

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
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### **THE JEWELS OF THE LODGE**

by

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### THE JEWELS

Under most jurisdictions, every speculative craft lodge has three movable and three immovable jewels, on which the brethren are intended to moralise. They are the square, the level, the plumb rule, the rough ashlar, the perfect ashlar and the tracing board. An eminent masonic writer, the Rev. Dr. George Oliver (1782-1867), said they are called jewels because "they have a moral tendency which renders them jewels of inestimable value". It is interesting to note that the square, the level and the plumb rule are called movable jewels in the English system, because they are transferred to the incoming master and his wardens each year, whereas in the American system they are called immovable, because the square is assigned to the east of the lodge, the level to the west and the plumb rule to the south. In the English system the ashlar and the tracing board are called immovable jewels, probably because in the early speculative period they tended to be located in particular parts of the lodge, but in the American system they are called movable, because they may be placed in any convenient position which varies from lodge to lodge. Having regard to the allegorical importance assigned to the jewels of the lodge, it is surprising that the authors of the early speculative rituals did not indicate what they considered to be the most appropriate positions for the immovable jewels to be placed in the lodge. Nor has the United Grand Lodge of England ever issued a ruling on the subject. As a consequence, enquiring masons cannot find a definitive answer to their questions concerning the placement of the tracing board and the ashlar. In practice they are to be seen in various locations, which often is only a matter of convenience, but may be part of the tradition relating to the particular ritual being worked or the custom in the individual lodge, district or jurisdiction. In this regard it is interesting to note that Irish lodges do not have a tracing board.

### OPERATIVE ORIGINS

The jewels of modern lodges of speculative freemasonry have come down to us from the usages and customs of operative free masons in earlier times. In operative lodges a particular stone was used as an emblem in each of the working degrees. The candidate was told, at an appropriate stage in the ceremony, that he represented that stone being wrought from its rough hewn condition, as brought from the quarries, to a state of perfection suitable for erection as a "living stone" in that most glorious of all Temples, 'that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'. Each degree also had a representative jewel, which was a miniature representation of one of the gauges used to test the stone and the work of the degree. The ceremonies in operative lodges reflected the various stages in the preparation, testing and erection of stones in the temple of King Solomon at Jerusalem, emphasizing their purpose and importance in the structure. The symbolic teachings also were based on the preparation, testing and incorporation of the stones in the structure. The several types of stones and the working tools and gauges used in their preparation, testing and erection, therefore were of particular significance to the operative mason. During his progress through the several degrees, the candidate in a lodge of operative free masons was tested on the work he had prepared in the preceding

degree, before being instructed in the work and the use of the gauges in the next degree. When a Fellow of the Craft had proved his ability to produce perfect ashlar stones, he was entrusted with the square, the level and the plumb rule as proof of his ability, but not as jewels of the degree. Operative degrees beyond that of a Fellow of the Craft were related to increasing levels of supervision, with special duties and responsibilities attaching to the rank. A Fellow of the Craft in operative free masonry was a master mason in respect of his capabilities, but the title of Master Mason was usually reserved for the mason who had overall responsibility for a job. The Master Mason frequently was the chief officer of a lodge carrying out work under day labour in England, or the

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proprietor of a lodge carrying out work under contract in Scotland. Some of these operative aspects are reflected in the degrees of other branches of freemasonry, for which membership of a speculative craft lodge is a prerequisite. However, the direct relationship between the purpose for which a particular stone is used and its symbolic meaning is no longer a significant part of the work in speculative craft freemasonry. Nor do the speculative craft degrees have jewels equivalent to those of the operative degrees.

The jewels of the master and wardens of modern speculative lodges are derived from the insignia of office worn by their counterparts in the old operative lodges. They also are the working tools of a speculative Fellowcraft Freemason, which might seem to be an anomaly, but it must be remembered that in operative days a Fellow of the Craft was a fully qualified craftsman. In operative lodges the rough ashlar typified the Apprentice and the perfect ashlar typified the Fellow of the Craft. Candidates for admission as an Apprentice were placed in the northeast corner, but qualified Fellows of the Craft seeking further advancement were placed in the south-east corner, from which is derived the practice of seating speculative Apprentices and Fellowcrafts in those corners. In speculative lodges the rough and perfect ashlar are often placed in the northeast and southeast corners, but in some lodges they are placed in front of the Junior and Senior Wardens respectively. In some constitutions the jewels of the deacons also are derived from operative practice, such as the maul of the senior deacon and the trowel of the junior deacon in Scottish lodges.

