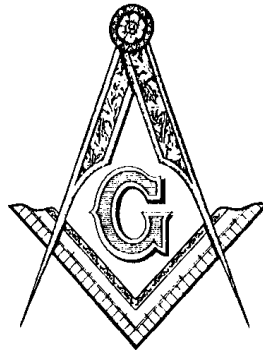


THE
NEWSLETTER
OF THE COMMITTEE
ON
MASONIC
EDUCATION



THE
GRAND LODGE OF CANADA
IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

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THE GRAND MASTER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TO ALL CONTRIBUTORS	4
SUBSCRIPTIONS	5
BACK ISSUES	5
THE COLLEGE OF FREEMASONRY	6
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.....	7
WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?.....	9
THE OFFICE OF STEWARD AND THE GRAND STEWARD	11
THE JEWEL OF THE STEWARDS IS THE CORNUCOPIA	13
AN OFFICE OF DISTINCTION, MUCH PRIZED BY THE FRATERNITY	14
TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME.....	15
CHANGING TIMES	17
THE UNEXPLAINED.....	19
HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF THE CRAFT	19
INTRODUCTION	19
THE FOUR TASSELS	20
NOTES AND REFERENCES	24

TO ALL CONTRIBUTORS

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Size of Article: Material submitted for the Newsletter should reflect consideration both of the physical size of the publication, and the readability of the piece. Our pages run 300-325 words per page, so a maximum of about 1200-1300 words is the limit. Articles can also be one-paragraph notes of interest, or any length in between. Longer articles of special merit might be printed in sections over several issues.

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An Invitation: The Newsletter is published by the Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Education. We welcome responses from all readers. If any of our contributors or subscribers have access to historical information about their District, or Lodge, or special individuals, please forward it to the Editor. Much of our Masonic history is also linked to the history of our country through members who have been community, business, professional, religious or political leaders. Careful research of material made available should provide some interesting information for The Newsletter readers. It would also help to educate us all about the contributions of individual members, lodges and Districts to the history of our country, provinces, and our villages, towns and cities. We need to know more about each other and about the part that Canadian Masons have played in our history. Can you help?

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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THE COLLEGE OF FREEMASONRY

The Committee on Masonic Education offers its challenging Correspondence Course of Masonic Education throughout this Grand Jurisdiction.

The College of Freemasonry is a four part program that can be taken separately or together as the student desires, in any order.

Upon completion of each program a certificate is awarded, but to become a member of the College of Freemasonry, you must complete all four programs. The cost of each program is \$20.00, payable in advance to:

Masonic Education Course 363 King Street West Hamilton, On L8P 1B4
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Brethren, a real opportunity – don't miss it – broaden your Masonic knowledge – Education is the key to your enjoyment of your Masonic future! (Note: This course requires access to reference material readily available in this jurisdiction and parts of the course pertain specifically to this Grand Jurisdiction).

Application forms are available on the Grand Lodge Web site or from your District Chairman of Masonic Education.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question 1: When is the Sign of Fidelity used?

Answer: For some reason, the Sign of Fidelity is one of the most misused of all the signs in Masonry. Perhaps it is because we do not pay particular attention to the instruction of new candidates in its use. Perhaps it is looked upon as such a 'common' gesture that we really don't pay much attention to when it should properly be used. Whatever the reason, there seems to be confusion over the use of the Sign of Fidelity.

If we refer to page 85 of Meeting the Challenge or page 65 of The Masonic Manual, we find that the Sign of Fidelity is used during Lodge in the following circumstances:

- during prayers
- during obligations;
- in the closing of the V.O.T.S.L.
- F.F.F. in the closing of the lodge;
- by the S.W. (only) when presenting a candidate;

In addition, the Sign of Fidelity is given when receiving Grand Honours or accompanying a brother who is receiving them, and as directed during the Installation Ceremony.

The following are examples of situations where the Sign of Fidelity should be NOT used?

- the Sign of Fidelity is not used by the Worshipful Master when receiving visitors;
- the Sign of Fidelity is not used (directed to the W.M.) when you have completed a piece of the ritual;
- the Sign of Fidelity is not used during grace at the banquet hour;

Several additional questions further illustrate the use of the sign.

