

CONFESSIONS OF A COWAN: A NON-MASON AND EARLY MASONIC HISTORY

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BERNARD JONES, writing in the 1950s, argued that the term Cowan should be used as a word 'for one who is not a mason'. But he was aware that masons often 'sadly libelled' the unfortunate Cowan, the term being regarded as one 'of opprobrium or reproach'.¹ I don't know whether usage of the word has changed in response to Jones's dictum, but it seems to me that the ambiguities of the word make it appropriate in my case. I regard myself as a Cowan in Jones's sense; I'm simply a person who is not a mason. But I think some masons regard me with something of the suspicion traditionally associated with the word: as an uninitiated person who is seeking to gain knowledge of esoteric masonic matters to which he is not entitled – an eavesdropper. And in its original Scottish usage Cowan meant a dry-stone dyker a man who worked in the material of masons – stone – but without the knowledge of how to bind stones together properly with mortar. For those who do not accept many of my conclusions about early masonic history, perhaps I am that sort of Cowan. A user of genuine masonic materials, the sources for masonic history, who fails to order and interpret them plausibly, to bind them together with the mortar of the true mason to produce a structure which will endure.

Anyway, I'm an unashamed Cowan, arrogant enough to believe that the very fact that I'm not a Freemason can sometimes have advantages when working on masonic history. I hope no one takes that as insulting. I've a great admiration for the work of many masonic historians who are Freemasons. Without their work, and not least the work of members of this lodge, I could not possibly have carried out my own research and produced my books.² But being an outsider has occasional advantages in allowing one to see evidence with a fresh eye, to perceive novel perspectives.

The main thrust of my work has been to emphasise the importance of the Scottish contribution to Freemasonry, and indeed to argue that the great majority of the central elements of early Freemasonry derive from Scotland. Reactions from within the craft have been mixed, but there tends to be a division along national lines. Scottish masons have usually been pretty happy with my work – not surprisingly, you will cynically remark. Equally unsurprising is that English masons tend to be less happy, and to have serious reservations. After all, I am suggesting that Freemasonry is far less an English creation than previous orthodoxy argued. Those Continental masons that I've had contact with have generally been pretty positive in comment on my work: but even here I fear there may be national bias in their responses – a readiness to welcome an interpretation that puts the English in their place!

Perhaps, then, this is the first point I should deal with. Does my 'Scottish' interpretation of the origins of Freemasonry derive simply from the fact that I am a Scot, and a historian of Scotland? It is certainly a beguilingly simple way of diminishing my credibility. And obviously for me simply to deny it does not carry much weight. But I stumbled into masonic history by accident, with no preconceived agenda to produce arguments to the greater glory of Scottish Freemasonry.

In the 1960s I was working as a research student on the Scottish Revolution of the 1640s, a period of massive upheavals and civil wars.³ In the course of this work I came across a stray reference to two Scottish generals being initiated as freemasons in the early 1640s. I was astonished, as I had always accepted the general assumption that Freemasonry emerged in England, and in the early eighteenth century. No history of Scotland, or of seventeenth-century Scotland, even mentioned the existence of Freemasonry. What did

it mean to be a freemason in the 1640s? Why did the Edinburgh Lodge single out two rebel generals for initiation? I was intrigued but was unable to investigate the matter any further as I had to get back to the mainstream of my work. But the question lingered in the back of my mind: how was it possible that there were freemasons in seventeenth-century Scotland, and what were they?

Only in the 1980s did I decide to investigate further, thinking there might be material for a short article to point out to mainstream historians the existence of freemasons in the seventeenth century. How wrong I was. As I got deeper into my research I found an astounding wealth of source material, all completely unknown to general historians. And it was not only a wealth of manuscript sources, but also a remarkable amount of published work which emerged. However, there were two problems for me. The first was that so much nonsense and absurdity had been published on masonic history and it was hard to separate this from the reliable, the respectable, in some cases the excellent. The second difficulty was that though much had been published, little of it had penetrated to university and public libraries. Freemasons had, and perhaps to some extent still do have, a tendency to 'publish' works, but then only advertise them, publicise them, in masonic circles. And even today there are cases in which second-hand bookshops have been asked to lay any books of Freemasonry on one side as some local freemason will buy them all rather than let them fall into the hands of outsiders!

If in some respects general historians are to be blamed for neglecting masonic history, in others it is attitudes within Freemasonry which are responsible, a feeling that study of masonic history is a matter which really is only the business of freemasons. The result can seem to outsiders the creation of a sort of masonic history ghetto. There is thriving life in the ghetto, but it is largely cut off from the wider world of historical research. You might say that that statement can immediately be shown to be false by the very fact of my presence here tonight. And I may say that not only was I immensely flattered to be invited to talk to you tonight, but I was greatly encouraged. I think it is a sign of health that you are prepared to listen to a Cowan even though you may not agree with what he says.

Back to the progress of my research on masonic history. I soon realised that the great partnership of D. Knoop and G.P. Jones, those giants of masonic history, represented a solid starting point, providing a context for my research, reference points to check with what I found in working on the sources.⁴ And Knoop and Jones were particularly stimulating because they sought to inject Freemasonry into mainstream history, in particular economic history. Finally, they made extensive use of Scottish seventeenth-century evidence, which was immensely helpful to me.

But soon I began to have doubts about the context in which they interpreted that Scottish evidence. They saw Freemasonry as essentially an English creation, and at first I accepted this, took it for granted: it was something everyone knew. Then I began to wonder why, if the movement began in England, the overwhelming majority of the evidence they used relating to the formation of Freemasonry in the seventeenth century came from Scotland. Scottish evidence was copious – far more copious indeed than Knoop and Jones knew. English evidence, by contrast, was almost non-existent – a few isolated references. The orthodox assumption was that for some reason early English masonic records had failed to survive, but luckily Scottish records did, and as they reflected practices imported from England they usefully filled a gap in surviving evidence for early English Freemasonry. Scottish evidence could therefore be interpreted in an English context. Why Scottish evidence might have survived while English had not was an embarrassing question, and I've never seen a credible attempt to answer it. My favourite explanation – though perhaps fortunately I've mislaid the name of its author – was that English lodges had existed so long that they had given up bothering to keep records. In Scotland on the other hand the lodges (recent imports from England, evidently) kept minutes because writing was something pretty new to the benighted Scots: they were fascinated by this new skill and tended to write down anything and everything! One gasps at the audacity, the illogicality, the ignorance of this desperate attempt to shore up a daft argument. Even Harry Carr, who stressed the importance of the Scottish records, implied that they were so prominent

not because vastly more was going on, in masonic activity, in Scotland than England, but because the Scots were obsessive keepers of records: 'Heaven bless the Scots! They took care of every scrap of paper, and if it were not for them we would have practically no history. Our earliest and finest materials are nearly all Scottish'.⁵ A related approach is to argue that the English lodges were intensely secretive compared to their Scots brethren, and did not keep records for this reason. But not only is there no evidence whatever that this was the case, there is no convincing evidence even of the existence of a network of lodges in England to practice such secrecy.

The question of why nearly all the seventeenth-century evidence of masonic activity is Scottish remains an embarrassment for some. One need look no further than to the exhibition here in Grand Lodge on the history of Freemasonry. What is there is excellent: attractive presentation, good clear explanations. But there is a huge hole in the middle of it. It starts with the activities and organisation of medieval stonemasons and then moves directly on to the early eighteenth century and the formation of Grand Lodge. What has happened to two hundred years of history? The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been edited out of existence. Rather present no evidence for the existence of Freemasonry in the seventeenth century than admit that much evidence exists but it is nearly all Scots!

Another way out of the Scottish embarrassment lies in the realm of definitions. If part of your definition of Freemasonry is that it is a movement that emerged in early eighteenth-century England, then with a vast sigh of relief the Scottish evidence can be declared irrelevant. Or it can be agreed that Scots masons were undoubtedly doing some interesting things, some of which were later also to be found in Freemasonry: but that nonetheless their practices do not amount to Freemasonry.

How do you define Freemasonry? What features need to be present before you can say 'this is Freemasonry'? This is much more difficult than it might at first seem. Take, as an analogy, attempting to define what are the essential, defining, features of a motor car. All the items on the list one produced might apply to the vast majority of cars, but then you realise that there are machines which we accept as cars which lack some of them. 'Steering wheel' might be an item on the list – but then you realise the few cars produced with steering columns are nonetheless cars. 'Gear box' might be another item – but then there are cars with gearing dependent on belt drives. It is a bit like that with Freemasonry. One can produce a long list of characteristics and features generally found in the movement, but then realise that what is nonetheless Freemasonry can exist – or could have existed – without some of them. My argument is that there are enough features of what one might call standard Freemasonry found for the first time in seventeenth-century Scotland for the institutions concerned to be organisations of freemasons. I fully accept that other central features are first found in eighteenth-century England, that in eighteenth-century England Freemasonry was added to, developed, and expanded into a movement which spread round the world and became a highly important cultural and social force. Nonetheless, the essentials were already present in the previous century in Scotland.

So, a list of Scottish masonic 'firsts':

- Earliest use of the word 'lodge' in its modern sense, and earliest evidence that such permanent institutions existed.
- Earliest official minute books and other records of such lodges.
- Earliest evidence of national organisation of such lodges.
- Earliest examples of 'non-operatives' (men who were not working stonemasons) being initiated into these lodges and sometimes forming a majority of members or even founding lodges.
- Earliest evidence connecting lodge Masonry with specific ethical ideas expounded through symbolism.
- Earliest references to the Mason Word.

Earliest masonic catechisms expounding the Mason Word and describing initiation ceremonies.

Earliest evidence of two degrees or grades.

Earliest use of the terms 'entered apprentice' and 'fellow craft' for these grades.

Earliest evidence (within the lodge of Edinburgh) of the emergence of a third degree.

Next, the English list of 'firsts':

Earliest copies of the 'Old Charges', the primary source of the medieval legacy which fed into Freemasonry.

Adoption of the term 'freemason' as standard for members of the movement.

Adoption of the term 'Accepted' for masons.

Earliest lodges composed entirely of 'non-operatives'.

Earliest Grand Lodge.

Production of the *Constitutions* of 1723.⁶

But the Old Charges were known to Scots masons by the mid seventeenth century. And in the eighteenth century the Scots lodges accepted many innovations being made in England – the terms 'freemason' and 'accepted', the founding of lodges with no links with working stonemasons, the creation of a Grand Lodge, the acceptance of the *Constitutions*.

It seems to me, nonetheless, that the Scots were already doing enough in the seventeenth century to be described as freemasons.

The listing of 'firsts' is a very, perhaps a shockingly, crude way of assessing the origins of Freemasonry, but it is an attempt to sum up in a few words the evidence which I believe supports my interpretations. Have I biased the lists in favour of my views? Obviously that is possible and it has indeed been suggested in a review of one of my books in this lodge's own journal: it is asserted that I tend to belittle the English evidence.⁷ My immediate response to that is, there is remarkably little of it to belittle! But obviously there is a danger that in arguing a case that one believes in, that one goes over the top.

Freemasonry, in my view, came into existence, in Scotland, around the year 1600, and once this has been realised a whole lot that is puzzling about Freemasonry becomes understandable. It has often seemed peculiar that this organisation, with its secrets, oaths, elaborate rituals, came into existence (as was assumed) in the eighteenth century. How did this fit in with the growing rationalism, with the age of Enlightenment? By contrast, such aspects of Freemasonry fit in beautifully with the turbulent intellectual world of the late Renaissance, with its obsessions with secret and ritual societies, with mysteries and hidden knowledge.

You are indeed in many respects heirs of the Enlightenment. But you are also heirs of the Renaissance. Less acceptable, perhaps, if you are heirs to the English masonic pioneers of the eighteenth century, then you are also heirs to the Scots masonic innovators of the seventeenth.

NOTES

¹ B.E. Jones, *Freemasons' Guide and Compendium* (revised edition, London, 1956), 425.

² *The Origins of Freemasonry, Scotland's Century, 1590–1710* (Cambridge, 1988); *The First Freemasons, Scotland's Early Lodges and their Members* (Aberdeen, 1988)

³ See my *The Scottish Revolution, 1637–1644. The Triumph of the Covenanters* (Newton Abbot, 1973) and *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 1644–1651* (London, 1977).

⁴ I am thinking in particular of *The Genesis of Freemasonry* (Manchester, 1947), the culmination of their massive contribution to masonic history.

⁵ H. Carr, *Harry Carr's World of Freemasonry* (London, 1983), 11.

⁶ These lists are adapted from my *Origins of Freemasonry*, 78.

⁷ *AQC*, 104 (1991), 237.

Brother Robert Gilbert, Master, in proposing a vote of thanks, said:

Ladies, gentlemen and brethren, we are all indebted to Professor Stevenson for his

brief, yet elegant and stimulating paper that can itself be added to his list of 'Scottish masonic "firsts"'. His presence here marks a radical departure from tradition for members of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, for this is both the first occasion on which a paper has been delivered to us by a non-mason, and the first on which non-masons have also been present to receive it. But as you will see, we do not exist as a research lodge merely to receive papers in polite silence; I shall explain to you how we conduct our affairs and you will understand why it is that we might also say, as Saul said of an earlier David, that the Lord has delivered him into our hands.

