



THE MIDDLE CHAMBER LECTURE

A SHORT HISTORY OF WILLIAM PRESTON
AND HIS WORK.

HIS LECTURE ON THE MIDDLE CHAMBER
INDICATING THAT OUR CURRENT DAY
RITUAL IS MUCH OLDER THAT WE PERHAPS
GIVE CREDENCE FOR

This Lecture is in 2 parts.

The 1st part gives a short introduction to William Preston the man and deals with his historic past and, as you will hopefully see, he became one of the most influential characters as far as post Grand Lodge Freemasonry is concerned.

The 2nd part is simply a recitation of his Middle Chamber Lecture, but hopefully you will see that Preston was not only an influential character in the politics of Freemasonry but his writings, as well as being revolutionary in his day, are still, most probably, the foundation for our modern day Ritual.

WILLIAM PRESTON

William Preston was a Scottish author, editor and lecturer, born in Edinburgh, on 7 August 1742. After attending school and college he became secretary to the linguist Thomas Ruddiman, who became his guardian on the death of his father. On the death of Thomas, Preston became a printer for Walter Ruddiman, Thomas' brother. In 1760 he moved to London and started a distinguished career with the printer William Strahan.

He became a Freemason, instituting a system of lectures of instruction, and publishing the "Illustrations of Masonry", which ran to several editions. It was under Preston that the Lodge of Antiquity seceded from the Moderns Grand Lodge to become "The Grand Lodge of All England South of the River Trent" for ten years. He died on 1 April 1818, after a long illness, and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

So, born in Edinburgh on 7 August 1742, his father, also William Preston, was a Writer to the Signet, a form of solicitor. His second, and only surviving child, was encouraged in Classical studies, entering the Royal High School, Edinburgh at six, where he shone in Latin, and would also have studied Greek. He continued his classical studies at college, before becoming secretary to Thomas Ruddiman, a classical scholar whose blindness now necessitated such help. Meanwhile, Preston senior's health and fortunes declined, due to bad investments and supporting the wrong side in the 1745 rebellion. As I said, on his father's, in 1751, Ruddiman became young William's guardian. He was apprenticed to the printer, Walter Ruddiman, Thomas' brother, but until Thomas' death in 1757 spent most of his time reading to him, and transcribing and copy-editing his work.

In 1760, furnished with letters of introduction by Ruddiman, Preston arrived in London, where he took employment with William Strahan, later to become the King's Printer, and a former

pupil of the same school as Preston. Here he would spend his professional life as an editor, earning the respect of writers such as David Hume and Edward Gibbon.

Shortly after Preston's arrival in London, a group of Edinburgh Freemasons living in the English capital decided to form themselves into a lodge. The Grand Lodge of Scotland felt they could not grant them a constitution, as they recognised the jurisdiction of the Antient's Grand Lodge in the capital. They were accordingly constituted as Lodge no. 111 at the "White Hart" in the Strand on 20 April 1763.

It may have been at this meeting that Preston became their second initiate. Unhappy with the status of the relatively new Grand Lodge which they found themselves part of, Preston and some others began attending a lodge attached to the original Grand Lodge of England, and persuaded their brethren to change allegiance. Accordingly, on 15 November 1764, Lodge no 111 of the Antients became Caledonian Lodge no 325 (now 134), under a constitution which was just starting to be known as the "Moderns"; that lodge later held its meetings at the Great Eastern Hotel on Liverpool Street in London.

Antient / ancient and Modern referred to the ritual used by the respective constitutions, not to the age of the Grand Lodges. The shift of allegiance occasioned some vitriolic correspondence between Caledonian Lodge and their former Grand Lodge.

Caledonian Lodge later became the major component in the first Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masonry; which will be the subject of another talk in the future!

Preston soon began an extensive program of Masonic research. Interviewing where he could, and entering into an extensive correspondence with Freemasons in Britain and overseas, he built a vast storehouse of Masonic knowledge, which he applied

initially to explaining and organising the lectures attached to the three degrees of Freemasonry.

He met with friends once or twice a week to test and refine his presentation, and on 21 May 1772 he organised a Gala at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand, at his own considerable expense, to introduce the Grand Officers and other prominent masons to his system.

The success of his oration on that day led to the publication, later that year, of his "Illustrations of Masonry", which ran to twelve English editions in the author's lifetime, as well as being translated into other languages.

