

**Sphinx Lodge No. 107 IC**

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2020**

# **The History of Irish Freemasonry in Sri Lanka**

Short talk by Jacques Huyghebaert



*“Never memorize something  
That you can look up easily”  
Albert Einstein”*

Access to information has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, we are at present in the internet age, and the earlier science fiction concept of having virtually all human knowledge available at our fingertips has become reality. .

Technology has changed our ideas about the importance of memory and content knowledge.

It's not unusual to hear people question “Why should I learn this if I can just Google it?”

Considering the current incredible performance, speed and superiority of the tools available to access, store and retrieve information easily and cheaply, has the time not come to review our learning and teaching methods in order to study to which extent and in which cases human memorisation is still relevant, sufficiently reliable and justified today not only for historical, administrative, academic, scientific, accounting and business purposes, but also for Freemasonry ?

In practical terms, since we are meeting across borders and geographical distances, with the help of “zoom” let me re-assure you, no need to try to memorise today's lecture !

It is available in electronic format, free of charge

At this point I wish to mention especially R. W. Bro. Robert Bashford, a Past Master of both the Lodge of Research No 200 I.C. and the Royal Arch Chapter of Research No. 222 I.C.

He is a pioneer and remains one of the main promoters in Ireland of the internet as a new working tool for masonic education.

If you are interested in further study and reading, here are a few links to most instructive websites and electronic media dedicated to Irish Freemasonry, for which Brother Bob Bashford deserves to be warmly congratulated.

Irish Masonic History and the Jewels of Irish Freemasonry

<http://www.irishmasonichistory.com/>

The Gift of Irish Freemasonry

<https://vimeo.com/18669439>

Lodge of Research No.200 I.C.

<https://www.irish-freemasonry.org.uk/>

Royal Arch Chapter of Research No. 222 I.C

<http://www.royal-arch.irish-freemasonry.org.uk/>

Grand Council of Knight Masons

<http://www.knight-masons.com/knight-masonry/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Knight-Masons-Information-108810901257/>

Irish Freemasons

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/IrishFreemasons>

Bob Bashford

<https://www.facebook.com/robert.bashford.18>

<https://www.icom.fm/en/lecturer/bashford-robert/>

Irish Mason

<https://www.facebook.com/irish.mason.3>

Grand Lodge of Ireland

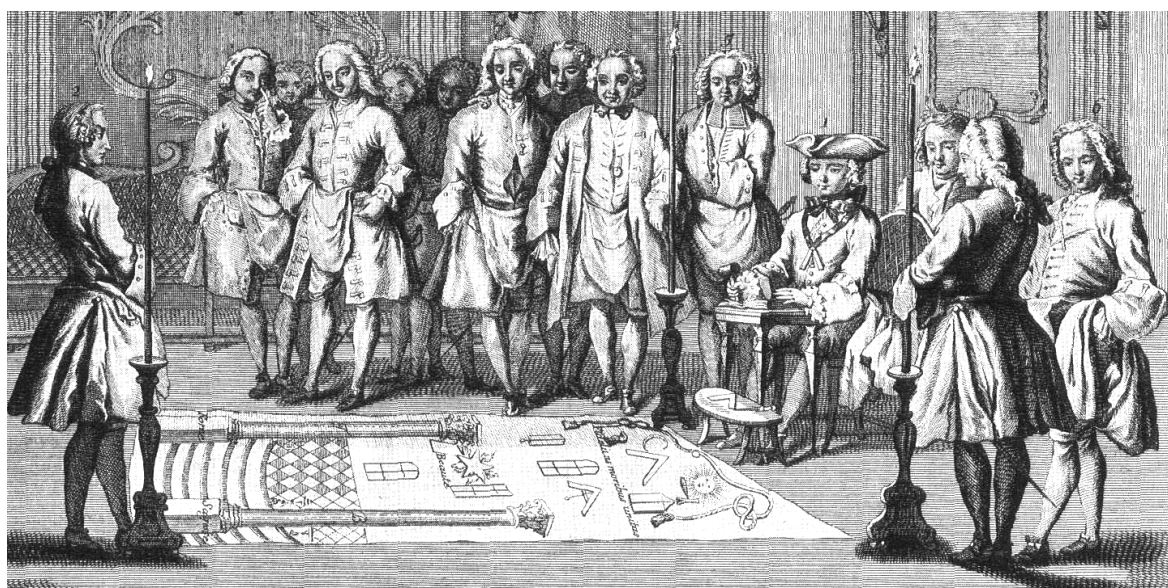
<https://freemason.ie/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Grand-Lodge-of-Ireland-804163436339931/?ref=bookmarks>

