

Richard Gan, (ed.), *The Treasures of English Freemasonry 1717-2017*, Lewis Masonic, 2017. Hardback. ISBN 978 0 85318 531 4, 304 pages.

Reviewed by Bro. Mark Tabbert

In 1992, in time for the 275th anniversary of the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, Quatuor Coronati Lodge 2076 brothers, John Hamill and Robert Gilbert produced *Freemasonry: A Celebration of the Craft*. That book focused not on English Freemasonry, but English Freemasonry's ideals and virtues spreading around the world. It exhibited a historical survey of Freemasons of different faiths and differing points of view who reflected Masonic virtues and principles. Not only did the book decline to examine English Freemasonry, it purposely included sections on medieval stonemasonry and Knights Templars, Rosicrucianism, the Ancient and Accepted Rite, and Freemasons from around the world – including a healthy number of Americans.

While *Celebration of the Craft* was handsomely commemorative, it was also primarily informational. It missed the opportunity to explain how English Freemasonry is as unique as Scots Freemasonry, Texan Freemasonry, or wherever the Craft has spread in the last three-hundred years. Twenty-five later, *Treasures of English Freemasonry, 1717-2017*, seizes that opportunity to tell that great story. As Editor Richard Gan states “ [This new book] . . . charts the progress of English Freemasonry, as opposed to Freemasonry in England. . . “

Under the editorship of Quatuor Coronati 2076's brother Gan, “Treasures” includes eleven essays covering a vast hoard of the English Freemasonry's material culture. Of the eleven essays, all but Diane Clements and Dr David Harrison are full members of QC Lodge 2076. Although a great amount of the featured artifacts come from Library and Museum of Freemasonry in Freemasons' Hall, London, a healthy and happy number are from other English Masonic repositories.

Like the best “picture books” *Treasures* achieves “Noun Definition” by beautifully combining “people and places with things.” It is an exhibition within a book that engages the reader through its artifacts, essays and stories, rather begging attention through a list of famous, or semi-famous, men, who, to a lesser or greater degree, joined Freemasonry.

The book itself is well designed. Colour selection is excellent and avoids the Masonic blue compulsion. Larger and gold reference numbers, within the black type, direct readers to illustrations at the back of each chapter. Placing the illustrations after the essays encourages the reader to first focus on the text and then enjoy the illustrations and their lengthy captions.

Adding and amplifying the riches of this book is its type: Granjon. Its creator, G.W. Jones (1860-1942) was called “Printer Laureate” by *The Times* and was an active freemason after joining Scots Lodge No. 2019 in 1892. Jones also developed many other important fonts including Estienne and Baskerville.

The eleven essays that present the *Treasures of English Freemasonry* cover logical and diverse topics. Gan's Overview includes classifications of artifacts, art and archive, and contains a setting maul believed to have been used by Charles II at the cornerstone ceremony of the new St Paul's Cathedral in 1675. Tradition holds that Sir Christopher Wren donated the maul to the Lodge of Antiquity, and over the centuries the maul headed special Masonic processions.

Following the maul are many more images of “hall of fame items” representing the various classifications.

The second essay by Prof Aubrey Newman and the third, by Dr David Harrison, and the fourth, by John Belton, provide narratives that move the reader from the 1600s and the “The Early Years of Freemasonry” and the competition between “The Antients and The Moderns” and the “Formation of the United Grand Lodge of England” in 1813.

Artifacts featured in these three essays include the Grand Lodge of England’s first minute book of 1723 and from Swan and Rummer Lodge minute book circa 1725. As expected, there are images of the Rev. James Anderson’s *Constitutions*, and Laurence Dermott’s *Ahiman Rezon*. But surprisingly it is Dermott’s copy with his bookplate that is presented. Also populating these chapters are many portraits of not famous men as Masons, but famous Freemasons—such Col. John Pitt, ca. 1750, William Preston, 1800 and the Duke of Sussex, the first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge. Supporting the papers and the people are plenty of early Masonic aprons and jewels for labour, and decanters, teapots and tumblers for refreshment.

Essay Five, Diane Clements’ “A Cornucopia of Freemasonry” is a short history of the UGLE’s collecting of books, artifacts, art and archives. Serving as the Director of the Museum and Library of Freemasonry since 1999, Clements, with her able staff, have brought the vast collections into public light. Her leadership into new informational technologies and innovative exhibitions provided a secure foundation and ample material that produced *Treasures of English Freemasonry*.

