The Second Grand Lodge[1]

The Grand Lodge of Ireland, the London Irish & Antients Freemasonry

Bro. Dr Ric Berman

Masonic lodges and Freemasonry were present in Ireland before the Grand Lodge of Ireland was established in 1725. And while Dublin initially followed the pattern set out in London, Irish Freemasonry evolved, a function of factors specific to Ireland. In terms of content, however, Irish Freemasonry remained analogous to its English counterpart, combining fraternal sociability and Enlightenment principles, not least religious tolerance, education and self-improvement. Interestingly, despite all that has been said and written, the differences in ritual that distinguished Irish from English Freemasonry were relatively modest. But they were prized nonetheless and provided a sense of distinction.

1. The Second Grand Lodge rests on a combination of new research and older material, including Schism: The battle that forged Freemasonry (2013); 'Antients Freemasonry and the London Irish', a paper delivered in Dublin in 2014 to mark the centenary of the Irish Lodge of Research, No.CC; and The Grand Lodge of England & Colonial America: America's Grand Masters (2023). The full version of the lecture has been published as a book.

An Abridged Version of the 2024 Prestonian Lecture

The impact of Irish Freemasonry extended far beyond the island of Ireland. This was, perhaps, articulated most plainly in the development of 'Antients' Freemasonry, which was established by London's expatriate Irish in the 1750s. A more socially inclusive and mutually supportive form of Freemasonry, it was not only shipped back to Ireland but also transported across Britain's Empire, particularly North America, carried by migration, trade, and regiments of the British Army. It was also absorbed into mainstream English Freemasonry following the 1813 union of the 'Moderns' – the Premier Grand Lodge of England – and the Antients, a merger that created the United Grand Lodge of England and the English Freemasonry that we know today.

The Grand Lodge of Ireland

The introduction to Dublin and Cork of the English model of eighteenth-century Freemasonry lagged developments in London by around five years. The starting point was almost certainly the Duke of Montagu's decision to accept the position of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England, a decision which attracted considerable interest in Ireland. Montagu, one of Britain and Ireland's wealthiest celebrity aristocrats, demonstrated that Freemasonry was fashionable as well as fun, and that it was socially and politically acceptable. The combination provided a rationale for those of 'the best rank' and 'learned scholars of most professions and denominations' to establish or join a Masonic lodge. Many others followed. And it was from this point that Freemasonry featured in many if not most of Dublin's newspapers and became an accepted part of social life.

John Whalley's *Dublin News Letter* carried a description of Montagu's installation in July 1721 and the following month John Harding's opposition-leaning *Dublin Impartial News Letter* recorded the initiation of a slew of aristocrats and political figures at the King's Arms Tavern in St Paul's Churchyard. The Duke of Wharton's decision to join the Craft drew similar attention, with Ireland's newspapers alerting their readers to 'his Grace [having been] admitted into the Society of Freemasons.'

Wharton became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in succession to Montagu in 1722. Despite having sold most of his Irish estates to invest in South Sea stock, a decision which proved to be a financial catastrophe, Wharton retained many friends within the Anglo-Irish elites where he had inherited the titles of Marquess of Catherlough, Earl of Rathfarnam and Baron Trim in the Irish peerage, alongside his English titles. His circle included Richard Parsons, the 1st Earl of Rosse, who would in just a few short years become the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

Born in 1702 in Twickenham, west of London, Rosse had succeeded to his father's viscountcy as a child and at the age of twenty-two was raised to an Irish earldom as an encouragement to maintain his Hanoverian loyalty. Equally importantly, Rosse was a fashionable social figure. He had rank, celebrity and an extensive social network in Ireland

where the family had owned estates for some two centuries. He was also affluent and, in common with the Duke of Montagu, acted as a beacon to attract others into Freemasonry.

Rosse was installed as Grand Master of Ireland in 1725 and may have remained the titular head of Irish Freemasonry until 1731, when he departed on a Grand Tour of Europe and Egypt. He was succeeded by James King, 4th Lord Kingston, a former Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England (1728–9). Indeed, there were strong connections between the two Grand Lodges from the 1720s to the 1740s.

A number of historians have agued that the Grand Lodge of Ireland was subject to a factional struggle between Irish Jacobites and pro-Hanoverian Whigs, and that Irish Freemasonry was split accordingly. It is possible that Rosse's friendship with the Jacobite Duke of Wharton is at the root of this belief. Both men founded or joined Hell Fire Clubs, Wharton in London and Rosse in Dublin. And both were somewhat mercurial young adults with a common interest in gambling, drinking, whoring, and mischief-making. Indeed, William Chetwode Crawley, a Masonic historian, describes Rosse as a man whose 'ideas of morals were inverted' and whose 'skill shone most in the management of the small-sword and the dice-box'.

But whether that is correct or otherwise, Rosse, unlike Wharton, was attuned to the prevalent political mood. And notwithstanding his libertinism, something not uncommon among the aristocracy and gentry in Dublin and London, he was loyal to the Hanoverian line, as were his officers: the Hon. Humphrey Butler, his deputy; Sir Thomas Prendergast, his Senior Grand Warden, a first cousin to the Duke of Richmond's wife, Lady Sarah Cadogan; Marcus Anthony Morgan, the Junior Grand Warden; and Thomas Griffiths, Grand Secretary.

Taken as a whole, there is no substantive evidence that the Grand Lodge of Ireland was the subject of a struggle for dominance as between Irish Jacobites and pro-Hanoverian Whigs, nor that Irish Freemasonry was divided. The opposite was the case, with Irish Freemasonry reflecting the political ascendancy of the pro-Hanoverian elites. And although the political flavour of Ireland's Grand Lodge changed over time and became antipathetic to Britain and British-establishment interests, this was not a function of a pro-Jacobite or anti-Hanoverian political shift, or republicanism, but a reaction to the British government's imposition of increasingly harsh and self-serving trade policies and a response to social and political disparagement.

The principal motive behind the creation of the Grand Lodge of Ireland and the participation of Dublin's aristocrats, gentry, and professional classes was a desire to emulate the splendour and renown of the Grand Lodge of England and to identify with the Enlightenment philosophy and Newtonian science with which Freemasonry was associated. Engagement with such concepts was also expressed elsewhere, not least in the formation of the Dublin Society which promoted national improvement through

the application of scientific method and the encouragement of the arts. The Dublin press published regular articles on Freemasonry throughout the 1720s, including popular exposés such as *The Grand Mystery of the Free-Masons Disclosed*, and the riposte, *The Free-Masons Vindication, being an Answer to a Scandalous Libel*. And at the same time, the *1723 Constitutions* was advertised widely and available for purchase from Dublin's many booksellers.

The first press report of a meeting of the Grand Lodge of Ireland appears in June 1725 in *The Dublin Weekly Journal* and sets out an account of Rosse's appointment as Grand Master. Covering almost a full page, the article describes the procession, installation, and subsequent Grand Feast, recording that more than a hundred gentlemen met at the Yellow Lion tavern in Warborough Street and 'after some time putting on their aprons, white gloves and other parts of the distinguishing dress of that Worshipful Order . . . proceeded over Essex bridge to the Strand and from thence to the King's Inns.' The parade comprised the masters and wardens of 'six lodges of gentleman Freemasons... under the jurisdiction of the Grand Master', and after 'marching round the walls of the great hall . . . the Grand Lodge, composed of the Grand Master . . . Grand Wardens and the masters and wardens of the lodges, retired to the room prepared for them where . . . they proceeded to the election of a new Grand Master'. The article continues, noting that they afterwards 'went to [a] play, with their aprons etc., the private brothers sat in the pit, but the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master and Grand Wardens, in the government's box'. The author implies that the Grand Lodge of Ireland had been in existence for some time, thus playing to the notions of longevity and substance. However, there is little doubt that the Grand Lodge of Ireland was a more recent construct.

