

I Wonder Why



By W.Bro Ken Gibson PPrGJW

*There are occasions during a ceremony when ones mind starts to wonder; this may happen during short breaks in the ceremonies such as when waiting for a candidate to return to the Lodge. During these periods I often found myself looking around and asking myself questions such as “**I wonder why we use that in that in the lodge?**” or “**I wonder what that represents?**” Despite asking questions to experienced brethren I could not find anyone who could fully answer all my queries.*

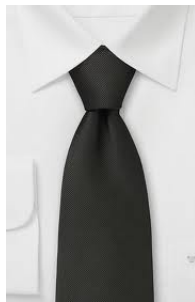
The ritual books do not always help us so I had to carry out some detailed research and I found some fascinating insights, which I would like to share with you.

One such item is a tie.

If you think about it why do we wear a tie. It fulfils no useful purpose other than hiding our shirt buttons. A tie is a piece of apparel that we have only been wearing since the 18th Century so before that what did we wear for masonic meetings and why?

In freemasonry we now all wear a tie of a similar design.

If you look around a Lodge you will notice that most freemasons nowadays wear a Provincial Tie, others wear a Grand Lodge Tie but several simply wear a plain black tie.



Black Tie

The summons from a Lodge usually states that correct dress in our Lodges is a black or a Provincial or Gand Lodge tie.

The question that posed itself was why must the tie be black?

If you ask the brethren why, most will not know, but some will say, “**it is in respect of the death of a builder**”, others will say that it is in “**memory of the fallen during the World Wars**”. So let’s look to see if either of these ideas have any merit.

Virtually all the portraits from earlier times are of upper class persons. In the Elizabethan times we can see, from these portraits, that most wore ruffs around their necks. These ruffs were very expensive to purchase and the normal working classes could not afford them. This meant that the majority of people rarely wore any form of neckwear.except the upper classes of the day. So the rich were the only people who would wear any form of neckwear.

Most speculative, or non-operative, Masonic Lodges started during the 17th century so this is the period that we need to consider.

In the early days of non-operative Masonry (circa 1600's) we find that the expected dress for a Freemason was a **white lace collar with white cuffs**. So the early freemasons wore a white lace collar or ruff. We find this from early portraits of freemasons.



Later in the 1700's the white collar was replaced with a **white bib or cravat**.

So where did the cravat come from?

The cravat was 1st worn by the **Royal-Cravates Regiment** of Croatian soldiers. This red or sometimes black cravat was made of linen, lace and muslin.



Their distinctive dress was not commonplace among the military so this neckwear was very unusual. They suffered great losses while attempting to obtain self-rule from the Habsburgs. After this abortive attempt they serve as mercenaries to the Kings of France.

One particular King, **Louis XIV (1638 – 1715)**, had great sympathy for their cause and he started wearing a cravat in a very similar style to the regiment. Many of his portraits portray him wearing such a cravat.



This fashion gradually swept France, as it was seen as a method of showing that you were of both power and wealth.

Why did we change in England?

A gentleman by the name of **George Bryan Beau Brummell** rejected the 18th century frills and is said to be the first person to wear a cravat in this country. He decided to wear a dark blue coat, buff-coloured pantaloons and waistcoat, black boots and a **clean white neck cloth or cravat**.



He was particularly adamant about the whiteness of his cravats. As he made his daily strolls around the London Parks, various gentleman's clubs and fashionable homes. Beau Brummell would stop and change his cravat as often as three or four times a day so as to ensure that they stayed white. He preferred neck cloths that were lightly starched and carefully folded.

Everyone from working men to royalty started to copy his fashion.

His great friend of his, the **Prince Regent, later King George IV**, adopted the simplicity of Brummell's outfits.

For the first time, poorer men hoping to make their way in the world could easily imitate upper class fashion without the massive cost previously associated with wearing ruffs. This gave them the means to imitate the Upper Classes, as the cost of a cravat was far lower than the high cost of fashionable clothes.



So by the end of the **18th century** the lace collar was replaced with a **cravat**. By this time they were worn for many different occasions and for general use they would not only be white but also any other colour. The change in colour was that people could wear a cravat over several days if it was not white, as it would not show the dirt so easily.

For more formal occasions a white cravat was always worn. Freemasons meetings are formal occasions so a white cravat was worn for all Masonic Meetings. The cravat was often referred to at this time, as a neck cloth.



When we look at portraits of freemasons, from this time, we can see them wearing these white cravats.



The minute book of a Lodge, **the Lodge of Prosperity No 61** in **1767**, instructed their Tyler to refuse admission to any member of a Lodge “**who is not clean and decently clad in a white cloth**”.

Another Lodge, now unfortunately extinct, **The Royal Cumbrian Lodge**, fined any brother **6d** for appearing in Lodge **wearing a coloured neck cloth or not having a clean collar** (*that is 6 old pence, for those who can not remember pre-decimalisation that is the equivalent to 2.5p*).

