



## Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

### A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

## Fred & Charlie ask.....



## The Mason's Word Is there one?

## 'The Temple door is open...'

Fred and his wife were having a pleasant after-lunch coffee on the patio. The sun was shining and, as Fred picked up his latest spy story – it was very good – and settled back, 'Management' said conversationally *'The grass is getting very long, dear'*. Fred, who would normally hotly contest any suggestion that he had neglected his gardening duties glanced at the tussocks now appearing amidst the dandelions and admitted to himself, to coin a phrase, that resistance was futile. He rose reluctantly from his chair.

With mower dragged out of shed, tank refilled, box attached,...damnably it started first pull. He now had no option. While he was musing on whether the mower was heavier this year or the lawn steeper, relief was mercifully to hand as he heard the click of the gate. Charlie had arrived with the weekly groceries.

They settled on the patio – the regulation two metres apart - and, coffee having arrived, chatted about 'subject normal' (no, not that but Charlie's Masonry). *'Why do we have two Masonic Words in the Third and not just the one?'* was Charlie's opening salvo. *'Do you know?'*

Fred paused, thought... then answered briefly and to the point. *'Sorry, no'*.

Charlie may not know his Masonry but he knew his Fred. There would be more to come.

*'Certainly C17 records suggest that the Operatives had just one 'Masonic Word' in Scotland. It was seemingly 'Mohabyn', meaning colleague or fellow and may have been the same in northern England.'* Fred mused. *'However as it was never written down (" I must not write, indite, mark , carve and so on....") but only exchanged by whispered syllables into each other's ear, the opportunities for variation appeared limitless. In Speculative lodges there is evidence of there being two generally accepted Words in use in 1700, eight Masonic Words in use by 1760 and then, if you add in all the variations of spelling in that eight arising from differences of dialect, brogue and accent, Words in use by the century's end were legion.'*

Charlie who liked to believe everything in Freemasonry was neat and tidy wondered how they ever managed to settle on the Words we use today?

*'Well, Charlie, things came to a head with the proposed unification of the Antient and Modern Grand Lodges. In 1809 a preparatory Lodge of Promulgation considered how best to reconcile the ceremonies, not least the Masonic Word when closing the Third Degree. They had by now so many Words to choose from.'*

*'An analysis of the field threw up some clues. The original Masonic Word in England was probably Hebrew. This meant that it would be formed of two syllables, one verb and one noun. Most of the Words discovered possessed a first syllable beginning with M and the second with B. Most of these modified Words were gibberish and had no meaning. However two Words in use did seem to represent 'Builder with stone' and 'The Temple door is open' which seem very appropriate for operative stone masons'*

*'It was also found that many Antient lodges used Words close to Maha Bone, while many Modern lodges favoured Words similar to Mach Banah. (Mach Banah was a son of Sheva, sometime leader of the tribe of Judah - 1 Chron. 2), Eventually, unable to decide between the two, they threw up their hands in defeat and left it to the Master of each Lodge to choose one or other of these two or feel free to continue with any Word then in Lodge use. On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1810 the Lodge of Promulgation recorded:*

**"That the Master of Lodges shall be informed that such of them as may be inclined to prefer another known method of communicating the [Masonic Word] in the closing ceremony will be at liberty to direct it so if they should think it proper to do so."**

*'The two Grand Lodges eventually united in 1813. A year later the Lodge of Reconciliation was formed and demonstrated three unified Degree ceremonies to the Grand Master in 1815 for approval. Unwilling to offend either Modern or Antient lodges Reconciliation had inserted both Maha-Bone and Mach-Banah. In 1817 the UGLE's favoured Stability Lodge of Instruction then proceeded to teach these to other lodges. In 1823 the Emulation Lodge of Improvement was formed, initially just to give general lectures. However later on it also decided to teach the Reconciliation working – which of course is the one most lodges favour today and why we use those two Words.'*

*You certainly know how to confuse a chap, Fred. Where do the phrases 'The death of the Builder' and 'The Builder is stricken' come from then? 'Well, Charlie, one thing's for sure. The operatives'*

*Masonic Word certainly never used those phrases. No operative mason would ever want to be reminded of his own dangerous life! No, it almost certainly arose about 1740 when Modern Grand Lodge introduced into its Third Degree both Hiram Abiff and the moral that death was preferable to dishonour. 'Death' as the Masonic Word became a logical reminder of what Masonic integrity was then all about'*

*'But neither Mahabone or Machbanah actually means that, Fred. Do they?'*

*'Charlie in your youth did you ever read 'Through the Looking Glass' by Lewis Carroll.' Charlie nodded vigorously. 'Remember Humpty Dumpty?. "When I use a word ...it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less ..."'*

As he departed through Fred's garden gate Charlie mused to himself 'I never thought my advancement in Masonic knowledge today would come from 'Alice in Wonderland' !

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