

Text for Exhibition

Squaring the Triangle: Freemasonry and Anti-Slavery

Introduction

Commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade, this exhibition is based around largely unknown archive resources. A recent cataloguing project has added details of more than 700 documents, relating to Masonic history in the West Indies and America between 1760 and 1900, to our on-line catalogue.

This period covers the establishment of African Lodge, the first Masonic lodge for black men in America. This was governed from London, as contemporary American grand lodges did not permit black membership. Prince Hall, a manumitted slave and respected Boston, Massachusetts, resident, became its Master. From 1847 his name has been synonymous with Prince Hall Masonry, the major black Masonic organisation in the world.

In the 18th and early 19th century members joined freemasonry from all sections of the local community, representing diverse social, economic and political views. Although not permitted to discuss religion or politics at lodge meetings, both slave owners and abolitionists are known to have been freemasons. Some members of Merchant's Lodge in Liverpool owned ships involved in the triangular trade whereas others supported the City's anti-slavery campaign. Masons who held abolitionist views included the poet, James Stanfield, of Phoenix Lodge, Sunderland and William Hutchinson, of Lodge of Concord, Barnard Castle, author of *The Spirit of Masonry*.

Documents included in this display reveal how attitudes towards the slave trade changed in Britain and abroad. As a result of trade links and military conquest, lodges had been established in the Caribbean from 1738. Membership was limited as the Book of Constitutions, or rulebook, of the Grand Lodge of England and its predecessors stated that anyone seeking to become a Mason must be free-born. In the 1840's, Albion Lodge in Barbados, supported by lodges in Antigua and St Vincent, and the Friendly Lodge, Jamaica, wrote to Grand Lodge seeking guidance on initiating ex-slaves, after anti-slavery legislation was enhanced in 1833 and 1838. Following debate at Grand Lodge, the term 'free man' replaced 'free-born' in the Book of Constitutions in September 1847, enabling all men to join.

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Attitudes towards Slavery before Abolition

The first Grand Lodge was formed in London on 24 June 1717. In 1751 a group of masons formed the rival 'Antients' Grand Lodge and the original Grand Lodge became known as the 'Moderns' or Premier'. In 1813, the two combined to form the United Grand Lodge of England with H.R.H. The Duke of Sussex (younger son of King George III) as Grand Master.

Freemasonry was established in the Caribbean and America in the early 18th century by colonial settlers and also by naval and military personnel. The first recognised Caribbean lodge was Parham Lodge in Antigua, warranted by the 'Moderns' Grand Lodge on 31 January 1738. The first recognised Lodge in America was St. John's Lodge in Boston, warranted by the 'Moderns' in July 1733. Caribbean Lodges continued to operate under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodges in England, Scotland and Ireland. American independence in 1776, however, resulted in individual American states forming their own Masonic Grand Lodges and gradually declaring independence.

Throughout most of the 18th century, the growth in the Slave Trade continued unopposed, with direct or indirect beneficiaries prospering significantly as a result. Despite one or two sporadic anti-slavery petitions to Parliament in the early 1780's, wider condemnation of the trade only became more prevalent towards the end of the decade. Full abolition of slavery in British dominions did not come into effect for a further half-century.

From the 1730's military men and traders established numerous Masonic lodges and chapters throughout the West Indies and the Americas. Picart's chart of Premier or Moderns lodges in 1736 includes Boston in New England as no. 126. Benjamin Cole's decorative list of Antients lodges for 1754 includes a lodge at Kingston, Jamaica, founded in 1739, and St Michael's Lodge, Barbados, founded in 1740.

Many early freemasons in the Caribbean and America were slave owners and traders. This 1790 membership list from The Great Lodge, Antigua, includes many landowners, known as planters, among its membership. Planters owned slaves who worked on sugar, cotton and cocoa plantations.

Contemporary publications, such as the Freemasons' Magazine, provide an insight into what members in England and Wales would have known and read about the situation in the West Indies and attitudes towards slavery. The Magazine included poems, prose articles and reports on events at home and abroad.

Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson, which first appeared in 1791, included criticism of the liberal anti-slavery views of this well-regarded friend of contemporary freemasons, writer and lexicographer.

The maiden parliamentary speech of the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master between 1813 and 1843, criticised the 1806 Slave Importation Restriction Bill.

