

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

BOOK REVIEW

INVENTING THE FUTURE

Dr. Ric Berman

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The year 2023 marks the 300th anniversary of the publication of Anderson's Constitutions of 1723. Dr. Ric Berman, a distinguished Masonic author and Past Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, has produced a work that introduces the reader not only to the contents of the Constitutions of 1723, but also to the consequences of their appearance in Freemasonry six years after the founding of the premier Grand Lodge. *Inventing the Future* leads the reader through the historical setting for the publication of Anderson's and illustrates just how radical the underlying ideology of the Age of Enlightenment appeared in early 18th Century England.

Dr. Berman sets the stage by describing the religious and political chaos that existed in England at the end of the 17th Century. With the English king being head of church as well as head of state, political and religious differences were both intensified and inseparable. The coronation of George I as King in 1714, and the resulting Jacobite Insurrection, settled the question of whether the monarchy would be Protestant rather than Catholic, but the social atmosphere of the time remained highly charged.

In that climate of division and dissent, The Grand Lodge of England, formed on St. John the Baptist's Day, June 24, 1717, provided a haven of respite and civility from the rough and overheated rhetoric of sectarian dispute.

Dr. Berman enumerates the five radical concepts that were found in the philosophies of the Enlightenment Era, and which were incorporated into the fabric of the premier Grand Lodge. Those five ideas are:

1. Religious tolerance;
2. Leadership by meritocracy;
3. Civility;
4. Scientific and artistic education; and
5. Societal and personal self-improvement.

Each of those concepts made its way into the Constitutions of 1723.

One of the most important features of *Inventing the Future* is the manner in which it introduces the reader to the men who were responsible for the founding of the premier Grand Lodge, and who, ultimately, were responsible for the publication of the Constitutions of 1723.

Most prominent among these men was Jean Theophilus Desaguliers. A Fellow of the Royal Society, and a well-known scientist and lecturer, Desaguliers was the intellectual force behind the newly constituted Grand Lodge, and, largely, behind the Constitutions of 1723.

Other men who played a significant role in the advancement of early Grand Lodge Freemasonry were George Payne, a prominent civil servant in London at the time, and John, Duke of Montagu, Freemasonry's first "celebrity" Grand Master. Dr. Berman points out that Montagu's involvement with Freemasonry signaled that it was, "acceptable morally, intellectually and politically, and that it could be fashionable and fun."

Included in this list of men, of course, is the Rev. James Anderson, whose name is forever attached to the Constitutions of 1723. Dr. Berman asserts that, ironically, the most probable scenario is that the Constitutions of 1723 are likely the work of Desaguliers and Payne, and that the Rev. Anderson was in all likelihood a "hired pen" who contributed little to the substance of the work. Anderson, somewhat impoverished by bad investments, likely hired his services to his friends, Desaguliers and Payne. He inserted his name as author of the Constitutions on page 74 of the document (somewhat "offhandedly," as Dr. Berman notes), and has since been given perhaps too much credit for his actual role in the production of the document.

Inventing the Future goes on to describe the lasting influence of the Constitutions of 1723. They formed a model for the Constitutions later adopted by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, the several Grand Lodges organized in the emergent United States, and even for the Antient Grand Lodge's *Ahimon Rezon*.

One topic on which *Inventing the Future* has very little to say is the history of Freemasonry as presented in the Constitutions of 1723. Here, Dr. Berman merely points out that it was fashionable, at the time, to be able to present an antiquarian history, whether for one's family or one's affiliations, including Freemasonry. Dr. Berman's conclusion is that the "history" contained in the Constitutions of 1723 should be viewed as "literary hyperbole."

The Constitutions of 1723, though revised a mere 15 years later to include the adoption of the Master Mason Degree as a part of Freemasonry's System of Degrees, gave Freemasonry its foundational structure and governing law. To say that the Constitutions of 1723 "invented the future" is markedly not hyperbole. It is a completely valid and accurate analysis of the impact that the work of Desaguliers, Payne, Montagu and Anderson had on Freemasonry, both at the time, and to be found in future generations.

Dr. Berman is to be commended for seizing the opportunity to bring the Constitutions of 1723 to the forefront of attention in contemporary Freemasonry. The contributions of Desaguliers, Payne, Montagu, Anderson, and other influential Masons of the period provide a window into Enlightenment Era thinking, and demonstrate how such thinking was incorporated into the structure of Freemasonry.

Inventing the Future is a useful guide to the Constitutions of 1723. It places the events of the time in their proper context, and demonstrates to the reader that as an institution, Freemasonry sought as its purpose to be a place where men of different religious and political persuasions could meet in a spirit of tolerance and good will.

Inventing the Future is a necessary addition to the library of any serious student of Freemasonry.

Inventing the Future, published in 2022 by The Old Stables Press, Oxfordshire, is available through online booksellers.