

Review: Ric Berman, *Espionage, Diplomacy & the Lodge. Charles Delafaye and The Secret Department of the Post Office.* The Old Stables Press, Goring Heath, Oxfordshire, 2017. ISBN 13: 978-0-9957568-0-9. 316 pages, illustrated, selected bibliography, £20 / US\$25. www.amazon.com/author/ric.berman

Ric Berman's *Espionage, Diplomacy, & the Lodge* investigates the connection between freemasonry in the first decades of the Grand Lodge of England, surveillance of the correspondence and activities of known and suspected Jacobites in England and abroad, and international relations. In so doing, it picks up where his first book, *The Foundations of Modern Freemasonry: The Grand Architects, Political Change and the Scientific Enlightenment 1714-1740*, left off by delving deeper into freemasonry's intentional redesign as a support of the Hanoverian succession. *Espionage, Diplomacy & the Lodge* is meticulously researched and detailed, and adds considerably to an understanding of early British intelligence services, particularly the roles played by the Secret Department of the Post Office and by key figures within it, most notably spymaster Charles DeLafaye and his masonic circle. Berman also sheds light on the political implications of several of the earliest lodges on the continent and the high profile initiations of European nobility. In so doing, he delves more deeply than previous works into the important connection between Freemasonry and the protestant Huguenot diaspora. Berman's case suffers in places from a problem endemic to the study of Masonic intrigues - a lack of smoking - gun documentation, which good intriguers rarely leave for historians, and the question of causality in the overlap between freemasonry and the political activity of its brethren. Even so, Berman skillfully uses the available evidence to build a strong case for a synergy between the Masonic activities of influential early masons and their intelligence gathering and diplomatic duties.

As Berman makes clear on p. 12, his is not presenting the thesis that the fraternity as a whole was part of a vast government conspiracy - a point which someone may want to make to *The Guardian's* Vikram Dodd whose December 17 2017 article "Freemasons are Blocking Reform, say Police Federation Leader" shows what a hot topic Masonic conspiracy theory has remained from the time of Berman's pro-Hanoverian Huguenots to the present. Rather, he focuses on 'members of the Grand Lodge of England, the Horn Tavern, and a handful of French Huguenot lodges, none of which should be regarded as representative of eighteenth-century freemasonry as a whole'.

Important elements in the Grand Lodge and the aforementioned lodges had ideological agendas and political activities which their masonic activity supported ideologically and in offering social connections to like-minded brethren with whom their masonic bonds created a trust network ideally suited to espionage. This was particularly true with the wide ranging connections of the Huguenot diaspora. The popularity of the masonic fraternity and its rapid spread created an excellent cover and a network that could be and, as Berman demonstrates, was harnessed to monitor Jacobites abroad and gain insight into the activities and attitudes of foreign diplomats and leaders.

In developing his case, Berman's opening chapters detail the life of Charles Delafaye, a Huguenot prominent in the Grand Lodge who rose to the top of Whitehall's anti-Jacobite spy network. In so doing, he develops the importance of the Huguenot/Masonic connection, and gives densely detailed biographical information on Delafaye and his links to the English

establishment. This detail establishes the importance of freemasonry to Delafaye and makes a solid case for his use of Masonic connections in his work. As noted above, there is no overt admission in his papers that he was using masonry to recruit spies, but the circumstances of his overlapping professional and masonic circles taken in the context of the time make a strong argument for a more than coincidental link between his fraternal and governmental activities.

The third and fourth chapters offer a detailed history of the Secret Department of the Post Office and the pioneering code breakers of the Deciphering Branch. As an addition to the history of British covert services and modern espionage, these chapters are highly interesting. The case for a masonic overlap is based on more richly detailed biographical sketches of early code-breakers and spymasters. Here, the case for a causal relationship between freemasonry and the covert activities of the masons whose lives are so colorfully described is fragile. The section concludes with the measured statement that the Secret Department and Deciphering Branch would have developed along essentially the lines that they did with or without masonic overlap, but that the masonic connections of several of the important members strengthened that course of development and served as a fertile ground for recruiting and affirming the loyalty of key members.

Though such a measured conclusion might disappoint modern day anti-Masons, it speaks to an important point in the study of masonic networks in eighteenth-century political activity. Namely, that masonry provided a ritualized, even spiritualized articulation of shared political ideology, a wide ranging trust network, physical spaces for meeting, and shared experience in operating a complex and secretive organization to aspiring and active members of the political class. Thus, masonry worked synergistically in many political movements around and across the Atlantic. The degree to which it became a force in shaping these varied movements - whether one is considering the Secret Department of the Post Office, Boston's Son of Liberty-laden Lodge of St. Andrew's, or the United Irishmen who's masonic foundations Jessica Harland-Jacobs exposes in *Builders of Empire*, is often the most difficult element for historians to determine. This difficulty is evident in Berman's analysis of the role of Masonic contacts in the early British intelligence services, and he admits that they would likely have developed along largely the same trajectory without masonry. Even so, *Espionage, Diplomacy and the Lodge* does demonstrate that within this trajectory, the freemasonry of Charles Delafaye and many of the cryptanalysts and spies in his network shaped the personnel of both covert departments in a meaningful way. Furthermore, he establishes clearly the important point that far from being coincidental, this was a successful result of early Grand Lodge freemasonry's orientation as a supporter of the Whig establishment.