The sum of 2.5p was obviously a great deal of money in those days as the average income was only 25p per week. So the fine equated to 10% of your weekly income.

I would imagine that this fine ensured constant compliance, as most freemasons would be very reluctant to pay out such a large sum of money.

I wonder what the reaction would be today if the Tyler had to inspect every brother to see if he has a clean collar and then fine him 10 % of his weekly income if his collar is dirty or he has the wrong colour tie. It could be an interesting experience similar to when we were younger and our mum's checked that our collars were clean before we were allowed to go to school.

Around the late **19th century** the fashion again changed this time from cravats to **ties**.

So why was there a change from cravats to ties?

This was mainly due to wore bright red distinguish between the



the military. **The British Army** originally uniforms and these bright uniforms would different regiments.

Unfortunately a bright uniform is not a good idea in times of war as it made them easy targets so these were changed to drab green outfits. This meant that the uniform would be difficult to design in order to show different regiments.

It was decided that the easiest way to distinguish between regiments would be by neckwear. This was how the regimental tie was formed. Each regiment would have a different design on their tie.



When soldiers left the army they continued to wear their ties and others wished to copy this style.

British designers then produced various other patterns and the tie came into general use for the entire population.

Ties had an enormous appeal to the Victorian middle classes. The mass production of ties allowed men to stand out and to assert their social status. As most Lodges, at this time, consisted of middle class Victorians the tie became expected Masonic dress.

An American tie manufacturer, **Jesse Langsdorf**, produced a three-piece simple design so the first mass produced tie was then available. This opened the market, as this style tie was cheap to purchase and therefore could be afforded by a large percentage of the working population. It fast became the fashion to be seen at all time swearing a tie.

The new fashion, in the **19th century**, was to wear a very wide tie and **white ties** were worn for all formal occasions and therefore all Masonic meetings.

At the end of the 19th century the fashion changed yet again and people started to wear a wide **black tie** especially with morning suits for various social events. **Again following this fashion the wearing of morning suits then became the expected dress for all Freemasons.**

Many freemasons today continue to wear a morning suit for masonic occasions. At many Grand Lodge and Provincial Grand Lodge meeting you continue to see some officers wearing tailcoats. Two this purely stems from fashion.



The bow tie dates from **1886** when Pierre Lorillard V, an American, is said to have invented the tuxedo as an alternative to the previously worn morning suit with tailcoats, these were worn with white bow ties.



An alternative view is that in **1865** Edward, Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VII, decided to change his style of suit for less formal occasions and had an easier fitting style of dinner jacket made by his tailor.

Which ever view is believed the black tie started to be used from this period onwards for formal occasions..

How do we know these facts?

It is from portraits of famous people over the years.



The evidence for these changes in freemasonry is clearly shown by **19th century portraits** of freemasons wearing black ties with their morning suits and regalia.

Earlier portraits of freemasons clearly show them wearing white ties and even earlier paintings showing white bibs or neck cloths being worn.

The fashion changed from Lace Collars, to Bibs, to Neck Cloths or Cravats, to Ties so Masonic dress changed in a similar manner. You can also clearly identify, from these portraits, the change of the colour of ties from white to black.



Modern Portrait

After the 1st World War finished the then Grand Master made it compulsory for every freemason to wear a plain black tie within all English Masonic Lodges. This was to “**honour those that died during the Great War**”.

When I first joined Freemasonry in the late 1960's the only tie that could be worn in a Lodge was a plain black tie. My Mother Lodge designed and produced a lodge tie but the Provincial Grand Master of Sussex forbade us, to wear it in the Lodge Room during ceremonies. We were only allowed to wear it at the Festive Board after the meeting had finished. So we wore our black tie for the meeting and changed into our lodge tie for the festive board.

During the 1950's ties became thinner similar to the ties worn today.

In 2002 the **Marquees of Northampton, who was the Pro-Grand Master**, announced a competition for a new tie design to include the colours of English masonry, that is **light blue, dark blue and gold**.

The current Grand Lodge tie was designed and is now worn by several freemasons especially around the London area.

Since this time **Provisional and District** ties have been designed and are worn today by many brothers. Most provinces now have their own design of tie and you can see these when you visit Lodges.

We also allow other ties such as The Athol ties worn in Athol Lodges such as the Newstead Lodge No 47, The Bryon Club for young masons and many others.



Various Masonic Ties

It is interesting to note that ties have been around since **221BC**. China's first emperor, Shih Huang Ti and his Terracotta Army were discovered buried in an underground tomb. Several of the militia in the army have a necktie wrapped around their necks.



Terracotta Army with Neckties

In addition, in **113 AD**, early Roman orators wore “neckerchiefs” to keep their vocal cords warm and the Roman Military is seen in many paintings wearing some form of neckwear.



So the tradition of wearing neckwear started over 2,000 years ago. Elizabethans wore ruffs and this custom died out during the Middle Ages as wars forced many cost savings especially with the high cost of wearing ruffs. The main reason for this change is the fact that a ruff uses approximately 15 metres of expensive lace and most people could not afford this expense.

