



THE MASONIC CONCEPT OF LIBERTY Freemasonry and the Enlightenment

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The newly-made mason quickly assimilates the admonitions of the Craft. He has been instructed never to propose, or at all countenance, any act that may subvert the peace and good order of society, and to pay due obedience to the laws of the state. He is directed to abstain from discussing any political or religious topic in the lodge, and, by inference, at the meal or supper which follows the meeting.

If he eventually assumes the chair of K.S., he signifies his acceptance of the Ancient Charges and Regulations, the third of which enjoins him not to be concerned in plots or conspiracies against government, but patiently to submit to the decisions of the supreme legislature. He receives the approbation of his peers if he is a peaceable subject and law-abiding citizen.

In the course of his endeavours to make a daily advancement in masonic knowledge, our hypothetical mason finds that the Craft has ancient injunctions against political discussion and revolutionary action. The old 'Sinclair Charters' of Scotland explicitly acknowledge the patronage and protection of the crown, and in a manuscript from the mid-seventeenth century, it is demanded of masons:

'... that you bee true men to the Kinge without any treason or falsehood and that you shall noe no treason or falsehood but you shall amend it or else give notice thereof to the Kinge.' (*Buchanan Manuscript*).

The second Charge of the *Constitutions* of Anderson (1723) contains the affirmation that 'a mason is a peaceable subject to the Civil Powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the Nation.' The situation would seem to be quite unambiguous.

However, after further research, our good mason cannot help but remark a glaring contradiction in the history of Freemasonry. He discovers that the American revolutionary leaders of 1776, many of the draughters of their Constitution and Bill of Rights, and indeed the first presidents of the United States, were both Freemasons and rebels against their lawful sovereign and government. Even more alarmingly, many of the principal political actors of the French Revolution, particularly during its first phase, were prominent French Freemasons, mobilised under the originally masonic slogan of 'liberty,

equality, fraternity’.

Advancing in time from 1789, he finds that the great revolutions of the following century are led by Freemasons: Simon Bolivar, José de San Martín and Bernardo O’Higgins in South America; Vicente Guerrero, and later Benito Juárez, in Mexico; José Martí in Cuba, José Rizal in the Philippines, and Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy. Most notably, the Texans who rebelled against the government of Mexico, and fought a successful war of secession, were predominantly masons, and indeed, all the presidents and vice-presidents of the Republic of Texas were masons too! What is he to make of all this?

The great paradox of Freemasonry is that its history is inextricably interwoven with the history of 18th and 19th century revolutions, at the same time as its writings firmly reject political disobedience and condemn subversion and revolt against the government of any land. I intend to unravel this paradox by two approaches; one philosophical, the other historical. For the former, I have adopted the thesis advanced by Giuliano di Bernardo, professor of philosophy, and for the latter, I refer particularly to a volume by Margaret Jacob, professor of history (but not, obviously, a mason). The two approaches, as we shall see, are not only compatible but complementary.

It is often stated that the original *Constitutions* of the Order were formulated within a particular historical context in England, characterised by dissidence between the royal house of Hanover on the one hand and the supporters of James Francis Edward Stuart, or James III for the Jacobites, on the other. With supporters of both factions in the English lodges, attempts were made to avoid conflict by protecting both. The situation was actually more complex than that, as we shall see, but this image makes a good starting point. Not wishing to inflame political differences between the brethren, it is claimed that Anderson wisely excluded the topic from polite lodge discourse, and emphasised the loyalty and peaceable nature of Freemasonry’s members.

Curiously, however, the *Constitutions* of 1723 specifically forbade the expulsion of a brother for such political crimes as fomenting revolution, although they insisted that ‘the loyal Brotherhood must and ought to disown his rebellion.’ The key to understanding the equivocal attitude towards dissent is the concept of liberty, and the philosophical context within which the brethren of the time understood this term.

The 18th century lodge records speak much of the ‘liberty’ of the brothers, or lay emphasis on the older term, ‘fraternity’, or, in seeking to describe the relationship between all brothers, speak of ‘equality’. What, precisely, did the Freemasons of the time mean by these words? ‘Liberty’ was clearly conceived of as something different from the custom of the guild to confer on its members the ‘freedom and privileges’ of practicing their craft. Mackey’s masonic encyclopædia of the early 20th century notes:

‘The word *freedom* is not here to be taken in its modern sense of *liberty*, but rather in its primitive Anglo-Saxon meaning of *frankness, generosity, a generous willingness to work or perform one’s duty.*’

In fact, to the masons of 18th century Britain, the word ‘liberty’ was understood not in this primitive sense, but precisely in the interpretation given it by the philosopher John Locke in his *Two Treatises of Government* of 1690.