Question 1a: Is the sign of fidelity given during the blessing (a prayer) for the banquet hour when the blessing is given after lodge closes but before the Brethren depart the Lodge room for the banquet hall?

Answer: In this example, once the Lodge is closed (and the Volume of the Sacred Law has been closed) the Sign of Fidelity should not be used.

Question 1b: Is the sign of fidelity given during the blessing for the banquet hour when the blessing is given before lodge closes?

Answer: In this example, the Lodge is still open, the blessing would be considered a prayer during lodge and the Sign of Fidelity would be used.

Question 1c: Is the sign of fidelity given during the blessing at the banquet hour?

Answer: As above, the Sign of Fidelity is not used during the banquet hour.

Question 1d: When is the sign of fidelity used during the memorial Service?

Answer: The sign of fidelity is assumed when the Worshipful Master begins “let us pray...”.

We hope that the above discussion of the use of the Sign of Fidelity will help alleviate the confusion over its use.

Question 2: Does the Worshipful Master of the Lodge participate in the giving of “The Grand Honours”?

Answer: The code for extending “The Grand Honours” is given in section 15 of the Book of Constitution. The method for extending them is found on page 83 of Meeting the Challenge. All members who are present in the lodge give “The Grand Honours”, while those who are receiving them, and those who are accompanying the recipients, stand at the Sign of Fidelity.

Question 3: Those Brethren in attendance at a lodge meeting, who are entitled to assume the gavel, generally stand and sit together with the Worshipful Master. Do they also rise with the Worshipful Master when the Lodge is being called from labour to refreshment and from refreshment to labour?

Answer: In the Book of the Work, it states: "... the three principal officers and the I.P.M. rising". Thus, in this situation, someone like the District Deputy Grand Master would remain seated and rise with the other Brethren.

Question 4: If a Past Master or a Grand Lodge Officer is occupying an officer's chair how is he addressed?

Answer: When acting as an officer he is addressed in that capacity, i.e. Bro. Junior Deacon or Bro. Director of Ceremonies, etc., regardless of rank and never as R.W., V.W. or W. Bro. Secretary.

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

V.W. Bro. Syd Lowe, The Tuscan 195

In presenting this paper, a very serious disclaimer must be offered. Very little originality or creativity can be attributed to the presenter. Plagiarism runs rampant throughout, as thoughts, ideas, and even whole sentences have been culled from many sources over a number of years. However, when all of these have been brought together into one cohesive unit, a most acceptable answer is provided to the oft asked question----

"WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?"

Masonry is not a temple of mysteries, nor a repository of rituals, nor a reformatory of the fallen, nor the branch office of a benevolent society, but the happy and restful, refined and intellectual home of goodwill and good sense.

Brethren, not Bondsmen – men of brain and brawn, young men and mature men, drawn and consolidated together by some magnetic affinity of association. Just average men in a world of motion and emotion, of aspiration and purposeful progress-----men who discover one another and realize themselves in a loose

and familiar association, men who have realized that the brotherhood of man begins with the manhood of a brother.

We are not interested in keeping Freemasonry alive as an organization just for the sake of keeping it alive. We are not interested in trying to justify our right to live today by virtue of something that happened yesterday. Rather, we are interested in making Freemasonry in the present, so vital, so arresting, so constructive, that it will give meaning and worth to all that Masons have done in the past to make the present possible.

Masonry is what we make it. The things we do today are history tomorrow. What we do now cannot be undone. There is no time in the annals of history when there has been more and greater need for organized endeavour to keep and preserve a way of life that all of us enjoy, and too many take for granted. It is to be hoped that all Brethren will remember their Masonic teachings.

Do not expect perfection in a man because he is a Mason, if you do, you will be very disappointed. Masonry makes men better, but no human agency makes them perfect. If he is a Mason, you have the right to presume that he is a fairly good man, but do not condemn Masonry as a whole should the odd Mason turn out to be bad. Even the "Great Teacher" had a Judas among his followers. The aim and purpose of Masonry is to receive none but good men, -- keep them good --and try to make them better. Judge the institution, not by a few failures, but by the average of its successes. This average is very high, and consequently gives standing to its members, but it cannot be an infallible guide.

