King Solomon's Temple in Myth and Ritual

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THIS IS MOST DEFINITELY NOT A HISTORY OF THE ACTUAL BUILDING WHICH MAY OR may not have been built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. The purpose of this article is to look at the history of an idea. The idea, image, symbol, however defined and used, of King Solomon's Temple is one of the most important in the history of Freemasonry and is central to the way in which Masonry delivers its ritual as it does today. This article will argue that the ways in which King Solomon's Temple was used is aligned to wider changes in English society. For the long period before any recognisable form of Freemasonry existed, the Temple was core to a Christian typological understanding of Old Testament texts, and as such also familiar to a wide range of society. This continued up until the end of the Enlightenment. During the following Romantic period, the way in which Biblical texts were interpreted necessarily meant a change in how Freemasons of the day used that text. It also became a less vital part of everyday life, a change that had a parallel in the way that Freemasonry itself became less overtly Christian.

The twentieth century saw an unprecedented (and time-limited) numerical expansion of Freemasonry in England, but this was a growth driven by entirely different factors. In the first half of the twenty first century, we find ourselves in another different environment, but one which I will argue is potentially more accepting of symbolism than the preceding ages. The original premise of this article was that Masonic ritual formed a distinct tradition, which first coalesced in the eighteenth century. The narrative was then going to be of how this distinctive tradition changed over the centuries, while remaining separate from the 'popular and uninstructed' world, as the obligation in the first degree describes those who are not Masons.

What it has become, however, is something slightly different. Reading around the topic across several centuries of writing demonstrates just how common many of the themes of supposedly unique or distinctive Masonic ceremonies are in Enlightenment thought. Such an approach requires a basic definition of some longer periods in English history. The most important for this article is the Enlightenment, generally understood as the period of the 'long eighteenth century' (from 1688 to 1815) in which science, the start of constitutional monarchy, and more liberal social attitudes, accompanied by a new openness to economic liberalisation, all took hold in England. The second main period is that of the Romantic age, starting at some point in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. This was an age marked by real tensions between the new ways of reading and writing literary texts (for the first time, including religious texts) and an increasingly conservative (very definitely with a lower-case 'c') set of public morals. So instead of writing an account of Freemasonry's distinctiveness, this article rather concentrates on an account of its place inside the Enlightenment. Of course, the rest of the world moved on in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the new sensibilities of Romanticism, while Freemasonry kept its rituals more-or-less unchanged. This article argues that, while the words stayed the same, the understanding of those words necessarily changed, and indeed, continues to do so. Such an approach has some important implications for how Masonic historians write its history and tell its story as the current custodians of this tradition.

The scope of this current article is deliberately limited to the use of King Solomon's Temple within the three now-established degrees of craft Freemasonry. This is for several reasons – not least that the Prestonian Lecture is established by UGLE, which has jurisdiction over them and no others. There are some brief mentions of the Royal Arch, the status of which was uncertain until the Sussex reforms of the nineteenth century. However, there remains a fertile field of study for others to pursue in relation to Mark Masonry and the Ancient and Accepted Rite in particular, which fall outside the scope of this article. Such research may well amplify, or even run against, the comments below on the developments in the nineteenth century as distinct groups within the wider Masonic *milieu* present themselves in different ways and to different audiences.

Intellectual History and Secrecy

The history of ideas by its nature rarely deals with objective facts. It is exceptionally rare to be able to say that one text is definitely influenced by another, unless it explicitly cites it. This becomes yet more difficult when we are dealing with writings on esoteric subjects. The authors of such works can have an understandable ambition to present their texts as new wisdom, the solution to ancient secrets, or an exposure of a powerful group.

For Freemasonry, where the very idea of secrecy was perhaps of more value than the secrets themselves, we have to take this into account when reading our texts. An author may well deny that that his text has taken inspiration from something that is available to those outside of the initiated, but that is often itself a framing of a narrative rather than the truth.[1] The great German enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottleib Fichte (1762-1814) himself addresses this question in his *Philosophy of Freemasons*:

> It was inevitable that an existing secret culture would influence public history, that some events in public history, which appear fragmentary within it, can be fully understood through the lens of secret cultural history, that some individuals who were part of the secret tradition also stood as remarkable figures in public history. It is therefore quite conceivable that public history could be explained by secret history.
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> Conversely, however, according to the principles just established, it was necessary that the possessors of the secret doctrine immediately suppress everything that, through any fault of theirs, came to public knowledge, relinquish it, and build no further upon it. Consequently, secret cultural history cannot be adequately demonstrated through public history, and no date in the latter can simultaneously be a date in the former. Anything that came into public hands ceased to be part of secret knowledge, and therefore attempts to piece together a secret history from public history should be undertaken with great caution.[2]

This apparent contradiction is well put by a modern (non-Masonic) writer: 'While [Freemasons] did not want their rites and practices to be revealed to the world, the attention given to them by the press … helped Masons to maintain their profile within English and Scottish society. Freemasonry became a strange mixture of secrecy and publicity, of ritualism and tolerance, of the traditional and the innovative.'[3]

The oxymoron of 'public secrecy' gives us two potential ways to read and interpret Masonic writings. The easy option is to take them at face value when they claim unique insights and secret knowledge. Some modern authors even accept the seriousness of claims by Anderson et al. when they say that their works are evidence of that membership because those works are also used as allegorical topics by the Freemasonry of the day. Alternatively, we can opt to tax our brains a little more when reading and interpreting our texts. This article seeks to do just that: by understanding something of the contemporary context of a Masonic text, we can try to work out what is truly distinctive about Masonry.

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[1] See D. Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* (New Haven, CA: Yale University Press, 2015), in particular Chapter 1.

[2] J. G. Fichte, *Vorlesung Uber Die Freimaurerei* (Berlin, 1803). Letter 15. Quoted in [Fessler, Ignaz Aurelius]: *Eleusinia of the Nineteenth Century.* Vol. 1. (Berlin, 1802). Available at https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/fessler_eleusinien01_1802/ (Accessed on 29 June 2026).

[3] P. K. Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CA: Yale University Press, 2013), 114.

