

Why is Freemasonry so Secret in Britain? By Mike Martin, July 2001.

“So why do you belong to that secret society?” is a question I get asked once in a while. When I reply “which “secret society” is that then?” You get the “you know, the Masons” accompanied by twitching and “over the shoulder” looks. Sometimes it seems that every one who isn’t a Freemason seems to believe that Freemasonry’s “secret” status swings between wild theories of “New World Orders”, “12 foot lizard men” and “silly old men dressed up in pinnies, tweaking each others’ nipples in the dark”.

There were 12 years between the time of deciding that I wanted to be one and actually becoming a Freemason. During that time, I read many books about Freemasonry, written by both Freemasons and non-Masons alike, that clearly indicated (to me at least) that although it was definitely a “private” body, it was only “secret” in some people’s minds. However, even this privacy appeared to be at odds with the historical accounts that I had read about the Craft’s place in Society, the fact that members tended to be looked upon as “Pillars of Society” and, of course, that the Grand Master (top Freemason in England and Wales) was actually a member of the Royal Family.

Shortly after my initiation into Freemasonry I noticed that some members of my lodge were wearing a badge in the shape of a little blue flower. However, when I asked them what it was (thinking it was, maybe a “secret” symbol) and what it meant I received non-committal replies about it being a “Forget-Me-Not” and “having something to do with German Freemasons during the War”. I decided to find out what this flower was all about, the search into the history of that little emblem has opened up to me, a distinctly horrifying time during the history of Freemasonry. It has also helped me to understand how Freemasonry gained its “secret” reputation here in the UK in answer to the threat from National Socialist or “Nazi” Germany and I also hope that my writing about it will help other newcomers to the Craft when quizzed in the same vein. My first clue to the violations committed against Freemasonry across Europe in those dark days came when I bought one of these badges and read the “potted” history that is supplied with it. However, having now looked further into the events surrounding the rise to power of the Nazis and their fellow “**Axis Powers**”, it strikes me that most knowledge of this persecution of Freemasonry is centred on the events within Germany itself. This is obviously due to the story of the same “Forget-Me-Not” emblem having now passed into Masonic lore, however that persecution was felt Europe-wide.

Of course it is right that the anti-Jewish outrages committed by the Nazis are common historical fare. However, mainstream historians appear to be unaware of the systematic defilement of Freemasonry, considered by Hitler and his Nazi Party as well as his Axis allies to be at best a tool of the Jewish conspiracy and at worst a full-blown partner in it. These actions against Freemasonry will probably ever remain consigned to the periphery of 20th Century history, due to the unfathomable evil and magnitude of the other events occurring at that time, however, I have written a brief pen picture for those who are interested to know.

The story really begins towards the end of the First World War, against the backdrop of growing unease and fear caused by the slow but inexorable rise of several totalitarian governments (which were to form the basis of the Axis Coalition) which were gaining control across Europe as well as further afield. Hitler, Mussolini and Franco all inaugurated their reigns with outrages against Freemasonry and it seems that they never relaxed their respective persecutions of the Craft. The conquest of nations by Nazi Germany and the other Axis Powers appears to have always been followed by hostile measures against Freemasonry. From Norway to the Balkans, the progress of the black Swastika trawled hate, vandalism and death in its wake.

USSR: In 1917, as one of their first acts, the Bolsheviks dissolved all Masonic Lodges in Russia. Any attempts to re-establish Russian Freemasonry met with the mandate of the 4th Congress of the Communist International in Moscow which required all Communist Freemasons to sever their lodge membership. They could not be considered for important posts in the new “reign” until at least two years after their severance. In 1925 Telepneff wrote, "regular Masonic activities of every description have ceased in Russia proper, due to the severe restrictions imposed by Bolshevik authorities." (At the time of writing this paper Russian Freemasonry has only just started to re-establish itself.)

Finland: Tsar Alexander 1 had already forbidden secret societies (including Freemasonry) in Finland in 1822. As a result Freemasonry had only just started to re-appear in Finland during the 1920s under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of New York with the Grand Lodge of Finland established in 1924. At the outbreak of the War, Finland declared its neutrality. The USSR, however, demanded that Finland cede certain territory. When the Finns refused, Soviet forces invaded in November 1939. During this “Winter War” the Grand Lodge decided to close down its activities. When Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941, the Finns again proclaimed “neutrality”, however, German use of Finnish territory led the USSR to bomb Finnish cities.