If one were asked to sum up the meaning of Masonry in a single word, the only word equal to the task would be "Light". From its first lesson to its last lecture, in every degree and in every symbol, the mission of Masonry is to bring the light of God into the life of man. It has no other aim, and knowing that, when the light shines, the truth will be revealed.

Freemasonry is a life to be loved, not a formality to be carelessly observed. It is a life grounded in religion, organized in morality, mellowed by good fellowship, humanized in character and dedicated to service. The Freemason however, should never forget that brotherly love is something more than good fellowship and social enjoyment; that relief is more than contribution to some charitable fund, and that truth is not served merely by refraining from telling falsehoods. May we ever be true to the grand principles upon which the order is founded, and these principles are better made evident by the way in which we live our lives.

In the work of Masonry, there are many fields of endeavour and, all are a part of our plan to improve ourselves in the way of life. One Brother may outline, in a few appropriate words, the duties that are ours as Masons, and his words inspire us. Another Brother may not have the same abilities, but he knows with equal certainty about his duties both as a man and a Mason. If he learns of a Brother who is sick or in distress, he understands. It is more than an understanding of duty; it is the understanding of the principles of love and brotherhood which quickens the desire into action and sends him to the aid of the sick and distressed. One Brother may be a good ritualist, another a student of symbolism, or an excellent worker on any committee to which he is appointed. Each Brother doing the special task for which he has the greatest ability, results in the success of the Lodge in particular and of Masonry in general.

THE OFFICE OF STEWARD AND THE GRAND STEWARD

“... rising to eminence by merit ...”

R.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels, GJW
Chairman, Masonic Education, Waterloo District
Member, Grand Lodge Masonic Education Committee

Presented at Ayr Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 172 G.R.C., Ayr
On Monday, 2 October 2000 on the occasion of the Official Visit of R.W. Bro. William Clemens, DDGM and Presentation of Regalia to V.W. Bro. Junior B. Groff, Grand Steward

Worshipful Master, The Right Worshipful the District Deputy Grand Master,
Distinguished Grand Lodge Officers, and Brethren:

Thank you, Worshipful Master, for extending an invitation to speak in your lodge, and thank you, Right Worshipful Sir, for granting me this privilege on the occasion of your Official Visit. It gives me much personal pleasure to take part in the proceedings marking this most memorable milestone in the Masonic life of V.W. Bro. Junior Groff. What a delight it was to travel in his company throughout Waterloo District and across the Grand Jurisdiction as he performed the duties of District Secretary during the Masonic year just past. What a complementary team

they made - Bill, the iconoclastic jester, and Junior his patient straight man. Together, in the discharge of the duties of their respective offices, it was clear that they were themselves happy, and they freely and liberally communicated that happiness to all of us lucky enough to be in their congenial company.

It has been said that, whereas the rank and title of Right Worshipful is accorded to Brethren for what they might do in the service of the Grand Lodge office to which they are elected, the rank and title of Very Worshipful is granted by appointment to worthy Brethren for what they have done - or in other words, conferred as a reward "for services rendered." While the former may over time be earned; the latter is deserved and when viewed in its proper sense, is indeed honorary. At the 145th Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge in July, M.W. Bro. Robert J. McKibbon, the Grand Master, appointed 69 Grand Stewards for 2000-2001, among them our most deserving Brother. From our ancestors come our names: but from our virtues our honours. Grand Honours, like Degrees in Masonry, are conferred according to merit and ability. Tonight, the members of your immediate Masonic family, the Brethren of your mother lodge, the Brethren of your sister lodges in Waterloo District, and your Brethren of the Grand Lodge, your paternal guardians (to carry the analogy further) are here assembled to congratulate you, Very Worshipful Sir, and celebrate the distinction you have achieved and earned.

