

# **An Interpretation of the Halliwell Manuscript**

**Introduction:** The existence of this document had been known for some time, but until Mr. Halliwell-Phillips drew attention to its real meaning it had been misunderstood. He drew attention to it in a paper “*On the introduction of Freemasonry into England*” read before the Society of Antiquaries in 1839. After this he published editions of a work called “*The Early History of Freemasonry in England*” which included a transcript of the poem. Mr. Halliwell and others have estimated that the work was written about 1390 or earlier. The author of the poem is said to be a priest due to the wording referring to reading of the gospel. This manuscript is claimed to be the oldest genuine record of the craft of Masonry known. A reference in the poem infers that there was an earlier version. The version of the original Regius Poem published by Halliwell was developed by Wor Bro Baxter, a Past master of Quator Coronati Lodge. This paper does not intend to deliver a word for word plain English interpretation of the poem, but rather a more condensed non-poetic version.

## **The Rules of Masonry according to Euclid**

Anyone who is able to read will discover in old records the story of great lords and ladies who had many children. Unfortunately they weren't able to keep them or their offspring in good health or give them support. They sent them to the Church to learn how to survive and do good works.

We pray for the Lord to give them honest work to do. Using the rules of Geometry the craft of masonry was adopted by the Church and work created for these children. The impetus for this came from Euclid who was the most curious of his peers, was the best learner and honest. His ideas spread far and wide although they were simple and included the concept of teaching each other and filial love. Euclid was the only one who should be called the Master because he taught that all should be treated equally regardless of birth or ability. Euclid taught geometry and started masonry in Egypt. It was practiced there long before it came to England.

The craft of masonry was started in England by King Athelstane. He built churches, halls, towers and loved to build. However, he found that there were faults in the way masonry was operating. Masons themselves asked for assistance and he gathered together Dukes, Earls, Barons, Knights, city leaders and others [lords] to develop how the craft of masonry might be governed. They established fifteen articles and fifteen points for use by the craft.

## **Articles.**

**Article one:** The master mason must be honest and steadfast, secure in his trade and pay his employees according to their results as well as feeding them. He is not to take fees or bribes to employ anyone, lord's son or common person. He should show good judgment and his profit will be good. [Hereafter the term “lord” includes any person who employs a team of masons to work for him]

**Article two:** When general meetings of master masons are held, masters must be advised of the place and date and must attend unless they have a good excuse such as ill health. If he doesn't he will be held to be disobedient.

**Article three:** A master may not take an apprentice unless he is able to serve seven years to learn the craft. This is the minimum to gain maximum advantage to the master and the apprentice.

**Article four:** A man who is bonded to a lord should not be made an apprentice as the lord can claim him at any time. To do this may cause problems within the lodge. It would be better to take an apprentice who has lords blood or of higher social standing to fulfill the training.

**Article five:** All apprentices must be whole of body, not lame or sickly. An imperfect man will do the craft harm.

**Article six:** If the master takes a lord as his apprentice, he may do so on the basis of rewarding him less than the other apprentices but with the proviso that by the time he has finished his apprenticeship he will be fully recompensed.

**Article seven:** The master will not employ anyone who is a thief, has killed someone or cannot prove who he is.

**Article eight:** If the master has a craftsman who is not performing satisfactorily, he may replace him with a better worker.

**Article nine:** The master will not undertake any work unless he can finish it to a good standard without later fault. It must be within budget as decided by the lord for whom the work was done.

**Article ten:** No master shall take over the work of another master under penalty of a ten pounds fine. If the circumstances are that the master who undertook the work first was not operating to the lords satisfaction or in excess of budget no penalty applies. In normal circumstances the master who starts the job finishes the job.

**Article eleven;** No mason should work at night unless there are good reasons to do so.

**Article twelve;** Masons will not generally criticize the work of others, but if there is a reason for criticism it should be settled between them.

**Article thirteen;** A master will teach his apprentice all he needs to know to be able to obtain a job as a mason wherever he goes.

**Article fourteen;** A master will not take on an apprentice unless he will be able to provide work for the full period of apprenticeship.

**Article fifteen;** The master will treat his apprentices and masons as friends and teach them to be honest and conscientious so that the craft is not seen as shameful.

### **Points**

**Point one:** Anyone working in the craft must have a belief in God, love his master and his fellow man.

**Point two:** The mason must work each day to the best of his ability to earn his keep and time off on holy days.

**Point three:** The apprentice must keep quite about what he sees, hears and learns in quarters or the lodge. It is honourable to do this even if the apprentice is a lord's son and tempted to tell. This would bring the craft into shame.

**Point four:** Masons will be faithful to the teachings of the craft and do no harm to their master or fellows. The same applies to apprentices.

**Point five:** The mason will receive his pay from the master humbly. If the master no longer wants the services of the mason he must advise him before noon. The mason cannot challenge this if he wishes to continue to work.

**Point six:** The highest and lowest masons must be aware that for a variety of reasons disagreements will arise. This should not disrupt the work but peace be made after the working day is over. During the holy day rest, efforts to maintain the peace should be made to allow work to continue properly on work days. This reflects Gods law.

**Point seven:** The mason will not lie with the master's wife, his fellow's wife or girlfriend under penalty of being despised by the craft. This applies also to the apprentice during his seven year term and if he transgresses he will be punished for such a foul sin.

**Point eight:** A mason will be true to the master and his fellows and treat them both fairly and if necessary mediate between them.

**Point nine:** Outside of the working place certain behaviour is to be followed. Masons will take turns in serving fellows as stewards in a friendly way. Any food or drinks consumed must be paid for with no advantage to anyone. Everything must be accounted for to every fellow's satisfaction. If not, it brings shame upon the mason responsible.