Italy: Mussolini went about the business of destroying the Craft in Italy. Having established his regime, he attempted to destroy the influence of Freemasonry and its lodges as he saw it. In 1924, Mussolini decreed that every member of his Fascist Party who was a Freemason must abandon one or the other organisation. General Cappello, one of the most prominent Fascists, who had held the post of Deputy Grand Master of the Grande Oriente of Italy, gave up membership in Fascism rather than betray his masonic ideals. He paid dearly for his loyalty, less than a year later, he was charged with complicity in an attempt on Mussolini's life and he was sentenced to thirty years in prison. In the summer of 1925 Mussolini officially dissolved Italian Freemasonry. In an open letter to Il Duce, the Grand Master of the Grande Oriente, Domizio Torrigiani, had the courage to stand up for democracy and freedom of thought. The price he paid for this stand was exile to the Lipari Islands. Hundreds of other prominent Freemasons were also exiled with him. At the peak of the anti-masonic agitation, in 1925-27, Blackshirt hooligans looted the homes of well-known Freemasons in Milan, Florence and other cities, and murdered at least 100 of them.

Spain: The Fascists were gaining more power across central Europe and Freemasonry was being targetted in most countries under their control. In 1925, Spain's first dictator, General Primo de Rivera, ordered the abolition of Freemasonry in his country. Then the rebellion of 1936 caused a civil war and in the territories held by General Franco, Freemasons and trade unionists were being arrested and executed. Some researchers claim that a large percentage of the 75,000 death toll of this conflict were Freemasons. In 1937 General Franco claimed that “*Freemasonry with all its international influence is the organisation responsible for the political ruin of Spain*”. In March of 1940 Franco banned Freemasonry and decreed that it was a felony to be a Freemason or to exhort the principles of Freemasonry. He further ordered all of its money and properties to be confiscated. All freemasons in “good standing” (this included those who officials felt had resigned to protect themselves) were now criminals and were sentenced automatically to twelve years in prison. Those who had received degrees above the 18th or Grand Officers looked forward to more than the statutory 12 years as they were considered to have “aggravated circumstances”. All freemasons were required to turn themselves in to the Authorities within 2 months of the decree, those that worked in government or public jobs were immediately sacked. However, Freemasons who agreed to

give the names of their superiors, the Officers involved in their initiation or even just other Freemasons were treated less harshly.

The Third Reich: Hitler was a minor war hero after being wounded twice during the Great War. His paranoia about Freemasonry first surfaced in his book "Mein Kampf" ("My Struggle") which he began writing in prison in 1924 where he was serving a 5 year sentence for the crime of Sedition as a result of the failed "Beer Hall Putsch" in Munich in November 1923. In the book he clearly demonstrated his antagonism towards international Judaism as well as listing Freemasonry as one of its tools. In the book he blames the German loss of WWI on a Marxist conspiracy due to the 1917/8 General Strike. He concluded that it was a Judaeo/Masonic/Bolshevik conspiracy to prevent Germany from gaining its rightful position in World affairs. This is how Hitler viewed Freemasonry, in his own words taken from Mein Kampf, Chapter 11, Race and People:

"The propaganda which the freemasons had carried on among the so-called intelligentsia, whereby their pacifist teaching paralysed the instinct for national self-preservation, was now extended to the broad masses of the workers and bourgeoisie by means of the Press, which was almost everywhere in Jewish hands."

"The Jew realized that in his efforts to reach the position of public despot he would need a 'peace-maker.' And he thought he could find a peace-maker if he could whip-in sufficient extensive sections of the bourgeois. But the freemasons failed to catch the glove-manufacturers and the linen-weavers in the frail meshes of their net. And so it became necessary to find a grosser and withal a more effective means. Thus another weapon beside that of freemasonry would have to be secured. This was the Press."

"In order to strengthen his (the Jew) political position, he directed his efforts towards removing the barrier of racial and civic discrimination which had hitherto hindered his advance at every turn. With characteristic tenacity he championed the cause of religious tolerance for this purpose; and in the freemason organization, which had fallen completely into his hands, he found a magnificent weapon which helped him to achieve his ends. Government circles, as well as the higher sections of the political and commercial bourgeoisie, fell a prey to his plans through his manipulation of the masonic net, though they themselves did not even suspect what was happening."

