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The apron and its symbolism

by Bro. F.R. Worts

There can be no doubt that the masonic apron has been developed from the apron worn by operative masons in the middle ages. The few examples surviving show that the operative apron was fashioned from the skin of an animal, most probably a sheep. It was large enough to cover the wearer from chest to ankles, and its fall was held by a leathern thong which passed round the neck. From each side a thong, firmly stitched, enabled the mason to tie the apron round his waist, and the tied bow tended to fall as end-strings. The use of this rough apron continued for many centuries; the woven apron used by modern masons is comparatively late; it came into use in the eighteenth century.

The leather apron died hard. Despite the use of softer materials from possibly 1740 onwards, it survived in use until at least 1811.

It is evident from surviving aprons and illustrations of the

early period that they were designed to be worn with the flap up and fastened, by means of a button-hole, to a button on the coat or waistcoat. Many of these old aprons have a button-hole in the flap, but there seems to have been a tendency amongst Master Masons to wear the flap down or to dispense with it altogether.

Before 1760, elaborately-painted or embroidered aprons came into fashion and continued to be favoured until the Union (1813). Many of these aprons were home-made, often artistically finished and adorned with symbolic designs. From 1760 onwards the printed and engraved aprons appeared, many of them being subsequently coloured by hand.

The tendency to decorate masonic aprons with symbolic designs began in the 1730s, and between 1740 and 1790 this practice became widespread. These efforts were mostly crude, but many



The first Book of Constitutions for Freemasonry was compiled by Rev. Dr. John Anderson in 1723. This frontispiece engraving by Bro. John Pine shows MW Bro. Philip, Duke of Wharton handing the Constitutions to his successor, MW Bro. Francis, Duke of Dalkeith.

surviving examples reveal skill and taste. Indian ink, paint and embroidery were commonly used for this ornamentation. The most popular designs usually included the All-Seeing Eye, the Columns, and the Square and Compasses, all evidence of the advance of Speculative Freemasonry in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The tassels, in rudimentary form, must have appeared at a very early date as a natural development of the waist-strings being tied at the front and hanging down over the

apron. There are, indeed, several surviving examples of eighteenth century aprons with broad ribbon ties, the ends of the ties being edged, usually with gold fringe, so that when tied at the front the fringed ends have the appearance of a pair of tassels.

The origin of rosettes on the FC and MM aprons is also unknown. In England they were a comparatively late introduction, and were not prescribed officially until 1815, when they were specifically designed to differentiate the three grades.

continued on page 2



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The apron from page one

It is probable, however, that their original purpose was purely ornamental.

There appears to be no official name for the squares or levels which decorate the apron of a Master or Past Master. The 1815 *Constitutions* described them as "perpendicular lines upon horizontal lines, thereby forming three several sets of (two) right angles", and originally they were to be of inch-wide ribbon. The same definition appears in the present [UGLE] *Constitutions*, though nowadays the emblems are usually of silver or white metal. They were designed only for purpose of distinction.

To all students, both young and old, a caveat must be given before this phase of our subject is considered. The modern Craft is essentially speculative, and every Freemason must necessarily be to some extent speculative in his attitude to its tenets; but there is a widespread tendency to extend the limits of true speculative research and to exaggerate symbolical values. This tendency had already developed strongly towards the end of the eighteenth century, and in modern times it has become both harmful to the Craft and to a proper understanding of its moral demands and teachings.

The apron appears to have on it symbols or emblems as decorative features, e.g., the

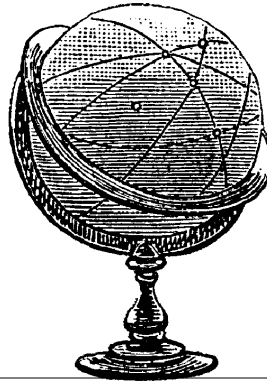
blue edged ribbon, the rosettes, the seven-chained tassels. Are these symbols or emblems? Have they any worth apart from artistic forms or embellishments?

