

# The Trowel

My initial interest in The Trowel, as subject of Masonic interest, was sparked by an interest in finding out the meaning of the words spoken in the Charge, read to the newly initiated Brother, during the First Degree, where we hear the words: -

“In every age monarchs themselves have been promoters of the art; have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the Sceptre for the trowel, ...” As with the words of the famous poet, Robert Frost: -

“Two roads diverged in a yellow  
wood, and sorry I could not travel  
both. I took the one less travelled  
by,”

So too it is, with most subjects of Masonic research, what initially appears to be a short few lines of explanation, may turn out to be quite the opposite. And can lead the researcher on many winding and interesting paths.

This small tool, though may be insignificant in itself, opens up such a vast array of teachings and subjects, that to endeavour to pursue and record them all, would require a library in itself.

Consequently, in my paper today, I can only hope to scratch the surface, perhaps open your minds and spark interest in pursuing this most interesting subject, further. Although the Trowel is used in many orders and branches of masonry, this paper is restricted to its use in Craft Masonry.



\* \* \* \* \*

“Exchange the sceptre for the trowel”



We are told that even kings have not been unwilling to join freemasonry and begin with the humblest position. This is what is meant by the words, "exchange the sceptre for the trowel".

Here the mention of a trowel means that whilst the ruler of a kingdom was entitled to wield a sceptre as the top person in the land, yet when he came into freemasonry, he was humble enough to become the lowliest member for a time. It is a lesson, that every freemason learns. We join Freemasonry, poor and penniless and begin at the bottom of the ladder

As the Trowel is not one of our speculative Working Tools - nor is it likely that even George VI would have been tempted to do a little moonlighting as a 'brickie' - we might be justified in enquiring quietly what it is all about.

# The Trowel

---

Well? Have reigning monarchs been members of the Craft? Most certainly they have. Queen Elizabeth II's father, King George VI, was an enthusiastic Mason from the time of his Initiation in 1919 (The Naval Lodge No 2612) until his death in 1952.

He became Grand Master in Scotland in the same year (1936) that his brother Edward VIII abdicated the throne and, as a Past GM installed three Grand Masters of the UGLE between 1939 and 1948. During the past century Edward VII, George V and Edward VIII all had strong Masonic connections. The Dukes of Kent and of Gloucester continue the custom that Princes of the Royal Blood, should offer leadership in Freemasonry.

King Charles XIII of Sweden was Grand Master of the Swedish Order of Freemasons. King Dom Pedro I of Brazil was also a Freemason

In the 18th century, when there was no office of Inner Guard and the latest initiate to the lodge was the one who was seated at the inner side of the door, when the next candidate was due to be admitted.

There is very little written about the Inner Guard when compared to other officers in the Lodge. 1816 being the first recorded mention of that office. For nearly a hundred years preceding this date the visitors would have been admitted and the candidates received in due form by the youngest entered apprentice or a brother appointed by the Junior Warden. It is interesting to note that the rank of Inner Guard is unknown in most American Lodges, where the Junior Deacon, under the command of the Junior Warden admits the visitors and receives the candidate. The office of Inner Guard is recognised in the Irish, English, and Scottish lodges as well as most lodges overseas whose Masonic traditions are descended from these constitutions.

The Word GUARD:

The name guard or guardian is evolved from the same origin as the word Warden. In Bernard

E. Jones book "Freemason's Guide and Compendium" we are informed that the word

Wardian and Guardian were one and the same, and a scholar noted in 1605 that the French, Italians and others whose language comes from the Latin turned the "W" of such words as wardian into a single "U".

Quoting from Bernard E. Jones book "because their alphabet hath no acquaintance with the W at all, but then to mend the matter - they use before the U to put a G, and so of warden or wardian doe make guardian, of ward, guard-. Hence it arises that we call him that waiteth at the Tower, 'one of the guard or 'Guard'."