Interestingly, although modelled on the Grand Lodge of England, there *were* points of difference between the two organizations even in 1725, perhaps most notably the election of Grand officers by the members of Grand Lodge as a whole. In England, such officers were appointed by the Grand Master.

In 1730 John Pennell, later Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, published the first Irish version of the *1723 Constitutions*. He had advertised in George Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* for a minimum of two hundred subscribers and achieved that objective without difficulty. His *Constitutions* contain a number of variations in ritual, including the prayer at initiation and the responsibilities of the deacons, a role undertaken largely by stewards in England. However, over time and for reasons that were more socio-political than Masonic, these and other variations came to be perceived as more substantive.

Another edition of the Irish *Constitutions* was published in 1751 by Edward Spratt, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. In his dedication to Lord Kingsborough, the Grand Master, Spratt makes the point that he should not be considered the author but 'editor and transcriber', writing that authorship should be ascribed to the 'learned

and ingenious brother, James Anderson.' Spratt also underlined that there were no essential differences in his volume as compared to the original *1723 Constitutions*, bar the absence of 'those Rules that tended to the Steward's [*sic*] Lodge.' Ireland had no such lodge: 'a thing not practised here.' This rather obviates the contention that the Masonic rift that developed between London and Dublin in the second half of the eighteenth century was due to differences in ritual. Indeed, the roots of the split lie in the creation of the expatriate-Irish-led, London-based 'Antients Grand Lodge' in 1751, and to a rising antipathy driven by political, social and economic friction.

The Antients Grand Lodge, the London Irish & Antients Freemasonry

If one were to identify a point at which Ireland began to veer away from English Freemasonry, it would be 11 December 1735. On that day the Grand Lodge of England met at the Devil Tavern, Temple Bar, London. Three senior Grand officers were absent and in their places George Payne was 'desired to take the Chair as Grand Master' and 'Bro. Lambell and Dr Anderson . . . took their seats as Grand Wardens pro tempore.' Martin Clare, the Junior Grand Warden, stepped up to sit as Deputy Grand Master. After opening Grand Lodge, the Minutes record

> *Notice being given to the Grand Lodge that the Master and Wardens of a lodge from Ireland attended without desiring to be admitted by virtue of a Deputation from the Lord Kingston, present Grand Master of Ireland. But it appearing there was no particular recommendation from his Lordship in this affair, their Request could not be complied with, unless they would accept of a new Constitution here*.[2]

James King, Lord Kingston, had served as Grand Master of the English Grand Lodge in 1729 and in 1735 was sitting for the second time as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Given his distinction, it may have been reasonable to expect that a deputation in his name would have been welcomed. However, with the apparent excuse that 'there was no particular recommendation from his Lordship', the Irish were snubbed and their request to be admitted 'could not be complied with.'

William Songhurst, a former editor of *AQC*, sought to explain the rebuff by 'the absence of fraternal intercourse' between Antients and Moderns, commenting that the decision to reject the Irish delegation 'seems to point to alterations having been made which prevented inter-visitation':

> *We know that the premier Grand Lodge was not recognised either in Ireland or Scotland, though both maintained fraternal correspondence with the Antients. Recogni*tion *by the Grand Lodges in the sister kingdoms, and a union with the Grand Lodge of the Antients*

2. Grand Lodge of England *Minutes*.

> *only became possible after the resolution passed by the Moderns in 1809 'that it is not necessary any longer to continue in force those measures which were resorted to in or about the year 1739 respecting irregular masons, and do therefore enjoin the several lodges to revert to the ancient land marks of the Society.'*

Songhurst is wrong, and demonstrably so. First and most obviously, the Antients Grand Lodge did not come into being until 1751 (initially as a 'Grand Committee'), sixteen years after the event discussed. Secondly, the formal schism between the Grand Lodges of Ireland and England did not occur until 1758, when Ireland broke off fraternal correspondence with the Moderns and recognized the Antients in its place, a decision that followed William Stewart, 1st Earl of Blessington's agreement in 1756 to serve as the Antients' first noble Grand Master. (Blessington, a leading Irish aristocrat, had been Ireland's Grand Master in 1738–39.) And thirdly, the Grand Lodge of Scotland did not recognize the Antients until 1773, when the 3rd Duke of Atholl was simultaneously Grand Master of the Antients and Grand Master-elect of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. At that point Scotland entered into a formal pact with Ireland under which both Grand Lodges recognized the Antients to the exclusion of the original Grand Lodge of England.

Songhurst is also wrong on another count: that 'alterations [had] been made [to Masonic ritual] which prevented inter-visitation.' There were, broadly, two relevant sets of changes. First, in the 1720s, when Desaguliers, Payne, and others at the Grand Lodge of England had modernized the ritual, adopting an Enlightenment approach to promote religious tolerance and self-improvement via education. But this had not prevented inter-visitation or made Freemasonry less popular – it had had the opposite effect. Under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of England with its reworked charges and regulations, Freemasonry grew rapidly in terms of grass roots membership and with respect to the number of lodges accepting the authority of the new Grand Lodge.[3] However, although it is possible that Songhurst was referring to these earlier alterations, it is more probable that he was writing of changes that took place in the late 1730s, three or four years after the date on which the Irish deputation had been barred from admission. This set of amendments has been identified by Songhurst and others as being at the centre of the dispute between the Antients and Moderns. And given its role as the supposed principal *casus belli* that initiated and sustained six decades of acrimony between the two organizations, it is appropriate to examine it.[4]

The adoption by the Moderns of 'innovative ritual' was criticized by the Antients and termed 'the discard . . . of the old unwritten traditions of the Order.' This gives rise to two questions: did such changes occur; and, if so, how comprehensive were they? The answer

3. Cf., R. A. Berman, *Foundations of Modern Freemasonry* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011, 2nd edn 2014, now Liverpool University Press).

4. Lepper & Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Ireland*, Vol. I, 232.

to the first question is 'yes'. Why else would the Moderns have resolved in 1809 that it was no longer necessary for them to continue 'those measures which were resorted to in or about the year 1739?' However, the answer to the second point is harder to clarify. Although the ritual used by Irish and Antients Freemasons *was* at variance with that used by 'regular' English Freemasonry, the nature and extent of that divergence needs to be understood both in absolute terms and in context.

A key point is that these changes were considerably *less* far-reaching than is often supposed. In the eighteenth century Masonic ritual took different forms in each of England, Ireland, and Scotland. But Masonic practices also varied regionally, as well as from town-to-town and lodge-to-lodge. This was a function of an oral tradition that tended to frustrate homogeneity, something achieved only later, and then only in part, when different versions of Masonic ritual were 'approved' and committed to paper. It was also customary for individual lodges to determine for themselves the nature of the ritual they followed, and this remains the case today, at least in English lodges, where there are some fourteen forms of accepted ritual, each of which has distinctive characteristics to a greater or lesser extent.