Sphinx Lodge

<http://www.sphinxlodge.org/index.htm>

Last but not least, I need to mention the generalised masonic use of “Whatsapp” and “zoom” as two new and immediately accepted working tools by Freemasons in Sri Lanka



So, yes indeed, the Masonic tracing board, used as a teaching aid in earlier times, is an item that, in Irish masonry at least, had disappeared already over 200 hundred years ago

## Irish military lodges played a major role in the expansion of Freemasonry in the world.

### Irish Warrants.

In 1727 the present Lodge No. 2 of Dublin and other ancient Irish Lodges came under the jurisdiction of Grand Lodge, although their warrants were not issued until five years later.

In 1730 John Pennell, who was to succeed Griffith as G. Secretary two years later, published his Constitutions - "for the use of the Lodges" of Ireland. This volume is partly, but not exclusively, based on Anderson.

The oldest Grand Lodge warrant in the world, that now held by Lodge No. 1, Cork, was issued in 1731 to a Lodge in Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, most probably for the household of Lord Kingston. This vellum document ante-dated by 23 years the first Warrant known to have been issued by the G.L. of England. In fact the practice of issuing Lodge warrants, now adopted by every Grand Lodge in the world, certainly started with the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

The Grand Lodge of Ireland was the first to issue ambulatory warrants to regiments of the British Army, and "in all the great campaigns which extended throughout the British Empire in the 18th Century somewhere among the baggage of the army there was sure to be a Lodge chest containing an Irish warrant." (Lepper and Crossle) In 1768 Army Lodges were exempted from payment of annual dues, but in 1813 they came forward voluntarily with an offer to pay 10s. 10d. each while serving in the British Isles, and this offer was accepted.

Later, in 1825, they were subjected to the same dues as other lodges.

After the Battle of Waterloo the Military Lodges began to die out, although there are five still working under the Irish Constitution and in 1932 the Grand Lodge actually met on English Soil under Lord Donoughmore in person

\* These are the 1st King's Dragoon Guards, No. 571 (1923): the 417th Royal Dragoon Guards, No. 295 (1758): the 5th Royal Inpiskilling Dragoon Guards, No. 570 (1788): the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, No. 646 (1932) and the Woreestershire Regiment, No. 322 (1769). At the present time an attempt is being made to revive the dormant lodge in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infaðtry, No. 227. (see p.195). for the constitution of Leswarree Lodge, No. 646, in the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars. This took place at Farnborough.

### Irish Freemasonry in Sri Lanka before Sphinx Lodge

In "100 years of Freemasonry in Sri Lanka" published in 2001 for the centenary of the inauguration of the Victoria Masonic Temple, we read : "The first Irish Lodge was Orange Lodge No. 51 I.C., with a warrant dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1761.

While it is true that there is an extant Masonic certificate issued in Colombo in 1802 by Orange Lodge, the number of this Lodge is not 51, which refers to the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment to which the lodge was attached, but No. 94 on the roll of the English Register (Antients). To add to the confusion it should be noted that there is also trace of Orange Lodge No. 274 S.C. attached to the same 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, and active in Colombo at the same time. There is no Orange Lodge under the Irish Constitution.

The chronology of pre-1861 Irish Freemasonry in Sri Lanka is as follows

- 1802 Lodge No. 863 – 89<sup>th</sup> Foot. 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers
- 1817 Lodge No. 227.- 46<sup>th</sup> Foot. 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
- 1820 Lodge No. 83. – 83<sup>rd</sup> Foot. 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. Ulster Rifles
- 1821 Lodge No. 62 - St. Thomas and St. James
- 1858 Lodge No. 58 – 50<sup>th</sup> Foot. Queen's Own Royal West Kent



All the Irish lodges in Sri Lanka during this first period were military lodges.

**The constitution of Sphinx Lodge** in 1861 marked the event of the first non military Irish Lodge in Sri Lanka and would be followed in the years to come by several more civilian lodges, while one by one the Irish regiments left the island together with their ambulatory lodges.

The name **Sphinx** was chosen, as a token of esteem and regard for the Queen's Own Lodge, No. 58, whence **Sphinx Lodge** emanated, and as a compliment to the 50th Regiment, which greatly distinguished itself in Egypt, and bears the **Sphinx** as the leading badge on the colors of the Regiment.