It is our practice for the Master of the lodge to propose a formal vote of thanks to the speaker and to make the first of a series of comments on the subject-matter of the paper. Next, the Senior Warden seconds the proposal and makes further comments of his own. Then the hounds are unleashed. All those among the audience who wish to make comments, whether or not they are members of the lodge, are invited to do so.

Our purpose in doing this, indeed the very *raison d'être* of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, is simply the furtherance of research into the origins and history of Freemasonry in its broadest sense. Our immediate aim is not necessarily either to praise or to bury the speaker. On the one hand we may draw out the conclusions that follow from the paper that has been delivered and amplify points that have been made; on the other we may argue against his theories, dispute the accuracy and validity of his statements and claims, and present our own contrary evidence and conclusions. And, being human, we take great delight in pointing out all the errors of fact that we can discover.

We are also none of us omniscient, and we are, of course, supplied with advance copies of the paper in order to produce long and detailed comments immediately after its delivery. In due time the papers we receive are printed in our annual *Transactions*, together with our deliberations upon them and the author's considered response. Let us then begin the process.

I know already which aspects of Professor Stevenson's theory of masonic origins will be commented upon by my colleagues, and as I have no wish to steal their thunder I shall not take up any specific points that he makes. Suffice it to say that I do not accept that Freemasonry, either Speculative or Operative, began in Scotland. Indeed, I do not accept that there is any direct link between Speculative Freemasonry and the Operative Craft. Such evidence as we have of the nature of 'Free and Accepted, or Speculative' Masonry before the Grand Lodge era seems to me to point to a very different origin.

We should, I believe, look rather in the direction of those men who, as a consequence of their absorption in what might loosely be termed esoteric philosophy, came to believe in the perfectibility of Man in society, and sought to promote political and religious tolerance in the decidedly intolerant climate of England during the Civil Wars, the Interregnum and the Restoration. The allegory of the building of King Solomon's Temple was ideal for their purpose, and the use of the terminology and tools of the builder's Craft provided at once a suitable and yet innocuous cloak for their activities. Variations of this general theory (which, I hasten to add, does not originate with me), setting out different paths by which such men may have progressed towards Freemasonry as practised and presented by Anderson and his contemporaries, have been suggested in a number of papers delivered to us in recent years. (*e.g.* Colin Dyer, 'Some Thoughts on the Origins of Speculative Masonry', *AQC* 95; A. C. F. Jackson, 'Rosicrucianism and its Effect on Craft Masonry', *AQC* 97; C. N. Batham, 'The Origin of Freemasonry (A New Theory)', *AQC* 106; and see also F. W. Seal-Coon, 'The Birth of Freemasonry (Another Theory)', *AQC* 92).

And there is a signal merit to this theory: its acceptance or rejection depends upon us being more adventurous and casting our nets rather more widely than we have done in the past in our search for primary source material. If we restrict our efforts to the analysis of the Old Charges and of the surviving records of institutions associated with the various building trades then we will never come to a full and final understanding of our origins. If we are to undertake such a wider search then we could do no better than to begin with a thorough examination of the published volumes of the Historical Manuscripts

Commission. This, I suspect, will lead us into uncharted and possibly perilous waters, but that may be a perfect stimulus to jaded theorists.

Which said, I do not wish in any way to belittle Professor Stevenson's achievements. Analysis of seventeenth century lodge records may not be sufficient but it is most certainly a necessary task. With his work on early Scottish Freemasonry Professor Stevenson has provided a much needed stimulus to prod us into examining our theories of origin with greater care. Some of us have undoubtedly been cheered by his work, and it is equally certain that others – and I suspect that we are in the majority – have been infuriated by it. But we are all of us much in his debt and I have great pleasure in proposing this vote of thanks.

Bro. Michel Brodsky, Senior Warden, in seconding the vote of thanks, said:

In his Prestonian Lecture for 1966 Bro. W. R. S. Bathurst wrote: 'A difficulty which besets all historians is that words in one age acquire meanings which they did not possess a generation or so before'. Prof. Lassalle an eminent French linguist writes in his PhD dissertation: 'The Cowan is an artisan who works a rudimentary and archaic form of masonry, he has no access to the "mason's word", he is on the same level as the "journeymen" about whom the Scottish masons are complaining at the very beginning of the XVIIIth century. This is a semantic evolution: because the "cowan" does not possess the "word" he may be tempted to obtain it by infiltration, listening at doors. It is the depreciatory meaning attached to this word until the end of the XXth century'.² Prof. Stevenson brilliantly demonstrates how correct was the late Provincial Grand Master for Gloucestershire. He gracefully and humbly presents himself as a 'cowan', though his high academic qualifications bear little similarity with the roughness of the labourer so named in Scotland as the extract of Prof. Lassalle shows.

May I present my own definition of organized, modern or speculative Freemasonry as it has existed since its appearance in London around 1720.

Freemasonry is a structured association of men, grouped in primary associations called lodges federated in a Grand Lodge from which they obtain their authority to meet. The lodges are self-governing bodies composed of men of diverse origin who are not bound together by trade or profession. The lodges have only the power to admit new members whose essential qualification is a belief in a Supreme Being. The degrees conferred by the lodges consist in the transmission of traditional secrets communicated according to specific fashion, whose absence invalidates the whole procedure.

Our speaker tonight has presented a paper which brilliantly demonstrates the lack and absence of any connection between my own definition of present day Freemasonry and his own views on the subject. The heart of the matter lies there, within Prof. Stevenson's list of his 'Firsts', where one recognizes elements which are in part to be found in modern Freemasonry, scattered among a large number of sources but never coherently associated together to show anything akin to the lodges which came into being after 1717.

One example: the '*Livre des Métiers*' the book of the crafts of Etienne Boileau mentions in 1268 '*Les Loges du Palais*', and the Cartularium of Notre Dame of Paris dated 2 February 1283 mentions 'Logia' occupied by 'operarii', while in England the word 'logia' is attested in January 1238 at the Vale Royal Abbey³. The word is very old and so not withstanding other meanings this association with building workers is ancient. Is it justified, then, to annex all its uses in this context with an ancestry of Freemasonry? For my part I believe that this game of analogy is very dangerous. Prof. Stevenson uses such analogies to express his apparently unlimited belief in this continuity of Freemasonry between the sixteenth century and the modern age.

I would like to draw his attention to one argument which demonstrates that the gap between the operative lodges and the speculative lodges was never bridged.

If one accepts that the Scottish operative lodges can be compared to the guilds or the livery societies elsewhere in Europe, then they had as their primary purpose the regulation

of the trade to the advantage of the 'masters' who were often also the most prominent citizens in the community. The lodges also existed as friendly and mutual aid societies whose members were exclusively stone-masons. The admission to the lodge was therefore regulated by the 'masters' or owners of the businesses who could and would limit the accession of their own 'apprentices' to the trade and reject the cowans. The distinction having an economic cause, and whatever the 'Mason Word' may have been, whether it was a pass-word or the bearer of magic or esoteric meaning, the lodges were part of the social structure of the local community. Alternatively the Scottish lodges of the 17th century did not have any economic role, their purpose being purely social: assisting their poor and distressed members.

In the first scenario one cannot understand, if the continuity theory is accepted, why the 'masters', who had for centuries regulated the admission of members for economic reasons and to protect their own share of the limited amount of work available, would suddenly yield their power to 'accepted' members to such an extent that the structure of the lodges was completely changed when the basic tie – a work contract between the proposer and the candidates – was abolished.

In the second one the lodges could open their doors to anyone who would contribute to the common welfare and, as happened in many of the oldest lodges, later adopt (during the middle of the 18th century) the ritual and masonic usage.

The early English lodges apparently had no 'operative connection' and few if any operative members. They borrowed, for many reasons, symbols and what they believed were the operative methods of admission and working. Why architecture and not another trade is another story.

In conclusion I would state that before 1717 there existed freemasons and non-perennial lodges, but no Freemasonry.

Worshipful Master, I very heartily support your motion of thanks and congratulations to Professor Stevenson.

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¹ AQC 79 (1966) p. 216.

² Jean Pierre Lassalle, *La formation et l'évolution du vocabulaire de la Franc-maçonnerie en France au XVIIIème siècle*. Thèse de Doctorat es lettres, 1984, Université de Toulouse p. 176.

³ Op. Cit. p. 104.

Bro. Michael Spurr, Junior Warden, said:

May I add my voice to the welcome which has already been extended to Professor Stevenson and thank him for his brief but interesting paper.

I say brief, because when I first read it through, I felt that it lacked the evidence normally found in the papers presented to this Lodge. On re-reading it I realised that it was intended that a familiarity with his published works was required and I was fortunate in being able to obtain copies of both *The Origins of Freemasonry* and *The First Freemasons*. Consequently my comments are to some extent based on these books as well as this paper.

In his books Professor Stevenson remarks on the rubbish written by some masonic 'historians', with which I agree and can only say that it is only equalled by even greater amounts of rubbish written by non-masonic writers. It was to counter this that Quatuor Coronati Lodge was originally established and the early members strictly discouraged speculation and only accepted evidence which could be proved, following the examples set by Leopold von Ranke and Barthold Niebuhr with respect to primary sources. The basis of present research was set by Bro R. F. Gould in his extensive studies which were intended to rectify the work of the more imaginative writers in the past. This is reflected in the past volumes of *AQC* and it is only in recent years that a degree of speculation has been permitted. Professor Stevenson in his writings refers to this as follows:

Thus though much of this book is based on sound documentary evidence. I make no apology for the fact that it also contains much in the way of tentative interpretation and imaginative guesswork . . . The 'facts' are frequently stubborn, refusing to make any sense, and speculation abounds when facts fail altogether . . .¹

I feel that we must consider carefully whether the presenter of the paper has 'massaged' the facts within the acceptable bounds of historical probability, while at the same time I will try to avoid the accusation of being 'anglocentric'.

In looking through the indices of my general historical reference books, there is only one which makes a reference to Freemasonry². In the Open University course A206 – *The Enlightenment*, there are general references to Masonry in that period, with particular attention paid to Mozart. Unfortunately, the latter is misleading on several counts. Since this is a subject which is generally ignored in works on history, it is a real pleasure to find an historian taking an interest in this specific subject.

Being half Scottish I am partially predisposed to accept the theory that Freemasonry, as we know it today, originated in Scotland but my English half is not so readily convinced.

There can be no dispute that the earliest evidence for the initiations of non-masons, the earliest lodge records and the other points mentioned in the paper, especially the written evidence, all come from Scottish sources. In fact it has always intrigued me that the first official historian and recorder of the activities of the Premier Grand Lodge was a Scot. He was one of our more imaginative 'historians' and to whom we are indebted for some of the Scottish terms such as 'entered apprentice' and 'fellow craft' or 'fellow of craft' which he introduced, replacing the English 'apprentice' and 'fellow'.

However, I do not consider that Professor Stevenson is comparing like with like. Scottish Freemasonry was essentially the control of craft guilds or the control of working masons and there is no real evidence that they were working in a speculative manner when they introduced non-masons into their meetings. The non-masons who were accepted into Scottish Lodges were, in the early stages, almost always persons from whom the Lodges wished to obtain an advantage or with whom they wanted to ingratiate themselves.

In addition there are certain other points which I find difficult to accept and the main one is the use of the English 'Ancient Charges' by the Scottish Lodges. If, as postulated by Professor Stevenson, speculative Freemasonry originated in Scotland, why was it necessary for the Scottish Lodges to hold copies of the English charges. I would have thought it would have been the other way round. The English tradition appears to have been that no speculative Lodge could be held unless there was a copy of these charges present and for the initiation of Ashmole and Mainwaring there are strong grounds for believing that a copy of the Ancient Charges was specifically prepared for that meeting. I would suggest that this necessity of having a copy of the charges available when making masons must have come from English sources, demonstrating that ceremonies of speculative initiation were practised in English Lodges and this was subsequently followed by the Scottish ones. There is abundant evidence from other sources that it was the normal guild procedure for apprentices to go through some form of introductory or initiatory ceremony which included taking an oath and even, in some cases, the communication of trade secrets.

The question obviously arises as to why there is written evidence in Scotland and none in England at the earlier date. It is easy to be an apologist and put forward possible reasons for this, however, Professor Stevenson does provide one possible answer himself.

When referring to the Schaw Statutes in *The Origins of Freemasonry* he draws attention to the 'art of memory' (p. 49) and the requirement under the Second Schaw Statutes that 'The warden of Kilwinning Lodge was ordered to test every entered apprentice and fellow craft in "the art of memorie and science thairof"'. As an alternative 'tentative interpretation' I suggest, tongue in cheek, that the reason why the English masons did not put anything in writing was because they had studied this 'art' so well that they relied on memory so needed no records. We have the evidence that in spite of George Payne's³ appeal in 1716 for 'any old *Writings and Records* concerning *Masons and Masonry* in order

to shew the Usages of antient Times ...⁴. However, Anderson recorded that 'several scrupulous brothers' had destroyed some copies. This might be one reason why English primary sources are unavailable.