Turning to the specifics of the accusations levied at the Moderns, the most frequent Antients complaint was that 'in or about 1739' the traditional passwords and handshakes that comprised the accepted form of Masonic recognition in the first and second-degree ceremonies were transposed. The switch had supposedly been made at the suggestion of the Grand Lodge of England to exclude Freemasons whose knowledge had been gleaned from the press rather than from participating in a lodge. However, such a ruse would have become known rapidly. A more probable explanation is that such changes were introduced to bar those believed to be of insufficient social standing.

Other criticism was directed at what was viewed as the Moderns' over-secularization of Freemasonry, especially in the omission of religious symbolism; changes to the way in which initiates were prepared; a failure to recite the Old Charges in full; and omitting to use swords in the initiation. There were also objections to 'stewards' undertaking roles performed in Ireland by 'deacons', and, perhaps most tellingly, to the Moderns' unwillingness to permit additional or 'higher' degrees to be worked in the lodge.[5]

But even allowing for the reality that eighteenth-century Masonic ritual varied widely, in most aspects the rituals used by the Moderns and Antients were aligned. Confirmation of this is provided in *Hiram: or the Grand Master Key*, published in 1766, which compares the two rituals, confirming the extent to which they overlapped and the absence of material contradictions.[6] But if ritual was not the central driver separating Antients from Moderns, what was . . .?

5. This was the fulcrum on which the Antients/Moderns Royal Arch dispute pivoted.
6. Anonymous, *Hiram: or the Grand Master Key* (London: W. Griffin, 1766), 2nd edn.

The work of two Victorian historians, Robert Freke Gould and Henry Sadler, underpins the received explanation of the dispute between the Antients and Moderns and how the Antients Grand Lodge came to be established.[7] Gould's synopsis is based on the Minutes of what he dismissively called 'that schismatic body, commonly, but erroneously, termed the *Antient Masons*', and is limited to an analysis of Freemasonry itself. Anecdotally, and despite his partiality against the 'schismatics', Gould was quite appreciative of the effectiveness of Laurence Dermott, the Antients' Grand Secretary, whom he terms 'the most remarkable mason of that time'. And he was correspondingly critical of the original Grand Lodge of England, especially Lord Byron, the Grand Master, and the core leadership, commenting that it was principally their actions and inactions that allowed the Antients to gain traction.

Sadler's assessment of the Antients focuses more on the influence of the majority 'Irish faction' in the rival Antients Grand Lodge and its constituent lodges. However, unlike Gould, Sadler argues pedantically that since the London Irish had not been members of English lodges it would be wrong to term any rivalry between the two organizations and their members a 'schism'.

Sadler's argument is based on a seeming tautology: that by definition one cannot leave or fracture an organization of which one has not been a member. He contends that no schism occurred and the presence of two competing Grand Lodges was an anomaly. This is a nonsense, albeit that it was accepted without question at the time and that it is still argued. Indeed, Dashwood, writing in support of Sadler, makes a similarly faux statement that the position could not have been otherwise since no 'exclusive territorial jurisdiction [for Grand Lodges] had [then] been formulated.'[8]

Sadler's approach and that of subsequent commentators ignores the evidence. There was a crossover in membership between Moderns and Antients, and vice versa. Why else would each Grand Lodge threaten to sanction members who joined their respective rival? The Moderns insisted that their members meet only under their jurisdiction or risk expulsion.[9] And the Antients took a parallel view:

> *if any lodge under the ancient constitution of England... shall have in their possessions any authority from the Grand Lodge of Moderns or in any manner assemble or meet under such authority, [they] shall be deemed unworthy of associating with the members of the Ancient Community and the warrant they hold under this Right Worshipful Grand Lodge shall be immediately cancelled.*[10]

7. R. F. Gould, *History of Freemasonry* (London, 1882–7), Vol. 2, chapter 4; and H. Sadler, *Masonic Facts and Fictions* (London, 1887), Chapters 3–5.

8. J. R. Dashwood (Ed.), *Early Records of the Grand Lodge of England According to the Old Institutions* (London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge, 1958), *QCA*, vol XI, p.v.

9. Grand Lodge of England *Minutes*, 24 July 1755.

10. Antients Grand Lodge *Minutes*, 1 June 1774.

Sadler and others also disregard those among the London Irish who were prevented or dissuaded from joining English lodges, something that had been the case since the mid-1730s, and purposefully overlook Freemasons who were ejected from Moderns Freemasonry and resurfaced as Antients. Indeed, with almost a quarter of lodges expelled by the original Grand Lodge of England during the decade to 1750, that exodus contributed substantially to the speed with which Antients Freemasonry developed.

Returning to George Payne's rejection of the Irish deputation in 1735, there is a further issue: that of 'a new constitution here'; in other words, the grant of a new warrant by the Grand Lodge of England. Payne was aware of the key difference between Irish and English Masonic warrants: the degree of autonomy devolved to an individual Irish lodge. Although Irish lodges were under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Ireland they retained considerable independence. Irish warrants delegated extensive power to each lodge, including a license to draw up its own regulations, a grant in perpetuity to the Master and Wardens of the right to constitute the lodge, and discretion as to ritual. Moreover, Irish lodges were not tied to a single geographic location but to the location of the warrant itself. It gave rise to the convention (and practice) that a lodge could meet anywhere, whether in Ireland or overseas. Indeed, this principle underpinned the grant of peripatetic military lodge warrants by the Irish and Antients Grand Lodges.

This flexibility would have been anathema to the Grand Lodge of England and to George Payne in particular. Payne had been instrumental in the construction of the regulations that set out the centralized federal framework that governed English Freemasonry, and with others had spent over a decade promoting and enforcing them. His statement implies that if the Irish were to meet as regular Masons in London they should do so only if they accepted a more restrictive warrant.

Consequently, in the absence of a written letter of introduction from Lord Kingston, and, perhaps, even if one had been forthcoming, Payne's recognition of a deputation based on an Irish warrant would, in his mind, pose an unacceptable threat to English Masonic conventions.

Having had their overture rejected, the reaction of the Irish delegation to Grand Lodge is unknown: bemused, annoyed, or otherwise. But perhaps because of it and the rejection of many of those from Ireland who wished to join English lodges, the Irish developed their own form of Freemasonry in London. And in such circumstances it was understandable that London-Irish Masonry would accentuate the greater deemed antiquity, integrity, and superiority of their ritual, including the Royal Arch which was integrated into lodge workings. And it was equally understandable that the London Irish would emphasise mutual support, an aspect of Antients Freemasonry that had particular relevance in a community facing adversity.

Given these parameters there was an element of inevitability to the eventual aggregation of London's Irish lodges and the formation of a rival Antients Grand Lodge that provided an alternative font of prestige, patronage, and authority, and functioned as a counterweight to the Grand Lodge of England. The Antients also targeted a far larger catchment area with Antients Freemasonry becoming a focal point for men from the middling and lower-middling classes seeking social and economic betterment and a more inclusive form of Masonic association.

