



Book of Constitution

Is the work that contains the rules and regulations of the Order as decided by Grand Lodge? It also contains accounts of the rights of lodges and members, and details of ceremonies, such as funerals, consecrations, installations, etc. The earliest record we have of such a work, is a manuscript written in the reign of Edward IV., which states that Prince Edwin assembled the Masons at York in 926, and then formed the English Masonic Constitutions, from the written documents in various languages, which were then submitted. These Constitutions continued under the name of the "Gothic constitutions," to govern the Craft until the revival of Masonry about 1715, when, probably from careless copying, and perhaps ignorance, they were found to be very defective, and in 1721 the Duke of Montague, who was at that time Grand Master, ordered Bro. James Anderson to "revise and digest them in a better method." This having been done, the same year, in December, fourteen learned brethren were appointed a committee to examine the result of his labors, and the following March his work was, with some trifling amendments, adopted by Grand Lodge, and published in 1723, entitled "The Book of Constitutions of the Freemasons, containing the History, Charges, Regulations, etc., of the Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity, for the use of the Lodges." Another edition was issued in 1738, and again in 1754 and 1767, when revised editions were issued, since which period the York Constitutions have remained, and are the base of all such works issued by Grand Lodges. The origin of this work was that during the reign of Queen Anne, Freemasonry was in a very sickly condition, partly owing to the age and weakness of the Grand Master, Sir Christopher Wren, and the last Grand Master of the purely operative Masons. On his death, there were still four lodges extant in London, and they

determined to revive Grand Lodge, which had been dormant for some years, and also restore the quarterly communications, and the annual festival. This they did, at a meeting held in the "Apple Tree Tavern," in London, and agreed, among other things, "that no lodge should thereafter be permitted to be held (the four old lodges alone excepted) unless by authority of a charter granted by the Grand Master, with the consent and approbation of Grand Lodge." In this way the old Masons in London transferred all their own inherent privileges as individual masons to the four Lodges in trust, that they would never suffer the Antient landmarks to be infringed. On the other hand, these Lodges agreed to recognize every Lodge, which should henceforth be regularly constituted, and to admit the Masters and Wardens to all privileges of Grand Lodge, precedence only excepted. Finding, however, that the craft was rapidly spreading; new lodges growing up in all directions, it was a cause of alarm lest the four old Lodges should lose their special privileges which they had been given, and on this account a Code was prepared, with the consent of all the brethren, for the future government of the Order. To this was annexed the regulation binding the Grand Master and his successors, and the Master of every Lodge, to preserve these regulations inviolable, and ordering them to be read in open lodge at least once in each year. These are embodied in the "Book of Constitution" as "summary of the Ancient Charges and Regulations," to be read by the Grand Secretary, or acting Secretary, to the Master-elect, prior to his installation in the chair of the Lodge.

James Anderson



Anderson's Constitutions were based on the Old Masonic Manuscripts (also called "Gothic Constitutions") and on the *General Regulations* which had been compiled first by George Payne in 1720. The full title of the 1723 edition was *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*. When in 1738, the Grand Lodge changed its name from *Grand Lodge of London and Westminster* into the *Grand Lodge of England*; the Constitution was rewritten by Anderson. The title of the second, rewritten, edition of 1738 was *The New Book of Constitutions of the Antient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, Containing Their History, Charges, Regulations, &c. Collected and Digested By Order of the Grand Lodge from*

their old Records, faithful Traditions and Lodge-Books, For the Use of the Lodges. The 1723 edition of the *Constitutions* was edited and reprinted by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1734, becoming the first Masonic book printed in America. A new edition of the *Constitutions* was published in 1754, by John Entick. He reverted to the Charges as drawn up in 1723 into which, especially in the first Charge, Anderson had introduced various modifications in the 1738 edition. It is this edition of the Charges which forms the basis of the Ancient Charges to be found today in the *Constitutions* of the United Grand Lodge of England, with only small verbal modifications, except with regards to the first Charge on God and religion.

