

THE FIVE NOBLE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

A STUDY FOR THE ENQUIRING FREEMASON

THE FIVE NOBLE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

WHY DO THESE NOBLE ORDERS FEATURE SO PROMINENTLY TODAY IN FREEMASONRY IN GENERAL AND IN THE FURNISHINGS AND RITUALS OF OUR LODGES IN PARTICULAR?

- 1) First, it is my purpose to explore the Architectural History of these five Orders, and
- 2) Secondly, having established their architectural significance, to show the close connection between operative Masonry and architecture on the one hand and accepted and speculative Freemasonry on the other.

My research and the decision to make this presentation had its genesis during a visit in 2006 to the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich on the River Thames in London. Between 1873 and 1998, this was the location of the Staff College of the Royal Navy. I was over awed by the magnificence of the architecture of those venerable buildings that adorn this sprawling complex. For the first time I was struck by the several columns which, as it turned out , are replicas of what I am accustomed to seeing in our Temple, Freemasons' Hall, Company Path, but only, in this instance, on a much grander scale. The majesty and grandeur of the columns of the Painted Hall and the Chapel, to name only two of the several buildings, have forever left an indelible impression on my mind. In the days that immediately followed my tour of the Old Royal Naval College, examples of these Orders of architecture suddenly seemed to be evident everywhere in London, and yet, hitherto, I was oblivious of them.

My consciousness was indeed stirred. I began seeing examples of the five Orders in buildings and structures such as:

- Ø The Monument on the bank of the Thames- an example of a free standing Doric column
- Ø Chelsea Hospital- an example of the Doric Order
- Ø The Grand Lodge on Great Queen Street-the two great pillars which flank the principal entrances are highly decorative derivatives of the Doric.

Ø The Archway Screen of Hyde Park Corner-example of the Ionic

Ø The portico of the famous Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square-a splendid example of the Corinthian Order, and finally

Ø The even more famous and well known St Paul's Cathedral- where in the masterly hands of that renowned and venerable architect, Sir Christopher Wren, the Corinthian occurs on the lower storey of the facades and on the upper storey the Composite Orders.

The next logical question that arose in my mind was: "Why are they so prominently a part of the architecture of Masonic Temples? At Grand Lodge in London, they are featured both in the façade of the building as well as the interior of Grand Temple.

Historical Background

First, let us look at the term "Noble". According to Perce J. George of Mannum Lodge #97, Grand Lodge, South Australia, a diligent search through many encyclopedias, dictionaries and books of architecture, has failed to reveal the term and this suggests that it is only used in Masonic literature, but it is not conclusive.

However, Mannum asserts that Mitchell Beazley's Pocket Guide to Architecture refers to these five Orders as "Classical" suggesting that both these terms are synonymous.

What is an "Order"? George Savage in his "Extract from Dictionary of Antiques" proffers this definition:

"An 'Order' is an architectural term which comprises the classical column with its capital and superimposed horizontal entablature." The column by itself is not the Order.

They were strict rules which governed the relationship between diameter and height of columns of each Order and the proportions of intercolumniation.

The column proper is divided into three named parts:

Ø Base-a series of annulets or ring-like mouldings. The portion of the column on which the Shaft is placed

Ø Shaft- may either be fluted (having long round grooves) or unfluted or plain as are the shafts in the Temple of Freemasons' Hall, Company Path.

Ø Capital – the carved head or upper part of a column superimposed on the shaft which, by its design, is the manner by which each Order is recognized and distinguished. This is developed later in the presentation.

In addition, the definition of the following architectural terms must be noted:

Ø Entablature- the entire horizontal superstructure supported by the row of columns and on which the arch of the ceiling is mounted, comprising the architrave, frieze and cornice (distinct horizontal layers, one on top the other running the length of the entablature). This detail is not evident in the design of Company Path's.

Ø Pilaster- a square pillar projecting from a wall. Refer to the western and eastern walls of the Temple, Freemasons' Hall, Company Path, for examples of this.

Ø Abacus- a square or rectangular member interposed between the capital of a column and the superstructure it supports (in other words, akin to a shim)

Bro Alex Horne in his 1964 Prestonian Lecture reminds us that from the first formation of society, order in architecture may be traced. When the rigour of seasons obliged men to contrive shelter from the inclemency of the weather, we learn that they first planted trees on end, and then laid others across, to support a covering. The bands which connected those trees at top and bottom is said to have given rise to the idea of the base and capital of pillars; and, from this simple hint, originally proceeded the more improved art of architecture

The five Orders of architecture are thus classed:

Tuscan
Doric
Ionic
Corinthian, and
Composite

What we have in the Company Path Temple is not strictly representational of the Orders as there is an absence of the entablature with distinguishing design.

The above listing ranges them not chronologically, but in increasing order of complexity.

