

## **The Installation Ceremony**

**Brother N. Grant MacLeod PM.**

Secretary, Lodge Houston St. Johnstone No. 242

The ceremony (which is not considered a degree) was brought from England in 1872 and the present ritual is a modern invention. Even in England there is no trace of a ceremony until after the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. Scottish lodges have records of the main officer being elected, but there has not been any mention of a ceremony in the minute books (as far as I'm aware). Even in my own lodge as late as 1876, two masters from a neighbouring lodge gave the 'past master's degree' to a brother of the lodge after the brethren retired - prior to that the Chair had been filled with deacons and wardens if the master wasn't present. Indeed, there are many instances of masters being installed in front of the brethren prior to 1850. In these cases, the past masters gathered round the new master to whisper a word - there was no inner working.

Although many brethren find Grand Lodge too traditional in their outlook, it is obvious that in the 1870s, this change must have been revolutionary. Why was it introduced? Very simply, it was probably because Scottish masters and past masters would not know the inner workings of England and (embarrassingly) had to retire. However, I'm sure there are other reasons. One point to note is that it cannot be assumed that all masters and past masters outside Scotland are installed masters. In England, there is an extended working that covers the same as a Scottish Installation (with the exception of the Q. of S.), but most signs are not obligatory since not all lodges use the extended working. In the U.S., very few lodges have any kind of ceremony at all and the master is installed with all the brethren present (including the ladies and children!). There is no inner working and the master will not know any details about an installed master. Again, the differences make masonic meetings interesting for visitors, remembering there is no right or wrong way and adverse comments should not be made.

A brief history of the installation ceremony is more than adequate. It dates from approximately 1722 with the Duke of Wharton constituting a new lodge which must include the installation of a master. As Can points out, The Grand Lodge of Scotland had just been formed and the third degree was relatively unknown, 'it is difficult to accept that the ceremony had any esoteric content ...' Unfortunately, most lodges ignored this ceremony, particularly since Fellowcrafts were permitted to become Master of a lodge. The earliest esoteric description appears in the exposure Three Distinct Knocks in 1760 when mention is made about the word and grip. William Preston wrote a famous book entitled -Illustrations of Masonry in 1775 and much of the content was adopted by lodges. This outlined the ceremony in a separate room of installed masters only - possibly the first evidence of a Board being formed. It is actually surprising today that considering the number of different practices that existed, there tends to be a reasonably uniform ritual in Britain although formats can vary from province to province.

### **The Future**

The installation ceremony appears to work and is successful if attendance figures are taken into account. Therefore, I see no need to alter the ceremony. However, many brethren find reading the Aims and Relationships of the Craft tedious and usually switch off. Perhaps a reduced set containing the same elements would be sufficient and have more chance of being remembered - at the moment, few brethren can list more than two of the aims so what is the

point of reading them? Give them something shorter and it may be remembered after all, they are important or are they?

Traditionally, lodges held onto good masters whereas today, it is an honour for a brother who has 'done his time' rather than ability. I realise this may be a generalisation and many lodges take great care in choosing a master and they are to be congratulated. Unfortunately, many lodges automatically elect the next in line and often suffer the following year (and this also applies to Provincial Grand Lodges where the Depute usually takes over no matter how little respect he may have from the daughter lodges). This has arisen due to lodges becoming structured with meetings monthly, bimonthly or more and the need to fill offices is essential to avoid the dreaded gap. These are the sentiments of Brother George Draffen writing in the Grand Lodge Year Book 1964. Although this was nearly 40 years ago, it is still applicable today. Do we not learn? One point he mentions is probably true in every lodge. Look through the list of past masters, possibly 50 to 100 years ago; there you will find some prominent men who held positions of responsibility in the community and work. Are today's masters of the same quality? He believed that 'very many are, but all too many lodges elect the master as a reward for filling the junior offices - regardless of his abilities as a leader'. This view was 40 years ago!