The use of neckwear, in history, is therefore to denote power, wealth and status and this fashion has continued until today. Even now businessmen nearly always wear suits and ties in the workplace.

So the compulsory Masonic dress for over 200 years was a white cloth or a white tie and black ties have only been worn only during the last 100 years.

History tells that most of the changes in Masonic neck attire are due to changes in fashion rather than for any speculative reason. The wearing of a black tie has only been compulsory for freemasons since the end of the 1st World War. The Grand Lodge and Provisional ties have only been around since the start of this century.

Who knows what Freemasons will be wearing in another 100 years?

Gloves



Another item of clothing that we all wear and take for granted in craft lodges is our **white gloves**. Why do we wear them? Is it symbolic or is it mainly for fashion purposes?

Let's start by looking at early **Operative Masons**. What did they wear?

It was the custom, for employers, to supply early **operative** masons with gloves for their work. How do we know this?

There are ancient records at **Ely Cathedral** that the Sacristy

“Bought gloves for new masons engaged on new work”.

These records date back to as early as **1322**.

The records of the head steward at **Canterbury College, Oxford** show that 20 old pence were given as glove money to all the masons who were rebuilding the College.

Another record shows, that in **1423**, ten pairs of gloves were supplied to masons in **York** whilst working on the **Minster**. There are further records dated **1331, 1383 and 1486** showing that gloves were presented to masons to “shield their hands from stone and lime”

This evidence shows that the masons of the middle ages wore gloves.

These gloves were, of course, for operative masons who were working on buildings, so they would obviously have been work gloves and worn in order to protect their hands from the coarse stones and the lime. They would have been made of leather or other strong materials, as this would have been the only suitable material available at this time.

There are no references as to the colour of the gloves supplied but I cannot believe that working masons would have been supplied with white work gloves. It is more likely that they were the natural colours of the materials used in making the gloves.

Working mason were not the only people to wear gloves, as there is plenty of evidence to show that, they were also worn by the upper classes.

The earliest reference to the use of gloves is found in **Egyptian Pyramids**. They were in the shape of bags and women, to protect their hands during work and cooking, wore them as mittens. It has been established that they were used to protect their hands from burning or staining.

In the **10th Century** the monks of **Saint Albans Monastery** in Mainz (now Germany) presented a pair of gloves to the new bishop when he was invested. This is the first recorded instance when gloves were worn to delineate status rather than just for practical reasons.



Church Gloves

It is also well known that the early **Kings of France** were presented with gloves at their coronations.

From this we can conclude that they were worn to designate that the wearer was a person of very high standing.

Knights and judges also wore gloves. Some were worn for symbolic significances and others for fashion.

The right glove was of particular importance as it was imperative to remove it when approaching a person of higher rank. It also had to be removed when approaching the altar in a church. Gloves were worn when attending church services and we can find samples of these **church gloves** in various museums.

Knights, we know from history, also wore gloves or gaunlets and we are all aware that when a knight slaps the face of an antagonist it is a challenge to a dual.

Knights are considered as high-ranking officials so the wearing of gloves helped to delineated their rank.



Knights Gloves

Bishops are seen in many early portraits wearing gloves especially when conducting official duties. The wearing of gloves by **Bishops** is a further sign of occasions when gloves are worn simply to denote high rank.



Custom dictated that **Judges**, in the Courts, were only allowed to give a judicial decision when wearing gloves. Once again we see a further sign that they are used to denote the seriousness of the wearer.

All these examples clearly demonstrate that gloves were not only worn, during the Middle Ages, for work purpose but were also worn to denote person of a high rank.

We have a clear distinction between work gloves and status gloves.

During the reign of **Elizabeth 1** gloves began to be worn as a luxury item. There is a case where the Earl of Hereford asked Lord Dudley to present to the queen, in his name, a pair of gloves as proof of his loyalty and devotion.

There is of course a very famous Englishman who was the son of a glove maker. This person was **William Shakespeare**. You can read many references to gloves in his plays.

White gloves have been worn since the Middle Ages by **Military Leaders, the Legal Profession and for Liturgical use in various religions**. They wore them for all formal occasions and they were always used to denote high rank officials.

Even now the Military can be seen wearing white gloves, just look at the passing-out parades at **Sandhurst Military Academy**.



Sandhurst Cadets

In the early 1900's white gloves were often worn at formal dinners by the then upper classes.

We are particularly interested in Masonic tradition so when were the earliest records showing Masonic Gloves?

In **1599** there is evidence that a freemason had to provide a pair of gloves on the day that he entered the Lodge as part of his entrance fee. In many of these early Speculative Lodges a newly made Brother had to supply:-

“Every member of his Lodge with a new pair of white gloves”.

The high cost of providing this large quantity of gloves clearly shows that new members must have been from the moneyed and higher classes.