Locke has been claimed as a Freemason on the basis of a letter of his dated 1696. This is now considered weak evidence, but the important point is that all pious masons of the time firmly believed Locke had been initiated into the Order. He had indeed been made a Fellow of the Royal Society, a hotbed of Freemasonry, in 1668, and his particular friends there were Robert Boyle, a known Freemason, and Isaac Newton, a member of a quasi-masonic society. Freemasonry in the 18th century has sometimes been described as Rousseauian, but first and foremost, it could also be, and was, right into the late 1760s Lockean, as well as essentially republican.

The *Two Treatises of Government* was the fruit of years of reflection upon the true principles in politics, a reflection resting on Locke’s own observations. Government, Locke held, is a trust; its

purpose is the security of the citizen's person and property; and the subject has the right to withdraw his confidence in the ruler when the latter fails in his task. Government and political power are necessary, but so is the liberty of the citizen; and in a democratic, constitutional monarchy, a type of government is possible in which the people are still free.

Locke wrote that we cannot be obliged to a government to which we have not given some sign of consent (Book II, §.119), and that 'the end of Law is to preserve and enlarge freedom' (II, 57). Governments are dissolved when the 'Legislative, or the Prince, either of them act contrary to their trust' (II, 221), and 'Power reverts to the people', who may then establish a new legislative and executive (II, 222). It is the people who decide when a breach of trust has occurred, for only the man who deposes power can tell when it is abused (II, 240). In the case of dispute 'the final appeal is to God', by which Locke specifically meant revolution.

Liberty is the antithesis of tyranny, for 'As Usurpation is the exercise of Power, which another hath a Right to; so Tyranny is the exercise of Power beyond Right, which no Body can have a Right to. And this is making use of the Power any one has in his hands; not for the good of those, who are under it, but for his own private separate Advantage.' (II, 199). 'When any one, or more, shall take upon them to make Laws, whom the People have not appointed so to do, they make Laws without Authority, which the people are not therefore bound to obey; . . .' (II, 212).

'The end of Government is the good of Mankind, and which is best for Mankind, that the People should be always expos'd to the boundless will of Tyranny, or that the Rulers should be sometimes liable to be oppos'd, when they grow exorbitant in the use of their Power, and imploy it for the destruction, and not the preservation of the Properties of their People?' (II, 229). In such a situation, revolution is justified, for 'When a King has Dethron'd himself, and put himself in a state of War with his People, what shall hinder them from prosecuting him who is no King, as they would any other Man, who has put himself into a state of War with them; . . .' (II, 239).

Giuliano di Bernardo shapes his argument on liberty around the ideas of Locke and the 19th century utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill, reasoning that if unconditional validity of the masonic proscriptions of rebellion were admitted, then masons would be obliged to respect *any* civil state power, whether democratic or tyrannical:

'But then, how can faithfulness or indifference be reconciled with masonic philosophical anthropology which postulates freedom itself among the fundamental elements constituting a mason? Freedom and tyranny are not compatible with each other, indeed they are openly contradictory. Therefore, Freemasonry cannot be indifferent to tyranny.' (p. 141).

Di Bernardo's interpretation is that 'A mason is a peaceable subject to those Civil Powers that guarantee the expression of fundamental freedom.' For:

'If this were not true, then it would not be possible to understand why, for example, American masons (Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and others), after having accepted the Constitutions of Anderson . . . , conspired and declared war against the Motherland. Furthermore, it would still not be clear why masons from all over the world, in different times, have fought against all forms of tyranny, And finally, it would be difficult to understand the thoughts and actions of those masons who dedicated their own lives to affirming the principles that made it possible to pass from a medieval and authoritarian type of society to a society founded on the rights of man and nations.' (p.141f).

Liberty, then, is trumps in masonic debate on the rights and duties of Freemasons. We now begin to understand why prominent members of the Craft were central to the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. The question remains, however, why the English (and, indeed, Scottish) masons of the 18th century took such pains to emphasise obedience to the powers that be and respect for the law in their *Constitutions* and other writings. To answer this question, and complete our resolution of the great paradox of Freemasonry, we must now turn our attention from philosophy to history.