The earliest English constitution, the *Cooke MS*, dates back to circa 1410 and the *Grand Lodge MS No 1* to 1583, this of course, is ignoring the earliest known record, the *Halliwel MS or Regius Poem* dated circa 1390. These, I would suggest, provide evidence of a 'history' being read to new entrants into the mason's guilds with probably some formal introductory ceremony. We also know from Conder, the author of the standard history of the London Company of Masons which was established in 1375, that this included a lodge 'into which persons in no way connected with the building trade were "accepted", a necessary qualification for non-operatives before being admitted into the Company's livery.'⁵ The earliest reference to this 'acceptance' was in 1621.

There is no direct evidence that Scotland influenced England but there is an inference from the use of the 'Ancient Charges' that England influenced Scotland. Possibly the traffic was two way but it is very much a chicken and egg situation and until better evidence can be produced I remain sceptical and preserve my anglocentricity with a 'not proven' verdict.

NOTES

¹ David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry – Scotland's century, 1590–1710*, CUP 1988.

² Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People – England 1727–1783*, OUP 1989. Freemasons pp. 11 and 242.

³ Grand Master 1718 and 1720.

⁴ Quoted from *Grand Lodge 1717–1967*, edited by T. O. Haunch, OUP 1967.

⁵ A. R. Hewitt *The Grand Lodge of England*, Prestonian Lecture for 1967.

Bro. Cyril Batham said:

Professor David Stevenson has established a reputation as a Scottish historian and I know that, in his opinion, non-operative or speculative Freemasonry was a product of Scotland rather than, as I have always believed, of England. I was therefore looking forward to his paper with lively anticipation but I have to admit to a feeling of disappointment. To use his own words, I am forced to look upon him as: 'A user of genuine materials, the sources for masonic history, who fails to order and interpret them plausibly, to bind them together with the mortar of a true mason to produce a structure which will endure.'

I am surprised that any historian should believe Freemasonry emerged in England in the early eighteenth century or that he should claim it to be a general assumption. Certainly the premier Grand Lodge of England was not founded until 24 June 1717 but that was not the emergence of non-operative Freemasonry. There are references to Freemasonry in the press and in various books and documents from 16 October 1646 onwards, that being the date on which Elias Ashmole was initiated in a lodge in Warrington but obviously those present must have been initiated before then though when or where is unknown.

It is often not realized that there is no official record of Ashmole's initiation which would be completely unknown, as no doubt were many other initiations in the seventeenth century, if he had not included an account of it in his diary. He makes no other masonic reference until 10 March 1682 when he records that he was invited to an initiation ceremony at Masons' Hall, London. It is inconceivable, if he had not had any contact with Freemasonry in the intervening thirty-five years, that he would have been summoned to this meeting so far from the place of his initiation. He wrote: 'I was the Senior Fellow among them' which is hardly the comment of one who had attended only one previous ceremony. When and where was he passed to the second degree? There is no record of it.

In his book *Records of the Hole Crafte and Fellowship of Masons*, Edward Conder states a case for initiations from 1621 onwards, Colin Dyer (*AQC* 95) speculates that non-operative Freemasonry emerged before 1600 and others whose papers appear in recent

volumes of *AQC* discuss similar possibilities. Further, in his *Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686) Dr. Robert Plot referred to initiation ceremonies and stated that he found: '... the custom spread more or less all over the Nation.'

Certainly there is no official record of an initiation in England until the third decade of the eighteenth century but that is because freemasons of that time never committed anything to writing if they could possibly avoid it and when they did, they destroyed it as soon as possible. Professor Stevenson casts doubts on this, calling it '... a daft argument' but I contend that it is well established. George Payne (Grand Master 1718-19 and 1720-1) complained that several valuable manuscripts '... were too hastily burned by some scrupulous Brothers, that those papers might not fall into strange Hands.' Moreover there are no official records of the first six years of Grand Lodge (1717-23) and we know of those events only through the second edition of Anderson's *Constitutions*, written twenty-one years later (1738).

The explanation quoted by Professor Stevenson is unknown to me and it is just as well that he has forgotten the name of the author for I have never heard anything quite so stupid and I agree as to its audacity, illogicality and ignorance. As I have mentioned, there is much evidence in the press and elsewhere of masonic activity in England in the seventeenth century but no confirmatory masonic records have survived for the perfectly understandable reason I have given. England is not alone in this. Freemasonry was introduced into France about 1725 but there are no official masonic records until a century later.

Professor Stevenson gives England credit for having the earliest copies of the Old Charges, though he should have written 'the only original Old Charges.' He states that they were known to the Scots masons by the mid seventeenth century. They were, but they were imported from England.

It has to be admitted that no English lodge has official proof of its existence before 1723 whereas, in Scotland, there were lodges before 1598, though they were operative lodges, something virtually unknown in England, and the word 'Freemason' in its modern sense does not appear in Scotland until 1725. Non-operative Freemasonry was not sufficiently established there until a few lodges met in 1736 and founded the Grand Lodge of Scotland, several years after the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and France.

I do not wish to belittle the debt that is owed to Scotland for, as Knoop and Jones have pointed out, English Freemasonry in the seventeenth century borrowed much from Scotland as it did from other sources but that does not mean that our present-day Freemasonry originated in Scotland, anymore than it did in Egypt, Greece or anywhere else. Nor am I embarrassed by the fact that 'nearly all the seventeenth century evidence of masonic activity is Scottish' and, indeed, I would refute that assumption of Professor Stevenson.

I wish to support wholeheartedly the Vote of Thanks to Professor Stevenson for the paper he has delivered this evening.

Bro. J. L. Belton wrote:

I have to thank Prof. Stevenson for having written *The Origins of Freemasonry*. Having read the book prior to his lecture, I was prepared for the probability that he might not find those present in full or even partial agreement with his views. Prof. Stevenson acknowledges that his book includes 'much in the way of tentative interpretation and imaginative guesswork' where evidence did not exist and indeed there is nothing wrong in such an approach as the statement is quite explicit. The responses to his lecture (and the book) did not, to my mind do justice to masonic research within Masonry or to a serious work of scholarship.

Masonry prides itself on being a broad church, tolerant of the views of others and yet the tenor of most of the responses did not reflect that ethic. My scientific training has ingrained on my mind the need to examine all the evidence and to keep an open mind before reaching any conclusion. A purely anglocentric approach to masonic history can

lead only to a narrowing of horizons. By comparison a willingness to consider the roles played by Scotland and indeed Ireland (and further afield) as well as England is likely to bring us nearer to understanding the interplay of Freemasonry and the cultural, intellectual and political values of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

From the responses, two comments stand out in my mind as typifying the anglocentric approach. The first was that 'Freemasonry started in 1717 with the formation of Grand Lodge in London'. Quite clearly there were Lodges of a speculative nature in the British Isles, and outside London, before this date. The second was that England lacked early records to match those of Scotland, because 'English Masons had a natural tendency to put less on paper than their Brethren north of the border'. It is interesting to reflect that by 1730 English reticence had reduced with the publication of 'The Flying Post' exposure and *Masonry Dissected*!

I cannot help but wonder what the strangers in our midst made of the evening! Were their preconceptions of masons as historians reinforced or did they enjoy the interplay of minds happy to consider that there could be alternative and valid points of view and based on documented facts? Prof. Stevenson has opened my mind to the possibilities of comparative masonic history, comparative between masonic and social developments on the one hand and between countries on the other. I suspect that time will approve his approach and that the development of Freemasonry will come to be seen as a rich and collaborative venture, not (as some would like to believe) purely an invention of the English.

Bro. Desmond Caywood wrote:

Aeneas Sylvius, later Pope Pius II, records in his diary his impressions and general observations of the Scots and of Scotland during his visitation to that country as a papal legate in the winter of 1434. One such entry notes that '*nothing pleases the Scots more than abuse of the English*'. A trait still extant, which, in my opinion, is faintly discernible in the Professor's writings; like his continental masonic contacts, I suggest that he too delights in '*putting the English in their place*'. Being a Scot he is perfectly entitled to do so, but in this instance, as an historian and non-mason, he seeks to make them subservient to Scotland, as the originator of a recognisable Craft system of Freemasonry in the masonic order of things, and he wants to set the historical record straight in this regard. In doing so he produces a great deal of impressive and highly feasible argument to support his claim: a worthy endeavour that should be applauded by all freemasons on either side of the border, after all we are all desirous of knowing the true origins of our fraternity, regrettably still shrouded in uncertainty. This contribution to our masonic knowledge, and to our *Transactions*, from a professional 'main-stream' historian, a non-mason, is unique and of great value besides being greatly appreciated.

It seems to me that the pivot on which the main body of Professor Stevenson's arguments are centred is William Schaw, a name well known to all masons interested in masonic history, and whom the Professor identifies as the initiator of many of the important organizational features that are familiar to modern freemasons. The fact that twenty-five 'organized' lodges existed in Scotland seven years before the formation of the English Grand Lodge, is reason for one to ponder this 'fact' and although they were 'operative' lodges, and in the main remained so, they are alleged to have been, '*as much concerned with rituals and secrets*' as with the administration of the practical stone-mason's trade. I would have thought that such a statement would be difficult – if not impossible to prove: Professor Stevenson believes these 'operative' lodges were the recipients of certain aspects of Renaissance knowledge, of intellectual thought and ideas, and Schaw is seen as the disseminator of such ideas, superimposing Neoplatonic and Hermetic views, and especially memory arts, on to their traditional, practical trade customs. Why, I wonder, has this taken so long to come to 'centre stage', and why has it been ignored, or passed over by previous masonic historians? Was it considered and discarded as unim-

portant, and if so why? These doubts are sufficient to cast doubts upon the feasibility of this assumption – or theory – whatever one wishes to call it.

The introduction of a medieval ‘memory system’ is claimed to have had a remarkable effect on Scottish Freemasonry, and in turn, on international Freemasonry. The source of this highly probable assumption, is perhaps triggered by Schaw’s second Statute in which he advises that masons should be tested in ‘*the art of memorie and science thairof*’. Bro. Haffner refers to this in his review (AQC 104, p. 237) of Professor Stevenson’s book *The Origins of Freemasonry – Scotland’s Century 1590–1710* (Cambridge U.P. 1988). He envisaged the ‘memory system’ to be such as that described by Frances Yates (*The Art of Memory*. 1966). The role played by memory during the Renaissance was asserted by Yates, but not all scholars agreed with her, many continued to deny that memory arts were ever commonly practised. A recent work by Professor Mary Carruthers (*The Book of Memory*. Cambridge U.P.) has pretty well removed any doubts that may have existed in this regard, by proving that memory arts were indeed practised; declining it seems in the late seventeenth century, as more and more books became available. Even then memory arts continued to be practised, certainly by many of the great scholars – but was it commonly practised by the lesser folk? Masonic ceremonial could only benefit from the adoption of such a system, but it is not absolutely certain that such techniques were introduced, let alone employed, in these lodges, nor do we know if the members of those lodges wanted such systems, or if they understood what the system was. It all seems so uncertain.

It is very pleasing to see that Professor Stevenson acknowledges the work of Knoop and Jones, a pity that Douglas Hamer, also a non-mason, was missed out, because he co-operated with Knoop and Jones in their pioneering efforts to bring forward a facet of history almost untouched by orthodox historians as a legitimate and worthwhile area of study. One cannot but wonder what the ‘copious’ additional evidence was that this erudite triad of scholars were unaware of?

Finally I congratulate Professor Stevenson on being the first non-mason (he will observe that I avoid the word ‘cowan’) to address the Quatuor Coronati Lodge (another first, I think!) and offer my sincere thanks for his stimulating and forthright paper.

Bro. Neville Cryer said:

To be part of this historic occasion is indeed a privilege and I wish to add my own congratulations to the speaker for the rightly provocative things he has said about the apparently ‘closed shop’ attitude of many freemasons who have sought to write about ‘masonic history and its personalities’. We do need the kind of interchange that he suggests – and as soon as we can effect it. My own cooperation with non-masonic researchers has amply proved the benefit that both parties can receive.

I was therefore intrigued by Dr. Stevenson’s assertion in the circulated paper that ‘Why Scottish evidence might have survived while English has not was an embarrassing questions, and I’ve never seen a credible attempt to answer it.’ Perhaps this is just the sort of subject that ought to be once more treated to proper in-depth research but might I suggest that the attack on the Guilds and trade associations by the officers of Henry VIII, the religious controversy in the reign of Elizabeth, the disturbed years of the early Stuart reigns and above all the upset of the Civil War period might well be the settings that provided England and Wales with a very different social and political milieu in which the continuity of Scottish trade institutions could not be emulated.

What I find interesting, now that I have a new and still inadequately researched source of old Masonry in York to uncover, is that evidence that we had not previously considered is still to be found. In a manuscript book kept by a previous member of this lodge, G. Y. Johnson, we have recorded evidence of freemasons in the York area from 1619 and throughout the 17th century whilst in 1681 there is the precise statement, ‘The Freemasons made a Company’ – it is, significantly, well after the Restoration.