Where we are actually dealing with a light gloss over a common contemporary topic, then we have some evidence that the Freemasonry of the day is part of the living culture of the age. Where the Masonic text is genuinely unusual in some way, then we may have evidence of a distinct culture, that operates alongside, but separately to, the wider contemporary intellectual culture. It is for this reason that much of this article is context, one of the things that Masonic historians often fail to engage with properly. A failure to do so is not just bad historical practice: it can also lead modern commentators to concentrate on the wrong things and construct a misleading version of Freemasonry's development and history.

This article also deliberately limits commentary on the earliest quasi-Masonic writings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to some basic background information. The murky development of Freemasonry as we now understand it has been covered by many others in more detail than can be done justice here. While the mediaeval and early modern context is vital, this article engages with Freemasonry as such as the earliest 'speculative masons' started to form lodges in London and found the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717.

Biblical Foundations

All discussions of King Solomon's Temple must start by looking at the Old Testament. The standard description of the Temple built by Solomon (at 1 Kings, 5ff.) describes Solomon receiving materials from Hiram, King of Tyre, and sending Adoniram to Lebanon to collect these:

> And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.
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> And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire

> concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household … And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together … And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.[4]

The text then describes the dimensions and decorations of the Temple and is the source for the majority of the Masonic description of it in the Second Degree Tracing Board. It also includes the description of Hiram as 'a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali', although not clearly a separate person to King Hiram:

> And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about. And he made two chapiters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapiter was five cubits, and the height of the other chapiter was five cubits: and nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain work, for the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapiter, and seven for the other chapiter. And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the chapiters that were upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapiter. And the chapiters that were upon the top of the pillars were of lily work in the porch, four cubits. And the chapiters upon the two pillars had pomegranates also above, over against the belly which was by the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapiter. And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished.
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> And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made king Solomon for the house of the LORD: the two pillars, and the two bowls of the chapiters that were on the top of the two pillars; and the two networks, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; and four hundred pomegranates for the two

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[4] All biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesty's Special Command: Appointed to Be Read in Churches: Authorized King James Version*, (Glasgow, 2011).

> networks, even two rows of pomegranates for one network, to cover the two bowls of the chapiters that were upon the pillars; and the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases; and one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea; and the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, were of bright brass. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan.

It then goes on to describe the dedication of the Temple and the prayers offered to God by Solomon, and in Chapter Nine God appears to Solomon and accepts those prayers. Some of this information is repeated in the First Book of Chronicles, which does not add anything material to our topic.

This, then, is the key text, but there are two other Biblical passages which we need to bear in mind. The first of these is Ezekiel's description of an ideal Temple structure, one so massive and complex that it could never have been built in Jerusalem, and which also draws upon the architecture of its own, rather later, period. The second passage is the description of the Temple in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation.[5] The reason that these two other biblical Temple visions are so important is that they all form part of a single mass of commentary in our period. Dating all the way back to Bede, commentary on Solomon's Temple was done in the context of Ezekiel's vision, an approach that continues until the Enlightenment and potentially later still.

The Temple in Revelation is important for a different reason, but one that is worth exploring a little due to its wider relevance to our theme. The use of Old Testament texts to interpret the New Testament is called typology, and it was one of the most pervasive ways of approaching the Old Testament from the time of the early Church Fathers until, debatably, the early Romantic period. More than simple analogy, this approach is used to demonstrate that Christianity is the fulfilment of the promises and prophecies made to the original Chosen People.

There are numerous examples of this approach to the interpretation of King Solomon's Temple, scattered liberally from some of the earliest Church Fathers all the way to the early modern writers who form our immediate context. In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville wrote that Solomon 'prefigures the image of Christ who raised the house of God in the heavenly Jerusalem, not with stone and wood, but with all the saints'.[6] The opening lines of Bede's *De Templo* - written in the eighth century - are that 'The house of God which King Solomon built in Jerusalem was made as a figure of the holy universal Church which, from the first of the elect to the last to be born at the end of the world, is daily being built through the grace of the king of peace, namely, its redeemer.'[7]

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[5] 1 Kings 5, 1 Chronicles 22:2, Ezekiel 40-48, Revelation 21

[6] Isidore, *Allegoriae quaedam sanctae Scriptura*, Migne, Patrologia Latina, Vol. 98, cols. 97-130. Available at https://archive.org/details/patrologiaecurs136unkngoog/. (Accessed: 29 June 2026).

There are plenty of other links drawn between Solomon's Temple and Jesus in early Christian texts:

> Eusebius's view was that while Solomon constructed a material Temple, Jesus created a Temple of believers-the body of Christ. Augustine expressed a similar sentiment: "Jesus built a Temple, not with wood and stone, but with human beings"; "Now we build this house by living good lives, and God also builds it by helping us to live". Hence Psalm 127-"A Song of Ascents, of Solomon: Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it"-refers not to Solomon, who presaged Jesus, but to Jesus himself, who from the hearts of his faithful built a Temple destined to become eternal.[8]

The reason that this is of relevance is that a sophisticated historian cannot - must not - read eighteenth-century writings about King Solomon's Temple without understanding that they will almost always be talking about much more than the literal building itself.

Indeed, the Dumfries MS of c.1710 uses Solomon's Temple as an explicit Christian type in the way that other non-Masonic theological texts did, setting out that the Temple signifies 'ye son of god & partly of the church ye son soffered his body to be destroyed and rose again ye 3d day & raised up to us ye christian church w[hich] is ye true spiritual church'.[9] It goes on to explain the significance of the two great pillars in the same way as Bunyan had some years earlier.

This is not an isolated example. George Oliver, another Masonic commentator, writing in 1823 made the same point:

> It was constructed on precisely the same plan as the tabernacle of Moses, but on a more firm and extended scale. The two edifices were emblematical of the Jewish and Christian churches. The tabernacle was a temporary and a moveable edifice; the temple fixed and permanent. The Jewish dispensation, in like manner, was but a shadow of good things to come, and was to be done away on the appearance of a more perfect system; which, though founded on the same basis, was to ensure for ever. The temple, erected and dedicated to the exclusive worship of the true God, but ordinances of his own appointment, is considered by Beda to be a type of the church of God in Heaven, the seat of perpetual peace and tranquillity, in allusion to

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[7] Bede, *On the Temple*: *Translated Texts for Historians, 21* trans. S. Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), 5.

