

## “British Imperial Freemasonry and the Military Lodge in the Age of Revolution”

### INTRO/ CONTEXT

Today I have been asked to talk about how the British Empire and the British Masonic experience abroad changed as a result of the American Revolution (or, as I prefer to call it, the American War of Independence). To do so, I need to broaden our field of enquiry, both geographically and chronologically.

In terms of geography, I believe that we need to contextualize the American Revolution within a broader Atlantic age of revolutions. The age of revolutions opened with events in Britain’s thirteen rebellious colonies in the mid 1770s but it also includes the French Revolution, a failed revolution in Ireland (the 1798 United Irish Rebellion), a successful slave rebellion and revolution in Saint Domingue (Haiti) (1791-1804), and the Latin American revolutions of the early nineteenth century. While these events were in many ways distinct and unique, they were also fundamentally inter-related. They involved interconnected political re-orderings that cannot be understood outside the context of eighteenth-century empire building and international affairs. They also shared a common ideological heritage and involved a lot of cross-pollination of liberal ideas, such as consensual government, equality before the law, natural rights, and popular sovereignty. It is no coincidence that this period also witnessed the abolition of the British slave trade (in 1807), though it would take another quarter century for the British to emancipate their slaves.

It is also important to remember that the American War of Independence was but one chapter in a long series of wars between Britain and France (and their various allies).

The conflict extended back to the end of the seventeenth century, with the War of the League of Augsburg to check the ambitions of Louis XIV, and forward through the early nineteenth century when the war against Napoleon finally came to a conclusion. So we can't really understand the American Revolution without a solid understanding of the first world war. No I am not jumping ahead to the twentieth century! Rather, I am referring to the Seven Years' War (aka the French and Indian War), which Britain and France fought on multiple fronts in Europe and around the world. Britain's victory led to a dramatic expansion of the empire, which, in turn, led to its need to reform its colonial administration and increase taxes to pay for its defense. The desire to avenge its defeat in the Seven Years' War was one of the main reasons France entered into an alliance with the Americans in 1778. But debts accrued during both wars destabilized the French crown and made it vulnerable to the forces of revolution in 1789. Britain did everything in its power to prevent this revolution from spreading but it was not until 1815 that France finally accepted defeat. At that point, Britain emerged as the predominant naval, imperial, and economic power in the world, a position it would hold until the end of the nineteenth century. In this way, the age of revolutions was coincident with what has been described as the first age of global empire, the period when Britain achieved an empire that stretched across the globe (and included not only formal colonies but also a network of naval stations, ports, and commercial spheres of influence), and led to the imperial grandeur of the Victorian era.

Keeping this broader context in mind, I would like to move back to the 1780s and the aftermath of the American War for a moment. Historians have long debated the extent to which the American Revolution marked a turning point in the history of the

British Empire. In 1782, the British lost about one-fifth of all the people in the empire – they were now citizens of the newly minted United States of America—and a territory that was demonstrating tremendous economic potential. Such a loss did have profound implications for the empire. Historians use the term “swing to the east” to describe the shift that took place. As they lost their Atlantic empire (also described as the First British Empire), the British turned their attention to Asia and the Pacific. The shift in focus is evident in Britain’s increased involvement in and new approach to governing East India Company territories in India; in state-sponsored exploration of the Pacific, most notably under the direction of Captain James Cook; and in the founding of a new colony of settlement in New South Wales in 1788 (also unique in its status as a penal colony; indeed, one of the most significant outcomes of the loss of the American colonies was the need to find an alternative penal colony; the Thirteen Colonies had received about 1000 convicts every year<sup>1</sup>). Combined with colonies the British had maintained in the Atlantic, these territories comprised the so-called “Second British Empire.”

While I think the concept of a swing to the east has some merit, it is important not overlook the fact that Britain retained a vital presence in the West Indies and North America. Though the British had lost thirteen north American colonies, they consolidated their position in the Caribbean. Britain also maintained control over its colonies in far north America: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec. Moreover, 100,000 Loyalists immigrated to British North America during and after the war. Their presence led to the founding of a new British colony, Upper Canada, which over time would become Ontario. The Canadian colonies would soon grow into a

---

<sup>1</sup> Levine, *The British Empire*, 45.

bulwark of the Second British Empire, and, as we will see, receive millions of British immigrants.

