

## FREE MASONRY 6

### THE OLD LODGE AT YORK

According to Masonic tradition, generally admitted, a General Assembly of Operative Masons in England was held at York in 926, when King Athelstan granted the Masons a Charter.

Dr. Anderson, author of the first printed history of Free Masonry approved by a Grand Lodge, in 1722, and published in 1723, refers to "The old Lodge at York City."

Preston, a Masonic historian of the 18th century, said: "To be ranked as a descendent of the original York Masons was the glory and boast of the brethren in almost every country where Masonry has been regularly established, and from the prevalence and universality of the idea that, in the City of York, Masonry was first authorized by Charter, the Masons of England have received tribute from the first States of Europe. This Grand Lodge was held in the highest esteem and veneration, and every Mason in the Kingdom considered himself bound by the Charges which originally sprang from that body."

Here Preston calls the General Assembly of Masons in England, which did not always meet at York, a Grand Lodge. True it met there oftener than at any other place, and was governed by a Grand Master, but it was not a Grand Lodge, as we know Grand Lodges of today. It issued no Charters to form Lodges, for Masonic Lodges were spontaneous bodies of workmen who organized wherever they were working, and were not obligated to report to a Grand Lodge.

These General Assemblies bore little resemblance to a Constituent Grand Lodge. Hughan says: "The Grand Lodge of England, first of its kind, was inaugurated in 1717."

Several years after the Grand Lodge of England was organized the Masons at York set up a Grand Lodge for the north of England. If a Grand Lodge existed there before that, why organize another?

For a fact, all the Lodges in England did not report to the General Assemblies, nor did they all come under the jurisdiction of Grand Lodges after the latter were formed. The Lodge at Alnwick always remained an independent body.

The Grand Masters of General Assemblies were not always Free Masons; skilled architects were sometimes chosen to preside; sometimes the King or a Prelate. Masonry, previous to the 16th century, seems to have been a purely operative institution, though recognized and patronized by the Crown and the Church as a useful and loyal body of workmen.

That there was a Lodge at York is well known, but that it had any more authority among the corporations of builders than any other Lodge cannot be proven by any documentary history or process of reasoning.

We often hear Masons say, "Is your Lodge the York rite?" as though there was any difference between the ceremonies practiced at York and any other part of England before the organization of the Grand Lodge of England. Whatever the ceremony of initiation was at work, it was the same at London until the London Masons introduced what the others called innovations, to which they strenuously objected, but afterwards went further in introducing new features than did the Grand Lodge of England.

The Grand Lodge of England introduced or adopted the Fellow Craft and Master Masons Degrees, but the Royal Arch and Templars Degrees were introduced at York, while the United Grand Lodge of England, in 1813, declared pure Craft Masonry to consist of three degrees - E.P., F.C., and M.M.

Craft Masonry is York Masonry as we universally accept the tradition that what we call Blue Masonry began at York in the 10th century and has developed into a universal fraternity known wherever established as York Masonry.

The original Charter of York was kept in the archives of the Old Lodge at York City and destroyed in the War of the Roses. Copies were made from memory and preserved in the British Museum along with many other old Masonic manuscripts.

By: Leonard Morris, P.G.M.; G.R.P.E.I.

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Submitted by D. Roy Murray

King Solomon Lodge, No. 58, GRS