There is further evidence of the purchase of gloves from the minutes of Aberdeen Lodge, Dunblane Lodge and the Lodge of Melrose in 1674 both of which show similar sentiments.

I would not advocate a return to this tradition, as this would prevent many people from joining freemasonry due to the high associated costs. In the 16th century however they wished to ensure that only the rich could become a freemason.

We can also find evidence for this in Masonic exposés written in the 18th century. Masonic ritual books did not exist as all ritual was taught by word of mouth from mason to mason. We therefore have to rely on written exposés of the Craft. The greater majority of these Exposés give similar accounts we have to assume that they are accurate. Lodges were very secret affairs so very little relating to ceremonies was put in writing.

It is written in a Masonic Exposé published in **1723**, entitled **“A Masonic Examination”** that

“When a freemason is enter'd, after having given to all present of the Fraternity two pairs of gloves, one for a man and one for a lady”.

A later French Exposé dated **1737** states that the ladies gloves were to be presented by the brother

“For her whom he esteems the most”.

This custom died out during the start of the 19th Century, which is a shame as it was a nice way to involve our ladies in masonry. However the wearing of gloves amongst ladies is no

longer fashionable which is most likely why it died out. There are a small number of lodges, mainly the Scottish Rite Lodges, where this tradition still persists.

Gloves came into speculative use from the operative practises with early masons who were working on buildings.

This would suggest that the symbolism of gloves is to emphasise the operative origin of today's Freemasonry.

The dress of operative masons became the dress of speculative masons.

As many members of early Speculative Lodges came from the professions it follows that they would not wish to wear work gloves but would prefer to wear white gloves to show their high standing in society.

It has been suggested that we wear white gloves as symbolism of purity, which is probably not the case, as I would suggest that like a black tie the colour has stemmed from fashion.

White gloves were worn to denote person of high rank. As early speculative masons were from these classes they would have continued to wear white gloves for Masonic meetings. This is a tradition that has continued to the present day.

It follows that the actual wearing of white Masonic gloves is symbolic but the colour is due to pure fashion.

When next you wear your white gloves just remember that people have been wearing gloves since the early Egyptians and that they have been worn for practical and fashion reasons ever since. Masons have worn them since the early Masonic Lodges were operating.

They are one of the only items, still used in modern day lodges, which remain unchanged, since the earliest formation of first Masonic Lodge.

Aprons

One item that we all wear in our Craft Lodges is an apron.



They are of various styles some are very plain and other are very fancy. Entered Apprentices have plain white aprons, Fellow Crafts have white with blue rosettes, Master Masons wear blue trimmed aprons and Masters and Past Masters have a different symbol. We also have an apron for Provincial Officers and Grand Lodge Officers. The leaders of any Province have a very fancy apron as do senior Grand Lodge Officers.

What sort of aprons do we wear in the past and why do we wear an apron. This may seem to be a question with an obvious answer but let's have a look at the apron in some detail.

We still have a few examples of the aprons worn by Operative Masons in the Middle Ages. They were large enough to cover the wearer from chest to ankles and were made from the skin of an animal, most probably a sheep. They were used to purely to protect the workmen from stones, lime and dust.

As speculative masons we copied the style of apron worn by our predecessors and this style has gradually changed over the years.

The earliest representation of the Freemason's Apron can be seen on a portrait dated **1717** of **Anthony Sayer, who was the first Grand Master of the modern Craft**. A similar apron is can be seen on the front piece of the first **Book of Constitutions' dated 1729**. Unfortunately, on the former only the upper half of the apron is visible. In the latter a Tyler is bringing several aprons into a hall. These portraits show that these are large white aprons tied with a bowstring in the front.

Early surviving aprons clearly show us that the bib was worn up as they have a buttonhole to fasten on to a jacket or waistcoat.



Early Mason Apron with Bib

From 1731 onwards the apron became smaller and made of softer fabrics usually silk, satin or velvet. The bib, of the apron, was folded down and became a flap and the leather thongs gave way to ribbons or strings.

Early aprons were plain white but from 1730 a tendency developed to decorate these aprons with symbolic designs. Many of these early aprons were hand made and elaborately painted and between 1740 and 1790 this practice became widespread.



Hand Painted Aprons

In the Library of the **Province of Yorkshire** is an apron dated about 1820. It is small and hand made of white linen edged with a narrow light blue ribbon. The strings are long and of the same blue ribbon. The flap is down and is cut in a semi-circle. So we still have examples of these early masonic aprons.

The material of early aprons was always leather. Operative Masons would have used leather aprons due to the nature of their work and Speculative Masons continued to wear leather aprons until the 1770's.

We can also see a leather masonic apron being worn by a famous painting of George Washington in the late 1700's.



What reference is there to the style of aprons worn by particular officers in the lodges?

We need to look in early references from Grand Lodge

There is a reference in the minutes of a **Grand Lodge**, dated 17th March 1731 that

“Masters and Wardens of particular lodges may line their white leather aprons with white silk, and may hang their Jewels at white ribbons about their necks”.