However Sussex later supported the abolitionist viewpoint, probably influenced by several of his Royal brothers and fellow Masons.

Sussex, who held liberal-minded Whig political views, worked towards making Masonry a genuinely universal brotherhood. He also supported Catholic emancipation and the initiation of Hindus as freemasons. Richard Rush, the American diplomat in London between 1817 and 1825, noted in his journal that the 1834 Emancipation Act was based 'on the foundation of what the Duke of Sussex then said'.

The Beginnings of the Anti-Slavery Movement and Freemasonry

It is estimated that between 1700 and 1810 British traders transported three million Africans to the West Indies, North and South America as part of the Atlantic or Triangular Trade. Many British towns and cities benefited directly or indirectly as a result of this activity. Some Freemasons who were merchants in cities such as Liverpool and Bristol were actively engaged in the trade. However, other Freemasons supported the movement for its abolition.

Quakers began petitioning Parliament against the slave trade from 1783 but such campaigns only gained wider support from May 1787, when the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was inaugurated. Two years later, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, an account written by a former slave, was published.

Olaudah made several public appearances around the country up to 1794 to promote his book. The first edition of 700 copies sold out, with eight further reprints during his lifetime. Olaudah's work, alongside those by contemporary black writers such as Ignatius Sancho and Ottobah Cugoana, exposed the barbarity of the slave trade.

A diagram of the *Brookes* by the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson became an iconic image of the anti-slavery campaigners and appeared in pamphlets, newspapers and tracts from c.1788. This ship was owned by a Liverpool family of the same name and carried as many as 740 human beings on one voyage from Africa's Gold Coast to Jamaica.

This 1822 translation of Clarkson's work, issued by the French printer, L – T Cellot, is bound with other rare tracts in a volume once owned by the eminent freemason and antiquary, William Harry Rylands, 1847–1922. It later found its way into the library of the research Lodge, Quatuor Coronati.

The engraver, Thomas Bewick, devised this iconic image for campaigners in 1787. Translated from an ancient Greek epigram, the slogan *Am I Not A Man and a Brother* was first used in an anti-slavery pamphlet in 1788. It became a familiar logo for the abolitionists, especially after Josiah Wedgwood's pottery and other manufacturers reproduced it on items such as cameos and medals.

The freemason, Ralph Beilby, was Thomas Bewick's business partner in Newcastle. Examples of Beilby's fine glasswork, including Masonic symbolism, have survived in the Museum collection. The attorney George Allan, friend of the anti-slavery playwright and freemason, William Hutchinson, became Beilby's patron.

Privately many individual freemasons supported abolition. Lodges in Kent proposed contributing to the cost of an anti-slavery bill to Parliament. Their Provincial Grand Secretary contacted the Modern's Grand Secretary, William White, to seek approval. Although no reply has survived, this request would not have been granted official sanction as the Grand Lodge distanced itself from political issues.

Works by Olaudah Equiano and other black men helped to dispel many arguments used by pro-slavery supporters to justify the slave trade. These men helped Britons to consider Africans as individuals, and possibly inspired some freemasons to support the abolitionist campaign.

A lodge had met at Gravesend, Kent, since 1751 but it was only named Lodge of Freedom, No. 77 in 1789. It is not inconceivable that growing publicity for the anti-slavery cause and the publication of Olaudah Equiano's book inspired its name and banner design. Depicting a freed slave, this may recall the rescue of Thomas Lewis, a servant of Mr Stapylton of Chelsea, in 1770. The abolitionist Granville Sharp obtained a warrant to retrieve Lewis from a ship, returning him to slavery in Jamaica, lying off Gravesend.

Freemasons' Hall – a centre for the continuing Anti-Slavery Campaign

After the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, campaigners continued to work for the gradual emancipation of all those who remained in slavery. From 1814 support groups held meetings at Freemasons' Hall and Tavern, at that time one of London's largest secular venues for public meetings.

Many black soldiers who had fought for Britain were freed following the end of the American War of Independence in the 1780's. Their arrival in London and the effects of anti-slavery legislation raised concerns about the number of poor black people living in the capital. The African and Asiatic Society was founded to 'relieve and educate poor natives of Asia and Africa in Britain'. It held its annual general meeting, chaired by William Wilberforce, at the Hall in 1821. The Times newspaper reported that a *'great number of poor Africans were regaled in an adjoining room with a good dinner'*.

