

"FREE" AND "ACCEPTED" MASONS

How did the words "Free" and "Accepted" originate?

The ancient craftsmen were very skilled and their craft was considered to be indispensable to the welfare of both church and state. They were the men who built castles and cathedrals. For this reason, they were not placed under the same restrictions, as were other workers. They were "free" to do their work, travel, and live their lives in a manner, which was in line with their duties. No one could become an Apprentice unless he was free born.

The Masons organized into "guilds", something akin to a trade union, and individual companies or groups of Masons contracted for specific construction projects. In the England of that time, various crafts (carpenters, distillers, pewter's, ironworkers, etc.) also organized into guilds, but most of the population worked under bond to the owners of the land on which they lived.

The word "Accepted" also goes back to the time of the operative Mason. During the later years of the Middle Ages, there were few educated outside the monasteries of the church. The "accepted" mason was originally a man who, in a lodge operative in origin or still partly so in character, was for all practical purposes of membership accepted as a mason. From this practice grew in course of time the use of the words "accepted" and "adopted" to indicate a man who had been admitted into the inner fellowship of symbolic masons. Candidates were "accepted" into freemasonry no earlier than the mid-seventeenth century. We first meet the phrase "free and accepted" in 1722.

By the late 1600's the demand for the type of architecture that lent itself to the guild type of operation was declining. Architecture itself was changing; and the number of men, as well as the number of operative lodges, was declining. Increasingly, Masonry adopted the legends and habits of the old operative lodges, for spiritual and moral purposes. As time went on, there became many more "Accepted" members than there were "Operative" members. Sometime in the eighteenth century, the "Accepted Masons" outnumbered the "Operative Masons" and Masonry became exclusively a speculative organization rather than an operative one.

Excerpted from: [Approaching The Portals](http://www.mwphglwa.org/In%20Progress/Study%20&%20References/Pdfs/Approaching%20the%20Portals.pdf), *General Information Concerning Masonry*, Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge F. & A. M. State of Washington and Jurisdiction
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