In **1721** Grand Lodge passed a resolution ordaining that: -

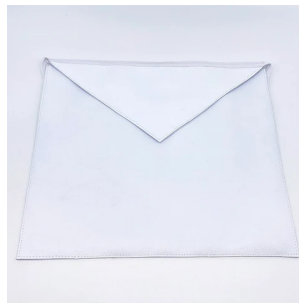
“None but the Grand Master, his Deputy and Wardens shall wear White Leather aprons with Blue Silk”

This was the first written mention of blue silk as a trimming for aprons. Other masons continued to wear a differing variety of aprons on lodges as the above was the only resolution and masons could wear whatever style they liked as long as it was not blue silk.

It took until **1814** for a uniform style of apron to be agreed by Grand Lodge.

The Constitutions dated 1815 stated the exact style of apron to be worn: -

Entered Apprentice: - A plain white lambskin 14 to 16 inches deep, square at the bottom and without ornament.



EA Apron

Fellow Craft: - A plain white lambskin apron, similar to the Entered Apprentice with the addition only of two sky-blue rosettes at the bottom.

FC Apron



Master Mason: - The same, with sky-blue lining and edging, 1½ inch deep and an additional rosette on the flap. No other emblem or ornament shall be allowed except to officers and past masters of the lodges, who may have the emblems of their offices in silver or white in the centre of the apron.”



MM Apron

You will notice that there has been very little change from the aprons of 1815 to the aprons worn today.

There is no doubt that the wearing of aprons stems from our Operative origins and we now wear aprons for speculative reasons, which are clearly stated by the Senior Warden when presenting an apron to a candidate.

A further question is why do we have rosettes on Fellowcraft and Master Masons aprons?

Rosettes

Their origin is totally unknown. They could be purely decorative or may have a more practical significance of representing the **Three Degrees or even the Holy Trinity**. The colour blue is said by some to symbolise charity although many aprons throughout the world have different colours. Masonic scholars have no clear understanding of their use and are unclear on their origin.

Before we investigate further I must give a word of warning.

(Towards the end of the 18th Century there was a tendency to exaggerate symbolic values. Unfortunately, many sincere and famous Freemasons, such as **Fort Newton, Oliver, Paton, and Wilmshurst**, who exercised much influence in their time, have written about symbolism but most of their comments are not based on historic proofs but rather on their own thoughts as to what they would like to believe they should represent. We must not completely ignore their reasoning but must remember that some of their explanations are exaggerated. We cannot solely rely on their explanations, as there is little or no evidence to support them).

These masonic scholars of their time literally invented speculative reasons for the explanation of masonic items.

So what are the true origins of these blue rosettes?

These scholars said the three rosettes represented the Holy Trinity or even the Three Degrees. We must be very careful and bear in mind that these speculative interpretations are pure invention and not based on any original masonic writings or rituals.

Lets look instead at some facts.

The rose has always been an emblem of secrecy.

In **Egypt and Ancient Greece** candidates for initiation into various mysteries **wore roses** to remind them to keep their secrets.

The **Romans** had the ceilings of their banqueting halls painted or engraved with roses to symbolise that the drinking events, held in them, were private.



Egyptian Rosettes



Roman Rosettes on a border

Conversations held “Sub Rosa” (or under the rose) are conversation that must be held in the strictest confidence. To emphasise this the 18th century Jacobites, who wished to return the exiled Stuarts to the throne, used a white rose as their badge.

At an earlier time a 16th century Pope declared that a rose should be carved into confession booths to ensure privacy. These carvings can still be seen, on the confessionals, in some churches today.

As a rosette is a small Rose so it could follow that we use rosettes in masonry as a symbol of secrecy.

As you can see there is a great deal of evidence that rosettes and roses were used to denote secrecy The actual reason that we wear rosettes cannot be traced so this is an unreliable explanation and is only based on my personal interpretation. We must not decide symbolic reasons without reliable proofs.

This shows how easy it is for any of to follow in the footsteps of **Fort Newton, Oliver, Paton, and Wilmshurst** and invent reason for symbolism.

We do however have facts that show clearly that rosettes have been used to denote secrecy in the past so it could be that early masons used rosettes in a similar way as freemasonry started as a secret society.

Another strange example, that we find hard to explain, is why do Provisional and Grand Lodge Aprons have seven chains or tassels on each side of their aprons?

Tassels



Tassels

Tassels have developed from the waist strings of early aprons. There are examples of 18th century aprons with broad ribbon with a gold fringe so that when tied they look like tassels. The tassels were originally of inch wide ribbon though nowadays they are made silver or white metal.

During the mid 1800 we find that aprons started to have silver tassels. The first mention of them is in the **1841 Book of Constitutions**. Before this time there is no reference to their use.

Past Master aprons have **seven tassels** and the number seven was considered sacred by many ancient cultured nations. The number seven however does have significant meanings as it was considered a sacred number.