The African Institution, founded in 1807, funded schools in Sierra Leone and sought the suppression of the slave trade. It held its annual general meetings at the Hall between 1822 and 1826, but ceased operating the following year due to insufficient funds. Despite setbacks, Parliamentary debates continued to press for the abolition of the slave trade throughout British territories. Wilberforce chaired an Anti-Slavery Society meeting at the Hall on 23 December 1825, seeking signatures to a petition for the mitigation and

ultimate extinction of slavery. Another key meeting took place on 12 June 1840, when Thomas Clarkson led a world anti-slavery convention attended by over 500 delegates from Britain, America and the West Indies.

William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester [1776-1834] was the nephew and son-in-law of George III. A keen Mason, he was the Patron of the African Institution, founded in 1807, and supported abolitionist legislation in Parliament.

On Saturday 15 May 1830, 2000 people attended an anti-slavery meeting organised by the London Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing Slavery throughout the British Dominions. The Society, listed among those hiring the Hall that year, voted to revise its aims and dispensed with 'gradual' in favour of immediate abolition. Three years later William Wilberforce shared a platform at the Hall with Thomas Clarkson on the last occasion before his death.

Thomas Clarkson presided over an anti-slavery convention attended by over 500 delegates, including black abolitionists from America, at Freemasons' Hall on 12 June 1840. The meeting was controversial as eight American women delegates were not allowed to speak and had to sit behind a curtain. They were, however, included in B R Haydon's painting commemorating this event, which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. Spurred into action, two of the women, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, led the first convention on women's rights at Seneca Falls, America in 1848.

After his death in 1833, four lodges chose to commemorate William Wilberforce. The oldest of these, William Wilberforce Lodge, No. 1234, which was consecrated in 1886, commissioned a maquette of their namesake now on display at Hull Guild Hall. In 1930 freemasons in Clapham Junction founded William Wilberforce Lodge, No. 5186. Another, Broomwood Lodge, No. 6060, which was consecrated in 1945, took its name from Wilberforce's home in Broomwood Road, Clapham. The third, Wilberforce Lodge, No. 6432, founded in 1947, met in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Africa.

Freemasons supporting slavery and anti-slavery

In the 18th and early 19th centuries freemasons represented a wide cross section of society, including men from a variety of countries, who held diverse social, economic and political views.

Many merchants in trading ports such as London, Bristol and Liverpool became Masons. Some were directly involved in the slave trade as their ships transported slaves across the Atlantic. Others were indirectly involved by importing goods such as sugar, cotton and cocoa from the Caribbean. Recent research has revealed that Thomas Golightly and Roger Leigh, members of Merchant's Lodge, No. 241, Liverpool, invested in ships involved in the slave trade.

In the same Lodge another merchant, Richard Downward, supported the abolitionist, William Roscoe, who became a Member of Parliament. Roscoe founded the Liverpool branch of the Anti-Slavery Society, helped to establish the African Institute and campaigned to abolish the slave trade, despite violent protests against him by slave-traders.

A coterie of Masonic abolitionist sympathisers in the North East included the poet, James Field Stanfield, member of Phoenix Lodge, Sunderland and the attorney and playwright, William Hutchinson, of Lodge of Concord, Barnard Castle, Co Durham.

Annual returns from Merchant's Lodge, No. 241, Liverpool, list Thomas Golightly and Roger Leigh as members, who invested in ships which transported slaves as part of the Atlantic slave trade. Also listed is Richard Downward, a supporter of William Roscoe, 1753-1831, Member of Parliament for Liverpool from 1806 to 1807.

Thomas Golightly was one of several pro-slavery Liverpoolians who petitioned Parliament on 14 February 1788. Golightly, a wine merchant, property speculator, Mayor, Alderman, Magistrate and founder of Liverpool's Unanimous Society, was the first Worshipful Master of Merchant's Lodge, No. 241 in 1780.