It is this aspect of leadership that makes a good master. Ritual can be given to brethren competent in that side - as long as a master can open and close his lodge, the rest is 'up for grabs'. The master's job is to 'rule his lodge' and to 'guide his brethren'. If he can do parts of the ritual, great, but it is not the main remit of his position. I'm sure every mason has been to a lodge where the master is unsure of the procedure including the ritual and it is often embarrassing to be there. Too often I hear the master say to a candidate after his first degree, 'remember the most important lesson you have learned is caution' and then possibly charity. If that is the most important lesson of the E.A. degree, I've obviously missed something. A good master must give words of wisdom or encouragement to the brethren and candidates and motivate them to seek more light (i.e. more knowledge).

Alternatively, good masters can be lost after their year (or two year) since another brother must(?) take over. Perhaps now is the time for lodges (not Grand Lodge) to review their structure to allow masters to be flexible. I'll look at three possible aspects: the election of a master, visiting and retention.

- *Election* - why does a potential master need to go through the offices? Well, he doesn't, at least not according to Grand Lodge laws. Lodges may prefer this requirement to ensure proficiency with the ritual and the running of a lodge - as we've all seen this does not follow just by going through offices. Very few lodges elect masters from the body of the lodge. Why? I would like to hear some valid reasons. If a man is suitably qualified then he should be eligible to take the Chair. Qualified here implies both reasonably knowledgeable about the Craft and also displays leadership qualities. This latter point could be a separate paper, but it is vital to lodges. The days of brethren 'putting up' with a poor master are over - they vote with their feet and do other things. Attendance figures prove this.

- *Visiting* - in my own lodge the master is expected to visit 3 or 4 times a week (maybe more). However, is this reasonable to expect today? Obviously, the commitment now is very different from 100 years ago work shifts are greater, family ties involve the father more, there are far more lodges to actually visit and so on - it is difficult to act as master for longer periods. As a result of travel being made easier, masters are expected to go farther afield. I visit lodges on holiday all over Scotland, but that doesn't make it right - I had the time when I was master and my wife drove a lot - we didn't have a child then. Visiting is important and enjoyable, but it doesn't make a man a better mason. Freemasonry is about enjoyment - putting extra pressure on

a busy master reduces this enjoyment. This puts off many men who would make a good master. Why can't visiting be delegated to office-bearers if a master is unavailable. After all, some lodges in the 18th and 19th centuries were governed by the Depute Master since the master was a landowner who could not always attend. (I'm not saying the master shouldn't attend his own meetings since the lodge must be lead from the front).

- *Retention* - if a master is good, lodges would benefit from his guidance for another year or more. However, the commitment is too great now for this to be realistic. For example, Lord Elgin in the Province of Fife & Kinross has served nearly 50 years as P.G.M. and the reports (I've heard) from brethren in his province are all good - he's a good leader who is respected. We need more of this, but with the nature of the job today, it is unlikely to get a man who would be able to do the same period with a full time job. However, if the provinces were smaller and more manageable then this may be a possibility. Struggling lodges would also benefit since Provincial may be able to help them directly. (For example, some lodges in Glasgow have formed the Western Districts group which support each other - a province within a province? Does this suggest Glasgow is too large?). There are too many Provincial Office-bearers who do nothing apart from attend installations and annual visits - so what? Installations are well attended and annual visits are boring. They don't manage - they possibly perform basic administration duties or help at consecration ceremonies or the like. Completely unnecessary. We don't have leaders that lead. Likewise in daughter lodges, must the master always do the obligation - no, but perhaps if it was compact and sensible then it is possible. Certainly, if a lodge wanted a master to do three, five or more years then a smaller province would help reduce the burden and travelling costs.

There is no easy answer to producing good masters, but certainly help from ALL the brethren is essential and not 'stab him in the back' when a mistake is made. How easy we forget the tenets of the Craft! Charity or relief is not just in monetary terms, but being there for a brother. If we all try to put Freemasonry's principles into practice and forget the road to glory, jewels and neglecting the welfare of our own brothers, perhaps the Craft would have more confident leaders.