

Fraternal communications: the rise of the English masonic periodical

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Freemasonry was formally established in England in 1717 and rapidly became very much a part of everyday eighteenth century life, as references to it in popular magazines of the time, personal accounts and items in local newspapers reveal.¹ From a contemporary viewpoint this may appear surprising since freemasonry is commonly regarded as a secret society with peculiar handshakes and bizarre rituals. However, it is only in the last seventy years of the twentieth century that freemasonry has lost its public face in this country.² Until then, public masonic processions were a familiar feature of town life. Even in 1929 it was not regarded as unusual that the laying of the foundation stone of Stratford upon Avon's Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was attended with full masonic ceremonies. Significantly the establishment and spread of freemasonry in England in the eighteenth century coincides with the rapid development of the book trade, and the establishment and growth of newspaper and periodical publishing,³ and the rise of the middle classes.

Freemasonry may have been a part of everyday life for an increasing number of men but the first masonic periodical did not appear until the last decade of the eighteenth century. It survived less than ten years and it was not until 1834 that a second masonic periodical was launched. Publishing is a commercial venture and the proprietor's aim is to cover costs and ultimately make a profit. It is significant that when the first English masonic magazine did appear it did not have an exclusively masonic content. The proprietor appears to have known his market and understood that in order to be successful he needed to appeal to a wider audience. The magazine was called the *Freemasons' magazine, or general and complete library*, it first appeared in June 1793 and was published monthly until December 1798.⁴

The opening editorial outlines the magazine's aims and contents:

This Magazine is not only intended as a monthly Register of literary Information, but will contain Essays, tending to the promotion of good morals; Strictures on the dreadful effects of Vice; together with a variety of such original and pleasing miscellaneous Subjects, as we may think useful or entertaining: these will form one part of our Magazine; the other, we conceive, will be of the most evident utility, and for which this Magazine is principally undertaken, - no less than that of an honourable medium, through which fraternal communications and correspondence may be conveyed one to another [...]⁵

The articles aimed at freemasons tended to be placed at the front, followed by articles of a more general nature. The editor clearly states that the primary purpose of the magazine is to enable freemasons to communicate with each other; however, in 1797 the magazine's title is changed to *The scientific magazine, and freemasons' repository*. The masonic content at this point is placed at the end of the magazine and items of more general interest are brought to the front. On page one of the volume the proprietor explains the reason for the change of title when he states that:

¹ For example, *The gentleman's magazine*, one of the most successful general magazines of the eighteenth century, has numerous references to freemasonry from the magazine's establishment in 1731. These references range from notices concerning newly published books, to letters with masonry as their subjects and reports of festivals and meetings. Freemasonry continues to feature in the magazine's pages well into the nineteenth century.

² Andrew Prescott, *Freemasonry and the problem of Britain*. Inaugural lecture by Andrew Prescott to mark the launch of the University of Sheffield's Centre for Research into Freemasonry, 5 March 2001. Retrieved from the website of The Centre of Research into Freemasonry, University of Sheffield <http://freemasonry.dept.shef.ac.uk/?q=papers_4> [accessed 31st August 2007] (para. 7 of 46).

³ The first successful daily newspaper, *The daily courant*, began publication in 1702 and soon had its rivals. By the 1730s printers were established in most major towns throughout the country and the development of provincial newspapers had helped put a system of distribution in place which proved to be one of the most important changes in the book trade in the eighteenth century since it opened up the provincial markets. The second half of the seventeenth century had seen the beginnings of periodical publishing and this continued to evolve in the eighteenth century.

⁴ See Appendix for a list of masonic periodicals published in England before 1900.

⁵ 'Address to the masonic body and public in general' in the *Freemasons' magazine: or general and compleat library*, June 1793, pp. 6-7.

From the time the Magazine became his property, it must have been observed, that an entire new, and he trusts improved, arrangement has taken place. This new arrangement has rendered its circulation much more extensive; and it has been suggested, that the number of readers would still farther be increased by a change of title.⁶

Either those behind the magazine misjudged the urge among freemasons to read about and exchange views on freemasonry, or, it is possible that at this time there were not enough masons who could afford to purchase the magazine and make it a success.