Perhaps the most vital element driving the new Grand Lodge forward was Laurence Dermott (1720–1791), the Antients' Grand Secretary (1752–70) and later Deputy Grand Master (1771–77 and 1783–87). From its inception Dermott positioned Antients Freemasonry as part of a notionally well-established Masonic tradition. It was in this context that he identified the Antients Grand Lodge with York Freemasonry and described the older, rival Grand Lodge of England, as 'Moderns'. The moniker was intentionally pejorative at a time when the age of an institution had implications for its legitimacy and standing. It was a clever and effective ploy. Indeed, virtually the same tactic had been employed by the premier Grand Lodge of England itself some three decades earlier: a major part of the 1723 *Constitutions* is James Anderson's faux or 'traditional' history of Freemasonry that dates its origins to 'Adam, our first parent, [who] had the liberal sciences, particularly geometry, written on his heart.' In this Anderson mirrors the mediaeval guilds where the centrepiece of each of the Old Charges is an allegorical, romantic history dating Freemasonry's origins to the tenth century King Athelstan (the *c.*1390 *Regius Manuscript*) or the third century St Alban (the *c.*1420 *Cooke Manuscript*), one of the earliest English Christian martyrs, or even more remotely to biblical times. By positioning Freemasonry as an institution that could be traced back across the centuries, the narrative implies authenticity. Dermott's dismissive categorization of the original Grand Lodge as 'Moderns' and the adoption of the emotive title of 'Antients' was designed to reinforce the argument that the latter had the greater claim to chronological legitimacy. And through repetition and excellent press management, Dermott largely succeeded.

An important part of this process was the publication in 1756 of Laurence Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon*, the Antients' book of constitutions, which was adopted by both Antients and Irish lodges, albeit that it was based almost wholly on Spratt's *Constitutions*.

Dermott promoted Antients Freemasonry in three other ways. First, by opening up the organization to a wider membership. Secondly, by ushering in compulsory, as opposed to voluntary, charitable contributions, thereby creating a proto-friendly society. And thirdly, by emphasizing the Royal Arch as a core component ('the root and marrow') of Freemasonry, an order that had been denigrated by Samuel Spencer, the Moderns' Grand Secretary. The Irish and Antients Grand Lodges also innovated in other areas with the issuance of travelling warrants, not least to British regiments transiting through Ireland

to America, the Caribbean and elsewhere, a move that helped to globalize Freemasonry; and the provision of certificates to members in good standing, providing what quickly became a Masonic passport that allowed access to lodges (and thus Masonic support groups) nationally and overseas.

Lodge membership registers, the lists of subscribers to Masonic books, and contemporary press reports, all point to how Irish and Antients Freemasonry altered over time, evolving from a relatively exclusive and predominantly Protestant organization in the 1730s to become far more socially inclusive and almost fully inter-denominational, with a substantial number of Catholic members. Several factors drove the process. As in England, one motive for joining a Masonic lodge was the forum that Freemasonry provided for local association. An invitation to fraternal drinking and dining was attractive as an end in itself, but this was enhanced by the additional potential benefits of networking. Freemasonry's tolerance of different religions was another key factor and something especially important in Ireland, where the lodge brought together conformist and non-conformist Protestants, Catholics and Quakers.

The spirituality of a quasi-religious ritual also held appeal, something of particular significance in Ireland where Catholic worship was circumscribed and non-conformist religion discouraged. And there were other influences. Fraternal benevolence did not equate only to giving charity, it included its receipt. Complete financial security was not on offer but lodge funds were available to assist distressed members and their families, not least following a death or during periods of unemployment or ill health. The significance of this aspect of Irish and Antients Freemasonry was reflected at the time in the weight attached to Masonic funerals:

> *That upon the death of any of our worthy brethren whose names are or may be hereafter recorded in the Grand Registry &c., the Master of such lodge as he then belonged to shall immediately inform the Grand Secretary of his death and the intended time for his funeral, and upon this notice the Grand Secretary shall summon all the lodges to attend the funeral in proper order, and that each member shall pay one shilling towards defraying the expenses of said funeral or otherwise to his widow or nearest friend.*[11]

In Ireland, as in England, aristocratic patronage provided a political and social imprimatur for Freemasonry, which was far from being a secret society. Indeed, the pomp and ceremony of Masonic parades, dinners, dances and other entertainments may have been a far more effective draw than any supposedly secret signs and tokens that were communicated privately in the lodge. Processions accompanied by music – and in port towns by naval salutes – with members in full regalia, often ended with public church services celebrating the semi-annual St John's Days or the laying of civic foundation stones.

11. Antients Grand Lodge *Minutes*, 1 July 1752.

Other Masonic events included dances and theatrical evenings, where concerts and plays were often preceded and followed by Masonic verse and song. Such events occurred regularly, both in Dublin and across Ireland.[12]

> *Loughrea [Co. Galway], June 25th, 1755. Yesterday being St John's Day, the Patron Saint of the Most Antient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, the Free Masons of this Town, of lodge No.248, met at some distance from the town from whence they marched in procession preceded by a band of music to the Fountain Tavern where they dined, and after dinner drank all the toasts peculiar to Masonry, the Royal Family, the Glorious Pious and Immortal Memory of King William, and other loyal toasts. At six in the evening, they marched to the Assembly Rooms where they gave an elegant Ball to the Ladies and Gentlemen. The Ball was opened by the Master; the first set consisted of twenty couple, the Men all Masons, and the Ladies (to do honour to the Fraternity), wore blue ribbons, and particularly a blue rose on each of their left breasts.*[13]

Unlike most other societies and institutions in Ireland, Freemasonry offered a bridge that crossed the divide between social ranks and religious denominations. And as the eighteenth century progressed, this became ever more obvious. By the 1790s Irish Freemasonry had expanded to embrace a membership that spanned the spectrum from landed gentry to the Protestant and Catholic working class. Of course, Catholic Freemasons were not present uniformly across Ireland,[14] and not all lodges were inter-denominational or socially inclusive. But taken as a whole, Irish Freemasonry was considerably less socially stratified and more religiously inclusive than elsewhere in Europe and, probably for this reason, by the close of the eighteenth century was Ireland's most popular form of civil association.[15]

The London Irish

Although there had been Irish enclaves in London from the late seventeenth century, St Giles in particular, the number of Irish settling permanently in London rose steadily in the 1730s and 1740s. Before then migration had been predominantly seasonal with men and women travelling across the Irish Sea to work on the harvest, especially the farms that ringed London. And although this continued, industrialisation and the lure of London's growing wealth created a locus of perceived opportunity that led to permanent settlement.

12. *Dublin Mercury*, 17–20 June 1769.

13. *Dublin Gazette*, 24–28 June 1755; *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 28 June – 2 July 1757.

14. The anti-Masonic papal bulls of 1738 and 1751 and canon law against Freemasonry were largely ignored in Ireland throughout the eighteenth century. The same was true in many other areas of Europe

15. P. Mirala, *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733-1813: A Social and Political History of the Masonic Brotherhood in the North of Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); & 'Masonic Sociability and its Limitations', in J. Kelly, M. J. Powell (Eds), *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010).

Higher migration from Ireland was also driven by the appalling weather conditions of 1738–40. The consistently freezing conditions decimated Ireland's grain and potato crops and led to widespread famine. The impact was compounded by inadequate relief measures, ongoing trade restrictions that raised the cost of food imports and restricted the exports that could pay for them, and by the War of the Austrian Succession which inflated food prices across Europe and exacerbated food shortages further.

