

A Masonic Lodge: its paraphernalia and Symbolism.

Let us first define what a Lodge is. It is in fact three things and if any one of these three is missing then the Lodge is not complete.

The first requirement is the meeting place itself. This is the physical being of the Lodge. It should be referred to as the Lodge room. Common practice calls it the 'Temple' but this can be an unfortunate term as the word does have religious overtones that may not be acceptable to all. Indeed we could ask why is the Lodge room not referred to as a Synagogue or a Mosque? The term 'Temple' really came into use in the early nineteen hundreds. If we look at the various venues used for Lodge meetings throughout the world, we can see that the term Temple is not appropriate *viz* many Lodges meet in Hotels, above restaurants, in community centres and even private houses.

Our reference to the 'Temple of Solomon' is to allow us to lay out the shape of the Lodge in the way that Solomon's Temple was laid out. The true 'Temple' is in our hearts not the bricks and mortar that we meet in. Our meeting place should be referred to as the Lodge Room.

The second meaning of a Lodge is the number of brothers required to form the Lodge. We know that there must be seven for the Lodge to be perfect and regular from the teachings of the First Degree Tracing Board where there are illustrated the seven stars which are meant to represent the number of masons needed to make the Lodge regular and perfect and without which no candidate can be legally initiated into Freemasonry. The seven brothers are the Master, the two Wardens, the two Deacons, the Inner Guard and the Tyler.

The third part is the summons which convenes the meeting. The summons must state the time, the date and the venue.

So, a lodge is not a Lodge until all three parts are present, the venue, the assembled brothers and time and date.

The interior of a Freemasons Lodge is made up of furniture, jewels and ornaments. Once again we take our lead from the First Degree Tracing Board. The first requirement is the mosaic pavement or the chequered floor. Many Lodge rooms will have a permanently laid floor with its black and white squares framed with a tessellated border. However many Lodge rooms especially those in hotels have to be built and dismantled at every meeting. These will have a carpet or linoleum that can be taken up and stored between

meetings. The pavement is usually twice as long as it is wide but the dimensions of the room may determine the actual size.

The person responsible for laying out the Lodge room is the Tyler. He will ensure that all the furniture is correctly placed and that aprons and collars and jewels for the officers are laid out.

He is assisted by the Director of Ceremonies whose responsibility is to ensure that the specific items needed for the degree work are in place or available. He ensures the working tools are correct, the Tracing Boards, the gavels, columns and in the case of the Third Degree that the sheet is at hand. He will also ensure that the apron needed for the candidate is ready.

The DC will also check that officers of the Lodge are correctly attired.

The WM is seated in the East and he will have a pedestal or a table alongside him on which will be placed his gavel. He also keeps his copy of the summons here and the Book of Constitution and the Lodge By Laws.

On his left sits the Immediate Past Master whose duty it is to advise and if necessary prompt the Master during the ritual. On his left sits the Chaplain. Any Grand Lodge officers that attend will sit on the Masters right in order of seniority.

Past Masters and Visiting Masters will sit behind the front row with visiting Masters on the left of the Master.

The Master is approached by steps alongside which are two pillars, the one on the left represents Boaz and the one on the right, Jachin.

The Senior Warden is seated in the West and will also have a pedestal or table alongside and on his left, on which are placed the gavel and the column. On his right stands a pillar or column which supports a candle.

The Junior Warden is seated in the South and has a pedestal or table on his left and on which are placed the gavel and the column. On his right stands a pillar or column which supports a candle.

In the centre of the Lodge room is the Masters pedestal – it should not be referred to as an altar. The large column supports the VSL which in turn supports the Square and Compass.

The kneeling stool is placed in front of the pedestal.

The VSL is opened in the First Degree at Psalm 133:1 (How good it is for brethren to dwell together): in the Second Degree it is opened at 1 Kings 6:8 (The winding stairs and the middle chamber of the Temple): and in the Third

Degree at 1 Kings 8 (the dedication of King Solomon's Temple). Other Lodges may open at different passages.

The VSL should be placed so that the candidate or anyone making an obligation can read it.

In some Lodges the VSL is placed so that the WM only can read it. This puts the candidate at a disadvantage in that he will be taking an obligation on writings that are unintelligible to him.

It is assumed that the WM because of his experience will be conversive with the VSL and therefore does not need to read it. However no-one should question the established practices of a particular Lodge.

The square and compass are laid on the closed book with both points of the compass concealed but pointing towards the Master. The only VSL that supports the Square and Compass is the one on the Masters pedestal. The other pedestals or tables may well carry VSL's but there will not be a square nor compass on them.

Where a Lodge has VSL's of different faiths more than one VSL of the appropriate faith will be open.

The Rough Ashlar is placed on the column of Boaz which for sake of convenience we call the Entered Apprentice's pillar. The stone is rough and unused as taken from the quarry until it is worked upon by the EA and rendered fit for the more experienced workman to prepare it for inclusion in the finished building.

This is a symbolic allusion to our own entry into the world and indeed into Freemasonry in that we are innocent, uneducated and not at all knowledgeable.

We are subsequently nurtured and taught by our parents or guardians by being given a liberal and virtuous education so that as the stone is accepted into the building so we are accepted into civilized society.