In contrast to Clements’ is Richard Gan’s essay that is a survey of artifacts contained in many Masonic museums throughout England. “My Cup Runneth Over” indeed, as the beauty, variety and depth of decorative arts, regalia and furnishings clearly indicates England’s Masonic history is perhaps far more interesting the further away from London.

Complementing Clements’ and Gan’s essay is Hugh O’Neill’s short overview of Masonic symbolism. While common practice in many Masonic exhibition catalogues, most are simply reduced to a glossary of terms and short definition. Although helpful to non-Masons such glossaries leave an oxymoronic impression that symbols are definable. Fortunately this book and O’Neill’s essay broaden, rather than narrow, the reader’s exploration of a “beautiful allegory illustrated with symbols.”

“Form follows function” declared American architect Louis Sullivan. Dr. James Campbell’s essay affirms this dictum: as English Freemasonry grew, it built larger places to meet. But what places! This short essay only provides the barest outline of a complex and grand history. What Freemasons built along Great Queen Street influenced Masonic temples around the world.

But missing is an essay to complement Campbell’s that showed the spread and variety of Masonic temples, monuments, and other landmarks throughout England and Wales. Such an essay could have included local brothers’ devotion and craftsmanship in adorning even the most humble temples.

Dr James Daniel’s “English Freemasonry Overseas” is short and sweet and built around the featured artifact. However, it is not quite up on American Masonic scholarship. George Washington was not Benjamin Franklin’s “Commander-in-chief” as both were commissioned by the Continental Congress. There is no evidence that Prince Hall and his brother Masons ever

petitioned for a charter from any American Masonic body. Rather, they went directly to the supreme source: the “Moderns” Grand Lodge of England.

Following Daniel’s essays are among the most poignant artifacts. Found between pages 222 and 243 are a 1785 Prince Hall letter, A Bible from the Lodge of the 18th Regiment of Foot No 351 stationed in Gibraltar in 1787, the 1843 Indian Burnes Medal, and Jersey Provincial Grand Lodge Jewels crafted soon after the Nazi occupation. Perhaps the book’s most profound objects are the Jewels made by soldiers of The Royal Prince of Wales Lodge No 1555. The lodge clandestinely met while imprisoned by the Imperial Japanese army in Singapore. Included among the hand-crafted group is the Almoner’s Jewel. One can only wonder who among those prisoners had anything to give? And more than this, who among them was in most desperate need?

Such small charity in the worst of times is what the Craft seeks to inspire in the best of times. From these small acts arose many great Masonic institutional charities. Dr John Reuther’s essay traces the origins of English Masonic philanthropy in the early Church and trade guilds. The Grand Lodge Treasurer’s first duty was to oversee charitable funds. From the Royal Masonic Institute for Girls founded in 1788, with the famous Ruspini painting of the 1802 “Procession” to the creation of the Samaritan Fund in 1990, the ways local, provincial, and Grand Lodge help, aid, and assist people and communities is as varied and beautiful as any treasure in this book.

The last essay is a review of the many members of the British Royal Family who have joined, and at least supported the Craft. It is a good reminder that as Queen Victoria’s father, two sons, as well as her grandsons and many great-grandsons joined the Craft, the Royal Family, like countless other British families, is also a Masonic family. The artifacts featured after this essay of course are the evidence of Royal patronage, but also from the aristocracy, archbishops and other clergy, and across the British political landscape—from Sir Winston Churchill’s apron, to a 1967 portrait of Grand Master, Edward, Duke of Kent.

While each essay is well-done and significant, *Treasures* is, after all, about Masonic stuff. And the best way to enjoy this book’s wealth is to start in the back and its “Catalogue and Index of Images.” Thumbnail images from A to Z show the width depth, breath and 300 years of English Masonic material culture.

In conclusion, *The Treasures of English Freemasonry* is a very fine and most welcome book. It sets a new standard in the presentation and comprehension of Masonic material culture. Where similar books have focused on a particular form of regalia or particular artists or era, *Treasures* covers them all. And it does so by providing the historical narrative behind the objects and art. It can only be wished that many similar books might soon appear filled with local Masonic treasure found throughout the British Isles-- and the world.