

Landmarks

RW Bro. M. A. R. Howard

During the Annual Installation and Investiture of Officers Freemasons are informed that from time immemorial, it has been an established custom among Freemasons for each Lodge, once in every year at a stated period, to select from amongst its Wardens and Past Masters a skilled craftsman to preside over them in the capacity of Worshipful Master; and the Brother selected has been informed that one of the qualifications which are essentially requisite in every candidate for the Master's Chair is that he should be well skilled in the Landmarks of the Craft. I therefore thought it appropriate to endeavour to portray some of the Landmarks in Freemasonry.

In Ancient times it was the custom to mark the boundaries of lands by means of stone pillars, the removal of which by malicious persons would be the occasion of much confusion, men having no other guide than these pillars by which to distinguish the limits of their property. To remove them therefore, was considered a heinous crime.

Hence those peculiar marks of distinction by which we are separated from the profane world, and by which we are enabled to designate our inheritance as Freemasons are called the landmarks of the Craft.

In the decision of the question what are and what are not the landmarks of Freemasonry, there has been much diversity of opinion among writers. Some restrict them to the signs, tokens and words, while others include the ceremonies of initiation, passing and raising and the form, dimensions and supports, the ground, situation and covering, the ornaments, furniture and jewels of the Lodge, while again some think that the order has no landmarks beyond its peculiar secrets. In my opinion all of these are loose and unsatisfactory definitions, excluding things that are essential and admitting others that are unessential. Perhaps therefore, the safest method is to restrict them to those ancient and therefore universal customs of the Order.

The division of symbolic Freemasonry into three degrees is a landmark that has been better preserved than almost any other. The legend of the Master Masons degree is an important landmark, the integrity of which has been well preserved. There is, as far as I am aware, no rite of Freemasonry practised in any country or language in which the essential elements of this legend are not taught. The lectures may vary, but the legend has ever remained substantially the same.

The government of the Fraternity by a presiding officer called the Grand Master who is elected by the members of the Craft is a landmark of the Order. The prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the Craft wheresoever and whensoever held is another landmark. It is in consequence of this law, derived from ancient usage that the Grand Master assumes the chair at every communication of Grand Lodge, and that he is also entitled to preside at the communication of every constituent Lodge where he may happen to be present.

The necessity for Freemasons to congregate in Lodges is another landmark, the government of the Craft when so congregated in a Lodge by the Worshipful Master and his Wardens is also considered a landmark. The necessity that every Lodge, when assembled, should be duly tiled is an important landmark. The right of every Freemason to appeal from the decision of his Brethren in Lodge convened; to the Grand Lodge is a landmark highly essential to the preservation of justice. The right of every Freemason after proper examination, unless he can be vouched for in the proper manner, to visit and sit in every regular Lodge is an unquestionable landmark of the order. It is, in my opinion, a landmark that no Lodge can interfere in the business of another Lodge nor confer degrees to Brethren who are members of other Lodges without their special request.

Certain qualifications of candidates for initiation are derived from a landmark of the Order. These qualifications are that he shall be a man, free born and of mature age, and have a belief in the existence of God as the GAofTU. It is a landmark that the VSL shall constitute an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge. Finally the equality of all Freemasons is another landmark of the Order; the secrecy of the Institution is another and most important landmark. The foundation of a Speculative science upon an operative art and the symbolic use and explanation of the terms of that art for the purposes of religious or moral teaching constitute another landmark of the Order.

The Temple of Solomon was the symbolic cradle of the Institution, and therefore, the reference to the Operative Masonry which constructed that magnificent edifice, to the materials and implements which were employed in its construction and to the artists who were engaged in the building are all component and essential parts of the body of Freemasonry, which could not be subtracted from it without an entire destruction of the whole identity of the Order.

Perhaps the crowning landmark of all is, that these landmarks can never be changed because as they were received from our predecessors, we are bound by the most solemn obligations of duty to transmit them to our successors.

Published in Masonic Bulletin-BCY-November 1953
Written by RW Bro. M.A.R. Howard, PDDGM