It has been estimated that up to 400,000 may have starved within an Irish population of *c*.3 million, a higher proportion than in the potato famine of the 1840s, when *c*.1 million of Ireland's then *c*.8 million population died. And although Europe's weather returned to more benign conditions in 1742, the legacy of deprivation and distress left an indelible mark and continued to power migration to America and Britain, 'the nearest place that wasn't Ireland.' There were jobs for some. London, the largest city in Europe, had pockets of wealth that created opportunities for artisans and skilled labourers, as well as domestic servants, porters, and sedan chairmen. And that expenditure trickled down ever narrowing channels into the poorest parts of London where hawkers and the unskilled took their chances to scrape a living.

London's Irish communities were distributed across the capital, but the majority congregated in four large slums: the contiguous 'rookeries' of St Giles and St Martin's, the former known as 'Little Dublin', for obvious reasons, or 'the Holy Land', referencing the religious faith of its many Irish residents, and the latter 'Porridge Island' for its numerous 'porridges' or 'cook shops'.

St Martin's, south of St Giles, was a maze of over-crowded tenements in foetid alleys, courts and narrow lanes, with many properties rundown and let to 'the lowest of wretches.'[16] Other rookeries were in the warren of alleys beyond the Tower of London, running east from the Minories through East Smithfield and along the Ratcliffe Highway down to the docks; and in the arc of streets north-east of the City of London, from Clerkenwell through Moorfields to Spitalfields. Conditions were dire, marked by cramped and insanitary tenements, with many properties held on short leases from absentee freeholders. Lessees controlled a single or sometimes several buildings, which were frequently sub-leased, either floor-by-floor or room-by-room. The largest rooms were often sub-divided, with sleeping spaces separated by rag curtains or makeshift partitions. A single house might thus hold fifty or sixty men, women, and children, each with access to a space marginally larger than the width of a narrow bed which would be leased monthly, weekly, or daily, with the poorest paying less than 1d per night for a strip of floor without a bed or blanket.

16. M. D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1966), foonotes on 331–47. (First published 1925.)

Frequently discriminated against by English landlords, the London Irish were catered for by their compatriots, with a slew of Irish-owned, Irish-run lodging houses and tenements operating across the capital. They were complemented by Irish-owned chophouses, alehouses, gin shops, and brothels, and Irish networks for fencing stolen goods. But the rookeries were not exclusively the sink estates of literature but for those with determination and luck, also fonts of aspiration and entrepreneurialism. Many migrants prospered, becoming successful traders, artisans, or shop keepers, with others engaged in the professions as teachers or apothecaries, or working as lawyers, doctors, and barber-surgeons.

And it was from this stratum of aspirational men that the Antients' membership was drawn. Lodge membership records illustrate this comprehensively as does the Antients' Grand Register, with middling and skilled artisans comprising well over a quarter of those members whose occupations are disclosed. The actual proportion was probably far higher. Many of those described as a 'tailor', 'weaver', or 'painter' etc. would not have been self-employed but small-scale business owners – employers rather than employees. Membership registers also confirm that Antients Freemasonry was characterized by shared occupations and locations, and that a combination of social, employment, and business connections underpinned lodge companionship. Indeed, Antients Masonry was from its earliest years an association of family, neighbours, and co-workers, the majority living and labouring close to one another in relatively compact districts. It was a medium in which a society based on mutual support might be expected to take root – and it did.

For almost the whole of this period, and with relatively few exceptions, the English elites disdained Ireland. And Moderns English Freemasonry followed suit. There was a contempt for Ireland, which was pictured as a backwater, and an unease, founded in the caricature of the Irish as 'feckless', that they posed a threat to Freemasonry's charitable funds. The position was made clear at the top of the organization with the Moderns' Grand Secretary, Samuel Spencer, reportedly telling an Irish applicant that 'your being an Antient Mason, you are not entitled to any of our charity. The ancient masons have a lodge at the Five Bells in the Strand and their secretary's name is Dermott. Our society is neither arch, royal arch or ancient so that you have no right to partake of our charity.'[17]

Spencer expanded his diatribe against Antients Freemasonry and Dermott, in particular, in a pamphlet, *A Defence of Freemasonry*.[18] His description of a 'three-hour lecture' by 'a red-hot Hibernian' is sarcastic, as is his account of the initiation of a sedan chairman who, too poor to settle his lodge fees in full, pays half in cash and half via an IOU. The pamphlet denigrates the Antients as a 'disgrace to society', whose members

17. H. Sadler, *Masonic Facts and Fictions (*1887); Kessinger Publishing (2003).

18 Anon., *A Defence of Free-Masonry as Practiced in the Regular Lodges, both Foreign and Domestic under the Constitution of the English Grand Master* (London, 1765).

have 'scarcely a coat or shirt to their backs' and are to be found in ale houses 'hooting and hollooing.'

Spencer's view was a distortion. The Antients' membership registers and Minutes demonstrate that its members shared a desire for social and economic betterment and a wish to be part of polite society. This was also the case in America and elsewhere. Of course, on both sides of the Atlantic, Antients Freemasonry was not for the poorest. Membership and dining fees and the obligatory charitable contributions were at levels too onerous for most working men. But for those who could afford to join there were many reasons to do so and to remain. The five Irish-led lodges that in 1751 founded the London-based Antients Grand Committee, later the Antients Grand Lodge,[19] were joined by another four lodges within twelve months and a further thirty within five years, by which point the number of members was in excess of a thousand.[20]

Within a further two decades the Antients had authority over 200 lodges across London, provincial England and overseas. The figure excludes lodges chartered by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and other overseas Provincial Grand Lodges, and omits the many independent Antients lodges that operated without a warrant, especially on America's frontier.

Antients Freemasonry in America

More than 400,000 Irish migrated to North America in the eighteenth century. They included many religious denominations but most, more than three-quarters, were Ulster Presbyterians – Scots-Irish – the descendants of Lowland Scots who had been encouraged to colonize the Plantation of Ulster from the early 1600s to the end of the seventeenth century. As Presbyterians they were subject to Ireland's penal laws which restricted full legal rights to members of the Church of Ireland. But despite what is often claimed, their migration was not due solely or mainly to religious and political discrimination, nor was it a function of the famines that had racked the country, although these factors played a role. The main drivers were the financial hardship of excessive land rents and the mercantilist trade legislation that constrained Ireland and made its agricultural and manufactured exports uncompetitive, together with the pull of better economic prospects elsewhere advertized in letters from friends and relatives carrying positive first-hand accounts of life in America, and the glowing pamphlets commissioned by land speculators and shipping agents. There would be taxes and hardships, but the former were lower than those levied at home and the latter considered to be more manageable. And unlike Ireland, America

19. The Antients Grand Lodge was formed following a meeting at the Turk's Head tavern in Greek Street on 17 July 1751. The meeting was attended by around 80 members of five lodges: the Turk's Head; The Cripple, Little Britain; The Cannon, Water Lane, Fleet Street; The Plaisterers' Arms, Gray's Inn Lane; and The Globe, Bridges Street, Covent Garden. The Grand Lodge referred to itself as a 'Grand Committee' until 27 December 1753.