What is clear is that the magazine was struggling to survive and had to rethink its format and presentation in order to continue. From 1793 until 1796 it was printed and published by J. W. Bunney, however from 1797 George Cawthorn is named as the printer. In the year the title is changed Cawthorn is the only name associated with the magazine. The successful magazines of the eighteenth century were the ones which appealed to a wide audience due to their miscellaneous content. The magazine aimed at a niche market, and indeed the magazine as a life style choice had yet to emerge. It appears that Cawthorn was trying to replicate the miscellaneous format and include the masonic material in a magazine for general consumption. Like many other societies, freemasonry was part of ordinary life and the masonic information contained within its pages was available to anyone who could gain access to it and could read. Unfortunately the copies of the periodical consulted at The Library and Museum of Freemasonry in London have no indication of how much the magazine would have cost at the time.⁷ For those who could not afford to buy newspapers and magazines in the late eighteenth century there was always the coffee house which had a range of such publications available for customers to read. The magazine may have been available in such establishments and it may also have been found in the news and reading rooms that existed in many towns in the eighteenth century.

During the period the magazine was published in England was at war with France. The magazine recorded these events and even included engraved charts and plans of the principal sea fights. Patriotism is a consistent feature throughout its pages and it is almost at pains to demonstrate the loyalty and devotion of freemasons to their King and country.⁸ Then, in 1798, the magazine ceased publication without any apparent explanation or warning.⁹ One possible reason is that it was a casualty of the times. Freemasonry was one among many societies meeting in England at this time and the general sense of panic engendered by the French Revolution quickly created fear of sedition. That which, until so recently had been deemed to be part of everyday life, suddenly came under suspicion. In 1799, a year after the magazine's demise, the Seditious Societies Act was passed which banned societies where members were required to take oaths. Freemasonry was exempted by an amendment to the Act, but it is possible that the demand for magazine with freemasonry as part of its content was affected by the climate of fear of the times.

The nineteenth century saw freemasonry established in England in the form it has retained to this day. The first ever Grand Lodge had been formed by four London lodges in 1717, but in 1751 a rival Grand Lodge had been set up by a group, mainly made up of Irish Masons, who were unable

⁶ "The proprietor to the subscriber" in *The scientific magazine, and freemasons' repository*, January 1797, p.1.

⁷ The only pricing information relates to the engravings, which could be purchased separately at two shillings and sixpence and a the price of binding the volumes that ranged from one shilling and sixpence for a standard half bound Russian backed version, to four shillings and sixpence for the calf bound gilt lettering version with extra masonic embellishments.

⁸ As Jeremy Black observes, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period witnessed an upsurge in conservative propaganda in many newspapers of the time. In addition, The Loyalist Association of 1792 was followed by a rise in populist right wing organisations, such as Constitutional Associations, Protestant Associations, Pitt Clubs, True Blue Clubs, Wellington Clubs, Brunswick Clubs and British Orange Societies, which were formed in response to radical societies of the period. 'Politicisation and the press in Hanoverian England' in *Serials and their readers 1620-1914* ed. by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1993), pp. 63-81 (p. 70).

⁹ The date of the final volume is thrown into some doubt by a note at the end of volume 11 of one of the three sets of the magazine held in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London. The note, written in ink by Dr. Robert Crucefix, reads, 'There are three more volumes 12 13 & 14 having the title of Scientific Magazine and Freemasons' repository – but as they contain no other reference to the masonic order than what appears on the title page I would not retain them in my Library – RC'. No other library in this country appears to have these volumes, the only evidence of their existence is this note, as a result, the question of their publication remains a matter of conjecture.

to gain access to English Lodges. These two Grand Lodges co-existed until the 27th December 1813 when they came together to form the United Grand Lodge of England, which has governed freemasonry in this country ever since. It acts as the administrative centre of freemasonry and ultimately controls the lodges meeting under its authority through a system of Provincial and District Grand Lodges, which are responsible for lodges in particular parts of this country and oversees. The Provincial and District Grand Lodge system was born in the eighteenth century but consolidated in the nineteenth century.

After the establishment of the United Grand Lodge of England freemasonry continued to grow in this country and this continued growth in the nineteenth century created a market for books and periodicals with freemasonry as their subject. The creation of a mass market requires common ground, as Bennett observes, "...mass markets can exist only where widely shared interests or values exist or can be created."¹⁰ The development of a market is also dependent on literacy. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century a significant number of the adult population could not read. However, as Altick points out, the political and social turmoil that was evident in this country in the years between Waterloo, in 1815, and the first Reform Bill of 1832, increased the audience for periodicals in particular.¹¹ People wanted to be able to read about the times in which they were living. The production of chapbooks and religious literature that began in the eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth century made books familiar objects and, as an informal education system evolved more of the population became literate.

