

The Post Boy Sham Exposure Of 1723

By

S. Brent Morris, 33°, G.C.

Presented to A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, #1949

On

October 30, 1999

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Then let us laugh, since we've impos'd
On those who make a Pother,

And cry, the *Secret* is disclos'd
By some false-hearted Brother:

The *mighty* Secret gain'd, they boast,
From *PostBoy*, or from *Flying-Post*.

With a fal, &c.

“Song VI”

A Collection of the Songs of Masons, 1734

Every now and then “Lady Luck” smiles upon your research. Such was the case in November, 1998 when I visited by good friend and brother, Yasha Beresiner, Past Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge. He is a dealer in rare paper items — maps, prints, etc., and his London shop is a delight to visit. He had recently acquired the December 26–28, 1723 edition of a London newspaper, *The Post Boy*, which had an “exposure” of Masonic ritual, a catechism of forty-two questions and answers.

When I first looked at the approximately 8½ x 14" single sheet, I said, “Oh, this is ‘A Mason’s Examination’ from *The Flying-Post*, the first published Masonic catechism.” A few minutes study proved me wrong (an experience I’m all too familiar with). Yasha’s paper was *The Post Boy*, not *The Flying Post*, and it referred to the earlier “A Mason’s Examination” (so-named by R.F. Gould in his *History of Freemasonry*). Yasha and I then checked Douglas Knoop, G.P. Jones, and Douglas Hamer’s *The Early Masonic Catechisms* and *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, two books which catalog every early major publication on freemasonry. What we found was a shock to us.

BACKGROUNDⁱ

In November 1998, a Channel Island dealer in old newspapers sold Bro. Beresiner a copy of *The Post Boy*, no. 5373 dated “Thursday December 26 to Saturday December 28, 1723.” Halfway through the

second column and ending nearly at the end of the next on the reverse side of the sheet is a letter addressed “*To the Author of the Post-Boy*” and signed “*Yours &c. A. B.*” The catechism that follows is intended clearly to look like an exposure of Masonic ritual to readers who are not freemasons. The author of the letter makes reference to the earlier and first such disclosure which had appeared in *The Flying Post* in April of the same year.ⁱⁱ A facsimile of the newspaper is published with this volume of *Heredom* and a transcription of the catechism follows this article. The newspaper itself is now owned by the library of the Supreme Council 33°, S.J., Washington, D.C.

Identification

The text of the catechism was unknown previously and the issue no. 5373 of the newspaper is exceedingly rare. Searches in the well-known Burneyⁱⁱⁱ and Nichols^{iv} collections, in the British Library and the Bodleian Library respectively, in other major U.K. library collections, and in similar repositories in the U.S.A. resulted in a complete failure to trace a copy of this issue of *The Post Boy*. A search in the “Union List of Serials” held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. revealed that twelve American libraries have holdings of *The Post Boy*. None had a copy of issue no. 5373^v.

The *Post Boy*

The Post Boy was first published in London on September 28, 1695 under the ownership of “A. Roper.” Initially, it appeared three times a week. The first editor was L. Beardwell who was based at Black Friars. In 1705 the well-known and versatile Abel Boyer in Fleet Street took over as editor. From the start, inclusive of this issue in question, the printer was George James, based in Little Britain and the political inclinations of the newspaper were towards the Tory party.

The Post Boy figures prominently in the early published references to the fraternity, carrying the first such publication.

But within a very few weeks of the latter advertisement appearing [for a ‘Society in Hampstead’ which Bro. Robbins believed was a veiled allusion to Freemasonry], Freemasonry — seemingly of its own volition — came for the first time into the open; and the earliest newspaper record of any of its proceedings is the following paragraph, published in the *Post-Boy* of June 24th–27th, 1721, and copied into two of the weekly journals the following Saturday.

There was a Meeting on Saturday last [June 24th] at Stationers Hall of between two and three hundred of the ancient Fraternity of FreeMasons, who had a splendid Dinner, and Musick [*sic*]. Several Noblemen and Gentlemen were present at this Meeting, and his Grace the Duke of Montague was unanimously chosen Master for the ensuing Year, and Dr. Beale Sub-Master. The Reverend Dr. Desaguliers made a Speech suitable to the Occasion.^{vi}

Further references and advertisements quickly followed in *The Post Boy*.

[A] further fillip was given to such talk [about Freemasonry] a very little later, by the publication in the *Post-Boy* of March 25th, 1722–3, of the announcement that

This evening [Tuesday, March 5th] the corpse of that worthy FREEMASON, Sir Christopher Wren, Knight, is to be interr’d under the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral....

The brochure [The Free-Masons: An Hudibrastick Poem] was launched with an amount of enterprise unusual in those days, for its advertisement is to be found also in the *Post-Boy* of February 14th–16th, [1723]....

[A]n event of high importance in our history was thus advertized in the *Post-Boy* of February 26th–28th, 1722–3,

This day is publish’d

The CONSTITUTIONS of the FREE-MASONS.^{vii}

The advertisement for Anderson’s *Constitutions* is headed “This day is published...” and thus gives an exact date for the publication of the *Constitutions*. The dual year “1722–3” is given because until 1752 the civil or legal year began on March 25 under the “Old Style” of calendar.

The Tax Stamp

In August 1712 a tax of one half-penny was imposed on all English newspapers and this appears on the top left-hand side of the second page of *The Post Boy*.