In 1774 he organised his material into lecture courses, delivered by him at the Mitre Tavern, Fleet Street. There were twelve lectures per degree, at one guinea per degree. So, being a shrewd Scot, he obviously made some money as well!

Present at the Gala were two members of the Lodge of Antiquity (once, as the Goose and Gridiron, an alleged founder of the Grand Lodge).

John Bottomley was then the Master, and John Noorthouck a colleague of Preston at Strahan's printing firm.

Antiquity was suffering from declining membership, and these two men conceived the idea of reviving their lodge by recruiting Preston. He was elected a member, *in absentia*, on 1 June 1774.

On his first attendance as a member, a fortnight later, he was elected Master of the lodge. The lodge accordingly flourished, which somehow displeased Bro Noorthouck.

He complained that the younger masons who now flocked to the lodge were all Preston's creatures, which had enabled him to stay in the chair for three and a half years.

During this period, commencing in 1769, Preston became the Assistant Grand Secretary, and "Printer to the Society". This gave him access to material which he subsequently used in "Illustrations of Masonry", dated 1796, which concerns us later. (Now, this is interesting.....)

It also gave him the opportunity to attempt to drive a wedge between the Antients and the Grand Lodge of Scotland, by challenging the basis on which the younger Grand Lodge was formed.

The attempt failed, and only served to widen the division between the two Grand Lodges.

On 27 December 1777, some members of the Lodge of Antiquity, including Preston, returned from church wearing their Masonic regalia. This amounted to little more than crossing the road.

Certain of the original members of Antiquity who were not present (and who included the two men who had persuaded Preston to join Antiquity) chose to report the incident to Grand Lodge as a proscribed Masonic procession. Instead of playing down the occasion, Preston chose to defend the actions of himself and his brethren by emphasising the seniority of his own lodge.

As the Goose and Gridiron, Antiquity had been one of the "founders" of Grand Lodge. Preston argued that his lodge had only subscribed to the original constitutions, and subsequent rulings did not apply to them.

After due process, Preston and his supporters were expelled in 1779. This split Antiquity. The longer standing members stayed with the Moderns. The rest of the lodge allied itself with the Grand Lodge of All England at York, becoming for the period of

their separation, "the Grand Lodge of All England South of the River Trent", warranting at least two lodges in its own right. In May 1789 the dispute was resolved, Preston, after an apology, was welcomed back to his Masonic Honours at a dinner, and the two halves of the Lodge of Antiquity were re-united in 1790.

Preston's expulsion from Grand Lodge signalled a great reduction in his contribution to Freemasonry. He had been absent from lodge for a year when he resigned in 1781. His brethren persuaded him to return five years later, which halted another period of decline.

He claimed to have warranted several lodges in his period of exile in a rebel grand lodge, but only two have been verified. About the time of his re-admission to the Moderns, he founded the Order (or Grand Chapter) of Harodim, which was a vehicle for his own ideas about masonry as expressed in his lectures. This died out in about 1800.

Preston took no part, and passed no public comment, in the long process of unification of the two Grand Lodges. His major Masonic legacy must be considered to be his "Illustrations of Masonry", which continued to new editions after his death, after a long illness, in 1818.

While Preston is remembered as a Masonic scholar; few modern masons have read his work. His history of Freemasonry is every bit as far fetched as Anderson's, although it starts far later with Athelstan, and his lectures and explanations must be read as a work of its time, relating the Freemasonry of the late Eighteenth century to the people of that time.

Preston's lasting impact is in drawing the perception of Freemasonry away from the bar and the dining table and giving it a more intellectual or even esoteric appeal.

Preston is also associated, with Grand Secretary James Heseltine and Thomas Dunckerley, with the movement of Masonic meetings from taverns into dedicated Masonic buildings.

So, Preston's "Illustrations of Freemasonry" refers with an excellent choice of language to the beauties of nature and the more important truths of morality.

The second section of his Monitor provides employment for leisure hours, traces science from its original source and by drawing attention to the sum of perfection we may, as Brother Preston tells us, contemplate with admiration the wonderful works of the Creator.

We are about to recount the Middle Chamber Lecture part of his wonderful lectures and monitor. Much of what you will hear will be familiar, but some parts may be new, or perhaps simply a different slant on what we're used to hearing.