Many ancient religions had seven gods, angels or demons, including **the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Persians and the Parsees**. In the East the number seven was held with great reverence.

The bible states that God created the world in seven days. We have Seven Wonders of the World and seven days in a week. There are numerous references to this number.

Again I, and no Masonic Scholar, can give you any factual explanation. The explanation that we find for their uses are of doubtful origin and appear to be again based on conjecture. I would like to give you an explanation for their use but I cannot find one.

The use of such items in masonry is just simply “**Shrouded in Mystery**”.

This is one of the wonderful issues regarding masonry, as we do not know the answer to many of our questions.

To add even more confusion Masters and Past Master don't have rosettes, they have squares or levels. Do we know what they are or why we wear them?

Squares or Levels.



Past Masters Apron

The **1815 *Constitutions*** describes them as “*perpendicular lines upon horizontal lines thereby forming three several sets of (two) right angles*”.

To describe them this way rather convoluted way shows that they may have represented three sets of right angles. I cannot currently find any emblematic reasons for their significance in early Masonic Literature or early Masonic Exposés. If anyone has a suggestion I, and many other masonic scholars, would be grateful for an explanation. As long as it is not based on the caution given above and is based on evidence rather than conjecture.

Nothing has been found in any early Masonic Literature or Exposés to explain their significance. The symbols on aprons are most probably emblematic so it is impossible to state accurately the reason why they are as they are.

A description of Masonry that we all know is “***Masonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.***”

So I would love to give you factual explanations but in truth we have no factual ideas as to why we use these items.

As previously stated, **Fort Newton, Oliver, Paton, and Wilmshurst** came up with explanations for symbolic meanings for many of the items used and found in lodges, including tassels and the emblems on Past Masters aprons but these explanations are based on pure speculation and not on any historic foundation. Some other masons have also tried to explain their symbolism but again these are based on their individual thoughts and speculation and are just supposition.

As Masonic Scholars we must always be on our guard against introducing our own speculative reasons for interpretation that are not substantive.

The apron is one of our most important symbolic features and is proudly worn by all freemasons of whatever rank. It is our most distinguishable object and is well known as the prime masonic symbol to those outside of freemasonry.

All freemasons will have heard the presentation given by the **Senior Warden** to new masons when being presented with their apron. These are delivered in slightly differing ways in various lodges. In most lodges the Senior Warden presents the apron to the candidate.

Here is an **ancient presentation**, which even now is relevant.

My Brother, on behalf of this Lodge, I now present to you this white Lambskin Apron. It may be that in the coming years, upon your brow shall rest the laurel leaves of victory; it may be that, pendant from your breast, may hang jewels fit to grace the diadem of some Eastern Potentate.

Aye! More than these, for light, added to the coming light, may enable your ambitious feet to tread round after round of the ladder that leads to fame in our Mystic Order; and even the purple of our fraternity may rest upon your honoured shoulders; but never again, from mortal hands; never again, until your enfranchised spirit shall have passed upwards and inward, through the pearly gates, can a greater honour be bestowed, or one more emblematical of purity and innocence, than that which has been conferred upon you tonight.

This apron, this special gift of this lodge, is yours to wear upon all proper occasions throughout an honourable life, and at your death, is to be placed upon your coffin that contains your lifeless remains and with them shall be laid beneath the silent clods of the valley.

May the pure and spotless surface of this apron be an ever-present reminder of "that purity of heart and uprightness of conduct so essentially necessary," thus keeping pure your thoughts, and inspire nobler deeds and greater achievements.

Then, when at last, your weary feet shall have come to the end of life's toilsome journey, and from your nerveless grasp, shall drop, forever the working tools of life, may the record of your life and actions be as pure and spotless as this Apron now is; and when your soul, freed from earth, shall stand naked and alone before the Great White Throne, may it be your portion to hear from the Great Architect, the plaudit; "Well done and welcome, thou good and faithful servant!"

Pillars, Columns & Candlesticks.

One item that you see in most lodges are candle sticks on pillars and the Wardens have a pillar.

Lets look at these items separately and see try to understand their meaning.

Starting with candlesticks or columns.

The candlesticks in several lodges are of different styles usually associated with different styles of Columns or pillars. These Columns or Pillars are usually topped with a candle.

So are these Columns, Pillars or are they Candlesticks?

We usually take our candlesticks for granted and give them little in any thought.

They are mentioned in the **Explanation of the 1st Tracing Board** but they are also referred to as **pillars**. So did **pillars** become **candlesticks**?

Early Lodge paintings and drawings show us that the candlesticks were arranged to form a triangle in the centre of the Lodge but later drawings from the early 19th Century show that they were moved to their present positions.

Nowadays **one is by the Master, one by the SW and one by the JW**.

When and why did they move?



Early Columns

If we look back to very early Lodges' minutes we find no mention of candlesticks but we do find three Pillars named in their text. In the **Explanation of the 2nd Tracing Board** five pillars are mentioned but only three pillars are mentioned in these early lodges and these represent the noble orders of architecture Ionic, Doric and Corinthian. In an early lodge we find a different explanation.

