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Masonic Connections and Rivalries between France and Britain

Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire

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**British Sociability in the
Long Eighteenth Century**

BOYDELL & BREWER

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BOYDELL & BREWER

British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century

**Challenging the
Anglo-French Connection**

Edited by
Valérie Capdeville and Alain Kerhervé

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Chapter 6

Masonic connections and rivalries between France and Britain*

Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire

IN A WORLD of Freemasonry that was used to being fairly discreet and to favouring orality, we find two written documents that are worth opening this chapter with because they reveal the complex relationship that French Freemasons maintained with England, or the British Isles more broadly, during the Enlightenment. The first document was aimed at the profane Masonic population. Just after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (1783), which put an end to the American War of Independence, the French lawyer, academic and encyclopedist Edme Beguillet, an officer of the newly opened Parisian lodge La Réunion des Etrangers, published his *Discours sur l'origine, les progrès, et les révolutions de la franc-maçonnerie philosophique, contenant un plan d'association et un projet maçonnique de bienfaisance, pour l'erection d'un double monument en l'honneur de Descartes*.¹ It was both a plea in favour of Descartes, who was a national philosophical celebrity,² and a violent attack on Newton and all those in France who promoted his theories: "The Masonic commendation of Descartes will be followed by an exposition of his little-known philosophy, which has almost sunk into oblivion since Anglomania caused us to be infatuated with a foreign system."³

* Note: all citations from French sources have been translated.

¹ *Discourse on the origin, progress and revolutions of philosophical Freemasonry, including an association plan and a Masonic charity project to erect a double monument in honour of Descartes*.

² Stéphane Van Damme, *Descartes. Essai d'histoire culturelle d'une grandeur philosophique (XVIIe–XXe siècle)* (Paris, 2002).

³ *Discours sur l'origine, les progrès, et les révolutions de la Franc-maçonnerie philosophique, contenant un Plan d'Association & un Projet Maçonnique de bienfaisance, pour l'Erection d'un double Monument en l'honneur de Descartes*, By Brother Beguillet, Parliament Lawyer and General Secretary of the L(odge) of La Réunion des Etrangers (Philadelphia, 1784), 37: 'L'éloge maçonnique de Descartes sera suivi d'une

The second document was aimed solely at the membership of one of the most prominent lodges in Paris, the Amis Réunis, which was made up of *fermiers-généraux* (tax collectors during the Ancien Régime), high-finance workers, foreign travellers of quality and theatre amateurs plus the artists under their protection. The lodge wrote in its visitors' book that the Brothers 'wanted to form a society of friends much like the English clubs.' The secretary also felt it necessary to specify in the register's margin 'or clubs, or coteries in French' and then on the next folio 'a coterie of respectable people'.⁴ To my knowledge, this is a unique case in the documentation currently available. This attempt by the actors themselves to define their own form of sociability is interesting because it resonates with a definition given half a century earlier by René-Louis de Voyer, marquis d'Argenson and future Foreign Affairs Minister from 1744 to 1747, of the famous Club de l'Entresol in his *Mémoires*:

The ecclesiastic [Alary] formed a small establishment whose history, now already unknown to many, will soon be forgotten by all. It deserves to be recorded nevertheless. It was an English-type club, in other words a wholly liberal political society, made up of people who liked to debate current affairs. They would meet up and express their opinions without fear of being compromised, because they were all acquainted with one another and therefore knew who they were talking with and in front of. This society was called the *Entresol*, because the place where they met was an entresol. It was where the ecclesiastic Alary lived. It had all manner of creature comforts: comfortable seats, a good fire in winter and windows that opened onto a pretty garden in summer. There was no lunch or dinner provided, but there were cups of tea in winter and lemonade and chilled liqueurs in summer. There was also a permanent supply of French, Dutch and even English newspapers. In short, it was a café for respectable folk.⁵

All of this points to the fact that eighteenth-century sociability was not just a social and cultural affair but also an association plan and a reflection

exposition de sa philosophie trop peu connue, et qui est tombée presque totalement depuis que l'Anglomanie nous a engoués d'un système étranger'

⁴ National Archives, 177 AP 1, Taillepied de Bondy papers, Amis Réunis visitors' book, commenced 16 February 1777, fols. 7–8.

