



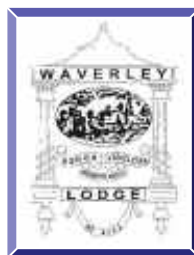
# THE SURREY ANNUAL CRAFT LECTURE FESTIVAL

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OBSERVATIONS OF A YOUNG MASON  
FROM THE CHAIR OF  
KING SOLOMON

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Young Freemasons Prize Essay 2005  
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## OBSERVATIONS OF A YOUNG MASON FROM THE CHAIR OF KING SOLOMON

*This essay is a personal reflection on Freemasonry, through my experience of being in the Chair at the Surrey Craft Festival. I hope it encourages you to consider how we can all contribute to, and improve ourselves, in the Masonic community. What, who and how we develop and behave as Masons depends on one single person – you. The Surrey Craft Festival is an opportunity for us to consider and reflect on what we are trying to achieve.*

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**B**rethren, I write to illustrate an opportunity unfamiliar to most young Masons in the Province of Surrey, yet one which deserves your keen interest and support. I will attempt to convey the apprehension, and excitement I experienced as I prepared and participated as Master of last year's SW Surrey Annual Craft Lecture Festival.

Think of yourself in my shoes 'on the night,' as I sat in the Master's chair, next to our Provincial Grand Master; The Rt. Worshipful Lt. Col. D.A.M. Phipps, M.B.E., who attended as President, and beside almost all the Surrey APGM's. I stood, looked around at the other Officers sharing my exhilaration, and said the ancient words, "Brethren, assist me to open the Lodge."

For the past twelve years in Surrey at least one Lodge each year hosts a 'Craft Lecture Festival.' Last year my own Waverley Lodge 4723 had the honour and responsibility. Preparation for a Lecture Festival requires a real commitment beginning at least a year and a half ahead of time.

First, the host Lodge of Instruction takes responsibility to organise the event and venue, and thereby gains the chance to propose a few of its junior Lodge members for specific roles at the Lecture Festival, one role being Master for the event.

The rest of the Officers for the ceremony are drawn from keen Master Masons from nearby Lodges. All participating Officers must never have been Master of a Craft Lodge. There were 17 Lodges represented by Officers at our Lecture Festival.

As is so often the case, Brother Secretary of the sponsoring Lodge carries much of the burden for communication and organisation, helped by other Lodge Officers with an opinion or vested interest and by Festival Organiser W. Bro. Tony Martin.

The purpose of the Craft Lecture Festival is to improve on Craft Masonic knowledge, an aim it admirably achieves in several ways:

- The 'Lectures' for which the Festival is named consist of explanations of Masonic practises and traditions. They are interesting, and could also be read from a text by an eager Mason looking for another more in-depth interpretation of our fascinating rituals.
- The floor work, signs, tokens and words are given in strict accordance with Emulation Ritual workings. You will be surprised to note the subtle or significant differences between the 'pure' Emulation Ritual and the form typically adopted in your mother Lodge. My own beloved Director of Ceremonies made it humorously clear that I was not to bring my newly-learned Emulation manners back into our Lodge and thereby possibly modify decades of development of our own tradition of perfectly acceptable 'Waverley Workings.'
- But mostly I found that the benefit of participation or attendance in the Craft Lecture Festival was personal Masonic growth through exposure to the aforementioned knowledge, and also through meeting the kind of Mason who shares my enthusiastic interest in the Craft. These people, new or experienced, share a spark of something that I believe forms the core and future of Freemasonry – and by exposure to them you can only be inspired in your Masonic career.

Like any other ceremony, the Craft Lecture Festival requires Lodge of Instruction (LoI) practise, involving the memorization of words and actions. To be successful I had to re-learn, with the excellent help of the caring and supportive Festival Preceptor W. Bro. Mike Good, aided by W. Bro Mike Goodall of the Emulation Lodge of Instruction, some of the slight variations of stance, address, and signs. The words, however, will be familiar to any Brother whose Lodge follows Emulation workings.

It was at the Craft Lecture Festival LoI that I first met and came quickly to admire and respect the other participants in the Festival. Surrey can boast an impressive group of 'junior' Masons, and I must say that I will not be surprised to see some of these in very important Masonic roles in future. The quality of commitment, interest and ability was immediately evident to me, as it was to the dedicated 'senior' Masons who were there to give guidance and support.

It became obvious that in the course of striving to perfect our ritual in the Lodge of Instruction the participants came together in a way that expanded the concept of Freemasonry beyond the confines of our own Lodges. This was, for some of us, a very positive first exposure to 'Freemasonry Universal.'