## Ceremonies and rituals

Men serving in the Dutch and British forces during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were nearly exclusively professionals, who would enter in the career as young men and spend their whole life with it till retirement age.

High mortality was part of the known dangers to which these men were permanently exposed. Regiments were sent on military campaigns throughout the empire, they were being moved all over the face of the earth. Every soldier knew he could die or be wounded in combat. Losses on the field of battle were staggering.

Apart from that, there were the added risks of sickness and death by disease as the result of a lifestyle that by today's standards would be considered terrible.



Hygiene, diet, clothing, were poorly adapted to the different climates and environments where the regiments were stationed. Overcrowded and badly ventilated quarters were the norm. Hard drinking was a long established tradition. Alcoholism was rampant. Medical facilities and medication were primitive.

A visit to colonial cemeteries in Sri Lanka and reading the tomb inscriptions can be most instructive.

Brethren who were members of military lodges had little room for personal effects as the standard luggage allowance provided only for the individual army kitbag.

Lodge paraphernalia were kept in a army chest that would follow the regiment.

In the general absence of books, manuals and written documents, particularly among members of military lodges in distant countries, Masonic ceremonies and rituals had to be memorised, but the wording did not have to be letter perfect. Also, the ritual was limited to the opening and the closing of the lodge, and to the reception in the several degrees. The pattern of the ritual in these days was short and simple: entrance, perambulation, obligation, secrets and charge.

Estimated duration : half an hour



The full communication of the mysteries and secrets of Freemasonry, or in other words masonic instruction was not done in the lodge at the same time of the degree work, but on separate occasions by aid of catechisms, in imitation of the traditional Church teaching methods. Catechisms follow a dialogue or question-and-answer format, which calls upon two parties to participate, a master and a student.

The symbols and allegories of Freemasonry were further explained by the aid of painted floor cloths or carpets, which would be rolled and kept safely in the lodge chest between lodge meetings.

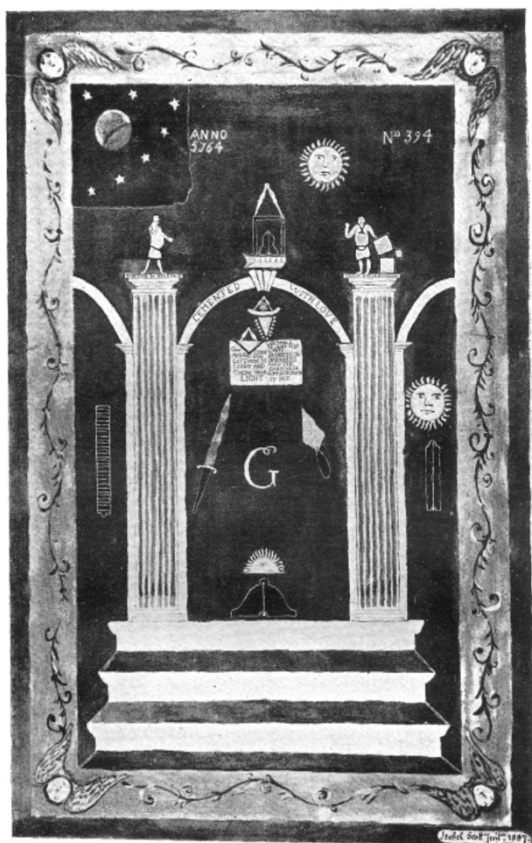
Splendid 18<sup>th</sup> century hand painted coloured floor cloths used by Irish lodges form the so-called "Crossle Collection" kept at Freemasons' Hall, Dublin and entrusted to the custody of the Lodge of Research No. CC under the Grand Lodge of Ireland

Floor cloths and tracing boards are no longer used in Irish Lodges, but they are definitely worth studying as they illustrate the rich symbolism of Irish Freemasonry, demonstrating that in the old days, degrees beyond the craft were also conferred in Lodge.

Despite the present availability of unprecedented access to knowledge for all in the history of mankind, Masonic ritual and symbolism remain the privileged and preferred paths to discover the mysteries and secrets of the Royal Art.

Only when we accept to learn and study Freemasonry with humility, patience and perseverance, only when we put into practice its moral lessons, by the example of our own conduct, can we hope to receive that Light from above which will enable us to understand the deeper meaning of the symbols and allegories of Freemasonry.