⁵ René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, Marquis d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires du Marquis d'Argenson*, ed. E. J. B. Rathery (Paris, 1859–67), vol. I, 96–100.

on its modalities. It is worth noting that a lodge in Perpignan even deliberately chose to change its name to La Sociabilité.⁶

Conflictual dynamics

Anglo-French Masonic relations – Scotland is a case apart, which I will individuate – thus bore the mark of rivalry and conflict rather than of fraternal emulation, and there were significant interactions in diplomatic circles. This was particularly true in the Baltic and the Levant, where the two countries had been vying with one another since the seventeenth century. The account given by Charles Tullman, provincial English Grand Master for Sweden since 1765 and Secretary to the London Ambassador to the Stockholm Court, is very illuminating in this respect. He had decided ‘to force the lodges that are working with French constitutions here [in Sweden] to follow his dictates.’⁷ With the support of his superior, Ambassador Sir John Goodricke, who was also a Freemason, he deployed a considerable amount of zeal and proselytised. Similar situations were also to be found in Naples, Warsaw and St Petersburg.

The conflict was political, territorial and symbolic. In fact, from the middle of the eighteenth century until nowadays, the Grand Lodge of England has claimed the ‘universal motherhood’ of London, the merging of the four London lodges giving birth to the Grand London Lodge in 1717; the writing of Anderson’s Constitutions in 1723 and in 1738 are not only considered as reference dates in the history of English Masonry but as the birth marks of ‘modern’ Masonry around the world.

Paris offered London a treaty of alliance (which was in reality a treaty of mutual non-interference) which stipulated that ‘in order to maintain the union and amity between them, the Grand Orient de France and the Grand Lodge of England will maintain a mutual correspondence,’⁸ and in particular that ‘the Grand Orient de France will have complete executive jurisdic-

⁶ ‘Our lodge is almost entirely made up of the cream of Roussillon nobility, who will be happy to set an example of propriety and virtue’ (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts Department, Masonic collection, FM² 349, *Sociabilité* file, 22 March 1783).

⁷ ‘die hier illegal arbeitenden Logen französischen Systems zu zwingen, sich mir [Tullman] unterzuordnen’. Cited by Roger de Robelin, ‘Die Freimaurerei in Schweden im 18 Jahrhundert’, *Gold und Himmelblau. Die Freimaurerei, Zeitloses Ideal* (Abo, 1993), 66.

⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts, Masonic collection, FM¹ 118, fol. 408v, article 3.

tion in its territory.⁹ Paris stated, moreover, that ‘the intention of the Grand Orient de France is to negotiate this equality, which has to form the basis of the treaty of alliance, with the Grand Lodge of England on equal terms.’¹⁰ London, of course, rejected their demand for parity and their conception of the Masonic space:

The equality of the 1st article cannot happen not least because Germany, Sweden and Holland have unanimously recognised the Grand Lodge of England, which can prove that it established the first National Grand Master in France, as their Mother ... It does not understand how the 2nd article wishes to constrict the Grand Lodge, which was established in London within range of the British Government, when its branches extend out into all parts of Europe.¹¹

The balance of power and the principle of equality that Paris was trying to impose on London at the beginning of the negotiations had two aims. Internally, it wanted to force the lodges that had been set up in France by London to renounce their English allegiance, and to have them re-established by Paris. The Anglaise in Bordeaux was singled out in particular and ostracised from the national Masonic community during its construction. Externally, Paris was seeking alliances in Europe and was opening up negotiations with Masonic Obediences across the Continent in order to isolate London and promote its own model of independent national Obediences, whose jurisdictions would be merged with state boundaries. The existence of this conflictual dynamic (because it was indeed a dynamic), which brought two conceptions of the Universal Republic of Freemasons into confrontation, is therefore undeniable. One was a ‘cosmopolitan’ conception, espoused by London, which ‘limited’ its demands to the recognition of its moral authority over the Order. The other was a ‘national’ conception, championed by Paris.

⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts, Masonic collection, FM¹ 118, fol. 408v, article 2.

¹⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts, Masonic collection, FM¹ 118, fol. 408r, article 1.

¹¹ Freemasons’ Hall, London, Archives of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Intense interactions

This rivalry did not, however, prevent intense interactions and exchanges between the two, which were a notable social connection between the two nations. Although the negotiations between the French and English Grand Lodges were marked by many tensions, they mobilised cultural and scholarly mediators of the first order. This was most notably the case with the astronomer Jérôme Lalande, Professor at the Collège Royal, and the ecclesiastic Rozier, editor of the *Journal de Physique*. Both these men regularly stressed their links with the Royal Society and the English scientific communities, proof once more that Masonic sociability fitted into the social environment with which it had forged close ties. For example, in 1773 Lalande wrote to London:

The Grande Loge de France – or, rather, the Grand Orient that has now been put in place – has long wished to develop a relationship with the Grand Lodge of England. Mr des Vignoles has sometimes written to us on this subject. As I cannot see him in the directory of grand officers, printed in 1773 at 1 Cole Newgate Street, I thought it best to return to source and contact you.