The distinctive red stamped design, unique to English newspapers, consists of a Royal “Rose of England” below a crown device within a decorative border. It was designed by John Rollos, engraver to the King, and often incorporates a die number below the main design. This is “402” in the case of the issue in question. The publishers would have transported the blank sheets to the Stamp Office in Lincoln’s Inn for the tax stamp to be applied on each sheet. After that the text of the newspaper would have been printed thereon.

There were a total of twenty-five tax dies on each copper plate sheet, indicating that this issue of *The Post Boy* would have been stamped from plate no. 17 which is on record as that plate used for a period of one year from June 1723. A record was kept at the Stamp Office matching the die number to the source for which it was used. These records can be inspected in the British Library.

The highest die number for the half-penny tax used on newspapers would have been “2350,” reached in 1757 when the tax was increased to one penny (as

was frequently the case when war broke out and additional revenues were needed by the government for the war effort). Rollos died in 1743 and was replaced by John Pine whose new designs for the tax stamp were used, with minor alterations, mainly in the thickness of the die numbering and more “stoic” designs in general. Since each tax stamp was hand-engraved individually, in spite of the availability of templates, no two tax stamps are absolutely identical.

Titles

The Post Boy continued intermittently until September 30, 1728. At its peak circulation in the first two decades of the 18th century, it was one of four major newspapers published in London in quantities of between 3,000 and 4,000 copies per issue. The publishers took pride in their special coverage of news from outside England and this factor was reflected in the changes in the title and the addition of sub-titles at different periods:

- *The Post Boy, Foreign and Domestick*
- *Post Boy, With Foreign and Domestick News*
- *Post Boy and the Historic Account*
- *Post Boy, the Freshest Advices, Foreign and Domestick*
- *Daily Post Boy*

Contemporary References

In *The Free-Mason's Accusation and Defence* (1726),^{viii} a father, purportedly writing to his son, makes an extended reference to the “examination” of the freemasons published in *The Post Boy*. The relevant statement begins as follows:

I remember, when I was last in Town, there was a Specimen of their Examinations published in the *Post-Boy*; but so industrious were the *Masons* to suppress it that in a Week's time not one of the Papers was to be found; where-ever they saw 'em they made away with them.

The author continues at length on the methods used by the freemasons to do away with all available copies of the newspaper. He states “I cannot change my Mind with the Date of the Paper,” and urges his son to obtain a copy “by any Means.” He continues, stating that the freemasons were angered by the

publication although they pretended not to give it any importance and that they “presently put out a sham Discovery to invalidate the other.” He ends this part of his letter by stating that “a friend and Mason let me understand that this was a genuine Discovery.”

“Song VI” of *A Collection of the Songs of Masons*, 1734, contains a stanza (reprinted at the beginning of this article) referring to “the might secret” gained “from *Post Boy* or from *Flying Post*..”^{ix} This song with references to *The Post Boy* was slightly rewritten to become “The Swordbearer’s Song” in Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1738.

Thus we see that *The Post Boy* exposure was well-known in its day, even if the masons were accused of “making away” with all copies of the newspaper. This accusation could be supported by the existence of only one known copy of No. 5373. The reference to only two exposures in “Song VI” and “The Swordbearer’s Song” would indicate the publications were familiar to all (or perhaps that their titles fit the rhyme and meter of the song).

EXPLAINING THE EVIDENCE

The Original Interpretation

Knoop, Jones & Hamer in their introduction to *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, stated that no issue of *The Post Boy* containing the “examination” had been traced by them and they proceeded with several suggestions to explain this.

- The *Briscoe Pamphlet* (1726)^x contains the “sham discovery” alluded to in *The FreeMason’s Accusation and Defence* detailed above.
- This “sham discovery” in the *Briscoe Pamphlet* was intended to invalidate the “examination” in *The Post Boy*.
- The author of *The Free-mason’s Accusation and Defence* may have confused *The Post Boy* with *The Flying Post* of 11–13 April 1723 in which, as mentioned above, the well-known *A Mason’s Examination* appeared first.
- The same “examination” may have appeared in both *The Post Boy* and *The Flying Post*.
- Two different “examinations” appeared, one in *The Post Boy* and the other in *The Flying Post*.

A preliminary examination of the text in *The Post Boy* led to be it being misidentified with *A Mason's Examination* (so named by Gould) from *The Flying Post*. After consulting *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, however, it was quickly realized just what a wonderful discovery this was because it presented an opportunity to analyze what is now the second oldest published exposure of Freemasonry: a catechetical examination of forty-two questions and answers.

With no copy of *The Post Boy* to hand, Knoop, Jones, and Hamer gave their five possible explanations for the comments in *The Free-Mason's Accusation and Defence*. While it is impossible to know what the author of the *Accusation* meant by "sham discovery," the phrase can be taken to mean "a misleading publication, appearing as a discovery, and intended to lead readers away from the real secrets of the Craft." On that basis, their first explanation is rejected.

Except for the "come-on" explanation of an accidental discovery of a secret history, the *Briscoe Pamphlet* is just another version of the Old Charges, surely well known and available in 1724. The second explanation is weak as *The Post Boy* examination is itself subtly flawed and needs no further invalidation.

The third explanation is quite possible as *The Post Boy* examination differs in essentials from almost all other catechisms, but *The Flying Post* is in agreement with the majority. Thus, if a freemason of the day described a 1723 newspaper examination as a genuine "discovery," he surely was referring to *The Flying Post*.

The fourth explanation is absolutely wrong and their fifth is entirely correct.

A Reinterpretation in Light of New Evidence

The Post Boy catechism is a well-written mixture of repetitions of neutral questions from other catechisms, logical extensions of those questions, and subtly different answers that disagree with other published exposures and manuscript catechisms. I have categorized the forty-two questions and answers as *Right and Consistent*, *Right but Inconsistent*, or *Wrong*.

