



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

Short Papers Competition 2007

*The opinions reflected by the author are not necessarily those of Internet Lodge,
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Paper 60/2007

Title
Author

Bye Laws Reveal Close Shave
Bro Howard Jones - Wales

The Bye-laws of particularly older Lodges can often be the source of interesting facets of Freemasonry and a valuable source of Masonic history and this was certainly the case in the Bye-Laws of a Lodge in West Wales I read some time ago, where the Secretary is instructed to forward annually a list of members to the Clerk of the Peace for the County Borough.

Why does he have to do this?

Does he still adhere to this requirement?

Let us ask him.

Brother Secretary, Do you carry out this duty? The answer is No.

WHY NOT?

This takes us back when George III. was King and William Pitt the Younger was Prime Minister.

1799 witnessed one of the most radical bodies; the United Irishmen.

Its initial aims were Catholic emancipation and Parliamentary reform and had become an avowedly republican movement which sought support from the French and the United Englishmen and Scotsmen were ready to assist.

These groups, together with the London Correspondence Society, were seen as a threat to King George and Parliament and amongst them were a few English, Irish and French Brethren, who used secret signs and oaths, based on those of Freemasonry, it was thought, to retain their identity and prevent them being discovered.

Pitt's government was uncertain of the real strength of these Radicals, was worried that they were regrouping and sought measures to repress them. Pitt proposed that all societies which administered secret oaths should be declared unlawful and any meeting requiring the swearing of oaths should be in public. Freemasons were placed in a difficult situation although, arguably, their oaths were outside the scope of the Bill since they were not seditious. More problematic was the requirement that Initiations should take place in a public meeting.

Pitt received a request to meet Lord Moira, Acting Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England; The Duke of Atholl, Grand Master of the Ancients' Grand Lodge together with a Past Grand Master of Scotland, who informed Pitt of the foremost objects of the Craft being faithful to God; our Country; and our Laws. Pitt expressed his good opinion of the Society and was prepared to recommend any clause giving exemption providing Freemasonry was not used as a cover by evilly disposed persons.

Pitt's recommendation to Parliament that the three Grand Masters would self-regulate the Freemasonry Society was unacceptable as Parliament felt they had lost control.

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There were a few amendments before Freemasonry became exempt from The Unlawful Societies Act 1799; the main condition was that every Lodge Secretary had to forward a list of members, before 25th March annually, to the Clerk of the Peace for each County Borough, who in turn submitted a return of all Freemasons in his district to the Magistrates in Quarter Sessions, who could be empowered to suppress a Lodge meeting if well-founded complaints were received.

It wasn't until 1967 that this Act was repealed and the Lodge Secretary relieved of that duty.

References

Bye Laws of a Lodge in the Province of South Wales Western Division.

From the reference Library in Carmarthen

- a) The reign of George 3rd
- b) William Pitt the Younger
- c) The Unlawful Societies Act 1799
- d) Information shared by Prof. Andrew Prescott

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