Thus, it was explained that the Wardian, Warden and Guardian are all one, 'a keeper or attender to the safety of that which, he hath in charge'.

# The Trowel

---

The Inner Guard, then is in effect the Door Warden, and in some early lodges, he was at first a serving Brother under the control of the Outer Guard or Tyler, who was also a serving Brother.

As each initiate was given a trowel, as well as an apron it was with a trowel that he gave knocks on the door and also pricked the flesh of the new candidate. It was thus that the trowel acquired the qualities of making sure that only fit men, were admitted and the security of the lodge was maintained.

The first recorded instance in an English lodge where the use was made of a "Door Keeper" was in 1734 at the Old Kings Arms Lodge No. 28, where more than likely he was the youngest Entered Apprentice, and he would use a Trowel as his weapon. It was about the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, century when the "Door Keeper" or "Inner Tyler" began to be called the Guarder or Guard and it was not until about 1814 when there was official recognition of the actual office of Inner Guard.

## The Tyler's Assistant

There are a number of old minutes where it is recorded that the Inner Guard or Inner Tyler was in fact regarded as an assistant to the Tyler, and as a serving Brother he was, like the Tyler, entitled to receive an allowance for his duties.

In the minutes of the Lodge of Honour and Friendship, Blandford, (ceased 1838) it is recorded a Brother was made an "allowance of one shilling for each lodge night and one shilling for every newly initiated Brother to take on himself the office of Inner Guard and to assist the Tyler - as he had been admitted under a dispensation of the Provincial Grand Master and was initiated without a fee".

The weapon with which the Inner Guard as traditionally armed was in fact the pointed trowel and it would appear there is ample evidence to support a valid argument that the Inner Guard should continue to be so equipped today, particularly as the sword has traditionally been the weapon of the Outer Guard or Tyler. It would appear to be a rather strange decision that the United Grand Lodge of England made nearly 170 years ago when it seemed it broke away from the tradition when the crossed swords were adopted in the place of the Trowel for the Inner Guard.

## The Trowel -The Inner Guard's Traditional Weapon

It would appear strange that in spite of standing tradition, our Craft appears to have overlooked the trowel in its ceremonial workings. Bernard E Jones suggests that the operative mason of old was largely a cutter and shaper of stone, whereas the trowel is a stone layers tool. There is no doubt at all that in the eighteenth century the use of the trowel was much more in evidence than it is now.

# The Trowel

---

In 1754 a Lodge Carmarthen has recorded the purchase of five trowels and the mending of twelve others, which seems to suggest that in the old lodge, trowels had a considerable part to play, but what part masonically we do not know. In the present day the trowel is used for the purpose of laying a foundation stone with masonic ceremonial where it is appropriate, as the as the only surviving link with operative masonry. The trowels used for this purpose are usually of silver, highly decorated and preserved as a memento for posterity, and are often to be found in a masonic museum. The trowel is still in use to this day in a few old English lodges, particularly in the cities of Bristol and Bath, where it has a place in the First and Third Degrees. Particularly in the Third Degree we are informed "the trowel is used for the noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of Brotherhood and affection which unites us in a sacred bond as a Society of Brethren, amongst whom no contention should ever exist".

The Grand Lodge of Ireland, in 1769, decreed "that the design for lodge seals shall consist of a Hand and a Trowel. Irish masonic seals dating back to 1738, showing a hand holding a pointed trowel as a stabbing weapon, provides a key to the use to which the tool was put in the early speculative lodges and possibly in the old Operative lodges which preceded them; it was the Tyler's or the inner Doorkeeper's weapon.

Many Irish Lodges, still use still design on their seals, to this day.

In Some Irish lodges a flat of the trowel is extended to the Candidate to receive his gift when inviting him to give to the cause of masonic charity. The hand and the trowel are found on some of the earliest known jewels used by the 'Modern' Lodges.