The next masonic periodical to be launched in England was *The freemasons' quarterly review*, founded by Dr. Robert Crucefix and edited by him for the first six years. Altick observes that in Great Britain in the period 1800 to 1830 the annual sale of newspaper stamps nearly doubled and so had the population of the country.¹² Freemasonry was also expanding and increased literacy created new levels of demand for print media. Crucefix's venture was well timed and his periodical, which was first published on the 1st April 1834, continued, with various title changes, until 1871. Critical quarterlies first appeared in the early nineteenth century and it is interesting that Crucefix chose this format for his periodical. He was clearly emulating these critical publications and trying to create a forum for an interchange of ideas, as his remarks in the first issue show. He notes that:

It has long been a desideratum with the Craft to have the means of communicating generally with each other; it is hoped the present undertaking will form a nucleus round which talent and interest of the Order will rally – an archive, where the events most interesting to Brethren may be recorded, and regular biographies given of such worthy Masons, who, by their zeal and industry, have advanced the interests of their art.¹³

In order to promote free expression of views he goes on to reassure potential contributors that they can remain anonymous.

The periodical provided an important forum for discussion and debate which challenged the official stance of the United Grand Lodge of England, and Crucefix certainly had another agenda for his magazine. He had come up with the idea of an Asylum for Aged and Decayed Freemasons and, although this idea met with popular support among the brethren, the Grand Master at the time, the Duke of Sussex, was opposed to the idea. Crucefix founded *The freemasons' quarterly review* in order to promote the asylum scheme and ultimately as a means by which he could vent his spleen about Grand Lodge.¹⁴

The magazine is a major source of contemporary reports of meetings and views on freemasonry. It is a periodical more clearly focused on masonic business than *The freemasons' magazine* of the 1790s had been, with two sections, the first comprising articles about freemasonry and the second section, called 'Masonic intelligence' comprising reports on the proceedings of Grand Lodge, which meets formally four times a year and issued details of its proceedings.¹⁵ This activity caused Crucefix to clash with Grand Lodge yet again, but highlights one of the most

¹⁰ Scott Bennett, "Revolutions in thought: serial publication and the mass market for reading", in *The Victorian periodical press: samplings and soundings* ed. by Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 225-257 (p. 251).

¹¹ Richard D. Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 329-330.

¹² Altick, p. 330.

¹³ Robert Crucefix, 'Introductory and general observations', *The freemasons' quarterly review*, 1 April 1834, p. 5.

¹⁴ The Asylum was built and it opened in 1850, but by this time both the Duke of Sussex and Crucefix were dead, the Duke in 1843, Crucefix just a few months before the Asylum opened.

powerful features of the newspaper and magazine press, which is that, more than any other medium of the time, newspapers and magazines report on and react to current events. Both Crucefix's magazine and the proceedings of Grand Lodge were published quarterly, and yet his magazine often managed to be first with the news.

The covers of *The freemasons' quarterly review* in 1843 have a price per issue of three shillings, which would have meant that only the upper classes would have been in a position to buy it. However, similarly to the *The freemasons' magazine* of the 1790s, it may have been available for others to read in public houses, coffee houses and news and reading rooms. The magazine underwent a number of title changes and in 1853 it became known as *The freemasons' quarterly magazine* and began a new series with Brother George Routledge taking over as publisher. Routledge proved to be a very successful publisher with the ability to see an opportunity and exploit it. Altick makes the point that the growth in the number of readers made periodical publishing an attractive commercial venture.¹⁶ The production of material for the popular market helped spread a habit of reading through society. Routledge had started his own business in 1836 which specialised in remaindered stock. As this activity became less profitable he became a publisher and, as Feather points out, was one of the first men to realise the potential market for books which was generated by railway travel.¹⁷ His masonic career was very brief, he was initiated in Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No. 4 in London on the 24th January 1853. His address was given as Soho Square, his occupation was publisher and his membership of the Lodge ceased in 1858.¹⁸ The year of his initiation into freemasonry coincides with his association with *The freemasons' quarterly magazine*, and it is possible that he became a freemason simply for as long as it was in his business interests to do so.

The magazine, under Routledge, adopted a format that is reminiscent of *The freemason's magazine* of the previous century, with a section designed to appeal to the wider public, and a section aimed at freemasons. His changes paid dividends and by 1855 demand had risen sufficiently for it to be published monthly under the title, *The freemasons' monthly magazine*, a Brother Richard Spencer¹⁹ became joint publisher with Routledge and the magazine reverted to being aimed primarily at freemasons. This was the first time since the previous century that a monthly masonic periodical was produced and it was sold for sixpence an issue. This made it much more affordable than when it was being issued as a quarterly publication, but nevertheless it would still have been beyond the reach of the lower classes. It would not be until the 1860s, after the newspaper tax was abolished in 1855 and paper duty was finally removed in 1861 that periodicals would become more universally affordable.