General Erich Ludendorff, (who was, incidentally, one of Hitler's heroes and co-offenders in 1923) was the German military leader responsible for Germany's submarine warfare successes during WWI and a leading light in the Nazi Party. After 1918 he appears to have spent most of his time trying to prove that Germany's WWI defeat and the following revolution were due to Freemasonry. He published the book "The Destruction of Freemasonry through the Revelation of its Secrets" in 1924 condemning and supposedly exposing its secrets. In his own words: "**Masonry brings its members into conscious subjection to the Jews..... it trains them to become venal Jews.... German Masonry is a branch of organized international Masonry, the headquarters of which are in New York.... there also is the seat of Jewish world power....**" and "*It is cheating the people to fight the Jew while allowing his auxiliary troop, Freemasonry to function*".

One of the first official actions made by Hermann Goering in his capacity as Prime Minister of Prussia, when the Nazis took over power in 1934, was a decree dissolving masonic Grand

Lodges it included the statement that "*in National Socialist Germany there is no place for Freemasonry*".

In 1935 shortly after Hitler's brutal rise to power in Germany, it became evident that Freemasonry itself was in very real danger as he outlawed all masonic organisations not under the direct control of the Third Reich and dissolved the ten German Grand Lodges. He declared that all masonic lodges had engaged in subversive acts against the state, confiscated all lodge properties. Many prominent dignitaries and members of the Order were sent to concentration camps. The Gestapo seized membership lists of the Grand Lodges and looted libraries and collections of masonic objects. (Much of this masonic "loot" went on to form the basis of Goebbels' "Anti-Masonic Exposition" held in Munich in 1937, it even included completely furnished masonic temples.) The Nazi Party ordered the words "Freemason" and "Lodge" to be discontinued and international Masonic relations to cease. The irregular Grand Lodge of the Three Globes became the "National Christian Order of Frederick the Great." Dr. Otto Bordes, its "grand master" agreed that masonic ceremonial would not be practised, and members would not be made Freemasons. They worked several "degrees" based on the "Aryan" myth. According to some researchers, there were approximately 70,000 Freemasons of good standing in Germany at the time. It is rumoured that Eichmann "secretly" issued orders that every single one should be put to death. Needless to say, these rumours also claim that in the region of 65,000 German brethren met their untimely deaths on the strength of these orders and that the remaining 5,000 (as for some reason their names were not listed in the books of their Grand Lodge) escaped and went underground.

Austria succumbed (March 1938) to the power of the Third Reich, this persecution continued, the Masters of the various Vienna lodges were immediately arrested and deported to some of the most notorious concentration camps, including Dachau in Bavaria.

Czechoslovakia (March 1939), the same procedure was repeated when Nazis troops simply occupied Bohemia and Moravia, (they were armed with lodge listings compiled in 1938) making them a "protectorate" of the Reich. For good measure the Nazis also incited the Slovaks to declare their own independent fascist republic.

Poland (September 1939), Nazi forces had overrun most of western and central Poland. In the same month, Soviet troops invaded Poland from the east, and the two armies divided the country between them. Enormous reprisals were exacted against the Poles in the Nazi-occupied region including the usual dismantling of Freemasonry. In the Soviet-occupied area, many thousands of Poles were forcibly deported to Siberia, and many others were killed. Nazi forces occupied all of Soviet-held Poland during their attack on the USSR in 1941. During their occupation of the country, Nazi forces pursued a policy of systematic extermination of the Polish people, particularly Jews and Freemasons, many of whom perished at concentration camps scattered throughout the country.

The Netherlands (May 1940), immediately after conquering the Netherlands, Nazi forces started to liquidate the Order of Freemasons. Buildings, archives and funds were confiscated, private masonic belongings of brethren were requisitioned. Temples were literally destroyed with archives and libraries being sent to Germany, buildings and furniture sold by public auction. The Grand Master H. van Tongeren, was taken to Germany, and died only three months later in a prison camp.

Belgium (May 1940), the Nazis had compiled over 2,000 dossiers on Belgium Freemasons in preparation for their invasion. On completion they immediately ordered the dissolution of

masonic lodges. Three months later 82 crates of books, works of art and masonic furniture were seized from the lodges in Brussels, in all around 179 crates of masonic property were seized and shipped to Germany.