There are some lodges in England where the trowel is still used as the weapon of the Inner Guard or Tyler. In the Royal Sussex Lodge, now extinct, a silver trowel was presented to the Inner Guard or Tyler. In the Lodge of Love and Honour No. 75, in Falmouth it is recorded in 1808 "that there should be two Tyler's, Williamson to act on the door inside and Symons outside, Williamson should wear his badge of office, consisting of a Trowel". That trowel is still worn by the Inner Guard of that lodge today.

There are some lodges in New Zealand where, the trowel is a working tool of the Third Degree, and there are some lodges where it is also the Jewel of the Junior Deacon.

The trowel has also been described as the implement of the Inner Guard, with which he is enabled to seal up the door of the Lodge Room, when all qualified brethren seeking admission have been admitted.

# The Trowel

---

## Golden Trowel Award

This award is not awarded by the Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M., although [the concept originated there](#). It is not mandatory that the award be given at all but given to a Brother who has demonstrated his devotion to the teachings of Masonry by "spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection that unites Masonry into one society of friends and brothers".

\* \* \* \* \*

The definition of the TROWEL as provided in The Lexicon of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey, published in 1860 is, in part, as follows;

**“An implement of operative Masonry, which has been adapted by speculative Masons, as the peculiar working tool of the Master’s Degree”**

The Trowel is an important symbol and working tool in Craft Masonry, in many parts of the world, although it has become obsolete in Ireland and England and in those rituals based on Irish and English workings.

The Trowel was still being used in Ireland and England in the 18th Century, when Masonry was being spread abroad, and, perhaps, as a result, American Lodges still use it as the only “Working Tool” in their Master Mason’s Degree.

An early English book, Preston’s Illustrations of Masonry dated 1792, says: “The Trowel is mentioned as one of the things presented to the W.M. on his installation.” The Masonic Lodge in Kilkenny has on display an old Collar and Jewel of the R.W. Provincial Grand Master, worn by R.W. Bro Tom Nicholson.

The Jewel is that of a Trowel.

But when the ritual was revived in 1813 the trowel appears to have been dropped from Irish and English craft Masonry altogether. These examples make it difficult to understand why the trowel has been almost excluded from our Craft ceremonies



In 1726, the tools of a freemason were the Gavel and the Trowel.

The Gavel to Separate and the Trowel to Join.

The Gavel represents passion, the capacity to introduce energy into a situation. The force of conscience enables a freemason to shape himself from a rough ashlar, by separating all vain or unbecoming thoughts to reveal a perfect ashlar able to take his place as a contributing member of society.

This transformation combined the acquisition of practical skills, with character development to enable a freemason to become part of that building not made by human hands, eternal in the heavens.

# The Trowel

---

It was thus clothed, with an Apron and holding a Trowel in his right hand and a Gavel in his left hand that each apprentice was admitted, as a fellow of the craft and became eligible to serve as Warden or Master of a lodge.

The trowel was obviously thought more of in the eighteenth century as early records show. In

Le Catéchisme des Francs-Macon's, 1744, the 'floor-drawing' for a 'Lodge of Apprentice Fellows' (i.e. First and Second Degrees combined), contained, among other symbols, the following tools: Square, Compasses, Level, Plumb-Rule, Trowel, and a Mason's Hammer.

There are a few old Lodges in England, one being the Social Lodge of Norwich, which have the custom of investing the Initiate with a silver trowel, with which he is exhorted "emblematically to stop up all interstices, or small spaces, in the Lodge, so that not a sound shall escape from within, nor an eye pry without".

In the Pilgrim Lodge, a London Lodge working the German Schroeder ritual, all members wear a jewel consisting of a silver key and a trowel.

Some Lodges in London, where at the Festive Board they perform 'The Trowel

Observance'. Part of the catechism is as follows: -

WM: - Brother JW; is our Brother, the SW, without his gavel?

JW: - He is, Worshipful Master; the labours of the evening being ended, my worthy

Colleague has exchanged the gavel for the Trowel.

