



HEREDOM

The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society

About Heredom
Board of Directors
Subscription Info

New Issue

Archive

Contact Us

Main Page

VOLUME 7, 1998

The Post Boy Sham Exposure of 1723
S. Brent Morris, 33°, G.C.

*Then let us laugh, since we've impos'd
On those who make a Pother,
And cry, the Secret is disclos'd
By some false-hearted Brother :
The mighty Secret gain'd, they boast,
From Post-Boy, or from Flying-Post.
With a fal, &c.*

"Song VI"

A Collection of the Songs of Masons, 1734

Every now and then "Lady Luck" smiles upon your research. Such was the case in November 1998 when I visited by good friend and brother, Yasha Beresiner, Past Mater of Quatuor Coronati Lodge. He is a dealer in rare paper items-maps, prints, etc., and his London shop is a delight to visit. He had recently acquired the December 26-28, 1723 edition of a London newspaper, The Post Boy, which had an "exposure" of Masonic ritual, a catechism of forty-two questions and answers.

When I first looked at the approximately 8 1/2" X 14" single sheet, I said, "Oh, this is 'A Mason's Examination' from The Flying-Post, the first published Masonic catechism." A few minutes study proved me wrong (an experience I'm all too familiar with). Yasha's paper was The Post Boy, not The Flying Post, and it referred to the earlier "A Mason's Examination" (so-named by R.F. Gould in his History of Freemasonry). Yasha and I then checked Douglas Knoop, G.P. Jones, and Douglas Hamer's The Early Masonic Catechisms and Early Masonic Pamphlets, two books which catalog every early major publication on freemasonry. What we found was a shock to us.

BACKGROUND

In November 1998 a Channel Island dealer in old newspapers sold Bro. Beresiner a copy of The Post Boy, no. 5373 dated "Thursday December 26 to Saturday December 28, 1723." Halfway through the second column and ending nearly at the end of the next on the reverse side of the sheet is a letter addressed "To the Author of the Post-Boy" and signed "Yours &c. A. B." The catechism that follows is intended clearly to look like an exposure of masonic ritual to readers who are not freemasons. The author of the letter makes reference to the earlier and first such disclosure which had appeared in The Flying Post in April of the same year. A facsimile of the newspaper is published with this volume of Heredom and a transcription of the catechism follows this article. The newspaper itself is now owned by the library of the Supreme Council 33°, S.J., Washington, D.C.

Identification

The text of the catechism was unknown previously and the issue no. 5373 of the

newspaper is exceedingly rare. Searches in the well-known Burney & Nichols collections, in the British Library and the Bodleian Library respectively, in other major U.K. library collections, and in similar repositories in the U.S.A. resulted in a complete failure to trace a copy of this issue of *The Post Boy*. A search in the "Union List of Serials" held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. revealed that twelve American libraries have holdings of *The Post Boy*. None had a copy of issue no. 5373.?

The Post Boy

The Post Boy was first published in London on September 28, 1695 under the ownership of "A. Roper." Initially, it appeared three times a week. The first editor was L. Beardwell who was based at Black Friars. In 1705 the well-known and versatile Abel Boyer in Fleet Street took over as editor. From the start, inclusive of this issue in question, the printer was George James, based in Little Britain and the political inclinations of the newspaper were towards the Tory party.

The Post Boy figures prominently in the early published references to the fraternity, carrying the first such publication.

But within a very few weeks of the latter advertisement appearing [for a 'Society in Hampstead' which Bro. Robbins believed was a veiled allusion to Freemasonry], Freemasonry-seemingly of its own volition-came for the first time into the open; and the earliest newspaper record of any of its proceedings is the following paragraph, published in the *Post-Boy* of June 24th-27th, 1721, and copied into two of the weekly journals the following Saturday.

There was a Meeting on Saturday last [June 24th] at Stationers Hall of between two and three hundred of the ancient Fraternity of Free-Masons, who had a splendid Dinner, and Musick. Several Noblemen and Gentlemen were present at this Meeting, and his Grace the Duke of Montague was unanimously chosen Master for the ensuing Year, and Dr. Beale Sub-Master. The Reverend Dr. Desaguliers made a Speech suitable to the Occasion.?

Further references and advertisements quickly followed in *The Post Boy*.

[A] further fillip was given to such talk [about Freemasonry] a very little later, by the publication in the *Post-Boy* of March 25th, 1722-3, of the announcement that

This evening [Tuesday, March 5th] the corpse of that worthy FREE MASON, Sir Christopher Wren, Knight, is to be interr'd under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral....

The brochure [The Free-Masons: An Hudibrastick Poem] was launched with an amount of enterprise unusual in those days, for its advertisement is to be found also in the *Post-Boy* of February 14th-16th, [1723]....

[A]n event of high importance in our history was thus advertized in the *Post-Boy* of February 26th-28th, 1722-3,
This day is publish'd
The CONSTITUTIONS of the FREE-MASONS.‡

The advertisement for Anderson's Constitutions is headed "This day is published. ..." and thus gives an exact date for the publication of the Constitutions. The dual year "1722-3" is given because until 1752 the civil or legal year began on March 25 under the "Old Style" of calendar.

* * *

This excerpt is from *Heredom*, the transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society

Scottish Rite Research Society
1733 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20009-3103
202-232-3579 voice, 202-383-1847 fax
srrs@srmason-sj.org, <http://www.srmason-sj.org/>

©1994-2002 the Scottish Rite Research Society & the Supreme Council, 33°, S.J. U.S.A. All Rights Reserved