**Point ten:** Masons are expected to live in a group without causing any trouble. If anyone makes false excuses, slanders others or doesn't work properly, he is to be brought to account. He is not to be allowed to get away with causing trouble but is to be prevented from continuing his wrongful ways and not looked after within the group. He must be brought before the next assembly unless he ceases to be a member of the craft. If he comes before the assembly he will be punished under the old laws.

**Point eleven:** If a mason sees a fellow making a mistake in his stone work, he is to gently draw his attention to it and help him to do it correctly. This will avoid additional costs to the lord. It should be done in such a way that the fellow making the mistake does not take offence at the intervention.

**Point twelve:** If a mason breaks any of the laws of the land he is to be given to the authorities for trial. The fact that he is a fellow mason is no reason for him not to be given up.

**Point thirteen:** A mason must swear not to thieve or pretend to be a higher craftsman than he is. He knows this is a sin and not good for himself or his kin.

**Point fourteen:** Every mason must swear an oath before his master and fellows that he will be steadfast and true to all the points listed wherever he goes. He must also affirm his allegiance to his Monarch and be true to him over everything. If anyone commits any breach of them he should be brought before the assembly that created these points.

**Point fifteen:** If brought before the assembly and found guilty of breaking the oath he must no longer be accepted as a mason. If he does not willingly make amends for their trespass, the sheriff will put him in prison at the Monarchs pleasure and confiscate any belongings he has to the Monarch.

### **Another rule of the art of Masonry**

It was agreed that annually there would be a meeting of all craftsmen and lords to discuss any matters which were causing concern and make any necessary changes. If not an annual meeting, there should be one every three years. The Monarch was to be involved to confirm the original intentions of King Athelstane in relation to matters of the craft.

### **The Art of the Four Crowned Ones**

Let us pray to God to help us keep the rules of masonry, as did the four holy martyrs. They were as good masons as ever existed, being also engravers and sculptors. The Emperor liked them as craftsmen and required them to make an image of himself which could be worshiped instead of Christ. They were steadfast in their opposition to carry out this task as being against Gods law. The emperor was furious at their refusal and put them into prison where they were tortured and eventually died, always steadfast in their faith. In the annals of Holy ones, the quator coronatorum are legend. Their feast day will be eight days after Halloween.

### **[Obligations to the Church and Self]**

Many years after Noah's flood, the tower of Babylon was built of stone and lime with the strength to withstand another flood. It was seven miles high and was a source of pride and boasting for King Nebuchadnezzar and his people. Their work was lost when the people were struck with an Angels curse in that no one could understand what the other was saying.

Many years later the teacher Euclid taught the craft of masonry widely. Through Christ's grace he also developed the seven sciences. They are grammar, dialect, rhetoric, music, astronomy, arithmetic and geometry. Grammar is the root of them all to those who learn to read. Rhetoric makes ornate speech; Music is a sweet song; Astronomy measures the stars; Arithmetic shows numbers can mean many things; Geometry separates truth from untruth. There is need to practice these sciences in Gods work and avoid pride and jealousy.

Christ teaches that the church is Gods house to be used by the people to pray and seek redemption for their sins. There should be no late coming or idle chatter. God should be worshipped day and night. Each drop of holy water washes away a sin. No head covering should be worn into church and prayers should be said while kneeling to uphold the Ten Commandments and the laws of the church. Pray to God to avoid the seven sins and care and strife and allow access to heaven. Lewd speech and foul jokes are forbidden and prayers are to be silent. Others should not be prevented from praying. The gospel should be heard while standing and afterwards kneel again. When the sacrament is given a silent prayer should be said. It could be this one or another similar. "I welcome you Jesus in the form of this bread. Shield me from sin and shame and give me redemption for my sins before I depart. Do not let me die in sin but wherever I go protect me. Amen so mote it be. Mary pray for me"

If virtue has been practiced while alive, on death on seeing God nothing will be lacking. All ill such as blindness and lost limbs shall be restored and God will forgive idle words. Gabriel will look after you.

More benefits of the mass are now detailed. Attendance at mass each day is desirable but if that is not possible, prayer should be said when the bells are heard at work. Just as when before a lord, the hood or cap is taken off, so must it be when before the Lord. Also the chin should be up when talking. Kneeling on one knee is also required. Keeping hand and feet still is required as is the absence of spitting and sniffing. This should be done privately. When mixing with others, whatever the class, always exhibit good manners. Pay due reverence to those superior [of a higher degree] known to you. When sitting to a meal, ensure hands are clean and a sharp knife is in use to cut bread. Allow others to have first servings and do not grab the best pieces even if it is to your liking. Keep hands clean, do not blow the nose in the towel or pick teeth. Too much alcohol should not be drunk even if you feel like it. Do not speak with food in the mouth. Do not insult anyone even if they do not let you speak through drinking. Keep your fists down and remain calm.

When with the ladies do not ogle them or laugh too loudly. Do not be rude or lewd or tell secrets to peers. Do not talk up your achievements, be modest. Wherever a worthy man is met, in Church, shopping or tavern, raise your hat and pay him due attention. Do not speak while he is speaking and when he is finished think carefully about what to say. Do not stop him from talking even if drink is involved.

If you follow these rules your reward will be Heaven.

Amen! Amen! So mote it be! So say we all for charity.

### **Comments**

Mackey says that Halliwell was not a Freemason. He added Phillips to his name when he married.

Obligations to Church and self is not a heading in the poem but was thought to be an appropriate separation and heading.

“For charity” is thought to be a milder oath than “by God”.

Where masonry is mentioned, the craft of architecture is included.

My copy of the poem was obtained from the website of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.

A study of the ancient charges of a freemason should leave little doubt that this poem is a likely source of origin.

King Athelstane ascended to the throne in 920CE

RW Bro Neal Hewton PJGW  
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