The Canadian colonies of the Second British Empire also became critical seedbeds for the development of new ideas about how to govern the empire. In order to avoid another war of independence, the British became reticent to apply too much pressure to their nineteenth-century colonies of settlement. Instead, they gradually allowed the power of the crown to wane vis à vis the power of the colonial legislature. The trend culminated in the granting of “responsible government”, first to Canadian colonies starting in 1848 (in the aftermath of two rebellions, by the way) and then to the Australian, New Zealand, and South African colonies later in the nineteenth century. (“Responsible governments” were those responsible to elected legislatures rather than a monarch or colonial governor. As historian Philippa Levine explains, “Responsible self-government created colonial mini-version of the British parliament, a two-house government in which the assembly approximated the House of Commons as an elected house, while the council consisted of those appointed by the colonial governor.”<sup>2</sup>)

If constitutional government characterized the colonies of white settlement, the rest of the empire experienced varying forms of autocratic rule. Garrison colonies like Gibraltar and Malta were ruled directly by the military. India was governed, uniquely, by a company-state: the English East India Company with increasing oversight by the British state via various governors-general and the London-based Board of Control. The old colonial system (rule by colonial governor working with local legislature) was still in place in many Caribbean colonies, but the increasingly tenuous position of the planters after the emancipation of slaves in 1833 led to them to dissolve their legislatures and

---

<sup>2</sup> Levine, 51.

request direct rule. Direct rule from London – known as crown colony government – was in place in the rest of empire, in places like Trinidad and Ceylon and later throughout Britain’s African colonies, where executive authority was concentrated in the hands of imperial officials. These “proconsular despotisms” were “characterized by a form of aristocratic military government supporting a viceregal autocracy, by a well-developed imperial style which emphasized hierarchy and racial subordination, and by the patronage of indigenous landed elites.”<sup>3</sup>

British imperial Freemasonry both reflected and responded to the changes transforming the world during the age of revolutions. For the rest of my time today, I will look at two aspects of British Masonic history the 1770s and the 1820s: the first is the fraternity's diffusion around the world and the second is the composition of the membership. In both cases, I will pay particular attention to military lodges.

But before I get into the changes that are evident in this period, it is important to point out some continuities. First, whether we are talking about the eighteenth century or the nineteenth century, Freemasonry grew in popularity over time. There were, to be sure, periods when membership rates fell and lodges went into abeyance (the almost constant warfare of the period facilitated Freemasonry's spread, but it could also lead to downturns in Masonic activity.) But, overall, the trend is clear: the number of lodges and members increased over time. Second, the role Freemasonry played in colonial societies remained fairly consistent across the period under consideration. Regardless of the decade, membership in Freemasonry provided a brother with opportunities for fellowship, growth, and recreation; facilitated his travels; eased his adjustment to foreign environments; gave him with resources when he could not make ends meet; and helped

---

<sup>3</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 8-9.

him advance in the world. It could offer all this and more because its members viewed one another as brothers, connected by shared ritual experiences and pledges of mutual obligation. Masonic fraternalism, according to one late eighteenth-century commentator, provided the ultimate global safety net: "Were the providence of God to cast you on an unknown shore; were you to travel through any distant country, though ignorant of its language, ignorant of its inhabitants, ignorant of its customs, you will . . . have a key, which will give you admittance to the brotherhood, and which will open the treasures of their charity."<sup>4</sup>

#### FREEMASONRY'S SPREAD

One topic that has always fascinated me is the globalization of Freemasonry – how a brotherhood that emerged in the early modern British Isles spread to the European continent and throughout the world. It was a long process, beginning in the 1720s and continuing, one could argue, to the present.<sup>5</sup> Three mechanisms were responsible for taking Freemasonry abroad: the military lodge, the provincial grand lodge, and the processes of migration. What we see in the period I am examining today is a shift in the relative importance of these mechanisms. Up to 1815, the regimental lodge was the most important vector; after 1815, it was replaced by migration as the primary mechanism for Freemasonry's diffusion. There are several reasons for this shift, which I will discuss in a minute. But let's first look briefly at the role of military lodges in exporting British Freemasonry.

---

<sup>4</sup> Weeks, *Sermon presented at St. Paul's Cathedral in Halifax* (Halifax, 1785, 23-24).

<sup>5</sup> See Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, Chapter 1.