[8] Y. Shaviṭ and C. Naor, *An Imaginary Trio: King Solomon, Jesus, and Aristotle* (Berlin Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 62.

[9] D. Knoop, G. P. Jones and D. Hamer (eds), *The Early Masonic Catechisms*, 2nd edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press,1963), 64.

> the harmony and peace which existed amongst the Masons of Zion, who cemented the temple without the use of axe, hammer, or metal tool.[10]

This has important ramifications for our reading of Masonic ritual and the force of King Solomon's Temple as a symbol when we get to the eighteenth century. However, as this typological approach to biblical interpretation faded in the nineteenth century, so did some of the fascination with topics such as King Solomon's Temple in the wider non-Masonic world, with, of course, some exceptions.

The Early Modern Inheritance

We have seen that King Solomon's Temple was a popular and consistent topic for Church writers from the earliest days of Christianity right up to the late Renaissance.[11] However, it is only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where we can start to draw tentative links between contemporary writings and the first generation of men who started to form lodges which we can find as recognisably Masonic. It is important to understand that King Solomon and his Temple were almost ubiquitous in early modern English culture: King James I was a new Solomon,[12] Bunyan wrote an entire poem on the Temple's spiritual significance,[13] Wren cited it as a template for St Paul's cathedral,[14]Hawksmoor made notes on the dimensions of Ezekiel's Temple when designing his London churches, and Isaac Newton worried obsessively about its dimensions.[15]

Indeed, for architects, newly emerging as a separate professional tier of scholarship from the more manual work of 'operative' Masons, it was considered fundamental as one of only two possible models for imitation, along with the Roman author Vitruvius. The Temple was the only building whose dimensions were given with Biblical authority, passing over Noah's Ark, although that was also used in a similar fashion in the period by some. For writers and theorists of the eighteenth century, then, there were very limited models to adopt for architectural excellence, of which King Solomon's Temple and the Roman models of Vitruvius were by far and away the most obvious and important. However, by the time that Freemasons were taking an interest, these two had already been combined into one single source of truth.

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[10] G. Oliver, *The Antiquities of Free-Masonry, Comprising Illustrations of the Five Grand Periods of Masonry, from the Creation of the World to the Dedication of Solomon's Temple* 1st edn, (London: Richard Spencer, 1823), 346–7.

[11] See R. King, *Solomon on Stage, Representations of Magic and the Occult in Early Modern English Drama* (Apollo: University of Cambridge Repository, 2024). Available at: https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.109036. (Accessed: 10 May 2026). This contains a description of the many uses of Solomon on stage in the period, albeit mainly focussing on his role as a 'magical' figure rather than as architect.

[12] R. Usher, 'William Laud, the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, and Biblical Architecture in Early Stuart Oxford', *The British Art Journal*, 16/1 (2015), 22.

[13] J. Bunyan, *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd* (London, 1688). In the digital collection *Early English Books Online*. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A30206.0001.001. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections (Accessed: 29 June 2026).

[14] C. Wren, *Parentalia or Memoir of the Family of the Wrens* (London, 1750). Available at https://archive.org/details/gri_33125011157357/. (Accessed ; 29 June 2026)

[15] T. Morrison, 'Solomon's Temple, Stonehenge, and Divine Architecture in the English Enlightenment', *Parergon*, 29/1 (2012), 135–63. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.2012.0033. (Accessed: 10 May 2026). T. Morrison, *Isaac Newton's Temple of Solomon and His Reconstruction of Sacred Architecture* (Basel: Springer, 2011).

The single most significant commentary on the Temple in the period is that written by Juan Bautista Villalpando. He was a Spanish Jesuit priest, born in the 1550s, who spent his life writing about mathematics and architecture. His most significant work was an enormous commentary on Ezekiel, published in 1596, which contained elaborate diagrams of his reconstruction of King Solomon's Temple based on Ezekiel's vision. Or, to be more accurate, Villalpando worked out how to present a version of Ezekiel's description of the Temple which was completely in line with the classical principles set out in Vitruvius, the two being brought together to form a single divine style of architecture, one which could then be employed in part by King Philip II of Spain when completing the building of *El Escorial*. Indeed, Villalpando argued that Vitruvius had made use of divinely inspired precedents which made such an identity almost inevitable.

Much of the debate around the best reconstructions for the Temple continued to draw on this key text, as well as challenge Villalpando's designs. Partially by way of response, Samuel Lee, Puritan, fellow of Wadham College, Oxford and later settler in North America, wrote his *Orbis Miraculum*.[16] This distinctively Protestant text (much in the same tradition as Bunyan, if with a different audience in mind) is now claimed by some as an early source for the Royal Arch narrative concerning what was found in the ruins of the First Temple.[17] But Lee also argues that the works of Villalpando cannot be a faithful recreation of Solomon's actual temple, as they are too dependent upon the vision of Ezekiel, which never actually existed in reality. His depiction of Solomon's Temple starts to look rather like the chapel of his *alma mater*, Magdalen College.[18] His rough contemporary, Thomas Beverly, in his *The Pattern of the Divine Temple* of 1687 still clings to a mystical interpretation. He hardly talks about Solomon at all, with all his attention paid to the New City of Jerusalem conjured up in *Revelation*, although he was preoccupied with measurement, particularly the size of the cubit, which had a divine association.[19]

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[16] S. Lee, *Orbis Miraculum; or the Temple of Solomon Pourtrayed by Scripture-Light* (London, 1665). In the digital collection *Early English Books Online*. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A49971.0001.001. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. (Accessed: 29 June 2026).

[17] This is, however, one instance where the alleged source rather betrays its later readers, most of whom have failed to notice that the 'Royal Arch' narrative is framed with distinct scepticism by Lee. I am grateful to Prof. Stephen Tucker for arranging the opportunity to view a first edition of Lee's book which is still held in the library of Wadham College, Oxford.