The Office of STEWARD is both ancient and honourable. The old English guilds all had their stewards, and our ancient operative brethren in the Masons Guilds likewise appointed stewards. The earliest surviving Masonic document, The Regius Manuscript, which dates from about 1390, contains these lines:

"The ninth point we shall him call
That he be the steward of our hall.
If you are in the hall together,
Each one must serve the other with good cheer.
It takes gentle fellows, as you must know,
To be stewards all in turn about,
Week after week without doubt
Amiably to serve each other,
As though they were sister and brother."
[Ninth point of the Constitutions]

In our lodges, “gentle fellows” are annually appointed and invested as Stewards to assist the Wardens. Their duties lie both in the lodge while at labour (assisting the Senior Warden by preparing the room and the candidate in the several degrees) and in the lodge during the hours of refreshment (assisting the Junior Warden by serving at the banquet table.) Indeed, the word ste-ward itself indicates their principal function as assistants to the Wardens: the second syllable is ward - warden derived from the Anglo Saxon word weard, meaning keeper or guardian. In medieval times, the Steward was originally the officer in charge of the well-being of the king’s pigs! The Anglo Saxon word stigan was a rise, or raised fence which enclosed the pigs, and stigu was a sty. Hence, the Steward was originally the “keeper of pigs” or “pig-ward” or “sty-ward” which over time evolved into “ste-ward.” In the circumspect words and discreet language of the gentlemanly English Masonic scholar, Bro. Bernard Jones, “It is for the Brethren receiving the welcome attentions of the Steward when the lodge is at refreshment to say whether they fully appreciate all that the name of the steward connotes.”

THE JEWEL OF THE STEWARDS IS THE CORNUCOPIA

“The cornucopia, or horn of plenty, is the sign of the Steward and, when combined with the compasses, of the Grand Steward. The cornucopia is appropriated to the Steward as his emblem because of his function in ministering to the brethren at the hours of refreshment.” But there is more to it than that ... Let me tell you an old story.

“When Amalthea’s horn
O’er hill and dale the rose-crowned flora pours,
And scatters corn and wine, and fruits and flowers.”
[Camoens, Lusiad]

Once upon a time, in those ancient days when the gods came down to earth and mingled freely with mortals, Greek legend tells us that Zeus (or Jupiter), the chief of the Olympian gods and goddesses and ruler of the skies, was one day blissfully playing with Amalthea, the she-goat (or nymph with goat-like features), daughter of the King of Crete, who had nursed him as an infant. Running into a tree accidentally while the carefree pair cavorted, Amalthea broke off one of her horns. To make amends Zeus promised that the horn would thereafter miraculously produce a never-ending abundance of fruit, nectar and ambrosia. In a sequel to the myth, the greatest of all Greek heroes, Herakles (who the Romans

called Hercules) fought with the river god Achelous, who had the form of a bull. During the wrestling contest, one of the god's horns was broken off. Herakles, generous in victory, returned the horn to his defeated opponent, who gave him Amalthea's horn of plenty in return. Thus the goat's horn, from which fruit, nectar and other refreshing gifts of the gods pour endlessly, became a symbol of inexhaustible bounty freely bestowed upon mortals. Today, Amalthea's horn, the horn of plenty, is the symbol which identifies the Stewards - on their aprons, jewels, and wands. (Is it possible that this is one source of all the ridiculous and postposterous nonsense which we occasionally hear about "the Masonic goat?")

What relevance does this ancient fable have to us as modern speculative Freemasons, and why am I relating it here tonight? In terms that resonate throughout the teachings of symbolical Freemasonry: "The cornucopia became less a symbol than the attribute of generosity, of good fortune, of the hard work and foresight which are the springs of plenty, of hope, of charity, of the autumn harvest-season, of righteousness and of hospitality."

One further classical allusion may be cited with Freemasonic relevance. Concordia, the Roman goddess of peace and harmony, was frequently represented as a matron holding an olive branch in her right hand, and a cornucopia in her left. That also gives us something to Think About!