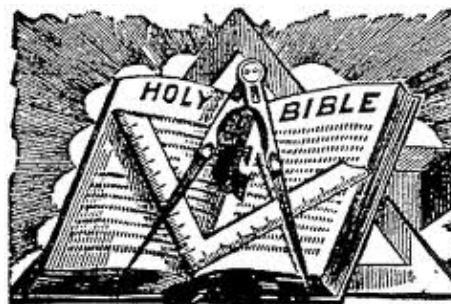
These **three pillars** are mentioned in **Dumfries Lodge No 4 in 1710 in a different way by a series of questions..**

Q. How many pillars is in your Lodge

A. Three

Q. What are these

A. Ye square the compass & ye Bible



Ancient Bible

So the pillars are not necessarily items of furniture.

In these early ceremonies, apart from a very brief oath, the ritual was made up of these Questions and Answer and we find reference to these pillars in a famous exposé, dated **1730**, known as **Masonry Dissected**.

Q. What supports a Lodge

A. Three Great Pillars

Q. What are they called?

A. Wisdom, Strength and Beauty

Q. Why so?

A. Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support and Beauty to adorn.

So here we find reference to furniture.

The reference to pillars can have multiple reasoning.

Most of the references to pillars in early lodges is relating to furniture.

A set of three pillars is mentioned in the records of the **Nelson Lodge in 1757**.

The Lodge of Relief, in Bury has a record that it purchased a set of three pillars in **1761**.

Also the ancient **Lodge of Edinburgh No 1**, which is now over **260 years old**, uses a set of three pillars each about three feet tall.

In most other early Lodges these pillars were usually found drawn on the floor of a Lodge in chalk and/or charcoal. These floor drawings later became our modern Tracing Boards.

We are told in the **Explanations of the First Tracing Board**

“Our Lodges are supported by three great pillars. They are called Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support and Beauty to adorn but as we have no noble orders in architecture known by the names Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, we refer to the three most celebrated architectural styles which are Ionic, Doric and Corinthian”.



1st Tracing Board

So the pillars are emblematical of **Wisdom, Strength and Beauty**, and were of three different types Ionic, Doric and Corinthian.

We are also told that they represented the three Grand Masters who bore sway at the building of the first temple, namely **Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of Tyre and Hiram Abif**.

The Master of a Lodge represents King Solomon and his column, was of the Ionic order, and is the symbol of Wisdom.



Ionic

The SW, who represents Hiram King of Tyre, and his column, was of the Doric order, and represents Strength.



Doric

The JW, who represents Hiram Abif, and his column, is of the Corinthian order, and is symbolic of Beauty.



Corinthian

So the WM represents Wisdom, the SW represents Strength and the JW represent Beauty.

Between **1696 and 1700** candlesticks first made their appearance. The **Old Lodge of Dundee** purchased a set of three candlesticks of the **Doric, Ionic and Corinthian styles in 1739** and they are still in use today. This is the first reference to a combination of pillars and candlesticks and serves as a pointer to a change.

In the **1750's and 1760's** we have evidence that pillars were used as furniture but towards the end of the **18th century** we find less mention of pillars and more of candlesticks.

Today we find in many Lodges the current candlesticks clearly show the three different styles of pillars.

This clearly shows that the Pillars that were used in early Lodges became the candlesticks that we use in most Lodges today.

This could easily be due to financial reason in order to reduce cost of opening new lodges. Using candlesticks as pillars means that the lodge does not need to purchase both candlesticks and pillars.

In early times many Lodges did not have or own a **Masonic Hall** in which they could meet, so they would meet in upstairs rooms in public house. It would also be easier to transport and store bulky furniture if they could combine the pillars into the candlesticks.

Just as an interesting side issue. Candlesticks are of course used to hold candles. Candles as we know are nearly always used in holy places but not necessarily just for light as they are frequently used in the open air during the day. They are used in many religions to show gladness and happiness.

A usual symbolic reference to a candle is for **Secrecy**

So how did I arrive at a candle meaning secrecy?

There is a very old metaphor, which is “**Tace is the Latin for candle**”. The arms of United Grand Lodge bear the motto “**Avdi, Vide Tace** ”. Which for those of us who do not understand Latin translates to “**Hear, See and be Silent**”?



Grand Lodge Coat of Arms

So therefore **Tace, which is Latin for candle, and Tace means be Silent** so candles teach us to **be silent and to keep our Masonic secrets**.

Next time you are in your lodge and you see the ADC light the candles you can later tell him what the candles represent.

That covers pillars and candlesticks what about columns?

The main reference to columns is to the columns in front of the Wardens, which they raise and close.

These are very similar to pillars. So are they columns or are they Pillars. Why do we use them and do they have any Speculative use?

In the oldest craft documents dated **c1410** called “**The Old Charges**” there were two pillars on which were engraved all the then known sciences.