[18] J. A. Bennett and S. Mandelbrote, *The Garden, the Ark, the Tower, the Temple: Biblical Metaphors of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1998), 146.

[19] T. Beverley, *The Pattern of the Divine Temple, Sanctuary, and City of the New Jerusalem* (London, 1687). Available at http://books.google.co.uk/books?vid=BL:A0020253974. (Accessed: 29 June 2026).

Moving into our main period, the first English publication of the French author Bernard Lamy's *Apparatus Biblicus* (in 1723) included detailed engravings of the Temple. Lamy also moved away from some of Villalpando's reconstructions, and the Temple in his imagination looks rather more similar to a Baroque church of his own day than the Renaissance images of the earlier Jesuit. John Wood is another example of this use of the authority associated with the Temple, with an approach that relied upon it in particular to interpret and guide the modern world:

> God directed the parts of Moses's Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple not only to be functional, but also to represent the history of the Jews. By knowing the historical facts, one could attain 'the thorough understanding of the Works of Creation', which Wood considered to be 'the principal function of the mind', and then apply it to one's own creation.[20]

Wood had what could be called an eclectic set of opinions, many of which overlap with contemporary Masonic writings, although there is no good evidence of his membership. Even William Stukeley, that great accumulator of early Masonic and antiquarian ideas of the early eighteenth century, thought some of his opinions farfetched, especially on the topic of Stonehenge. However, for our purposes he is important because of the central role that the Temple played in his understanding of architecture and history. He thought that the Temple represented the universe, and his plans for Bath drew up Ezekiel's vision of the Temple.[21] Of course, the most sarcastic comment about Ezekiel comes, unsurprisingly, from Laurence Dermott, where he also takes the opportunity to take a swipe at pretty much the entire Solomonic tradition.[22] We should perhaps not be surprised by this, as Dermott was an early foundational figure in the Antient Grand Lodge, which deliberately portrayed itself at this time as in opposition to and subversive of the Premier Grand Lodge of Anderson *et al.*

We therefore arrive at a point where all the traditions feeding into the early modern theory of architecture derive from King Solomon's Temple and so are, at least to an extent, in harmony. This harmony presents itself as a common methodology (as set out in the examples above) but has different outcomes in terms of actual designs depending on the time and location of the author in question. As Rosenau says, 'Solomon's and Ezekiel's Temples were bound to be identical … as they were based on divine guidance and, for him, this necessitated geometric regularity.'[23] At this point, therefore, every piece of architectural excellence must, by definition, be an emulation of the work carried out by Solomon.

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[20] E. Harris, 'John Wood's System of Architecture', *The Burlington Magazine*, 131/1031 (1989), 101.

[21] Harris, *John Wood's System of Architecture* and Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 218.

[22] L. Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon: Or, a Help to a Brother; Shewing the Excellency of Secrecy, … Together with Solomon's Temple an Oratorio, as It Was Performed for the Benefit of Free-Masons* (London, 1756), xi ff. Available at https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_ahiman-rezon-or-a-help_dermott-laurence_1756. (Accessed: 29 June 2026).

There are, in addition, numerous uses of this idea in a metaphorical sense rather than as a theory for how to design actual buildings. Francis Bacon wrote about 'Salomon's House' in his *New Atlantis*, first published posthumously in 1626. Many have claimed that this is a Rosicrucian text in some way - certainly a text that has elements of secret knowledge contained within it. While there is no good evidence that Bacon (or other contemporary figures) was associated with any form of Masonic organisation, even if he was interested in 'hidden knowledge',[24] it is another example of the importance assigned to King Solomon's Temple in the period.

Perhaps most famously and most popularly, models of the Temple attracted crowds of interested viewers, including monarchs themselves. This was not just the initial display in 1675 of the models created by Rabbi Jacob Judah Leon, which were dedicated to Charles II. It is a reasonable supposition that these found favour in court circles after earlier contact between Henrietta Maria and Leon when she was in exile in the Netherlands during the Commonwealth, but that favour also seems unlikely to be the sole reason for its commercial success.[25] A much larger and more ornate model was displayed in London in 1724-25, which had originally been prepared in Hamburg. This second model was displayed again in 1729-30.[26] Slightly later, in 1737, there was a new edition of Newton's analysis of the length of the 'sacred cubit' by William Whiston, a former pupil of Newton, who was so convinced that it contained certain errors that he made his own revised version, which he then used on lecture tours in 1726 onwards.[27]

Solomon of course was discussed for more than just his temple. As the ultimate wise king, he was commonly coopted to create royal legitimacy, especially in periods where that was under pressure. While it cannot be proved one way or another, it seems likely that royal support and interaction with these displays was a way to link the still new Hanoverian regime to well-established patterns of legitimacy. Not only did it link them to ancient Biblical figures, but Edward VI and Henry VIII had both been depicted as Solomon in their time, including the famous image in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* of Henry as King Solomon, with his feet resting on the back of Pope Clement.[28]

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[23] H. Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple: The Image of the Temple of Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity* (London: Oresko Books, 1979), 95-9 for more examples.

[24] See F. A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*: (Routledge Classics) (London: Routledge, 2001) Chapter 15, 'Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry', 262-77.

[25] A. L. Shane, 'Rabbi Jacob Judah Leon (Templo) of Amsterdam (1603-1675) and His Connections with England', *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, 25 (1975), 124.

[26] Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 163.

[27] Harris, *John Wood's System of Architecture*, 102.

[28] John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was first published in 1563 and quickly became a leading (and state-approved) text of the English Reformation.

In Scotland, Stirling Castle is at least possibly a sixteenth century example of a monarch claiming Solomonic authority, one who by that stage was already James VI of Scotland and already seemed likely to become King of England in due course.[29] Indeed, James, now King of England as well, attended to a sermon by one of his fellow countryman (John Gordon, newly appointed Dean of Salisbury), which set out the Hebrew roots of the name 'Britain' and the symbolism of King Solomon's construction of his own temple.[30] This then was drawn out into a sermon which sought to portray James as the inheritor of the ancient traditions of Britain as a whole as well as the inheritor of Solomon's wisdom and royal rights and dignity.