Norway (June 1940), Shortly after the defeat of the Norwegian army, the dissolution of masonic lodges was the first action on the agenda of Major Quisling.

France (June 1940) signed an armistice with the Nazis and the puppet Vichy government caused the two Masonic bodies of France, the Grand Orient and the Grenade Loge to be dissolved whilst, at the same time seizing their property and later selling it at auction. As with the earlier appropriations in Germany, some of this property will probably have formed the basis of the Anti-Freemason and anti-Jewish exhibition in the Petit Palais, Paris in 1942.

Greece (April 1941), many Greek Freemasons participated actively in the struggle on the Northern Epirus mountains and lodges in the cities were helping in any way they could. Two Freemasons, both its King and Prime Minister led the country at that time. Twenty one days after invasion, the Nazis reached Athens and one of their first actions was to go to the Masonic Hall, confiscate whatever records were left there and inflict serious damage to the property. (This fate was shared by the other masonic properties throughout the Country). The next step was to arrest the then Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Philotas Papageorgiou. He was taken to prison where he was kept under very harsh conditions, which caused irrevocable damage to his health and although he was released some seven months later, he never recovered and died in 1947.

Even the countries that remained outwardly independent or even allied with the Axis powers had to prove their support by taking equally harsh measures against Freemasonry within their borders.

Romania was initially neutral, however, its internal policies aligned it with the Axis powers and led to a policy of friendship towards Nazi Germany this included a prohibition on Freemasonry. In June 1940, without opposition from Germany, the Soviet Union occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. This was followed by a later German occupation, as Romania's oil pipelines were crucial to the Reich's energy supplies.

Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (April 1941), were also required to enact twin sets of laws (anti-Semitic and anti-masonic) in order to fully demonstrate their compliance with the Nazis. However, the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, at least, had already taken the decision to cease all masonic work in its lodges on 2 August 1940 and it remained dark until 23 June 1990.

Hungary (March 1944), Bela Kun had confiscated all industrial and commercial enterprises as communal property, banks were expropriated, a number of newspapers were banned and all masonic lodges were dissolved after he had proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat in March 1919. Hungary underwent several changes of government prior to the outbreak of WWII and although it proclaimed neutrality it appears to have been sympathetic to the Axis cause. This meant that when the Nazis occupied Hungary in 1944, no further activity was required against Freemasons, as they had never been allowed to resume their activities.

Britain: The United Grand Lodge of England suspended all masonic meetings in September of 1939 in response to the National Emergency. However, in December of that year the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge allowed meetings to resume but requested that all members of "ENEMY" nationality or birth should temporarily withdraw in the interests of

harmony. Meanwhile, the Axis powers were making in-roads into English society in the form of Oswald Mosely's British Union of Fascists and Spencer Leese's Imperial Fascist League. Both of these organisations produced anti-masonic and anti-Jewish propaganda as well as supplying intelligence to the Nazis in Germany.

Freemasons in Britain had only to look helplessly across the English Channel, to see the treatment of their brethren 25 miles away in France (some researchers estimate around 1,000 French Freemasons were deported to Nazi concentration camps). A little further away, but importantly a part of Britain, the island of Jersey in the Channel Islands was invaded after a night of heavy bombing on 29th June 1940 was invaded by Nazi force. Despite promises from the German commanders that Freemasons and masonic property were not at risk, the Masonic Temple was quickly ransacked and Masonic property (and allegedly some Freemasons) was either vandalised or shipped off to Germany for an Anti-Masonic exhibition to be carried out in Berlin the following year..

It comes as a surprise to many Freemasons when they learn that Nazi Intelligence (SS), in preparation for their anticipated invasion and occupation of Britain compiled a "Special Search List Great Britain" (Sonderfahndanglist G.B.). The list contained nearly 3,000 entries including names of prominent Freemasons as well as addresses of masonic buildings and companies that had dealings with Freemasons that would be singled out for special treatment upon completion of the invasion. Undoubtedly, this list will have included Sir Winston Churchill our Prime Minister at the time, as well as the Duke of Kent and King George VII. The existence of such a list clearly demonstrates that the Nazis would have followed their usual programme of suppression (or worse) if their invasion plans had come to fruition. Another little known fact is that whilst UGLE appears to have remained largely unaware (at least officially) of these sinister events, individual Freemasons were obviously aware of and worried by the events occurring in mainland Europe. Some had even gone as far as making the heart-rending decision to end the lives of themselves and their loved ones rather than to fall into the hands of the Nazis, if they landed on English soil.