AN OFFICE OF DISTINCTION, MUCH PRIZED BY THE FRATERNITY

The Office of Grand Steward was created soon after the formation of the premier Grand Lodge in England in 1717. We find the first reference to Stewards as early as 1720, and in 1723 twelve Grand Stewards were appointed by the Grand Master to superintend the banquet and other arrangements connected with the annual feast or festival of Freemasonry, when, according to Dr. Anderson, the Grand Wardens were ordered to take some Stewards 'to their assistance.' Bro. Colin Dyer explains, "The two Saints John, Baptist and Evangelist, were regarded as patrons of Freemasons and their feast days, 24 June and 27 December respectively, were especially marked by the fraternity, it being the custom in the early days after the formation of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 for the annual feast to be held on one of those two days." In the 1738 edition of *The Constitution of the Free-Masons*, Dr. Anderson wrote: "The Stewards now take the whole Affair upon themselves and do the best they can. Nor are their Accounts now audited by the G(rand) Lodge, for that generally the Stewards are out of pocket." (Are you prepared for this, Junior, or did the Grand Master neglect to tell you? I was

certainly relieved to discover this, because even if the Grand Junior Warden has to prepare the sandwiches for Grand Lodge, you as Grand Steward will pay for them!]

In the Grand Lodge Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario, the Grand Steward is entitled to “be clothed in purple” as an Officer of the Grand Lodge. (Since 1735, the Grand Stewards in England have worn aprons and collars of crimson with silver adornments. This distinctive regalia was also worn in Canada by the Grand Stewards until after World War I.)

The jewel of the Grand Steward is “the Cornucopia between the legs of the compasses extended, surmounting a glory, all within a circle.” These are symbols full of significance to Freemasons: First, one of the three great lights in Masonry, the compasses is an instrument for drawing a perfect circle, and the emblem of geometry. As one of the Working Tools placed in the hands of a Master Mason it is, “an instrument of proportion - the precise quality required to keep tradition and revelation, principle and creativity, in balance.” At various times in our Rites and Ceremonies we are given the proper interpretation of the implement - to keep us within due bounds, and to limit our desires. “In traditional iconography the compasses are regarded as symbols of prudence, justice, temperance and truth, virtues which are all based upon the spirit of moderation.” Secondly, the glory symbolizes the Sun, the source of light and energy, and therefore the creator of life, and “its rays represent the celestial or spiritual influences which the Earth receives. The light radiated by the Sun is intellectual knowledge.” Thirdly, the circle is a symbol of infinity, having neither beginning nor end - of perfection, being absolute - of divinity, being immutable - of protection, being a closed circuit. All of which may be learned through a cursory observation of the Jewel worn by the Grand Stewards.

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME.

In conclusion, I would direct your attention to one last point pertinent to the significance of our Grand Lodge regalia, and one, far from being least, is perhaps first in importance. Like all items of Masonic clothing, the Collar is both utilitarian and symbolical. When a Mason assumes the added responsibility of Office either by election or appointment in his constituent Lodge or in the Grand Lodge, he is invested with a Collar. While the Jewel suspended from it may be a symbol of authority in the Office - whether the gold chain of Grand Master or the garter blue collar of Grand Steward - the Collar itself is a constant reminder of the

obligation once taken but forever binding to serve faithfully to the best of one's skill and ability. "For every right there is a parallel duty." Properly appreciated and considered in its rightful sense, Grand Lodge regalia is in fact the livery worn by a servant to identify his master - and I strongly recommend that you wear it with great pride for the service already rendered that it represents, but moreover to ever consider it as a reminder of the service you owe to the Craft in general and your Brethren in particular.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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2. Dyer, Colin. The Grand Stewards and Their Lodge. London: Grand Stewards' Lodge, 1985. p. 1
3. *ibid.* p. 7.
4. Constitution of the Grand Lodge. Section 396 (b) (vii)
5. MacNulty, W. Kirk. Freemasonry: A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994. p. 32.
6. Chevalier & Gheerbrandt. Dictionary of Symbols. p. 227.
7. *ibid.* pp. 945-946.
8. *ibid.* pp. 195-200.

CHANGING TIMES

R.W. Bro. Garry Dowling
Chairman, Grand Lodge Masonic Education Committee

As we enter the new millennium, we must realize that times are changing. The manner in which we live, work and interact with others are remarkably different than they were even a decade ago.

Just as change is affecting our lives, so too is it changing the face of Masonry, and nowhere is this more noticeable than in the role of Masonic education.

