

WITHIN THESE SACRED WALLS

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R.W. Master, W. Wardens Brethren all.

Let me first make it clear that whilst I have a professional background, in social work and mental health, unlike some of our brethren in this distinguished Research Lodge, I am neither a scholar nor an academic. This occasional paper, like Topsy 'just grewed' from some aspects of the look I recently had at 'Swallowwell' in Country Durham,

This ancient and honourable society to which we belong has many highways and byways each with interesting facets; some are clearly set before us in our rituals, often acknowledged and often overlooked.

As an institution, our fraternity is undoubtedly hierarchical in form; power of management and control, within our constitution, laws, and regulations, carries duties and responsibilities; these responsibilities for good governance are vested at many levels in grand, provincial and lodge levels, underlying this hierarchical scheme. However, it is a simple yet complex concept symbolised by the lambskin apron, that badge of innocence and bond of friendship. However difficult governing and managing our society may at times be, all is in vain if we lose sight of fraternity and brotherhood within our craft.

The sure base for any structure be it a building or an organisation lies in sound foundations and a strong cornerstone. Our Masonic realities lie within the here and the now of the year 2005, but however turbulent our times, our continuation must rest secure on our ancient and honourable foundations a belief in a supreme being a grasp of time tested moral principals of our order and a real sense of brotherhood stemming from this may I draw your attention to a passage of ritual we listen to at least once a year at our installation ceremonies, do we really hear what is said I quote from the address to the brethren.

May you enjoy every satisfaction and delight which disinterested friendship can give within these sacred walls.

What makes these walls sacred within our Masonic lodges? It is the act of consecration. To consecrate; from the Volumes of the Sacred Law in use in our lodges:

<i>Cahram</i>	To Devote
<i>Nazar</i>	To Separate
<i>Qadesh</i>	To Set Apart

Those of us who have had the rare privilege of attending the consecration of a new lodge or chapter cannot fail to be impressed and uplifted by the experience. This is even more pertinent if one fully participates as a lodge founder. From two such experiences, I can assure you that it creates a bond so poignant and heartfelt that it can never be easily dissolved.

This paper is not primarily about the whole magnificent ceremony of consecration but it is specifically orientated towards the Masonic significance of the consecrating elements, as I perceive them.

Let us first lay in some background by giving some definitions on constituting, consecrating and dedicating. These actions:

1. Bring a new lodge into being,
2. Give effect in Masonic Law to the terms of the warrant
3. Empower the members of the new Lodge to carry out the functions, specified in the warrant.

Consecration is a Masonic rite, religious in form, by which a new lodge is blessed in form and dedicated to the purpose for which is it regularly constituted i.e. the practice of Free and Accepted Masonry

To these may be added a “dedication” which is the religious and Masonic rite by which a building or a room is hallowed and sanctified for the practice of Freemasonry in distinction to “consecration” which performs the same function for

the corporate body of Masons forming a new Lodge; in fact the ceremonial carried out today at the inauguration of a new lodge in order to establish its existence is simply termed its consecration; it comprises the functions of both constitution, dedication and consecration as previously defined but constitution is now merely a formal pronouncement within in the wider ceremony.

May I at this point quote from Bro. Mozart's *Magic Flute*

Sarastro proclaims:

The Rays of the sun defeat the night

The Chorus replies:

Glory to the consecrated

You passed through darkness

May thanks be given to the

O Isis and Osiris

May strength conquer

And bring to wisdom and beauty

The crown eternal

Brethren, our lodges are consecrated. To consecrate, according to Mackay's *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry* is to 'Offer to give or dedicate, in pious and decent language and gesture a man or any other thing to God by separating it from common use'

The act of consecration is performed through certain consecrating elements being scattered and offered, with appropriate invocation to God, the Great Architect of the Universe.

The elements of consecration are defined as 'Those things, the use of which in the ceremony, as constituent and elementary parts of it, and, are necessary to the perfecting and legalising of the act of consecration and dedication'. The act is therefore made valid through these elements, and it is their use in a sacramental manner, by one who has the necessary powers 'The consecrating officer', which sets the Lodge and the building apart and dedicates it to God.

The elements necessary to consecrate a Freemason's lodge are corn, wine, oil and salt. The symbolism attached to these four elements, in both antiquity and today is of great richness.