Speculative masonry has existed in England from at least 1646, when Elias Ashmole was made a mason in a lodge at Warrington. At first non-operative members constituted a small minority, but late 17th and early 18th century lodge records reveal a rapid conversion of the guilds of operative workmen to private societies of 'free and accepted' gentleman masons. Simultaneously, there was a

consolidation of the power of parliament to govern the nation, the Whigs rose to ascendancy as keepers of the revolutionary heritage of 1688-89, and the economic power of the craft guilds declined. 'Speculative' masonry may have developed from the influence of William Schaw in Scotland and later spread to England, but the essence of Enlightenment Freemasonry is characteristically English, and what was re-exported to Scotland in the early 18th century was something new. The emphasis on constitutions, laws and governance originated in London.

Some researchers claim that Freemasonry remained 'prudently silent' during the Protectorate, and it is only after the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 that it emerged into general consciousness. By 1717 it was sufficiently established, and the lodges numerous enough, for four London lodges to take it upon themselves to constitute a 'Grand Lodge'. By the 1720s Fellows of the Royal Society were prominent in the London lodges, and by 1725 there were 64 lodges on the roll of Grand Lodge.

The craft guild had gradually evolved into 'a society' which retained something of the old while incorporating the interests and values of the higher classes who had now been recruited and who would rapidly come to dominate. Bernard Jones notes that the Old Ms. Charges had long lost most of their usefulness, but they contained some material which it was desirable to save and preserve in rather different form. The old religious language disappears, and the guild, complete with its myths and rituals, has been embraced only to be transformed into something new.

Freemasonry quickly spread in Scotland and Ireland, and to America and Europe; first to France and the Netherlands, later to the German states and other countries. This much is familiar: I now intend to take a closer look at masonic thought and practice as it concerned politics and society, and its relation to that historical phenomenon we now refer to as the Enlightenment.

At the time of the formation of the first Grand Lodge, the British situation was unique. As a result of their revolutions of 1640 and 1688, they had secured constitutional and parliamentary government. However, Freemasonry neither caused nor participated in these revolutions. To ensure respectability, English Freemasons remained silent on any part their members may have played, and Continental masons carefully reconstructed the mythic history of origins from Hiram and King Solomon's Temple, through the Crusades and Knights-Templar, up to 17th century England.

The exiled Catholic Jacobite Chevalier Ramsay's story of Masonry coming to France via the mediæval kings of Scotland was popular, as it bypassed the English revolutions altogether. British Freemasons themselves carefully avoided all mention of association with these upheavals. The specifically British origins of Freemasonry already rendered it suspect in most Continental countries where parliaments, revolutions, bills of rights, and acts of tolerance were seen as inherently subversive.

From early in its history Freemasonry was accused of possessing democratic and republican intentions, if not communistic ones, first by the Catholic Church, later by opponents of the French Revolution. Clerical critics were quick to identify TGAOTU with the god of the deists. In 1738 the Papacy condemned Freemasonry, its prime offence being that it '... imitates an aspect of the government of Republics. Its leaders are chosen, or dismissed, at its will.' This was regarded as scandalous. The myth that Cromwell had been the founder of Freemasonry was widespread in France. However, it contains a simple truth: this private society was a British, not a Continental invention.

The British lodges were a startling innovation inasmuch as their members met through 'sociability' as *individuals* in the lodges, rather than within the confines of the family, church, confraternity, or other traditional bodies that primarily reflected their position in society at large. There is an important reason that this form of socialising arose first in Britain. Its crafts and guilds had been weakened earlier than was the case on the Continent, and the market economy was further advanced. Even the Scottish merchant guilds had been denied their monopoly privileges by the Scottish parliament as early as 1672. By the 1720s British society permitted more open and relaxed social interactions (although not necessarily marriage) between lords, gentry, and commoners. In his writings, a young French visitor to London in the 1720s, Voltaire, made that familiarity famous. With it came a degree of religious

toleration unknown except in the Dutch Republic.

Who were these masons, and what did their 'sociability' consist of? Surviving records show they were literate, of moderate to advanced education, and sufficiently affluent to be able to afford the substantial fees: in other words, they were probably congruent with the 20 per cent of British male citizens who were enfranchised. Their socialising frequently included eating and drinking to excess, although their lectures and writings self-righteously censured such sybaritic behaviour. They talked, debated and discussed, and we have sufficient knowledge of the nature of their discussions to reconstruct their world view, politics and significance for a changing society.

