

THE OLD PAST MASTER

THE "ACCEPTION" – EARLY SPECULATIVE MASONRY?

In Scotland, as early as 1600, non-operative or gentlemen masons were admitted into operative lodges. Contemporaneously, in England, the same thing was happening, particularly in the London Company of Masons [founded in 1376 as a trade guild], where "before 1618" there was an inner circle of masons, which appears to have been by invitation only, and which was a group of speculative masons espousing a spiritual movement towards a better life – and appears to be a precursor of the stronger philosophical movement that became known as speculative masonry after the formation of the Grand Lodge of the Moderns in 1717. This inner circle of masons became known as the "Acception". At that point in time you could be an operative or non-operative free mason, as well as go on to being an "accepted" mason, but they were not one and the same.

For example, Elias Ashmole a noted scholar and antiquary who founded Oxford's Ashmolean Museum notes in his diary that on October 4, 1646 @ 4:30 p.m., he was made a Free-Mason at a lodge in Warrington in Lancashire, along with a Henry Mainwaring. There were seven members of the Lodge present to make him a Free-Mason. Almost 36 years later, Ashmole received a summons on March 10, 1682 to attend a meeting at Masons' Hall in London. He did, and on March 11, 1682 @ about noon was admitted into the fellowship of Free Masons – he notes that he was the Senior Fellow among them (it being 35 years since he was admitted). They then adjourned to dinner at the expense of the "New Accepted Masons". This would seem to imply that there was some connection between the Lodge at Warrington and London, and also that Ashmole did not become an "accepted" mason until 1682, after he had obtained a degree of literary prominence as a Rosicrucian. This would be consistent with admission into a speculative group of free-masons.

It is interesting to note that the London Masons' Company received and disbursed all monies, including that of the Acception, until 1677. Thereafter the Acception maintained its own finances, but continued to function for an undetermined period of time as a separate body. The Masons' Company records show that there was a separate Constitution for the Acception, but it has unfortunately failed to survive.

In the Masonic Revival of 1717, the function of the Acception was taken over by the Lodges under the new Grand Lodge of the Moderns and the 1751 Grand Lodge of the Antients. However, the purpose of the Acception was carried over into speculative freemasonry, since the early lodges met as speculative masons, and at the direction of the Master, lectures would be presented by learned members on topics designed to give the brethren an insight into the various Arts and Sciences, and furnish them with the knowledge so necessary and commendable in a Gentleman – e.g. to make a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge. True Masonic discourse, which seems to put so many masons to sleep in this day of the dumbing down of America.

FRATERNALLY AND FONDLY,
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Sources:

1. See *"The Genesis of Speculative Masonry"* by Douglas Knoop, @ page 6.

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2. *"Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry"* by Colin Dyer [1976], pages 14-18; *"A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry"* by Henry Wilson Coil [1973] @ page 55.
3. Colin Dyer, same as above; *"The Freemason at Work"* by Harry Carr @ page 50, who notes that records in the London Masons' Company show admissions into the Acception in 1621, 1631, 1650 and more recent dates See also *"The History of English Freemasonry"* by John Hamill (1994) @ pages 35-39; and *"Freemasons' Guide and Compendium"* by
> Bernard E. Jones (1950) @ pages 88-91. I would note that it was more
> expensive to join the Acception. Than to become merely a free-mason.
> 4. See *"An Enclylopaedia of Freemasonry"* by Albert G. Mackey, M.D.,
> 33° (1921 Ed.),, pages 10-12.
> 5. See Knoop, Jones & Hamer, *"Early Masonic Pamphlets (1978)"* @ page
> 161.