These “Old Charges” tell us how four children of **Lamech**, namely **Jabal, Jubal, Naamah, and Tubal-Cain** (Tubal-Cain is known to have invented the forge and is mentioned in our current rituals). They feared that the world was about to be destroyed by fire or flood so they decided to inscribe all the then known sciences upon two pillars in order to preserve all the knowledge that they had found.

One was made of Marble so that it would not burn and one of Clay so that it would not drown in water.

There are a number of variants to this legend about indestructible pillars. Some ascribe them to **Seth** and some to **Enoch**. So these two pillars of Lamech, not Solomon’s, were the earliest reference to pillars in the history of the Craft. In the **14th and 15th century** Solomon’s Pillars had no special significance for Freemasons.

In most of the rituals used today the two pillars mentioned are the **Two Great Pillars at the porch way or entrance to King Solomon’s Temple**.



King Solomon’s Temple

The first appearance of Solomon’s pillars, as a craft ritual, is in a summary called “**The Edinburgh Register House**” dated **1696**. The “Edinburgh Register House” is the oldest surviving document, which describes the actual performance of ceremonies. From this time onwards there is virtually no reference to the Pillars of the children of Lamech so the ritual has changed from earlier times.

Pillars became handsome pieces of furniture, in early Lodges, usually standing in the West. They were used as a kind of portal through which candidates could pass and this custom is still in use in some Lodges today.



Ancient Pillars

Early English exposés of the Craft, between **1760 and 1765** state that Wardens were **floor officers**, rather like our current Deacons, and that they carried in their hand a pillar each. One exposé states “**The Senior and Junior Warden have each of them a column in their hand about twenty inches long**”.

Later, in the 1700's, the Wardens were given seated places in the Lodge. **Initially both sat in the West facing the Worshipful Master. The Junior Warden was then moved to his current position in the South.** The columns were then placed on the pedestal in front of the wardens.



Wardens Columns

Here we have clear evidence based on masonic fact that the wardens columns clearly represent the two great pillars at the porch way or entrance to King Solomon's temple.

This is supported by The **Three Distinct Knocks**, a Masonic exposé dated 1768, which states that **The Senior is Strength and the Junior is to Establish.**



The Three Distinct Knocks

Part of the 2nd degree ritual also states the names of the two pillars and what they represent.

So there is a clear distinction between the three pillars that became candlesticks and the Wardens columns.

The candlesticks or pillars represent Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre and Hiram Abif, whilst the Wardens Columns represent the two great pillars at the porch way or entrance to King Solomon's Temple.

The columns used by the Wardens are used to inform the brethren as to whether the Lodge is open or closed. The pillars, or candlesticks, are fixed pieces of furniture. Have a close look at the candlesticks in your own lodge or other lodges when you visit. At first glance they may appear to all be the same but look closely and you will often see difference between them.

Hopefully you are now aware of the reason for the candlesticks and the columns in our Lodges and understand that they are not just decorations but have very ancient and symbolic reasons for their use which is based on historical documentation.



Conclusion

Evidence clearly states that: -

- *Black Ties and Lodge Ties are fashion orientated.*
- *Gloves are symbolic of operative masons although the white colour of gloves stems from past fashions.*
- *Aprons stem from our operative past but their design has changed slightly over the years.*
- *Candlesticks, candles and warden columns have historical and symbolic reasons for their use.*

As we have discovered we must always be careful, when we consider the symbolic use of many of the items we use within the Lodge. The symbolism stated may not be based on historic use or fact but may purely be based on conjecture. There are many papers and documents that can be explored and I would suggest that these should always be considered being coming to a conclusion.

Many items have documented symbolism that has been used since the early days of masonry, some has been invented and some is based on fashion. Due to the lack of early written details of ceremonies there is always room for debate and discussion regarding the correct interpretation of masonic ritual and symbolism. This is very healthy and should always be encouraged.

Lodges of Instructions or Rehearsal should be encouraged to have question and answer sessions rather than just be a rehearsal of ritual. After each Lodge of Instruction meeting why not spend a few minutes discussing some of the lodge items with which we cannot find a reference in our ritual book. If they cannot be easily or quickly answered then some research may be required to find the answer. This approach would help to stimulate thought and help masons to retain their enjoyment and understanding of our wonderful institution.

This would also help retain our membership and keep brethren interested in attending our meetings.

Acknowledgements

I have used evidence from several masonic papers and records in order to write this Masonic Paper.

The transactions of **ARS QUATUOR CORONATORUM Lodge No 2076** have been particularly informative and I would recommend that anyone interested in further research reads their literature. This Lodge is open to any mason, interested in history, to join their correspondence circle.

Simply apply via their web site <http://quatuorcoronati.com>

When you first became a mason you were asked

“To make a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge”

By taking an active interest in the everyday items that we see every time we enter our Lodges we can all endeavour to follow this instruction simply by asking

“I Wonder Why?”