The Grand Lodge of Ireland issued the fraternity's first traveling warrant in 1732. The warrant gave members of the lodge the authority to meet anywhere they were stationed. Between 1732 and 1813 the Irish warranted nearly 200 such lodges; the Ancients were next with 108. Nearly every regiment in the British Army had at least one lodge in its ranks; many had several. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 51<sup>st</sup> Foot had Irish, Scottish, and English lodges. The Royal Artillery had 28 Ancient lodges! The estimate for the total number of regimental lodges is around 500. As Irish Masonic historian Chetwode Crawley put it: "These lodges permeated everywhere; everywhere they left behind the germs of Freemasonry." When a regiment departed, civilians who had participated in the military lodge would continue working and eventually receive their own warrant. For example, Irish lodge No. 74 (in the Second Battalion Royal) was active in Albany, New York during the 1750s. The lodge initiated several townsmen into Masonry. Upon the regiment's transfer in 1759, the lodge informed Irish authorities that it had decided to copy its warrant in order to set up a new lodge: "Our body is very numerous by the addition of many new members, merchants, and inhabitants of the City of Albany, they having earnestly requested and besought us to enable them to hold a Lodge during our absence from them." Of course, copying a warrant was highly irregular; the Grand Lodge of Ireland nonetheless authorized the Provincial Grand Master of New York to grant the lodge its own warrant. At least nine regiments in General Wolfe's army that took Quebec City from the French in 1759 had lodges attached to them. After their victory on the Plains of Abraham, the British occupied the city and within two months representatives from the regimental lodges met to form a permanent local grand lodge.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Material for this paragraph taken from Harland-Jacobs, *Builders*, 32-37.

Military lodges continued to spread Freemasonry through the end of the eighteenth century. But the second half of the eighteenth century was their heyday – the vast majority of military lodges had been warranted by 1815, and thereafter they declined in importance. That is not to say that regimental lodges were gone. On the contrary, some very important military lodges, such as the Lodge of Social and Military Virtues and the Minden Lodge, continued to meet in various parts of the empire over the course of the nineteenth century. Regimental lodges were also instrumental in helping establish British Freemasonry in new colonies New South Wales and the Cape Colony. But from the 1820s on, migration overtook military lodges as the most important mechanism for Freemasonry's proliferation abroad.

Indeed, migration was a key feature of nineteenth-century British life. A rapidly rising population combined with a serious post-war depression, social unrest, and prison overcrowding to cause both individuals and the state to turn to migration as a way to relieve pressure at home. Between 1815 and 1914 22.6 million Britons emigrated from the British Isles. Notably, their primary destination was the United States of America, demonstrating that in the case of migration as in the case of trade, the Revolution had not marked much of a rupture. British migrants made their way in significant numbers to the colonies of settlement in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Upper Canada had a population of 915,000 by 1851. This population had been built in three waves – the first (or charter generation) was the migration of Loyalists from the thirteen colonies following the American Revolution; the second was a migration of Americans looking for economic opportunities at the turn of the century; the third, and most significant, wave was composed of British and Irish settlers arriving after 1815. 66,000

migrants arrived in 1832 alone.<sup>7</sup> The end of the wars brought an increase in transportation; by 1820, there were 32,000 colonists in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).<sup>8</sup> Regardless of their destination, the arriving Europeans encroached on indigenous lands, leading to conflicts with native inhabitants and the elaboration of complex ideologies to justify settler colonialism.

Many among the migrants who arrived in colonies during the nineteenth century were Freemasons. If a settler, upon reaching his destination, found no Masonic lodge or determined that existing lodges were too crowded, he could petition a grand lodge in the British Isles to send a warrant for a new lodge ("a deputation to constitute a lodge"). Hundreds of lodges in British North America, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand were established in this manner. Membership in Freemasonry helped British migrants in countless ways: it gave them access to a network of lodges that could assist them as they moved around the world; it encouraged moral improvement; it offered opportunities for recreation and social networking; it conferred respectability. As John Stephen, a police magistrate who arrived in New South Wales in 1827, wrote in a letter to the Grand Lodge of England: "the greater part of the free community have been admitted as Masons in England from the prevailing notion of the necessity of being so on becoming Travellers."<sup>9</sup> We see the impact of migration on the growth of overseas lodges in Upper Canada and Nova Scotia. Only one Irish lodge was at work in Upper Canada during the 1820s and 30s; but between 1841 and 1855 fifteen other lodges took root there. Meanwhile, the Grand Lodge of Scotland was busy issuing warrants for new lodges in

---

<sup>7</sup> Harper, "British Migration and the Peopling of the Empire," in Porter (ed), *Oxford History of the British Empire Vol. III*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> Levine, 47. 400,000 by 1850. 1788-1867: 150,000-160,000 convicts arrived in Australia.