Solomon's Temple was also conscripted to other uses. For example, George Reynold's mathematical teaching text, hidden beneath the title of *The State of the Greatest King, Set Forth in the Greatness of Solomon, and the Glory of His Reign … And Because Different Kinds of Gold and Silver Hath Been Frequently Mentioned … a Short Treatise Is Subjoyn'd … Concerning the Same, and the Specifick Gravity Thereof, with Easie Rules … for Trying of Gold and Silver.*[31] The Temple was even used as a way for Masons to raise some funds when needed, at events such as an oratorio called 'Solomon's Temple' specifically written to raise money for 'the Benefit of Sick and Distressed Free Masons'.[32]

None of this should surprise us. It fits into a society that took biblical texts seriously and applied them to everyday life, whose members were prepared to spend time working through the details whether by private study, public worship. However, the idea that all these individuals were Masons, or even proto-Masons, based on their discussion of the Temple is counterfactual. The Temple was being discussed and interpreted everywhere in the seventeenth century, but this is not evidence that those doing so were part of a Masonic tradition or culture as such.

The New Grand Lodge(s)

Freemasonry, then, was just one more body that took this symbol seriously in the early eighteenth century. This fits with the other main characteristics of eighteenth century

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[29] I. Campbell and A. Mackechnie, 'The "Great Temple of Solomon" at Stirling Castle', *Architectural History*, 54 (2011), 91-118. Available at: doi:10.1017/S0066622X00004019. (Accessed: 4 September 2025).

[30] M. K. Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture: (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History) 110* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 247–8.

[31] G. Renolds, *The State of the Greatest King, Set Forth in the Greatness of Solomon, and the Glory of His Reign … And Because Different Kinds of Gold and Silver Hath Been Frequently Mentioned … a Short Treatise Is Subjoyn'd … Concerning the Same, and the Specifick Gravity Thereof, with Easie Rules … for Trying of Gold and Silver* (Bristol, 1721). Available at https://archive.org/details/b30535189/. (Accessed: 29 June 2026)

[32] Printed separately in J. E. Weeks, *Solomon's Temple. An Oratorio. As It Is Performed at the Philharmonick Room, in Fishamble-Street for the Benefit of Sick and Distressed Free Masons.* (Dublin, 1753), but also included in Dermott, *Ahimon Rezon*, 200-8. For other performances at the venue (including one of Boyce's Solomon some years earlier, see W. H. Grattan Flood, 'Fishamble St. Music Hall, Dublin, from 1741 to 1777', *Sammelbände Der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* [Dec. 1912], 51–7.

Masonry, the quest for self-improvement is a quintessential enlightenment topic. Dining clubs were a common feature of more-or-less learned societies of the time. A parallel interest in new scientific ideas, links to ancient cultures, and religious leaning was not just an apt description of Desaguliers, Folkes, and Newton, but could equally apply to all modern men.

The idea of the 'public sphere' developed by Habermas[33] in the twentieth century is now contested, but England in the early eighteenth century was developing a new way for members of 'polite society' to interact, and the development of that – and the popularity of it – is perhaps shown as well by the emergence and relative popularity of Freemasonry as it is by the coffee house culture that equally spread to most large and medium urban centres.[34] This cross-over is well evidenced by the fact that a lot of 'Masonic' writing in fact contains little truly Masonic content outside of some fairly lightweight use of particular images. In many ways, King Solomon's Temple has very light or trivial importance in the early writings of those involved in the circles surrounding either the Premier Grand Lodge or the Antients.

As an example, the oratorio entitled 'Solomon's Temple' by Weeks referenced above is indeed a full text which was set to music by Richard Broadway (organist of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin), where Solomon and Hiram are two key figures. However, it has nothing to say Masonically; it does not bring any ritual content beyond what is already set out in the relevant biblical passages. There is praise of wisdom, strength, and beauty, but not in any context that makes it a text that today we would regard as Masonic. Richard Samber, writing in 1722, wrote an explicitly Masonic account of the significance of the Temple, couched in alchemical terms. His writings, however, are rather difficult to assign to any particular Masonic tradition. Some writers have suggested that he fabricated much of this and wrote to curry favour with his patrons. For our purposes, that perhaps is not important, as they were either true descriptions, or were thought likely to impress, in either case showing the currency of the symbol at the time.[35] Much the same can be said of some of the lectures delivered in lodges in the early eighteenth century, especially the scientific topics. Masons were just interested in the same sorts of things as non-Masons and sometimes asked to hear lectures about those interests inside the lodge rather than in the coffeeshop, which could be the same physical space in some cases.

James Anderson, one of the prime movers of the early period of the Premier Grand Lodge, of course used Solomon's Temple as a source of authority in the large narrative history at the front of his *Constitutions*.[36] In his alternative *Constitutions for the Antient Grand Lodge*, Laurence Dermott claimed to have been visited by the four head porters of the Temple, in an entirely fanciful and throw-away fashion.[37] There is of course no definite explanation of why he choose those particular characters. That choice, however, looks like a way of undermining Anderson, who had deployed the authority of largely fictional history in his *Constitutions* at length and with seriousness. Dermott's use of them is anything but serious and it is a reasonable suggestion that it was because the original idea still did have force and authority. There is, however, one fundamental development in Freemasonry of the 1720s that, over the following 300 years, meant that King Solomon's Temple became inextricably linked with Freemasonry. That is the introduction of the Third Degree.

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[33] Jurgen Haberman (1929 – 2026) was a German philosopher who developed a theory of ethics which was rooted in the idea that Enlightenment public discourse was a foundational part of modern society, ethical theory, and social constructs.

[34] For a summary of the arguments around the role of coffee houses in the early eighteenth century see: B. Cowan, 'The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, 47/1 (2004), 21–46. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X03003492. (Accessed: 10 May 2026).

[35] Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 183.

