



Plot 1686 Epitome in Nat. Hist. Staffordshire

“85. To these add the Cuftoms relating to the County, whereof they have one, of admitting Men into the Society of Freemasons, that in the moorelands of this County feems to be of greater request, than any where else, though I find the Customs spread more or less, all over the Nation; for here I found perfons of the moft eminent quality, that did not disdain to be of this Fellowship. Nor indeed need they, were it of that Antiquity and honor, that is pretended in a large parchment volum they have amongst them, containing the History and Rules of the craft of masonry. Which is there deduced not only from facred writ, but profane story, particularly that it was brought into England by St. Amphibal, and first communicated to St. Alban, who set down the Charges of masonry, and was made paymaster and Governor of the Kings works, and gave them charges and manners as St. Amphibal had taught him. Which were after confirmed by King Athelstan, whose youngest son Edwyn loved well mafonry, took upon him the charges and learned the manners, and obtained for them of his Father a free-Charter. Whereupon he caufed them to assemble at York, and to bring all the old Books of their craft, and out of them ordained such charges and manners, as they then thought fit: which charges in the said Schrole or Parchment volum, are in part declared: and thus was the craft of masonry grounded and confirmed in England. It is also there declared that these charges and manners were after perused and approved by King Hen, 6. and his council, both as to Masters and Fellows of this right Worshopfull craft.

86. Into which Society when any are admitted, they call a meeting (or Lodg as they term it in some places) which must consist at left of 5 or 6 of the Ancients of the Order, whom the candidats preftent with gloves, and fo likewise to their wives, and entertain with a collation according to the Cuftom of the place: This ended, they proceed to the admission of them, which cheifly confifts in the communication of certain secret signes, whereby they are known to one

another all over the Nation, by which means they have maintenance whither ever they travel: for if any man appear though altogether unknown that can shew any of these signes to a Fellow of the Society, whom they otherwife call an accepted mason, he is obliged presently to come to him, from what company or place soever he be in, nay tho' from the top of a Steeple, (what hazard or inconvenience soever he run) to know his pleasure, and assist him; viz. if he want work he is bound to find him some; or if he cannot doe that, to give him money, or otherwise support him till work can be had, which is one of their Articles; and it is another, that they advise the Masters they work for, according to the best of their skill, acquainting them with the goodnes or badnes of their materials; and if they be any way out in the contrivance of their buildings modestly to rectify them in it; that masonry be not dishonoured: and many such like that are commonly known: but some others they have (to which they are sworn after their fashion) that none know but themselves, which I have reason to suspect are much worse than these, perhaps as bad as this History of the craft it felt; than which there is nothing I ever met with more false or incoherent.

87. Far not to mention that St. Amphibalus by judicious persons, is thought rather to be the cloak, then master of St. Alban; or how unlikely it is that St. Alban himself in such a barbarous Age, and in times of persecution, should be supervisor of any works; it is plain that King Athelstan was never married, or ever had so much as any natural issue; (unless we give way to the fabulous History of Guy Earl of Warwick, whose eldest son Reynburn is said indeed to have been married to Leonora the supposed daughter of Athelstan, which will not serve the turn neither) much less ever had he a lawful son Edwyn, of whom I find not the least umbrage in History. He had indeed a Brother of that name, of whom he was so jealous though very young when he came to the crown, that he sent him to Sea in a pinnace without tackle or oar, only in company with a page, that his death might be imputed to the waves and not him; whence the Young Prince (not able to master his passions) cast himself headlong into the Sea and there died. Who how unlikely to learn their manners; to get them a Charter; or call them together at York; let the Reader judge.

88. Yet more improbable is it still, that Hen. 6. and his Council, should ever peruse or approve their charges and manners, and so confirm these right Worshipful Masters and Fellows as they are call'd in the Scrole: for in the third of his reign (when he could not be 4 years old) I find an act of Parliament quite abolishing this Society. It being therein ordained, that no Congregations and Confederacies should be made by masons, in their general Chapters and Assemblies, whereby the good course and effect of the Statutes of Labourers, were violated and broken in subversion of Law: and that those who caused such Chapters or Congregations to be holden, should be adjudged Felons; and those masons that came to them should be punish'd by imprisonment, and make fine and ransom at the Kings will. So very much out was the Compiler of this History of the craft of masonry, and so little skill had he in our Chronicles and Laws. Which Statute though repealed by a subsequent act in the 5 of Eliz. whereby Servants and Labourers are compellable to serve, and their wages limited; and all masters made punishable for giving more wages than what is taxed by the Justices, and the servants if they take it &c. Yet this act too being but little observed, 'tis still to be feared these Chapters of Free-masons do as much mischief as before, which if one may estimate by the penalty, was anciently so great, that perhaps it might be usefull to examine them now."