20. *Registers of the Grand Lodge of the Antients*, 1751–1813.

had inexpensive land from which good profits could be earned, plentiful food grown, and relative political and religious freedom.

Some left for England, but a far more formidable number travelled west across the Atlantic. Those with agricultural leases and businesses that had value sold up and used the proceeds to pay their fares to America and acquire land. Those who did not travelled as indentured labourers, and worked for up to five years to pay their debts. They sailed from Belfast, Dublin, and Londonderry, and from Ireland's many minor ports, and their destinations were Charleston, New York, Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia, the last the most important port of call for the vast majority.

Pennsylvania was a destination in itself and a distribution point for onward settlement elsewhere. Although the absolute number of eighteenth-century migrants is relatively modest when compared to the more than four million who left Ireland for America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was nonetheless significant, equating to some 10–12% of America's white settler population that in 1780 was around 2.2 million.[21] And Ireland's migrants were not spread evenly across the thirteen colonies. Most gravitated towards western Pennsylvania, the frontier lands of western Virginia, and the Carolina Piedmont, where they comprised up to half, and sometimes more, of the local population.

A minority of Irish and London Irish migrants were already Freemasons when they arrived in America. Others were initiated afterwards. And as they travelled south and west along the wagon trails to the back country, they carried their Freemasonry with them, with the chartering of Antients and Irish lodges documented from the mid-1750s.

Although some warrants were sourced from across the Atlantic, Pennsylvania took a leading role in launching Antients Freemasonry across the middle and southern colonies, constituting lodges both at home and in other provinces. Pennsylvania's first move to adopt Antients Freemasonry was recorded at the 5 September 1759 meeting of Antients Lodge No. 1, 'the Grand Master's Lodge', in London when a petition was presented and granted for a Provincial Grand Lodge warrant 'for the brethren at Philadelphia.' The petitioners were members of Lodge No. 4, a lodge that, unusually for Pennsylvania, comprised artisans and sailors. The petition marks the beginning of Antients Freemasonry's formal path into North America. The positive news and a provincial warrant were conveyed to America and within a decade, Pennsylvania's Antients Freemasons would reign supreme and Moderns Freemasonry all but disappear from the province.

Irish and Antients Freemasonry was also carried to America by the British military, many of whose regiments were deployed to Ireland and granted travelling warrants by the Grand Lodge of Ireland prior to crossing the Atlantic. A smaller number of regiments

21. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, the number of migrants leaving Ulster was so considerable that Ireland's linen industry was under threat of collapse and the exodus of agricultural tenants rendered a few Irish estates unviable; and although migration slowed during the war years of 1775–83, it accelerated hard afterwards, with more than 10,000 leaving in 1784 alone, a number that increased in the years that followed.

received warrants directly from the Antients Grand Lodge in London which was keen to encourage America's 'right worshipful and very worthy gentlemen' to join its version of the Craft. But Irish migration was unarguably the most powerful vector and across the western frontier from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.

The conclusion of the War of Independence cemented the dominance of the Antients over the Moderns in what was now the United States of America. Where from the 1730s until the early 1760s America's elites had looked to England and to London in particular as the epitome of polite society, and had embraced English – Moderns – Freemasonry as the embodiment of elite polite association, from the mid- and late 1760s other influences prevailed, as Moderns Freemasonry came to be associated with loyalism whereas the Antients were identified more directly with patriotism and revolution.

Massachusetts, and Boston in particular, casts a light on the relative position of Antients and Moderns Freemasonry before and after Independence. Before the war Moderns Freemasonry included within its ranks many of Boston's most important figures, from the governor and members of the Council to the city's leading merchants, lawyers, and shipowners. Being a Freemason was an assertion of social standing and of one's gentility and philanthropy. The lodge – and there were many of them – was an effective and pleasant forum for networking and social interaction, with the Provincial Grand Lodge acknowledging overtly that ultimate Masonic authority lay with the Grand Lodge of England. In contrast, Boston's Antients Freemasons admitted those whose financial, political, and social status were of a lesser distinction. Antients Freemasonry was associated with Ireland and to a smaller extent Scotland, but mainly with the insurgent 'Grand Lodge of England according to the Old Institutions' – the Antients – which had extended the democratization of Freemasonry. Many of its leading figures were connected to the Sons of Liberty and republicanism and, importantly, the organization enjoyed an elevated level of Masonic autonomy.

By the time Independence had been achieved, Antients Freemasonry had become the fraternal association of choice for many at the forefront of the new political establishment in America. Its leaders embraced its inclusiveness, moral principles, and Enlightenment philosophy, and identified Freemasonry with the common good, in particular the provision of charity and mutual assistance. When John Rowe, the Moderns PGM for Massachusetts, died on 17 February 1787, his St John's Grand Lodge and Massachusetts' Moderns Freemasonry had reached a nadir. The First and Second Lodges of Boston had merged, the Third and Fourth ceased to exist, and many of Boston's Moderns had fled to Canada or England. And for those who remained, one can appreciate why they would question the rationale of remaining subordinate to England, a country with which they had been at war. After debate, the Antients voted in December 1791 to merge with the

Moderns to create the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The rivals united on 5 March 1792, with St John's the junior partner.

The Stirrings of Irish Nationalism

From the mid-eighteenth century Britain's condescension towards the Irish and Ireland began to grate more harshly. That John Perceval, 1st Earl of Egmont, and other Irish peers, were 'shouldered aside' in the procession marking the wedding of the Prince of Orange to George II's eldest daughter, and that Irish peers were unable to obtain recognition of their precedence captures the sense of alienation.[22] And this was mirrored Masonically in Dublin's changing relationship with London. What had been a mutual fraternal association became antipathetic, something reflected in the Earl of Blessington accepting the role of the Antients' Grand Master and, two years later, in Ireland's recognition of the Antients Grand Lodge and the cessation of fraternal communications with the Premier Grand Lodge of England.

It was from around this point in the 1750s that the political tone within the Grand Lodge of Ireland began to change, becoming more nationalistic, later overtly so. The Hon. Thomas George Southwell, whose father had been Grand Master in 1743, was Deputy Grand Master during Lord Sackville's Grand Mastership and Grand Master in his own right from 1753–6. The family had been loyalists, but their burgeoning Irish nationalism is underlined by their opposition to the oppressive Declaratory Act and nationalist pro-Irish sympathies expressed in subsequent parliamentary debates. Brinsley Butler, Lord Newtown-Butler from 1756 and 2nd Earl Lanesborough from 1768, Deputy Grand Master 1753–56 and Grand Master in 1757, took a similar political line and supported recognition of the Antients Grand Lodge, an act of Masonic defiance that foreshadowed his later opposition to the government.

However, despite the mounting financial pressure on Ireland, an effective political opposition took time to develop, and resentment was initially 'kept within tolerable bounds.' The delay was a function of several factors, including a generational legacy of traditional Anglo-Irish loyalty to Britain and the strength and effectiveness of British patronage. Nonetheless, Britain's mercantilist policies slowly herded the once steadfast Anglo-Irish towards patriotic Irish nationalism.[23] And as the eighteenth century progressed, irritation at Britain's condescension and the ever-growing opportunity cost of playing economic second fiddle began to be expressed in louder and more frequent demands for self-determination.