However, these Freemasons did more than simply convene and converse. In their private sociability, they established a form of self-government, complete with constitutions and laws, elections and representatives. They bestowed sovereignty on this government and gave it their allegiance, yet it could in turn be altered or removed by the consent of a majority of brothers. The lodges became microscopic civil polities, new public spaces, in effect schools for constitutional government.

The virtues sought by the lodges were presumed to be applicable to governance, social order and harmony, and the public sphere.^[1] Their significance was their ability to teach men distinguished by their assumed merit how to integrate enlightened values with the habits of governance. The lodges endeavoured to civilise, to teach manners and decorum, to augment civil society. They taught men to speak in public, to keep records, to pay 'taxes', to be tolerant, to debate freely, to vote, to moderate their feasting, and to give lifelong devotion to the other members of their Order. Thus they became *citizens*, in the modern sense of the word, rather than mere 'subjects'.

The gist of masonic rhetoric was invariably civic. The miniature polities created were intended not only to possess internal government, but also to be social and intellectual in character. They were never intended to be *political* in the partisan sense of the word. One might say the lodges were deeply concerned about the political without ever wishing to engage in day-to-day politics. Masonic records are clear on the lack of specific political involvement on the part of almost any European lodge. The official masonic *Constitutions* published in London in 1723 prohibited 'any quarrels about religion, or nations, or state policy . . . we . . . are resolved against all Politicks, as what never yet conduc'd to the Welfare of the Lodge.' But to understand this position, we need to know what London Freemasons meant by *politics*.

'Politics' in 1720s Britain meant something rather different from the rest of Europe. When discussing 'politics' the masonic *Constitutions* meant *party* politics, the conflict of organised groups precipitated by the evolution of a new political nation as the result of the Revolution Settlement of 1688-89. 'Politics' was the competition for power between Whig and Tory, Jacobite and Hanoverian, in a constitutionally protected parliament.

However, to avoid politics did not mean to deny the civic. As the *Constitutions* proclaimed, Freemasonry was practised 'when the civil powers, abhorring tyranny and slavery, gave due scope to the bright and free genius of their happy subjects . . .'. The enjoyment of social harmony by the lodge members relied upon peace and freedom as guaranteed by the civil authorities. Each lodge was intended as a microcosm of the ideal civil society.

English Freemasonry possessed distinctive civil and political characteristics shaped by a social context derived from the English Revolution. As Margaret Jacob notes:

'With markedly political language the *Constitutions* praised the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus, using a contemporary parlance that signalled identification with the Hanoverian and Whig regime, which had ascended to political dominance in 1714. Predictably the earliest British leadership of the Grand Lodge founded in 1717 tended to be 'court'-variety Whigs, that is, supporters of strong ministerial government and by their own definition the heirs of the Revolution of 1688-89.' (p. 46).

The goal of government by consent within the context of subordination to 'legitimate' authority was vigorously pursued by the Grand Lodge of London and was demanded of all lodges affiliated with it. Thus, the lodges were political societies, not in a party or faction sense of the term but in a larger connotation. The form of the lodge became one of the many channels that transmitted a new civic

and political culture, based upon constitutionalism, which opposed traditional privileges and established hierarchical authority.

This new culture, with Freemasonry as its vanguard, is known today as the Enlightenment, a key passage in European development. It began in England, but is strongly identified with France, where events took a more dramatic turn. It argued that people's habits of thinking were based on irrationality, polluted by religious dogma, and over-conformed to historical precedent and irrelevant tradition. The way to escape was to seek true knowledge in every sphere of life, to study the liberal arts and sciences, to establish the truth and build upon it. Its premises were liberal, pro-science, anti-superstition, and that the state was the proper vehicle for the improvement of the human condition.

The essence of Enlightenment philosophy was reason. Logic had been borrowed from the Greeks as early as the time of Thomas Aquinas, but Descartes and other 17th century philosophers had applied *reason* to the traditional questions, judging it to be a powerful avenue to truth. They understood that logic alone could be used to defend all manner of absurd notions, and insisted on combining it with this new principle, which embodied common sense, observation, and their own unacknowledged prejudices in favour of scepticism and freedom.

The rising merchant class was the driving force of the Enlightenment. They firmly believed that their new-found wealth was the result of their individual merit and hard work, unlike the inherited wealth of traditional aristocrats. But the chief obstacles to the reshaping of Europe by the merchant class were the same as those faced by the rationalist philosophers: absolutist kings and dogmatic churches. In the course of the struggle, individualism, freedom and change replaced community, authority, stability and tradition as core European values. Religion survived, but was weakened and often transformed almost beyond recognition; monarchy was to dwindle over the course of the next century to a pale shadow of its former self.

