

The Impact of the Steam Engine on Freemasonry

Some Internet-based Research

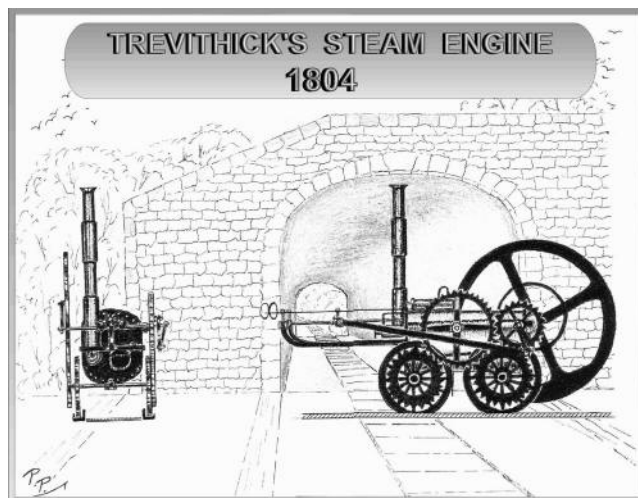
Introduction

As part of his program for 2003 as Master of Internet Lodge of Research, RWBro. Kim Greenizan randomly assigned research topics to groups of three members of the Lodge. W.Bro. George Tapley, R.W.Bro. Don Russell, and W.Bro. Dennis Millbrandt drew "The Steam Engine". This short paper documents the results of their research.

In order to narrow the topic somewhat, some boundaries had to be set. At the same time, since we are a *Masonic* Lodge, a tie to Freemasonry seemed most appropriate. Accordingly, "The Steam Engine" was confined to a particular application, the steam locomotive, and the steam locomotive in turn linked to railways. This paper looks at the impact of this chain of inventions on Freemasonry around the world. Normally, for thoroughness and accuracy, any such research would make use of a variety of sources. Since we are an *Internet* Lodge of Research this paper looks at what can be gleaned solely from the Web, with all of its surprises and a few disappointments.

Summary of Research Results

Two Brethren had significant impacts on the development of the steam engine and later on the use of the steam engine, in the form of a locomotive, as a means of transportation. In Scotland James Watt (initiated into Masonry in 1763), well recognized for his improvements in the functioning and efficiency of the steam engine, also took out a patent in 1784 for a locomotive, although it was never constructed. In Cornwall, Bro. Richard Trevithick's use of steam under high pressure was essential to the development of effective railway engines. Trevithick built the first tramway locomotive in 1803 and in 1804 built the Penydarren locomotive - the first steam locomotive to successfully run on rails.



There is no record on the Web of when or where he was made a Mason, but mention is made of a Masonic souvenir of his stay in Swansea, Wales: a glass vase inscribed with the name "Brother Richard Trevithick" in Indefatigable Lodge #237. ⁽¹⁾

By the mid-1800's the impact of a growing railway system was being felt by Grand Lodges:

"The growth of the railway systems led to greater mobility and easier communication between the Grand Lodge and the Provinces"
(History of the United Grand Lodge of England) ⁽²⁾

"The advent of Railways in the 1840's led to a more active interest in Grand Lodge by the brethren of the Provinces and correspondingly larger attendances at the Quarterly Communications and the need for devolution of real power to the Provinces was soon apparent"
(History of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Glasgow) ⁽³⁾

"...the advent of industrialization and the need to improve and extend the railway system to accommodate the manpower requirements of London (the then commercial capital of the world) and the consequential increase in the population on Kent resulted in the new dormitory towns in what now forms Metropolitan Kent. This growth ultimately resulted in the need to establish lodges and chapters to serve the increasing number of men who found guidance and pleasure within the fraternity."
(History of the Masonic Province of East Kent) ⁽⁴⁾

The formation of new lodges or the growth of existing lodges around a "railway" theme spread around the world:

- In 1849, in Glasgow, Caledonian Railway Lodge No. 354 was granted a charter to hold and constitute meetings anywhere on Caledonian Railway property. Membership was restricted to those employed on the railway when initiated, although gradually this requirement was eased, and candidates were sometimes assisted in gaining railway experience. This appears to be the only instance of a named Railway Lodge having a Web presence (although there are many railway lodges / hotels). Interestingly, Caledonian's award-winning web site has no links to the history or present state of railway lodges ⁽⁵⁾.
- An extensive history of rail and Freemasonry in New Zealand, particularly in the late 19th century, exists as a paper written by the late VW Bro R.E. Pugh-Williams, Past Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand ⁽⁶⁾.
- In 1949, "The Railway Craftsmen's Association of New Zealand" was formed and is still in existence. Its objects are to further the teachings and aims of Freemasonry among Railway brethren and to encourage Railway brethren to maintain interest in their respective Lodges and in the Craft. The Association puts on degrees for Lodges throughout New Zealand, and presents a Master's apron to every member being installed into the Chair of King Solomon for the first time ⁽⁷⁾
- In Australia, an architect specializing in the conservation of historic buildings has written a history of Comet Masonic Temple in Barcaldine, Queensland. Comet Lodge erected and re-erected its Hall six times in nine years, beginning in 1876, moving it to accompany the extension of the Central Railway 300 miles across the country ⁽⁸⁾.

- Around 1890 the Lodge "Le Port du temple de Roi Salomon" (working in French under the Misraim Rite) was founded in Jaffa, and received a large influx of affiliate members in the form of French engineers who had come to build the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway ⁽⁹⁾.

In North America, only fragments of published railway connections can be found:

- Valley Lodge in West Pittston, Pennsylvania, was so named in 1871 because most of its original members were employed by the Lehigh Valley Railroad.
- Windsor, Ontario's first lodge (1854) was known as "Great Western Lodge". As was the case elsewhere, the arrival of the railway in Windsor caused the decline of smaller surrounding communities and in this case resulted in the closure of Rose Lodge in nearby Sandwich ⁽¹⁰⁾.
- Talbot Lodge No 546 in St Thomas, Ontario was instituted in 1919 and became known as a railway lodge because of the dominance of CPR and NYC railway workers as officers.

The Spring 1998 issue of "Freemasonry today" has an article on "the Masonic Heritage of America's Pioneer Railroad". Unfortunately, as is often the case, while the magazine has a website it contains only a small selection of articles from the print version.

Some out-of-the ordinary material did turn up showing the connection between railways and Freemasonry.

- Phoenixmasonry's Museum has a B&O railroad signal lantern presented to the most popular conductor on the railroad by the Ladies Masonic Fair Association of Waverly Lodge ⁽¹¹⁾.
- A "Mail Carrier of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway" poster reproduction is available on a number of websites. The locomotive shown on the posters has the Square and Compasses on the nose, but there is no information about the source.
- And of course there is a railway connection in Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would be King"
- "The beginning of everything was in a railway train upon the road to Mhow from Amjir"

And finally, an unsolved mystery:

several obituaries from the New England states mention memberships in an Anchor club for Masonic railwaymen and their families, probably in the first half of the 1900's, but give no details;

and a subject for more research:

The Ancient Order of United Workmen was founded in Pennsylvania in 1868 as a fraternal benefit society, and most of its early members were railroad workers. Its original rituals were plagiarized from the Masonic rituals ⁽¹²⁾.

Conclusion

There is enough evidence from Internet sources to conclude that, at least in the last half of the 1800's and into the early 1900's, the spread and use of the railway network assisted in the growth of Freemasonry.

Some Sources for Further Reading

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