At the time of the foundation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717, there was no clearly understood Master Mason degree as we now know it. By the 1760s, it was commonly worked and understood across London at least, if not universally within England. Exactly where its origins lie is not entirely clear, although a convincing case has been made by Christopher Powell that it is primarily the work of John Desaguliers and was written in the 1720s, drawing on exactly the texts referenced above.[38] Whether or not one accepts Powell's arguments that Desaguliers was the author, it cannot be denied that the ceremony of raising a candidate to the third degree is almost an explicitly Christian one.

While the ritual allows for different interpretations, its roots clearly lie in the religious understanding of the eighteenth century where Solomon's Temple was a core part of commonly used Christian rhetoric and discourse. A core part of that imagery was concerned with a belief in resurrection of the dead and the building of a New Jerusalem. What could be a better backdrop to the narrative of Hiram's death than a building which lived in popular culture as a symbol of God's promise to assist the faithful to ascend to that very 'heavenly city, built not by human hands'?[39]

Masonic authors like William Hutchinson[40] are also interesting because they diverge from Anderson's theory that contemporary speculative form of Masonry had continuity with Solomon's organisation for the building of the Temple.[41] Hutchinson says explicitly that the signs and tokens employed at the construction of the original temple were 'manual proofs of the part each was stationed to perform: the light which had possessed the soul and which was the first principle, was in no wise to be distinguished by such signs and tokens, or revealed, expressed, or communicated thereby.'[42] Hutchinson therefore simultaneously shows his readers the importance of the narratives of the building of the Temple by Solomon while also denying that the narratives give away the secrets of modern Freemasonry. But, importantly, it is worth noting that he ends with a typically Christian gloss:

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[36] J. Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons; Containing the History, Charges and Regulations of That Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* (London, 1723). See also D. Johnson 'Anderson the Historian: The 1723 Constitutions in Their Intellectual Context', in J. S. Wade, ed., *Freemasonry and the Enlightenment: The 1723 Constitutions* (Cambridge, 2024), 259–78.

[37] Dermott, *Ahimon Rezon*, xi; Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 219.

[38] C. Powell, 'The Hiramic Legend and the Creation of the Third Degree', *AQC* 134 (2021), 65–95.

[39] The immediate quotation is from 2 Corinthians 5, although also see also Acts 7 and 17, Hebrews 9, and Mark 14.

[40] William Hutchinson (1732–1814) was an English lawyer and antiquary from County Durham. He was initiated into Freemasonry in 1770 in Barnard Castle Lodge of Concord. He published *The Spirit of Masonry* in 1775.

[41] A. Horne, *King Solomon's Temple in the Masonic Tradition* (London: Aquarian Press, 1971), 35. Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple*, 140.

> In commemoration of this great promise to the faithful, we ornament the entrance into our lodges with these emblematical pillars; from our knowledge of the completion of that sacred sentence accomplished in the coming of our Redeemer.[43]

What, therefore, can we conclude about the role and importance of King Solomon's Temple in eighteenth century Freemasonry?

First, part of the lure and appeal of Freemasonry to the first couple of generations of recognisable Freemasons was the way in which its ritual aligned to their wider beliefs about the world. King Solomon's Temple was important to them exactly because it was important in contemporary culture. It had a vital link to the faith of the overwhelming majority and to build the Temple into the ritual was just another use of an image that had potent force to non-Masons as well.

Secondly, the contemporary Masonic use of Temple imagery was popular because it linked closely with non-Masonic usage. Men like Newton and Wren (not Masons[44]) and Stukeley were not being Masonic or anti-Masonic when they speculated about the length of a cubit or the relationship between Moses, Solomon, and the Druids who they thought built Stonehenge. They were part of a wider debate about the sources of ancient wisdom and the ways in which that wisdom had been passed on to later generations.

The Nineteenth Century

From this point onwards, the argument moves from the interpretation of positive evidence to seeking conclusions from a lack of evidence. In the Enlightenment period, we have looked at a number of texts of different types, both Masonic and non-Masonic. As we move into the nineteenth century and later, what we see is an absence of texts. That absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. However, I shall argue that this absence demonstrates a declining interest in King Solomon's Temple, that the idea had lost its vitality, and that it no longer quite fitted what Freemasonry was becoming.

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[42] W. Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures* (2nd edn, Carlisle, 1795), 85. Available at http://google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Spirit_of_Masonry_in_moral_and_eluci/. (Accessed: 29 June 2026)

[43] Hutchinson, *Spirit of Masonry*, 91.

[44] In his Prestonian lecture of 2011, James Campbell made the case for Wren being a Mason. See J. Campbell, *Was Sir Christopher Wren a Mason? The Prestonian Lecture for 2011* (2nd edn, n.p., 2011).

It would, of course, be genuinely astonishing if all interest in King Solomon's Temple suddenly died in the nineteenth century, and the more determined reader will continue to find it used as the basis for both Masonic and non-Masonic writings. One example can serve us here, the arch-Romantic writer Thomas De Quincy, who wrote a long essay on the links between Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. The whole essay is still worth reading as a refreshing dismissal of many of the more far-fetched conspiracy theories that sometimes still flourish. However, De Quincey's attention to King Solomon's Temple is interesting because it specifically calls out that Freemasonry uses it in a Christian and typological fashion, as a representation of Christ's kingdom. This is, I would suggest, a classic example of Romantic medievalism, where the appeal of an older idea is too strong to resist.[45] What, then, might explain this change as the world moved into the Romantic nineteenth century? Two great themes started to make themselves felt across English culture, both of which have a profound implication for how Freemasonry used its ritual and symbolism, but also how it projected them.

If Romanticism was already alive in the late eighteenth century, it was in the nineteenth when it came to dominate taste in and interpretation of literary texts. One of the key aspects of this was that the force of allegory as a concept declined markedly, to be replaced with a new idea of the symbol, which needed interpretation by the reader.[46] This change in the way of creating and interpreting texts was accompanied, perhaps unsurprisingly by a disparaging of the older allegorical methods, which were now characterised as dead and lifeless.[47]

Secondly, the nineteenth century also saw a comprehensive change in the way that biblical texts increasingly came to be viewed as historical texts, in much the same way that earlier generations had already treated classical texts, and using many of the same critical tools. This was part of a wider change in historical method itself, from Thomas Macauley (arguably the founder of the Whig idea of history in the mid-nineteenth century and certainly its greatest early writer) onwards, where there was an awareness of the importance of method and a separation of methodology from the accumulation of facts.