By the same token, I wonder how many masons south of the Watford Gap are aware

of the comparatively detailed information we have for the lodge in Chester in or about the year 1660 – again, let it be noted, after the Restoration. We not only have the names of 26 members but it is clear from the research done on the individual members that this lodge was already fully speculative.

What it seems to me is being usefully said by our speaker is that English freemasons have been both myopic in their view of their Freemasonry and unwilling to do enough to discover their earliest roots. This is not to assert that we can establish a serious counter-argument to all the Scottish ‘firsts’ so ably listed by our speaker but it does perhaps hint that the full truth about ‘Speculative Masonic Origins’ has not yet been uncovered. We are surely challenged to go back to sources.

Miss Christine Hinze wrote:

The meeting was a revelation to me, and I hope that it will be the first of many to which cowans will be invited.

How brave Professor Stevenson was, to speak on such a contentious topic to such a hostile and volatile group. Never before have I witnessed such merciless verbal battering. But the Professor would seem to be his own worst enemy. Did he really think that the argument, as he presented it, was convincing? His talk (often defensive in tone) lacked substance – in fact, afterwards, I couldn’t recall one valid point made by him. I was a visitor, neutral, and very willing to be persuaded. Perhaps some prior knowledge of the topic would have been advantageous, but it shouldn’t have been necessary. What is the evidence? Where is it? Mention of a citation or two would not have gone amiss. I left the meeting none the wiser.

Bro. Jacques Litvine said:

I am a continental freemason initiated some thirty-five years ago and I heard Professor Stevenson’s lecture with the utmost surprise.

There are non-masonic authors in France who understand Freemasonry and write pertinently about it, for instance Pierre Chevalier, author of a very complete history of French Freemasonry from its beginning till the present. This author is read and respected as a great historian by people in general and freemasons in particular. His books are sold everywhere, quite openly. He never raised any concern within the Craft because he dealt in proven facts.

Professor Stevenson’s statement about Scottish precedence in the birth of Freemasonry is not so much a surprise or a shock but seems to me a vain and bold assertion.

For us, continental freemasons, the Craft began in 1717 and we accept the English Grand Lodge as the first one, the first one to be organised and thus to exert a greater influence.

Professor Stevenson has said he met ‘Continental Freemasons’ who were happy to support his challenge to the precedence of the English Grand Lodge, perhaps, I quote ‘to put the English in their place’. I wonder who they were? As a Grand Officer of both the French and Belgian Constitutions, I do not remember having heard such a shocking sentiment, even in private!

If he sincerely meant to examine the origins of Freemasonry, I can only regret the sarcastic tone of his paper. He proposes a facile argument, first the operative line – not proven, far from it – and that of ‘non operatives’ being initiated into Scottish ‘operative’ Lodges. I would enquire about their philosophical or moral motives and about their studies? I believe that there are, unfortunately, no supporting minutes.

I think it is not worth pursuing my argument further; Professor Stevenson will see that we reject any attempt to divide us by spurious arguments.

The word ‘Cowan’ is translated into French rituals by the word ‘profane’ which means ‘non-initiated’. After this paper I am afraid it will have another meaning for me: a non initiated who will never understand the real meaning of Freemasonry.

Nevertheless, I congratulate Professor Stevenson for his essay concerning a very strange world for a Cowan: Freemasonry.

Bro. Wallace McLeod wrote:

Professor Stevenson's presence in our midst is a welcome innovation, and I only regret that complexities of time and space conspired to keep me from hearing his paper in person. We generally say that, at a certain technical level, there are no secrets in Masonry. But, sad to relate, there are still far too many professional scholars who seem to regard everything connected with the craft as inaccessible, or irrelevant. All too frequently, one picks up a publication that refers to masons or Masonry, and finds that the statements made, or the terminology employed, do not coincide with reality. Professor Stevenson, on the other hand, demonstrates a close familiarity with the ritual, the regulations, the administration, the organization, and the membership of Masonry, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. *O si sic omnes* . . . In general terms, his presentation has dealt with matters that were covered in greater detail in his two splendid books of six years ago, but we are grateful that he was able to be with us on this occasion. We may venture to hope that, from time to time, other 'cowans' may be persuaded to address us.

Bro. W. K. Macnulty wrote:

We masons should welcome the serious academic interest in the origins of our Order which Professor Stevenson's work represents. His paper and his book, *The Origins of Freemasonry, Scotland's century, 1590-1710*, on which the paper is based, handle the material in a way which has been much neglected in the past – in the context of the social and intellectual climate in which Freemasonry evolved. I have to say, also, that I am very pleased to find in his work academic support for some of my own opinions about the origins of the Craft.

Although I am an English mason, I am also an American of Scottish descent. This heritage gives me a vantage point which is at the same time detached from, and sympathetic to, both the Scottish and English claims for contributions to our beginnings. From this perspective I would like to offer a response which minimizes the geographical aspects of the discussion. In doing this I hope to prevent some important ideas from being lost in an *intra-insular* competition.

In his paper Prof. Stevenson goes to some length to define Freemasonry. He does the same thing in his book. His fundamental argument is that '... in its essentials modern Freemasonry is Scottish rather than English in origin'. The definition one chooses for Freemasonry is important for his argument, and he pleads a case against 'perverse' definitions which exclude Scottish evidence. I am sympathetic to his view, and I hope Prof. Stevenson will not find my comments to be 'perverse' in that respect. However, I cannot agree with his understanding of the 'essentials' of Freemasonry. It seems to me that in defining Freemasonry as he does Prof. Stevenson has encountered one of the difficulties faced by a non-mason who undertakes to study the Order.

When a *mason* asks the question, 'What is Freemasonry?', the answer is provided by the masonic ritual itself. Every mason present tonight knows that masonry is '... a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.'¹ This definition may sound a little bit twee when it is considered as a foundation for serious historical research in the 20th century; and it may be useful, *for the sake of this discussion only*, to recast it in contemporary terms. I would like to suggest that Freemasonry is 'a philosophical frame of reference codified by the use of a symbolic structure'.

With that definition in hand, we can stand in London in 1717 (a time and place upon which all can agree) and look back into the 16th and 17th centuries. In doing so we see that the intellectual paradigm of the secular, educated communities throughout Britain and central Europe was the western mystical tradition, the philosophical frame of reference at the very centre of renaissance thought. Material relating to this tradition has been

generally available only since the 1960's², so it is not widely known. In his book Prof. Stevenson identifies it, correctly I think, as a very important influence on early Freemasonic thought and activity. It seems to me that this is the fundamental idea; that '... in its essentials modern Freemasonry ...' is a codification of that western mystical tradition which was, itself, the essence of Renaissance thought.

But identifying the *source and nature* of our 'system of morality' in this way still leaves a very large question: 'From where did our founders get the *symbolic structure* with which to teach their system of morality?' It seems to me that is the question which Prof. Stevenson answers in his book; and I think he presents some very important ideas.

The scope of the *The Origins of Freemasonry* is much broader than that of the paper we have heard tonight, and since it contains many valuable ideas, it seems appropriate to comment on some of them at this time. The book also contains a great deal of conjecture. That is not a fault; it is a situation imposed by the very limited amount of authentic material available on the subject; and Prof. Stevenson is very careful to identify conjecture whenever he makes it. I find, however, that there are some of his conclusions with which I cannot agree; and two seem of sufficient importance to require comment. The first is his mis-understanding of the subject of Death as it is treated in the Third Degree – he identifies it (wrongly) as necromancy, the art of obtaining secrets from the dead. It seems to me that this association is another example of the difficulties faced by non-masonic historians. If Prof. Stevenson had personal experience of the Degree, I am confident that he would understand it differently.

There is a second important point with which I disagree. Prof. Stevenson takes the view that it is incorrect to assume that '... only ... gentlemen can be regarded as doing speculative things, thus deserving the title of Freemasons'. He suggests that such a restrictive definition leads to the conclusion that '... it's not what you do but who you are that counts ...', and such a view seems to him to be contrary to the egalitarian ideals and teachings of the Craft. As a mason I share his egalitarian sensibilities, but it seems to me that there is an excellent reason, which is not at all based on class bias, for suggesting that the early freemasons were likely to have been almost exclusively gentlemen. Because of the way I think we must define Freemasonry, I think we have to say that during the 17th and early 18th centuries the thing that separated a Freemason from an operative mason is that the Freemason was working at the Renaissance mystical tradition. The pursuit of that discipline requires time for reading, for reflection, and for contemplative thought. It seems to me, given the social and economic conditions in the 17th and early 18th centuries, it would have been uncommon to find the leisure required for that sort of activity except among gentlemen.³

Except for these points of disagreement (and a few others which seem less important), I think that Prof. Stevenson's book presents a very believable picture. In summary, the philosophy at the core of Renaissance thought made the association between operative masonry, architecture and classical wisdom a commonly acknowledged idea. In the late 1500's William Schaw, an educated gentleman who had philosophical interests as well as being the master of works and general warden of masons in Scotland, seems to have tried to impose a philosophical discipline on the operative craft (with a view, perhaps, to help it 'realize its potential' or perhaps to 'make it into what it once was' (my speculations)). Scottish gentlemen joined operative lodges either in search of 'classical wisdom' or of technical information which was thought to relate to that wisdom, and we should think of these Scottish gentlemen (as we think of Ashmole) as early Freemasons. In presenting this picture Prof. Stevenson draws together most of the evidence for the Transition Theory, and in a few of the Scottish Lodges (such as Edinburgh Lodge) a transition may actually have occurred. It seems to me, however, that Prof. Stevenson also shows that transition from operative to speculative is not the main stream of development for Freemasonry. William Schaw's efforts to introduce a philosophical orientation into Scottish operative masonry failed in the long run. In the late 17th century the operatives regained control of most of their lodges and pushed the gentlemen out. In only a few

cases, such as in Edinburgh Lodge, did they, themselves, leave and start new operative lodges.

Prof. Stevenson goes out of his way to point out that in England there is no evidence of a parallel involvement of gentlemen in operative Lodges. I think we should agree with him that it is safest to assume the lack of such evidence probably indicates a lack of such activity. We will do better to set aside the Transition Theory and realize that the founders of the English Grand Lodge in 1717 were starting something entirely new. Perhaps they were attempting to accomplish what Schaw had tried and been unable to do because of the conservative orientation of his craftsmen and the turbulent times in which he lived. We do know with certainty that in 1717 the Grand Lodge of England was an entirely speculative organization which was working with a 'system of morality'. Those early freemasons acquired the masonic symbolic idiom from some (at present unknown) source; and, during the 18th century, they developed it into a very sophisticated philosophical system.

It seems to me that it is difficult to ignore Professor Stevenson's evidence that the masonic idiom which the founders of the Grand Lodge of England adopted and developed to teach their 'system of morality' came originally from Scotland. I cannot agree entirely with Prof. Stevenson, because I think that 'in its essentials' Freemasonry encapsulates the philosophical essence of the Renaissance which is an intellectual construct much broader than any single country. Having said that, it seems to me that as we consider the origins of our Order and try to understand the source of the *idiom* in which our founders cast their teachings, we must certainly give most careful consideration to Scotland and to Prof. Stevenson's work.

May I add my thanks to Professor Stevenson for his participation in the labours of the evening to those which he will already have received?

NOTES

¹ Stevenson, himself, appears to be aware of this bit of ritual, because he uses the words in his book; though he does not quote them or use them in a definitive sense.

² The pioneer in this work seems to have been Dame Frances A. Yates, latterly Reader of Renaissance History at the University of London.

³ I am not suggesting that craftsmen didn't have rituals or moralize over their tools. I *am* saying that in the 1600's it would be unusual to find an operative mason with the time to pursue work similar to that of Bacon, Fludd, or Ashmole. It would certainly be difficult to find enough of them to define a social movement. This is not the case today. My own Lodge has boasted a publican, a joiner, and a lorry driver, all seriously interested in the philosophical aspects of the Order (and all gentlemen, I am quick to say!).

Bro. Geoffrey Markham said:

I join in thanks to Professor Stevenson for coming here to-day and for his paper and, in particular, for making us reconsider the position covered by it. I also take this opportunity of thanking him for making many details of Scottish masonic history readily accessible through his books on Freemasonry.

I shall be disagreeing with him on various points but not, so far as I can manage it, in any spirit of competition. Consistently with attempting to put the record straight, it is essential to avoid being partisan. Unless we do this, greater understanding in a field which on any basis is very difficult will be impossible. I would like to see Q.C. members being able to work with Professor Stevenson rather than having to work against him.

I believe that there is far more substance to English seventeenth century masonic evidence than Professor Stevenson suggests and that, also, shortage of surviving English evidence can in fact reasonably be explained by a stricter attitude towards secrecy in England than in Scotland.

Because of Professor Stevenson's line of argument there is little alternative but to summarise the main sources of English seventeenth century evidence to show that there is genuine quality of information in them if interpreted fully and in relation to each other.

