

## Sir Christopher Wren and Freemasonry: New Evidence.

By Bros, Bernard Williamson and Michael Baigent Summer 1996,

A search through the archives of the Royal Society has provided new information regarding the claim that Sir Christopher Wren was initiated into freemasonry in London on 18<sup>th</sup>, May 1691. This claim was advanced in a handwritten note added to the manuscript of John Aubrey's *Naturall Historic of Wiltshire*, 1685 now in the Bodleian library Oxford. This manuscript is in two parts, bound and filed separately as *MS AUBREY 1* and *MS AUBREY 2*. In the second part a short account of freemasonry appears:

"Sr. William Dugdale told me many years since, that about Henry the third's time, the Pope gave a bull, or diploma ['patents' added above] to a company of Italian Architects ['Freemasons' added above] to travel up and down and over Europe, to build churches. From those derived the Fraternity of Free masons [adopted masons added above]. They are known to one and another by certain signes & ['markes' erased] and watch words: it continues to this day. They have severall Lodges in severall Countries for their reception: and when any of them fall into decay, the brotherhood is to relieve him & c. The manner of their adoption is very formal, and with an oath of secrecy,"

The page to the left of this account was original left blank and on this at some later time, were added three additional notes in Aubrey's hand. One of these notes concerns Freemasonry, It reads,

"MDM, this day ( may 1691 the 18<sup>th</sup>. Being Monday after Rogation Sunday) is a great convention at St, Pauls' church of the fraternity of the Accepted[ 'free' being struck out] masons where sr. Christopher Wren is to be adopted a brother: and Sr. Henry Goodric,, of ye tower, & diveres ['severall' being struck out] others - and there have been kings, that have been of this —Sodalitie,"

Of those who have studied the text, Clarke in *ARS Quatour Coronatorum* , 1965, concluded that Wren was "almost certainly<sup>2</sup> a freemason, John Hamill, in 1986, in his book *THE CRAFT*, is more cautious, concluding that however possible it might be, "it is not proven". As we will show, the text can now be accorded a greater degree of veracity. To understand this it is necessary to look at the history of John Aubrey's manuscript.

### **John Aubrey's Manuscript.**

John Aubrey (1626-97) was one of the founder members of the Royal Society, being recorded in the list of Fellows 20<sup>th</sup>, May 1663, In 1685 he wrote his *Natwall Historic of Wiltshire*, It was never published but remained in manuscript. However, the Royal Society so admired his work, and felt that it was of such value to Fellows, that an official copy was ordered and made for the societies archives in order that Fellows would not have to travel to Oxford to consult it. Dr. Michael Hunter, in his biography of John Aubrey wrote:

Above all, the Royal Society did Aubrey the honour of having a transcript made of his *Naturall Historic of Wiltshire* in 1690-1, a unique and extraordinary gesture showing their esteem for it, which cost them the considerable sum of seven pounds.(£832.64 in 2001)

This copy was made by the Clerk to the Royal Society, Mr. B G Cramer who began the task in 1690 and completed it in mid 1691. This copy is still in the archives of the Royal Society as *MISC. Ms 92*, and it runs to 373 pages.

When Cramer was ordered to produce this copy Aubrey took the opportunity to make many additions and emendations and he oversaw their inclusion into the new text. This is indicated by a short note, in Aubrey's hand, attached to folio 124a, of part two of the original manuscript: Aubrey writes, referring to a printed pamphlet on wool which has been appended:

" Mr Cramer! As to this Treatise of wooll, transcribe only the presentment of the grand jury at Brewton in Somersetshire"

When Aubrey had written the original manuscript he had written only on the first page of each leaf. In consequence, a blank page appears to the left of each page of text. On this blank page are written the additions and emendations relating to the text on the right. It can be supposed that all these changes were made for the purpose of Cramer's new copy, but we cannot be absolutely certain of this. We can say however, that Cramer included them in his new copy. In his copy, Cramer included the following in the main body of text:

"Memorandum, This day ( may the 18<sup>th</sup>, Being Munday 1691 after Rogation Sunday) is a great convention at St. Paul's church of the fraternity of the Adopted Masons: where Sr, Christopher Wren is to be adopted a Brother: and Sr. Henry Goodric,... of the tower & divers others. There have been Kings, that have been of this Sodality," We can, therefore, accept that Aubrey, Wren and the Royal Society agreed with this addition citing Wren's initiation into Freemasonry, It seems reasonable to accept it as a truthful statement.

John Aubrey was a close friend of Sir Christopher Wren, Both were in the Royal Society, Wren had been a founder member of the Royal Society and served as president from 1680-2, He was still alive and active in the society in 1691, the date of Cramer's copy. It has been suggested that perhaps Wren intended to be initiated but on the day he was unable to attend. However, on the 18<sup>th</sup>, May 1691, the date of the initiation and the date of the additional text relating to Freemasonry, Cramer would have still been working on earlier pages of his copy. Given that the date is written on the day in question and that Cramer Copied this page at a later date, *after the fact*, there was ample time to amend the text to reflect any variation on the planned event. That this was not done is good evidence that Wren did not miss his 'adoption'. In Conclusion, given that none of these men objected to this statement, nor altered it after the event but prior to the copying, we can accept that it records a real occurrence. We can be confident that Sir Christopher Wren was indeed initiated into Freemasonry in 1691. We should like to thank the librarian and staff of both the Royal Society and the Bodleian Library for their help in making these manuscripts available to us.