What does the term ‘Masonic education’ mean to you? Do the words dull and boring come to mind? Another talk on the ‘apron’? The columns, ‘revisited’? A monotone presentation of the history of Masonry through the last hundred years. A ‘filler’ presented at the end of an already long evening. Let me state that not all Masonic education is like this. There are indeed some brilliant ‘flashes’ and some bright twinkling stars (and these need to be shared across our jurisdiction – but that is another topic). Is that your opinion of Masonic education? Should Masonic education change with the times?

Yes, just as some of the other aspects of our fraternity need to change with the times, so does Masonic education.

Some lodges have begun a series of ‘Masonic education’ presentations where individual Brethren speak on their favourite hobby or their interesting career. What a pleasant surprise to find that your hobby may in fact be shared with another Brother. The job you do everyday, may be fascinating to your Brethren who know absolutely nothing about it. Lodges that have tried this started out with only one or two ‘volunteers’, but now there is a waiting list of presenters. These presentations may be conducted in Lodge or if preferred in the more informal surroundings of the banquet hour. In my mind, they constitute Masonic education.

Other lodges have included short skits or ‘mixing’ games as part of a Masonic education presentation. These run the gamut from activities requiring reasonable advance preparation to activities requiring little more than some photocopying effort. Have you heard of “Masonic Bingo” or “Masonic baseball”? Such activities have a goal of getting as many Brethren to participate as possible and of providing an atmosphere in which Brother can actually talk to Brother! These also

constitute Masonic education.

And, there is always a story to tell. Many Brethren travel regularly as part of their public avocation. Some of them have the privilege of attending lodge in other provinces, states or countries. Is Masonry really the same in these places? What are the differences? What are the similarities? There are always interesting happenings that can add to our ‘Masonic education’.

So why not make Masonic education one of the vehicles we use to combat the effect that changes in our modern world are having on the apparent lack of time we have to really get to know our Brethren? Why not expand our definition of Masonic education? In the words of our Brother-To-Brother theme, ‘revitalize’ Masonic education. Why not use it as a vehicle, not only to learn about masonry but equally as important, as a vehicle to learn about Masons! Changing with the times!

(Editor’s Note: A new chapter has been added to the latest update of the Brother-2-Brother toolkit. It has been assembled by the Masonic Education Committee and is titled “An Education Program of Short Talks, Skits and Plays”. See your Lodge B2B chairman for details).

THE UNEXPLAINED

HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF THE CRAFT

The First Degree
The Four Tassels

W. Bro. Raymond Daniels, B.A., F.C.F., M.P.S.
Waterloo Lodge No. 539, Waterloo

It is of the genius of symbolism to hide as well as reveal. Our own minds must act for no symbol wears its meaning on its sleeve.

Harry LeRoy Haywood
1886-1956

INTRODUCTION

Circumspice ... look around you

"Properly appreciated, a Lodge room and its several appointments serve as a book in which the silent and contemplative Brother can continually read a great and useful series of lessons, and see clearer and clearer a deep and yet deeper meaning into many things usually passed over without much thought." ¹

In what follows, I will direct your attention to one of those "appointments" in the first Degree, and suggest a few thoughts about its history and symbolism. The real importance of Masonic symbols is **what these symbols teach**: the philosophy of Freemasonry. We must always remember that, "The purpose of Freemasonry is not to teach the meaning of symbols; the sole purpose of symbolism is to teach Freemasonry." ²

THE FOUR TASSELS

The Lodge is Opened in the First Degree In the South

Pendant to the four corners of the lodge are four tassels

These are the final features pointed out by the Junior Warden on his guided walking-tour of the lodge. This almost casual reference in the Ritual raises three questions which I will attempt to answer:

1. What are they?
2. Where did they come from?
3. How did they get there?

... Geometry, or Masonry, originally synonymous terms ...

About 1741, **William Preston**, in his **Lectures** from which our Ritual is in large part derived, alleged that: "GEOMETRY, the first and noblest of sciences, is the basis on which the superstructure of Masonry is erected." **John Browne**, in the **Master Key** published in 1802, maintained that: "*Geometry* is the Origin of Mathematics and the foundation of Architecture."

But what, pray tell, have **the four tassels** to do with Geometry, Architecture, or Masonry? To answer the question, we must briefly reconstruct the method used by operative masons in medieval days to lay out the ground for the foundation of a new building. The Master Mason, or Architect, marked the centre of the piece of ground. He then plotted the square or rectangle, the foundation upon which the walls were to be erected. Let us see how he went about the process of "laying lines", and look at the implements he used.