He mentions some of these in his book on masonic origins but not in a way which seems constructive even towards some of his admissions as to English Masonry. I now refer to these sources as follows:

(1) The Ashmole 1646 evidence (relating to Warrington in Lancashire) indicates, through interpretation of the details of those present, a non-operative meeting of a type many years in advance of such meetings in Scotland. 'Non-operative' is used in these comments in its wider sense.

(2) The Ashmole 1682 evidence (which refers to the London Company of Masons) and that of Randle Holme (relating to Chester) again enable, in each case, identification of those present as predominantly non-operative masons, and, taken with the earlier Ashmole evidence, indicate a substantial extent of similar masonic custom. Plot identifies this in 1686 as being '... spread more or less all over the Nation ...'

(3) The Ashmole, Holme and Plot evidence each show the existence of a brotherhood open to different levels of society in a very class conscious era.

(4) Plot, Holme and Aubrey refer to secret signs and words (not the Scottish 'Mason Word'). Plot also describes the involvement of masons with the Old Charges, the availability of masonic charity and that they were known as 'Accepted Masons'.

(5) The 'Acception' in the London Company of Masons offers an explanation of the term 'Accepted Mason' (and vice-versa) and is mentioned in the earliest surviving records of the Company which start in the 1620s, though the Acception may clearly be earlier. A status is signified beyond the freedom of the Company and there is reference to the 'making' of masons in the records.

(6) The use of the expression 'making' with regard to masons, which is also found in *Grand Lodge No. 1 MS.* of 1583, in contrast with the fifteenth century *Cooke MS.*, suggests that by that time the idea existed of non-operatives becoming masons simply by going through a ceremony; ['... Edwin ... made Masons ...' (Edwin being, in the legendary history, the supposed son of King Athelstan)]. Knoop and Jones in the *Genesis of Freemasonry* (1947), p. 143 suggest the possibility of there being provision for non-operatives as early as 1500 if wording similar in essence, which is in the *William Watson MS.*, appeared in the lost original of that document. The early Scottish catechisms, from the 1690s onwards, use 'entered' with regard to initiates where English exposure versions use 'made', indicating a contrast between operative and non-operative terminology in this respect.

(7) On the basis of paragraph (6) it is strongly arguable that the large number of seventeenth century English versions of the Old Charges, referring to the 'making' of masons is evidence of non-operative masonic activity, particularly when coupled with the fact that it is clear that non-operative lodges sought to possess versions of the Old Charges, and that, indeed, the probable reason why so many have survived is because they were required by non-operative lodges. This point as to 'making' obviously does not apply to Scottish versions which were simply imported *en bloc* from England for use in operative lodges or copied from those versions. Incidentally, the situation of groups of masons possessing treasured versions of the Old Charges and the tradition as to the existence and maintenance of masonic customs of the nature of 'Land-Marks' make it likely that 'occasional lodges' were the exception rather than the rule in seventeenth century England.

This is not a comprehensive review of early evidence of English non-operative Masonry and its historical background, but is enough to show as to the seventeenth century that such evidence is by no means insignificant. This position exists, further, even though, as will be shown next, there is reason to believe that there was an English attitude towards masonic secrecy which was more restrictive than that in Scotland, but for which evidence would be more plentiful. Also there was, in fact, a network of English Masonry in the late seventeenth century (see Robert Plot, contrary to Professor Stevenson).

The English *Constitutions* of 1723 direct that Masons shall be cautious in their '... Words and Carriage, that the most penetrating Stranger shall not be able to discover or find out what is not proper to be intimated ...'; and, in the 'Manner of Constituting a New Lodge', there is reference to '... some other Expressions that are proper and usual

on that Occasion but not proper to be written . . .'. When one comes to look at the English exposures (particularly *Masonry Dissected* of 1730) which were unauthorised and printed for commercial benefit, it becomes fully apparent that aspects which were confidential, apart from secret modes of recognition, were symbols, the degrees of Masonry and, to some extent, the form of the ceremonies themselves.

In Scotland the position was less strict than in England. There are handwritten catechisms (apparently *aides-memoires*) relating to these confidential matters. Minute books are plentiful as to Scottish lodges; but none are known to have existed as to England save for the London Company of Masons (which was not strictly a 'lodge'). See also Herbert Poole in *Gould's History of Freemasonry* (1951), Vol. II, p. 163, as to English brethren being evidently more scrupulous than Scottish about not committing matters to writing.

Therefore, the English evidence of seventeenth century Masonry is (consistently with the English attitude towards secrecy) of the character of the tip of an iceberg, and of sufficient substance to explain why it was that in the 1720s and '30s it was English, rather than Scottish, non-operative Masonry which was strongly ascendant.

Towards the end of his paper, Professor Stevenson writes as if he is going to define Freemasonry but fails to do this. I suggest that this is because he is not sure whether the seventeenth century Scottish evidence to which he refers is of the same kind as the comparable English evidence [even though he also maintains that the English evidence is virtually non-existent]. His doubts are illustrated by his book *The First Freemasons* (1989), p. 69, where he states:

'Non-operatives arrive in Kilwinning Lodge in a remarkable burst in the 1670s. As in other lodges the motives of both lodge and non-operatives are unclear.'

The comparable English evidence relates to Masonry which was predominantly non-operative. There is therefore no reliable relationship of like with like in Professor Stevenson's comparisons.

This weakness in his position takes the force out of his list of 'firsts', but that list is subject to two further objections. One is that his firsts are at best 'first known' and in this respect the points already made as to the recording of masonic data being more permissible in Scotland than in England during the seventeenth century are particularly relevant.

The third objection is that Professor Stevenson does not identify, either in his paper or in the similar list in his *Origins of Freemasonry*, the precise evidence to which he is referring; and, where one can hazard a guess, further objections come to mind. For example – '... earliest evidence connecting lodge Masonry with specific ethical ideas expounded through symbolism . . .'; if this relates to Sir Robert Moray's five pointed star and acrostic, Bro. Wallace McLeod has answered it in *AQC* 97; though this is not necessarily to deny Moray significance in the history of Scottish Masonry.

Historically there have been two streams of masonic ideas in English Craft Masonry. One of these is illustrated by the *Charges of a Free-Mason* in the 1723 *Constitutions*, which were derived in part from the Old Charges and in part from the old customs by which, of necessity, Masonry was defined and held together in the days before Grand Lodges (the term 'Land-Mark' was already used in 1723). The 1723 Charges of a Free-Mason had no counterpart in Scotland; and the existence in England of the ideas contained in them pre-date James Anderson's compilation of 1723 [see Knoop and Jones, *The Genesis of Freemasonry* (1947), p. 176–185]. They are contained still in the present English Book of Constitutions, the same in principle and, for the most part, in the same words as those of 1723. They formed the moral basis which enabled English Freemasonry to extend round Europe and much of the world during the 1720s and 30s.

The other stream of ideas was masonic ritual, which was in process of development during the same period and did not reach final form until the early years of the nineteenth century. It is in this field, in particular, where I believe that Scottish Masonry made an important (though not the only) contribution. With their insistence on Land-Marks it is hard to understand how English masons accepted any Scottish ideas at all, but it is clear

that they did. To say the least, the terms 'entered apprentice', 'fellow craft' and 'cowan' are undeniably Scottish. Lack of space and the extent of the topic do not allow further observations on this to be included in these comments.

Before concluding I must declare an interest in having ventured into the minefield of masonic origins, namely in two papers which are in *AQC* 100 and 103 respectively. *AQC* 103, plus corrigenda in *AQC* 104, is fairly complete in itself.

I was interested to discover from his book *The Origins of Freemasonry* that Professor Stevenson had noticed a similarity between certain characteristics of the pre-Reformation religious guilds and some of the early characteristics of Freemasonry. I mentioned the same point on pp. 89–90 of *AQC* 103. He raised the question whether the ideas thus arising could have been absorbed into Freemasonry on its formulation, in Scotland (by William Schaw), as he sees it, around 1600. I suggested that early English non-operatives had adopted the ideas prior to the abolition of the guilds, which took place in England in 1547. This indicates an aspect of the divergence of our views.

I again thank Professor Stevenson and hope that these comments will not deter him from joining with members of this lodge in efforts towards further clarification of this fascinating topic.

Bro. Aubrey Newman wrote:

Most historians of Masonry would acknowledge the debt they owe to Professor Stevenson for the light he has thrown on the ways in which Masonry developed in the sixteenth century. In his books rather than in this lecture he has shown that we must turn to Scotland to understand the ways in which the gentry were attracted to membership of masonic lodges. Most would accept that by the end of the sixteenth century there are a number of such Lodges in Scotland; at the same time there is a considerable, and growing, volume of evidence that by the middle of the seventeenth century such lodges can be found in England. One does not need to wait for the formation of Grand Lodge in 1717 to recognise the existence of regular Masonry; such pieces of evidence as the initiation of Ashmole or other detailed evidence from Cheshire by the 1660s are in themselves conclusive. The issue however which Professor Stevenson has not addressed is that which might be described as that of 'cultural transference', did such activities arise spontaneously and independently in England or were they brought down from the north?

There is early evidence of such masonic activities in the North of England which could well be regarded as part of a process of intellectual 'osmosis', the drift of ideas through the border country, the former Marches between England and Scotland and developing round Newcastle. There might also be some point in looking at the activities of various Scottish drovers south of the Border. But that would not establish any creditable link between the Scottish gentry and the ways in which English gentry also entered upon speculative Masonry.

I would like to suggest that there is a much more plausible link between Scottish Masonry and developments in England during the first half of the seventeenth century, the period which is really decisive for English Masonry. There is scope for a close examination of those Scots who came down south with James VI and formed part of his English court. A great deal of information about these individuals can be drawn from various Royal Household Lists and Accounts for the reigns of James I and Charles I, and it would be of value to see how far any of these individuals can be identified as being active in Scottish Masonry. It is at least plausible to suggest as a possible line for research that gentlemen of the Scottish court who had been active in Scottish Masonry and who had come with James decided to continue these activities down south. There is ample evidence in other periods for such individuals taking their Masonry with them, such as the military lodges or even English gentlemen on the continent during the eighteenth century.

Some such developments would go far to explain the paucity of information before the middle of the seventeenth century and the increasing volume thereafter. Above all, it

would bridge the gap between the evidence adduced by Professor Stevenson and that available for seventeenth-century England.

Dr. Marilyn Palmer wrote:

Having read some of the contributions to *Quatuor Coronati* in connection with my own research, may I respectfully suggest that Prof. Stevenson has perhaps underestimated his audience? I have some acquaintance with his previous books, and know that he has more information than this. I perhaps have a fellow feeling for a non-mason on this occasion, and if my opinion concurs with others you have had, wonder whether he could be tactfully contacted to suggest that he might give more of his evidence in the paper? I feel he 'doth protest too much' about his non-masonic background, and consequently does not have the time to develop his interesting thesis on the Scottish origins of Freemasonry. Like Professor Newman, I am interested in the possibility of the transmission of various masonic practices from Scotland to England following the union of the English and Scottish crowns under James VI and I, but I will leave him to make this point!

Bro. David Peabody wrote:

It would appear that Professor Stevenson played Cricket at school and learned how to play off the back foot: he starts his paper with short strokes of the bat at Freemasonry in general (I think that he called it a thrust), and ends up being run out on the second ball.

I would have expected Professor Stevenson to have given us some guide as to his primary source material which would have enlightened all of us. Instead he cites in his notes only five books in addition to his own, and it would appear that we are required to read his own works to find any bibliographical references with respect to his paper.

As to Scotland's early contribution to Freemasonry, I would suggest to Professor Stevenson that he considers Bro. Speth's paper, 'Scottish Freemasonry before the era of Grand Lodges' (*AQC* 1, pp. 139-149), for controversial views on the role of Scotland in our history. And why only Scotland? There are other sources of the Craft. I am currently researching the impact of Huguenot refugees on early Freemasonry – and finding more evidence of significant value than seems to be the case with Professor Stevenson's theory.

Bro. Paul Rich wrote:

Certainly Professor Stevenson's books represent one of the most significant contributions to masonic history in recent years, but just as his revelations about Masonry in Scotland have come as a surprise one wonders if the future might not hold further surprises about Masonry in England that would challenge his thesis.

The fact is that the seventeenth century produced a vast amount of manuscript material which has still not been thoroughly studied. Moreover, the number of freemasons who do study original sources in archives is very small indeed. Currently I am working in archives in Mexico and often I find that I am the first person to examine the material from a masonic standpoint. That is the case, for example, with the nearly 900,000 documents relating to the presidency of Porfirio Diaz, longtime dictator of Mexico. Such experiences make me feel that we have to be tentative in any remarks about masonic origins.

Professor Stevenson has made a considerable impression on masonic history. Might I add that he is a generous correspondent and most willing to share his knowledge, as I know from personal experience.

Bro. Richard Sandbach wrote:

To my sorrow I was unable to be present when this paper was delivered; as one of the early advocates of non-masonic speakers at our meetings, and of Dr. Stevenson's presence

in particular, I had looked forward to meeting him and hearing the discussion. It was not to be, so I am writing my comments.