Mr de Luc, a skilled physician and close friend of mine,¹² who stayed with you last year, has assured me you will be kind enough to honour me with a response and this I earnestly request of you.

My position as Senior Warden of the Grande Loge de France obliges me to ask you some questions. If you do not have the time to respond, I would be grateful if you could send me the name and address of the Grand Lodge's Correspondence Secretary so that I might address myself directly to him. It is no problem for him to write to me in English. In the two years since Freemasonry in France took on a new shape and adopted new activities, we have set up and reformed more than 200 lodges ...

I would also like to ask you if the Grand Lodge of England has received the two most recent annual reports that we had printed for you, showing our Statutes, the charts of our lodges and a list of our officers.

¹² Jean-André De Luc (1727–1817) was a Genevan geologist of Huguenot origins as well as Queen Charlotte's reader in London from 1773 onwards. The scientific correspondence that De Luc maintained with the queen was published in 1779 under the title Jean-André De Luc, *Lettres physiques et morales sur l'histoire de la Terre et de l'Homme* (La Haye, 1779 and Paris, 1779). I am preparing to publish De Luc's personal papers, preserved at the Sterling Memorial Library of Yale University, New Haven, CT, which contain friendly and scholarly correspondence with Lalande.

I can send you them if you wish and would be grateful if you could send me your reports from London. You could have them taken to the home of the bookseller Elmsley or to Mr Nourse's residence, who both often have occasion to come to France. If you have someone who would like to establish a correspondence between the two Grand Lodges through me, that would be very pleasing for both sides.

I would be interested to know where the Grand Lodge assembles and whether the plan to contribute to the purchase of a house has gone ahead as planned in 1773. Does the Grand Lodge have a building or public establishment in London or Scotland?

Please excuse me for the liberty I have taken in importuning you on account of my zeal for Freemasonry, which must be as dear to you as it is to me judging by the eminent position you hold.

I am with respect

Sir

Your very humble and obedient servant

Delalande

From the Académie des Sciences and the Royal Society of London, at the Collège Royal, Place de Cambrai.¹³

Likewise, in preparation for the 1787 convent (general meeting), the Philalèthes (literally, lovers of truth), who were a mystical Masonic society that brought together the cream of Parisian society and their counterparts from across Europe, decided to question the Grand Lodge of England (which they considered to be the repository of the Order's history) on the origins of Freemasonry and the ancient archives that the English Brothers had preserved. The following extract is from the memorandum addressed to their counterparts in France and abroad:

It would seem useful to ask England how far back the Archives and Protocols of their first ones [Lodges] go to see if they have proof that Freemasonry existed in the previous century somewhere and also to gather together all the Blue Lodge degrees [Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason] and more particularly the Catechisms that are not used in their studies.¹⁴

¹³ London, Freemasons' Hall, Grand Lodge Library, *Archives of the United Grand Lodge of England*, undated.

¹⁴ Charles Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris, Une politique de la folie* (Paris, 1996).

While London was seen as the repository or even the model of Freemasonry's origins, France was, in turn, where many English Freemasons generally discovered the Masonry of Adoption (open to women) and where they practised sociable Masonry. The case of Lady Colebrooke, who lived in Boulogne, illustrates this well. In his *Journal*, Abot de Bazinghen, a member of the local nobility, mentions the existence of a Lodge of Adoption in 1781 in Boulogne-sur-Mer, which initiated representatives from the local high society, including his own wife. The Grand Mistress was Milady Colebrooke, and her daughter, Miss Colebrooke the elder, was First Director (the female equivalent of the Senior Warden in the male lodges). The *Journal* states that just after Mrs de Bazinghen's initiation, 'Brother Comte de la Mark – Worshipful Master of the military lodge Parfaite Union – gave a superb banquet, after which, at two o'clock in the morning, the Colebrook ladies left Boulogne for Soissons where they had rented a house.'¹⁵ Mr and Mrs Bazinghen had become acquainted with the Colebrooke ladies a few months earlier when they had helped to distribute a play staged by a selectively recruited amateur theatre troupe. This is a particularly interesting example because, with only a few exceptions (which are scantily documented elsewhere), women were reputed to be absent from the lodges in England. Given their composition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the English lodges can be considered *a priori* to be societies for men, whereas the French Freemasons seem to have followed the example of Brother Choderlos de Laclos (who had penned a plea to open the temples to women)¹⁶ and welcomed Sisters into the temple of the Fraternity more readily. As such, they pioneered the trend for Women's Freemasonry and the Masonry of Adoption and are thought to have been the main contributors to its diffusion on the Continent. It would be worth carrying out a detailed study in this domain to take into account national representations or stereotypes and established memberships.