A question and answer is *Right* if it "sounds right." That is, its language and symbolism is in general agreement known Masonic usages. It is *Consistent* if it agrees with at least one other manuscript or published catechism. It is *Inconsistent* if it is unlike any other manuscript or catechism. For example, question 1, "Q. Are you one of us? A. I'll stand Tryal," is in general agreement with several other catechisms from 1730 to 1762. It is classified as *Right and Consistent*.

Question 3, however, "Q. What's your Name? A. Base or Capital, according to my Degree," sounds right because it uses architectural terminology, but there is no other known usage of those terms. Thus it is classified as *Right but Inconsistent*. Presumably a brother seeking admission to a 1720 lodge would be accepted if he gave right but inconsistent answers to an examination, as long as he gives correct answers to the few essential questions.

A question is *Wrong* if it deals with an essential point of identification — a secret word, for example — and it disagrees with all other evidence. For example, question 34, "Q. What is the Apprentice's Word? A. Babel," disagrees with every other early revelation of Masonic secrets, which give *Boaz* at the apprentice's word. Someone saying his name was "base or capital," would probably be admitted as a visitor, but if he gave *Babel* as the apprentice's word he would be immediately rejected as an imposter.

For purposes of this analysis I have relied on Knoop, Jones, and Hamer's *The Early Masonic Catechisms* and *Early Masonic Pamphlets* and compared their manuscripts, catechisms, and pamphlets from *The Edinburgh Register Register Ms.*, 1696, through *Jachin and Boaz*, 1762. My idea is that any knowledge of masonry published in this period would likely have been available to the author of *The Post Boy* in 1723.

By my analysis of the forty-two questions, twenty-three are right and consistent, fourteen are right but inconsistent, and five are wrong:

Right and Consistent: 1, 2, 5, 6, 8*, 9*, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 40, 41

Right but Inconsistent: 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 22, 23, 25†, 38, 39, 42

Wrong: 3, 4, 34, 35, 36

*positive, reflecting well on masonry; †negative

The Post Boy catechism is a sham, “a misleading publication appearing as a discovery, intended to lead readers away from the real secrets of the Craft.” A casual reader of this second exposure of Masonic “secrets” would find questions and answers that mostly agree with the previously published examination in the *Flying Post* and with what we can conclude were generally held beliefs about masonry. The *Wrong* answers, however, are “fatally” wrong for anyone trying to pass themselves off as a true freemason, and would lead to their immediate exposure. The effect of *The Post Boy* catechism is at the least to confuse the reader about what are the secrets of masonry.

The questions that remain and which cannot be definitely answered are:

Who prepared this catechism and why? It is possible that it was either

- a practical joke prepared by some wits who were relying on the published secrets of the freemasonry, or
- a disinformation campaign by freemasons designed to misdirect the general public from their workings of the period.

I conclude that it was a clever disinformation campaign by the freemasons. First, the tone of the questions is almost entirely positive, leaving the reader with a favorable image of the Craft. Second, the only really wrong answers are “fatally” wrong and would identify anyone relying on them as an impostor. Third, there are references of the period to “sham” or “mock” exposures which until now have not been identified. *The Free-Mason Accusation and Defence*, 1726, claims that the masons “put out a sham Discovery to invalidate the other,” but it also claims “the *Post-Boy* is a genuine Discovery.” I believe that the author of the *Accusation* confused *The Post Boy* with the *Flying Post* in making the latter claim. *A Letter from the Grand Mistress of Female Free-Masons*, 1724, refers to “a Sheet full of *Mock-Masonry*, purely to puzzel and banter the Town,” though the examples of “false Signs and Words” it gives do not agree with those given in *The Post Boy*.

Finally, there is only one extant copy of *The Post Boy* No. 5373. This entirely agrees with the charge in the *Accusation* that

so industrious were the Masons to suppress it, that in a Week’s time not one of the Papers was to be found; where-ever they saw ’em they made away with them. They went from Coffee-house to Coffee-house, and tore them privately out of the Books. Those they could come at so easily they bought, even at the extravagant Price of 2s. 6d. and 5s. a Paper. By this means there is hardly one to be met with.

I imagine a group of freemasons carefully writing the catechism, “leaking” it to *The Post Boy*, and then asking their brothers to gather up some of the copies of the paper to give the impression the masons were concerned about it. The total absence of copies can be explained by over-zealous brothers gathering up too many issues.

ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONS

In the analysis that follows I have relied on Knoop, Jones, and Hamer’s *The Early Masonic Catechisms (EMC)* and *Early Masonic Pamphlets (EMP)*, the Masonic Cook Club’s reprints of Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1723 and 1738, *Masonry Dissected*, *Three Distinct Knocks*, and *Jachin and Boaz*, and Wallace McLeod’s *The Old Charges*. It is my hope that future researchers will be able to build on my preliminary analysis of this unique document.

[1] Q. Are you one of us? A. I’ll stand Tryal.

[2] Q. How will you be try’d? A. By Question and Answer.

These questions agree in spirit with most of the catechisms from 1730–60, where the questioner is invited to prove or disprove the examinee, presumably with further questions. Prior to that date the response seems to have been a simple positive assertion.

Right and Consistent

Quest. 1 Are you a mason? Answer yes
The Edinburgh Register House Ms., 1696 (EMC, p. 31)

Quest. 1. Are you a Mason? Ansr, Yes indeed that I am.