The repetition of words and actions can be perceived by some as a rather dry and uneventful routine. This was far from the case for the Craft Lecture Festival Lol. There was no shortage of amusing moments stemming from mistakes or misunderstandings, and these were balanced nicely by the pride of finally getting it right. In the end the whole Lodge performed to a very high standard. This means we each successfully became skilled at our part of an old and established ritual, and this helps keep Freemasonry on the centre. I thank the more experienced workmen mentioned previously for shaping us into more perfect Masons.

While many come to Freemasonry in Surrey with good intentions and fresh enthusiasm, quite a number have no clear way to spend this energy in a way that makes a difference to the larger Masonic Community or themselves. If you are like me you may have asked many older Masons about one or another aspect of the Craft. You may have borrowed texts of variable value from your Lodge library. You may have explored the UGLE approved internet sites of Lodges and found a lot of confusing and sometimes esoteric information. Expansion in your Masonic experience depends in part on the size and quality of the membership of your Lodge, and in part on the accessibility of quality information. Some of this is not available until you have progressed further than Master Mason. Of course, it *mostly* depends on you. One opportunity you can employ is to invest your time in participation in a Craft Lecture Festival.

In my role as Master, I was responsible for opening the Lodge in due form in all three degrees before handing the gavel to the President. My Officers were excellent, and that helped to keep me on track. There followed appropriate salutes and the minutes of the previous Festival were read and approved. Almost all of the Officers participating had attended the previous year's Festival at Guildford, as part of our education for our own, so we were able to vote in favour of the minutes, which passed unaltered. After a few eloquent and supportive words from the President I was invited back to the Master's chair. It was exciting to have the gavel again.

Next we heard a noteworthy summary of the history of the sponsoring Lodge, by Waverley Lodge Secretary W. Bro. Richard Graham. For those with limited knowledge of other Lodges, these histories can be very interesting. The floor was then given to the Festival Preceptor, in our case W. Bro. Mike Good. The Preceptor guided us through the background of the Lectures, and then through several parts of Lectures with the impressive assistance of others.

The Lectures for which the Festival is named and exists are very interesting insights into some of our ritual and the meaning and reasons for it. I recommend it to you to seek the opportunity to hear these or read some, as they will doubtless expand your Masonic knowledge. Some of the words in the Lectures form a part of the Craft ritual, and then the rest goes beyond what you may have heard before to explain and clarify further.

I refer you to the Emulation Lodge of Improvement Committee or the Surrey Craft Lecture Festivals Committee for more detailed information, and a calendar of upcoming Festivals.

One of the highlights of the Festival for the participating Officers is unquestionably the distinguished attendees. At our particular 10<sup>th</sup> SW Surrey Annual Craft Lecture Festival, we were also honoured by an uncommonly large audience of Provincial Grand Officers, which I will explain later.

In all over 70 Brethren attended, and the Lodge itself was full to capacity during the ritual. I have not personally seen such an impressive audience other than in Provincial Grand Lodge ceremonies.

After the Lectures, I led the closing of the Lodge in all three degrees. The work by everyone involved was of such a high standard that it was the highlight of my short Masonic 'career.'

Upon retiring from the Lodge, as many as could fit in the Farnham Masonic Hall dining room went down to an excellent Festive Board.

One of the joys of Freemasonry for countless Masons is a fine meal in good company. I must say that this was a genuinely memorable example of what the Festive Board can be when at its best. There were many gracious speeches – all delightfully received – and we learnt that the Lecture Festival charity columns and raffle had gathered over £600 for charity, which was handed to Brother President for the benefit of the 2008 Surrey Festival.

At the end of the evening many of us had made new Masonic contacts, and the benefits to Surrey Masonry were manifold.

In conclusion, I earlier promised to explain the reasons why there were four Assistant Provincial Grand Masters, and the Provincial Secretary accompanying the Provincial Grand Master to the Festival:

As The Rt. Worshipful Lt. Col. D.A.M. Phipps, OBE, and The Worshipful APGM P.A. Johnson explained to me at the time, one reason for their attendance was that they 'particularly believe in the value of the Lecture Festivals to Craft Freemasonry,' and 'want to encourage more of them by means of their attendance and support.'

The other reason was that, regrettably, ours was the *only* SW Surrey Lecture Festival last year. Thus, I have composed this essay with the specific design of helping to promote more of these, for all the reasons mentioned herein. I hope you will reward my effort with your own support of future Surrey Lecture Festivals, and in turn be rewarded by your participation in them.

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