> What becomes of the certainty of the revelation if its foundation is only the shifting sands of the relativities of history? To put the question another way, if the Bible is merely the written deposit of only one line of religious development which took

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[45] T. De Quincy 'Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons', *Essays* (London & New York: Ward, Lock & Co., 1886), 357–402. Available at https://archive.org/details/essaysdequincey00dequiala. (Accessed: 29 June 2026)

[46] G. Berefelt, 'On Symbol and Allegory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 28/2 (1969), 201. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2307/428569. (Accessed: 10 May 2026).

[47] A commonplace theme, but examples include Burckhardt (in art history), Hazlitt (in poetry), and the changing presentations of Shakespeare on stage. For a summary, see V. Brljak, 'The Age of Allegory', *Studies in Philology*, 114/4 (2017), 697–719. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2017.0025. (Accessed: 10 May 2026).

> place in the Fertile Crescent in ancient times, what grounds are there for attributing to it an authority which other religious movements do not possess? What becomes of the claim that the Bible is the sole authoritative revelation of the divine nature and purpose for the world?
>
> The Bible all at once became a difficult book, a specialist's book, not a book for working men and women; the new principles of exegesis were not easy to practise.[48]

What did this mean for the interpretation and use of Masonic ritual texts, not biblical *per se* but presented as an ancient truth, nonetheless?

This fundamental change to theology, academic at first, but rapidly making its way in the world as shown by controversies such as that surrounding Darwin and Paley. cannot but have changed how our Victorian forebears interpreted their Masonic ritual. King Solomon's Temple could no longer be a record of an actual building and the stories of Hiram Abiff, and his companions could no longer be taken as history.

This wider shift in intellectual approach has a more specific development in relation to King Solomon's Temple in particular. The first systematic excavations in Jerusalem, and specifically on the Temple Mount, also began in the nineteenth century. There had of course been earlier interest in what remained of ancient buildings, as shown by (for example) the papers of the eighteenth-century Egyptian Society, which included Stukeley, Folkes, and others in that Masonic and scientific circle of the Royal Society.[49] However, their focus had been on an idea of universality in ancient religion which pointed to a single truth, and which drew together the cultures of Egypt, Israel, Greece, Rome, and the Druids, in a way that was no longer intellectually sustainable.[50]

These new researches were practical and involved the actual examination and excavation of real buildings. The first detailed surveys of the Temple Mount were carried out in the 1830s, followed by more detailed work that carried on until the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, when the work was no longer led by former Western powers.[51] This was part of a wider set of archaeological works across the region, seeking material evidence for Biblical narratives. As such, these were not ideologically innocent excavations.[52] There was rather an explicit link between Evangelical Protestantism and a group of primarily British and

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[48] A. Richardson, 'The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship', in S. L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 3 & 296-301.

[49] M. Anis, 'The First Egyptian Society in London (1741-1743)', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale* (1952), 99–105, Available at https://doi.org/10.3406/bifao.1952.2085. (Accessed: 29 June 2026)

[50] D. B. Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woolbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2002), 154.

[51] K. Golar, 'The Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif', *Finding Jerusalem: Archaeology between Science and Ideology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 149.

[52] L. C. Robson, 'Archaeology and Mission: The British Presence in Nineteenth Century Jerusalem', *Jerusalem Quarterly* (Ramallah), no. 44 (2009), 5-17.

American archaeologists. The works of men like Edward Robinson became the key texts of the day, widely reprinted, and completely displacing the older approaches used by Villalpando and Lee, who sought to extrapolate morals from Biblical text.[53] Rather, this new approach was to use the material remains in the Holy Land to demonstrate the literal truth of the Biblical texts themselves. The implications for the Masonic audience are dramatic. King Solomon's Temple as allegory becomes an outdated idea, which ceases to have living relevance in non-Masonic society. The whole point of the ritual, therefore, is undermined.

One reasonable argument is that this is part of a more fundamental shift in how Freemasons saw themselves. Freemasonry in England in the eighteenth century had been an almost exclusively Christian movement. The reforms of the Duke of Sussex in 1813 put in place the foundations for a form of Freemasonry that catered 'not so much the highly complex and erudite spiritual game, but much more the self-education of its members as moral citizens'.[54]

As part of Britain's evolving relationship with local elites in its colonial possessions, Muslims from the 1840s started to participate in Freemasonry, notably in India. While there had been occasional Muslim men initiated in the eighteenth century, these were very much exceptional cases, whereas it now started to become a more common and regular occurrence. Because King Solomon's Temple would already have been to some extent familiar and acceptable, a parallel can be drawn between these new Muslim initiates and their Jewish predecessors in the 1730s; they were joining an institution where the basic story was familiar and part of an existing living culture, albeit without the addition of the Christian significance which the context of the English Enlightenment had placed upon it.

The next step was to widen the membership further. Monotheistic religions were more easily catered for, and Parsis, Jains, Sikhs, and Confucians were all members of Indian lodges by the 1860s, having been able to interpret their own faith in a way that allowed both them and the English Masonic establishment to agree that they had a belief in a singular 'great architect of the universe'. Hinduism, with its wider concept of divinity which can encompass multiple forms of the divine, was more difficult, and yet, with some flexibility, the first Hindu members were initiated by the 1870s. This was only possible in a Masonic environment which no longer insisted that its core image and story was based on a literal truth. Where once that literal truth had been the anchor for an extended allegory, King Solomon's Temple was now itself an allegorical concept.

This change had a role in the development and popularisation of a number of Companion Orders, orders beyond the Craft which some now view as core parts of the wider

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[53] E. Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and Adjacent Countries*, 3 vols, 1st edn (London: Boston, 1841).

[54] J. A. M. Snoek and J. Harland-Jacobs, 'Freemasonry and Eastern Religions', in H. Bogdan and J. A. M. Snoek, eds, *Handbook of Freemasonry* (Boston MA: Leiden, 2017), 262.