The extremists teach that they are symbols: indeed, they go much further and state that the actual form of the apron, and the form of its flap, and the position of the flap, are important in their symbolic content. Little, if any, credence need be given to such opinions or judgments. At the best the decorations on the apron are possibly emblematic, but what the emblems mean it is impossible to state accurately; e.g., it is said that the blue ribbon edging symbolises charity. It may, but charity is a common virtue of the Craft, and many aprons have different coloured edging. The three rosettes are said to represent the three degrees, but no scholar knows yet what their origin was. The symbolic origins of the tassels and their seven chains are also shrouded in mystery. It is far better to accept the probability that regalia-makers from 1830 onwards contrived a symmetrical design for the apron by placing the tassels with their ornamental chains on either side of the apron. Finally, the extremists will even make the "hook" (the circle) and the "clasp" (the serpent) symbols of tremendous and mystical ideas; no better example of wishful thinking could be given. That these humble devices, so commonly used throughout the world to serve needs of fastening attire, should be tortured to yield such meanings is unjustified.

The symbolical explanations which are virtually standardized in the modern rituals are clear, simple and wholly satisfying. It is the unchallenged right of every Freemason to seek further afield for the interpretations that will fulfil his spiritual needs. But he should remember Tennyson's line on "The

falsehood of extremes", and be slow to accept the "wider explanations" until he can do so with full conviction. ■

Excerpted from Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, vol 74 (1961)



OUR MASONIC WORLD

New Brunswick 2001

New Brunswick seems to be an efficient jurisdiction, if the Grand Lodge *Proceedings* for 2001 are any indication. Grand Lodge met on May 11-12 in Saint John. Seven committee reports were presented, and in one fell swoop, were received and accepted.

The *Communication* also differed from ours in that non-masons were received in open Grand Lodge, including four representatives from the Order of Rainbow for Girls. By the way, BC's representative, RW Bro. M.J. Linklater, was present.

Another difference is that the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master and DDGMs, each serve two-year terms.

Grand Master, MW Bro. James Pike stated in his address that he felt some members were confused about the purpose of the Masonic Renewal Committee, which has been going around the jurisdiction to apparently small turnouts. Some lodges are reticent to admit to "outsiders" that they have problems. The Committee has outlined some steps to success — examine your lodge and be honest with yourself about what you find; form a plan that will correct

these faults; endeavour to make the lodge a place where all feel they are involved and important; and activate a serious and conscientious membership programme.

The Grand Lodge is involved in a number of charitable works. It donated \$24,000 for the operation of Camp Goodtimes, a getaway for kids 7-13 with a history of cancer. It also supports a Deaf/Blind Summer Rubella Camp and contributed to a Play Garden at Saint John Hospital. Word of mouth about charity doesn't appear to be good enough, as the PR Committee reported that it "once again found it necessary to purchase advertising in the local newspapers."

The Reports of the DDGMs reveal that one district formed a Masonic Resource Team, which offers to help lodges with degree work, speakers, fellowship nights, training for Masters and so on. One district has a bonspiel. Another reports lodge activities such as a Community Christmas Tree, rebuilding a children's playground, and a Duct Tape Derby (how freemasons induce the tape to race isn't explained). Lodges in one district have a "Candlelight Lecture" given in open lodge, the contents of which we are unaware.

New Brunswick's membership shrunk by 207 in 2000. A lodge with 100 members closed, but the jurisdiction had only a total of 52 affiliations, which shows the advantage of an amalgamation over surrendering a warrant. Another lodge, dating back to 1855 under England, folded its tent in February 2001. Unfortunately, such an old lodge rated only four terse lines in the Grand Historian's report. And **Sunset Lodge No. 56** continues to work in a temporary home in Maine, with permission of that state's Grand Lodge.

For what are perhaps information purposes, the



Still turn your back when
others scoff.
Be deaf at least, if not
be off.

W Bro. Palmer Cox



MWBro. James C. Gordon, Grand Master 2001-2002, (on right) is seen here presenting a cheque to Bill Thornton, CEO of BC Guide Dogs Services, while guide dogs, Meg and Jovial, look on.

Executive Officer of DeMolay for New Brunswick submits a report to Grand Lodge. The province has one Chapter, but the EO reports that Advisory Councils for two proposed Chapters have been set up.

