A TALE OF TWO CITIES

By W. Bro Ken Walton PAGDC

"**It was the best of times; it was the worst of times; it was the spring of hope; it was the winter of despair"**

You'll remember that these words were so poignantly written by Charles Dickens in A Tale of Two Cities. He was referring to Paris at the time of the French Revolution which started on 14th July 1789 when the people stormed the Bastille prison and released the prisoners. Ever since that date the French celebrate the glory of Bastille Day on 14th July each year.

The other city in Dickens' novel was, of course, London about which he said:

"…There was scarcely an amount of order or protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies took place in the capital every night; the mail coach was waylaid by seven robbers; the guard shot three and got shot himself by the other four, after which the stagecoach was robbed in peace. **Doesn't that sound very much like Johannesburg today?** Musketeers went to St Giles to search for contraband goods and the mob fired on the musketeers and the musketeers fired on the mob: and nobody thought any of these circumstances much out of the ordinary…"

But what, I hear you ask, has this got to do with Freemasonry? When a candidate is prepared to be passed to the second degree he is asked to describe the mode of his preparation and, of course, he will reply in the familiar fashion: "…I was divested of metal etc…"

I wonder brethren whether you have considered, when we carry out a first degree ceremony, why the Tyler divests the candidate of metal, including any ring or watch he might be wearing? During the second section of the First Degree Lecture, which sadly is seldom heard in Lodge nowadays, the candidate is asked that question, to which he is prompted to reply (or in some Lodges in England he is obliged to learn the answers off by heart before he can proceed to the second degree), he is prompted to reply: **Firstly,** that he might bring nothing offensive or defensive into the Lodge to disturb its harmony; **Secondly,** that as he was received into masonry in a state of poverty, it was to remind him to relieve indigent brethren; and **Thirdly,** at the building of King Solomon's Temple there was not heard the sound of a metallic tool. It's the first answer I'd like to talk about briefly because it ties in with what Charles Dickens was saying about the state of London in the 18th Century.

Remember brethren that our Order was founded in1717 and in 11 years time it will be our 300th anniversary. Without question, we are the oldest secular society in the world. Be

proud of that! But I'd now like you to give some thought to our ancestors who travelled to Lodge during the mid 1750s and who enjoyed the Festive Board afterwards.

I don't want to digress, but how could the building of so stately an edifice as King Solomon's Temple have been carried on and completed without the aid of metallic tools? If you don't know the answer I urge you to read the Second Section of the First Degree Lecture. Here, in part, is what is says:

Q. How could the building of so stately an edifice as King Solomon's Temple have been carried on and completed without the aid of metallic tools?

A. The stones were hewn in the quarry, there squared, carved, marked and numbered. The timber was felled and prepared in the forest of Lebanon, carved, marked and numbered also; they were then floated to Joppa, thence conveyed on carriages to Jerusalem, and there set up with wooden mauls and implements prepared for that purpose.

Q. Why were the stones and timber prepared so far off?

A. To show the excellence of the Craft in those days, for although the materials were prepared at so great a distance, yet when they were brought to Jerusalem, and came to be put together, each piece fitted to that exact nicety, that it appeared more like the work of the Great Architect of the Universe than of human hands.

At this stage I gladly acknowledge the help of the late Brigadier A.C.F. Jackson **PDepGSwdB** of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No 2076. Brigadier Jackson was the Prestonian Lecturer in 1976 and he delivered a paper entitled Preston's England. (1) It dealt with the everyday life of Masons in the late 18th Century. Preston (a great Masonic scholar) was born in 1742 and moved to London in 1760 so you'll see that the time is about the same as Dickens was writing about. And apart from Charles Dickens (2) two other authors wrote about conditions at that time. Thomas Carlyle's (3) magnum opus The History of the French Revolution painted a picture of life in Paris, and Benjamin Disraeli, (4) later to become Prime Minister, wrote a great deal about life in London.

So, getting back to the candidate in the First Degree whose first answer to the question why he was divested of metal was to bring nothing offensive or defensive into the Lodge, let me sketch briefly what it was like in London in general, and in Lodge in particular, when some of our rituals were written at the time of the French Revolution. There is a tendency nowadays to think that while Paris was on the brink of revolution, London was a fine and gracious city. Let me disabuse you of that thought and put the record straight.