- **I - Of GOD and RELIGION.**
 - *A Mason is obliged by his Tenure, to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid **Atheist** or an irreligious **Libertine**. But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves: that is, to be Good men and True, or Men of Honor and Honesty, by whatever Denomination or Persuasion they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the Centre of Union and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance.*
- **II - Of the CIVIL MAGISTRATES**, supreme and subordinate.
- **III - Of LODGES.**
- **IV - Of MASTERS**, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices.
- **V - Of the Management of the CRAFT** in working.
- **VI - Of BEHAVIOR**, viz.:
 - **1. In the Lodge while constituted.**
 - **2. After the Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone.**
 - **3. When Brethren meet without Strangers, but not in a Lodge.**
 - **4. In Presence of Strangers not Masons.**
 - **5. At Home and in the Neighborhood.**
 - **6. Toward a strange Brother.**

The section on religion of 1738 refers to the Seven Laws of Noah, which are a list of seven moral imperatives which, according to the Talmud, were given by God to Noah as a binding set of laws for all mankind.

- **I - Of GOD and RELIGION.**
 - *A Mason is obliged by his tenure to observe the moral law as a true Noachites; and if he rightly understands the Craft, he will never be neither a stupid **Atheist** nor an irreligious **Libertine**, nor act against conscience. In ancient Times, the Christian Masons were charged to comply with the Christian usages of each country where they traveled or worked; being found in all nations, even of divers' religions. They are generally charged to adhere to that religion in which all men agree (leaving*

each brother to his own particular opinions); that is, to be good men and true, men of honor and honesty, by whatever names, religions, or persuasions they may be distinguished; for they all agree in the three great articles of Noah, enough to preserve the cement of the lodge. Thus Masonry is the Center of Union, and the happy means of conciliating persons that otherwise must have remained at a perpetual distance.

The Constitutions of the Antients

The Book of Constitutions, or Ahiman Rezon, of the Grand Lodge of England According to the Old Institutions, also known as the Antient Grand Lodge of England or the Grand Lodge of the Antients, was first published in 1754. Its author, Laurence Dermott, was Grand Secretary of the Antient Grand Lodge from 1752 to 1771. The full name of the first edition was *Ahiman Rezon; or a Help to a Brother; showing the Excellency of Secrecy, and the first cause or motive of the Institution of Masonry; The Principles of the Craft; and the benefits from a Strict Observance thereof, etc., etc.; Also the Old and New Regulations; etc. To which is added the greatest collection of Masons' Songs, etc.* A second edition was published in 1764, and subsequent editions in 1778, 1787, 1800, 1801, 1807, and 1813. The second edition was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1855 by Leon Hyneman. Dermott borrowed heavily from the Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Ireland which had been published in 1751.

The first Charge in the *Ahiman Rezon* reads as follows:

- **CHARGE I. Concerning GOD and Religion.**
 - *A Mason is obliged by his Tenure to believe firmly in the true Worship of the eternal God, as well as in all those sacred Records which the Dignitaries and Fathers of the Church have compiled and published for the Use of all good Men: So that no one who rightly understands the Art, can possibly tread in the irreligious Paths of the unhappy Libertine, or be induced to follow the arrogant Professors of Atheism or Deism; neither is he to be stained with the gross Errors of blind Superstition, but may have the Liberty of embracing what Faith he shall think proper, provided at all Times he pays a due Reverence to his Creator, and by the World deals with Honour and Honesty ever making that golden Precept the Standard-Rule of his Actions, which engages, To do unto all Man as he would they should do unto him: For the Craft, instead of entering into idle and unnecessary Disputes concerning the Different Opinions and Persuasions of Men, admits into the Fraternity all that are good and true; whereby it hath brought about the Means of Reconciliation amongst Persons, who, without that Assistance, would have remained at perpetual Variance.*

The Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge of England

When the United Grand Lodge of England was created with the union of the Ancients and Moderns, a new version of the Constitutions was drafted. It was a synthesis of the *Constitution of Anderson* of the Moderns and the Ahiman Rezon of the Ancients.

- I - Of GOD and RELIGION.
 - *A Mason is obliged, by his tenure, to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the art he will never be a stupid atheist or an irreligious libertine. He, of all men, should best understand that God seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh at the outward appearance, but God looketh to the heart. A Mason is, therefore, particularly bound never to act against the dictates of his conscience. Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the order provided he believe in the glorious architect of heaven and earth, and practice the sacred duties of morality*

1-Source: Pocket Lexicon of Freemasonry

2-Wikipedia