In 1856 *The freemasons' monthly magazine* changed its name again to *The freemasons magazine and masonic mirror*. Routledge ceased to be associated with it and it was published instead by Brother Henry George Warren.²⁰ The magazine continued until 1871 when it ceased publication on the 4th November 1871. There is no indication given in its pages that the magazine was struggling and no reason is given for its demise. However, by 1871 masonic periodical publishing and periodical publishing in general was changing. The magazine was no longer the only periodical available aimed at freemasons and it is possible that it ceased because it lost its audience to the new masonic magazines that were being launched.²¹

The world of Victorian periodicals was becoming very different to the one that had existed at the end of the eighteenth century. Changes in technology, literacy, methods of distribution and the

¹⁵ *Proceedings of the United Grand Lodge of England* (London: United Grand Lodge of England, 1813 -). Commonly referred to as Quarterly communications.

¹⁶ Altick, p.318.

¹⁷ John Feather, *History of British publishing* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 143.

¹⁸ Membership registers of the Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No. 4, London held by The Library and Museum of Freemasonry at the United Grand Lodge of England, London.

¹⁹ The Biographical File on Richard Spencer, held by The Library and Museum of Freemasonry at the United Grand Lodge of England, London, records that he was a publisher, printer, bookbinder, bookseller and masonic regalia seller working variously in High Holborn, Little Britain and Great Queen Street from the mid-1830s to the mid-1870s. His firm was eventually absorbed into what is now Toye, Kenning and Spencer, Regalia Manufacturers, Great Queen Street. Spencer was a prominent freemason, he was initiated in Bank of England Lodge No. 329 (now 263), London, in 1827.

²⁰ Warren had begun a masonic magazine in the 1854 called the *Masonic mirror*. The date of the first issue is uncertain, but it was last issued 1855 and then amalgamated with *The freemasons monthly magazine* to become *The freemasons magazine and masonic mirror*.

²¹ See Appendix for a list of masonic periodicals published in England before 1900.

prices charged for books and periodicals were factors which enabled a publishing industry to emerge on a vast scale. The printing processes that were in use at the beginning of the nineteenth century were essentially unchanged since Guttenberg, three hundred and fifty years earlier, and typesetting, printing, binding, papermaking and type founding were all done by hand. The expanding newspaper trade created a pressure for change due to its production patterns, and gradually, throughout the century, there were developments in printing presses, illustration methods, mechanical book binding, and, in 1884, the first successful mechanised type compositor was invented.

In addition to these developments, the structure and nature of society changed considerably. Not only did the population increase dramatically, the nineteenth century saw the rise of the powerful and influential middle classes. Prescott argues that, "one of the engines behind the development of Victorian middle class culture was the multiplicity of clubs and societies in both London and the provinces" and that one of the largest and most successful of these was freemasonry.²² This emergent middle class had access to money and leisure time which had previously been the preserve of the aristocracy. These changes in society were reflected in freemasonry and the nineteenth century saw a great rise in the membership, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century. This is also partly due to the way that freemasonry organised itself. Its administration beyond London was greatly improved in the second half of the nineteenth century and it is interesting to note that between 1820 and 1859, 250 new lodges were formed outside London in the provinces, and between 1860 and 1899 this increase accelerates to 790 lodges.²³

The lack of detailed analysis of the social composition of masonic lodges makes it difficult to form an entirely accurate picture of membership, but the cost of becoming a freemason can act as some kind of indication that a large proportion of Victorian masons did come from the middle classes.²⁴ By 1885 the minimum initiation fee was five guineas, or 105 shillings,²⁵ and, since an estimated sixty percent of the population earned less than 25 shillings a week,²⁶ membership was restricted to those with both money and time to spare.

In addition, glancing at the professions recorded in the membership registers for this period, it becomes clear that a wide range of trades and professions were represented amongst the members. It is important to stress that these middle class masons encompassed the full range of this burgeoning class and included small landowners, professional men, civil servants and tradesmen, the kinds of men who often developed a strong sense of civic duty and became pillars of their local community. The result of an increase in members who were likely to have the money to buy and the time to read a masonic magazine created an increase in demand.

