THE EARLY HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY – PART ONE (SCRIPT)
"The seven fountains of Wisdom that flow from Philosophy."

PICTURE 1 – Opening screen – Preamble.

The history of Freemasonry encompasses the origins, evolution and defining events of the fraternal organisation.

This lecture covers three phases. Firstly, the early history and those to whom history can be accredited. Secondly, the emergence of organised lodges of operative "Trades" masons during the Middle Ages.

Then the admission of lay members as "accepted" (a term reflecting the ceremonial "acception" process that made non-stone masons members of an operative lodge) or "speculative" masons.

Finally, the evolution of purely Speculative lodges, who were not directly "Trades Lodges", and the emergence of Grand Lodges to govern them.

The watershed being the formation of the first Grand Lodge in London in 1717. So I have targeted Part One of this lecture to those attributable formative years.

Early history presents two difficulties to historians, the lack of written material, down to the 18th century, and misinformation generated by masons and non-masons alike.

Its history includes early development from organised bodies of operative stonemasons to the modern system of speculative lodges organised around regional or national "Grand Lodges".

PICTURE 2 – Euclid of Alexandria

Euclid of Alexandria is the most prominent mathematician of antiquity best known for his treatise on mathematics. The lasting nature of "The Elements" makes Euclid the leading mathematics teacher of all time.

Other manuscripts traces masonry to Jabal, son of Lamech (Genesis 4: 20–22), and tells how this knowledge came to Euclid, from him to the Children of Israel (while they were in Egypt), and through to King Athelstan Saxon King of England.

This myth formed the basis for tracing masonry back to biblical times, and fixing its institutional establishment in England during the reign of Athelstan in the tenth century.

PICTURE 3 - GEOMETRY

The Old Constitutions of the Medieval Freemasons, the most prominent place of all the sciences is given to geometry, synonymous with Freemasonry.

Thus, in the Regius Manuscript, (Picture 5) which dates not later than the latter part of the fourteenth century. The Constitutions of Freemasonry are called “the Constitutions of the art of geometry according to Euclid.”

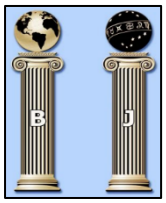
The Egyptians were among the first who cultivated geometry as a science. “It was not less useful and necessary to them,” “in the affairs of life, than agreeable to their speculatively philosophical genius.”

From Egypt, which was the parent both of the sciences and the mysteries of the Pagan world, it passed to other countries; and geometry and Operative Masonry have ever been found together, the latter carrying into execution those designs which were first traced according to the principles of the former.

Speculative Freemasonry is, in like manner, connected with geometry. In deference to our operative ancestors, as a result of our close connection with them, Speculative Freemasonry derives its most important symbols from this science.

Hence Euclid, the most famous of geometricians, should be spoken of in all the Old Records as a founder of Freemasonry in Egypt.

PICTURE 4 – The two great Pillars in Freemasonry



The two great pillars which stood at the porchway or entrance of King Solomon’s Temple were named Boaz and Jachin, and were cast on the plains of Jordan in the clay grounds between Succoth and Zeredatha.

These pillars were either brass or bronze. In either case they came from a combination of "Sun" metal, that being copper and "Moon" metal that being either tin or zinc. The Globes on top of the Pillars are the Terrestrial and Celestial.

As a point of interest

Jakin is a city in Early County, Georgia, United States. Incorporated in 1895, The first mayor of Jakin, James Morris "Major" Bivings, named the town "Jakin" after one of the columns of Solomon's temple.

Being forewarned of the destruction of the world by fire or flood, in the Old Testament it is written the science on two great pillars, one which would not sink, the other fireproof.

The Flood came in 1656 AM (*Anno Mundi* – "year of the world"). From the rest of the Old Testament and other well-documented events, we understand that creation, as calculated, was about 4004 BC. So with a little more maths we can calculate the second date.

Using the Bible, well-documented historical events, and some maths, we find that the Flood began approximately 4,359 years ago in the year 1656 AM or 2348 BC.

The pillars were rediscovered after 'Noah's' flood, the knowledge passing from Hermes Trismegistus to Nimrod to Abraham, who carried it into Egypt where he taught it to Euclid.

Euclid in turn, taught geometry/masonry to the children of the Lords of Egypt, whence it passed back to the children of Israel who used it to build the Temple of Solomon.

