

JANUARY ISSUE

Introduction

Whence We Came?

“Whence we came?” is an aged old question. We know the Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1717, but where did the four lodges that formed the Grand Lodge come from? How far back do our traditions go? Does our ancestry really date only so far back as the age of taverns and bars? Over the next series of articles, we will explore our history and in the process, travel through time to ancient lands and rediscover ancient wisdoms. This month we remain in the British Isles and curl up with a good book, *The New Atlantis* by Sir Francis Bacon and peek into the Fellows of the Royal Society.

Whence We Came? New Atlantis

Francis Bacon, 1st Viscount of St. Alban was born January 22, 1561, and died of pneumonia on April 9, 1626. He was a statesman, a scientist, a philosopher, and an author. He was a proponent of the “scientific method”, which sought to acquire knowledge (and truth) by experimentation, observation, and continuously testing hypotheses. He is often referred to as the father of empiricism, i.e. using one’s senses to observe, study, and to experiment as a way of seeking knowledge. He rejected the ancient methods of broad generalizations and abstract theories, and pushed for building knowledge based on proven facts (Baconian method).

Bacon was a politician, and served a number of years in Parliament. He was known as a liberal reformer, friend of the crown but rejected dictatorial powers, fought in favor of religious freedom, advocated for the union of England and Scotland (which did not happen until 1707 during the reign of Queen Anne) and increased integration of Ireland.

Bacon took an interest in the establishment of colonial North America and published a report “The Virginia Colony”, and in 1610 received a charter from the King to establish a colony in Newfoundland, Canada.

There have been theories that Bacon was Shakespeare, a Freemason, and a member of the Rosicrucians. Two books written by Bacon include the “Great Instauration” and the “New Atlantis”.

Great Instauration, while never completed, was composed of two parts consisting of a systematic plan to revolutionize learning. The outline consisted of six parts: (i) division of the sciences; (ii) the interpretation of nature; (iii) study of the universe; (iv) hierarchy of intellect; (v) summary of Bacon's views; and (vi) his new philosophy. The goal of the work was to reinvent scientific study and to link natural history with science.

The New Atlantis is about a utopian island, named Bensalem (clearly Jerusalem). The inhabitants of this island are civilized men who pursue knowledge and truth through science (very similar to our seven Liberal Arts from the Fellow Craft degree). The book is about stranded sailors who come upon the island and are met with generosity and are taken in by the enlightenment of the people. The people are governed by a priest, who is essentially a scientist, and the government is housed at Salomon's House (King Solomon's Temple?).

Salomon's House, is a research center devoted to all forms of science, with knowledge dating back thousands of years. The society is utopian, in that there is no commerce, no money, no decay, vices, or ills, all are taken care of and looked after. To quote from the book, "But thus, you see, we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver or jewels, nor for any other commodity of matter, but only for God's first creature which was light.....the greatest jewel is not one of monetary value but of knowledge." The lead priest continues, "The end of our Foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret motion of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the affecting of all things possible". In Salomon's House, instead of erecting statues to Deity, that raised statues to inventors in a celebration of science and modernity.

While Bacon passed in 1626, he was considered a "founding influence" upon the Royal Society of London. The President, Council and Fellows of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge was established on November 28, 1660, by a charter from King Charles II. From its website, the society is referred to as an "invisible college of natural philosophers". The motto of the group is "Nullius in Verba", which means "take nobody's word for it". Its members included Christopher Wren, Robert Boyle, Elias Ashmole, Robert Moray, and other leading academics.

Interestingly, Christopher Wren is believed at one point to have been the Worshipful Master of the Goose and Gridiron Lodge, Elias Ashmole became a freemason on October 16, 1646, Robert Moray joined the Craft on May 20, 1641, and while Robert Boyle was not a mason at the time of his joining the Royal Society, he had joined masonry sometime afterwards. Freemasons were heavily involved in the creation of the society and continued to be influential in its workings, such as John Desauguliers who was the Curator of Experiments in

1712 and a few years later, the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England. J.R. Clarke, in his book “The Royal Society and Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry”, notes that between 1720 and 1740 some 25 members of the Royal Society had served in the Grand Lodge in some official capacity, and that over eighty members of the Royal Society were freemasons.

The common theme between Bacon and his work the New Atlantis and the Royal Society with Freemasonry is quite evident. Here we have men who wished to challenge the prevailing opinions of the day – to challenge the tyranny of King and Pope. Men who asked questions, experimented, and took nothing for granted that they could not prove through reason. They pioneered a new frontier, that to know God did not require dogmatic blind faith, **but that one could know God through nature, science, truth, reason, and logic.** A true utopian society.

Next month, we will explore Rosicrucianism.

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