Four issues of the newsletter *Mostly Masonry* were sent out. There's no word what the content is that isn't mostly Masonry.

The jurisdiction is one of the few in Canada with only one ritual (similar to our 'Ancient' work) and the Ritual Committee has little to do because the ritual is printed in full. The Committee made the novel suggestion that it "should be disbanded or given another task to do." The incoming Grand Master felt otherwise, as he appointed a Ritual Committee (with a new Chairman) and perhaps it'll do more than emulate TV's Maytag repairman. ■

Review by VW Bro. James Bennie of Lodge Southern Cross No. 44.

Keystone of Life

The Keystone of Life Foundation provides small items of medical equipment needed by hospitals. It was formed in 1975 by a group of Royal Arch Freemasons and their relatives. Since the inception of the Foundation, contributions have been made to hospitals and patients throughout the jurisdiction of the Grand

Chapter of British Columbia and Yukon

The Foundation receives requests from hospitals which are reviewed by a board of dedicated volunteers. Requests are approved for funding depending on the amount of donations received each year. Donations are the main source for purchasing hospital equipment such as patient lifts, adjustable beds and defibrillators.

The Foundation is a registered non-profit society. Administrative costs are very low and paid for from the interest earned from membership dues. ■

In the community

The BC Masonic Foundation recently donated \$5,000 to the **Canuck Place Children's Hospice**, making it possible for them to offer specialized care for children with progressive life-limiting illnesses, and their families.

The goal of this care is to enhance quality of life for the child and family. This means different things to different families. For some it is pain and system management for their child; for others, it is a good night's sleep knowing their child is well cared for by professionals. It may be an opportunity for a child to experience a new activity or it may be grief counselling for brothers and

sisters. Or it may mean all of these things.

With our donation, this team of doctors, nurses, councillors, therapists, school-teachers, volunteers and many others at Canuck Place, is able to offer comprehensive, family-centred care throughout the progress of the child's illness and until the family no longer needs them.

Raising our public profile this past March 17th, **Shrine Imperial Potentate**, Kenneth W. Smith, laid a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Ottawa. This is the first time the Shrine has taken part in this ceremony. ■

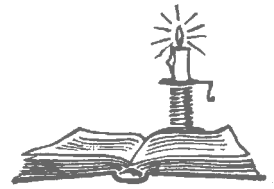
Letters

A recent visitor to our shores, Bro. Michael J. Edmonds of East Sussex, writes to tell us that while visiting the Museum of Anthropology at UBC he discovered a rather striking ceramic plate in their giftshop. Titled "The Origin of Light", it was designed by Kitamaat Haisla artist, Lyle Wilson, who writes:

"The Origin of Light is a Pacific Northwest coastal legend which has many variations. Although Raven plays a part, the main character in this version is the Light—which can be either the Sun or Moon. There is another dimension when the Light is thought of as a metaphor for Human Consciousness—so when Raven releases this ball of light, he was actually releasing much, much more." Bro. Edmonds felt that this metaphorical sense of light would be of interest to a masonic audience. ■

Lodge notes

For the last three years **Rainbow Lodge No. 180** in Port Hardy has organized the annual July Filomi Days Kids' Fishing Derby. This year, raising



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1971-1996

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public awareness of Freemasonry, W Bro. Norman Cole and W Matron Anna Golsbury of Polaris Chapter No. 98 participated in the annual parade while brethren operated a food concession, weighed the catches and presented the trophy, resulting in two positive newspaper stories. ■

Back to lodge

by R W Bro. Geoff Mook

The Summer's nearly over, the dark nights setting in. It won't be long before, the lodge is meeting once again.

The summer break is welcome, to give us all a rest. To start the winter season, with some vigor and some zest.

I hope the new Grand Master, will help to spur us on. And I know there is no magic, for the work that must be done.

I know it isn't easy, and changes must be made. But who and what those changes are, heaven only knows.

So if you are a member who very rarely goes, please my brother

Come on out don't be one of those, your input is important Ideas we must share so if you are a mason, show us that you care

The election's in October, I'm thinking now of those Who will fill the officers chairs: could you be one off those?