To satisfy the growing demand for printed material, books, magazines and newspapers had to be distributed throughout the country. The systems that had been in place in the eighteenth century were transformed by the railways. By the 1850s publishers had rapid and reliable access to the whole country, in addition, time spent travelling by rail created a demand for material to read. The growing number of freemasons were part of an expanding middle class who travelled and read, and these factors help to explain why, within three years of each other, two new, weekly masonic newspapers were launched, *The freemason* in 1869, and *The freemasons' chronicle* in 1872. It is also surely no coincidence that the first weekly masonic publications were launched after the removal of the last of the stamp and paper taxes in 1855 and 1861 respectively, commonly referred to as the taxes on knowledge. As Brake points out, after these taxes were abolished there was a rise in daily and weekly serials.²⁷

²² Andrew Prescott, *Brother Irving: Sir Henry Irving and freemasonry*. Retrieved from the website of The Irving Society <http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/brother_irving.htm> [accessed 3rd September 2007] (para. 3 of 19).

²³ Aubrey Newman *The contribution of the provinces to the development of English freemasonry: Prestonian Lecture for 2003*. (Rochester: Privately printed, 2003), p. 18.

²⁴ More studies such as Roger Burt's 'Freemasonry and socio-economic networking during the Victorian period', in *Archives*. v. 27 (April 2002), pp. 31-38, are required in order to be able to draw more accurate conclusions about social composition of lodges.

²⁵ One guinea is equal to 21 shillings.

²⁶ A. C. F. Jackson, 'Our predecessors of about the time that Quatuor Coronati Lodge was founded', in *Ars quatuor coronatorum: transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076*. v. 90 (1977), pp. 39-53 (p. 39).

²⁷ Laurel Brake, 'The 'trepidation of the spheres'', in *Serials and their readers 1620-1914* ed. by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1993), pp. 83-102 (p. 87).

The freemason was a weekly newspaper, published in London from 1869 until 1951. The editorial for the first issue of Saturday 13th March 1869, acknowledges the newspapers aims to represent English freemasonry, when it is stated that:

It is beyond dispute that the progress of Freemasonry, not only in England but in every part of the globe, has been for some time past almost incalculable [...] A society at once so admirable and so extensive [...] ought to be [...] as fully represented in the Press of Great Britain as it is in that of Germany, France or the United States of America.²⁸

The importance of distribution via the rail network can be seen in early issues of the newspaper where it is stated that, '*The freemason* is published on Saturday mornings in time for the early trains'.²⁹ Early issues of the newspaper include a list of the agents responsible for its distribution. The agents were all masons and they were based in the major centres throughout England and Wales, to help ensure wide distribution.

The agent for Newcastle, Shields and Alnwick was listed as W.E. Franklin, a bookseller, stationer, newsagent and printer, and *The freemason* also carried advertisements for his business. Franklin had had considerable experience of the benefits that the railways brought to the book trade. He had set up a bookstall in the Central Railway Station in Newcastle in 1850 and by 1853 he had twelve stalls at major stations in Northumberland and Durham. He became responsible for distribution of books and newspapers to the stations of the North Eastern Railway, but in 1864 the Railway Company signed an agreement with W.H. Smith and Franklin lost his franchise. By the time he acted as agent for *The freemason* he had lost his franchise, but he had gained extensive experience of distributing periodicals in the north east.

By the end of its first year of publication a notice to advertisers in the issue for the 4th December 1869 points out that circulation is nearly half a million a year and therefore the newspaper offers advantages to advertisers. Figures provided by a magazine or newspaper are not necessarily reliable since they are designed to attract advertisers, but the magazine was obviously proving to be a success.³⁰ A year after the first issue, the editor notes, in the edition for the 5th March 1870, that the paper has ten times the circulation ever attained by any masonic paper in England, but its actual success can be measured by the increase in advertisements within a year of the first issue. It cost money to advertise and those placing advertisements needed to be confident it was money well spent. As Nevett remarks, periodicals of the later Victorian period provided the advertiser with a revolutionary way of bringing products to the attention of the increasingly wealthy British consumer.³¹ The advertisements were more effective than before since they reached an ever increasing audience, and the products promoted could be made available nationally via the railway network.

Although the content of the newspaper was primarily masonic, the newspaper's full title was, *The freemason: a weekly journal of freemasonry, literature, science and art* and non-masonic material was included. Books such as Edgar Brinsmead's *The history of the pianoforte* were reviewed³², and notices such as one in the issue for the 13th January 1877 which stated that, 'The South Eastern Railway Company conveyed from London, via Folkestone and Boulogne, en route for Milan on Wednesday, 948 cases of silkworms' eggs, weighing 26 tons 11cwt. The eggs were imported at Liverpool from Japan.'³³ A further indication that the newspaper was aimed at a class of people who were interested in matters of business and the arts.