WM: - Brother SW; why have you made that exchange?

SW: - Better to spread the cement of Brotherly Love; because as the Trowel is used by Operative Masons to lay on that substance which binds together Ashlars of stone, so is the Trowel used by Speculatives to unite friendships among the Brethren.

In the Scientific Lodge at Cambridge - founded in 1754 - the Initiate at the Festive Board wears a small silver trowel suspended from a collar. The Brother proposing his health "exhorts him to the exercise of Charity which is likened to the cement which binds and perfects the building".

In some English Lodges the trowel is worn as a jewel by the eldest Past Master.

In some English Lodges a trowel is the emblem of the Tyler.

# The Trowel

---

The trowel is referred to in the degree workings of the Grand Orient of France.

In Scotland today, the Trowel is used as the collar jewel of the Junior Deacon, and the Grand Junior Deacon also wears this jewel as part of his regalia.



They explain the use of the Trowel this way:

“The Trowel teaches that nothing can be united without proper cement, and the perfection of the building depends on the suitable disposition of the cement. So, Charity, the bond of perfection and social union, must unite separate minds and interests that, like the radii of a circle which extend from the centre to every part of the circumference, the principle of universal benevolence may be diffused to every member of the community.”

“As it is used by the operative Brother to spread cement which unites the building into one common mass, so the Freemason uses the Trowel emblematically for the noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection, that cement which unites

the members of the fraternity into one sacred band or society of Brothers among whom no contention should ever exist.”

The trowel today is seen as the jewel attached to the collar of the Charity Steward, under the English constitution.



It was appointed to be worn there, because it had in earlier times been the symbol of care for the brotherhood and that which secures the wellbeing of the brethren.

# The Trowel

In many Irish Lodges, the Jewel of the Almoner, is a purse with a heart on it, much like the Scottish Trowel Jewel, without the handle. This may well have been derived from an older version, with a trowel.



The Trowel is also well known in European Masonry.

In Scandinavian countries, all Masons in Craft Lodges wear the Trowel as a jewel.

Entered Apprentices receive an Unpolished Trowel in a leather strap and wears it on his left lapel.

Fellowcrafts wear a polished silver Trowel with a white rosette.

Master Masons wear a golden Trowel on a colourful rosette.



These countries use two sets of Working Tools, both sets being explained in the First Degree.

The first set consists of the square, level, and plumb rule.

The second set consists of the Trowel, hammer and compasses.

In one some French workings, the candidate in the Fellowcraft Degree is made to take five 'voyages' around the Lodge and on each 'voyage' carries a different Working Tool, namely the mallet and chisel, the square and compasses, the rule and crowbar, the level, and on the fifth and last 'voyage', the Trowel.

In U.S.A. Lodges, and, in those Canadian Lodges which have taken their ritual and form from the various American states, the Trowel is the only Working Tool used in the Third Degree.



# The Trowel

---

To quote Albert Mackey's Encyclopaedia:

"This implement is considered the appropriate Working Tool of a Master Mason, because, in operative Masonry, while the Apprentice is engaged in preparing the rude materials, which require only the gauge and gavel to give them their proper shape, the Fellow Craft places them in their proper position by means of the plumb, level, and square; but the Master Mason alone, having examined their correctness and proved them true and trusty, secures them permanently in their place by spreading, with the Trowel, the cement that irrevocably binds them together."

Robert Macoy, in his book, The Masonic Ritual, informs us that

"the Trowel is an implement made use of by operative Masons to spread the cement which unites the building into one common mass; but we, as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection; that cement which unites us into one sacred band, or society of friends and brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, or rather emulation, of who best can work, and best agree."

This charge, as MaCoy gives it, has remained relatively unchanged to this day, and is still used by most American and some Canadian Lodges.