Leaving France's northern coast behind and travelling down to its capital, we find the famous Lodge of the Neuf Sœurs (a reference to the nine Muses), which was often presented as a symbol of the growing appeal of the Parisian centre in the final third of the eighteenth century. The prestige of this lodge was linked to the memory of *fermier-général* and philosopher Hélvétius, who had nurtured a plan before he died to found a 'Sciences' lodge with the support of the astronomer Lalande. His project was taken

¹⁵ Alain Lottin (ed.), in collaboration with Louissette Caux-Germe and Michel de Sainte-Maréville, *Boulonnais, Noble et Révolutionnaire. Le journal de Gabriel Abot de Bazinghen (1779–1798)* (Arras, 1995), 68.

¹⁶ Besançon Public Library, manuscript Z 377 (4).

up by the society or 'salon' that his wife had formed in Auteuil. The Neuf Sœurs also owed its reputation to the celebrity of its Worshipful Master, Benjamin Franklin, and to the fact that it had welcomed Voltaire in 1778, a few weeks before his death.¹⁷ Unlike the Neuf Sœurs in Paris, the lodges across the Channel were reputed to be more circumscribed in their public activities in the eighteenth century (this is still the case today). They would limit their interventions in the secular domain (i.e., outside of the Temple, in city life) to charity work for contemporary charitable organisations. However, in reality the picture here too was more nuanced. First of all, three lodges in European capitals (Paris, London and St Petersburg) had adopted the name of the ancient Muses in the 1770s. The Lodge of the Nine Muses in St Petersburg had set the ball rolling in 1774 with its constitutions from the Grand Lodge of England, which gave it the identification number 466. The Parisian lodge followed in 1776, and on 25 March 1777 the London lodge was formed, with the identification number 235. It met at the Thatched House Tavern in St James's Street.¹⁸ All three lodges were linked to their respective science academies. The global environment was undoubtedly favourable to the spread of a sociable Freemasonry, in line with the expectations of the urban elite, across Europe and in the British isles.

Within the context of London Masonry, the Lodge of the Nine Muses was not just another high society lodge. It was majorly connected to the Royal Society, for example, and it claimed to adhere to the Newtonian legacy espoused by Jean-Théophile Désaguliers. It also welcomed many Brothers and visitors from overseas, particularly Italians and Russians. Its founder, Bartolomeo (Bartholomew) Ruspini (1728–1813), a famous surgeon and philanthropist and protégé of the Prince of Wales, was himself of Italian origin.¹⁹ It was Ruspini's intention with the Lodge of the Nine Muses

¹⁷ Louis Amiable, *Une loge maçonnique d'avant 1789, la loge des Neuf Sœurs* (Paris, 1897), supplemented with a commentary and critical notes from Charles Porset (Paris, 1989).

¹⁸ Significantly, other societies and clubs would meet in this tavern, which was located in an area that represented the social centre of the London elites. [Lodge of the Nine Muses. no. 235], A centennial sketch of the history of the Lodge of the Nine Muses, 1777–1877. Presented to the Brethren at the centennial festival, held at Long's Hotes, Old Bond Street, London, on Tuesday, May the 8th, 1877, [London: Unwin Brothers, Printers]. Further information is available on the lodge's website: <http://www.ninemuses.org.uk/html/library.html> and particularly in the e-book published by the lodge in 2012: <http://www.ninemuses.org.uk/historybook/>.

¹⁹ He is the subject of a biographical note written by Isabelle Krihiff-Aguirre in *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières (Europe/the Americas & Colonies)*. *Dictionnaire*

to show the influence of the London lodge in Europe and to affiliate the foreign visitors who converged on the English capital. Most notable among them was Pascal Paoli, who was welcomed as a member. The lodge also corresponded with its Parisian sister, the Neuf Sœurs.