I read Dr. Stevenson's views on the origins of Freemasonry some time ago and with great interest. One side of my nature would wish to believe them but, alas, I cannot. He rightly reminds us of many items which he calls 'firsts' for Scotland but the sum still does not explain the point to which I keep returning, that, as Bro. Colin Dyer pointed out in 1982 (see *AQC* 95, pp. 120–169) we have not seriously tried to explain why speculative Freemasonry developed on the foundation of the masonic craft. I hope to enlarge on this in Lodge next May but for me it is the key question in any thinking about our origins.

The Scottish evidence is impressive insofar as it points to the existence in Scotland of a flourishing mason craft organisation long after any there may have been in England seems to have decayed. Perhaps the Scots were better at protecting their own interests than the English? Or perhaps patronage was more extensive and essential in Scotland in the seventeenth century than it had become in England? Or perhaps the enactment and enforcement of the Schaw Statutes led not only to more methodical recording than in England but also to a consolidation of the mason-craft, a realisation of a sense of identity? At all events, something happened to keep Scottish lodges alive when their English equivalents seem to have been at best weak and failing. But that does not explain why Freemasonry, speculative Freemasonry, developed. Any explanation of that must fit credibly into the social environment.

Here I must state a belief I firmly hold, that the development was a two-part process. Sometimes we seem to have used the term non-operative as if it is synonymous with speculative. My own view is that there was no speculative Freemasonry in England (and dare I say probably not even in Scotland) before the late seventeenth century and that so far as England is concerned non-operatives did not wish to be made masons in order to learn the mythological history of the Craft or its rather rudimentary moral teachings; I cannot imagine that those whom we know of as 'made' in that period would be keenly attracted by such things, they being far too intelligent for that. But in the uncertainties of the English Civil War and its aftermath they might well feel that the recognition secrets of a movement which covered the country could provide an element of safety in strange territory. Any speculative element would have to await more settled times. I hope to elaborate on that next May.

Why might non-operatives wish to become masons in Scotland? I cannot pretend to have an answer; but if a credible answer can be found then we might be a step nearer deciding the relationship between the masonic history of the two countries. It would be good if Dr. Stevenson could offer some ideas on this, for it is the point where I find myself unconvinced by his arguments as no doubt he will not be convinced by mine if he ever does me the favour of reading my paper next year.

Bro. Walter Sharman wrote:

It is only too true that the origins of Freemasonry are shrouded in mist – indeed if it were otherwise we would, in my view, miss a certain mystique. Just think of it, there would not even be a *raison d'être* for a great deal of the work of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge itself.

It was my pleasure to be able to attend Quatuor Coronati's 'First' of a lecture by a non-mason, Prof. David Stevenson on the above subject. Many potent arguments were advanced against the speaker's proposition. May I add just the following few points.

Prior to the meeting I spent several hours researching a rare book in Grand Lodge Library '*Book M*' or '*Masonry Triumphant*', 1736. It deals fairly extensively with masonic lodges in my neighbouring province of Durham which at that time were not yet attached to the comparatively new London premier Grand Lodge. It was only after some lapse of time that such lodges saw an advantage in accepting the tutelage of a Grand Lodge. Almost certainly they would have originated prior to 1700; in some cases they would probably have gone back many more years.

The author of the book was Bro. William Smith, apparently the same who produced Smith's *Pocket Companion*, Dublin, 1735.¹ The *Book 'M'* indicates that Smith spent about three to four years in Durham and that in '1733 he joined the semi-operative Lodge at Swalwell and was made "Free" of the Lodge in March 1734 (i.e. joined).' On page 22 of the Waples commentary on book 'M' in the Library of the Provincial Grand Lodge, Durham, there is mention of 'the Gateshead Lodge at the Fountain Inn at the occasion of its constitution,' (i.e. foundation). The question naturally arises: where did these brethren come from? Were they one of the several old lodges partly operative, partly speculative? It is strongly suggested that this was already a fully fledged lodge which at length had decided to accept the protection of the Grand Lodge of England. This appears to be evidence, if indeed it was needed, of fairly wide spread masonic activities certainly in the North of England prior to 1700.

There are four further extracts from William Waples's elucidation on *Book 'M'* which relate to a number of Northern lodges and evidently strong speculative masonic life. (See notes [2] to [5]).

Being a Liveryman of a London City Company (Worshipful Company of Glovers, founded in 1349) I have been able to establish from archival material that well before 1700 non-Glovers, i.e. speculative members, were admitted. Their financial contributions must have played a part.

The purpose of my comments is to prove the existence of fairly strong Masonry in Northern England during the early part of the 18th century. If one assumes a generation of masons to be the equivalent of about 25 to 30 years and if one accepts that the fairly strong masonic life of these so-called 'St. John's masons' existed for possibly three or even more generations one arrives at a period in the early to mid-seventeenth century. In my view this would compare well with Scottish Masonry regardless of availability of written documents or otherwise. I trust Prof. Stevenson will find it possible to accept my conclusions.

NOTES

¹ Book 'M', Commentary by Bro. W. Waples, 1961, page 7. 'The series of masonic manuals published by Bro. William Smith in 1735/6 ... consists of three books: The Pocket Companion, Dublin, 1735, The Pocket Companion, London, 1736, Book 'M', Newcastle'.

² do. page 5. '... it appears obvious that Smith had in mind a number of other lodges which were locally known as St. John's Masons.'

³ do. pages 18/19. '... in view of the working of the Harodim and an ancient series of degrees which were carried over by unattached lodges in Durham County when they elected to accept a Warrant under the G.L. of England ... every effort was made to bring the Northern unattached lodges into the fold of the then newly organised Grand Lodge.'

⁴ do. page 23. '... that body who until the 1730s or so owned no allegiance to a central body, such as the Lodges at Sunderland, Gateshead, Newcastle, Durham, Darlington, etc.'

⁵ do. page 30. Old Water Clock in Durham Masonic Museum, made in 1701 by a member of Swalwell Lodge with emblem of interlaced triangles. See also Waples Commentary (1940) on this item (also in the Provincial Grand Lodge Library).

Bro. Trevor Stewart wrote:

I, too, congratulate Dr. Stevenson on his timely contribution to the continuing debate about our possible origins. I am quite content to accept his list of Scottish so-called 'firsts' with the caveat, of course, that they are *the earliest known* at present. It may be that, lurking hidden in some *English* attics are even earlier *English* documents which might help to readjust his thesis. And serendipity, as Joy Hancox has reminded us recently¹, should not be discounted by the historian.

I would suggest, however, that Dr. Stevenson has presented a somewhat distorted picture. He seems to have based his central thesis on what I would call the 'external' features of Freemasonry and has more or less neglected any systematic consideration of 'inner', ideological features which would have contributed a more subtle, more com-

prehensive definition of 'Freemasonry'. He has presented a picture of what may have happened by way of ceremonial in the places where these early Scottish lodges met. He has concentrated on what some of these freemasons did but appears to have ignored what they may have believed. The landscape of their beliefs, attitudes and motivations, religious and ethical, is a vital part of that picture if one is to delineate what may have been the essential character of early speculative Freemasonry and to chart possible origins. The persistent worry in my mind is that I cannot see how or why enlightened men would be attracted to, and retain an interest in mere builders' initiation ceremonies which is all that Dr. Stevenson's purely Scottish evidence amounts to.

Rather we should consider, for example, the fact that at any one time during the first half of the eighteenth-century at least 25% of the Fellows of the Royal Society were members of lodges.

According to the 1723 *Lists* forty Fellows (i.e. 25% of the Society's total membership) were freemasons. Of these, twenty-three were Fellows *before* their initiation and sixteen were elected Fellows *after* their initiation. Of the former sub-group, thirteen had been elected Fellows *before* the founding of premier Grand Lodge. Examination of the 1723 *List* shows that thirty-two of these forty Fellows still *retained* their membership of their lodges and it also shows that a *further* twenty-seven Fellows had been initiated by them. Of this later intake, sixteen had been elected Fellows *before* their initiation and eleven were so elected afterwards. By 1725, then, fifty-nine Fellows (i.e. still 25% of the Society's total membership) were freemasons. Examination of the *Lists* of 1723, 1725 and 1730 shows that nine Fellows continued their memberships of their lodges throughout the decade. It is also noteworthy that these Fellows were members of at least twenty-nine different lodges, so these 'elite' memberships were not concentrated in just a few privileged lodges, nor were they simply responding to the novelty of the institution nor to the social cachet of the membership once the highest nobles in the land began to assume titular leadership of it.²

The existence of a twelve-page 'Narrative of the Free Masons Word and Signs', copied and submitted by one Thomas Martin to Sir Hans Sloane of the Royal Society, subscribed 'Copia vera' and dated therein '1659', preserved within the Society's Copy Register (Vol. IX, ff. 240–252), possibly read before the Society c. 1708 and known subsequently as B. M. Sloane MS no. 3323, would seem to indicate an interest in the phenomenon of freemasons among the Fellows. Furthermore, according to Lyon's *History of the Royal Society*, of the eighty persons with whom John Winthrop jun. (1606–1676), FRS and Governor of Connecticut, corresponded in England and Europe thirty were also FRS and of these twenty-six were freemasons³. Moreover, the catalogue of Winthrop's own library reveals his obsession with esoteric sources of antique wisdom⁴. As a corollary, the little we do know of the contents of the library of Robert Boyle, FRS, (1627–1691) also shows a similar preoccupation with such arcana.⁵ Scattered throughout the early volumes of the Society's *Philosophical Transactions* are papers which show a remarkable consistency in investigating such phenomena. There are items on the mysteries of the ancient inscriptions and languages⁶, on the significance of the alignment of pagan temples⁷, and on the burial customs of so-called 'primitive' peoples as reflected in their sepulchral monuments⁸. The recurrent obsession among Fellows with morbid pathology and human physiology is paralleled in the teaching of the Third Degree, emergent in England in the 1720s, while the authors' assumption that the originators of these inscriptions, temples and sepulchres were custodians of a hidden wisdom preserved intact throughout the ages and simply waiting for elucidation by the newly developing techniques of analytical observation, is one that is paralleled in the First Degree Charge. It may be worthwhile remembering yet another parallel between the practices in the early days of the Royal Society and those of the freemasons' lodges. The early groups of intellectuals had gathered together to 'consider of Philosophical Enquiries and such as related thereunto'⁹ and any subject was considered worthy of scrutiny except theological and political matters. Dr. John Wallis, writing in the late 1670s, recorded that 'to avoid diversion to other discourses and for some other reasons, we barred all Discourses of Divinity, of State Affairs and of News ...'¹⁰. This

prohibition, designed to ensure harmonious discussion and to minimise the changes of discord arising from members' possible political and/or religious affiliations, is paralleled explicitly in the injunctions given to the Entered Apprentice in the Charge of the First Degree in lodges.

Consider, too, the fact that large numbers of 'enlightened' middle-class professionals, like physicians, were attracted to membership of lodges¹¹. Consider the existence and concerns of groups like John Byrom's 'Cabala Club'¹², Benjamin Furly's 'Lantern'¹³ and the Spalding Gentlemen's Society¹⁴. These men were all sophisticated thinkers and many of them had already made contributions to either the scientific or literary and artistic life of the nation. They would hardly have been attracted to simplistic ceremonies however antique in their alleged origins. The symbolism, the theological concepts, the philosophical bases, and the ethical principles underlying the institutions described by Dr. Stevenson as being the origins of Freemasonry would hardly have retained their interest. I cannot imagine freemasons like James Bradley (1693–1762), the astronomer, and Brook Taylor (1635–1731), the mathematician, to name but two obvious examples, being attracted to and satisfied with mere ritual question and answer routines, oath-taking, and simplistic moralising followed by feasting and singing of sentimental songs which is really all that Dr. Stevenson's Scottish Freemasonry amounts to. The integrity of such men belies such an assumption. It must have been more than just this that persuaded such intellectually and socially well-established men to seek and retain membership of the Craft even in the face of the repeated scurrilous attacks upon it in the popular press and the spectacular 'mock masonry' processions in the capital's streets.

The *masonic* activities, beliefs and attitudes of the early freemasons may well have been much more erudite than Dr. Stevenson has been led to assume on the basis of his Scottish evidence. I think that his thesis might have benefited from his casting a net wider and so considering, for example, some purely English evidence of what some lodge's pre-occupations were during this formative period. He might have considered the activities of the Old King's Arms Lodge (now no. 28) which show members' consistent interest in practical scientific inventions as well as in the philosophical bases of morality¹⁵. Their clearly marked fascination with mensuration goes some way to explaining why there are so many references to geometry, astronomy and builders' tools throughout our rituals for these seem to reflect a then prevailing obsession with a cosmology and a teleology that had been generated largely in the wake of Newtonianism. The work of this English lodge was not unique in England as several contemporary witnesses testify¹⁶.