PICTURE 5 – The Regis Manuscript.

The oldest known work, The Halliwell Manuscript, also known as Regius Poem, dates between 1390 and 1425.

This document has a history in its introduction, stating that the "craft of masonry" began with Euclid in Egypt, and came to England in the reign of King Athelstan.

PICTURE 6 – Martianus Minneus Felix Capella (360AD – 428AD)

Martianus Minneus Felix Capella was a pagan writer of late antiquity and is considered the founder of the Trivium and Quadrivium categories that structured Early Medieval education.

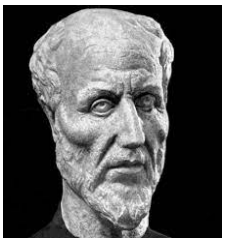
Capella was a native of Algeria in the Roman province of Africa. His single encyclopaedic work, De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii ("On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury"), also called De septem disciplinis ("On the seven disciplines").

The remaining seven books contain expositions of **the seven Liberal Arts**, representing the sum of human knowledge. The academic work was a complete encyclopaedia, written in Latin, of the culture of the time, held in high repute during the Middle Ages.

These seven arts encompass the totality of knowledge to be acquired during the classical and middle ages and the renaissance in philosophical and theological thinking.

They were a prerequisite to understand divine creation – although the language used in medieval texts is allegorical. The lunar crater Capella is named after him and the picture taken from the Apollo 11 Eagle.

PICTURE 7 – Proclus Diadochus (412AD – 485AD)



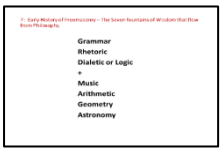
About the Quadrivium, Proclus said:

Arithmetic is the Discrete at Rest
Astronomy is the Discrete in Motion
Geometry is the Continuous at Rest
Music is the Continuous in Motion.

By the seventeenth century the Old Charges had assumed a standard form. After an introductory prayer or blessing the **Seven Liberal Arts** are rooted in Geometry.

They are composed of two families containing three and, respectively, four arts – this "3+4" structure is critical to understand how these arts complement each other.

PICTURE 8 – The Seven Liberal Arts



Some proposed additions like architecture and medicine (which were left out by Capella) or the visual and manual arts such as sculpture and painting as defended by during the Renaissance.

In Italy, Renaissance Leonardo da Vinci and Leon Batista Alberti, the academic matter was agreed upon around 1500, yet it required another century in Spain and England to be settled – then was decided that the manual and visual arts, including architecture, would be embraced. This evolved into the modern curriculum for Liberal Arts.

The liberal-arts curriculum is described as the comprehensive study of three main branches of knowledge: the humanities (literature, language, philosophy, the fine arts, and history), the physical and biological sciences and mathematics, and the social sciences.

The first family is composed of:

Grammar – defines the rules used to construct phrases, sentences, words, and connects these elements to communicate ideas in a given language. An understanding of this first art is necessary for all others to be learned.

Rhetoric – is the art of using language as a means to persuade. Once a student learns how to read and write properly, they are now prepared to manipulate words and sentences to express complex ideas. Mastering Rhetoric is an intermediate step before delving into the more complex domain of Logic.

Dialectic or Logic – is the reasoning which seeks to confront and contrast ideas, identify which is correct and which is not, remove ambiguity, and measure, compare, analyse, prove, and demonstrate facts with clarity.

So, Grammar is the mechanics of a language; rhetoric is the use of language to instruct and persuasion; logic is the “mechanics” of thinking clearly, of comparison and analysis.

Now we can proceed to second family that is composed of these four arts:

Arithmetic – (from the Greek word for “number”) is the oldest and most elementary branch of mathematics, used for tasks ranging from simple day-to-day counting to advanced science and business calculations.

Geometry – (Ancient Greek geometry, “earth”, and metria, “measure”) is a part of mathematics concerned with questions of size, shape, and relative position of figures and with properties of space.

Harmony or Music – (from the Greek mousike, “(art) of the Muses”) is an art form whose medium is sound organized in time. Music theory also relies considerably on mathematics, number theory and the laws of arithmetic.

Astronomy – (from the Greek words astron, “star”, and nomos, “law”) is the scientific study of celestial objects.

Historically, astronomy includes disciplines as diverse as meteorology (study the weather), the motion of celestial objects, celestial navigation (in oceanic trade and exploration), the making of calendars and documenting historical facts, even divining the future (astrology).