The actor, sometime wine merchant and poet, James Field Stanfield, was a visiting member of Phoenix Lodge, Sunderland from 1789. In 1774-1776 he sailed on a ship taking goods from Liverpool to Guinea in West Africa. During this life-changing experience, he saw the sadistic treatment of both crew and human cargo. He witnessed captured Africans being brought aboard what he described as 'a floating dungeon' for the journey to the West Indies. A female slave was flogged in the captain's cabin for a minor offence. The sailor who administered the punishment, considered too lenient, was also flogged and the woman flayed 'until her back was full of holes'. Stanfield, with his limited medical knowledge, bandaged the woman, as the ship's doctor and his assistant had died from a tropical disease.

Stanfield addressed his *Observations on a Guinea Voyage* to Thomas Clarkson in 1788 and the following year published *The Guinea Voyage, a Poem in Three Books*. Between 1793 and 1798 several of his Masonic and anti-slavery poems appear in the Freemasons' Magazine. He named his son, later a successful marine painter, Clarkson, in honour of the abolitionist campaigner.

The author of *The Spirit of Masonry*, William Hutchinson, was an attorney and member of Lodge of Concord, Barnard Castle. Married to a Quakeress, Elizabeth Marshall, he was encouraged by his neighbour and fellow freemason, Rev Daniel Watson, to write an anti-slavery play, *The Princess of Zanfara*. The printer and freemason, John Wilkie, of St Paul's Churchyard, published the first edition anonymously in 1798.

The play's frontispiece featured Thomas Bewick's image *Am I Not a Man and a Brother* and a dedication to '*the Society Instituted in the Year 1787 for the Purpose of Effecting an Abolition of the Slave Trade*'. Other Masons in the North East who sympathised with the abolitionist cause were Dr Robert Jackson of Stockton on Tees, George Allen of Darlington, the Newcastle banker, Robert Ormaton, and William Batson, Treasurer of the Newcastle Bible Society.

The Experience of Black Men in Lodges

According to the Book of Constitutions, candidates had to prove that they were free-born (ie born of a free mother) to be eligible for membership. This ruling barred former slaves from membership. According to some estimates, there were 5,000 black people in London by the end of the 18th century, with a similar number living elsewhere in Britain.

There is evidence, based on examples of black men known to have become freemasons, to suggest that many others joined. No doubt Influenced by Masonic ideals of universal brotherhood, membership records usually include details of age, profession and address but not physical appearance or religious affiliation.

Many free and enslaved black men, such as Olaudah Equiano and the preacher John Marrant, served in the Navy. For example, the crew on Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory, included black men from the West Indies and Africa who saw action at Trafalgar in 1805. Sailors often joined or visited lodges located in port towns for transient periods of time, without full membership details being recorded.

Some black men, including Prince Hall, served with the British forces during the American War of Independence. More than 1,000 former soldiers came to London and became destitute. While some men left to form a settlement in Sierra Leone, Africa, others remained and began small businesses. Sailors and soldiers, including Trumpeter Overton, who was initiated as a freemason in Brighton in 1805, were often recruited in the West Indies.

Daniel Miller was entered, passed and raised in Lodge of Industry, No. 186, London, but his eligibility for membership was questioned. According to the minutes of the Stewards' Lodge for 16 November 1808, Miller, a carpenter, sailed to the West Indies as a cook on a merchant ship after receiving his certificate.

Royal Clarence Lodge, No. 452 (Moderns) initiated Lovelace Overton, a trumpeter in the King's Dragoon Guards, aged 25 in 1805. On returning to Barbados in 1823, he tried to visit various lodges but was refused. Overton considered attempting to form a lodge for black men but was unsuccessful. He returned to England and appears in a painting of the King's Dragoon Guards Baggage Train c.1825, by which time he was the personal servant of the Guard's Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel George Teesdale.

The Brixham-based True Love and Unity Lodge, No. 248, recorded in their minutes on 21 September 1814 that Bro. Thomas Smith, a black man, was provided with 5 shillings as he had fallen on hard times. Brixham, a busy fishing port, became a Naval supply base during the war with France. Soldiers from various foot regiments, many of whom joined this Lodge, were stationed at its Berry Head Barracks to defend the fleet. Napoleon Bonaparte spent several days here offshore on HMS Bellerophon before being exiled to St Helena.