22. T. Barnard, *Improving Ireland?* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 123.

23. There was support for the monarch, George II then George III, but as King of an Ireland governed not from London but by an independent Irish Parliament.

Irish economic subservience was an increasingly visible counterpoint to Britain's growing economic and financial success. And the cost of dependency, once accepted as necessary, became too obvious and too onerous. By the late 1750s, the patriotic nationalist faction in the Irish Parliament could muster a majority. And in what was a period of economic and social Enlightenment, easing restrictions on trade had become both a moral and a financial imperative. Irish concerns percolated back to London through formal and informal channels, but continued to be ignored, and the antipathy between the two countries grew with the lack of common political ground having an excessively high cost.[24] Hostility to Dublin Castle developed into a succession of constitutional quarrels that dominated Anglo-Irish politics through the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. And it was reflected in Freemasonry.

Laurence Dermott

It is not possible to comprehend fully the influence of Antient Freemasonry without mentioning Laurence Dermott, who almost singlehandedly and virtually from inception shaped the Antients' persona and administration. Dermott led the Antients as Grand Secretary and then Deputy Grand Master for over twenty-five years, positioning it as 'keeping the ancient landmarks in view.'[25]

Dermott recognized the social value of history and tradition, and especially its emotional impact. And it was a mark of his confidence and intelligence that he was willing to satirize Masonic historiography. In *Ahiman Rezon* Dermott informs his readers that he had determined to publish a history of Freemasonry and had 'purchased all or most of the histories, constitutions, pocket companions and other pieces (on that subject) now extant in the English tongue.' However, having furnished himself with pens, ink, and paper and surrounded himself with the relevant compositions, Dermott 'fell to dreaming' only to be woken a little later:

> *A young puppy that got into the room while I slept, and seizing my papers, ate a great part of them, and was then (between my legs) shaking and tearing the last sheet... I looked upon it as a bad Omen and my late dread had made so great an impression on my mind that superstition got the better of me and called me to deviate from the general custom of my worthy predecessors otherwise I would have published a History of Masonry; and as this is rather an accident than a designed fault, I hope that the reader will look over it with a favourable eye.*[26]

24. J. C. D. Clark, 'Whig Tactics and Parliamentary Precedent: The English Management of Irish Politics, 1754–1756', *Historical Journal*, 21.2 (1978), 275–301.

25. L. Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon* (London, 1756), Dedication.

26. Ibid., vi–xvi.

Dermott's irony and satire were deliberately at odds with the more ponderous style adopted by the Moderns' chroniclers: 'Doctor Anderson and Mr Spratt . . . Doctor D'Assigny and Doctor Desaguliers.' And his conversational introduction and relaxed style epitomized the more open attitude adopted by Antients Freemasonry, marking its accessibility and attraction to the aspirational classes.

Dermott makes his first appearance in the Antients' *General Register* on 1 February 1752 as one of two men proposed for the position of Grand Secretary to replace John Morgan, who had been 'lately appointed to an office on board one of His Majesty's ships.' Dermott had emigrated to England in 1747/48, working in London as a journeyman painter. He was already a Mason, having been initiated into Lodge No. 26 in Dublin in 1740 and rising through the various offices to become its Master in 1746:

> *Brother Dermott had faithfully served all Offices in a very reputable Lodge held in his house in the City of Dublin... [and] Brother Charles Byrne (Sr.), Master of No.2 proved that Bro. Lau. Dermott having faithfully served the Offices of Sr. and Jr. Deacon, Jr. and Sr. Wardens and Secretary was by him Regularly Installed Master of the good lodge No.26 in the Kingdom of Ireland upon the 24th day of June 1746.*[27]

The warrant under which the lodge was constituted had been issued in Co. Sligo in December 1735. The lodge then moved to Dublin where it met at Thomas Allen, the Master's house, and from there to London, the warrant probably carried across the Irish Sea by either Allen or Dermott.[28]

The Antients' *General Register* lists Dermott's address in 1752 as Butler's Alley, Moorfields. This was close to Grub Street and immediately north of the City of London. Alexander Pope refers to the area in *The Dunciad* as a 'powerful image of shabbiness of way of life [and] morals.'[29] The area was impoverished, overcrowded, and packed with cheap housing, brothels, and gin and alehouses. But Dermott soon departed for accommodation elsewhere, driving himself forward through hard work and three marriages, each of which elevated his status.

Perhaps because of his achievements, in the mid- and late nineteenth century it became commonplace to vilify Dermott. William Laurie wrote that:

> *much injury has been done to the cause of the Antients... by Laurence Dermott . . . the unfairness with which he has stated the proceedings of the Moderns, the bitterness with which he treats them and the quackery and vainglory with which he displays his superior knowledge, deserve to be reprobated by every class of Masons who are anxious for the*

27. Antients Grand Lodge *Minutes*, 1752–60, 90.
28. W. Smith, *A Pocket Companion for Freemasons* (Dublin, 1735).
29. V. Rumbold, *The Dunciad in Four Books* (Harlow; Pearson, 2009), 4.

> *purity of their Order and the preservation of the clarity and mildness which ought to characterise all their proceedings.*[30]

Albert Mackey described Dermott in a similar vein: 'as a polemic, he was sarcastic bitter, uncompromising and not altogether sincere or veracious.'[31] He nonetheless acknowledged that Dermott was 'in intellectual attainments . . . inferior to none . . . and in a philosophical appreciation of the character of the Masonic institution he was in advance of the spirit of his age.'[32] Robert Freke Gould's view of Dermott was of an 'unscrupulous writer [but] a matchless administrator.'[33] William Hughan called him 'absurd and ridiculous.'[34] And Henry Sadler described Dermott's writings as 'comical', 'ridiculous' and 'scarcely worth a moment's thought.'[35]

Dermott was also attacked during his life and used later editions of *Ahiman Rezon* to retaliate with biting satire. He was effective, joking that the Moderns had found it

> *expedient to abolish the old custom of studying geometry in the lodge and some of the young brethren made it appear that a good knife and fork in the hands of a dextrous brother (over the right materials) would give greater satisfaction and add more to the rotundity of the lodge... from this improvement proceeded the laudable custom of charging to a public health to every third sentence that is spoke in the lodge.*[36]

The Moderns published a rebuttal in 1765 in *A Defence of Freemasonry . . . as practiced in the regular lodges*, with advertisements for the book noting that it contained 'a refutation of Mr Dermott's ridiculous account of that ancient society, in . . . *Ahiman Rezon*'.[37] But this was an over-statement and *A Defence* achieved only the most limited success. Indeed, the Earl of Blessington's acceptance of the position of Grand Master in 1756 and the subsequent decision of the Grand Lodge of Ireland to enter into communication with the Antients continued to dent the Moderns' reputation and was long-regarded by them with incredulity. Indeed, even a century later, Moderns apologists considered the decision inexplicable, Gould writing that it was 'a little singular that Dermott secured the services as titular Grand Master [of a] nobleman under whose presidency the Grand Lodge of Ireland conformed to the laws and regulations enacted by the Regular or Original Grand Lodge of England.'[38]

30. W. A. Laurie, *The History of Free Masonry and the Grand Lodge of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Seton & MacKenzie, 1859), Footnote, 60.
31. A. Mackey, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry* (Philadelphia, PA, 1874), 214.
32. Ibid.
33. D. Wright (rev.), *Gould's Freemasonry Throughout the World* (New York, NY), Vol. 2, 151.
34. W. J. Hughan, *Memorials of the Masonic Union* (Leicester, 1913), 8.
35. H. Sadler, *Masonic Facts and Fictions* (London, 1887), 110–2.
36. *Ahiman Rezon* (1764), xxix–xxxi.
37. *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 21 September 1765.
38. *Gould's Freemasonry Throughout the World*, Vol. 2, 168.