The newspaper reported freemasons' involvement in national events, for example in the issue for the 27th October 1877, there is a notice concerning the Freemasons Indian Famine Fund. The regular column, 'Masonic and general tidings' always tended to include items of general interest such as short reviews of good restaurants in London and details of the Lord Mayor's show. By the

²⁸ 'The editor's address' in *The freemason*. Saturday 13 March 1869, p.1.

²⁹ *The freemason*, 25 December 1869, p.280.

³⁰ This is further indicated by the list of agents printed in the paper. By the issue for 26 June 1869 the number of agents listed on p. 10 has trebled, and by the end of the year the issue for 25 December 1869 no longer gives a full list of agents. On p. 280 there is a note of the foreign and colonial agents, followed by a note to say that the paper is available from all booksellers and newsagents in England, Ireland and Scotland.

³¹ Terence Nevett, "Advertising" in *Victorian periodicals and Victorian society* ed. by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 219-234 (p. 223).

³² Brinsmead, Edgar, *The history of the pianoforte: with an account of ancient music and musical instruments* (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, [1870]).

³³ *The freemason*, 13th January 1877, p.15.

1880s the newspaper had a special column which reviewed the plays on in the London theatres. A further indication of the leisure activities and interests of those who read the newspaper.

The newspaper always included reports of lodge meetings, with a section specifically for London lodges. These reports often give a detailed account of an event or a meeting, listing individuals who attended and can be a very useful source of information about London freemasons and masonic life. Similarly the obituaries, some of which are very detailed and include pictures, provide insight into an aspect of a man's life which in many cases has remained hidden.

An article entitled 'Masonic reading' appeared in the issue for the 1st January 1887. The author provides an interesting insight into one man's opinion of magazine and newspaper publishing of the time when he states that:

There should be, on the part of those who publish masonic newspapers, an effort to have the tone of the paper very high. Low scurrilous articles ought to be excluded; only the pure and beautiful should be published [...] Many of the periodicals, as they are published today, are unworthy of the names they bear. They are nothing but the scrapings, the peelings, while the fruit has been thrown away.³⁴

Between 1873 and 1885 the Rev. Adolphus Frederic Alexander Woodford acted as editor.³⁵ Woodford was a formidable masonic scholar and drew around him some of the great masonic scholars of the time. As a result articles by such men began to appear in the newspapers pages and helped to ignite a lively debate about the accepted views of masonic history. The newspaper was reflecting the interests and concerns of a growing number of freemasons who were believed in a more disciplined and erudite approach to masonic history. In 1886, a year after Woodford stepped down as editor, Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076 was formed with the aim of being the premier research Lodge and Woodford was one of its founding members. The newspaper demonstrated that a new approach to the history of freemasonry was in demand by the brethren, and the success of the research lodge, which still exists today, built on the foundations which the paper had laid.

As with any other magazine or newspaper, advertising helped fund *The freemason* and the adverts provide an insight into the sort of men who were freemasons in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the early years of the newspaper the advertisements appeared on the final page, and fall into three main categories. Advertisements for masonic products, for example music and lodge furniture, advertisements for the businesses run by freemasons, for example engravers and tailors, and advertisements for hotels and taverns who were promoting their premises as a suitable place for lodge meetings. By the end of the 1880s there is a change in the types of adverts. The number of advertisements for masonic products and businesses run by freemasons are much fewer, and in their place are adverts for life and fire insurance, fine art prints for the home and trips on the railways. The adverts are aimed at the middle classes who were able to spend money on leisure pursuits, on interior decoration and insurance. The change in the type of adverts is also an indication of the paper's success. As *The freemason* became more established it could charge more for advertising space. Smaller tradesmen would have been priced out of the market by larger businesses and suppliers of luxury goods.

The notion that the newspaper was aimed at those members of society with a disposable income is reinforced by looking at the special Christmas numbers produced. The first one appeared in 1879 and comprised stories, poems and articles designed to be of general interest. The editor hoped it would appeal not just to the families of freemasons but the wider public as well. Christmas gift annuals, as Altick notes, had first appeared in the 1820s and 1830s, but it was only with the rise of mass circulation periodicals that these annuals were transformed into special Christmas numbers.³⁶ These annual supplements proved to be incredibly success and this success is mirrored by Christmas numbers published with *The freemason*. The early ones carried few adverts and were not illustrated, but by the 1890s the special issues were obviously proving to be a more successful. They now included illustrations, some full page, and their content meant that they could be enjoyed by all the family. The supplement carried an increasing number of advertisements for luxury goods and services. The Christmas number for 1897, for example, carries full page adverts for Grant's Morella Cherry Brandy and for Harrods. The paper was aimed at a consumer who had a large enough income to be able to contribute to charitable causes. Charity has always been a major

³⁴ "Masonic reading" in *The freemason*, 1st January 1887, p. 3.