London was reputed to be the healthiest city in the world even if the standard was not very high. Outside the slum areas many houses had running water on all floors. But in spite of its reputation for health, its sanitary measures were appalling. Any house that had a garden or back yard had an outdoor pit system which was politely called the "Necessary House" or "House of Office." Those who didn't have that, used a bucket or chamber pot

and chucked the waste out of the window into the street. Contagious diseases such as typhoid and dysentery were endemic. One of the busiest trades was a barber. Those who wore wigs had to have their heads shaved regularly so the barber was always busy. Most barbers also carried on a lucrative trade in minor surgery and medicine. That's the origin of the red and white striped pole that some barbers still put outside their shops.

Brigadier Jackson writes that the manners of the 18th century were a curious mixture of coarseness and elegance. The Georgian, particularly in the presence of ladies of his own class, might bow and posture and turn a compliment with the courtliest grace. The same man on occasions would use the most violent and obscene language not only to his equals among men but also to women of any class inferior to his own.

In similar circumstances, many women used language which was equally bad. References to the natural functions of the body and details of sex, in ordinary conversation, were so frequent and commonplace that they must have become as meaningless as the four letter words in use today. When his anger was aroused, the upper or middle class man was inclined to get involved in the most unnecessary brawls, often ending in duels with a fatal result.

Costly laces and elegant clothes were worn by people who were frequently dirty and whose personal habits, by modern standards, were most unpleasant. The lack of indoor toilet facilities may have contributed to this and any lady or gentleman unable to find the "necessary house", or unwilling to go out of doors in the cold, would have no scruples about using the fireplace or a corner of the room. (5)

There were, of course, many people of better manners but it should be appreciated that the men of this period were liable to indulge in the coarsest of pleasures, and the chastity of any woman of a level of society lower than his own was a challenge to the virility of the Georgian male. In the country houses, the chief sport of the young gentlemen of the family seems to have been the seduction of the female servants, a pastime as much enjoyed by the quarry, it would seem, as the hunter. The young woman concerned, if fortunate enough to have a child, could under the Bastardy Act of 1773 demand marriage - which was clearly unthinkable – or be kept in comfort for the rest of her life.

In theory, it was the privilege of gentlemen alone to wear swords but in practice men of all classes except the lowest wore them. An unfortunate result of this was the prevalence of duels, especially after a few drinks when a man would take offence against some perceived attack on his honour. Unquestionably, it was for this reason that swords were forbidden in most of the Moderns Lodges, whilst the Antients drawn from the artisan class, had no need for this rule. So although we give noble and philosophical reasons for not allowing metal into Lodge, I suspect the real reason is more basic!

When the mason of Preston's time left the house to go to Lodge he was entering what was fast becoming the most important city in the world with a population of 1 million. The population of Britain in the late 18th century was 8 million and the next biggest city to London was Bristol with a population of 100 000.

The middle classes were moving out of the centre of London into the nearby villages of Kensington, St Pancras, and Islington. The poor lived in the centre in areas like Seven Dials in Covent Garden just a few hundred yards from the site of the present Grand Lodge Building. So close were the tenements, huts and sheds that it was possible to go from one end to the other without seeing the light of day. These areas were the private empires of the gang bosses where crimes of violence could be committed with impunity and where criminals were safe from justice. Until 1749 when the Bow Street Runners started,

32 years after English Freemasonry was founded, there was no police force.

Thanks to the generosity of W. Bro David Lewis I have here an Ordnance Survey Map of London (1805) which clearly indicates the density of the area around Covent Garden and Great Queen Street. Two hundred years later of course, it is now an enormously desirable area of London real estate and Sir Donny Gordon's Liberty International Group recently set a record for the value of property purchased in that area when they paid hundreds of million pounds for property around the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The map will be available for inspection after the meeting for those interested.

London at that time was a miracle of wealth and splendour and a cesspool of poverty and vice. As William Cowper (6) the poet said:

> Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaimed
> The fairest capital of all the world,
> By riot and incontinence the worst.