English-origin Blue Lodge degrees and French-origin 'Scottish' degrees

In order to understand the importance of Franco-British Masonic interactions, we need also to focus on the success of the French high degrees. These were often perceived as having devalued the three primary degrees of English Masonry (Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master), which were judged to be too simplistic and not selective enough. The French high degrees emphasised the chivalrous, Christian nature of Freemasonry and allowed orders to organise lavish ceremonies with highly elaborate decors and settings. Once again, though, this situation was not clear cut because it was possible to combine a commitment to the three 'English' primary degrees and the trend for the 'French' high degrees, whose paternity incidentally the French symbolically attributed to the Scottish.²⁰ This tendency to attribute the Order's origins to medieval Scotland rather than to England descended from Jacobite Andrew Ramsay's 1737 *Discours*. There are numerous (and some unexpected) records of this, not least among which is the account of Jean-Paul Marat, who was doctor at the time to the Comte d'Artois's security entourage. He was welcomed as a Mason in London and admitted into the swanky Temple of the La Bien Aimée Lodge in Amsterdam on account of his French-origin high degrees. On 10 October 1774, with his certificate from the London lodge the Misericorde in hand, he signed the Amsterdam lodge's visitors' book.²¹ Fifteen years earlier, in 1759, Casanova had also visited the prestigious Dutch lodge and invented a high degree for himself in his entry in the visitors' book: 'Giacomo Casanova of

prosopographique, ed. Charles Porset and Marie-Cécile Révauger (Paris, 2013), III, 2422–4.

²⁰ This is still the case. Incidentally, the most frequently practised rite in the world is currently the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. Beyond its symbolic reference, however, its origins lie less in Scotland and more in a broad Atlantic movement that went from Bordeaux to Haïti, on to Charleston and then back again to France.

²¹ The Hague, Orde van Vrijmetslaren onder Het Grootoosten der Nederlanden, Archief, carton 4337, 41: Visiteurenboek van de loge La Bien Aimée, minutes dated 10 October 1774.

the Saint André Lodge in Paris, Grand Inspector of all lodges in France.’²² Moreover, he recounted the episode in *Histoire de ma vie*:

M. D. O. – a merchant from Amsterdam – invited me to dine with him at the burgomasters’ lodge. This was a true honour, because despite all the usual rules of Masonry, it would only admit its twenty-four members. These were the wealthiest millionaires in the Bourse [the Amsterdam Stock Exchange]. He told me he had announced me and that the lodge would be opened in French because of me. They were so happy to have me that they declared me supernumerary for the entire duration of my stay in Amsterdam. M. D. O. told me the next day that the company I had dined with had three hundred million between them.²³

This was undoubtedly an exaggeration, but it is nevertheless an interesting source because of Casanova’s combining of the three English-origin primary degrees, which would have allowed him to be recognised anywhere in the world as a Brother, and the French-origin high degrees, which enabled access to the smartest Masonic cenacles. He wrote, moreover: ‘Two months later [after being initiated as a Freemason in Lyons], I became first a Fellowcraft and then a Master in the Duke [*sic*] of Clermont’s lodge in Paris.’²⁴ There is no higher degree in Freemasonry [*sic*]. Those who imagine themselves to be higher because of the new titles that have been invented are mistaken, or else they want to deceive.’²⁵

This Franco-British combination was not just a characteristic of individuals but was also expressly adopted by those lodges situated at the interface of oceanic and colonial spaces, such as the Heureuse Rencontre in Brest, or at the meeting point of different linguistic areas, such as the Candeur in Strasbourg. Both of these are good illustrations of the dynamics at work

²² The Hague, Orde van Vrijmetselaren onder Het Grootosten der Nederlanden, Archief, carton 4337, 41: Visiteurenboek van de loge La Bien Aimée, 1759.

²³ Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, published under the guidance of Gérard Lahouati and Marie-Françoise Luna, in collaboration with Furio Luccichenti and Helmut Watzlawick (Paris, 2013), II, 225.

²⁴ Louis de Bourbon-Condé (1709–71), Comte de Clermont, Grand Master of the Grande Loge.

²⁵ Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, I, 590. Casanova’s first draft read as follows: ‘Two months later, I received the second degree in Paris, and a few months after that the second degree [of Entered Apprentice], and a few months after that the third, which is the Mastery. This is the ultimate. All the other titles that have been given to me over time are pleasant inventions, which although symbolic add nothing to the dignity of the degree of Master’ (Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, I, 1025–6).

and the plasticity of the different forms of Masonic sociability that existed during the Enlightenment.