Consider also the incidence of lodges, like Lodge of Antiquity (now no. 2), using Books III and IV of Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, which deals with the design and construction of holy sanctuaries and the Orders of architecture respectively, as integral parts of their proceedings. The Enlightenment saw human history episodically and the classical era which had produced Vitruvius was viewed aesthetically as one of tranquil order and beauty. This would help to explain the sustained importance ascribed to *De Architectura* by early freemasons' lodges in London and elsewhere in England. That influence is reflected probably in the importance attached in the catechetical lectures on the Five Noble Orders. Furthermore, we need to recall that Vitruvius provided that potent image of Man within a circle within a square which was a long-lasting, favourite device to express diagrammatically the mathematical nature of the relationship between the microcosm (Man) and the macrocosm (the rest of the universe). It may be, therefore, that Vitruvian Man was still being perceived by the early English freemasons as the symbol of Man's direct and harmonious relationship to the cosmos and the Deity – idealised Man being seen as embodying those principles and harmonies inherent in the universe at large. If this is so then we are not so much in the builder's yard as in the alchemist's laboratory engaged on a much more mystical quest.

This vexed question about the possible origins of speculative Freemasonry may become clearer if one considers some of the basic features of the Enlightenment *mentalité*. Among the most important of these was the elevation of the faculty of human reason to a hitherto unappreciated pre-eminence. There was a new emphasis on the beneficial powers of

reason. Coupled with this was a new faith in the universal efficacy of science, especially of mathematics and geometry. An optimistic epistemology emerged which was characterised chiefly by an assumption that truth is discoverable by rational thought and objective observation/analysis of natural phenomena and that it is not only unmistakable to the rational inquirer but also ennobling and liberating. There was an equally new optimistic view of human nature itself and of human potentialities that implied a rejection of the traditional religious notion of Original Sin and which led to a tolerance of men's failings, a view also that human nature was perfectible and that genuine progress for the benefit of all was attainable. It produced a *weltanschauung* that was essentially humanity-oriented rather than God-oriented and one that was marked by an inter-faith toleration. Related directly to this was a novel 'political' assumption that all humans share the same essential nature and the same fundamental rights.

Where can we see evidence of these cultural 'shifts'? Not in the customs, regulations, and structural organisations of those very old Scottish lodges so dear to Dr. Stevenson's heart. They are much more clearly discernible, for example, in the public utterances of the many *English* clergymen who preached to congregations of freemasons throughout *England* during the eighteenth-century. The relevance of these published sermons becomes clear when we remember that they were sponsored and paid for by individual lodges to commemorate special anniversaries in their histories. My point is that the freemasons were prudent men and would hardly commission sermons from clergymen whom they knew would not reflect their own thinking. They would hardly go to the trouble of and expense of having the sermons printed if the texts of the sermons did not reflect their own beliefs, thinking and attitudes. We can assume, therefore, that these sermons genuinely do reveal, to a greater or lesser extent, the private thoughts and feelings of the freemasons. They provide us with a valuable insight into the inner recesses of the sponsors' ethical outlook. (See Appendix for a sample listing.)

Viewed from a religious standpoint, these sermons reveal their sponsors' belief that men were now free to pursue their own courses in life by the principles of enlightened Reason. To this extent they represent an inversion of the prevailing theocentricity of former ages as well as a shift in moral thinking in which Natural Religion takes precedence; Revelation (as conceived traditionally) becomes a questionable adjunct; the doctrine of Original Sin is more or less forgotten; the universe is conceived of as a largely self-regulating mechanical system governed throughout by fixed, ascertainable laws, the orderliness of which demonstrates the Originator's omnibenevolent wisdom and power and which seems to justify men's faith in its moral significance. The truly religious life here on Earth tends to be identified herein with a daily practice of moral benevolence that is based on axioms of right and wrong that are independent of tradition or opinion, as indisputable as those in geometry and detectable in much the same way. These sermons also reflect consistently the sponsors' strong belief in the capacity of human faculties, in particular in men's autonomous reason unaided by Revelation, to comprehend and master the physical world as well as attaining to fundamental religious truths such as those concerning the existence of God, the relation of the Deity to this world as Creator and His moral government of Mankind. Collectively, they convey a uniform impression of the freemasons' assurance; one that is almost as striking in the arena of their ethical thinking as Newton's discoveries in that of physics. In fact, the sermons seem to represent a sustained effort to describe the freemasons' everyday morality as being founded on bases as solid as those on which science itself appeared to the to be founded, to reflect their ordered and objective pattern of universal morality that was raised above the effects of variations in time or space and which conformed to the will of enlightened reason. They reflect a widely disseminated theology and a holistic view of the nature of society that featured an egalitarianism, a nobility of aspiration, a remarkable degree of toleration, a quiet patriotism, an optimistic perspective on the malleability and perfectibility of human nature as well as a practical and humane disposition towards beneficence and charity.

Having conducted a thorough search of the *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue*, I have yet to find anything comparable written and delivered in Scotland although I am, of

course, quite prepared to concede that some Scottish clergymen may have preached to congregations of Scottish freemasons on similar themes during the early years. Even so, if such sermons were delivered, they were not printed at the behest of those Scottish lodges. Early and in some cases very early indeed, as they are Dr. Stevenson's Scottish lodges' minute books reveal nothing of their members' systems of beliefs, their philosophical attitudes and social motivation. They provide plenty of details about the 'external' or organisational features of early lodges but very little, if anything, of the 'inner' features which are so amply illustrated by evidence from south of the Border. Dr. Stevenson has prudently, some may even allege conveniently, left himself an escape clause by voicing the question: It all depends on how widely one defines 'Freemasonry'. To limit the definition merely to the minutiae of Scottish mutual benefit societies or a trade guild as he does, is to restrict too much the scope of his inquiry.

NOTES

¹ J. Hancox: *The Byrom Collection*, 1992, pgs. 7–12.

² W. F. Firminger: 'The Lectures at the Old King's Arms Lodge', in *ACQ*, vol. 45 (1932), pgs. 254–9.

³ H. Lyons: *The Royal Society, 1660–1940*, 19.

⁴ R. S. Wilkinson: 'Catalogue of the Library of J. Winthrop jun.', in *Ambix*, vol. 11 (1963) pgs. 33–51; vol. 13 (1966), pgs. 139–186.

⁵ H. A. Feisenberger: 'The Libraries of Newton, Hooke and Boyle', in *Notes & Records Roy. Soc.*, vol. 21 (1966), esp. pgs. 52–55.

⁶ *Philosophical Transactions Abridged*, 1809, vol. III, pgs. 254f., vol. IV, pgs. 165 & 514.

⁷ *op. cit.*, vol. V, pg. 501.

⁸ *op. cit.*, vol. VI, pg. 63.

⁹ R. H. Syfret: 'The Origins of the Royal Society', in *Notes & Records Roy. Soc.*, vol. 5 (1948), pg. 76 quoting from a letter addressed by Dr. John Wallis FRS to a Dr. Smith of Magdalen College, Oxford dated 29 January 1696/7.

¹⁰ J. Wallis: *A Defence of the Royal Society*, 1678, pg. 7.

¹¹ E. H. Ackernecht: 'Great Doctors and Scientists as Freemasons', in *Clio Medica*, vol. 17 (1982), pgs. 145–146 lists 160 early physicians who were freemasons.

¹² J. Hancox: *op. cit.*, pgs. 12ff., 20, 38, 41, 174, 182, 186 + 193.

¹³ The 'Lantern' gatherings invariably stimulated 'delightful, subtle, profitable and solid converse' (J. Locke: *Correspondence*, vol. III letter no. 877 dated 14/24 November 1686, pgs. 68–70 to P. van Limborch). Occasionally there was 'vigorous argument' (*op. cit.*, letter no. 1034 dated 24 March/3 April 1688, pgs. 422–4, van Limborch to J. L.). There are no less than 38 letters in vol. III of the *Correspondence* alone which refer to the meetings of Furly's 'Lantern'. Benjamin Furly (1636–1714) played a prominent part also in a 'Friday' Club 'Liberate et Concordia' in his adopted Rotterdam (see R. Porter & M. Teich (eds.): *Enlightenment in a National Context*, 1981, p. 69, Cf. W. I. Hull: *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam*, 1941, pgs. 88–95). The range of Furly's personal intellectual and spiritual pursuits is shown by the content of his library: see *Bibliotheca Furleiana*, 1714. A more detailed picture of the activities of these fellow-inquirers is presented in P. J. Buijnters: 'Les Lumieres hollandaises', in *Studies in Voltaire & the 18th Cent.*, vol. 87 (1972), pgs. 197–215.

¹⁴ D. M. Owen & S. W. Woodward (eds.): *The Minute Books of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society* (Lincoln Rec. Soc. Pubs. vol. 73), 1981, pgs. xiii, xv, xvi & 51f. (e.g. papers and discussions on art, lost languages, natural phenomena, ornithology, surgery).

¹⁵ W. F. Firminger: *op. cit.*

¹⁶ e.g. Bro. Francis Drake FRS (1695–1770) of York in 1726 noted that '... in most lodges in London and in several other parts of this kingdom, a Lecture on some points of Geometry or Architecture is given at every meeting' ('A Speech Deliver'd ... at a Grand Lodge ... in the City of York ...', in D. Knoop *et alia* (eds.): *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, 1978, pg. 207). Cp. W. Smith: *Book M – or Masonry Triumphant*, 1736, Preface & pgs. 18–22. See also Anon.: *A Word to the Wise*, 1795; C. Dyer: *The Grand Stewards and their Lodge*, 1985, pgs. 25–8; *Minutes of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of England, 1723–1739*, *QCA* vol. 10 (1913), pg. 260.

APPENDIX

A Few Examples of Published Sermons Preached before Lodges of Freemasons (Main Source: BL/ESTC)

28 December	1734	——. Robinson	Bridge End Chapel, N/Cle	unnamed
24 June	1738	J. Bate	St. Paul's, Deptford	?
28 December	1747	J. Price	St. John Baptist, Bristol	?
27 December	1750	Anon.	St. John's, Gloucester	unnamed, no. 157
	1752	J. Moseley	?, Gloucester	?
26 October	1752	Anon.	St. Mildred's, Poultry	?
21 June	1764	——. Barwise	St. John's, N/Cle	St. John's, no. 225
27 December	1764	T. Davenport	St. John's, Birmingham	St. Paul's, no. 109
	1765	J. Whitmarsh	Taunton, P.C.	St. George's, no. 315
27 December	1765	T. Bagnall	St. John's, Birmingham	St. Paul's, no. 64
	1769	R. Wallace	——, N/Cle	St. John's, no. 225
27 December	1769	R. Miln	——, Carlisle	——, no. 369
	1770	J. Caddington	——, Exeter	Union, no. 370
27 June	1772	J. Gower	Five Fields Chapel, London	?
31 August	1772	C.J.	Bury St. Edmunds P.C.	Royal Edmund, no. 437
24 June	1774	J. Grant	Greenwich P.C.	unnamed, no. A93
27 December	1775	R. Green	Highbridge Chapel, N/Cle	St. Nicholas', no. 313
24 June	1777	W. M. Leake	St. Peter's, Colchester	Angel, no. 64
16 October	1777	——. Scott	New FMs' Hall, N/Cle	St. John's, no. 184
	1778	W. Fryer	All Saints, York	?
22 December	1778	J. Parker	Rotherham P.C.	Druidical, no. '109'
28 December	1778	W. Johnson	St. Martin's, York	PGL of York
	1779	J. Smith	Deal Chapel	PGL of Kent
24 June	1779	V. L. Bernard	St. Mary Tower, Ipswich	British Union, no. 214
23 June	1780	T. Crane	St. John's, Chester	Golden Lion, no. 166
23 April	1781	W. Johnson	Doncaster P.C.	St. George's, no. 433
27 December	1781	H. Shuttleworth	Preston P.C.	Amity, no. 266
	1784	J. Hodgets	Dudley P.C.	Harmonic, no. 457
26 June	1786	T. Crane	St. John's, Chester	Golden Lion, no. 133
24 June	1788	C. Milne	Camberwell P.C.	Antients' G.L.
27 December	1788	D. Turner	——	——
1 July	1789	——. Baldwin	St. George's, Wigan	Sincerity, no. 492
17 September	1790	W. Watkins	Frome P.C.	Royal Clarence, no. 560
20 March	1791	W. Butler	St. Bride's, Fleet Street	?
	1792	W. Watkins	St. Cuthbert's, Wells	?
24 June	1792	R. Harper	Charles P.C., Plymouth	Unity, no. 137
24 June	1793	J. Inwood	Gravesend P.C.	Freedom, no. 89
1 January	1794	M. Wrigley	Ashton-under-Lyne P.C.	Minerva, no. 536
19 May	1794	J. Inwood	West Malling P.C.	True + Faithful, no. 34
29 July	1794	J. Penn	Beccles P.C.	Apollo, no. 544
27 December	1794	——. Watson	——, Lancaster	St. John's, no. 534
18 May	1795	J. Inwood	——, Faversham	Harmony, no. 176
16 May	1796	J. Inwood	——, Dartford	Emulation, no. 535
February	1797	J. Inwood	——, Woolwich	Perfect, no. 552
19 April	1797	J. F. Pearson	——, Lewes	South Saxon, no. 557
5 June	1797	J. Inwood	——, Chatham	Kentish L. of Antiquity, no. 10
9 October	1797	P. Dickinson	St. Mary's, Scarborough	Old Globe, no. A267
12 December	1797	J. Simpson	St. John's, N/Cle	PGL of N'Land
29 December	1797	J. Inwood	Northfleet P.C.	United Friendship, no. 329
3 September	1798	J. Inwood	Ramsgate P.C.	Jacob's, no. 570
10 September	1798	G. Wolley	St. Mary's, Scarborough	Old Globe, no. A267

27 June	1799	J. Inwood	Maidstone P.C.	Fortitude, no. 341
	1800	W. Haswell	Tynemouth P.C.	?
	1800	J. Simpson	North Shields P.C.	PGL of N'Land
28 August	1800	J. Rodwell	Trinity, Hall	Rodney, no. 351
27 May	1801	M. J. Naylor	Batley P.C.	Fidelity, no. 512
	1811	J. Inwood	St. Martin's, Birmingham	Shakespeare, no. 501

P.C. = parish church

Professor Stevenson replied:

Bro. Robert Gilbert exhorts us to be more adventurous in casting our nets more widely. That is exactly what I've sought to do. But it seems Brother Gilbert has strong views as to which new directions the net should be cast in, and that the rich fishing grounds of early Scottish masonic records are to be ignored. Folk who come up with new ideas are likely to be seen as infuriating. I don't set out to infuriate: but I prefer that response to apathy.