The description given by Anderson of 'The Manner of Constituting a New Lodge' in the postscript of the 1723 *Constitutions* is the earliest official account we have of an English Masonic ceremony. It is, in essence, an initial installation ceremony preceded by a formal act of constitution by the Grand Master, his deputy or from 1738 onwards, one of his grand wardens. A master of a lodge was to be deputed to assist if necessary, not in a ceremonial way but simply to stand in as deputy grand mater. Anderson's account of the 'Manner of constituting' does not appear to involve any ceremonial rite, of constitution, at all, but merely a formal pronouncement by the Grand Master "I constitute and form these good brethren into a new lodge, followed by something like an oration on the nature and principles of the institution" In Anderson's words:

Some other expressions that are proper and usual: the ceremonial and main content of the manner of constituting, appears to have lain entirely in the installation of the first master of the new lodge" By certain significant ceremonies and ancient usages. This may imply some procedure of a more or less esoteric nature, for placing the master in the chair, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that it was preceded, by a consecratory rite for the corporate members of the new lodge.

It is in Preston's *Illustrating Freemasonry* as an appendix of the first edition of 1772 that we find first reference to a ceremony of consecration and an outline description of it. The 1792 edition enlarged on a number of details, notably the reference for the first time to corn, wine and oil as elements for consecration. This does not appear as ritual but more of a descriptive summary. The fact that Preston was able in 1772 to describe the ceremony of consecration, suggests that though it may have been 'all too frequently omitted' it was not completely new!

As Bro. Gordon, P.G. Hill comments, ‘Preston did not invent lectures’, he was no innovator, he carried on ‘old traditions, endeavouring to correct, refine and amplify the old workings.’

The concept of dedicating a lodge room or hall has an obvious derivation from the religious ceremony of consecrating a church or chapel, while the tradition of the foundation stone goes back into folklore. In Preston’s day this tradition was already of great antiquity in civic and ecclesiastical history, but of more there is no doubt that there was some foundation stone laying, consecration of a lodge and dedication of a hall. There are close parallels in the underlying significance of the ceremonial acts, of symbolically ensuring that the first or foundation stone of a new building is well and truly laid and fit to receive. The super structure to be erected upon it and of constituting the first or founder members into the corporate body of a lodge and consecrating this to its future functions.

The use of corn, wine, oil (and salt) in the consecration ceremony seems to be a case of cross fertilisation; by motifs and symbolism. From this the ‘Public Ceremonies’ foundation stone laying and dedication of the halls. Perhaps the earliest mention on record of the three elements (salt did not come until later) in connection with the laying of the foundation stone, that of the Royal Exchange in Edinburgh on 20th September 1753, with Masonic ceremonial; by the Rt. Hon George Drummond Lord Provost of Edinburgh and Grand Master of Scotland. This appears in an account of the occasion in the Gentleman’s Magazine for 1753:

The Grand Master having applied the square, the plumb, the level and the mallet to the stone in order to fix the same in its proper position, gave it three knocks with the mallet followed by three “huzzas” from the brethren, the masons anthem was played by music which being ended, a cornucopia, with silver vessels were handed to the grand master filled with the abundance of corn wine and oil, he according to an ancient ceremony poured them on the stone saying “May the bountiful hand of heaven supply this city with the abundance of corn, wine and oil and all other necessities of life”

This was followed by a prayer to the G.A.O.T.U.

In several foundation stone layings and the few dedications of buildings recorded in Grand Lodge proceedings since 1813, salt is not found in connection with these ceremonies until it featured in the laying of the foundation stone of Freemasons Hall on 14th July 1927.

Even so, scattered instances of its use appear in Masonic periodicals, of consecration of private lodges, from 1860 onwards, incidentally these reports concern consecrating in the Provinces!

I note that of the consecrating vessels of the United Grand Lodge of England, the present Cornucopia and the two ewers were acquired in 1851. Given my previous remark about “salts” appearance in 1927, I also note that a tazza dor salt was presented for Grand Lodge in 1885.

In the consecration of our temples, in early days, and in current Grand Lodge procedures, these elements were scattered on what was termed “the lodge” or “the lodge board”. In some cases this was the “tracing board” as in the present usage, but in our earlier times it is referred to a model of the “arc of the covenant” to symbolise the indwelling spirit of “the Most High!”

William Preston’s *Illustrations of Masonry* (American edition 1804) details the mode of consecrating lodges and notes this is never used but when specifically ordered. He notes:

The Grand Master and officers, accompanied by some dignified clergymen, having taken their stations “the lodge” which is placed in the centre and being covered with white satin, the ceremony of consecration commences. All kneel devoutly and the preparatory paper is rehearsed. The chaplain or orator produced his authority i.e.: the Constitution role and properly assisted, proceeds to consecrate the new lodge with the elements of corn, wine and oil.

The “lodge” is uncovered and the first clause of the consecration prayed is rehearsed all devoutly kneeling; the response is made “glory

to God on high” incense is scattered over the “lodge” and the grand honours repeated as before. The “lodge” is again covered and all the brethren rise up whilst solemn music is resumed, followed by the blessing, a repeat of response and honours, then an anthem is sung and the brethren of the new lodge, having advanced according to rank, offer homage to the grand master at which point the ceremony of consecration ends.