The Doric, Ionic and Corinthian are the original three Orders invented by the Greeks and are considered as representing Strength, Wisdom and Beauty.

The Tuscan and Composite are of Roman origin.

The Orders, as used by the Greeks, were essentially constructive. The Romans, on the other hand, frequently used them as purely decorative features, without any structural

value; although they continued to use them constructively, as in the colonnades of forums and temples.

1) Tuscan Order



Tuscan

The Tuscan is the first of the five Orders of Architecture. It is the most simple and solid of the five orders. It was invented in Tuscany, whence it derives its name. Its column is seven diameters high; and its capital, base and entablature have few mouldings. The simplicity of the construction of this column renders it eligible where ornament would be superfluous.

Sir Henry Wotton in his *Elements of Architecture* describes it as “a plain, massive, rural pillar, resembling a sturdy well-limbed labourer, homely clad”

2) Doric Order



Doric

The Doric is the second of the Five Orders of Architecture and the first and simplest of the Greek Orders. It is plain and natural and is the most ancient. Its column is eight diameters high and has seldom any ornaments on base or capital, except mouldings; though the frieze is distinguished by triglyphs and metopes, and the triglyphs compose the ornaments of the frieze. The solid composition of this order gives it a preference in structures where strength and a noble simplicity

are chiefly required.

The Doric is the best proportioned of all the orders.

Historic tradition has it that, in about 1,000 B.C., the Dorians, a tribe from the region to the north of the Gulf of Corinth, invaded and conquered southern Greece. The Dorian's, then being the dominant race, gave their name to the style of architecture.

3) Ionic Order



Ionic

This is the third of the Five Orders of Architecture and the second of the three Greek Orders. It bears a kind of a mean proportion between the most solid and delicate orders. Its column is nine diameters high; its capital is adorned with volutes, and its cornice has denticles. There is both delicacy and ingenuity displayed in this pillar; the invention of which is attributed to the Ionians, as the famous Temple of Diana at Ephesus was of this order. It is said to have been formed after the model of an agreeable young woman, of an elegant shape,

dressed in her hair; as a contrast to the Doric order which was formed after that of a strong, robust man.

4) Corinthian Order



Corinthian

This is the fourth of the Five Orders of Architecture and the third of the three Greek Orders.

The Corinthian is the richest of the five orders, is deemed a master piece of art, and was invented at Corinth by Callimachus. Its column is ten diameters high, and its capital is adorned with two rows of leaves, and eight volutes or scrolls akin to a ram's horns(as compared with four volutes on Company Path's version), which sustain the abacus. The frieze is ornamented with curious devices, the cornice with denticles and modillions. This order is used in stately and superb structures.

Legend has it that Callimachus took the hint of the capital of this pillar from the following remarkable circumstance:

“A freeborn maiden of Corinth was attacked by an illness and died. After her burial, her nurse collected a few things which used to give the girl pleasure while she was alive, put them into a basket and placed it on her grave, covering the basket with a roof-tile for protection .It happened that the basket was placed over the root of an acanthus. When the plant grew, the stalks and leaves curled gracefully around the basket, until reaching the tile they were forced to bend downwards into volutes. Callimachus, a sculptor and a worker in Corinthian bronze, passed by the grave and observed the basket with the leaves growing round it. Delighted with the novel style and form, he set about imitating the figure and built for the Corinthians some columns with capitals designed after that pattern, and determined the proportions to be allowed in finished works of the Corinthian Order. The vase of the capital he made to represent the basket; the abacus, the tile; and the volute, the bending leaves”

5) Composite Order



Composite

The Composite, contrived by the Romans, is the last of the Five Orders.

It is compounded of the other orders. Its capital has the two row leaves of the Corinthian, and the volutes of the Ionic. Its column has the quarter-round as the Tuscan and Doric orders, is ten diameters high, and its cornice has denticles or simple modillions. This pillar is generally found in buildings where strength, elegance and beauty are displayed.

According to Horne, the ancient and original orders of architecture, revered by Masons, are no more than three, the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. To these the Romans have added two, the Tuscan, which they made plainer than the Doric, and the Composite, which was more ornamental, if not more beautiful, than the Corinthian. The first three orders alone, however, show invention and particular character, and essentially differ from each other: the two others have nothing but what is borrowed, and differ only accidentally; the Tuscan is the Doric in its earliest state; and the Composite is the Corinthian enriched with the Ionic. To the Greeks, and not to the Romans, we are indebted for what is great, judicious and distinct in architecture.

As a general comment, it must be noted that whereas the shafts of all five Orders are fluted with the exception of the Tuscan, the shafts of the Company Path Temple are all plain or unfluted.