³⁵ Woodford was initiated in Lodge of Friendship No. 345 (now 278), Gibraltar in 1842 and had a very active masonic career. His obituary appears in the volume of *The Freemason*, 31st January 1887, pp. 709-710.

³⁶ Altick, pp. 362-363.

feature of freemasonry from its earliest days and the Christmas number for 1897 carries twenty advertisements for organisations, such as hospitals, societies and schools seeking financial assistance.

Advertisements in *The freemason* clearly indicate that by the end of the nineteenth century freemasonry had become, what we would call today, a lifestyle choice, and its development during this period charts the point where the artisan trades became middle class professions. This developing class had aspirations to a certain lifestyle and this is mirrored in the newspaper. As James observes, '[...] a periodical does not embody only an editorial viewpoint; it communicates [...] through both content and format: it encapsulates a style of living for particular readers at a particular time and place.'³⁷ Not every mason could afford to buy Farrow and Jackson's wine cellar equipment as advertised in its pages, for example, but they were sold the idea that one day they might.

By the end of the nineteenth century the masonic periodical press had found its voice and its audience. If the formula for a popular periodical in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was, as Altick observes, a price of 6d or lower, plenty of light fiction and amusing non-fiction, then a weekly publication, such as *The freemason*, took this formula and applied it to a specific subject matter.³⁸ *The freemason* cost 2d per issue for the first ten years and then from 1880 it was priced at 3d.³⁹ This price meant that it was therefore affordable, particularly to the aspirant lower-middle classes. As Prescott observes, freemasonry had a growing social prestige in the second half of the nineteenth century. Numerous members of the aristocracy were freemasons, the Prince of Wales became a freemason in 1874 and other members of the Royal Family were also masons.⁴⁰ From the very beginning those behind a periodical such as *The freemason* demonstrated that they knew their audience. A notice in the issue for the 25th December 1869 spells this out when an announcement is made that it will use, '[...] old faced type, similar to that used by the Pall Mall Gazette and other high class publications.'⁴¹ The proprietors had a very clear idea of the kind of publication they wanted to produce and they wanted their newspaper to be classed with what they regarded to be quality publications. As the proprietors had aspirations for their paper, so did many of its readers have aspirations to raise their position in society.

The histories of freemasonry, periodical publishing and the rise of the middle classes can be read within the pages of the masonic magazines of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Vann and VanArsdel remark in their introduction, nineteenth century Britain can be regarded as the age of the periodical, and technology, literacy, rapid distribution via the railway and lower prices were all factors that enabled this to happen.⁴² With regard to the masonic press in particular, a further factor that becomes apparent is the middle class aspiration of many freemasons. As the list of masonic periodicals in the appendix indicates, after the taxes on knowledge are removed there is a sudden increase in the number of masonic periodicals. As with serial publishing in any subject area, some titles are short lived while others gain and retain a loyal readership. *The freemason* and *The freemason's chronicle* proved to be the most successful masonic periodicals, as can be seen by their longevity. They provided their readers with what they wanted at a price they could afford, and close reading of their pages can provide us with valuable information about eighteenth and nineteenth century England, as much as they tell us about the workings of a secret society.

³⁷ Louis James, "The trouble with Betsy: periodicals and the common reader in mid-nineteenth century England", in *The Victorian periodical press: samplings and soundings*, ed. by Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 349-366 (p. 365).

³⁸ Altick, p.363.

³⁹ It did not increase its price again until 1940 when it rose to 6d per issue.

⁴⁰ Andrew Prescott, *Brother Irving: Sir Henry Irving and freemasonry*. Retrieved from the website of The Irving Society <http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/brother_irving.htm> [accessed 3rd September 2007] (para. 4 of 19).

⁴¹ "Important notice" in *The freemason*, 25th December 1869, p280.

⁴² J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, 'Introduction' in *Victorian periodicals and Victorian society* ed. by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) pp. 3 - 8 (p. 7).

Appendix

List of English Masonic periodicals published before 1900, held by The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London. (Listed in chronological order)

Freemasons' magazine : or, general and complete library

London : Printed and published by J. W. Bunney, No. 7 Newcastle Street Strand, and sold by Scratcherd and Whitaker, Ave Maria Lane, vol. I (June 1793) - vol. VII (December 1796)

Frequency: monthly

Vol. II printed by T. Burton and Co. of 28 Little Queen Street.