Chetwode Crawley Ms., c. 1700 (EMC, p. 37)

I Are you a Masone, Answer Yes ended that I am

The Kevan Ms., c. 1714–20 (EMC, p. 42)

(Question) are you a mason (Answer) yes I am a freemason

Sloane Ms. 3329, c. 1700 (EMC, p. 47)

Q. Are you a Master-Mason? A. I am; try me, prove, disprove me if you can.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 25

Q. Are you a Mason? A. I am.

The Mystery of Free-Masonry, 1730 (EMC, p. 154)

Q. Are you a Mason? A. I am so taken to be Among Brothers & fellows.

Wilkinson Ms., 1724–30 (EMC, p. 121)

Mas. Brother, are you a Fellow-Craft? Ans. I am; try me, prove me.

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 39

Mas. Brother, are you a Fellow Craft? Ans. I am. Try me, prove me.

Jachin and Boaz, 1762, p. 30

[3] Q. What's your Name? A. Base or Capital, according to my Degree.

The answer to this question uses architectural terminology, which “sounds” Masonic. The answer seems right, but there is no comparable response in any other catechism. The most frequent name given by the catechisms is Jachin.

This is an example of a test question that could be innocently asked in a public setting to determine if someone were a Mason. The answer of “Base or Capital” is in total disagreement with all other catechisms.

Wrong

... to you good fellow wt is your name (A) J or B.

Sloane Ms. 3329, c. 1700 (EMC, p. 48)

Q. I greet you well Brother what is your Name. A. Jachin

The Whole Institution of Masonry, 1724 (EMC, p. 81)

I greet you well Brother, God's Greeting be at our Meeting, what is your Name answer *Jachin*.

The Whole Institutions of Free- Masons Opened, 1725 (EMC, p. 87)

I greet you well brother craveing your name—answere J and the other is to say his is B.

Graham Ms., 1726 (EMC, p. 90)

Ex. What's a Master-Mason Nam'd?

R. *Cassia* is my name and from a Just and Perfect Lodge I came.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 29.

[4] Q. From whence come you? A. From Solomon's Temple.

The catechisms that have this question all agree that the answer is from a Lodge of St. John. This is another example of a test question in total disagreement with all other catechisms.

Wrong

Q. From whence came You. A. I came from a Right Worshipful Lodge of Masters and Fellows belonging to Holy St. John.

The Whole Institution of Masonry, 1724 (EMC, p. 81)

The Salutation is as follows — from whence came you — I came from a right worshipful Lodge of Masters and fellows belonging to God and holy saint John...

Graham Ms., 1726 (EMC p. 90)

Q. Whence Come you A. from the Holy Lodge of St. John

The Wilkinson Ms., 1724–30 (EMC, p. 137)

Q. From whence came you? A. From the Holy Lodge of St. *John's*.... Ex. Of the Right Worshipful and Holy Lodge of St. *John's*. Resp. From whence I came.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, pp. 9, 23

[5] Q. What did you see there? A. A folded square Paper.

[6] Q. What was the Use of that Paper? A. It was a Passport to the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, and all the private Parts of the Temple.

These two questions seem to allude to an early secret or perceived secret of masons. No less than five catechisms indicate that a Mason must respond to the receipt of a paper square — either folded or cut like a mason's square. Wallace McLeod, commenting on *An Hudibrastick Poem*, says the idea the paper must be folded in a square is “a misunderstanding of a genuine secret.” (W. McLeod, *The Grand Design*, p. 73) Question 5 conforms to the idea that a paper square is important to masons, and question 6 give a nice explanation of it.

Right and Consistent

Another signe is by lending you a crooked pin or a bit of paper cut in the forme of a Square....

Sloane Ms. 3329, c. 1700, (EMC, p. 46)

A MASON, when he needs must drink,
Sends *Letter*, without Pen and Ink,
Unto some Brother, who's at hand,
And does the Message understand;
The Paper's of the Shape that's square,
Thrice-folded with the nicest Care;...

An Hudibrastick Poem, 1722/23 (EMP, p. 89)

what other tenours did your oath Cary—my second was to obey God and all true Squares made or sent from a brother....

Graham Ms., 1726 (EMC, p. 91)

As, if one were in a company, and to send for another mason, he does it by sending a piece of paper, with a square point folded in at the corner....

A Mason's Confession, (? 1727) 1756 (EMC, p. 104)

Sim. Sr. I have just now received inclosed in a letter a piece of Paper in this form

Dialogue between Simon and Philip, c. 1740 (EMC, p. 176)

[7] Q. What office did you bear there? A. I was Scali-ger, or Ladder-Bearer, at the Makings.

There is no office of Scaliger or Ladder-Bearer mentioned in any catechism. The word *Scaliger* seems to be derived from the Latin word for ladder, *scalae*. (I am indebted to Wallace McLeod for this observation.) Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1738 include “The Swordbearer's Song,” so a Ladder

Bearer isn't out of place, even if it appears no where else. Hogarth's 1742 painting, “The Mysteries of Masonry Brought to Light by the Gormogons,” shows a hapless candidate carrying a ladder with his head between two rungs.

Right but Inconsistent

[8] Q. How many Engagements have you? A. Five.

[9] Q. Which are they? A. First, to be true to the King and the Grand Master. 2dly, Not to meddle with Politicks or Disputes about Religion in the Lodge. 3dly, Not to abuse or slander one another. 4thly, To answer all Signs and Tokens. 5thly, To keep the Secrets and be Merry and Wise.