Influence on Operative Masonry

How did these Five Orders impact on the mason craft? Although not well understood outside an enthusiastic few (and not always by them), the Five Orders exercised a considerable fascination, even if sometimes indirect on craftsmen of all kinds, apart from architects and interior decorators.

The Augustan Age (1700-1750) was intensely interested in Architecture. To satisfy the needs of architects and builders, and the curiosity of the dilettanti, numerous books on the subject had been and continued to be published. Many indeed were devoted to the one subject of the Orders and gave in great detail particulars of their dimensions, modular relationships, proportions and so on. Anderson in his Constitutions extolled the virtues of the “Augustan Stile” and poured scorn on “Gothick Ignorance” and the “Confusion and Impropropriety of Gothick Buildings.

Masonic Symbolism of the Orders

Why these Orders of Architecture are so intimately linked with speculative Masonry? Why do we today see replicas of them in our Temples, read of them in our rituals and see them as part of our furnishing?

We are reminded of the close connection between early accepted and speculative Freemasonry on the one hand and operative Masonry and architecture on the other. Bro T.O. Haunch, S.W., who in moving the vote of thanks at the end of Bro Atkins’ 1968 Prestonian Lecture had this to say and I quote:

“Intelligent and educated men of the eighteenth century, then, took a keen interest in building and in development and refinement of styles of the late Renaissance, and it is not surprising that many of them, as patrons of building works no doubt, should have been attracted to Masons and Freemasonry. Nor is it surprising, in the circumstances, that the

five noble Orders should have been grafted on to the developing system of speculative Freemasonry.

Operative masonry, and accepted Freemasonry following it, already had a tradition of pillars and columns. There were the two pillars of the Old Charges, the one which would not burn, and the other which could not sink, which were the means of preserving the Seven Liberal Sciences for posterity from God's vengeance by fire and water. Then there was the basic importance of, and interest in, the porchway pillars of KST. To these the Augustan speculative Freemasons proceeded to add the columns of the five noble Orders, and to develop their symbolism, especially that of the three most celebrated, the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, as the traditional supports of the Lodge".

Influence on Speculative Masonry

1) I quote from Bro Alex Horne's 1964 Prestonian Lecture:

"With the coming of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the intellectual and religious mind of Europe had taken a turn, and the formation of our own Grand Lodge in 1717 had thus brought with it almost inevitably the injection into the new Speculative Masonry of the elements, not of the "barbarous" and now unpopular Gothic, but of the revived and universally acclaimed classical architecture, of which the Five Orders were at once the symbol, the epitome and the expression.

The influence of the "accepted" or "speculative" masons was a sign of the times and a genuine reflection of the intellectual spirit of the period. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries knowledge of architecture, more particularly of the Orders, was regarded as an essential part of every gentleman's education.

Probably it was this interest in the art of building that induced cultural gentlemen of the period to join the lodges; and this general interest of the age in architecture (comparable, let us say, to the present-day general interest in music) may explain why, of all the medieval arts, it was the mason craft, and not any other, that was seized upon by the cultured gentlemen of that time and transformed by them into a speculative science"

2) My research suggests that William Preston is held responsible for the introduction of the Five Orders into the Masonic system.

3) The Second Degree Tracing Board

Every Mason of our Constitution would be very familiar with the following extracts from the Explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board, and I quote:

“.....the five who hold a Lodge are the Master, two Wardens and two FC’s.....Five hold a Lodge in allusion to the five noble orders of architecture, namely the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

4) Grand Lodge Certificate

Since the middle of the 18th century certificates have been issued to Brethren. In 1819 the United Grand Lodge first used a design with the Three Pillars in line across the certificate, forming two panels. This certificate is known as the “Pillars Certificate”, and, with modifications, is still in use today.

5) Lodges named after the Orders

It is very common to hear of Lodges of our Constitution worldwide that derive their names from one or the other- Doric, Ionic and Corinthian by far being the most popular.

6) Emblematic manifestations of the Orders of Architecture in our Company Path Temple, Georgetown

6.1) The floor candle-holders (as indeed they were before the advent of electricity) of the WM, SW and JW’s are patterned after the Corinthian Order with a fluted shaft.

6.2) The back of the Chairs of the WM, IPM , Chaplain and other distinguished Brethren who sit on the dais are adorned with a feature akin to the capital of a Corinthian column as part of their construction

We have arrived at the end of this excursion whose purpose was to explore the Five Orders of Architecture. I hope that I have succeeded in providing to the Brethren a better appreciation of their historical significance and Masonic symbolism.

*Written by WBro. K.W. Williams DGJD
Union Lodge #247*

THE FIVE NOBLE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

Studies for the New Freemason.

This booklet was prepared and type-set by Bro. J.S. Donaldson, Secretary of Hawick Lodge No. 111, Scotland for the education of the enquiring Freemason.

Article 1 - 2016