In England, while political liberty and freedom of speech were limited before the Glorious Revolution, the so-called 'coffee-houses', which had arisen in the period 1670-85, established a venue where the rising middle classes could meet and engage in discussion. Jürgen Habermas, the prominent German philosopher, has argued that this 'public sphere' appeared first in England in the 1690s, in the aftermath of the English Revolution, and he sees Freemasonry as anticipating the European-wide adoption of this sphere as an alternative to absolutism. Here he locates the earliest moments in the formation of modern civil society. The lodge, the philosophical society, the scientific academy became the underpinning, as philosophers like Habermas and some historians have long believed, for the republican and democratic forms of government that evolved slowly and fitfully in Western Europe from the late 18th century on.

However, it was not long before division came to English Freemasonry, in the form of a schism between the Grand Lodge and a breakaway group of lodges who called themselves 'the Antients', dubbing Grand Lodge 'the Moderns'. Between 1739 and 1751 the secessionists formed a rival grand lodge, and the two were not reconciled until 1813. Bernard Jones attributes this to the apathy and neglect of the Premier Grand Lodge and its apparent inability to rule the Craft on the one hand, and differences in ritual and ceremonial practice on the other. A certain Irish element no doubt played a part in the split as well.

These points are well-known, but Margaret Jacob uncovers a political and social division behind the schism, which is somewhat more interesting and persuasive. Although the masons spoke of all brothers as 'equal', this did not obviate the role the lodges played as places that replicated social hierarchy and order, based not on birth *per se* but on an ideology of merit. The lodges mirrored the old order just as they were creating a form of civil society that would ultimately replace it.

In spite of their rhetoric of equality, the early lodges were elitist, drawing most of their members from the literate and modestly to greatly affluent classes. The leadership was overwhelmingly Whig, and powerful and influential Whigs at that. Originally, the Whigs had been the revolutionary force behind

the drive for constitutionalism and liberty: now they had become part of the Establishment, and sought to discourage further revolutionary fervour by emphasising peaceability and law-abiding behaviour. This, more than Jacobite and Hanoverian sensitivities, is the source of the masonic prohibitions on subversion, and even the discussion of politics in lodge. Jacob remarks:

‘The Freemason coveted affluence; he wanted prosperity, but without decadence. His is the conscience of those Whig gentlemen who wanted to live like the court and reap its benefits, while managing somehow to avoid the inevitable slide into licentiousness and corruption. So the masonic publicists emphasise the ritualistic and fraternal aspects of food, drink, and song, seeking to make them into symbolic expressions of masonic unity, harmony and moderation.’ (p. 67).

She distinguishes between the ‘court’ behaviour of the Grand Lodge group, and the ‘country’ opposition that gave rise to the Antients, which she characterises as a ‘revolt of lesser men against their betters.’ The lionising of tradesmen and shopkeepers in the writings of the Antients is a constant theme; they oppose the deism of the Moderns; they see themselves as ‘reformist’. To add an air of respectability to their ceremonial innovations, they describe these as ‘Scottish’. On the other hand, in the 1760s the Moderns were preoccupied with emphasising law and order against Wilkesite radicalism,^[ii] and de-emphasising their own revolutionary heritage.

Let us now consider the spread of Freemasonry. In the 1730s Masonry became established on the Continent, especially in France and Holland. These lodges also enshrined British cultural values entwined with the potentially subversive issues of religious toleration, relaxed fraternising among men of mixed, and widely disparate, social backgrounds, an ideology of work and merit, and, not least, government by constitutions and elections. These values were the prized ideals of the Enlightenment, the international cultural movement that laid claim to the secular and the modern.

As these Continental lodges were replicas of British lodges, they conveyed forms of governance and social behaviour generated within the unique political culture of that island. Although men had voted at meetings for centuries on both sides of the Channel, it was only in Britain that they did so within a constitutional framework and at a national legislative assembly where voting was by individual and not by estate or locality.

This distinctive form of political culture nurtured a new form of civil society. Individuals with voting rights, at that time a distinct minority in Britain, identified with political parties and issues on both a local and national level. These men read and debated, formed reading societies, clubs, and lodges, where they tested their abilities as orators and commentators, or as students of philosophy and literature. In the lodges men also became legislators and constitution makers.