The catechisms are consistent that masons have either five “points” or “points of fellowship,” though questions eight and nine rather seem to refer to five duties of a mason. These duties or engagements agree in general with the “Old Charges” and other lists of duties of masons, and they are admirable civic virtues.

Right, Consistent, and Positive

Q. How many proper Points [pertain to a Free-Mason]? A. Five; Foot to Foot, Knee to Knee, Hand to Hand, Heart to Heart, and Ear to Ear.

The Grand Mystery of Free- Masons Discover'd, 1724 (EMC, p. 79)

... at the full and total agreement thereof to follow with five points of free Masons fellowship which is foot to foot knee to knee breast to breast cheek to cheek and hand to Back which five points hath referance to the five cheif signes which is head foot body hand and heart and also to the five points of artitectur and also to the fve orders of Masonry yet takes thire strength from five primitive one devine and four temporall which is as follows first christ the chiefe and Cornerston secondly Peter called Cephas thirdly moses who cutte the commands fourthly Bazalliell the best of Masons fifthly hiram who was filled with wisdom and understanding

Graham Ms., 1726 (EMC, pp. 95–96)

Ex. What are they [the Five Points of Fellowship]? Hand to Hand, Foot to Foot, Cheek to Cheek, Knee to Knee, and Hand to Back.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 28

[Chapter Nineteen. The Charges General]

1 The first charge is that ye shall be true men to God and the Holy Church; and that ye use no error nor heresy, by your understanding or by discreet or wise men's teaching.

2 and also that ye shall be true liege men to the King without treason or falsehood; and that ye know no treason or treachery, but that ye amend it if ye may, or else warn the King or his council thereof.

3 And also ye shall be true each one to another; that is to say, to every Master and Fellow of the Craft of Masonry that be Masons allowed, ye shall do to them as ye would they should do to you.

4 and also that every Mason keep true counsel of lodge and of chamber, and all other counsel that ought to be kept by the way of Masonry.

...

7 And also you shall call Masons your Fellows or Brethren, and no other foul name....

"A Tentative Reconstruction of the 'Standard Original' of the Old Charges

[1520/83] in Modern Spelling," *The Old Charges*, pp. 47-48.

THE FREE-MASON'S OATH. You must serve God according to the best of your Knowledge and Institution, and be a true Leige Man to the King, and help and assist any Brother as far as your Ability will allow....

The Grand Mystery of Free-Masons Discover'd, 1724 (EMC, p. 79)

...Eucluydes gave them these Admonitions following:

I. To be true to their King.

II. To be true to the Master they serve.

III To be true and love one another.

IV. Not to miscall one another, &c.

...

I will, by God's Grace, begin the Charge.

I. I am to admonish you to honour God in his holy Church....

II. To be true to our Sovereign Lodge the King, his Heirs and lawful Successors; committing no Treason, Misprision of Treason, or Felony; and if any Man shall commit Treason that you know of, you shall forthwith give Notice thereof to his Majesty, his Privy Counsellors, or some other Person that hath Commission to enquire thereof.

III. You shall be true to your Fellows and Brethren of the Science of Masonry, and do unto them as you would be done unto.

IV. You shall keep Secret the obscure and intricate Parts of the Science, not disclosing them to any but such as study and use the same.

...

XVII. You shall not slander any of your Fellows behind their Backs, to impair their Temporal Estate or good Name.

Roberts Constitutions, 1722 (EMP, pp. 76, 79)

Here followeth the Worth and Godly OATH of
MASONS.

...

1. YOU shall be a True Man to God, and to the Holy Church; and that you use no Error, nor Heresy by your Understanding, or by the teaching of Men.

2. YOU shall bear true Agement to the King, without Treason, or Falshood.

3. AND that you know no Treason, but may amend it, if you may; or else warn the King, or his lawful Successors, or their Council thereof.

4. YOU shall be True one to another.

The Briscoe Pamphlet, 1724 (EMP, pp. 117-8)

[10] Q. how do you begin to make a Mason? A. By building the Temple.

[11] Q. Who are the Four Corner Stones? A. Four Fellow-Craftsmen,

[12] Q. Who are the four Capitals? A. Four 'Prentices.

[13] Q. Who is Cupola? A. The new Brother.

[14] Q. How high do you raise him? A. Above Ground.

[15] Q. Who turns the Ladder? A. The Junior Warden.

These six questions "sound right" because they contain architectural terms and give a hint of hazing new candidates. However, they have no counterparts in any catechisms. It's odd that the Junior Warden would turn the ladder and not the Ladder-Bearer.

Right but Inconsistent

[16] Q. What's the Sword-Bearer's business? A. To examine and see that none but Men enter the Lodge.

While Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1738 has a "Sword Bearer's Song," there is no office of Sword Bearer per se mentioned in the catechisms. This is probably an allusion to the Tyler who guards the

Lodge with a sword and keeps out all who are not members. He would incidentally see that none but men enter the Lodge.

Right and Consistent

[17] Q. What's the Reason Women are not admitted into your Society?

A. Because they can't keep a Secret.

Only two catechisms contain any reason for limiting Masonic membership to men, and both seem designed to hurt the fraternity. One says women are "incapable of Fellowship" and the other that their "innate curiosity" secluded the mysteries of masonry from them.

Right and Consistent

These mean Wretches ... are egg'd on by some silly Women, who (because for good Reasons their Sex are by the Constitutions judged incapable of Fellowship) are therefore nettled and seek revenge."

A Mason's Examination, 1723, EMC pp. 71–2

The women, in particular, have a strange Opinion of them [Freemasons]; by them they are concluded utter Enemies to the Fair Sex, who, for the generality, have them in the greatest Abhorrence....