#### EARLY SPECULATIVE JEWELS

One of the earliest known references to the jewels of the lodge is to be found in the records of operative free masonry in Scotland, the Edinburgh Register House MS dated 1696, which is endorsed "Some Questions Anent the Mason Word". It is a catechism which sets out fifteen questions that must be put to a mason who claims to have the Word, as well as the answers he was required to give before he could be acknowledged as a mason. To the question: "Are there jewels in your lodge?" the reply was: "Yes three, perpend esler, a square pavement and a broad oval." Every freemason will be familiar with the square pavement, but the other two may not be known to him. The perpend esler or ashlar is an important stone used in the construction of masonry walls, but it is not the perfect ashlar stone required to be produced by a Fellow of the Craft as a test piece in operative lodges. Nevertheless the early speculative freemasons called it a perfect ashlar, possibly mistaking perpend for perfect. In speculative lodges the perpend ashlar was later replaced with the finely polished cubical stone used in modern lodges. The square pavement, to which a great deal of symbolism attaches, is no longer called a jewel and is included in the furniture of the lodge. The broad oval is one of a multitude of names by which the broached thumel appears to have been known and will be discussed later.

The perpend ashlar is commonly called a header and is usually three units long and one unit square in cross-section. It passes through the wall from the inside face to the outside face, tying the leaves of the wall together for added strength. The end faces of a perpend ashlar are dressed to conform with the surface finishes of the exposed faces of the walls, but all other faces are broached or scabbled to provide a good bond with the courses of stone through which it passes. The running stone used in wall construction is a similar stone, but it is broached for bonding on all faces except those to be exposed, which are dressed accordingly. At the end of his training in the old operative lodges and before he could be passed as a Fellow of the Craft, an apprentice was required to produce a satisfactory rough dressed ashlar, usually three units long and one unit square in cross-section, suitable for finishing as a perpend ashlar or a running stone. Before being allowed to take charge of the fitting and marking of stones for erection in the structure, an experienced Fellow of the Craft was required to prove his capabilities by producing a perfect ashlar as a test piece. It was similar to the rough dressed ashlar, but fully dressed and polished on all faces. In the early 1700's, when an apprentice was being tested on the catechisms in a speculative craft lodge he would be asked: "What are the immovable jewels?", to which the answer was: "The trasel board, rough ashlar and broached thumel". The word trasel, which is sometimes corrupted to tarsel, comes from the Old French through the Middle French trestel, which signified a bar or beam supported by legs, whence is derived the English trestle. The trasel board was the trestle table on which sketches were drawn,

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or over which the plans were spread. The trasel must not be confused with the indented tassel or indented tarsel in the old catechisms, which comes from the Old French tassel through the Middle English, among other things signifying an ornamental piece of fabric, the tassel or ornamental tuft of threads in modern English. It is interesting to note that a torsel, which is a plate supporting the end of a beam in a brick wall, is also called a tassel, but it comes from the French tasseau signifying a bracket. Although most of the practical aspects of these jewels have been omitted from the speculative explanation, the philosophical aspects of the instructions given in operative days have been incorporated and expanded upon. It is generally accepted that the rough ashlar refers to a rough hewn stone as brought from the quarries, which in olden times was cut one-eighth to one-sixteenth of an inch over the required finished measure. However, the meaning of the broached thumel in the catechism is uncertain. It seems most likely to have been derived from the Scottish operative masons to whom broach meant to rough hew, or to groove or scarify. A broaching thurmal, broaching thurmer or broaching turner was the chisel used to carry out broaching work. One form of the broaching thurmal is a narrow serrated chisel similar in many respects to the scutch, a cutting and dressing tool used by a bricklayer, probably is derived from the Old French escousser meaning to shake off. Thus the three immovable jewels referred to in the old catechisms of an apprentice logically symbolized the instructions he received for the work represented by the trasel board; the tools he used to execute the work, represented by the broached thumel; and his finished product, the rough ashlar. Another possible derivation of thumel is as a variation of the French tournelle, which means a turret, because the word was in common use in England in various forms from about 1400 until at least the 1750s.

Yet another suggested derivation is from the German thurm, which means a tower, because that word also was in general use in England during the same period. Moreover, it is likely that the French tournelle and German thurm have a common ancestry, from which the Scottish thurmal or thurmer may also have been derived. In any event, the cutting face of one form of the chisel used as a broaching thurmal is somewhat similar in appearance to a small castellated turret when viewed from above. Very early French tracing boards and some of

their contemporaneous English counterparts depicted a cubical stone surmounted by a pyramid, not unlike a squat church tower with a tall spire, which also was called a broached thumel in English speculative lodges. This stone is still retained on French tracing boards, but long ago disappeared from English tracing boards. French freemasons have always referred to this stone as "la pierre cubique a pointe", literally meaning a pointed square stone. The original French ritual, still in use, explains that it is a model of a spire or turret, whose various outlines provide a means of teaching the apprentice the forms of the square, triangle, cube and pyramid. Whatever the derivation and intended symbolism of the broached thurnel in the old English lodges and the broaching thurmal in the old Scottish lodges, it had disappeared from use by 1720.

