy, which the filling thereof, will be discussed at this Meeting, under Item 6. iii.

Suggestions for nominations will be gratefully received at the Meeting, so please don't post any names to me, thank you.

I have been busy on our behalf, by attempting to raise our profile with a series of initiatives, (please items below) which I hope, will increase our membership on the one hand and spread the benefits of membership on the other.

The Talk at this Meeting is, as you will have doubtless seen, will be given by W/Bro. Cliff Wyatt, who really doesn't need any introduction, but he will have one anyway!

Please give Cliff plenty of support for what will be, I am certain, a very informative Talk.

Guests are, as always, especially welcome.

RAISING OUR PROFILE

-or Stisted and beyond!-

I have made an application to have stall, for the want of a better word, at this year's Stisted Summer Fete.

It will; if I can get it, take the form of myself and at the moment Alec Hall, manning it, but please do your best to come along, to what is a great day-out anyway, to relieve us at say, one hourly interval. I shall have flyers stating the purpose of the Study Circle, past Summons' and membership forms. Also, I thought, the sale of books and paper ephemera, the proceeds towards Charity and maybe our Circle funds, may be a good idea.

Any suggestions will be thankfully received and faithfully applied.

Provincial Library and Museum

.The Library and Museum came into being nearly four years ago and is continuing to expand.

It is a valuable resource, not just for Freemasons who wish to research the subject of Freemasonry per se, but also for members of the public who are curious about the Craft and such things as; if a relative of theirs was a Freemason and the name of the Lodge to which they may have belonged.

At the Stisted Summer Fete this year, it is my intention, subject to permission being granted of course, to have alongside the Study Circle stall, another stall dedicated to the Essex Provincial Library and Museum, with perhaps, a few of the less valuable items and images of the more valuable ones, on display.

Hopefully, this will raise the awareness of Masons and non-Masons, of this local facility.

PIERRE.

THE AUTHOR OF THE PAPER

.W/Bro. Clifford Wyatt, was Initiated in 1944, received Grand Rank in 1975 and Awarded the DSEM and PPSGW in 2009.

He was one of the Founders of the Study Circle, a Board Member at the Masonic Centre in Woodgrange Drive for 20 years.

Founder and First Secretary of the Southend Association of Secretaries for 16 years, Chairman of the Open Day Project and Secretary of the Old Southendian Lodge and Chapter for some 20 years.

Now at the age of 89, sitting back and enjoy listening to others...

**For your Diary in 2010.
May, 20th, Sept', 16th, Dec', 16th**