That the Ladies are a little jealous of the Fraternity is natural, from their Innate Curiosity, by reason the Mysteries of Masonry are secluded from that Sex....

Free-Masons Accusation and Defence, 1726 (EMP, pp. 159, 161)

[18] Q. What's the Master's Business? A. To give the Charges, receive the Fees, and teach the Lodge the Art of Masonry.

No catechism gives these explicit duties to the Master, but since he asks all of the catechism questions, he is giving the charges and teaching the Lodge. The receipt of fees would be handled today by the Treasurer or Secretary, but it is not inappropriate for the Master to have had this duty.

Right and Consistent

Mas. Why should the Master represent the Pillar of Wisdom? *Ans.* Because he gives instructions to the Crafts to carry on their Work in a proper manner with good harmony.

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 33

[19] Q. What is done before the demolishing? A. The sham Words are taught by the Senior Warden.

The word "demolish" is not used in any catechisms, but it presumably refers to closing the lodge, perhaps symbolically "demolishing" it? Neither are "sham words" referred to in any other catechism. The Grand Mystery Laid Open gives the words *Laylah Illallah* and *Whosly Powe Tigwawtubby*, which are clearly gibberish, sham words, but not identified as such. It's possible that the answer is a sly confession of what this catechism is offering its readers.

Right but Inconsistent

What is God called? Laylah Illallah.... What is the Square Call'd? Whosly Powu Tigwawtubby....

The Grand Mystery Laid Open, 1726 (EMC, pp. 97–8)

[20] Q. What do you do when you first come into the Lodge? A. I crook my Arm and bend my Foot.

Where the description of a candidate's posture is given, it seems to involve odd posture and foot and arm positions.

Right and Consistent

[H]e is to behold a thousand different Postures and Grimaces, all of which he must exactly imitate, or undergo the Discipline till he does.

A Mason's Examination, 1723 (EMC, p. 72)

Q. How did he make you a Mason? A. With my bare-bended Knee and Body within the Square ... my naked Right Hand on the Holy Bible....

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 11

Mas. What was the Instructions he gave you? Ans. He taught me to take one Step upon the First Step of a right Angle oblong Square, with my left Knee bare bent, my Body upright, my Right foot forming a Square....

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 19

Mas. What Instructions did he give you? Ans. He taught me ... to take two Steps upon the second Step of a Right angled oblong Square, with my Right Knee bent bare, my Left Foot forming a square, my Body upright, my Right Hand on the Holy Bible, my Left Arm supported by the Point of the Compasses, forming a

Square; where I took the Obligation of a Fellow Craft.

Jachin and Boaz, 1762, pp. 31–2

[21] Q. Which way were you brought into the Lodge ? A. Between the Wardens blind-folded.

The catechisms agree that the candidate is blindfolded and conducted by the two Wardens.

Right and Consistent

Then he is blind-folded and the Ceremony of — is performed.

A Mason's Examination, 1723 (EMC, p. 72)

who Conducted you into the Lodge—the warden and oldest fellow craft—

Graham Ms., 1726 (EMC, p. 91)

Q. How was you admitted? A. ... two Wardens took me under each Arm, and conducted me from Darkness into Light, passing thro' two Rows of the Brotherhood....

The Mystery of Free- Masonry, 1730 (EMC, p. 155)

Mas. How was you prepared Brother? Ans. I was ... hoodwinked....

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 16

[22] Q. How did you look before you were admitted? A. Like a Fool.

[23] Q. How did you look afterwards? A. As wise as my Neighbours.

There are no comparable questions in any of the catechisms, and early masons seemed to take their ceremonies very seriously. However, a candidate, as described in the catechisms, would certainly look foolish, but the next question has him quickly restored to “wisdom.”

Right but Inconsistent

[24] Q. How came you off? A. In a whole Skin, but empty Pockets.

The “whole Skin” refers to a leather apron made from a whole animal skin, and the “empty Pockets” refers to being deprived of all metal.”

Right and Consistent

When a Free-Mason is enter'd, after having given to all present of the Fraternity a Pair of Men and Women's Gloves and Leathern Apron....

A Mason's Examination, 1723 (EMC, p. 72)

Q. How did he bring you? A. ... deprived of all Metal....

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 10

Mas. How was you prepar'd Brother? Ans. I was ... depriv'd of all Metal....

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 16

[25] Q. What is the Masons Craft? A. One fool makes many.

There is no similar question in the catechisms. This could be a negative comment on masonry or a subtle hint of what the author is doing to the readers.

Right but Inconsistent and Negative

[26] Q. How do Masons work? A. By Rule and by Measure.

This question not only has an obvious reference to architectural tools but also agrees with one catechism.

Right and Consistent

Q. How is it [a Lodge] govern'd? A. Of Square and Rule.

The Grand Mystery of Free-Masons Discover'd, 1724 (EMC, p. 78)

[27] Q. What were the Dimensions of the Lodge? A. Three times three.

No catechism gives the dimensions of the lodge, but “three times three” is consistent with masonic symbolism.

Right and Consistent

... if the Master proposed the Health or Toast with *three Times three Claps*....

Jachin and Boaz, 1762, p. 53

[28] Q. How high was your Lodge? A. Out of the Reach of any but a Free Albans.

The catechisms agree that the height of a lodge is unreachable. While the expression “Free Albans” appears no where else, St. Alban has figured in the Old Charges for centuries.