## What about the future of Freemasonry ?



Far too often Masons look back with nostalgia to the past glory of the Masonic order and they study its history, as if Freemasonry was already a dead institution.

While many old lodges surrender their warrants, more and more museums are including sections where masonic artefacts and documents are on display.

The principles which made Freemasonry strong in the past three centuries and enabled it to spread over the two hemispheres are still valid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If we look back 250 years ago, we observe that our fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers and more distant ancestors had to adjust to ever changing times and conditions of life.

The masonic rituals and ceremonies were modernised, step by step, but always without touching at the landmarks or basic principles of our Fraternity.

It is now our turn, to reflect on the future of our ancient venerable Institution.

Since we are unable to force outsiders to join Freemasonry, or even coerce Brethren to attend lodge meetings, there is no point for the rulers of the Lodge to complain about the lack of commitment of the newer members, to become upset at the unwillingness of Brethren to follow traditions the justification of which they cannot understand or to expect them always to be obedient on the sole basis of a symbolic authority vested in the Masonic hierarchy.

The questions are :

How should we render our lodge meetings worth attending ?

How can we make Masonic membership interesting and attractive ?

How can we do that while remaining faithful to the tenets and landmarks of the Order ?

What do we need to do in order that worthy men in Sri Lanka will increasingly apply to join Freemasonry and become faithful and enthusiastic Brothers ?

There is no doubt that the new high-tech gadgets, even if their sudden growth and general use has unexpectedly resulted as one of the side effects of covid-19, are to stay after the victory over the deadly pandemic and are bound to become powerful 21<sup>st</sup> century working tools to communicate easily among the Brethren and to dispense better Masonic education.

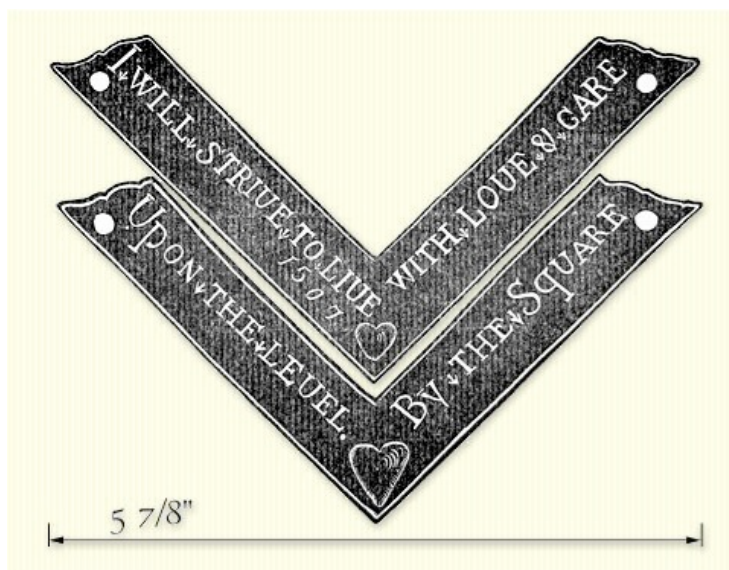
The original practical purpose for the operative Master Builder of the tracing board was to enable him to draw the plan of his projected building, without which none of stupendous edifices erected hundreds or thousands of years ago could have been built.

While technology and methods may change over the centuries and the traditional tracing board, pencil and skirret are being replaced by Powerpoint, Whatasapp, Zoom and other tools, the deep message and content of Freemasonry remains unchanged.

Our Masonic rituals and ceremonies, illustrated by symbols and legends, so expressive, remind us how important and how essential it is to design and plan meticulously whatever we intend to do, if we hope to make our dreams come true in the short span of our life here.

Freemasonry regards the whole human species as one family - the high and the low, the rich and the poor, who, as created by one almighty Father, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other. Demanding the highest integrity from its members, Freemasonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion; and causes true and disinterested friendship to exist among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

On this principle we are enjoined, always and wherever we are, to practice the moral virtues and never to lose sight of the tenets of our Fraternity : Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.



***“I will strive to live  
with Love and Care  
upon the Level  
by the Square”  
1507.***

A heart appears in each angle

THE  
**ASIATIC JOURNAL**  
AND  
*MONTHLY REGISTER*

FOR  
British India and its Dependencies :

—  
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BOOKSELLERS TO THE HONOURABLE EAST-INDIA COMPANY,  
LEADENHALL STREET.