For reasons which are not clear, smoking in fashionable society declined after the middle of the century. "Smoking has gone out," said Dr Johnson (7) in 1773, and continued "out" for 80 years. By contrast, there was a steady increase in the use of tobacco by the rest of the population and smoking was normal in all lodges, even in Grand Lodge until it was banned in 1755 as being "an indecency that should never be suffered in any solemn assembly." It was the age of the churchwarden pipe, provided automatically by the type of inn where lodges met, as was the tobacco to smoke in it. Many men used snuff or else chewed tobacco soaked in rum. Lodge of Antiquity No 1 had a bylaw in 1760 permitting a member to smoke except when "the Lodge is honoured with the visit of a Brother who wears a blue apron," when he had to get permission from the Master "unless such visitor smokes a pipe himself."(8)

There was heavy drinking among the upper classes and it was the era of "the three bottle a day man." Nationally, however, the second half of the century was a big improvement on the first half. William Hogarth's famous engraving Gin Lane and signs outside bottle stores such as "Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for twopence, clean straw for nothing" dated before the Act of 1751 which imposed huge excise duties on spirits. This turned the poor back to beer and spectacularly reduced the mortality rate, but it had little effect on the middle and upper classes who could afford to buy spirits, with the exception of

Scotch whisky which the Scots cannily kept to themselves and did not export over the border. Hogarth (1697 to 1764) was a prolific artist and I will pass around some examples of his work. He was also a great social campaigner against the evils of drink and played a significant role in persuading the Government to pass the law of 1751 which deterred the poor from drinking gin. His paintings and engravings ridiculed vice and all excesses offensive to the moral code. He was an active freemason and a member of Grand Stewards Lodge, for whom he designed the jewel still in use today.

He had a sharp wit and his painting Sleeping Congregation represents The Rev Dr J T Desaguliers (Grand Master in 1719) preaching to a congregation among whom are several prominent Grand Officers shown fast asleep and snoring.

It seems that Freemasons drank no more than the general public, and often very much less. In almost all lodges the by-laws provided fines for brethren "disguised in liquor", to use a quaint expression of the time. Repeat offenders were excluded from lodge.

Nevertheless, it was to be expected that in an age when hard drinking was the fashion, the early speculative lodges should observe many of the old drinking customs. The drinking of toasts was extremely popular throughout Europe at that time, and there is some reason to suppose that even in the course of an Initiation ceremony in some of the early 18th century lodges the brethren would have drunk a toast to
"the Heart that conceals and to the Tongue that never reveals."(9) The Steinmetzen, the German stonemasons, had what they called a pledge feast at which toasts were drunk, or pledged, with much ceremony and precision, and in so doing they were observing a custom followed in every German craft.

The Shrewsbury Chronicle of 19th September 1788 carried the following report:

'…We learn that last week the new Salopian Lodge of Freemasons was regularly constituted by Major Charles Shirreff Deputy Grand Master for this county; when an excellent dinner was provided and the afternoon spent with that sober hilarity and with that edifying conversation that becomes and should always distinguish Free & Accepted Masons from men of dissolute and disorderly manner…"

I looked up the Directory of Lodges recently and that lodge (number 262) is still in existence. It meets on the second Monday of each month from October to April. Like many English lodges outside London it is in recess during the summer months. Shropshire is a small Province with only 33 Lodges.

On the other hand, the Lodge of Amity Song Book of 1778 includes the following:

Let every man take a glass in hand,
Drain bumpers to our Master Grand
As long as he can sit or stand
With decency.

That lodge no longer exists.

For the majority of middle class Englishmen, the formal dinner did not degenerate into the traditional drinking bout, reputed to end with the participants sliding under the table or being carried off to bed by the footmen. This may have been not infrequent for the country squire who had hunted, fished or been on his land all day, and who had nothing else to do in the evening. The townsman was normally reasonably abstemious and after dinner joined the ladies for cards and conversation, or went into town to participate in its many attractions such as the theatre, or to a coffee house to gossip and gamble – the latter being a far worse middle class vice than drinking.

At the weekend the Londoner took his pleasures further afield. A trip up or down the river, or a visit to the many gardens, those at Ranelagh and Vauxhall being the most fashionable. There was music and dancing. At Vauxhall the mason of Preston's time could have heard the infant prodigy Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (a future member of the craft) at the age of eight playing his own compositions.

As you know, January 2006 marked the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth and on Wednesday 15th February Lyceum Lodge of Research held a Mozart evening when W. Bro David Lewis entertained us, and the ladies, with some of Mozart's magnificent Masonic music.