<sup>9</sup> John Stephen to the Grand Lodge of England, 1 September 1827, Grand Lodge of England, HC 21/C/1; Quoted in Harland-Jacobs, *Builders*, 1.

Nova Scotia. Its first lodge appeared in 1827; by 1844 it saw fit to appoint a provincial grand master and it set up an additional fifteen lodges in the next fifteen years.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, a British colonist was much more likely to join a lodge that had been set up by fellow migrants than to join a military lodge (the exception was in the most remote corners of the empire such as New South Wales and Norfolk Island where military lodges offered the only access to Masonry.)

So, did Britain's loss in the American Revolution contribute to this decline in military lodges and their role as a vector of Freemasonry? Not directly. But, as noted, the American Revolution was but part of a series of wars against France that finally concluded in 1815. The coming of peace and the subsequent rise in migration did, I believe, make military lodges less significant (there are other reasons for the decline in military lodges which I will discuss in the final part of this paper).

The American Revolution was perhaps more significant to the history of British Freemasonry abroad insofar as it led to a fundamental rethinking of relations between colonial Freemasons (or formerly colonial Masons) and the British grand lodges. For the first time, Masons who had derived their authority from Britain began questioning whether they continued to owe loyalty – and dues – to Britain. To get at the issue of relations within the world of Anglo-American Freemasonry, we need to look at the third mechanism by which Freemasonry spread abroad – provincial grand lodges.

The provincial grand lodge system had emerged in England in the 1720s. The Grand Lodge of England established the Provincial Grand Lodge for Cheshire in 1725 and appointed a Provincial Grand Master for the East Indies just four years later. They appointed a Provincial Grand Master for New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in

---

<sup>10</sup> Harland-Jacobs, *The Essential Link*, 240-1.

1730. From that point on the grand lodge deputized provincial grand masters wherever a strong Masonic presence had emerged or wherever they anticipated Freemasonry would take off. The Provincial Grand Master served as the Grand Master's representative in a locality and had the authority to warrant new lodges. For example, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts established 50 lodges in North America before the American War of Independence.<sup>11</sup> The Provincial Grand Master was also responsible for collecting fees and dues, keeping registers, corresponding with and reporting to the metropolitan grand lodges, settling disputes, and disciplining lodges or brethren who violated regulations.

The British grand lodges maintained, and even expanded, the provincial grand lodge system after the American Revolution. Between 1792 and 1799, the provincial grand master of Upper Canada warranted no less than twenty new lodges. And the first Irish overseas provincial grand lodges emerged in this period with the establishment of a provincial grand lodge of Barbados in 1801. In the first half of the century, the English Grand Lodges set up provincial grand lodges for South Africa, St. Helena, Ceylon, Mauritius, Haiti, Malta, Grenada, New South Wales, Victoria, China, and South Australia. While some were more active than others, they were all supposed to ensure that Freemasonry was established on a firm footing in these areas.

But the outcome of the American Revolution caused serious complications for the provincial grand lodges that had been operating throughout the North American colonies prior to the war. All of the lodges operating in the colonies had derived their authority from one of the four British grand lodges. Each grand lodge also had provincial grand lodges at work in the colonies. Four of the five Modern provincial grand masters serving

---

<sup>11</sup> See Harland-Jacobs, *Builders*, 38-40.

at the time of the conflict had remained loyal to Britain: William Allen of Pennsylvania, Egerton Leigh of South Carolina, John Rowe of Boston, and John Johnson of New York. When the dust settled after the war, American Freemasons were forced to confront the question of "the relationship of political loyalties to fraternal relations." Steve Bullock carefully and eloquently discusses various responses to this issue, including the rejected proposal to create an American Grand Lodge with Washington as Grand Master, in Chapter Four of *Revolutionary Brotherhood*. Ultimately, he argues, American Freemasonry was able to divert the source of its legitimacy away from the British Grand Lodges and toward its status as a republican institution, well suited to the needs of the new nation in the making. Meanwhile, the British had no choice but to watch as, one by one, their provincial grand lodges (some with very illustrious pedigrees) declared themselves independent of their connection to Britain and set up state grand lodges all up and down the eastern seaboard.