Stephen Dillet, who moved to Nassau, Bahamas around 1840, was born in Haiti. A small businessman in America, he owned slaves but is known to have manumitted one man, William Bain, in 1826. Dillet was initiated in African Lodge No. 2 Philadelphia, before joining Royal Victoria Lodge, Nassau, Bahamas. The island's coroner and postmaster, Dillet was the first black man to win an election as representative for Nassau and became Provincial Grand Junior Deacon and Deputy Provincial Grand Master in 1857.

Situation under Scottish and Irish Constitutions – Prince Hall initiated into Irish Lodge - Scottish lodges in America and the West Indies had black men as members.

Black men were also initiated in continental lodges. Angelo Soliman, a former slave, skilled chess player and polymath, became a member of *zur wahren Eintracht* lodge in Vienna at the same time as Mozart.

America – formation of Prince Hall freemasonry

The early details of Prince Hall's life are uncertain. He was probably born into slavery around 1735, received his freedom in 1775 before establishing himself as a successful tradesman in Boston, Massachusetts. The Irish lodge, No. 441, based in the 38th Foot Regiment, garrisoned at Castle William (now Fort Independence) in Boston Harbour, initiated Prince Hall and 14 other black men on 6 March 1775. These men went on to form their own Lodge and were granted a warrant by the 'Moderns' Grand on 29 September 1784 as African Lodge, No. 459.

African Lodge prospered under Hall's dynamic leadership and became a source of mutual support for black men in Boston. All American lodges that had not paid any dues for several years were removed from the register of the new United Grand Lodge of England, following the merger between the Antients and Moderns in 1813. Due to unreliable communications, African Lodge was one of many American lodges that lost contact with Grand Lodge. Therefore African Lodge, which had assumed the role of a 'Provincial' Grand Lodge by authorizing the creation of Lodges for black freemasons in other states, declared its independence in 1827.

The movement grew and Prince Hall Grand Lodges were set up in other states, some of which may have been founded by black men initiated as Masons in British lodges. The name Prince Hall began to be used as a generic title for Black Lodges and this title was adopted officially at a conference in Arkansas in January 1944. Prince Hall Masonry is now the major black Masonic organisation in the world.

William H. Grimshaw included a version of Hall's life in his *Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People in North America*, published in 1903. Unfortunately there is limited documentary evidence for many of Grimshaw's biographical details but these are often repeated as facts. However, a more recent study by Charles H. Wesley appeared in 1977, *Prince Hall Life and Legacy*, which examined all the available resources.

Today there are 45 Prince Hall Grand Lodges with 5,000 sub-ordinate Lodges with approximately 300,000 members. Along with the USA, Prince Hall Lodges exist in Canada, the Bahamas, Barbados, Liberia, Trinidad and Tobago and England.

Pressure for Change

Changes to public attitudes towards slavery and its abolition occurred slowly, over many years. The reasons for this were not just the product of the work of the abolitionist movement, despite the tireless work of Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce and many less well-known men and women, including the freemasons, James Field Stanfield and William Hutchinson.

In many cases slaves achieved their own release by earning money to gain freedom or by taking part in the numerous rebellions in the West Indies and America. Protecting British interests and plantation owners in the West Indies from French attacks and American privateers in addition to the effects of debilitating tropical diseases, stretched the limited resources of the army and navy. At the same time the economics of sugar, cotton and cocoa production on plantations in the West Indies became unviable due to civil unrest and cheaper goods being produced in North and South America.

The focus on achieving freedom, following effective legislation in British territories that came into effect in the late 1830's, moved west to North and South America. Public anti-slavery meetings at Freemasons' Hall from the 1840's concentrated on achieving abolition in the Americas. Following the change in wording from 'free-born' to 'free man' in 1847, Grand Lodge refused to recognise its counterparts in American states that did not initiate black men.

The Jamaican economy suffered considerably as a result of emancipation and the American Civil War. Some members of the black community, including Paul Bogle, sought help from Edward John Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica, to address their grievances but were ignored. The arrest of Bogle and others for sedition led to the Morant Bay Rebellion, mentioned in this letter from Dr

Robert Hamilton, Provincial Grand Master of East Jamaica, to the Grand Secretary in 1866.