I have not been able (to date) to find any specific references to treatment of Freemasons in other countries under Axis influence such as: Denmark (April 1940) fell to Nazi invasion forces and surrendered; Luxembourg (May 1940), also fell to Nazi invaders. The reigning Grand Duchess, Charlotte, subsequently established a government-in-exile in London; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: In June 1940, occupied by Soviet forces in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. On August 6, 1940, Estonia became a republic of the USSR. When Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941, Estonia was occupied by German troops.

Conclusions: This brief foray into those times cannot really begin to convey the full horror and fear that must have been felt by our brethren at the time. However, it does go some way to explaining why a "cloak of secrecy" was adopted by the Craft at a time when these dictators appeared to be unstoppable. At a time when it looked as if their plans might succeed and an invasion of Britain appeared imminent, with the attendant spectres of murder, imprisonment and social exclusion waiting in the wings for Freemasonry generally and even people with connections to it. Many have said that surely Freemasonry should have shrugged off this "cloak" shortly after 1946, however, that is to ignore that the World War was quickly followed by the rise of the Communist USSR and the attendant Cold War with all of the paranoia that it caused. The Communists were no more a friend to Freemasonry than the Nazis and Fascists and so the habit of "secrecy" continued well into the 1980s until it was becoming clear that the feared East-West hostilities were unlikely to take place and since the

“Fall of the Wall in 1989 followed by the break-up of the USSR many Eastern European Grand Lodges have re-established themselves. Sadly, well established habits can be hard to shake it off, even now nearly 60 years after the War was won and Nazism defeated. This has lead me to two conclusions:

The Forget-Me-Not badge should not just symbolise the resistance offered by German Freemasons during the dark times of the 30s and 40s against Nazi oppression but rather the efforts of Freemasons across Europe and Asia during the first half of the 20th Century. The ranks of those regimes oppressing the Craft has also included the Fascists, the Bolsheviks and the Communists. We should present one of these little flowers to every newly made mason, explaining that “Throughout the ages the darkest of evil has not been able to snuff out the light of Freemasonry, this tiny flower symbolises the fact that even extremist forces have no power against our tenets, namely, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth ”

We must continue to shake of this unnecessary secretiveness, the modern-day detractors of Freemasonry are snapping at the ankles of this grand old institution in an attempt to influence the public’s perception of it. On the whole their efforts appear to be meeting with success, to the point where our own Government has even attempted to compel all Freemasons in Public Service to register their membership as an interest likely (because of its obligations) to put them at risk of corruption or collusion. These people are trying to drag the reputation of our members and traditions to the level of clandestine criminality and in some cases are even attempting the destruction of Freemasonry. The conspiracy theorists making these wild accusations against the Craft are gaining in reputation and we appear to be losing the upper hand. These people are not going to simply go away and their accusations are neither benign nor trivial. It is having consequences for our membership right now and undoubtedly will continue to do so into the future unless we act. We must accept that action is required and begin to provide full and honest answers to these claims of wrong doing amongst our ranks, even if it is only to confirm the invalidity of the claims.

Mike Martin, 12th July 2001

Sources:

The “**Potted History**” supplied with Forget-Me-Not badges

“**Mein Kampf**”: Adolf Hitler

“**Fascist Attack**”: Freemasonry Today, Autumn 1997, by Matthew Scanlan

“**Pietre-Stone’s Review of Freemasonry**”: <http://users.iol.it/fjit.bvg/freemas.html>

“**The German Propaganda Archives**”: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/>

“**The Annihilation of Freemasonry**”: The American Mercury, Feb 1941 by Sven G. Lunden

“**The US Holocaust Memorial Museum**”: <http://www.ushmm.com/> Papers referring to Freemasonry It is worth noting that the US Holocaust Memorial Museum holds thousands of items of Nazi documentation detailing the joint procedures for investigating and dealing with Freemasons and Jews in the occupied countries. Records of the RSHA - Reichssicherheitshauptamt [Office of the High Command of Security Service pursuing the racial objectives of the SS through Race and Resettlement Office.

Addendum:

Poturgical