—  
1823.



**ST. PATRICK'S DAY.**

We comply with pleasure with the request of a correspondent at Kandy, in inserting the following account of the festivities at that station on St. Patrick's day.

Monday, the 17th March, the anniversary of Erin's tutelar saint was observed at Kandy, by the sons of the Emerald Isle, in the true spirit of Irish hospitality.

Long before the "harbinger's note," the approach of day was proclaimed by the band of the 16th regiment, and the national air of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," was heard in every street and lane of the "city of kings."

The brethren of the Lodge of Taprobane having decided on laying the first stone of their Masonic Hall on this festival, aroused to work by the musical summons, were, shortly after gun-fire, perceived moving in procession, headed by the band playing the march "*Come let us prepare*," and on reaching the site whereon they proposed to build, having thrice viewed it, masonically, the prayer and benediction was solemnly and impressively pronounced over the stone, and the ceremony of scattering and pouring out the corn, wine, and oil, performed by three brethren of the order of Knights Templar, in due costume, and armed: sacred hymns being played at intervals, and "God save the King," at the conclusion.

The brethren having returned in order, and closed their Lodge, a very neat *déjeuner* attracted the attention of the early risers, and the party joyously partook thereof.

No care for the morrow seem'd to hang o'er the  
No chagrin "; regret—but for *praities gallore*.  
For the hope to revisit the land of his sire, -  
Cheer'd each as he thought of the whiskey and lyre. -

The staff mess-room and an adjacent quarter were fitted up in the Cingalese style of ornament for the ball and supper. At the east and west entrances of the former were two transparencies: one representing a crown and harp, with a distant view of a commercial port and city; the other "The star of St. Patrick." -

A numerous party of ladies and gentlemen having assembled at an early hour of the evening, dancing commenced at nine o'clock, and continued till twelve, when a supper was announced, which in truth did great credit to the stewards and provèdor.

The toasts enumerated below were given, and enthusiastically drunk, and the scene was much enlivened by the melodies of an officer of acknowledged celebrity, no less for his musical taste than for comic powers.

The dance was resumed after supper, and slackened not till three 'clock, most of the amateurs of Vestris' art having alertly obeyed the first command of the ladies; but it being the custom of the country, and an Irishman's privilege on such a day, although "he loves all that is lovely," some of old Erin's choicest songs ("small blame to their gallantry"), could not be moved from the veritable poteen, but kept it up till

"Shelah's day in the morning."

*First Toast.*

“ The glorious and immortal memory of St. Patrick.” Tune – St. Patrick’s Day.—Song by Mr. Henly, “ St. Patrick was a Gentleman, and he came from dacent People.”

*Second Toast.*

“ The Emerald Isle " Tune—The Exile of Erin. Song by Capt. Walton, “Strike the Harp.”

*Third Toast.*

“The King, God bless him.”—God save the King.  
Walton, “ The Chapter of Kings.”

*Fourth Toast.*

“ The Ladies who have honoured us this evening with their company.” Tune—  
Here's a health to all good Lasses. Song by Mr. Henly, “Young Lochin Var.”

*Fifth Toast.*

By Mr. Sawers. “To the Sons of Hibernia, who have this night given the most signal proof of their national hospitality and chivalrous gallantry.”

This was drank with the most enthusiastic applause, and nine times nine.

Thus in the City of Kings have the children of Caledonia and Hibernia evinced their attachment to the land which gave them birth ; and we trust that the example will not be lost on the sons of St. George.— [*Ceylon Gov. Gaz. March 22.*

Asiatic Journal Vol. XVI., page 613.

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*Asiatic Journ.*—No. 96.

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—[*Ceylon Gov. Gaz.* March 22.

## SUMATRA.—JAVA.

Among the last accounts from Batavia, there is a very long report respecting the dissensions which, so long ago as 1819, broke out in the west coast of Sumatra, between the natives of the upper districts of Padang, relative to religious opinions, so that some chiefs of the kingdom of Manangkabang concluded with our Resident at Padang a convention, by which they ceded their country to the government of the Netherlands, on condition that the inhabitants of those countries should be protected from the attacks of their turbulent neighbours called Padrees. The result was, the occupation of the ceded districts, but by no means the submission of the Padrees, who on the contrary became so obstinate, that on the 30th of April 1821, measures were taken to endeavour to drive them from their villages, situated in the