Gould failed to appreciate the political and socio-economic dynamics that underlay Blessington's decision and why the Antients had enjoyed success in attracting members. In any event, even within the terms of his own analysis, Ireland had *adapted* rather than *adopted* the laws and regulations of the Grand Lodge of England.

Antients Freemasonry expanded under Dermott's guidance. The combination of inclusivity and deemed superior antiquity was a powerful draw, and in his second edition of *Ahiman Rezon* Dermott composed a 'Philacteria for such gentleman as may be inclined to become Free-Masons' to accentuate the pre-eminence of Antients' ritual. Probably more than any other element of *Ahiman Rezon*, the catechism captures and cements the perception of Masonic superiority, something that became key to attracting and retaining members. Of course, what Dermott held out to be facts were either falsehoods or opinions. But they were nonetheless a powerful encouragement to join Antients Freemasonry, whether *ab initio* or by way of 're-making', that is, by converting from Moderns Freemasonry. The persuasive power of Dermott's arguments was directed at prospective candidates at home and overseas, and especially at American colonists whose 'right worshipful and very worthy gentlemen' were singled out for particular flattery.

As the Antients Grand Lodge expanded, it posed a growing challenge to the authority of the original Grand Lodge of England. As an example, the frontispiece to the third edition of *Ahiman Rezon*, published in 1778, reflects the exclusion and marginalization of the Moderns in favour of the Irish, Scottish, and Antients branches of Freemasonry:

> *The three figures upon the dome represent the great masters of the tabernacle... The two crowned figures with that on their right hand represent the three great masters of the holy temple at Jerusalem. The three figures on the left hand represent the three great masters of the second temple at Jerusalem.*
>
> *The three columns bearing Masons aprons with the arms of England, Ireland and Scotland and supporting the whole fabric, represents the three Grand Masters... who wisely and nobly have formed a triple union to support the honour and dignity of the Ancient Craft, for which their Lordship's names will be honoured and revered while Freemasonry exists in these kingdoms.*[39]

Dermott's explanatory text also reminds the reader that it was Antients – not Moderns – Freemasonry that offered support to the indigent, quoting an unfortunately phrased letter from the Moderns' Grand Secretary to 'a certified petitioner from Ireland' that stated that 'your being an Antient Mason, you are not entitled to any of our charity.' Dermott's response was to heap derision on the Moderns, underlining that Antients Freemasonry provided a conduit for Masonic benevolence and superior ritual, and suggesting that the Moderns Grand Lodge was both dictatorial and ignorant, that they admitted 'all sorts

39. *Ahiman Rezon* (1778), 'Explanation of the Frontispiece.'

of Masons without distinction', thereby confirming the Moderns' ignorance of the true nature of Freemasonry 'as a blind man is in the art of mixing colour.'

Disparagement of the Moderns was a constant thread throughout Dermott's time in office, as was his vigilance in press management which ensured that the Antients would be portrayed positively:

> *the [3rd Duke of Atholl] thanked them for the great honour they had conferred upon him by continuing him Grand Master for the year ending and he likewise acquainted them that he was of opinion (and it is the opinion of the Society in general) the Modern Masons are acting entirely inconsistently with the antient customs and principles of the craft.* [40]

The installation of the Earl of Antrim as Grand Master and Dermott as his Deputy in December 1786 was a colossal occasion accompanied by the installation of officers of 'several hundred' Antients lodges. And Dermott once again ensured that the ceremony received widespread and favourable publicity. One press article, for example, reads that *the day was spent in the utmost harmony and much to the honour of the true system of ancient and legitimate masons*.[41] It underlines that even after thirty-four years Dermott was not willing to forego any opportunity to sideswipe the Moderns in order to place the Antients in a better light.[42]

Such antagonism and confrontation ended only after Dermott's death. The tone of later editions of *Ahiman Rezon* was moderated and the two rival Grand Lodges gradually eased towards one another as they attempted to close the ideological and social gap that separated them. Discussions as to how to unite the Moderns and Antients began in earnest in the early 1800s. Reunion committees were formed in 1810 and thereafter things moved forward relatively swiftly. The royal family became involved in the rapprochement process and by so doing facilitated the combination of the two rivals.

The final hurdle was to reach a compromise regarding the Royal Arch.[43] And in the context of an accord between the Modern and Antients this was potentially problematic. The Royal Arch had become a hugely popular part of Antients ritual and had garnered a strong following. Indeed, members of Moderns lodges had also been attracted to the Royal Arch and the ritual had been embraced by the Moderns, albeit semi-officially, from the 1760s. However, despite what was happening on the ground, the Royal Arch degree had not been adopted formally by the original Grand Lodge of England. Indeed, it had been rejected, with Samuel Spencer, the Grand Secretary, announcing that the degree 'seduced the brethren' and did not (and should not) form part of the traditional ritual of 'three degrees'.

40. *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 9–11 April 1772.
41. My italics.
42. *Morning Herald*, 29 December 1786.
43. *Ahiman Rezon* (1756), 47.

The incorporation of the Royal Arch into the working of the lodge had been for decades the most obvious means by which the two rival Grand Lodges were differentiated and its denunciation by the Moderns had provided Dermott with a highly effective lever. The 1813 compromise was to define regular Freemasonry as 'the three degrees and no more . . . the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason*, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch*', the last being '*the master mason's degree completed*'.[44] That is the reason that the Royal Arch had such symbolic importance at the union of the Moderns and Antients and it is why that legacy and its consequences resonate today.

Although the relationship between the Grand Lodge of Ireland and the Grand Lodge of England was restored in 1813, following the creation of the United Grand Lodge of England, Antients Freemasonry's influence endured, especially with respect to greater inclusivity, which expanded greatly the number of men who could and would become Freemasons, and enhanced mutuality. And in America and elsewhere, with a more firmly embedded sense of spirituality.

44. Author's italics.

Bro. Dr Richard (Ric) Berman

Ric researches and speaks on English, Irish, and American Freemasonry, with a focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He has written numerous journal articles and some ten books, and has given keynote talks worldwide. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, Ric holds a master's degree in economics and a doctorate in history from the University of Cambridge and the University of Exeter, respectively, following which he spent two years post-doctoral research at the University of Oxford. Ric has been a Freemason for over forty years and has twice been the Prestonian Lecturer. He holds Grand Rank in the United Grand Lodge of England and is a Past Master of three English lodges including Quatuor Coronati Lodge, the premier lodge of Masonic research, where he chairs the QC Correspondence Circle (QCCC), the oldest Masonic Research Society in the world. Ric is also an American Freemason, a member or honorary member of lodges in five states, a Fellow of the Philalethes Society and a member of the Society of Blue Friars whose purpose is to recognize Masonic authors.