English recognition of the Brest and Strasbourg lodges

The 'Livre d'Architecture,' which was the register of minutes taken at the assemblies and meetings of Loge Anglaise no. 184, reveals that the Heureuse Rencontre, which numbered many naval officers among its membership (it is important to highlight this point because of the Anglo-French naval rivalry), had a dual identity. Preserved at Finistère's Departmental Archives, the register covers a period from the creation – or 'installation' – of the Brest Lodge on 18 May 1774 to the end of the Revolutionary period.²⁶ The circumstances of this lodge were original, to say the least, because it was 'known to the Grand Orient de France under the title of Heureuse Rencontre and to the Grand Lodge of England as no. 184.'²⁷

The lodge's decision to come under the jurisdiction of two Obediences at the same time, one of which was foreign, represented a considerable amount of additional administrative work. It meant that one community of Freemasons had to actuate two independent lodges, practise different rituals, keep two registers of all minutes, correspondences and accounts, elect two colleges of officers every year and so on. This task was complicated by the fact that London was in the habit of writing in English to its continental foundations while the use of French was common in eighteenth-century European Masonic correspondence (even when documents did not cross the border). The translation of English regulatory texts and of the documents sent by London was therefore a laborious prerequisite. It was also compulsory for all Freemasonry collective reflections and practices to be recorded in French. Trying to match the English and French Masonic uses, or at least to find some similarities between them, also necessitated the

²⁶ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *Loge Anglaise n°184*, Livre d'Architecture 1774–year VI.

²⁷ The Masonic collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's manuscripts department holds an identical Livre d'Architecture from the Heureuse Rencontre under the classification FM³ 261: 'the present register containing two hundred and forty-eight pages including the present one has been classified and signed by us on the first and last pages and handed over to the archives of the Heureuse Rencontre Lodge to be used for registering the minutes and deliberations of the symbolic lodges' meetings for the degrees of Entered Apprentice Fellowcraft; and M[aster] Mason. Brest Lodge, Year of Light 5773 – symbolically, the Masonic calendar begins at the world's creation ... 4,000 years ago.'

long but interesting task of compiling and comparing all the documents, which was the responsibility of the Commissioners. There is evidence of this in the archives:

1. The lodge adopts in their entirety the Commissioner's comments on lodge no. 184's request for the distinctive title of *Heureuse Rencontre* should some English lodges have distinctive titles as well as their numbers.
2. On the request to the Very Respectable Grand Lodge of England for the functions attributed to each officer in English lodges and on the delivery to them of those attributed to date to the officers we recognise in our lodge.
3. On the request to the Very Respectable Grand Lodge of England for the degrees that it recognises, their relative ranks, those that are due honours, the type of honours, how they are conferred, how each degree operates (working or banquet lodge) and how each of them is pictured.
4. On the delivery to the Very Respectable Grand Lodge of England of the names of the degrees that we have given to date in the lodge as well as the names of those that we are familiar with.
5. On the request to the Very Respectable Grand Lodge of England for an overview of the lodges that it recognises as being properly constituted.
- ...
10. On the delivery to the Very Respectable Grand Lodge of England of the signs, words and touches that we believe to be the new English recognition with a request to be so kind as to tell us if it is genuine, and if it is not and if there is one, to please pass them onto us.²⁸

Some members of the lodge had undoubtedly under-estimated the drawbacks of such a situation, including the Worshipful Master, who was presiding over the work himself, as his declaration to the lodge's Commissioners on 26 June 1776 shows:

[the Worshipful Dudezerseul declares] that the reason for these comments and protestations over the meeting of 25 June was the belief that

²⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts, Masonic collection, FM³ 261, 'Livre d'Architecture of the *Heureuse Rencontre*', Brest Lodge, minutes from 16 May 1774, fols. 44–5.

since the French and English lodges form one single lodge under the name of *Heureuse Rencontre* no. 184, these two lodges must by rights have the same officers. However, having read articles 3 and 17 of the Grand Lodge of England's general regulations and their comments on the articles to the Grande Loge on 16 May, *we accept that the French and English lodges are absolutely distinct and separate and that they are independent of one another.*²⁹

Given the risks of confusing the two structures, a meeting was convened to arrive at some clarification. The Commissioners explained to the Brothers that 'since the lodge [no. 184] has considered that it has specific rules that are distinct from those of the Grand Orient de France and, further, that the head of Lodge no. 184 only has authority at the behest of the Grand Lodge of England, this lodge cannot be merged with the *Heureuse Rencontre* Lodge.'³⁰

If the Freemasons in Brest accepted the complexity of such an organisation and, consequently, the uncertainties and awkwardness of the separation, it was clearly because it was in their interests to do so. For them, the English affiliation in 1772 in no way meant a renunciation of almost thirty years of the French Masonic practices which they had been adhering to since 1745, and likewise the lodge's formation through the Grand Orient de France did not imply more of a separation with London. Herein lies the ambiguity, but also the richness, of the Brest Lodge's situation. The matter of the high degrees is a good example of this. One of the keys to the success of French Freemasonry in Europe was without a doubt the existence of these high degrees, which were mainly Christian and chivalrous in essence. So, when they linked up with English Freemasonry, it may have seemed at first glance that they would have had to abandon the high-degree rituals. In reality, the situation was more complex, and the choice of constituent power proved decisive. English Freemasonry was not monolithic. While the Grand Lodge of the Moderns believed, up until the 1813 Act of Union, that 'pure Ancient Masonry comprised three degrees and no more,' its rival the Grand Lodge of the Ancients practised the Royal Arch high degree. It was the Ancients who had granted the constitutions to the Brest Lodge, a choice that demonstrates that they had a good knowledge of the Masonic situation in England (arguably through geographic proximity). This

²⁹ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *English Lodge no. 184*, Livre d'Architecture, fol. 19, 26 June 1776.