Anyway, at the conclusion I hope you will agree with me that what we are using today can certainly be traced to William Preston, from Edinburgh!

THE MIDDLE CHAMBER LECTURE

This journey to the Middle Chamber, like many of the ceremonies of Freemasonry, is based upon one of the legends connected with the building of King Solomon's Temple. It is said that there were 80,000 Fellow Crafts who laboured in the mountains and the quarries. Here it was their duty to prepare materials to be used in the erection of the Temple. At this task they worked six days and then received their wages. On the evening of the sixth day those who had proved themselves worthy by a strict attention to their duties, were entrusted with certain mysterious words, signs, and grips, by means of which they were enabled to work their way to the Middle Chamber of the Temple to receive their wages.

At the same time King Solomon, accompanied by his confidential officers, repaired to the Middle Chamber to meet them. His secretary he placed near his person, the Junior Warden at the outer door, and the Senior Warden at the inner door, with strict instructions to suffer none to enter who were not in possession of the words, signs and grips previously established, so that when they gained admission he knew they had been faithful workmen and ordered their names enrolled as such entitling them to wages.

He then admonished them of the reverence due the great and sacred name of Deity, and suffered them to depart for rest and refreshment until the time should come for them to resume their labours on the first day of the following week. They did not work upon the seventh day, because in six days God created the heaven and the earth and rested upon the seventh. The seventh day, therefore, our ancient Brethren confederated as a day of rest from their labours, thereby enjoying frequent opportunities to contemplate the glorious works of creation and adore their great Creator. We, also, my Brother, follow our usual vocations six days of the week and rest upon the seventh. We have now symbolically been working for six days have been found faithful

and are in possession of the same mysterious words signs and grips us were our ancient Brethren.

We are therefore about to endeavour to work our way to the place representing the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's Temple where, if we succeed in gaining admission, I have no doubt we will alike be received and rewarded, as were they. This, my Brother, is a symbol of our life on earth.

As Fellow Crafts we are labouring in the quarries of the world preparing ourselves as living stones for that Spiritual Temple, that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. The signs, words, and grips with which we are entrusted symbolize the means by which we are known as faithful workmen.

They are tokens of that noble character which can only be acquired by faithful service.

The reward of such service is a constant acquisition of knowledge and continual growth in character represented by the weekly payment of wages in the Middle Chamber. Before we can enter the Middle Chamber, we must pass through an outer and an inner door.

At the outer door the Junior Warden will demand of you the pass and token of the pass of a Fellow Craft which symbolize the characteristics by which we are judged by our fellow men. They are the signs which give us our reputation with our Brethren.

At the inner door the Senior Warden will demand the grip and word of a Fellow Craft, the symbols of those deep-seated characteristics called *characters*.

The pass and token can be assumed. They are outward manifestations only - but the grip and word, are the inner secret of the soul and cannot be imitated or assumed by those who do not actually have them.

The token represents the opinion of men; the word is the knowledge of God.

In the legend of King Solomon's Temple, the unfaithful workman sometimes ascended to the inner door, but as he did not have the mystic signs and tokens entrusted only to the faithful craftsmen, he could not enter the place of wages.

So you, though you have entered our mystic circle and may mount to all the grades of honour we can bestow, may not acquire those celestial signs and tokens by which alone you can pass the inner door of the Spiritual Temple where the wages of the soul are received by the worthy craftsmen.

In this journey to the Middle Chamber we will impart to you a fund of valuable information and in your continued progress through the ceremonies of our Order we will instruct you in many Masonic secrets which will enable you to pass our outer door, the door of the material lodge; but the signs and tokens which will take you through the inner door of the spiritual lodge to the Middle Chamber of nourishment, refreshment and joy can only be acquired by daily putting into practice the principles which we here teach.

If you fail to so acquire them, on you and you alone will rest the responsibility for your failure. You come here to learn the secrets of Masonry, which when properly applied, lead to the inner secrets of the soul.

There are two kinds of Masonry, Operative and Speculative.

By Operative Masonry we allude to a proper application of the useful rules of architectures whence a structure derives figure strength and beauty. By it we learn to apply the materials and forces of Nature to the construction of material edifices and to

maintain a due proportion and a just correspondence between all the parts of the structure.

