

## Reverend, Genealogist and Freemason

How should we imagine James Anderson? The English historian John Dickie describes him in his book "The Freemasons" as "the epitome of a Scottish Freemason: a red-haired, maladjusted clergyman (...)." Be that as it may, the author of the "Constitutions" was a committed contemporary whose life cannot be limited to Masonry alone, and experienced many vicissitudes.

James Anderson was born around 1680 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the son of John Anderson, a master glazier and high-ranking Freemason. In 1705- 1709 he attended Marischal College in his native city and shortly afterwards was appointed by the Church of Scotland to preach in the Presbyterian congregation of his home town.

"Bishop Anderson"

In 1710 the Church of Scotland appointed him pastor to the Scottish people in Westminster, London. He preached first at Glass House Street and then at the French Protestant Chapel in Swallow Street, Picadilly. From 1734 until his death in 1739 he ministered at Lisle Street Chapel, Leicester Square. He lived in a house opposite-

Did Anderson's contribution merely constitute "Masonic folklore"? (Photo © Wikimedia) above St James's Church, Picadilly.

The Gentleman's Magazine described him as "well known among the people" and noted that he was called "Bishop Anderson" by his congregation - a title, it should be noted, that he could never claim. The magazine adds that he was "a learned but imprudent man who lost a considerable portion of his property in the fatal year of 1720." In the bankruptcy of the South Sea Company, Anderson lost a lot of money. He is said to have been thrown into debtor's prison as a result and suffered financial hardship until his death. The widow he married was also largely penniless.

Anderson was a "dissenter". This was the term used in connection with the church reforms of the 16th to 18th centuries to describe Protestants who separated from the Anglican state church and formed their own congregations. Nevertheless, the Reverend had a good relationship with the authorities; Queen Caroline is said to have granted him a pardon.

Historical research

Anderson preached the sermon "No King-Killers" in 1715, on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I. It was an impassioned defence of the way Presbyterians had behaved during the Civil Wars. The text even went through a second edition.

In 1732 Anderson published his Royal Genealogies; or the Genealogical Tables of Emperors, Kings, and Princes, from Adam to these times. Although not in its entirety, certain parts of the book are of historical value. Although Anderson relied on the "Genealogical Tables" of the German pedagogue and writer Johann Hübner (1668-1731), his achievement should not be underestimated thanks to his diligence. He had worked on this work for seven years. It was withdrawn from circulation. In 1742, a new edition was published without the offending passages. The accusation that they were myths remained. In 1739, shortly after Anderson's death, News from Elysium, or Dialogues of the Dead, between Leopold, Roman Emperor, and Louis XIV, King of France, was published.

The Freemason

Anderson had very probably already become a Freemason in Scotland. He was not involved in the founding of the Grand Lodge at the Ale House at the Goose and Gridiron in June 1717. The lodges of Horne Tavern, Westminster, and Solomon's Temple, Hemmings Row, listed him in 1723 and 1725 respectively. If Anderson is followed, the Grand Master, the Duke of Montagu, had commissioned him in the Grand Lodge to edit the "Old Gothic Con-

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Anderson writes in the preface with regard to himself as an author: it is "all about facts and the full truth: thus he lets every nation enjoy its own faith."

Anderson's last work is entitled "A Genealogical History of the House of Yvery, in different branches of Yvery, Lovel, Perceval, and Gournay". The first volume was published in 1732, the second appeared gradually and was by a different author. His disparaging remarks about the English aristocracy and the Irish people soon led to the work being withdrawn from the stitutions. Today, it is argued that J.T. Desaguliers, the Deputy Grand Master, and Grand Master George Payne, among others, introduced the Enlightenment ideas and that Anderson's contribution was merely "Masonic folklore".

When a committee of 14 brethren agreed, not without debate, the work was ready in January 1723. The Post boy announced it the following February and it went on sale. The preface was dedicated to the Duke of Montagu, and Desaguliers had signed it. In 1738, the second, altered edition appeared. But the first edition had already led to controversy. It was not until 1735 that Anderson seems to have re-entered the Masonian public sphere.

Satire and a loveless Dr. Earl

The English painter and graphic artist William Hogarth (1697- 1764), caricaturist avant la lettre, was himself a Freemason, but made fun of his brethren in a drastic way. His depiction of a drunken master of the chair ("The Night") is still famous today. Anderson also got his share: on the sheet "Secret of the Freemasons", the Emperor of China and his Ge.folge lead a ritual. The author of the "Constitutions" wears a white apron, has his head between two ladder rungs and tries to kiss the backside of an old woman. The whole thing is a satire on the annual procession of masons through the streets of London and on Anderson's thesis that Royal Art had already taken its starting point with Adam.

On 2 June 1739, the Daily Post read: "Last night the body of Dr Anderson, a Dissident clergyman, was laid to rest at Bunhill. The bier was carried by five Dissenters and the Reverend Desaguliers. It was followed by about a dozen Masons who surrounded the grave. After Dr. Earl had delivered a speech on the uncertainty of life, without mentioning the deceased by a word, the Brethren raised their arms in a solemn mourning position, sighed and struck their skins three times in honour of the deceased."

Thomas Müller