This letter from the Provincial Grand Master dated 1863 includes a reference to Dr Alexander Fiddes, FRCS, who went to Jamaica in 1841 and later wrote about the treatment and cure of leprosy. Fiddes was a close friend of George William Gordon, a respected Baptist minister and magistrate. A supporter of fellow black inhabitants on the island, Gordon was charged with high treason and hanged after the Morant Bay Rebellion. Eyre's severe suppression of the rebellion led to considerable criticism and his private prosecution in England.

Before the abolition of slavery in America in 1865 many people affected by the punitive Fugitive Slave Laws fled to freedom in Canada. African American abolitionists spoke about this issue at anti-slavery meetings at Freemasons' Hall. James W. C. Pennington, minister of the first black Presbyterian Church in New York, spoke at the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1843, while the priest, missionary and educator, Alexander Crummell, spoke to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1851. Samuel Ringgold Ward, author of *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, spoke at a meeting chaired by Lord Shaftesbury in 1853, which led to the formation of a London Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada that raised £1,200 to assist fugitive slaves.

A former slave, Rev. Thomas M Kinnaird, of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, Hamilton, Canada, requested free use of Freemasons' Hall in March 1861 for a Fugitive Slaves of Canada West fundraising meeting. However, he was informed that hire was only available at the usual terms.

Letters to the United Grand Lodge in 1868 provide evidence of the problems African Americans experienced in attempting to join freemasonry after the abolition of slavery. Robert Harlan, a former slave of Cincinnati, Ohio, won his freedom after gaining a fortune during the California Gold Rush. He was initiated as a freemason while in London for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Globe Lodge, No. 23. Having learnt about the formation of Boston's African Lodge, he encouraged Goff and Moon to petition Grand Lodge for a warrant.

The Grand Master, the Earl of Zetland, wrote to the Grand Master of the Lodge of New York in 1861. The latter sought an exchange of representatives with England but, because of the refusal of their Lodges to admit individuals holding certificates from the United Grand Lodge of England simply on grounds of colour, Zetland regrets that such an exchange is impossible.

Free-born to Free man: The Change to the Book of Constitutions

The Grand Lodge has always stood apart from issues of governmental policy and members are required not to discuss politics or religion at Lodge meetings. Therefore, as an organisation Grand Lodge did not become directly involved in the anti-slavery movement but individual members expressed opinion on discrimination.

Following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, further anti-slavery legislation in 1833 freed all those living in British colonies but this did not come into full operation until 1838. As a result members began raising questions about the 'free-born' condition of membership.

Prominent Masons such as Dr Robert Thomas Crucefix, the founder of the Freemason's Quarterly Review and the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution for aged Freemasons and Widows of Freemasons, raised the issue. He wrote to the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master in 1836 suggesting that the term 'free-born' should be changed, to enable all free men to join.

In the 1840's, Albion Lodge in Barbados (supported by lodges in Antigua and St Vincent) and the Friendly Lodge, Jamaica, both wrote to Grand Lodge seeking guidance on initiating former slaves. After the death of the Duke of Sussex in 1843, the Earl of Zetland became Grand Master and the issue of membership criteria was raised at last in Grand Lodge for September 1847. It was agreed that the text in the Book of Constitutions, the Candidate's Declaration and the Lectures should be changed from 'free-born' to 'free man', which is what it says today.

William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*, first published in 1772, included his Lecture on the First Degree. A candidate was charged to declare that he was 'free by birth' but this was changed to 'free man' in all version printed after 1847, following the ruling by Grand Lodge.

The wording free-born was included in the first Book of Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge dated 1815 as part of the declaration made by a candidate on initiation. There is no direct reference to a candidate needing to be free-born in rules published before this date by either the Antients or Moderns Grand Lodges but candidates had to declare that they were free-born at initiation. Robert Crucefix wrote to the Grand Master in 1836 seeking a change to this text but the issue was not formally changed until 1 September 1847.

Soon after the Emancipation Act of 1834 came into full effect in 1838, many Lodges sought to initiate black men who had been debarred from joining due to the inclusion of the term 'free-born' in the Book of Constitutions. Albion Lodge, Barbados wrote to the Grand Secretary on 7 April 1840, seeking to initiate ex-slaves.

A few years later in 1844, Friendly Lodge, No. 291 of Kingston, Jamaica also wrote seeking guidance from Grand Lodge, only to receive a reply that the new Grand Master, the Earl of Zetland was considering proposals to change the wording to enable ex-slaves to join as freemasons.