By Speculative Masonry we allude to a proper application of the useful rules of the Temple Builder whence our souls will derive a spiritual strength and beauty. By it we learn to subdue our passions, act upon the square, keep a tongue of good report, maintain secrecy and practice charity. It is so far interwoven with religion as to lay us under obligations to pay that rational homage to the Deity, which at once constitutes our duty and our happiness.

We work as Speculative Masons only, but our ancient Brethren worked in Operative as well as in Speculative Masonry. The difference between the Operative and the Speculative Mason is not determined by the tools with which he works, but by the difference in the materials with which he builds.

We use the same tools and implements as did our ancient Brethren, but to us the gauge, gavel, square, level and plumb are not merely the working tools of an Operative Mason's art, but visible, tangible emblems of great moral truths and duties. The Operative Mason's work, being constructed of perishable materials must sooner or later crumble into dust, but the Speculative Mason is a moral builder for eternity, fitting immortal nature for that spiritual building which shall endure when earth's proudest monumental piles shall have crumbled, and its glory and greatness shall have been forgotten.

When the vast sun shall veil his golden light,
Deep into the gloom of everlasting night,
When wild destructive flames shall wrap the skies,
When ruin triumphs and when nature dies,
Man shall alone the wreck of worlds survive,
Unhurt amidst the war of elements.

As Speculative Masons, therefore, let us imitate our ancient Brethren and proceed on our way to the Middle Chamber.

At the very beginning of our journey we must pass through an aisle between two pillars which respectively represent the porch of the Temple and the two brazen pillars which King Solomon placed at its entrance. The pillar on the left hand is called Boaz and denotes strength; the one on the right hand is called Jachin and denotes establishment.

Together they allude to the promise of God to David that he would establish his kingdom in strength. King Solomon is said to have erected these pillars in commemoration of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which guided the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness.

The right hand or south pillar represents the pillar of cloud and the left hand or north pillar that of fire. Thus they were memorials of God's repeated promises to His people, and because the Children of Israel passed through the porch to the Temple, they were continually reminded of the abundant promises of their God and inspired with confidence in His continued protection and support.

So, to us as Masons, they represent the ever-sustaining power of our God supporting and directing us in the great work we have to do. As they were placed at the entrance of the Temple so are they placed at the beginning of our journey to the Middle Chamber to remind us that we are passing from the world of the seen and temporal, the material world, to the realm of the unseen and eternal; the spiritual realities.

The Temple pillars are said to have been cast by the architect of the Temple, H. A. on the banks of the Jordan, in the clay-ground between Succoth and Zeradatha.

In this respect they are representatives of Space and Time, which were cast by the great Architect of the Universe in the clay ground of the brain and placed in the porch way of human consciousness, where they constitute the border between material and spiritual sciences

We all are architects of fate
Working in these walls of time,
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.
And the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.
Build to-day, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.

The pillars of the Temple are said to have been cast hollow, the better to serve as safe repositories for the archives of Masonry against all conflagrations and inundations.

Space and time are hollow. We are dwelling within their walls, and though floods may overwhelm and fire and consume the material work of our hands yet will the record of a noble character be forever safe in the repository of God's infinite love and care.

The Temple pillars were each 18 cubits in height and over adorned with chapiters of five cubits. The chapiters were adorned with lily-work, net-work and pomegranate, denoting Peace, Unity and Plenty. The lily from its extreme whiteness and purity denotes Peace; the net-work from the intimate connection of its parts, Unity; and the pomegranate from the exuberance of its seeds, Plenty. To us the chapiters speak of the unity which should ever distinguish our fraternity, encouraging us to live in peace and harmony with each other and with all men.

The chapters were further adorned with globes on their tops, representing the terrestrial and celestial spheres, and teach us to so regulate our lives that when we pass from earth, the terrestrial, it may be to that other and better world the celestial.

Thus, the globes are two artificial spherical bodies and denote the universality of Masonry.

Between the pillars we see a path, representing the path of life. This path is paved with checkered blocks of alternate white and black to indicate the nature of this life, checkered with light and darkness; prosperity and adversity, calm and storms; good and evil.

Taking this path, we come to a flight of winding stairs which represent the means by which we climb from the depths of our earthly nature to that higher life in the temple of our God. As you stand here, my Brother, you represent a man just starting out on the journey of life with a great task before him, that of self-development.

