



The Masonic Order of Athelstan

in England, Wales and its Provinces Overseas

A History of the Order



A History of the Order The Masonic Order of Athelstan grew out of the shared interests that a number of like-minded individuals had in the origins of Masonry. Their research culminated in a few members of that group focusing specifically on the Saxon Chronicles. In essence, their informal meetings became more and more regular and the rich and invigorating debates offered each member considerable encouragement and support to continue with their personal endeavours. They had become a dedicated Masonic and historical discussion group.



As the group progressed its subsequent interface with other like-minded Masons encouraged them to progress the idea of a new Order even to the writing of a ritual to support it. This ritual was based on the research of many old historic documents and the discovery of old Craft and other Masonic ritual. Eventually the draft of the ritual was produced based upon the life and symbolism of King Athelstan, the grandson of King Alfred, and the first King of England to be referred to as 'The King of All the English'. The Grand Court of the Masonic Order of Athelstan was conceived if not yet born.

As the group explored the idea of setting up the Order it caught the imagination of more and more Freemasons both senior and junior. Eventually there was a following which quickly grew as "word of mouth" spread and has now become a vehicle for many well-read and like-minded Masons to come together and discuss their individual learning.

So what is the Order of Athelstan? The Order has become

many different things to many different people. For many it is historic and educational, for others it is rich in symbolism and a vehicle to keep a great deal of old ritual alive, for others it is where good friends meet to share knowledge, thinking, friendship and good company.

On the practical side it is what we like to call a 'functional' degree, in other words it is aimed at accommodating people's modern lifestyles with low costs. Midweek meetings generally commence at around 6.30 pm and conclude after a 3 course (maximum) meal at around 9.30pm, in order to give brethren time to be together at the bar and to encourage discussion, or to proceed home if preferred. There are no 'wine takings' and the few formal toasts do not have any fire attached to them.

It is Masonic, and therefore candidates must be Craft Freemasons as well as Companions of a Royal Arch Chapter (these are the requisite qualifications). If a potential candidate holds these requisite qualifications they can be invited to our Festive Board and will be warmly welcomed by all. The intention is to enable brethren to attend the dinner, after the meeting, as a way of introducing them to the Order without disclosing the ritual and workings of the Order.

Normally a maximum of three meetings a year are encouraged, two working and a third the Installation. At this meeting the ceremonial is about 40 minutes in total and allows for a 20 minute talk or lecture. This is encouraged by way of an annual Provincial Certificate and a Grand Court Presentation to the best of the best. A number of other incentives have and will be introduced, by way of keeping brethren interested, some of which in my mind should be considered by the other Orders we frequent.

Like other Masonic ceremonies that use legend and allegory to tell a story and portray good ethical conduct and behaviour, in Athelstan, we use the legend of Athelstan's York Assembly of 926 as the framework and conduit for ours. The main difference being that the Masonic references represent the earliest recorded references to Masonry in Britain. In this Order we aim to bring to life the 926 Court that was held in York to educate and raise the quality of Masonry in 10th Century England and in so doing to explore the development of the

Craft over the centuries in order to prompt further study and research. As such our meetings are held in a Court and our candidates are 'Instructed' into the Order.

The Masonic Order of Athelstan portrays the story of a Master Mason called to York in 926 to receive the Ancient Charges. It goes on through a series of delightful ritual to explain a lot of the Symbolism we still see in some Lodges today and culminates with an Historical oration taking us through the development of the various Grand Lodges, the appointment of Sir Thomas Gresham in 1567 as the first Speculative Grand Master and ends at 1813 with the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England.

'The Inner Workings of an Eminent Prior', deals with the earliest passing of the veils ceremony and the Kabbalistic explanation of the four banners of the Royal Arch, 'The Inner Workings of a Worshipful Master or Grand Master of Speculative Masons' based on the betrayal of Athelstan by Edwin and the 20° A&AR and finally 'The Knights Paladin of the Scarlet Mantle'.

This last Order bears some further explanation, it is made up of 9, 10 and 12 Knights added to which are the Deputy Grand Master and Grand Master making a total of 33. This is further explained as the 9 being representative of the 9 Knights Templar who first went to the Holy Lands, the 10 is that of the 10 mystic Knights who Guarded Charlemagne and the 12 are the 12 disciples of Christ and the 12 Knights of the Round Table of whom Athelstan was thought to have been a model for the mythical King Arthur. This then added up and including the Deputy and Grand Master makes the Mystical number 33 or the years that Christ lived on Earth.

The appendant Order of the Scarlet Mantle is strictly a reward-based degree. It is a Knighting ceremony and is commemorative of the Knighting of Athelstan by Alfred the Great in and around the year 898 (the first recorded making of a Knight in England). It is stated that Athelstan, upon being knighted was given a 'Sword with a golden hilt and a scarlet mantle bedecked with jewels'. Members bear the initials of Knight of the Scarlet Mantle (KSM), Knight Commander of the Scarlet Mantle (KCSM) or Grand Cross of the Scarlet Mantle (GCSM) after their name and naturally can only use this in the context of the Masonic Order of Athelstan.

Although the Order is unashamedly invitational, if you have an interest in joining please contact us, either by post or email and we will do our best to help.