Other popular attractions for Londoners were the lions at the Tower of London, Madame Tussaud's waxworks, the newly opened British Museum and – bizarrely – for 2d taking tea with the lunatics at Bedlam. Bedlam is a contraction of Bethlehem. The priory of St Mary of Bethlehem outside Bishopsgate was founded in 1247 and began to receive lunatics in 1377. It was given to the City of London by Henry VIII in 1547. It became one of the sights of London where for twopence anyone might gaze at the poor wretches and bait them. It was one of the disgraces of London at that time. (10)

But far and away the most popular public spectacle, which was free, were the public executions. The penal system of England still had its mediaeval cruelty and men and women could be sentenced to almost indefinite imprisonment for the smallest offences. Unless they could bribe their gaolers to feed them, all but the strongest starved to death. The crimes punishable by hanging increased throughout the 18th century until they numbered about 200, including trivial offences. The law was often self defeating with juries refusing to convict for minor offences which would lead to execution. As the police were so ineffective the worst criminals were never caught. Nevertheless, in
London in 1785 there were 97 hangings at Tyburn, all attended by large crowds who would pelt the prisoners with stones and rubbish.

The 18th century embraced an extraordinary period in English history and it is hardly surprising that the domestic needs of the ordinary people, the poor and the working classes, were ignored. The ascent of King George I to the throne in 1714 was symptomatic of what was to come. He could not speak English. As Sir Winston Churchill says: (11) "…Here on English soil stood an unprepossessing figure, an obstinate and humdrum German martinet with dull brains and coarse taste. As a commander in the late

wars he had been sluggish and incompetent and as a ruler of men he had shown no quickening ability or generosity of spirit…" His son George II was little better. The accession of George III in 1760 caused a profound change in English politics. Both George I and George II were aliens in language, upbringing and sympathy. (12)

The revolt of the American colonies and the loss of America in 1776 had shattered the complacency of 18th century England and its aristocracy. (13) The influence of John Wesley and the Methodists was spreading, particularly in their opposition to the scourge of alcohol, so graphically illustrated by Hogarth.

Lodges in those days were small, especially in London, where a dozen would be a good membership. (14)

Country lodges were bigger. The Master was an important figure and certainly did "rule and direct his lodge" The lodge met around a long table and, when the opening ceremony was concluded, the Master opened the Bible which he had in front of him, put on his hat and sat down. If there was a degree ceremony, the Master picked up the Bible and the brethren stood round a diagram previously drawn on the floor by the Tyler with chalk or charcoal. After the ceremony the candidate - whether a member of the aristocracy or not - had to wash it away with a mop and pail.

Towards the end of the 18th century lodges were comfortable places. Thanks to craftsmen like Chippendale, and to French influence, furniture had developed far beyond the stools and benches of the previous century. Most lodges kept their own furniture at the inn where they met and provided their Master and Wardens with large padded armchairs, while the other brethren sat on well made chairs.

For lighting, wood or brass candlesticks, elaborately carved in the richer lodges, were used for illumination and for the symbolic lighting. It was still the era of smoky candles which had to be snuffed at regular intervals. Gas was not to come for several decades and electricity was almost a century away. (15) In winter a good fire of wood or coal, possibly under a mantelpiece copied from one made by the Adam brothers, made the lodge a very pleasant place to spend an evening.

The proceedings were leisurely and companionable, probably because many lodges met in the top room of an inn or pub. The publican was usually the Tyler and when more ale was needed the Junior Warden would bang on the floor to attract his attention. The proceedings included snacks, drinking and smoking. Calling-off was frequent so there was ample time for the drinking of toasts and the singing of songs. When the Lodge was closed some brethren would have supper together at the inn, while others went home.

It was no longer the London of Hogarth's famous picture Night which shows a drunken Master being helped home by an equally drunk Tyler. There were of course masons who drank too much but the majority did not and, like Major Sherreff referred to earlier writing to the Grand Secretary, could refer to himself as "not a supper man." These men

preferred bread and cheese in their own home rather than risk a late return home through the streets of London.

Until after the 1800s there was no effective police force and travellers were liable to attack. Some roads were so dangerous that armed horsemen were available for hire to protect travellers. The streets of London were no place to be after dark. Because of open fires there was a constant fog over the city and the mason returning home after lodge walked with care, hand on sword or pistol, listening for following footsteps and avoiding if possible figures who loomed up out of the fog.