[Worshipful Master, may I have your permission to obtain from the Senior Steward that curious working tool known as the SKIRRET, to illustrate my explanation of this technique? I am aware that the Skirret is moralized on in another degree, and properly belongs to the Master with which "to lay lines and draw designs" on his tracing board.]

Now, Brethren, come with me for a few moments in imagination to the building site and observe our Operative Brethren at work on a splendid new Abbey Church to be erected in the most "modern" style of architecture, subsequently to be known and admired as "**Gothic**". The site has been selected and the ground consecrated by Father Abbot in an elaborate and impressive ceremony. The labourers have levelled the field, and to-day the Master Mason has come "*to mark out the ground for the foundation of the intended structure,*" for to-day is Midsummer Day, the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year when the Sun reaches its zenith in the northern hemisphere. The Sun has not yet risen when the Master Mason selects a spot as the **centre** of the intended building. Wearing his ceremonial apron and gauntlets in honour of the occasion, he solemnly places a small piece of stone to mark the centre around which the great and superb edifice will rise. As the first rays of the morning sun begin to diffuse the eastern sky with pale light, he sends one of his assistants a hundred paces or more in a North-east direction. The Assistant awaits, on the alert for the further directions from the Master, who now crouches low to the ground at the centre. Just at the moment when the first edge of the Sun becomes visible above the horizon, the Master quickly shouts instructions signalling slight adjustments in the assistant's position until all three points - the Master, the Assistant, and the rising Sun - are in perfect alignment. Then a second landmark is established by placing another stone where the Assistant stands. Thus the **Foundation Stone** is laid at the North-east corner and the main axis of the building is established. The Masons watching all know that this ceremonial method of laying the first stone goes back to the ancient mysteries, its origin lost in the mists of antiquity.³ They exchange knowing glances when Father Abbot and his Monks solemnly intone a plainchant hymn to Saint John the Baptist, whose feast day in the calendar of the Christian Church has supplanted the old Midsummer Day festival honouring the pagan solar gods.⁴

The remainder of this fine day in late June will be spent in establishing perimeter lines on the ground outlining the rectangular shape of the building, so that the foundations for the superstructure may be laid during the rest of the summer and the early autumn months and the footings can be completed before the onset of cold winter weather brings construction to a halt.

The Master will apply some of the trade "secrets" of his Masonic art, using the principles of Geometry, the ancient and exact science of measurement. Using the **skirret** both as a **stretched line** to lay straight lines and as a **measuring line** to establish length, he proceeds to *Geometrize* following the time-honoured method. Paintings discovered at Thebes, Egypt, dating back to 3000 BCE show masons

holding a stretched cord by means of which a line is being drawn. Gardeners still use this simple but curious tool to this day. It has three components: a spool, or cord holder, which acts as a centre pin; a length of cord wound around it; and a second pin or stake attached to the other end of the cord.

Moving to the second point now established, the cord is unwound from the spool, the cord is stretched taut, and the second pin is driven into the ground, marking a straight line.⁵

Having calculated the external dimensions of the rectangular building, using the skirret to mark them on the ground, the Master then **squares** the North-east corner using the sure and simple method of constructing a right-angle in a circle.

But first, let me offer a word of explanation. In all references to operative use and the related moral symbolism found in the Ritual, the **skirret** is an implement used for drawing straight lines. However, as every teacher who has ever used a blackboard in the classroom knows, a piece of chalk at the end of a length of string can be used to draw a circle. The Master, by using one pin of his skirret as the centre, and a fixed length of line stretched tight as the radius, may easily inscribe a circle on the surface of the ground simply by rotating the other pin. Let's watch him closely as he squares the first corner.

Selecting any point on the first line laid in alignment with the Sun, he inscribes a circle passing through the North-east corner of the building marked by the Foundation Stone. Using that radius, he marks a point on the circumference of the circle. From that point he draws a line through the centre to mark the diameter. By connecting the three points thus established on the circumference of the circle, the angle formed at the Foundation Stone is a perfect **square of ninety degrees**.