³⁰ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *English Lodge no. 184*, Livre d'Architecture, fol. 20, 8 September 1776.

contrasts sharply with the relative lack of knowledge that Lalande showed in his aforementioned 1773 letter, despite the fact that he was Grand Officer of the Grand Orient and a member of the Royal Society.

The Brest Lodge is proof that Freemasons during the Enlightenment knew how to make the most of the opportunities afforded them by a plural Fraternity. They practised supplementary high degrees, whose foreign origins just made them all the more appealing. Once reattached to the Grand Orient, the *Heureuse Rencontre*'s autonomous existence in relation to Lodge no. 184 allowed it, after much skilful manoeuvring during meetings, to simultaneously pursue the practice of the French high degrees. For example, on 7 September 1782 'the Worshipful Master ... read out the regulation to be observed in the English lodge no. 184, at the Brest Lodge ... and convened an English lodge for the lodge's "chevaliers de l'orient" [one of the principal French high degrees] in order to confer on them the Royal Arch degree on the first Saturday of next month.'³¹

Not only did the Brest Brothers succeed in combining the English and French degrees, they also integrated both of them into a newly created scale of degrees. They clearly found this system to their satisfaction because, when their lodge came out of hibernation in September 1797 after five years of interruption to its work as a result of the Revolution,³² they were happy to abide with the obligation from the new political regime to change the name Royal Arch to Parfait Arch.³³

The Breton lodge's decision to have a dual French and English identity also offered the potential to nurture stimulating and enriching relations with lodges in other countries while, at the same time, not isolating itself in regard to its regional Masonic fabric – in contrast to the situation which its mother lodge, the *Anglaise* in Bordeaux, once found itself in. The Brest Lodge was mainly composed of naval men, but it also regularly welcomed foreign visitors. It offered assistance to shipwrecked sailors, such as Robert Wyneau (a member of the *Perfect Amity* no. 230 in Bath) and Captain Wreitt from Limerick, and to merchants, all of whom opened up new horizons for the Brest community.³⁴ Moreover, the lodge was subject to an increasing number of requests from Brothers who wanted to gain access

³¹ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *English Lodge no. 184*, 'Livre d'Architecture', fol. 43r, 7 September 1782.

³² Their work was interrupted in October 1792.

³³ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *English Lodge no. 184*, 'Livre d'Architecture', fol. 72v. The lodge's minutes made reference at the time to 'la République française une et indivisible' (the French Republic, one and indivisible).

³⁴ Archives Départementales du Finistère, 40 J 47, *English Lodge no. 184*, 'Livre d'Architecture', fol. 41r, fol. 58v.

to England or another country through an English Masonic certificate. Some of the problematics developed by Renaud Morieux in his thesis on the Channel as the Anglo-French border were therefore visible here in the masonic domain.³⁵

The Brest Lodge had proved in its own way that, with adaptability and diplomacy, it was possible to retain a considerable amount of room for manoeuvre in relation to the Obediences and their drive for centralisation. It is worth noting that this approach appeared to comply with the regulations enacted by the Grand Orient: 'all lodges situated within the territory of one Grand Orient will be able to request and obtain aggregation letters from another Grand Orient, but they will only be delivered to those lodges equipped with local constitutions and the consent of the Grand Orient that those lodges depend on.'³⁶ Moreover, the *Heureuse Rencontre* never sought to hide the fact that its Brethren also belonged to the Grand Lodge of England. It was a unique case, and the *Chambre des Provinces* in Paris, which was extremely pernickety in ensuring that respect for Masonic orthodoxy was maintained within the Grand Orient, could not dispute the legality of their decision.³⁷

The national logic that was increasingly asserting itself across Masonic Europe at the end of the eighteenth century did not therefore exclude a commitment to the principle of a broad, cosmopolitan space. Neither wholly English Freemasons nor wholly 'French Freemasons' (in the contemporary sense of the expression), the Brest Freemason community had constructed its own identity.