But the story of the Revolution's impact on Anglo-American fraternal relations does not end there. Not long after the Revolution, Upper Canadian Masons became so disgruntled over the neglect of their provincial grand master that they broke off and set up a rival grand lodge. Though they did not contemplate a total break from Britain at this point, their actions foreshadowed the Canadian Masonic independence movement of the 1850s, when Irish Freemasons took the lead in severing ties with the British Grand Lodges and forming a separate Grand Lodge of Canada (in the Province of Ontario). Notably, and this gets us back to the long-term impact of the American Revolution, one of English Masonry's most prominent leaders and a man with experience in colonial affairs, Lord Carnarvon, advocated the Grand Lodge adopt a very conciliatory approach

(a kind of responsible government, in fact). He observed that concessions to the brethren in Canada had come tardily "and that the feeling in Canada in favor of independence had grown very strong." Placing events in a historical and imperial context, he remarked that he "was afraid that in this matter they had gone too near that fatal rock 'too late,' which had shipwrecked to many empires, dynasties and governments."<sup>12</sup>

To sum up my argument to this point – the age of revolutions was a turning point for British imperial Freemasonry insofar as migration replaced the regimental lodge as the primary mechanism by which the fraternity spread abroad. Moreover, the American Revolution specifically had a significant and long-running impact on Anglo-American fraternal relations and the authority of the British Grand Lodges. For the remainder of my time today, I want to look at one other area in which we see some significant changes, namely the composition of British lodges.

## FREEMASONRY'S COMPOSITION

One of the main arguments I make in my book is that late eighteenth-century Freemasonry was a more inclusive and tolerant institution than its early nineteenth-century successor. I demonstrate this by exploring the ways in which the brotherhood became more politically, racially, and socially exclusive. For example, I show that by the early nineteenth century, British Freemasonry was firmly and self-consciously aligned with the British state. Gone were the days when one could find men from across the political spectrum – radicals as well as loyalists – in Masonic lodges. By this point, both British and American lodges had declared African-American Masons illegitimate, and

---

<sup>12</sup> Carnarvon quoted in H-J, *The Essential Link*, 250.

colonial lodges throughout the British Empire were restricted to white members of sufficient property and respectability.

Although I don't explore this in the book and more research is required to fully establish this point, the history of military lodges also offers evidence of the increasing exclusivity of British lodges. To examine the changing nature of the military lodge, we need to start in the eighteenth century, when military lodges were flourishing. In this period, regimental lodges welcomed both officers and privates as members. Noting this, Masonic historians have long celebrated Freemasonry's ability to "provide a common meeting ground for all ranks."<sup>13</sup> Robert Gould observes that the Masonic lodges in the army helped "strengthen the bonds of friendship, and . . . diffuse among the officers—commissioned and non-commissioned—and the rank and file, a spirit of charity, fraternal kindness, and subordination."<sup>14</sup> Discussing Freemasonry's contribution to the development of regimental community, Raymond Parkinson notes: "Once within the precincts of the Regimental Lodge, where all the external advantages of rank or station were laid aside, the more thoughtful type of soldier found a refuge from the hardships and monotony of his service. Officer, non-commissioned officer, and man meeting on the same level bred a mutual respect, devoid of servility, that was invaluable in welding each unit into a well-tempered weapon."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Parkinson, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland*, 302. See also Milborne in Frere, *Grand Lodge, 1717-1967*, 261 (notes that "the majority [of military lodges] were composed of all ranks."); and Bullock, 90.

<sup>14</sup> Gould, *Military Lodges*, 118. He even attributed Freemasonry's success in the army to "the zeal of the rank and file." "The love for the Craft," Gould explained, "seems not to have spread downwards, but upwards, namely from the soldiers' barrack-room to the officers' mess." Gould, 158. Frey, *British Soldier in America*, 66, points out that "small groups of enlisted men participated, at least in a peripheral way, in most of [officers' cultural] undertakings."

<sup>15</sup> Parkinson, 290. Walter Firminger, *The Early History of Fm in Bengal and the Punjab*, vi, praises Freemasonry for affording great relief to "the severe caste system of the British Army at the close of the eighteenth century."