Bro. Brodsky begins with a definition of Freemasonry. As with a great many historical problems, in masonic history controversies can pass imperceptibly from arguments based on research and evidence to those that are really about definitions. This is certainly present in the present debate. Bro. Brodsky's definition, if accepted, leads undoubtedly to the conclusion that Freemasonry began in England. But is that definition at all biased? Could it be said that it was biased, an exclusive definition which is designed to exclude the Scots? For example, the absolute necessity of having a Grand Lodge. Scotland does not get one until 1736: therefore 'Freemasonry' need not be sought in Scotland before that date. But this is ludicrous. Before 1736 there were some very old lodges, and many newer ones were being formed; they practised the three degrees, and used in ritual the 'Mason Word' which has enough similarity with later rituals to be regarded as freemasonic (if there is such a word). And the members of these lodges were drawn from a wide range of social groups – though a few remained purely operative in membership. But on Bro. Brodsky's definition they cannot be called freemasons – even if that is what they call themselves – copying that word from England.

Quite where Bro. Brodsky's passage on 'lodges' mentioned in medieval times fits in to the argument I don't know. Taking them to be direct ancestors of freemasonic lodges is indeed 'a very dangerous game'. But I dealt with the problem of the medieval lodges in my book though unfortunately I couldn't squeeze it into my paper. I came to conclusions similar to Bro. Brodsky's.

As to patriotic bias, I was aware in writing my books that I needed to guard against this. lest it influence my interpretation of the evidence. Undoubtedly seeing so much of the origins of Freemasonry as lying in Scotland, together with me being a Scot, could be interpreted as likely to lead to patriotic bias. Is it not for me to decide whether I'm guilty or not. There is, however, equally the possibility of bias on the part of those who read my books or hear my talks. Is it mere coincidence that Scottish freemasons have generally welcomed my interpretation, while response in England has, been, shall I say, hesitant? Some Scots, however, have gone a bit over the top when they heard what I have to say, and while I thought I was bringing them new ideas, they have assured me that they have always known that Freemasonry originated in Scotland! Now that is indeed 'patriotic bias'.

The evidence Bro. Cryer notes from Chester and York sounds most interesting, though I'd like to know what is meant by 'freemasons': initiates, or working stone masons?

Miss Hinze ends her short but not sweet comments by looking forward to my reply. It's

an extraordinary little farrago of abuse that she has submitted, in the course of which she comprehensively shoots herself in the foot. She states that ‘Perhaps some prior knowledge would have been advantageous, but it shouldn’t be necessary’. On what basis then can she criticize my work? If I went into a lecture on advanced nuclear physics I wouldn’t understand a word – but I wouldn’t blame the lecturer for it. ‘I couldn’t recall one valid point made by him’. Well of course she couldn’t. Her own confession of total ignorance of the subject suggests she couldn’t tell a ‘valid’ point from a banana. As to the supposed lack of substance, a lecturer has to craft his talk to suit the intended audience. I worked on the assumption that the majority of my audience would consist of men who were masons, and that all of them would have some knowledge of masonic history, and some would be eminent masonic scholars, it being a research lodge. Therefore there was a good deal I need not say, and therefore concentrated on a few main strands of thought. Miss Hinze perhaps likes lectures full of detailed ‘facts’ to pass the sufficiency test. I find them indigestible.

Miss Hinze describes my audience on this occasion as ‘hostile’: ‘Never before have I witnessed such a merciless verbal battering’. This is pure fantasy: No such battering took place. Was she at the same lecture as me?

Bro. Litvine claims my lecture was sarcastic in tone, that the argument was facile: ‘we despise any attempt to divide us by spurious arguments’. Only initiates can really understand Freemasonry. This is the self-satisfied type of conclusion that often arises in religious history: ‘If you’re not “one of us”, sharing the same faith, you are not qualified to write on our history’. My response is that initiates clearly do have special advantages over non-initiates, but that the latter have advantages over the former. It may be that those outside a movement can stand back and produce new perspectives without being hampered by being so close to ingrained beliefs and traditional assumptions.

Bro. Litvine falls into the category of those who are so indoctrinated by membership of the movement. He is shocked by any questioning of the magic year of 1717, but makes it clear that his first reaction is based not on historical evidence, but on faith, and on fear that questioning it would divide masons among themselves – something which I am evidently and deliberately attempting to do. As occasionally in dealing with religious historians, my response to the worries of the faithful is that they are welcome to maintain their faiths but any faith worth having should be able to accept rethinking aspects of that faith’s history when the evidence requires it.

Bro. Wallace McLeod. Eureka!

Bro. McNulty provides an instance of the way in which, as I said in response to Bro. Litvine, being a non-mason masonic historian is sometimes a disadvantage: I’ve misunderstood the significance of Death in the Third Degree. On reflection, however he displays an example of the opposite problem – of the mason historian who *is* a mason. He contradicts me with the certainty of the faithful, indicating my interpretation is wrong because it does not conform to modern masonic ritual. He may be right: but it is *historical* evidence that is needed to prove the point.

Bro. Markham argues that I could – and should – have included more on early English Freemasonry in my *Origins* book. A valid point, and it could be said that this inevitably puts English masons at a disadvantage. They get half a chapter, Scotland’s masons eight and a half chapters. My excuses are that the book does by its title proclaim that it is mainly concerned with Scotland, and that publishers were muttering about word limits by the time I got to my final chapter!

I'm interested in Bro. Newman's suggestion that the aftermath of the move of the Scots court to England might be one of the mechanisms whereby masonic ideas filtered through from one country to the other. Another mechanism may well have been the civil wars of the 1640s. It is after all in that decade that we get the first evidence of initiations in England, with Robert Moray and Alexander Hamilton being initiated into a Scots lodge meeting at Newcastle, and Elias Ashmole at Warrington. It was a decade of great intellectual ferment in England – as thousands of printed pamphlets appeared espousing various causes and ideas. Could these have included a masonic element? Alas, we have no evidence.

Dr Palmer suggests that I underrated my audience: she may be right. It is hard to judge in advance how knowledgeable an audience will be. As to not having time to develop my thesis, I agree. It took two books to develop my ideas: compressing that into a 35 minute talk was not easy, and I consciously decided to concentrate on general themes so as not to burden the audience by packing the talk with details.

Unfortunately I have very little interest in sport, so the cricket analogy of Bro. Peabody is partly lost on me. I didn't cite sources in detail. What do you expect in 35 minutes? Perhaps I should have brought my books down to London and read them very fast. Rather oddly Bro. Peabody first chides me for having so few bibliographical references, then implies strong distaste to follow up such references as there are by reading my books. His own research on Huguenots and early Freemasonry sounds most interesting, though frustratingly he does not indicate what period he is talking about. The closing sentence suggests a childish spite on the lines of 'I've got more evidence than you have'. Anyway, he has just said that he has not seen my evidence, so how can he know?

Bro Paul Rich suggests that further surprises may well be found in early masonic history. I agree entirely: that's the way the study of history goes. In some ways it's frustrating but everyone who writes history has to accept that new evidence may appear that will undermine his or her interpretations and conclusions. On the other hand, this is what keeps history alive and fascinating. Bro Rich points out the huge archives that exist which might possibly contain a few masonic references – if you took many years to work through them. One such source is the Scottish Registers of Deeds, which runs to many hundreds of volumes, some of which contain indentures or contracts between stonemasons and the parents of boys being apprenticed to the craft. Harry Carr in his paper on apprenticeship (*AQC* 69 (1956), pp. 46–85) traced five Scottish indentures: I've now got over forty. (I'm not trying to denigrate Carr; he is an historian for whom I have much respect). Most of the new masonic indentures, incidentally are not my discoveries: two scholars in Edinburgh who are working through the registers volunteered to send me all the references to masons that I found.

Intriguingly, a few of the new-found indentures make it a condition of the contract that the apprentice should be entered in the master's lodge. Clearly the fathers of the boys concerned knew of the existence of lodges, and that belonging to one was beneficial to them in carrying out their craft. How widely was the existence of the lodges known to the public?

Bro. Sandbach asks why did so many developments in the craft in the seventeenth century take place in Scotland rather than England, and why did guilds continue in Scotland at this time? I think at least part of the answer lies in Scotland being economically, and in some respects socially, backward relative to England. In England the medieval framework of guilds etc. which had organized and controlled craft production and trade had largely collapsed under the strains of a fast changing economy: in Scotland much of it remained in place. When (begging a lot more questions) the Scottish lodges began to organize, it

was natural to take as a model to build on the incorporations (English guilds) to which they belonged. On the question of *why* non-operatives joined lodges in the seventeenth century, I confess that I don't have any answer that would satisfy me, let alone anyone else. Curiosity to see what went on in these secret organizations of craftsmen? Interest in their rituals?

Bro. Walter Sharman notes of lodges in a 1736 publication 'Almost certainly they would have originated prior to 1700; in some cases this would probably have gone back many more years'. This is not an argument: it's an assertion with no evidence. I've come across this type of logic before, in a nineteenth century masonic historian who studied Aberdeen Lodge records of the late seventeenth century. He then pontificated that the records showed a lodge in such a stage of development that it must have been in existence a century at least before the records which survive. Piffle. And equally in Bro. Sharman's case. Finding lodges existing in the 1730s provides no evidence whatever to support the case that there was 'wide spread masonic activities certainly in the North of England prior to 1700'.

Bro. Michael Spurr fears I may have massaged the facts. I like the ingenious turning of one of my arguments against me: If as I argued the Art of Memory was employed by early masons, then surely this is why there are so few English seventeenth century records: they memorized everything. But if the evidence concerning the Art of Memory is very limited, unfortunately it is lacking altogether in England. 'Better evidence' Bro. Spurr wants. So do I! Is the assumption that while the English could master the Art, the Scots were so thick that they had to write everything down?

Bro. Trevor Stewart is deeply worried about my having concentrated on the externals of Freemasonry. In some respects the heart of Freemasonry lies in its rituals and beliefs. Agreed. But the problem lies in evidence – or rather in lack of evidence. All one can do is piece together fragments of evidence gleaned from the rituals of the mason word and a few other sources. 'Mere builders' initiation ceremonies'. I hope I treat my subjects with more respect.

The evidence of Royal Society records showing how many fellows were freemasons is important. I knew a great many of the fellows joined lodges, but failed to deduce that it was unlikely that the mason – fellows listed in 1723 had all been initiated after the founding of the Grand Lodge in 1717. This is a legitimate use of retrospective evidence. Yes, I would accept that I delved more deeply into Scottish primary sources than English ones – though not, I hope, to the extent of leaving out English references to bias my case. I was writing basically of Scottish Freemasonry, and it was as writing progressed that I realized that I'd have to tackle the 'English dimension'. I'm surprised to learn that my definition of Freemasonry limits it to 'the minutiae of Scottish mutual benefit societies or a trade guild'. That is simply nonsense. So is the sly comment that I 'prudently, some may even allege conveniently, left [my]self an escape clause' by raising problems in definitions of Freemasonry. This leaves me flabbergasted. Does he not try to defend the terms he uses when he works? If not, that may explain why he batters me with eighteenth-century FRSs and sermons (and indeed, falls into the trap of descending to the dreaded *minutiae*) when it is the seventeenth century which is in question. This is another example of retrospective evidence running wild. Perhaps he has neglected to define his centuries.

Well, I was warned by a number of sources that Quatuor Coronati audiences tended to be carnivorous where their speakers were concerned. I now know they were right. My theory is that the members of the lodge find the strain of acting fraternally to each other

so strong that they welcome any chance to have a go at some 'fair game'. But of course I did not come to the lodge expecting agreement.

To speak to the lodge was an honour, and I'm particularly happy to have been the first non-mason to address the lodge.