England’s revolutionary period lay behind it, so it was able to proceed relatively smoothly and gradually down the road to what we know as modern democracy; but English liberty was dynamite when transported to France, where resistance by church and rulers was intransigent. The result was, ironically, that while Britain remained saturated with class privilege and relatively pious, France was to become after its own revolution the most egalitarian and anticlerical state in Europe – at least in its ideals. The power of religion and the aristocracy diminished gradually in England; in France they were violently uprooted.^[iii]

In summary, we can say that Freemasonry was one of the channels, perhaps the main channel, by which the values of the Enlightenment were transmitted from Britain to America, France, the Netherlands and, eventually, to all civilised countries. The essentials of the message were liberty, tolerance and sociability, and indeed as Immanuel Kant, the late-Enlightenment philosopher maintained, the idea that through reason, all men could find a way of life that is satisfying and fulfilling. What can we finally say to our hypothetical puzzled mason on the great paradox of Freemasonry? Firstly, we can with tolerable safety endorse the premise of Giuliano di Bernardo that ‘A mason is a peaceable subject *to those Civil Powers that guarantee the expression of fundamental freedom.*’ Without liberty, Freemasonry cannot exist.

Secondly, we can show from history that Freemasonry was inevitably the bearer of revolutionary Enlightenment ideas where liberty did not exist. We know with reasonable certainty that the French

lodges did not practice politics, yet their philosophy could not but cause many of their members to be active participants in the politics of revolutionary liberation movements. Freemasonry may have been officially neutral, but its members were not. And finally, we can remark that we are all, indirectly, the beneficiaries of Freemasonry and the Enlightenment: we now regard their general political values as so normal that we tend to take them for granted. Secularism, constitutionalism and parliamentarism are their heritage, obviating the need for revolutionary action to achieve liberty. That, perhaps, is the most important conclusion that can be drawn from this brief study.

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NOTES

[i] **Public Sphere.** Term coined by Jürgen Habermas (1989) to refer to the emerging independent society in 18th century Britain and the growth of a new 'public sphere... which mediates between society and state, in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion.' The idea of modern representative democracy as first conceived by Enlightenment philosophers included recognition of a living web of citizen-to-citizen communication known as 'civil society' or the 'public sphere'. The bourgeois public sphere was an area where people, 'disregarding status altogether', could gather to conduct open debate, speak freely, have increased access to information, and be independent from economic and state control. These factors were necessary for creating a genuine democracy where everyone could participate in creating a society which was open and accessible to all. Habermas's work relies on a description of an historical moment during the 18th century when British coffee-houses, French salons and German cafés became the centre of debate, and extends this to an ideal of participation in the public sphere today. He develops the normative notion of the public sphere as part of social life where citizens can exchange views on matters of importance to the public good, so that public opinion can be formed. The public sphere comes into being whenever people gather to discuss issues of political concern.

[ii] **John Wilkes** (1725-1797), Freemason, radical politician. Elected MP for Aylesbury 1725, founded *The North Briton* 1762, a newspaper that attacked George III and his appointed prime minister. The king tried to prosecute Wilkes for seditious libel, but the Lord Chief Justice ruled that, as an MP, Wilkes was protected by privilege. Parliament then waived that privilege, but before Wilkes could be seized he fled to France. He returned to England in 1768 and was arrested. A huge crowd surrounded the prison, demanding his release. Troops opened fire, killing 7 people ('The Massacre of St. George's Fields'). Wilkes was fined, expelled from the House of Commons and imprisoned. On his release he was thrice re-elected for Middlesex, but Parliament overturned the results each time. He then campaigned for freedom of the press, and began publishing parliamentary debates. The government ordered the arrest of his printers, but a great crowd surrounded the House of Commons, and the government backed down. In 1774 Wilkes was elected Lord Mayor of London, and also MP for Middlesex. He campaigned for religious toleration and the reform of parliament. He supported the American Revolution, was a passionate opponent of the harsh criminal code, and promoter of the radical cause. The conservative trend in English Freemasonry was fostered by concern over Wilkes, and later further strengthened by the excesses of the French Revolution.

[iii] **French Revolution.** Space limitations have prevented me from expanding on the relations between Freemasonry and the French Revolution. The reader is referred to United Masters' *Transactions* Vol. 31 No. 7, Oct. 1996, where a paper by Bro. Hans Kracke entitled 'Freemasonry and the French Revolution' gives a general historical overview of this relationship.



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