Evidence that eighteenth-century military lodges promoted a fraternalism that cut across army ranks comes from many sources. I will provide just a few examples. The master of one Irish army lodge is described in correspondence as “but a poor common Soldier.”<sup>16</sup> Military lodges composed of both officers and privates were active in India during the 1780s.<sup>17</sup> The Provincial Grand Lodge of Bengal established a new lodge among the “considerable Number of Non Commissioned Officers, and private soldiers, [and] Invalids, settled at Chenar” in 1793.<sup>18</sup> The Lodge of Fidelity No. 7, attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Fusiliers and active in the West Indies and Nova Scotia, was composed of the regiment's NCOs and rank and file.<sup>19</sup> Many of these lodges were warranted by the Ancient and the Irish Grand Lodges. Indeed one of the reasons the Ancients achieved such remarkable success, in both the British Army and the colonies, was their willingness to include men of humbler rank in their lodges.<sup>20</sup>

Army officers of the eighteenth century do not seem to have felt threatened by the presence of NCOs and privates in lodges. Freemasonry, with its emphasis on duty, loyalty, good behavior, and knowing one’s place, did not jeopardize rank or discipline. Describing this state of affairs, one social historian of the British Army suggests: “At first a newly admitted trooper must have felt embarrassment at addressing his Commanding Officer as ‘Brother’ at the meetings, but outside the Lodge ‘workings’ normal military protocol prevailed, and Freemasonry never endangered discipline.”<sup>21</sup> Had Freemasonry posed a threat to these fundamental aspects of army culture, it would

---

<sup>16</sup> He was the master of Lodge No. 92 in the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Milborne in Frere, 262.

<sup>17</sup> In 1808, NCOs and privates established the Lodge of Unity, Peace, and Concord in the 2nd Battalion of the 1st (Royal) Regiment. Gould, *Military Lodges*, 165, 170.

<sup>18</sup> PGL Bengal to GLE, 11 Feb 1793, United Grand Lodge Historic Correspondence File 17/B/15, Archives, Freemasons’ Hall, London.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, “HRH Prince Edward Augustus,” *Papers of the Canadian Masonic Research Association* I, 326.

<sup>20</sup> See Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 29-30.

<sup>21</sup> Brereton, *The British Soldier*, 111.

not have been supported and patronized by so many officers, like Major General Tottenham of the 90th Foot. Tottenham actively encouraged Freemasonry in his regiment. In 1783 he requested a traveling warrant from the Grand Lodge of England, noting that many of his officers and sergeants belonged to the brotherhood and, since they were upstanding men, he wanted all members of the regiment to join the fraternity.<sup>22</sup>

Evidence that eighteenth-century lodges welcomed men of all ranks challenges the prevailing assumption among historians of the British Army that there were insurmountable barriers between officers and men. After all, differences in social class did not really affect how officers and men experienced eighteenth-century military service at a basic level. Stationed in strange environments far from the (relative) comforts of home, officers and men faced together the physical and emotional upheavals caused by a regiment's movement around the world. Both groups confronted the constant risk of death from disease or battle wounds and the monotony of garrison duty. It is hardly surprising that they turned to each other for support. As historian Tony Hayter explains, "there developed . . . a tacit system of complicity between officers and men, a realization that both were victims of a strange and terrible predicament."<sup>23</sup> Freemasonry, with its ability to balance fraternalism and hierarchy, provided an ideal way for officers and men to offer mutual support in the face of very challenging conditions. In 1793 brother Alexander Galloway of the Royal Artillery died and left behind a widow

---

<sup>22</sup> UGL Historic Correspondence 7/D/10, Archives, Freemasons' Hall, London. Demonstrating the connection between Fm and the eighteenth-century army, Gould notes that at least thirteen Scottish Grand Masters prior to 1769 held commissions in the army. Among the Modern Grand Masters who also held army commissions were the Marquis of Carnarvon (later 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Chandos) (GM, 1754-6), the Duke of Beaufort (GM, 1767-71), and the Duke of Manchester (GM, 1777-82) (all were colonels). Lord George Sackville was Grand Master of Ireland in 1751. Lord Aberdour (later 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Morton) served as both Grand Master of Scotland (1755-6) and England (1757-61) and was Commandant of a Light Dragoons corps in 1759.

<sup>23</sup> Hayter, *Making the Georgian Army*, 116.

and two children who had no means to take care of themselves. The garrison commander, who was a prominent Mason, attended the funeral and brought with him the regimental band. The brethren organized a subscription for the widow. The lodge later thanked the commander for "his personal attention, and distinguished affability in promoting the good of Masonry by ordering such a splendid interment to our late Bro. Galloway."<sup>24</sup> Thus, during the eighteenth century, Freemasonry fostered a fraternalism that maintained discipline but could cut across the ranks of the army; officers and men did at times think of one another as brothers.