In Strasbourg, the Brothers of the *Candeur*, a lodge that was closely linked to the university and aimed at persons of note, worked under the leadership of Pierre de Guenet. Originally from Languedoc, he had been present at the origins of Freemasonry in France and never missed an opportunity to remind his Parisian interlocutors of the fact: 'About forty years ago,³⁸ I was received by Milord Darwentwater, who was Grand Master at the time³⁹ and who received all the court nobles, and I have been witness

³⁵ Renaud Morieux, *Une mer pour deux royaumes. La Manche, frontière franco-anglaise XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Rennes, 2008).

³⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts, Masonic collection, FM¹ 118, commission for foreign Grand Orients, fol. 408r, 7 March 1775.

³⁷ A letter from the *Heureuse Rencontre* was in fact read out at the *Chambre des Provinces* on 4 June 1774. It explicitly mentioned the constitutions granted by the Grand Lodge of the Ancients.

³⁸ His letter written from Strasbourg is dated 22 April 1773.

³⁹ Charles Radcliffe, Lord Darwentwater (1693–1746) was Grand Maître from 27 December 1736 until 1738. It is likely he left the post after the pope had fulminated

to all the progressions and variations that the order has undergone. My zeal and steadfastness have led me to the reform [the Templar reform that spread from Dresden in Saxony] that was introduced to me a long time ago.⁴⁰ By 1765, when the Grande Loge de Paris (the Obedience succeeded by the Grand Orient in 1771–77) was in crisis, he could not find words harsh enough to criticise the laxity of French Freemasonry:

All of Germany, Russia and Italy wholeheartedly reject, through a comprehensive reform, these so-called Brothers, who through either their state of origin or their customs should not be members of this Great Republic. There is no more anarchy than in France. Masonry in this country is just an object of amusement, for the most part seen as an opportunity to swindle or gorge on food and drink. We must only be interested in frivolity, and we will be the last to restore masonry to its first institution. Only by following it can we achieve its aim.⁴¹

Although the new Obedience intended to impose its law on the provincial lodges, it sought to break with Paris and requested patents from London instead:

Driven to desperation by the fanciful, self-seeking claims of the so-called Grande Loge, which has resumed its position (under the name of Grand Orient), we deemed it Necessary for the Good of the Order to turn to England where Masonry has been preserved in all its simplicity and purity, and we have obtained constitutions from them.⁴²

At the same time, De Guenet made contact with the emissaries of the Templar reform from Saxony, who were bringing with them a plan for the radical reform of the Masonic Order that was chivalrous and Christian in essence. While this was far removed from the English Masonic model, it was known to be thriving in Saxony:

the bull *in eminenti* in May 1738. The last mention of his Masonic activity is in December 1739 at a meeting at which he was present in his capacity as former Grand Master. He was executed after the Jacobites' defeat at the Battle of Culloden.

⁴⁰ Archives Départementales de l'Hérault, Astruc papers, 1E8, item no. 11.

⁴¹ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscripts Department, Masonic collection, FM¹ 111, Chapelle collection, tome VI, fol. 445r, 22 January 1765.

⁴² Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire de Strasbourg, mss 5437, *Registre des procès-verbaux de la loge de La Candeur constituée mère des loges du Grand Orient de Strasbourg [sic]*, 30 June 1772, fol. 271.

Turning Away from the sorry spectacle now on offer to Us as a result of the schism that divides French Masonry and anticipating Only very slow and highly uncertain outcomes from the zealous efforts of the lodges in the Midi to resolve the situation, we have fixed Our attention and pinned our hopes on the operations of Northern Germany.⁴³

While Brest chose dual recognition from France and England, Strasbourg chose both the path of Masonic reform with its conversion to Templar Masonry and a return to the Order's English origins as a source of stability. It is clear that French Freemasons were certainly never left indifferent by English Freemasonry in the eighteenth century. Moreover, this is still the case today because Freemasonry worldwide is still split between a self-proclaimed regular Freemasonry, that is, recognised as such by London, and a Liberal or Adogmatic Freemasonry, which is not recognised because it does not respect the landmarks defined by London. Even when they maintain that they have broken with the hegemonic claims of the Grand Lodge of England, the French Freemasons still define themselves in relation to the English. Hence, close attention paid to the different levels of relations in the Order and its management strata at local level would reveal a broad spectrum of attitudes and representations.

⁴³ Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire de Strasbourg, mss 5437, *Registre des procès-verbaux de la loge de La Candeur constituée mère des loges du Grand Orient de Strasbourg [sic]*, 30 June 1772, fol. 272.

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