Vols. III and IV printed by J. Parsons of No. 21 Paternoster Row.

Vol. VI onwards printed by George Cawthorn, British Library, Strand.

Continued by: *The scientific magazine and freemasons repository*

The scientific magazine and freemasons repository

[London : George Cawthorn, British Library, Strand, vol. VIII \(January 1797\) - vol. XI \(December 1798\)](#)

Frequency: monthly

A supplement for the year was issued at the end of 1797 and 1798.

Continues: *Freemasons' magazine : or, general and complete library*

The freemasons' quarterly review

London : Printed by William Wilcockson and sold by Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper of Paternoster Row, J. Churchill of Princes Street, Soho, Stevenson of Cambridge, J.

Sutherland of Calton Street Edinburgh and J. Porter of Grafton Street, Dublin, 1834 -1849

Frequency: quarterly

Continued by: *The freemasons' quarterly magazine and review*

The freemasons' quarterly magazine and review

London : Published for F. Crew and the proprietors by Richard Spencer, 314, High Holborn, 1850-1852

Frequency: quarterly

Continues: [The freemasons' quarterly review](#)

Continued by: *The freemasons' quarterly magazine*

The freemasons' quarterly magazine

London : Published by Bro. G. Routledge & Co., Farringdon Street, and sold by Bro. R. Spencer, 314, High Holborn, vol. I (31 March 1853) - vol. II (30 September 1854)

Frequency: quarterly

Continues: *The freemasons' quarterly magazine and review*

Continued by: *The freemasons monthly magazine*

The freemasons monthly magazine

London : Bro. G. Routledge & Co., Farringdon Street and Bro. R. Spencer, 314 High Holborn, 1 January 1855 - 1 December 1855

Frequency: monthly

Continues: *The freemasons' quarterly magazine*

Continued by: *The freemasons magazine and masonic mirror*

Masonic mirror

London : Br. Henry George Warren, [1854] -1855

Frequency: monthly

Amalgamated with: [The freemasons Monthly Magazine](#)

The freemasons magazine and masonic mirror

London : Bro. Henry George Warren, 2, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1856-1871

Frequency: monthly, no. 1 (1 January 1856) - no. 12 (30 December 1857)

weekly, vol. IV, no. 1 (6 January 1858) - vol. XXIV, no. 644 (4 November 1871)

From 1868 to 1871 published by the Freemasons' Magazine Company Limited, No. 19 Salisbury Street, Strand, W.C.

Continues: *The freemasons monthly magazine*

The masonic observer

[London] : n.p., 1856-[185-?]

Frequency: irregular, no. 1 (November 1856) - no. 3 (December 1856)
quarterly, No. V (March 20 1857) – [185-]

Details of last issue unknown.

From No. 3 (December 1856) onwards the full title is: *The masonic observer and Grand Lodge chronicle*

The masonic press: a monthly journal, review and chronicle, of freemasonry and its kindred subjects, etc.

London: n.p., no. 1 January 1866 - [18--]

Frequency: monthly

Details of last issue unknown.

The freemason

London: George Kenning, 1869-1951

Not published between 7 September 1940 and August 1948

Frequency: weekly

The Kingston masonic annual

Hull : M.C. Peck and Son, Steam Printers, [187-] - [187-]

Frequency: annual

The rectangular review : a quarterly communication on philosophy, freemasonry, archaeology, science and the fine arts

London: n. p., July 1870 - April 1871

Frequency: semi-annual

The masonic examiner : a monthly medium of information and communication for brethren of every rite and degree, recognised and un-recognised

London : Bro. Matthew Cooke, 1871 - [187-]

Frequency: monthly

The masonic magazine : a monthly digest of freemasonry in all its branches

London : George Kenning, 1873 - [18--]

Frequency: monthly

Details of last issue unknown.

"Supplemental to "The Freemason" printed on title page.

The freemason's chronicle

London, 1875-1957

Frequency: weekly

Masonic monthly

London: George Kenning, July 1882 – [18--]

Frequency: monthly

Details of last issue unknown.

Masonic star: a weekly journal and record of freemasonry at home and abroad

London: Printed by the Adambury Press 59 Moore Lane, published at 124, 124 and 125 Fleet Street, 1888-1889

Frequency: weekly

Masonic review: a monthly journal of masonic and social events for freemasons

London, 1889 – 90

Frequency: monthly

The Masonic journal

Liverpool: W. and J. Pugh and Co., vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1897) - vol. 7, no. 6 (June 1905)

Frequency: monthly

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