

LE COSTITUZIONI DI ANDERSON

We are pleased to announce the acquisition by our Library of an excellent copy of Anderson's First Constitutions dated 1723. Cloth cover late bound collated complete 91pp and frontis piece by John Payne.

By Yasha Beresiner

The 'modern' Masonic Constitutions are generally accepted to be a natural evolution of the ancient Charges and Regulations of the operative freemasons dating to the 14th century.

TITLE

The most important 'modern' Constitutions are those of premier Grand Lodge of England (founded 1717) first published by James Anderson in April 1723. They are titled:

The CONSTITUTIONS OF THE FREE-MASONS. Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful FRATERNITY. For the Use of the LODGES. LONDON : Printed by William Hunter, for John Senex at the Globe, and John Hooke at the Flower-de-luce over-against St. Dunstan's Church, in Fleet-street. In the Year of Masonry - 5723 Anno Domini - - 1723. 96 p. plus frontispiece, 20 cm x 24.5 cm. Frontispiece Engraved by John Pine in Aldersgate Street London.

In order to write the Constitutions, Anderson was requested to ‘digests’ the content of the old Gothic Constitutions adopting the legendary history *in toto*. This was *an* indication or emphasis of the lack of any other source material in England at this time. Interestingly there is no differentiation between operative and non-operatives throughout the Constitutions.

FRONTIS PIECE

The frontispiece to this first Book of Constitutions represents actual portraits. On the left is the 5th Grand Master, the Duke of Montagu, in his robes of the Garter. He is handing a pair of compasses and a document to the Duke of Wharton, his successor as Grand Master in 1722. This illustrated document may be interpreted as being the manuscript of Anderson’s new Constitutions. On the other hand, it is more likely that it represents a copy of the ancient charges and regulations, the implication being that Grand Lodge was in possession of such an ancient charge at the time and which was passed on from one Grand Master to the next.

The compasses, the only ‘tools’ depicted in the frontispiece, are said to belong to the Grand Master. Each of the two Grand Masters is accompanied by his Officers: The Duke of Montagu is flanked by Dr John Beal the Deputy Grand Master, Josias Villeneuve his Senior Warden, who holds a group of aprons and gloves and Thomas Morris, the Junior Warden. Behind the Duke of Wharton stand his Deputy Dr John Theophilus Desaguliers, in his clergy dress, and the two Wardens: Joshua Timson and William Hawkins.

Centrally placed on the floor, between the two Grand Masters, is the diagram of the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid beneath which the word *Eureka* is written out in Greek script. Anderson refers to the formula on page 20 of the constitutions when, with regard to Geometry, he states:

... the Greater Pythagoras, prov'd the Author of the 47th Proposition of Euclid's first Book, which, if duly observ'd, is the Foundation of all Masonry, sacred, civil, and military.

Clearly Anderson chose Euclid's theorem, attributed to Pythagoras (that in a right angled triangle the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides) because of it symbolises Geometry, traditionally the most important of the liberal arts and sciences.

The Greek word *Eureka*, however, under the emblem has been interpreted in two ways. A) as a possible error. The engraver of the frontis piece, John Pine or maybe Anderson himself, may have confused Archimedes' famed outcry with the Pythagorean theory. B) It may have been intentional. '*Eureka*', which literally translates from the Greek as '*I have found*', was first used by Archimedes. There is no reason, however - at a time when Greek was a popular language in Europe - for the word to be applied to other major achievements. Thus the association of the word *Eureka* with the emblem of a most important discovery, the 47th proposition, may well have been intentional.

THE TEXT

With regard to the 91 pages of text, rather surprisingly James Anderson's name does not appear in the Constitutions until page 74, where the 'approbation of the publication is given, listing *James Anderson AM , Master, the author of this book* listed against Lodge XVII, very near the end of the book.

The origin and basis for the 1723 Constitutions are stated by Anderson, on page 58 to have been compiled by George Payne, the Second Grand Master, in 1720 and approved by Grand Lodge on 24 June 1721. There appears to be no other record of George Payne's *General Regulations* and Anderson's claim is not supported by any evidence or record of George Payne's involvement in the General Regulations.

The Rev John Theophilus Desaguliers, who was the 3rd Grand Master in 1719 and was acting as Deputy to the Duke of Wharton when the constitutions were published, wrote the preface to the Book of Constitutions. It was at Desaguliers' instigation that James Anderson wrote the Constitutions.

The word '*Constitutions*', which has always been used by our Grand Lodge, is mentioned in many of the Old charges including the earliest known: *the Regius Manuscript*, which is headed, in Latin '*Hic Incipiunt constituciones artis...*' It is interesting that we still today use the plural '*Constitutions*' when in fact it would be correct to call it the *Book of Constitution and Laws*, as is the case in other Grand Lodges. The explanation lies in tradition.

JAMES ANDERSON

Anderson was born, bred and highly educated in Aberdeen, Scotland, where Aberdeen University granted him a Doctor of Divinity degree as late as 1731. His father was Master and Secretary of *the Lodge of Aberdeen* (only 20% of the membership were stonemasons) several times. James Anderson grew up in a 'Masonic' household. He is likely also to have been initiated in Scotland before he travelled to London.

There is no information on the quantity of the 1st Edition that may have been published in 1723. The largest possible number would be 500 and the usual estimate is about 200 copies which were presented to dignitaries and Lodge secretaries. The estimate is calculated in relation to the known number of Lodges and Masons at the time. A rare and very desirable book.