The sequence of events by which the rough ashlar and the cubical perfect ashlar became jewels in modern speculative lodges was progressive in nature, varying from location to location and from lodge to lodge, with no clear boundaries between one usage and another. Not only are the available records scarce, but such as are available often do not record the actual dates when one custom lapsed or another was introduced. It is not clear why the perpend ashlar came to be replaced by the cubical perfect ashlar, nor when the change was made. All that can be said with certainty is that the cubical perfect ashlar seems to have been in general use in English speculative lodges by 1800. The perpend ashlar is an emblem of perfection and strength, coupled with the bonds of brotherly love. This is much more expressive than the cubical perfect ashlar as a symbol which illustrates the advancement of an apprentice from the rough and unpolished state to the state of discipline and education that is the hallmark of an experienced craftsman. As the bonding of men in friendship is an important objective of speculative freemasonry, it is a great pity that the perpend ashlar of operative masonry is no longer one of the jewels of the lodge.

#### SPECULATIVE TRACING BOARDS

Tracing boards were an important piece of equipment in all lodges of operative free masons. The inventory of stores recorded in the Fabric Rolls of the York Minster in 1399 include "ij tracying bordes". In lodges of operative free masons the locations of the tracing boards was entirely a matter of convenience

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to suit the work but there would be at least one in the office the Superintendent of Work in the stone yard and at the building site. During the construction of large buildings, such as cathedrals, there usually were drafting offices as well as the site offices. The practical tuition given in conjunction with the ceremonial

work of an operative lodge, customarily commencing at noon on the sixth day of the week, was carried out with the aid of a plan sketched on the floor or a drawing laid on a trestle board, usually in the centre of the lodge room so that those under instruction could gather round it.

In operative lodges the tracing board was used to give practical instruction to the candidates in the development of the required shapes of stones, in the preparation of the required templates and in the marking out of stones appropriate to the work of the degree. It was also used to illustrate the setting out of the work and to show how the stones should be assembled in the structure. In the early speculative lodges it was customary to draw a plan on the floor of the lodge room using chalk, charcoal and any other suitable medium, much as would have been done in an operative lodge. Like the drawings of the operative masons, they were placed in any convenient location where the members could gather round. This practice continued until painted or printed pictures of the "floor drawings" or "floorcloths" first became available around 1744 in France and 1760 in England. The location of modern tracing boards at the western

end of the squared pavement, or in any other position offering a clear view, has become acceptable and is in keeping with ancient practice.

The oldest known set of speculative tracing boards in Great Britain belongs to Lodge Faithful, which was founded at Norwich in 1753 and now meets at Harleston in Norfolk. These boards are dated 1800 and depict the modern form of rough and perfect ashlar on the First Degree board. The modern ashlar are also depicted on a set of tracing boards painted by William Dight in 1808 for the Lodge of Unanimity and Sincerity, which meets at Taunton. A set of tracing boards painted for the Chichester Lodge in 1811 by Josiah Bowring, a portrait painter of London, also depicts the modern ashlar. These boards appear to be the prototypes of the famous set painted by John Harris in 1821, from which most modern tracing boards are derived. The rough ashlar on tracing boards is usually placed at the foot of the Corinthian column representing the Junior Warden, who traditionally is in charge of the apprentices. The perfect ashlar is usually placed at the foot of the Doric column representing the Senior Warden, who traditionally is in charge of the craftsmen.

During the evolution of speculative freemasonry, there was a significant tendency to rearrange the symbolism and related rituals of operative free masonry, in what might best be described as a perceived orderliness and regularity. This may have been the underlying objective in replacing the perpendicular ashlar with the cubic perfect ashlar, perhaps influenced by a work entitled "The First and Chief Groundes of Archyitecture" published by Ihon Shute, Paynter and Archytecte in 1563 and reprinted in 1912. Early speculative freemasons included many erudite scholars who shaped our rituals in conformity with the literary English of the day. Among them, no doubt, would have been some who were familiar with Shute's work, in which he offers the injunction that "Ye shall make a four square stone like unto a dye" and continues with a description of the origin and rise of the architectural orders, which is repeated in virtually the same language in some of the old masonic lectures.

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