The above ceremony being finished, the Grand Master, advancing to the pedestal, constitutes the new lodge in the following form.

“In the exalted character of the Grand Master, to which the suffrages of my brethren have raised me, I invoke the name of the most high, to whom be glory and honour. May he be with you at your beginning, strengthen you in the principles of our royal art, prosper you with all the success and direct your zealous efforts, to the good of the craft.

By the divine aid, I constitute and form you, my good brethren, masters and fellows, into a lodge of free and accepted masons; and henceforth empower you to act as a regular lodge, in conformity to the rites of our venerable order and the charges of our ancient fraternity. May God be with you. Amen”

In addressing ourselves firstly to the General and Spiritual symbolism of the consecrating elements we note that corn, first to be scattered is a symbol of fruitfulness.

Wine of refreshments and sacrifice

Oil of joy and concord

Salt the subtle element, which gives savour, symbolising friendship and brotherhood

When once of old in Israel. Our early brethren wrought with toil Jehovah’s blessings on them fell in showers of corn and wine and oil,

As corn is offered, the symbol of plenty, we offer fruitfulness in our daily lives and conduct. Corn, the symbol of nourishment, the element of our daily bread, for which we pray each day, should remind us to give freely to others in every way. Associated as it is with the realities of the solid earth of ordinary daily life, it should remind us to practice charity in its fullest sense. The free practice of charity brings its inner reward and the corn, scattered in the West reminds us that our strength should spring from charity as its sure foundation.

When there a shrine to him alone they built with worship, sin to foil on threshold and on cornerstone they poured out corn and wine and oil. The next free element wine is the symbol of joy and cheerfulness if refreshment and sacrifice, the true sacrifice that is required of us if we are to build a right. It is also an emblem found in the mysteries of antiquity where it was used as a substitute for the lifeblood and hence, indicated the sacrifice of life in the service of the (Most) High. As wine when taken, produces a sense of exaltation and enhancement of life, so, when poured out in offering it symbolises self-sacrifices.

With this element we give ourselves our strength and vital energies into Masonic service. If our work is to be well built and carried out in harmony, our personal wishes, self centred feelings and thoughts must often be sacrificed to the good of the lodge as a whole.

It is perhaps of real significance that the element of sacrifice is offered in the last, the place of those, who at least in symbol, if not in fact, have learned wisely to rule through service.

*And we have come, fraternal bands with joy and pride and prosperous
 spoil to honour him with votive hands
 With streams of corn and wine and oil.*

The third element is oil (symbol of peace and unanimity); symbol of joy and an element of harmony and concord. Oil is in a special sense the most potent element of consecration and setting apart. Not only does it service to blend and smooth the rougher, stronger elements of our daily food and so, make them more palatable, and easy to assimilate. But oil is above all that which sustains fire. From time

immemorial, the candle and the oil lamp have given light and the power of fire to mankind.

Anointing with oil has, from antiquity been used to bestow blessings from on high and in many rites denotes the supreme act of consecration. It is an emblem of joy and the conveyor of benediction and blessing. Oil poured forth in the south signifies the gift of grace and spiritual power within our hearts, which will enable us to show forth harmony and beauty in our lodges and lives.

*Now o'er our work this salt we show emblem of thy conversant power
and may thy presence lord, we pray, keep this temple from decay*

The fourth element, salt, symbol of hospitality and friendship, was not always considered essential and was additional to the other three. However, in its use today it is emblematic of friendship and brotherhood. It can be considered the concrete expression of all the rest for corn; wine and oil are completed by the added savour of salt.

If the hand is guided by charity, personal thought and feeling, disciplined by self-sacrifice, and our daily lives irradiated by harmony and concord then brotherhood must surely result in all our relationships with our Masonic brethren and indeed our fellow men.

Salt, the offering associated with the air we all share and breathe is the emblem of that fraternal affection and brotherliness which arises from harmonises Masonic life.

Brethren, perhaps in this 'prentice hand' occasional paper you have seen something of my 46 years in this craft of free and accepted masonry and some what of that which I view essential.

It is good to reflect that what we take for granted does on occasion require refreshing and a closer look.

The sacramental elements, used in consecrating, constituting and dedicating our Masonic lodges are part of the very fabric of our daily bread and sustenance.

As we close this Research Lodge in our after-meeting and in our daily lives, in our joys, harmony and brotherhood, we continually meet those elements, corn, wine, oil and salt, may you carry their symbolism in your hearts and enjoy them to the full, within the compass of Masonic propriety.