But any sense of cross-rank camaraderie and fraternalism seems to have disappeared by the early decades of the nineteenth century, as the age of revolution came to a close. This change in tone was part of a broader effort to reform the army in response to the threat posed by revolutionary France in 1793. "In the decade that elapsed between the end of the struggle for the American colonies in 1783 and the outbreak of the war with republican France, the British army," according to military historian David Gates, "sank into dereliction." As one contemporary soldier recalled, "Our army was lax in its discipline, entirely without system, and very weak in numbers."<sup>25</sup> It faced major challenges recruiting soldiers. Administration of the army was lacking in many regards: a commander-in-chief was appointed only in wartime, and the army bureaucracy was divided and remote. Far behind the military innovations in Europe, the British Army even lacked a comprehensive drill manual. This state of affairs began to change in 1792 when the army finally adopted an official drill manual and it began finding new ways to address manpower shortages and the problems with officer recruitment.

---

<sup>24</sup> Graham, *Outlines of the History of Freemasonry in the Province of Quebec*, 96.

<sup>25</sup> Gates, "The Transformation of the Army 1783-1815," in Chandler and Beckett, *Oxford History of the British Army*, 132.

The reforms picked up pace when the Duke of Wellington succeeded Sir John Moore as Britain's premier general in 1809.<sup>26</sup> Emphasizing order and discipline as the key to military success, Wellington "sought to engender obedience, loyalty, passivity, and lack of inquisitiveness among the rank and file."<sup>27</sup> He firmly believed that the army would function most effectively if its structure and internal workings mirrored Britain's social hierarchy. Thus, even though some officers were beginning to advocate a more humanitarian approach to training soldiers in this period, Wellington continued to support corporal punishment. In order to invest the officer corps with the authority necessary to command obedience, he insisted on maintaining a considerable gulf between officers and men, two groups that became increasingly homogeneous and alienated from one another as the century proceeded. A deep-rooted prejudice against promotion from within the ranks indicated the growing distance between officers and men and the emphasis on knowing one's place in the army.

Developments in the history of British military lodges revealed this shift in relations between officers and men. In 1810, the master and officers of Lodge No. 354 in the 49th Regiment of Foot, then stationed at William Henry, Lower Canada, complained to the Grand Lodge of England that the commanding officer of the regiment had ordered that no person could be initiated into the lodge without his permission. When the brethren disobeyed this order, the commander abolished the lodge "for the maintenance of good order and military discipline." The members of the lodge begged the grand lodge

---

<sup>26</sup> Wellington had direct connections to Freemasonry. His father served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland (1781, 1821-8). Arthur was initiated in the family lodge No. 494 at Trim in 1790 but he did not find time in his busy military career to participate regularly in Masonic activities. Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century*, 297-8; Lepper and Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland*, 216.

<sup>27</sup> Gates, 144-5.

to intervene and assured the authorities that their lodge was composed of “the most respectable Non-Commissioned Officers in the Regt with a few Privates.”<sup>28</sup>

There is no record of whether the grand lodge intervened, but subsequent changes in the rules governing military lodges indicated the direction metropolitan policy was heading. In 1813 the Grand Lodge of England passed a new code of regulations pertaining to military lodges (enacted in 1815). First, it decided that it would not grant a new military warrant without the consent of the commanding officer. It also forbade military lodges from initiating civilians. Finally, and most significantly for the composition of army lodges, it prohibited the admission of “any military person below the rank of corporal, except as serving brethren, or by dispensation from the grand master.”<sup>29</sup> Privates who were allowed to join lodges were relegated to the position of servants. Shortly after the new regulations came into effect, commissioned officers began forming “Officers’ Lodges” that excluded men of the lower ranks. Such lodges had already begun appearing in regiments stationed in India<sup>30</sup>, Gibraltar<sup>31</sup>, and Quebec<sup>32</sup>. The very fact that they were distinguished in name as "Officers' Lodges" indicates a departure from past practice.

---

<sup>28</sup> Master and officers of Lodge No. 354 to the Premier Grand Lodge of England, 5 June 1810, UGL Historic Correspondence File 16/H, Archives, Freemasons’ Hall, London.

