



the Allied Masonic Degrees

Introduction

In his epic poem “The Task” (1785), the British poet, William Cowper, has a line which reads: “Variety is the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour” But other expressions on a similar theme can be found as far back as the ancient Greeks and it is a view to which many of us would subscribe.

Variety is one of the great attractions of the AMD. Of course, there are other Masonic orders with multiple degrees but, in these, they are progressive and have a common theme, as in the three Craft degrees. But in the AMD each of the five degrees is entirely separate and with a different theme.

Thus, each of the degrees of the Order teaches a particular moral lesson or related set of moral lessons. These may be briefly summarised as:

**St Lawrence the Martyr
Knights of Constantinople
Grand Tilers of Solomon
Red Cross of Babylon
Grand High Priest**

**Fortitude and Hospitality
Humility
Duty and Responsibility
Fidelity, Integrity and Truth
Service and Dedication**



Before we explore each of the degrees in more detail it would be worth explaining how the Order came into existence and to look at some of the significant developments in its history.

A Brief History of the Order

Originally the various degrees beyond the Craft were worked in Craft Lodges under warrant from the Antient or Atholl Grand Lodge. This was during the late 18th and early 19th century. However, in order to introduce some standardisation of the rituals, and to exercise central control over the operation of the various degrees, it was agreed in the late 1870s, that a governing body should be established. Thus the “The Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees in England and Wales and the Colonies and Dependencies of the British Crown” was constituted as a sovereign body in 1880, with the Reverend (*later Canon*) George Raymond Portal as its first Grand Master.

The first degrees to acknowledge the supremacy of the new Grand Council were the Grand High Priest, St Lawrence the Martyr, the Red Cross of Babylon and the Knights of Constantinople. Further developments were largely influenced by the establishment in America in 1892 of a similar body styled the “Sovereign College of Allied Masonic Degrees for the United States of America”, with a similar objective to the English body. Among the degrees that came under the control of this body were the Grand Tilers of Solomon and the Order of the Secret Monitor.

By agreement with the American body, in 1893, the degree Grand Tilers of Solomon was conferred upon the Earl of Euston, the then Grand Master, and other leading members of Grand Council. The degree was then added to the original four under the Grand Council. Then in 1895 the Grand Master was invited by the American Order of the Secret Monitor to work the American version of that degree in the UK. He then duly authorised councils to work the American degree of Secret Monitor, notwithstanding that a UK OSM body had existed since 1887. This unsatisfactory situation continued until 1931 when the Grand Council of the AMD recognised the Grand Council of the OSM as the sole authority for that Order and ceased to work the American version.

In 1897 the Grand Council also obtained control of the Order of Holy Wisdom, a series of degrees worked by a Newcastle Tabernacle since about 1810. In fact these degrees were never worked under the Grand Council and were transferred to the Grand College of Knight Templar Priests when it was constituted in 1923.

So, at various times, the Grand Council has controlled between 4 and 7 orders. But since 1931 Grand Council has controlled the five degrees we have today. Apart from the degree of St Lawrence the Martyr, which must be conferred first, the other four degrees may be conferred upon candidates in any order. Let us now examine the five degrees and discover what they have to offer.

St Lawrence the Martyr.

This is the degree in which a council is always opened and closed and in which all business must be conducted. The degree commemorates the martyrdom of St Lawrence in the year AD 257 (*sic*). Lawrence was born in Spain in AD 225. He later moved to Rome where he was ordained as a deacon by Pope Sixtus in AD 257. Among his duties he was given charge of the Treasury and the Church's riches.

This was at the time of Valerian who was Roman Emperor from AD 253 to 260. He ordered that Lawrence should hand over to him all of the Church's riches. Lawrence was granted 3 days to arrange this. During this time Lawrence quickly dispensed most of the wealth to the poor and needy, who he then presented to Valerian as the true treasures of the Christian Church. Valerian was so infuriated by this that he ordered Lawrence to be slowly roasted on a gridiron.

It might be added that Valerian got his comeuppance two years later when he was captured by the Persians and spent the rest of his life as their prisoner. This episode does not form part of the degree.

Legend has it that Lawrence taunted Valerian during his torture by saying that he was already roasted on one side; it was time to "turn me over". From this Lawrence was adopted as the patron saint of cooks, chefs and comedians, among others. In reality, it is much more likely that Lawrence was executed by decapitation, which was the usual method of execution at that time.

The degree teaches the lessons of courage, fortitude, charity and hospitality.



Knights of Constantinople

After the rather gruesome tale of St Lawrence's demise, this fairly short but highly entertaining degree is a real delight. The temple for this degree represents the courtyard of the palace of the Emperor Constantine in Constantinople during the fourth century AD.

In the chair of the Council, which is arranged like a Craft Lodge, is the Illustrious Potentate, supported by the Chief of the Builders (*Senior Warden*) and the Chief of the Artisans (*Junior Warden*).

A key element to the success of the ceremony is the work of the Senior Conductor, who is in charge of the candidate. On entering the Council he tells the candidate that those working people around them (*the brethren*) are to be regarded as inferiors and to be ignored. Later in the ceremony he learns the error of his attitude and acknowledges that all men are equal in the sight of God.

The ceremony is great example of the drama and humour that can be enacted in teaching a valuable lesson, principally that of humility.