Meeting on the level

by Bro. Bill Williams

We all know what is meant by that phrase, when used in Freemasonry: it means to meet as equals in every way.

But where did this phrase

come from? Did it come from the fact that it is believed that when we die we go to a place where all are equal? I would like think that is so.

I would like to read the first verse of an old poem by Bro. Rob Morris:

We meet upon the level and part upon the square, These words have precious meaning and are practiced everywhere,

Come let us contemplate them, they are worthy of a thought,

From the ancient times of Masonry these symbols have been taught.

We meet upon the level, every country, sect and creed, The rich man from his mansion, the poor man from his field, For wealth is not considered within our outer door, And we meet upon the level upon the checkered floor.

But do we really meet on the level, or is it a phrase we only pay lip service to, knowing that as freemasons, we are supposed to treat each other as equals? Do we treat the folks we meet as equals or do we size them up, checking out their clothing, the car they drive, their speech and where they live?

Is it only within lodge that we're supposed to meet on the level?

I have just returned from our Grand Lodge Annual Communication and while I prepared this presentation prior to attending, there were many observations made, that I had sort of expected. I went there to observe and not to criticize but came away with a few points that I would like to share with you.

There were many gatherings of brethren, and in most cases at the centre of the gathering, was a Grand Lodge officer, past Grand Lodge officer or a brother who was perceived to be of some importance or prominence in public life.

I joined many of these



GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY OCTOBER, 2002

2	Wed	District No 16	Trinity Lodge 98	Vancouver
4	Fri	Principal Officers Meeting		Prince George
4-6	Fri-Sun	Masonic Workshop		Prince George
9	Wed	District No 25	Richmond Lodge 142	Richmond
11	Fri	District No 12	Queen Charlotte Islands	Lodge 189
16-18	Wed-Fri	Western Canada Conference	Canmore	Alberta
19	Sat	100th Anniversary	Harmony Lodge 37	Grand Forks
23	Wed	75th Anniversary	Confederation Lodge 116	Victoria
26	Sat	Scottish Degree Team,	Richmond Lodge 142	Vancouver
28	Mon	Past and Fraternal	Bethel 40, Job's Daughters	Richmond

groups, and I'm happy to say that I felt accepted by all to whom I spoke,

But the attention of most of the brethren was directed to the "Gold" or "Blue".

Is this wrong? Yes and no: yes, because that is not how we are taught in Freemasonry: no, because that is human nature.

So, if we are to follow the "straight and narrow" we must overcome our natural inclinations and strive instead to follow our teachings.

And what are these teachings? Where can we find these lessons?

The lessons are throughout our work, in each of the degrees: in the descriptions of how we are to figuratively use our working tools.

In the EA: The Twenty-four Inch Gauge, Common Gavel and the Chisel. In the FC: The Square, Level and the Plumb-rule. In the MM: The Skirret, Pencil and Compasses.

We learn the words, but do we reflect upon their meaning, content and import?

So, can we become better men, can we overcome our faults, our natural feelings, our inherent reactions to someone who seems different to us? Can we change? I believe we can, and must, if we are to uphold the ideal of the Craft which is

to make "good men better men".

We now have two months prior to our next meeting. I would like everyone here to identify one of their faults and for the next two months try to make positive changes to overcome that fault.

What can you lose? ■

Bro. Bill Williams, District Education Officer and a member of Summerland Lodge No. 56, Summerland, BC, presented this paper prior to our summer recess. The poem excerpt is taken from "Life in the Triangle," by Rob Morris (1818-1888), Louisville, Printed by J. F. Brennan & Co., 1854.

Grand Lodge

It's not too early to be thinking about our 2003 Annual communication in Dawson Creek. Hosted by **Peace Lodge No. 126** and the lodges of District 19, this will be an excellent opportunity for the brethren and their ladies to experience northern hospitality. Registration through our Grand Lodge website is encouraged: visit our Grand Secretary's webpage soon. ■

Email your lodge happening to our editor:
editor@freemasonry.bcy.ca