Astronomy/Astrology was also critical to the study of philosophy and theology, as everything divine or spiritual came down from the heavens – without it what was left was considered as “earthly” and profane.

PICTURE 9 - St. Alban

After the completion of the temple, this led to masonry arriving in the France of whence it went to England under Saint Alban.

The knowledge was lost in the wars after the death of Alban, but at Edwin's assembly at York in 926AD, he gave the masons their charges, and had them bring any writings they had inherited.

The enduring myth of the "Grand Assembly" was continued in the first printed constitutions of the eighteenth century, making York the birthplace of English masonry, as previously mentioned when King Athelstan convened a grand council of the mason's trade.

This allowed the old lodge at York to claim precedence over all the other English Lodges.

Records of the operative lodge attached to York Minster are written on the Fabric rolls of York Minster (a record of the erection and maintenance of the fabric of the building), and extend from 1350 to 1639, when the lodge became irrelevant to the cathedral.

PICTURE 10 – ATHELSTAN (894 – 939)

In 927 he conquered the last remaining Viking kingdom, York, making him the first Anglo-Saxon ruler of the whole of England. After his death in 939 the Vikings seized back control of York, and it was not re-conquered until 954.

The birth of organised English masonry occurred when King Athelstan convened a grand council of the mason's trade. Later manuscripts added detail, and by the time of Queen Elizabeth I, this assembly was acknowledged to have occurred.

At medieval universities, this would have led to the degree of Master of Arts (after the BA). After the MA, the student could enter for Bachelor's degrees of the higher faculties, such as Music.

This is the only way the student would receive formal education in ancient and medieval times, and this system has reflections echoed in our modern education system today. To ignore this order would be the same as teaching advanced calculus before the student is familiar with basic arithmetic or knows how to read.

Once the seven arts and sciences were mastered, he would have completed his education path and would be a full or free man, able to better understand creation and its mysteries.

Why "Liberal"?

Those who were slaves or not completely free would never receive full education, therefore the curriculum was named the "Free" arts and sciences – Liber meaning free in Latin (same root used in the word Liberty).
Once achieved such level of education, he would be free from the chains of ignorance.

The learned man is a free man, liberated by the sciences.

PICTURE 11 – Origin of the term "Freemason"

We Egyptians ruled Kemet for 33 Dynasties, when the pale ones conquered Kemet, our 33rd Dynasty became their 33rd Degree in Freemasonry. The Romans conquered Kemet in 30AD after 5000 years of Dynastic rule.

Origin of the term "Freemason"

The earliest English documents to refer to masons, are written in Latin — "sculptores lapidum liberorum" (London 1212), "magister lathomus liberarum petrarum" (Oxford 1391), or Norman French "mestre mason de franche peer" (Statute of Labourers 1351).

These all signify a worker in freestone, a grainless sandstone or limestone suitable for ornamental masonry.

In the 17th century building accounts of Wadham College, the terms freemason and freestone mason are used interchangeably. Freemason also contrasts with "Rough Mason" or "Layer", as a more skilled worker who worked or laid dressed stone.

The adjective "free" in this context may also be taken to infer that the mason is not enslaved, indentured or feudally bound.

Master Masons in medieval England

A medieval Master Mason would be required to undergo a liberal education. In England, he would leave home at nine or ten years of age already literate in English and French, educated at home or at the petty (junior) school.

From then, until the age of fourteen, he would attend monastery or grammar school to learn Latin, or as a page in a knightly household would learn deportment in addition to his studies.

Between fourteen and seventeen he would learn the basic skills of choosing, shaping, and combining stone and then between the ages of 17 and 21, learn by rota, a large number of formal problems in geometry.

Three years as a journeyman would finish with the submission of a masterwork dealing with a set problem in construction or design. At this point, considered qualified, but still had a career ladder to climb before attaining the status of Master Mason on a large project.

In his function as architect, the Master Mason probably made his plans for each successive stage of a build in silverpoint on a prepared parchment or board. These would be realised on the ground by using a larger compass than the one used for drafting.

Medieval architects are depicted with much larger compasses and squares where they are shown on a building site. Fine detail was transferred from the drawing board by means of wooden templates supplied to the masons.