In moving from the simpler espionage of opening suspect letters to international diplomacy, Berman achieves some of the strongest points in his book. He demonstrates that certain highly placed political actors in the Grand Lodge used masonry intentionally for international intelligence gathering activities, and in so doing explains many of the early continental lodges and aristocratic initiations which filled the "Remarkable Occurrences in Masonry" in the *Freemasons Calendar* and have been viewed in a far more naive light by masonic enthusiasts and antiquarians. Chapter five describes how the network created by Delafaye and his masonic associates expanded across the continent. The growing popularity of freemasonry made continental masonic lodges, ideal places to introduce well-heeled members of the political classes of Catholic Europe to British political ideas as well as to gather

intelligence on Catholic governments from them. As Berman is quick to admit, his evidence is largely anecdotal but, as he also points out, this is to be expected considering the nature of covert communication in the eighteenth century. Though there may be no smoking gun, the final three chapters of *Espionage, Diplomacy and the Lodge* do an admirable job of tracing the patterns behind the ample smoke, sufficient to leave the reader convinced that there was most likely fire behind it.

Chapter five reconstructs the informal intelligence networks of John Coustos, William Dugood, Vincent La Chapelle and Charles Labelye, part-time spies whose masonic connections played a notable role in international espionage. John Coustos, known to masonic historians as the most famous masonic prisoner of the inquisition, established a lodge in France, in Berman's analysis, largely as a means of monitoring Jacobite exile and French masonic grand master Charles Radcliffe, Earl of Derwentwater. Within two months, the lodge had initiated a senior courtier, the Duc de Villeroy, and was renamed Villeroy-Coustos Lodge (170). Other highly placed political actors followed. The lodge was raided by French police in 1737 and was apparently defunct soon after. On moving to Lisbon around 1740, Coustos founded another lodge. Berman gives no evidence for political activity here other than that the presence of international merchants made the lodge a fertile ground for information gathering, and that it was again raided by the local Catholic authorities, this time resulting in Coustos' arrest, torture, and release through the intervention of a highly placed mason in the British government - the subject of Coustos' autobiographical book. Similarly circumstantial and anecdotal evidence surrounding the overlapping Masonic activity and spying of the Dugood, La Chapelle and Labelye create a strong if not definitive case for masonic intelligence gathering.

Chapter six returns to France, and explores the manner in which the Duke of Richmond acting through the prominent Horn Tavern Lodge in London established major French lodges at Paris and Aubigny, and how members of Walpole's spy networks operated through these lodges. It explores how Derwentwater's establishment of Jacobite lodges in France inspired Richmond to establish anti-Jacobite, pro-British lodges. This created a masonic climate in which both factions courted prominent French aristocrats and gathered information. Chapter seven gives a very insightful analysis into freemasonry as a tool of diplomacy between England and Austria. It first focuses on the initiation of Francis Stephen, Duke of Lorraine, into freemasonry, in Berman's words, 'a soft diplomatic component of a far broader political engagement', with the man expected to rise to the position of Holy Roman Emperor at a time when British foreign policy was shifting its alignment from a French to a Viennese orientation. The chapter then moves to the London initiation of wealthy Hapsburg nobleman Prince Anton Esterhazy within the context of the diplomatic dance inspired by the circumstances leading to the War of the Polish Succession. Berman presents a very cogent and convincing case that bringing Esterhazy into freemasonry was intended to create an informal venue for him to meet with British officials at a time when overtly political meetings were impossible due to strong parliamentary opposition to an Austrian alliance.

Overall, *Espionage, Diplomacy and the Lodge* is an important contribution to scholars working to unravel the intentions, meaning and implications of eighteenth-century freemasonry, as well as to diplomatic history and to historians of the British secret service. Though the nature of the subject matter limits much of the argument to anecdotal and circumstantial evidence, Dr Berman utilizes that evidence as astutely and insightfully as

possible. In so doing, his latest work sheds new light on the interplay between freemasonry, the Whig establishment, and covert intelligence gathering, and by implication sheds light as well on the anti-masonic reaction in Catholic Europe. It is an admirable contribution to the field of academic scholarship on freemasonry and on early modern British history.