If you are faithful in this task you will receive the reward of the noble upright character, as designed by the great Architect of the Universe Upon your moral, spiritual and Masonic trestle-board. You will notice that this flight of winding stairs has three divisions of respectively three five and seven steps representing life under three aspects each higher noble and greater than the preceding.

The first division, consisting of three steps, alludes to the three symbolic Degrees of Masonry, E. A., F. C. and M. M. and also the three principal Stages of human life, infancy, manhood, and age, the period assigned to us for the completion of our spiritual Temple. As such it is a constant reminder that we should employ our time wisely and well. So, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom as the prayer of

a distinguished Mason of the olden time and it should be the daily prayer of each one of us.

Let us take the three steps.

This brings us to the second division consisting of five steps and alludes to the five senses and to the five orders of architecture. The five senses may be defined as man's faculty of receiving impressions and are the means by which he receives his knowledge of the material world. They are hearing, seeing, and feeling, smelling and tasting. Their proper use enables us to form just and accurate notions of the operations of nature, to provide sustenance for our bodies, to ward off danger to enjoy the blessings which God has given us, and contribute to the happiness and comfort of others. Their improper use tends to impair our faculties and weakens our power to grow and accomplish. Masonry urges us to make proper use of these senses and thereby to attain to the fullness of true manhood. Of these senses the three most revered by Seasons are hearing, seeing and feeling, for by hearing we hear the word, by seeing we see the sign and by feeling we recognize the grip whereby one Mason may K A I T D A W A I T L.

These three are most closely allied to spiritual truths, for by hearing we hear the voices of duty; by seeing we see the truth, and by feeling we recognize the grip of brotherly love and affection whereby one Mason may know another in the darkness of adversity as well as in the light of prosperity. By order in architecture, is meant a system of all the members, proportions and ornaments of columns and pilasters, or, it is a regular arrangement of the projecting parts of a building, which, united with those of a column, form a beautiful, perfect and complete whole.

The five orders of architecture are Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite. Each is distinguished from the others by the shape of its column and the variety and richness of its

ornamentation. To us as Speculative Masons these orders in connection with the five senses teach the important lesson that we should so develop our faculties that each, according to the needs of his own character, may plan, support and adorn his spiritual Temple with the columns of Divine knowledge, power and love. The three orders most revered by Masons are the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, since they represent Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. The Doric order on account of its robust solidity and massive grandeur combined with harmonious simplicity, represents the pillar of Strength. The Corinthian, the richest of the five orders, is deemed a masterpiece of art and represents the pillar of Beauty. The Ionic, requiring great judgment and skill in its construction. And combining the strength of the Doric with the beauty of the Corinthian represents the pillar of Wisdom.

Let us take the five steps.

This brings us to the third division of the stairway consisting of seven steps. It alludes to the seven liberal arts and sciences, Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. These sciences are representative of universal knowledge and the symbol of the foundations of the superstructure, and Rhetoric the ornament of the temple of language. Arithmetic represents the foundation, geometry the superstructure and Astronomy the sublime ornamentation of our intellectual temple. Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic furnish the soul with the key to all language, while Arithmetic, Geometry and Astronomy open to him the secret laws of nature. Music is the connecting link between them, the medium giving the natural world communication with the spiritual.

Let us take the seven steps.

And now, my Brother, having reached the summit of our symbolic stairway, let us pause a moment to consider the lesson of life which Masonry would teach you.

Thee three steps represent the period of our life on earth, divided into three stages of infancy, manhood and age.

The five steps our human faculties applied to the construction of material edifices symbolized by the five orders of architecture, while the seven steps symbolize the complete circle of human learning and the full development of man's soul.

The winding stairway as a whole is a symbol of progress and instruction, teaching you that as a Mason you must not remain in the ignorance of irrational childhood, if you would be worthy of your vocation, but that your destiny as an immortal being requires you to ascend step by step, until you reach the summit, where the completed treasures of truth await you.

The stairs are winding to represent the circuitous way by which we must go to investigate the many sides of truth.

Masonry points the way, but you must travel the road yourself.

Our symbolic stairway was easy for you to ascend, but the heights which you must climb in actual life will be hard to reach and the task is great; yet remember the reward will be magnificent; your wages will well repay the effort.