Few men went unarmed but, at night, a sword or pistol was often inadequate against the gangs which infested the streets. The sensible mason returning home after lodge joined a group, or took a cab or a sedan-chair. If he could not afford that, he could hire for a few pence a link-boy or girl who, with torches of tar or resin, would light him home and help him to avoid stepping in the filth which lined the pavements.

I started this talk by asking why a candidate is divested of metal. I think it's now clear that although there are two other philosophical reasons why this happens, the authors of our original ritual books were conscious that most masons at that time came to lodge armed. That, I believe, is the principal reason for the injunction. In other words, to avoid disharmony and potential violence in Lodge.

It's interesting that, almost three hundred years later, similar circumstances still exist in Johannesburg and parts of the United States which persuade masons to carry guns to Lodge.

As Voltaire said: plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Curiously, after I had largely completed this paper, I received the summons for last month's meeting on 14th September of Quatuor Coronati Lodge 2076. On the back page appeared the following:

MONEY AND METALLIC SUBSTANCES

Q. What is the origin and significance of our procedure in this part of the preparation of the candidate?

A. The polluting influence of metal is stressed several times in the Bible. Here are two examples:

"And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exodus Chapter 20 verse 25)

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (1 Kings Chapter 6 verse 7)

Pritchard's exposure, Masonry Dissected dated 1730, emphasized the metallic aspects of the procedure in those days, but gave no reason for it:

"How did he bring you?" "Neither naked nor cloathed, barefoot nor shod, deprived of all metal and in a right moving posture."

The next description from a similar source – Le Secret des Francs-Macons, by the Abbé G.L.C. Perau, was published in France in 1742 and is much more detailed:

"After he has satisfied these questions, he is deprived of all metal articles he may have about him, such as buckles, buttons, rings, snuff-boxes,etc. There are some Lodges where they carry precision so far as to deprive a man of his clothes if they are ornamented with gallon (a kind of gold or silver thread)

Another French exposure, Le Catéchisme des Francs-Macons, goes further:

Q. Why were you deprived of all Metals?

A. Because when the Temple of Solomon was in building, the Cedars of Lebanon were sent all cut, ready for use, so that one heard no sound of hammer, nor of any other tool when they used them (i.e. the timbers)

A more extended symbolism began to make its appearance towards the end of the 18th century and the following is an interpretation of Preston's First Lecture:

"Why deprived of metal?"

"For three reasons: first reason, that no weapon be introduced into the Lodge to disturb the harmony; second reason, that metal, though of value, could have no influence in our initiation; third reason, that after our initiation metal could make no distinction amongst Masons, the Order being founded on peace, virtue and friendship."

There can be little doubt that the present day procedure is a survival of the idea of pollution from metal and since the candidate for initiation is symbolically erecting a Temple within himself, that is probably the reason, why the "deprivation" has remained a part of our practice for more than two centuries.

*** *** *** *** *** *** *** ***

But, having said all that can anyone explain how that is compatible with the Inner Guard's Jewel of Office?

NOTES

(1) The Prestonian Lecture for 1976. Ars Quatuor Coronatorum. Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No 2076.

(2) Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870). A Tale of Two Cities. 1859.

(3) Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) the son of a stonemason. History of the French Revolution.1837.

(4) Benjamin Disraeli (1804 – 1881). Prime Minister 1868 and 1874 to 1880. First (and last) Earl of Beaconsfield.

(5) Brigadier A C F Jackson op. cit.

(6) William Cowper (1731 – 1800). Memoir published posthumously 1816.

(7) Dr Samuel Johnson (1709 – 1784). Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides 1785.

(8) Freemasons' Guide and Compendium. Bernard E Jones page 477

(9) Freemasons' Guide and Compendium op.cit. page 478

(10) Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable

(11) Sir Winston Churchill. A History of the English-Speaking Peoples. Book Eight. Chapter 7

(12) Sir Winston Churchill op.cit. Book Eight. Chapter 12

(13) Sir Winston Churchill op.cit. Book Nine. Chapter 16

(14) J P Malcolm. Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the 18th century. Grand Lodge Library and Museum.

(15) Minutes of Canongate Kilwinning Lodge no 2 of Edinburgh dated 15 June 1818. "… owing to the great expense of lighting the lodge room with wax and tallow candles, resolved that the Secretary and the Treasurer wait upon the Manager of the Gas Company. Brigadier A C F Jackson op.cit.