

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

## BOOK REVIEW

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### EARLY MASONIC PAMPHLETS

DOUGLAS KNOOP, G. P. JONES AND DOUGLAS HAMER

REVIEWED BY:

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The names Douglas Knoop, G. P. Jones and Douglas Hamer will be immediately recognizable to any serious student of Freemasonry. Knoop and Jones published at least six other volumes of Masonic history, and the trio were responsible for at least three books on early Masonic documents, including the subject of this review.

*Early Masonic Pamphlets* is exactly what its name suggests. It is a collection of documents (and sometimes fragments of documents) that are the oldest known writings about Freemasonry, either written by Freemasons or those with an interest in the Craft. Including publications that appeared up through the year 1735, the collection of documents is almost exclusively made up of literature from Great Britain, especially London.

Some of the writings are mere one-liners that include a mention of Freemasonry. Such instances provide clarity as to the extent to which Freemasonry was a part of the public conversation at a particular time, and the context in which it was mentioned reveals how the Craft was viewed.

The earliest included text is from 1638, and was published in Edinburgh, Scotland. Identified as “The Muses Threnodie,” it contains the earliest known reference to the Mason’s Word. Reading these four short lines, one may conclude that Freemasons were common enough to be casually mentioned in verse, and that the Fraternity was viewed in something of a mystical aura.

It didn’t take long for anti-Masons to have their views published. Identified only as an “Anti-Masonic Leaflet” published in 1698, the text gives warning “To all the Godly people in the Citie of London” of the wickedness of Freemasonry. The writer, in just two short paragraphs, manages to refer to Freemasons as “the devilish Sect of Men,” “Meeters in secret,” and “Anti Christ.” The invective heaped upon Freemasonry and Freemasons by the anonymous writer is reminiscent of the condemnations of Freemasonry emanating from the religious far-right of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Little, it seems, has changed.

The learned Elias Ashmole is frequently cited as being one of the earliest to record his membership in Freemasonry. *Early Masonic Pamphlets* reprints a portion of his diary, published in 1717, in which he describes being made a Freemason in 1646.

One of the more curious items included in *Early Masonic Pamphlets* is the dedication from a book with the intriguing title, *Long Livers: A curious History of Such Persons of both Sexes who have liv'd several Ages, and grown Young again.* The author of *Long Livers* identified himself as Eugenius Philalethes, a name sure to attract the attention of contemporary Freemasons. The dedication is unique in that it is some fifty pages long, and the author dedicates the book to the “Grand Master, Masters, Wardens and Brethren of the Most Antient and most Honourable Fraternity of the Free Masons of Great Britain and Ireland.” The dedication is a lengthy homage to the good influences of Freemasonry. One wonders exactly how the dedication relates to the subject of the book, except, perhaps, to imply that living a life in accordance with Masonic principles may result in reaching an old age,

From the dedication of *Long Livers*, the authors move on to the inclusion of the Roberts Constitution, dated at 1722. The Roberts Constitution reveals obvious roots in Operative Masonry. Clearly, it served as a primary source in the compilation of the later Constitution of 1723 and 1738.

One of the more amusing entries in *Early Masonic Pamphlets* is “The Free Masons; An Hudibrastick Poem” dated 1722 or 1723. Hudibrastic is a type of comic narrative poetry this is characterized by eight-syllable rhyming couplets. In this instance, the unknown author delivers a thoroughly bawdy (the authors call it “tasteless”) collection of verses meant to ridicule the institution of Freemasonry and Masonic meetings. While likely meant to portray Freemasonry in scandalous terms, the “Hudibrastick Poem” is a wonderful example of the literary use of parody. If anything at all, it might have been a bit too close to its mark for the comfort of some early 18<sup>th</sup> Century Masons.

The authors of *Early Masonic Pamphlets* next turn to an almost forgotten gem. Knoop, Jones and Hamer examine the *songs* included in Anderson’s Constitutions of 1723. The inclusion of these odes makes it clear that music has always been, and was always intended to be, an important part of the practice of Craft Masonry.

A later entry in *Early Masonic Pamphlets* reproduces a 1725 article from *The Dublin Weekly Journal* that provides an early record of the appearance of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

From 1726, the authors include a lengthy anti-Masonic pamphlet known as “The Free-Masons Accusation and Defence.” Published in six installments, the pamphlet purported to be a series of letters between a father and son. The son expressed an interest in Freemasonry and was generally favorably disposed toward it. The father’s letters contain sharp attacks on Freemasonry and are intended to dissuade his son from seeking membership. This particular

publication proved to be quite popular and went through several different printings. It later found itself revived and printed in the United States in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

“The Free-Masons Accusation and Defence” sparked a lengthy response favorable to Freemasonry that was published later in 1726 under the title, “A Full Vindication.” The anonymous author of this work sets out to refute the specific charges leveled in “Accusations and Defence.” The authors note that this particular work has received little notice, and that it is reproduced on *Early Masonic Pamphlets* for the first time.

Another item included in *Early Masonic Pamphlets* and being reprinted for the first time is Cole’s Constitutions, 1728-29. Cole’s Constitutions are likely older than the date that they were initially published. Based on their content, it is reasonable to conclude that they served as another source for the compilers of the Constitutions of 1723.

One of the more interesting entries is the inclusion of “Peter Farmer’s New Model,” an exposure of Freemasonry that followed up on Samuel Prichard’s *Masonry Dissected*. A catechism of each of the three Degrees of Masonry is offered in verse form. Very little of the “New Model” relates to any recognizable Masonic ritual. It is likely offered as a skit intended to mimic, or, perhaps, to be a parody of Freemasonry. As a point of particular interest, the “New Model” contains several songs written either for Freemasons or about Freemasonry.

*Early Masonic Pamphlets* goes on to offer a miscellany of Masonic odes, poems and articles published about Freemasonry in the first half of the 1730s. The inclusion of these items again serves to demonstrate the extent to which Freemasonry was a part of the literary life of Great Britain in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The mentions of Freemasonry are so numerous, it is clear that the Craft had captured the attention, if not the hearts, of the reading Englishmen of the day.

The authors close *Early Masonic Pamphlets* on a serious note, reprinting an address given by Martin Clare. Clare was a schoolmaster, a Fellow of the Royal Society and eventually served as Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England. Clare was likely the author of *A Defense of Masonry*, which was an answer to *Masonry Dissected*. Here, the authors include his address given before a quarterly communication of the Grand Lodge in 1735. Then serving as Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge, Clare makes the case that Freemasonry teaches gentlemanly manners and forms the basis for refined and enlightened conversation.

*Early Masonic Pamphlets* is an absolute necessity for the Masonic researcher, and a source of interest to the more casual Masonic reader. It provides a series of valuable snapshots that illustrate how Freemasonry was popularly viewed in the early Grand Lodge era. It also provides insight into the literary and language skills of the writers of the time – both those who approved of Freemasonry and those who abhorred it. *Early Masonic Pamphlets* helps to place Freemasonry in its historical context, while at the same time providing a reliable and substantive collection of Freemasonry’s important early writings. No Masonic Library is complete without this volume.

*Early Masonic Pamphlets* was published in 1945 by Manchester University Press and republished in 1978 by the Quatuor Coronati Correspondence Circle. It is long out of print, and copies are quite rare. They may occasionally be found in the inventory of online booksellers.