Right and Consistent

[Chapter Fourteen. Saint Alban]

3 And Saint Alban was a worthy knight, and was chief steward with the king, and had the governance of the realm, and also of the making of the town walls; 4 And he loved well Masons and cherished them much.

“A Tentative Reconstruction of the ‘Standard Original’ of the Old Charges [1520/83] in Modern Spelling,” *The Old Charges* (Toronto: Privately Printed, 1986), pp. 47–8.

Q. How high is your lodge A. Inches & spans Innumerable

Dumfries No. 4 Ms., c. 1710 (EMC, p. 62)

How high is yr lodge? A. As high as ye stars inches, & feet innumerable.

Trinity College, Dublin, Ms., 1711 (EMC, p. 70)

Q. How high is your Lodge. A. Feet & Inches Innumerable.

The Wilkinson Ms., 1724–30 (EMC, p. 130)

Q. How high? A. Inches, Feet and Yards innumerable, as high as the Heavens.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, p. 12

Sim. How high was your Lodge. Phil. As high as the Heavens and as low as the Earth.

Dialogue between Simon and Philip, c. 1740 (EMC, p. 178)

Mas. How high [is your Lodge] Brother? Ans. From the Earth to the Heavens.

Three Distinct Knocks, 1760, p. 32

[29] Q. What is the Master's Name ? A. Solomon.

This question appears in no other catechism, but agrees with the symbolism of Solomon's Temple and of Solomon as Grand Master at Jerusalem.

Right and Consistent

... the wise King Solomon was Grand Master of the Lodge at Jerusalem....

The Briscoe Pamphlet, 1724 (EMP, p. 123)

[30] Q. Where was the first Lodge kept? A. In the City of Enoch.

[31] Q. Who was the Master Mason? A. Cain.

[32] Q. Who was his Wardens? A. Seth

[33] Q. Why so? A. Because he set up the Pillars.

No catechism has these specific questions, but they are in sentiment with the idea that the patriarchs were masons.

Right and Consistent

But *godly* ENOCH, of *Seth's* Loins,
Two Columns rais'd with mighty Skill:
and all his Family enjoins
True Colonading to fullfil.

“The Master's Song”

Anderson's *Constitutions*, 1723 (EMP, p. 92)

Now this is what the Remarker of the Constitutions wanted to know when he mentions the Two Pillars of Stone, whereon were engraven the liberal Sciences, one supposed to be raised by Seth and the other by Enoch....

The Briscoe Pamphlet, 1724 (EMP, p. 121)

Wherever Buildings Masons found,
To praise their Art they pick'd occasion;
Hence Cain was for the Craft renown'd,
And mighty Nimrod was a Mason.

Cain founded not his City fair,
Till mark'd for murdering of *Abel*....

Ode to the Grand Khaibar, 1726 (EMP, p. 186)

From what he has said, the great Antiquity of the Art of Building or Masonry may be easily deduc'd. For without running up to Seth's Pillars or the Tower of Babel for Proof....

Francis Drake's Speech, 1726 (EMP, p. 203)

[34] Q. What is the Apprentice's Word? A. Babel.

All early catechisms agree that the apprentices' word is *Boaz*. The word *Babel* is strongly associated with Masonry and is indeed a biblical “B” word, but it is *not* the apprentice's word. Anyone using it would be recognized as an impostor.

Wrong

IF Hist'ry be no ancient Fable,
Free Masons came from Tower of Babel....
An Hudibrastick Poem, 1722/3 (EMP, p. 86)

And at the Tower of Babylon, Masonry was much made on; for the King of Babylon, who was Nemorth, was a Mason, and serv'd the Science....

Roberts Constitutions, 1722 (EMP, p. 73)

THUS when from Babel they disperse
 In Colonies to distant Climes,
 All Masons true, who could rehearse
 Their Works to those of after Times.
 “The Master’s Song,” Anderson’s *Constitutions*,
 1723 (EMP, p. 94)

The Grand Design to rear,
 Was ever Masons Care,
 From Adam down before the Flood,
 Whose Art old Noah understood,
 And did impart to Japhet, Shem, and Ham,
 Who taught their Race
 To Build space
 Proud Babel’s Town and Tow’r, until it came
 To be admir’d too much, and then
 Dispersed were the *Sons of Men*.
 “The Warden’s Song,” Anderson’s *Constitutions*,
 1723 (EMP, p. 101)

Q. How many particular Points pertain to a Free-Mason? A. Three; Fraternity, Fidelity, and Taciturnity. Q. What do they represent? A. Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, among all right Masons; for which all Masons were ordain’d at the building of the tower of Babel, and the Temple of Jerusalem.
The Grand Mystery of Freemasons Discover’d, 1724 (EMC, p. 79)

[35] Q. What is the FellowCrafts Word? A. Jerusalem.

All early catechisms agree that the fellowcrafts’ word is Jachin, though there are references to a “Jerusalem word.” The word *Jerusalem* is strongly associated with Masonry and is indeed a biblical “J” word, but it is not the fellowcrafts’ word. Anyone trying to use it would be immediately recognized as an impostor.

Wrong

Q. Give me the Jerusalem Word. A. Giblin.
The Grand Mystery of Free-Masons Discover’d,
 1724 (EMC, p. 79)

37 Give me the Jerusalem Words? G... G...
Institution of Free Masons, c. 1725 (EMC, p. 85)

[36] Q. What is the Master Word? A. Hiram Abif.