Masonic system, notably the Ancient and Accepted Rite.[55] These orders present themselves as explicitly symbolic, and so are freed from some of the constraints of more literally expressed Craft ritual. The Ancient and Accepted Rite also provided an explicitly Christian environment for those who found that important. The fact that it did not take in a large proportion of the, at least nominally, Christian members of UGLE is further evidence that UGLE by this point was a secular organisation, and one dedicated to moral advancement and not overly interested in the allegories it used to do that. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Kipling, in one of his most famous poems, 'The Mother Lodge'[56], could celebrate the inclusivity of his lodge in Lahore, including men of all religions and ethnicities.

Of course, new movements continued to spiral out of Masonic circles. These eventually fed into the works of writers such as Aleister Crowley in the twentieth century. He was undeniably associated with Masonry in its widest sense, but represents the further stage of esotericism, by which point symbolism and esotericism had become so elaborate they had no place in regular practice, at least from UGLE's perspective. From a brief heyday, this occult movement then arguably collapsed in on itself as a result of its own complexity.

The Twentieth Century and Beyond

Sadly, the enormous increase in the number of UGLE Freemasons in the first half of the twentieth century was not driven by any intellectual spirit of the age, but by war. The two catastrophic World Wars saw an unprecedented need for brotherly love and relief, both during the conflicts and afterwards when men, scarred by their experiences and cast back into civilian life, sought some form of mutual support and comradeship.

Rudyard Kipling is perhaps the most famous Masonic author of the first half of the twentieth century, and while he does indeed use the idea of the Temple in his poem *Banquet Night* of 1926, it is in a very different context:

> "Once in so often," King Solomon said,
> Watching his quarrymen drill the stone,
> "We will club our garlic and wine and bread
> And banquet together beneath my Throne,
> And all the Brethren shall come to that mess
> As Fellow-Craftsmen - no more and no less."
>
> The Quarries are hotter than Hiram's forge,
> No one is safe from the dog-whip's reach.

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[55] See R. Gan, 'The Full Spectrum of Freemasonry: The Development of the Other Orders of Freemasonry and Their Relationship with Craft Masonry', in J. S. Wade, ed., *Reflections on 300 Years of Freemasonry: Papers Delivered to The Quatuor Coronati Lodge Tercentenary Conference on the History of Freemasonry* (London, 2017), 235–52 for a useful summary and chronology of these orders.

[56] First published in the Pall Mall Gazette in May 1895.

> It's mostly snowing up Lebanon gorge,
> And it's always blowing off Joppa beach;
> But once in so often, the messenger brings
> Solomon's mandate: "Forget these things!
> Brother to Beggars and Fellow to Kings,
> Companion of Princes - forget these things!
> Fellow-Craftsmen, forget these things!"

For Kipling, at least in this poem, Freemasonry has no value beyond the human relationships it fosters between its members, who are all equal inside the lodge room, and, even, at the banquet afterwards.

Alongside Kipling’s poetry, Freemasons’ Hall in London stands as another tribute to the fallen of the First World War. Representations of King Solomon fill the building, most notably the Grand Temple, with its enormous bronze doors which replicate those of the original Temple. It is undeniably a wonderful building. However, the fact that it uses King Solomon’s Temple as its template for design and decoration does not mean that it is, in the context of this article, very interesting or important symbolically. Its meaning comes from its dedication, the scroll of the fallen of each lodge in the Shrine, and the splendour of the Grand Temple. But by the 1920s, those symbols have become just decoration. They remind Freemasons of the ritual used in their lodges, but they do not add to it. Masons must look elsewhere now for examples of the Temple having a living resonance.

The rise of ‘conspiracy novels’ of the last thirty to forty years has seen a resurgence in popular interest in the Temple and its symbolism thanks to the writings of authors such as Dan Brown. This has been accompanied by massively popular film franchises, not just chronicling the adventures of Robert Langdon, but his fellow traveller Indiana Jones. From the sublime to the ridiculous, the general public has also gladly paid for the privilege of seeing Sean Connery in *The Name of the Rose* as well as Nicolas Cage in *National Treasure*. A search for ‘Solomon’s Temple’ on the British Library catalogue returns about fifty novels published since 2000, roughly two every year.

What would be labelled esoteric speculation or occult knowledge when referring to the eighteenth century is now dismissed as conspiracy theory and trash fiction, but it has driven an increased popular interest in Freemasonry. A quick Google search for King Solomon’s Temple points to a huge variety of resources, many official Masonic pages, but an ever-increasing number of (sometimes bizarre) theories. How we, as twenty-first-century Freemasons, respond to this interest tells us much about how true we are to our eighteenth-century precepts and the extent to which the change of attitudes in the nineteenth century continues to define us. Personally, I tend to think that the eighteenth century paradigm cannot be resurrected, because the image of the Temple no longer carries the religious weight that it once did, especially in an age when the appeal of formal religious identification seems to be on the wane.

How twenty-first-century Freemasons, respond to this interest reveals something of how true modern Masonry is true to its eighteenth-century precepts and the extent to which the change of attitudes in the nineteenth century continues to define the institution. The consistent appeal of the Temple as an image intrinsically associated with Freemasonry suggests that there is still life in it. UGLE Freemasonry may now be focussed on public morality in the widest sense, but in order to attract and retain members, an institution such as UGLE needs its symbolism. Freemasonry today may offer a chance for men to 'seek for that which was lost' – which also brings us right back to the foundational approaches in the eighteenth century.[57] If it is King Solomon's Temple that allows UGLE to explain its purpose most clearly, then we should perhaps embrace that future.[58]

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[57] J. Harland-Jacobs and J. A. M. Snoek, 'Freemasonry and Western Esotericism', in H. Bogdan and J. A. M. Snoek, eds, *Handbook of Freemasonry* (Leiden; Boston MA, 2017), 297.

[58] This is an edited version of the 2026 Prestonian Lecture, updated for *AQC*. The author is grateful to the many people who read and commented on earlier drafts, in particular Bro. Prof James Campbell, the 2011 Prestonian Lecturer.