The Master Masons who appear in record as presiding over major works, such as York Minster, became wealthy and respected. Visiting Master Masons and Master Carpenters sat at high table of monasteries, dining with the abbot.

From the Middle Ages to the Reformation.

History shows two levels in medieval masonry, the “lodge” and the "guild". The use of the word lodge indicates a workshop erected on the site of major work, the first mention being Vale Royal Abbey in 1278. Later, a secondary meaning as the community of masons. The earliest surviving records of these are the laws and ordinances of the lodge at York Minster in 1352. These regulations were imposed by the Dean and Chapter of the Minster.

The major employer of masons in medieval England was the crown, and they frequently employed masons by impressment. In other words, they were forcibly recruited as needed.

The Halliwell Manuscript, or Regius Poem, is the oldest known document of masonic origin. The poem, seen as a response to legislation dating back to the Black Death, and the Statute of Labourers of 1351, which Edward III attempted to fix wages at pre-plague levels.

The earlier date follows the 1389 ordinance of Richard II requiring the guilds and fellowships to lay before him their Charters and Letters Patent, and the second follows the more serious legislation of 1425 banning the annual assemblies of masons.

In 1356, the preamble to regulations governing the Trade of Masons specifically states that, unlike the other trades, no body existed for the regulation of masonry by masons.

Finally, in 1376, four representatives of the "mystery" or trade are elected to the Common Council in London. This also seems to be the first use of the word "freemason" in English. It was immediately struck out, and replaced with the word "mason".

Around 1450, the will of a mason from Beverley, gives a tantalising glimpse into the emergence of masonic regalia. An inventory of John Cadeby's possessions mentions several zonae (girdles).

During this period, the Reformation occurred. It was assumed that the church was the major employer and with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, lodges disappeared.

On the death of Henry VIII, Archbishop Cranmer sought to advance the reformation by the abolition of guilds and fellowships. In 1549 it was repealed, presumably because they were too useful to the government.

The government were a major employers of masons, who in London had moved from a fellowship to a corporation. While not chartered until 1666, the state used it in the sixteenth century to procure and indent masons for building projects.

PICTURE 12 – Herrad of Landsberg

We can further examine the seven Liberal Arts as they were viewed by medieval scholars and students using the 12th century monastery painting.
At the abbey in France, Herrad received the most comprehensive education available to women during the 12th century.

She rose to a high position in office at the Abbey, and was soon put in charge of governing and educating her fellow nuns. Herrad was elected Abbess in 1167. She taught those arts described as **"The seven fountains of Wisdom that flow from Philosophy."**

PICTURE 13 – The Worshipful Company of Masons.

The Worshipful Company of Masons is number 30 in the order of precedence of the ancient Livery Companies of the City of London, set by the Aldermen in 1515.

The focus of this Livery Company is to preserve and encourage the use of natural stone, including supporting the training of craftsmen as well as the preservation and appreciation of iconic historic stone buildings.

What is certain, however, is that while Freemasonry's origins may be lost to the sands of time, the lessons and tools used by stonemasons to create the awe-inspiring structures of history continue to inspire decency, humility, and brotherly love in Freemasons of today.

Joshua and Edward Marshall erected Temple Bar in 1673, the barrier from where trade was officially regulated. Four years later Thomas Strong laid the foundation stone of the new St Paul's Cathedral and his brother Edward laid the last stone of the building's lantern in 1708.

They were Master Masons among a number of other prominent members of the Company who worked on the City's most beautiful monuments under Sir Christopher Wren and between 1670 and 1718 at least 8 individuals involved in the construction of St Paul's became Masters of the Masons' Company.

PICTURE 14 – Robert Benson 1676 -1731 (Baron Bingley)

Robert Benson, 1st Baron Bingley, PC (c. 1676 – 9 April 1731), of Red Hall, near Wakefield, Bramham Hall, Yorkshire and Queen Street, Westminster. Great Queen Street is now the Headquarters of English Freemasonry.

An English Tory politician who sat in the House of Commons from 1702 until 1713 when he was raised to the peerage as Baron Bingley and sat in the House of Lords. He served as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1711 to 1713.

The lodge would not again expand outside of York until the 1760s. In 1707, Robert Benson, the Lord Mayor of York, was president.

PICTURE 15 – LAST SCREEN OF PART ONE

In this Part One…we have covered the first two thousand years …to be continued in Part Two with the Tri-centenary to modern times.