<sup>29</sup> *Constitution of the Ancient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons with the Charges of a Free Mason* (Halifax: Edmund Ward, 1819). The Grand Lodge of Scotland did not impose any official restrictions against men of the lower ranks. In 1850 all the grand lodges passed legislation barring the admission of civilians into army lodges throughout the British Isles and the empire. Gould, *Military Lodges*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> For example, officers in the 2nd Battalion of the 1st (Royal) Regiment petitioned to form an “Officers’ Lodge” in 1809. Officers of the 16th Native Infantry formed the Lodge of United Friendship, No. 5 in Madras in 1812 and those of the Bombay Artillery established Orion in the West Lodge, No. 15 in 1823; NCOs were admitted only as serving brethren. Gould, *Military Lodges*, 159, 170-171, 192.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence from Masons stationed in Gibraltar in the 1780s reveals the operation of a lodge of officers (No. 28) and a “Soldiers’ Lodge.” UGL Historic Correspondence 20/A and B, Archives, Freemasons’ Hall, London.

<sup>32</sup> Two lodges established in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, stationed in Quebec in the early 1790s, revealed the increasing exclusiveness of military lodges. Royal Rose Lodge No. 2 “consisted almost wholly of officers”, while the Lodge of Fidelity was for Masons among the rank and file. Harris, 326.

Take, for example, changes in the composition of Lodge No. 361, stationed in Bombay with the 17th Dragoons. In 1813, the lodge consisted of thirty-four members: twenty-nine NCOs and five privates. In 1821 the lodge admitted six commissioned officers and one civilian; these seven soon decided “that the half-monthly meeting [of the lodge] be entirely for the Br. Officers (Military) of Lodge No. 361.” They condescended to allow NCOs, “if they desire it,” to attend the regular monthly meeting of the lodge, although the officers informed “the old members” that they might call on their assistance at the half-monthly meetings if they required it. This situation led, essentially, to the operation of two separate lodges working under the same warrant--one for officers and civil servants, and the other for NCOs and privates.<sup>33</sup> Had they petitioned the grand lodge for a new warrant in the first place, the officers would have certainly received one. But the more efficient course was to hijack an existing lodge and push out the privates and NCOs. In the process, they brought Lodge No. 361 into line with the increasingly exclusive policies of military Freemasonry.<sup>34</sup>

Now restricted to officers, army lodges functioned, in effect, as an extension of the regimental mess. Officers’ lives revolved around the mess, which was basically a private club complete with income requirements, servants, and rules.<sup>35</sup> The mess was not just a place to eat and relax, but a vehicle for officers to assert their identity as a group by defining themselves against those who were excluded, the lower ranks. The lodge

---

<sup>33</sup> Lodge No. 361, Minutes, quoted in Gould, *Military Lodges*, 191-2.

<sup>34</sup> An incident in British North America was also indicative of this shift: A Mason living in New Brunswick reported to the Grand Lodge of England that a lodge composed of non-commissioned officers and privates in the 33rd Regiment was meeting in St. John and that “respectable Brother Masons” in the town wished “to open a Lodge on a Gentlemanly and proper footing.” The Grand Lodge of England readily granted this request. John Stephens to Grand Secretary, 28 April 1845, UGL Historic Correspondence 16/I, Archives, Freemasons Hall, London.

<sup>35</sup> See Farwell, *Mr. Kipling’s Army*, 61-2.

operated as an extension of the mess insofar as it also provided an exclusive assembly point for those in command.

Thus, a number of factors contributed to the decline of regimental lodges in the early nineteenth century: the coming of peace, the administrative consolidation that accompanied the union of the Ancients and the Moderns, the new regulations barring the initiation of civilians in military lodges. But perhaps most significant was this change in tone, this increasing exclusivity and the requirement that commanding officers approve a lodge's formation.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, it is possible to identify some important changes in the world of British Freemasonry between the 1780s and 1810s. First, migration replaced military lodges as the primary mechanism by which the brotherhood spread abroad. Second, the composition and functions of military lodges shifted in this period, reflecting the increasing exclusivity of British Freemasonry overall. Finally, the American Revolution had a significant impact on Anglo-American Masonic relations, leading to the establishment of independent American Grand Lodges, and, eventually, an Masonic independence movement in Canada. To see and understand these shifts, we need to look at the big picture, the Atlantic Age of Revolutions. For though Freemasonry is indeed a local institution, it is, at the same time, profoundly global.

---

<sup>36</sup> Gould, *Military Lodges*, 157-60.