The Ashlar on the FC pillar shows the progress on the stone as it is being worked and modeled. It also alludes to our own progress through life, our understanding of the liberal arts and sciences, until it becomes the Perfect Ashlar, the finished stone.

This shows that we have had a well spent life of virtue and piety as proved by the square and compass and having reached the peak of our perfection so we can meet our maker as is inevitable, with a clear conscience.

A square should be placed on the EA's or JW's pedestal and a Compass on the FC's or SW's pedestal.

The Tracing Boards are placed in a convenient position so that they can be seen by all. This is not always physically possible but in deciding on their position consideration should be given for anyone entering the Lodge after it has been opened.

The letter 'G' is normally hung in the centre of the Lodge room but where a Lodge is dismantled after the meeting a more convenient position may be determined. In some Lodges it is placed above and behind the WM. It can also be placed on the centre pedestal.

The warrant of the Lodge is displayed near the WM usually in front of the Chaplain. The Lodge cannot convene if the warrant is not displayed. It is the DoC's responsibility to ensure that it is in place.

The Working Tools are displayed in a convenient place some where near the East. In some Lodges as each degree is opened the tools of the previous degree are put away but in others the tools of each degree are left on display as the degrees are opened and only the tools of the degree that is closed are put away. This is for each Lodge to determine its usage.

With regard to the wardens. Apart from the gavels which enable the Wardens to assist the Master in the running of the Lodge, the most important item on his pedestal or table is the column. Regretfully very little attention is given to this piece of Lodge furniture which is a shame as it is fundamental to the tenets and principles of our organisation.

It is also incorrectly represented in many Lodges. The most common form of columns are replicas of two of the three columns that support a Freemasons Lodge – the Doric and the Corinthian columns. On top of these columns are two globes– the one represents day and the other night. This set up has become standard in most Lodges but I would contend that they are misguided. Let me explain.

The Wardens are working masons.

The Senior Warden is placed in the West for two reasons – one to control the work force in that half of the work place as it is too far away for the WM to see what is going on and secondly to mark the setting sun.

The Junior Warden is placed in the South being mid way, to call the brethren from labour to refreshment and from refreshment to labour but also to mark the sun at its meridian ie mid day.

So the question arises – how does the warden mark the sun?

The answer is with a surveyors pole or rod or more accurately with an obelisk. This is the most important tool in the Masons tool bag. Basically it is a stick with a pointed top.

There was a famous geometrician by the name of Erastothanes. He was the curator of the Museum in Alexandria. Now Erastothanes knew that there was a town some 5,000 stadia away from Alexandria called Syrene (we know it today as Aswan). A stadia is 430 miles. In Syrene there was well and at midday at the Summer Solstice it was noted that the Sun shone directly onto its waters. This was the only time in the year that it happened. It was also noted that at the same time an obelisk or stick when held upright would have no shadow.

Erastothanes now noted that if he raised an obelisk at Alexandria ay exactly the same time, he would cast a shadow. He then measured this shadow and calculated its angle with respect to Syrene.

He learnt his geometry from studying the ancient Egyptians.

He found the angle to be 7.2 degrees. He also knew that the world was sphere and that it was 360 degrees. So by dividing 7.2 into 360 he found that the distance between Alexandria and Syrene was one fiftieth of the earth's circumference. He determined that the earth must be 50 times 430 (being the distance between the two places) i.e 21,500 miles.

This information has never been challenged nor improved upon.

This same obelisk was used to determine due East and West. Information of great value to the builder. The way they did it was this.

At sunrise on the day of the Spring or Autumn Equinox the builder would place his obelisk on the intended site of his building. He would then align a second obelisk at the point on the horizon where the sun first appeared. By drawing a line between the two a true East / west alignment could be achieved. From this it was easy to calculate North and South and indeed any point on the compass.

The same result can be achieved by using the shadow of the sun cast at mid day (when the sun is at its Meridian). If for several days or weeks prior to the Spring Equinox the shadow from the sun was marked on the ground between mid morning and mid afternoon a series of V shapes will be drawn which would become more discernible as the sun rose higher in the sky with each passing day. By drawing a line through the base of the V to the base of the obelisk the true North South alignment can be drawn. The advantage of marking the sun at its meridian is that the compass can be set for any time of the year.

Now if this experiment was repeated for an entire year a pattern would emerge showing the progress of the seasons. A cross reference then with the phase of the moon would establish a calendar. Religious festivals could now be set. Hence the sun would rule the day and the moon would govern the night. An even more involved calculation based on the information derived from the obelisk would show the signs of the Zodiac. It would also explain why various churches appear to the East in different positions. As the seasons change so the sun rises in a slightly different position every day. So the position of East tends to move. The altar in every church is placed in the East so if a Saint's day fell in say December like St Andrew's then the position of the sun ie East in December would determine where the builder would site the altar. This would be different to the position of the east in July. So the obelisk in the care of the Warden is a most valuable part of our Lodge. We place the globes of the sun and moon in the obelisk to remind us of their responsibility.

A Freemasons lodge is full of symbolism. Over the years some of it has become distorted or misinterpreted. It is for ever open to discussion. You will agree with some - you will wonder about others. This talk may have helped you to understand a little about your Lodge and I hope will encourage you to investigate more.

Compiled by RW Bro Roy Martin
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