Grand Tilers of Solomon, or Masons Elect of Twenty-Seven

This degree has a theme very similar to that of the Cryptic Degree of Select Master. The lodge room represents a secret vault beneath King Solomon's Temple. The three principal officers represent Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of Tyre and Hiram Abif.

In order to build and furnish the vault, the three Grand Masters have recruited 24 highly skilled craftsmen making a total complement of 27 Masons Elect.

During a secret convention of the Masons Elect, an intruder, the candidate, unwittingly enters the vault. This is a great embarrassment to King Solomon because he has only just been warned by King Hiram that the vault was not properly secured. Solomon had dismissed the warning saying that the vault was too remote to be discovered by strangers. In anger, King Solomon orders the immediate execution of the stranger.

Fortunately for the stranger Hiram Abif intervenes by suggesting to King Solomon that he should not be too hasty but find out how the stranger came hither. This is agreed to and when it becomes apparent that the stranger arrived there by accident he is pardoned and, having already witnessed part of the secret convention, he is admitted to their number.

An important lesson has been learned, the great danger of carelessness.



Red Cross of Babylon

This degree, which is in three parts, relates to the period in the reign of the Persian King Darius (*the successor to Cyrus*) when the work on building the second Temple at Jerusalem is interrupted and threatened by the hostility of neighbouring tribes.

The first part of the degree takes place in the Grand Sanhedrim when it is resolved that Zerubbabel (*represented by the candidate*) should journey to Persia to seek an audience with the King and ask him to restore the permission, previously granted by Cyrus, to continue the building work without further impedance. The candidate is accordingly entrusted with the necessary signs to pass the sentries.

The second part involves crossing the bridge between the two domains. He successfully crosses the bridge but on the Persian side the Jewish pass is not recognised and he is arrested by the Persian guards. Zerubbabel explains that he is Prince of Judah and insists on an audience with the King. This is granted in part three of the degree when it transpires that the King recognises Zerubbabel as a friend of his youth. Zerubbabel is greatly honoured in the Persian Court and eventually obtains the necessary decree from Darius to continue with the building work without further interruption.



The Holy Order of Grand High Priest

This was one of the first of the four degrees to come under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Grand Council in 1880 but it has always been referred to as an “Order”.

This impressive Order has a complicated history and has been known under many different titles in various countries. The earliest references appear around 1770.

The brother in the chair, The Most Excellent President, represents Melchizedek, King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God. This relatively obscure Biblical character appears in the book of Genesis in the Authorised version of the Bible.

The temple (*tabernacle*) represents the encampment of Melchizedek.

The ceremony is in two parts.

In part 1 the candidate is obligated and then attends to some tongue-twisting readings from Genesis, read by the Chaplain, which describes a battle of four kings against five. The candidate then represents the patriarch Abram returning from his journey after the battle of the kings, when he is received by Melchizedek.

In part two, after having partaken of bread and wine he is entrusted with the various signs, words and grip – no less than ten!

Finally, he is anointed, consecrated, and set apart to the Holy Office of Grand High Priest.



Qualifications

To gain admission to the Order a brother must a Mark Master Mason and a Royal Arch Mason.

Regalia

At the completion of each degree a brother is invested with a breast jewel showing the emblems of that degree.



On completion of the five degrees a brother is entitled to wear a breast jewel which is either a composite jewel or a bar from which are suspended five miniature jewels.



The officers of a council wear collars of orange and royal blue when the council is open in the degree of St Lawrence the Martyr. Grand Officers and District Grand Officers wear green collars with appropriate trimming and embroidery – gold for Grand and silver for District ranks. Collar jewels are worn to denote office or rank. Collarets and jewels are similarly worn.



Structure of the Order

The Order is controlled by the Grand Council, headed by the Most Worshipful Grand Master supported by Grand Officers. Under Grand Council are several Districts, Inspectorates and unattached councils.



The District Grand Council of Surrey was constituted in 2007 and was previously part of the old District of the Southern Counties. The District is headed by the District Grand Prefect who is supported by a Deputy District Grand Prefect and a team of District Grand Officers.

Our present District Grand Prefect is RW Bro John French who was appointed in 2017 to succeed RW Bro Ray Hussey. John is ably supported by his Deputy, W Bro Bob Tuthill.

At present Surrey has 9 councils located around the main centres of the District. The Master of the Council is the Worshipful Master of the degree of St Lawrence the Martyr, which is the degree in which all business is conducted. In this degree the officers correspond to those of a Craft Lodge. In each of the other degrees of the Order the Master and officers take on various titles reflecting the nature of the ritual and ceremonial.

What is in prospect for new members?

The AMD is one of the Sovereign Orders administered from Mark Masons' Hall, London. These Orders are generally referred to as "progressive" Orders. Please never refer to them as "side orders" – if you want these you should find a good restaurant!

Once admitted a brother may choose to advance in office as soon as he wishes and according to the situation in the unit he chooses to join. In the AMD the ritual in most progressive offices, apart from that of Master, is fairly simple to learn and the Master may choose to share his work with Past Masters.

At the end of each degree ceremony there is a lecture summarising the nature and teachings of the degree. These lectures may be delivered any member of the council, not necessarily an Officer or Past Master.

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