This is the most frustrating and tantalizing question of the *Post Boy* catechism. The first definite appearance of the Master Mason Degree occurs in

Samuel Prichard’s 1730 *Masonry Dissected*, and it would be a great discovery to have firm evidence of the degree being worked at an earlier date. Such evidence could be separate words for three classes of Masons: apprentices, fellow crafts, and masters. However, question thirty-four refers to “the Apprentice’s Word” and question thirty-five refers to “the Fellow Crafts Word.” The former uses a possessive to mean the “Word belonging to the Apprentice.” The latter lacks an apostrophe, but is clearly possessive. The phrase “Master Word,” however, means the “chief or principal” word — like a “master key.” Lacking either an apostrophe or a final *s*, unlike the phrase in *Masonry Dissected*, we can make no definite conclusion about the *Post Boy* hinting at the Master Mason Degree. The Name Hiram Abif does appear in Anderson’s *Constitutions* of 1723, where Anderson tries to argue that Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif are different men. The *Briscoe Pamphlet* of 1724 tries to rebut Anderson’s argument. In any event, *Hiram Abif* is not used by any catechism. Anyone trying to use it would be immediately recognized as an impostor.

Wrong

Help by the learned Hiram Tyrian Prince,
 By Craftsmen good,
 That understood
 Wise Hiram Abif’s charming Influence
 “The Warden’s Song,” Anderson’s *Constitutions*,
 1723 (EMP, p. 102)

E. What was that which was lost and is now found? R. The Master-Mason’s Word... Ex. Give me the Master’s Word.

Masonry Dissected, 1730, pp. 26, 29

[37] Q. What is the grand or general Mason Word? A. Ask S. John.

No catechism gives a “grand or general Mason Word,” but this is similar to a “Universal Word” or a “Primitive Word.” In any event nothing is revealed.

Right and Consistent

Q. Give me the Universal Word. A. Boaz.
The Grand Mystery of Free-Masons Discover’d,
 1724 (EMC, p. 79)

38 Give me the Universal Words? ...
Institution of Free Masons, c. 1725 (EMC, p. 85)

Yet for all this I want the primitive Word. I answer it was God in six Terminations....

The Whole Institutions of Free-Masons Opened, 1725 (EMC, p. 88)

[38] Q. How many states of Masonry do you reckon? A. Three. The first before the Flood; The second after the flood; And the third after the Destruction of the Temple.

[39] Q. How do you call them? A. Nature Masonry, Law Masonry, and Gospel Masonry.

These two questions have no counterparts in any catechism though they maintain the established usage of the Bible for Masonic symbolism.

Right but Inconsistent

[40] Q. How many Orders of Masons are there? A. Seven Orders.

[41] Q. What is the highest Order that our present Masons can attain to?

A. Few exceed the Fourth Order

These two questions support the popular idea of many — some very exclusive — levels or orders of masonic membership. This is a natural extension of apprentices, fellowcrafts, master masons and is supported by one pamphlet. By 1760 in France a seven degree system was described in the anonymously published book *Les Plus Secrets Mystères des Hauts Grades de la Maçonnerie Dévoilés*.

Right and Consistent

He makes wonderful Brags of being of the fifth order: I presume (as he is a Mason) he means the fifth order of Architecture....

Letters of Verus Comodus, 1725 (EMP, p. 138)

[42] Q. What qualifies a Man for the Seventh Order? A. These five Things. First, Conquest over Nature. Secondly, the Composition of the Grand Elixir. Thirdly, The Mastery of the great Work. Fourthly, The Chaining of the Golden Dragon. Fifthly, The Enjoyment of the Silver Lady, &c.

This question expands on the idea of an hierarchy of orders but brings in alchemical terminology which is not found in any other catechism or early masonic document, even though it has an appropriately esoteric “sound.”

Right but Inconsistent

Acknowledgements. I am deeply indebted to Bro. Yasha Beresiner for his generously helpful advice and guidance as well as for being a true friend and brother.

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Endnotes:

ⁱ Much of the material from the next two sections is taken verbatim from Yasha Beresiner, “The ‘Sham Exposure’ in *The Post Boy*, December 1723: A Discovery,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum (AQC)*, vol. 111 (1998), pp. 198 – 202, and is reprinted with the permission of the author and of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London. Bro. Beresiner comments extensively on newspapers and other ephemeral publications dealing with freemasonry in his inaugural address, “Aspects of Masonic Ephemera ... Before 1813,” in the same volume, pp. 1–23.

ⁱⁱ *The Flying Post, or Post-Master*, no. 4712, 11–13 April 1723, anonymous letter, untitled and commonly referred to as *A Mason’s Examination*.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Burney Collection of Newspapers. The Library of Rev. Dr. Charles Burney, D.D. (1757–1817) was purchased by the British Museum in 1818 for the sum of £13,500! It consisted of, among other things, 700 volumes of newspapers dating from 1603 to 1818. The collection is now kept in the British Library Newspapers Collection (Colindale).

^{iv} The John Nichols Collection is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

^v Bro. David B. Board provided the search of the Smithsonian collection.

^{vi} Alfred F. Robbins, “The Earliest years of English Organized Freemasonry,” *AQC* 22 (1909), p. 68.

^{vii} Robbins, pp. 74, 75, 75–6.

^{viii} An anonymous anti-Masonic publication comprising six letters between father and son, three supposedly written by the former attacking the Craft and the other three are feeble responses by the latter.

^{ix} Douglas Knoop, et al., *Early Masonic Pamphlets* (1944; reprint, London: Q.C. Correspondence Circle: 1978), pp. 316–24.

^x The *Briscoe Pamphlet* is undated though the first issue is established to have been published in 1724. Knoop, *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, pp. 111–30.

