

A Masonic Panorama by Neville Barker Cryer

A Masonic Panorama: Selected Papers of the Reverend Neville Barker Cryer.

Introduced by Kent Henderson;
edited by Tony Pope.

Melbourne: Australian Masonic Research Council. 1995. Pp. 175.

Review published in *Royal Arch Mason Magazine*, written by Wallace McLeod

The Australian Masonic Research Council includes nearly all the research lodges in Australia. Every two years it invites a well-known Masonic scholar to tour the region, and publishes his lectures. For 1995, the speaker was Bro. Neville Cryer, Past Master, past Secretary and past Editor of 'the premier lodge of research', Quatuor Coronati, in London.

Here are the texts of fourteen talks from his trip.

Probably the most important is the first one, 'The Churches' Involvement with Freemasonry'. In order to refute the fundamentalists (who say that Masonry and Christianity are incompatible), he provides many examples of ministers of the gospel who have been active Masons, from 1721 right up to the present.

In another paper, entitled 'Women and Freemasonry', Bro. Cryer traces the role of women in operative masonry, tells the apocryphal stories of their eavesdropping on Masonic secrets, and talks about the Eastern Star, Lady Freemasons, and Co-Masonry. Very discreetly, he hints that these latter organizations should be 'recognized'.

In a paper on 'The different origins of English and Scottish Freemasonry', he suggests that Masonry evolved independently in the two kingdoms, and that Harry Carr and David Stevenson were both wrong to say that it came from one country or the other. In his argument he asserts (54) that 'Scotland never had any Ancient Charges'. Actually, it had at least a dozen copies, going back to about 1650 (see Stevenson, *The First Freemasons*, 189-191).

Four of the talks argue that various cryptic references in eighteenth-century documents, and several unpublished early ceremonies, demonstrate that some of the 'higher degrees' (Mark, Ark Mariner, Most Excellent Mason, and Royal Arch) preserve old wording, and reflect certain aspects of operative masonry.

Three more of the papers are concerned with particular details that developed out of early rituals and are still found today - details not recognized by all Brothers.

Bro. Cryer offers an interesting paper on the Geneva Bible of 1560, and its contribution to the development of English ritual. In this connection he says (104) that there is no occurrence of the name Hiram Abif 'in any known catechism, manuscript or ritual up to 1760'. Actually it is found in several copies of the 'Spencer Family' of Old Charges, soon after 1725. He might also have cited a name from 1 Chronicles 2:49, and reported the meaning that is given to it in a version of the Geneva Bible printed in London in 1580.

As part of his continuing study of individual lodge buildings (on which he has already produced a series of books), he talks about 'Surprises in Scottish lodges'.

Then he goes on to discuss the significance of the Huguenot refugees and their descendants, for English intellectual history and for the evolution of Masonry; as one might expect, the key figure here is John Desaguliers, G.M. in 1719. Bro. Cryer concludes by asking, 'Is there anything else to research?' The answer, of course, is yes. All very interesting.