Simply by extending the lines of the angle established, the dimensions of the new Abbey would be measured and marked. Combining the skill and science of the modern Architect and Engineer, the Master extended ropes from the centre of the building and pegged them down at the four corners. Using his **square to try and adjust** the corners, he made them true.

Since I proposed at the outset to explain the origin and position of **the four tassels**, look carefully at those long ropes, stretched diagonally across the ground. Do you see where the ends are pegged down at the corners? They are tied in knots to prevent the ends of the ropes from unravelling. Now can you see a connection with **the four tassels**?

Look closely at the Tracing Board of the First Degree. There the Tassels are depicted in the four corners of the indented skirting or border of the chart, a direct reference to the explanation of their origin outlined above. In many English lodge rooms, where the chequered carpet covers the entire floor, you will find the tassels woven into the pattern at the four corners. (They appear in the corners of the Mosaic Pavement in some of our lodge rooms - e.g. Preston-New Hope Temple, Hespeler.)

But, you ask, how did they migrate from the floor to the ceiling? To answer this we must return for a brief moment to the medieval building site. Time has passed, and much progress has been made in construction of the great Abbey church. The walls have risen high above the foundations so carefully laid out by the Master Architect. As the walls arose, stone on stone, course on course, a **plumb-line** was dropped from each corner to check that the wall was perpendicular, and the angle of the corner true to the original square. ⁶ *ERGO*, all is made clear and the mystery of the pendant tassels solved! The tassels suspended from the four corners of the lodge represent the corner plumb-lines used by our Operative brethren to try and adjust all verticals.

The prophet **Amos** had a vision in which the moral tendency of the plumb-line is illustrated:

"This is what the Lord showed me: there was a man standing by a wall with a plumb-line in his hand. The Lord said to me, What do you see, Amos? A plumb-line, I answered, and the Lord said, I am setting a plumb-line to the heart of my people Israel." ⁷

We as Speculative Masons also see in the infallible plumb-line a moral lesson to be applied to life and conduct. The four tassels represent the **Four Cardinal Virtues: Temperance, Fortitude** or Courage, **Prudence** or Wisdom, and **Justice** - sure and certain guides to enable a man to maintain an upright life. The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle considered the Cardinal Virtues to be **four sides of a perfectly symmetrical character**, and the man who possessed them could stand **foursquare** to all the winds that blow. ⁸

Well, Brethren, there you have it: Geometry - ropes - tassels - virtues - square conduct. Hopefully, as the Ritual puts it, "*... by which you will be enabled the better to distinguish and appreciate the connection of our whole system ...*"

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. G.E.R. "Essex Master". **The Teachings of Freemasonry**. London: Cecil Palmer, 1928. p. 72. [Grand Lodge Library, Hamilton E11]
2. Mackey, Albert G. (1807-1881) **The Symbolism of Freemasonry**. 1869.
3. Oliver, Rev. George. **The Antiquities of Freemasonry**. Philadelphia: Leon Hyneman. "The terms east and west have been honoured with peculiar notice ever since the world began, and it is from the uniform practice of our ancient brethren that we retain a regard for those points in all our ceremonies. ... Christian churches and Masonic lodges are built due east and west, and the eastern part in each is deemed the most sacred. ... The first edifice appropriated to the exclusive purpose of divine worship was the tabernacle; and this, by God's immediate direction, was placed due east and west. p. 141 [GLL Hamilton O1B2]
4. It is no coincidence that the two Masonic festivals, on which Installations were formerly held, coincided with the feast days of the two Saints John - St. John the Baptist on 24 June and St. John Evangelist on 27 December - which replaced the Summer and Winter Solstice celebrations of the pagan solar cults.
5. Jones, Bernard E. **Freemasons' Guide and Compendium**. London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd., revised edition 1956. The Line and Skirret pp. 443-446
6. Ward, J. S. M. **An Interpretation of our Masonic Symbols**. reprinted Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company. Chapter XIV p. 123 - 125.
7. **Amos 7: 7 - 8** The New English Bible, 1970.
8. Stalker, Dr. James. **The Seven Cardinal Virtues**. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1902. p. 2