In many parts of the world, of all working tools, it is the Trowel which seems to be most appropriate to the Master Mason Degree;

The Entered Apprentice, who can make only a beginning at the task of shaping the ashlar, needs only the gavel and the gauge;

the Fellow Craft, to bring the stone into completeness of size and form, requires the plumb, square, and level;

The Master Mason's task is to set the finished stone in its place, and bind it there, for which purpose the trowel is his most necessary tool.

Therefore, the Master Mason has been given the Trowel as his working tool because it is most symbolic of his function in the great work of Temple Building; when that tool has done its work, there is nothing more to do, because the structure stands complete, a united mass, incapable of falling apart; the stones which were many have now, because of the binding power of the cement, become as one.

If the stone represents an individual man, and if the Temple represents the Fraternity as a whole, it is evident that the Trowel is the symbol of that which has power to bind men together.

The Trowel has been, and still is, a respected Working Tool in the Craft throughout much of the world and, even though we may not use it ourselves, it may still provide us with much symbolism on which to moralize.

# The Trowel

---

Just as the trowel is used by operative masons to spread the cement, which unites the stones of a building into a substantial structure; we, as Free and Accepted Masons, may use it for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love, which unites us into one close bond of brotherhood.

The Trowel is an emblem of completion. The final stage of a job is reached when mortar is applied to bind the stones together, or when plaster is applied over the wall, thereby obscuring the differences between the stones.

The Egyptians regarded the Trowel as an emblem of secrecy that was binding on the Initiate in the ancient mysteries. In an old English ritual, the Entered Apprentice is presented with a silver trowel, "emblematically to stop up all interstices in the lodge so that not a sound shall escape from with, nor an eye pry without." In Irish lodges during the eighteenth century, we read that a pointed trowel was used as a stabbing weapon.

But the trowel has, in addition a deeper significance. Numerical values receive especial attention in Masonry, possibly because mathematics was the first of the sciences to help civilise the human race. Geometry is regarded as chief among the seven liberal arts and sciences, --its initial blazes before you. The 47th problem of Euclid is an important symbol in this masonry

The series, 3, 5 and 7, occurs frequently among the symbols of Masonry, but the number 3 is most frequent; the 3 Great lights, 3 Lesser lights, 3 Degrees in the Craft Lodge, 3 Senior Officers in the lodge, 3 Sub-Ordinate Officers, 3 Stages of human life, 3 knocks and many other instances, which you will recall. The reason for this prominence is that 3 is the symbol of Stability.

Geometry teaches that three points in one plane, are always in equilibrium.

And this is the philosophic interpretation of the trowel. It presents three points. It is the principal working tool of the Master Mason, not only because it spreads the cement of brotherly love, but also because, the close bond of brotherhood, so constructed must always be in equilibrium and is firmly founded on Stability.

But there is yet another reason; the trowel in the hands of the operative mason is, frequently required to remove from the bearing surfaces of the stone, such foreign substances as may have become attached to it while it lay, among unclean surroundings and which would interfere with its perfect bonding.

# The Trowel

---

The irregular block of stone came out of the quarry, --that is, the outer world. It entered the Apprentice degree, where by aid of the common gavel and the twenty-four-inch gauge, it was shaped into a rough ashlar. It was then passed to the Fellowcrafts, who, by use of their working tools made it plumb, square and level and fashioned it into a perfect ashlar.

However perfect an ashlar it may have been, when it received the commendation of the Grand Master, through contact with the world, it superficially acquired vices and faults, which unfit it for a perfect union.

The trowel in this relation may be regarded as referring to the three jewels of the Master degree, Friendship, Morality and Brotherly Love, which when worthily worn, so cleanse and purify, that the stone is in every respect fitted to be raised to its permanent place in the walls of the Temple of Masonry.

Brethren, it has been my pleasure, today in more ways than one: -

Firstly, having the great honour and privilege of being installed as Worshipful Master of The Irish Lodge of Research, Lodge 200.

Secondly, of having the respect of all of you, Brethren, attending today to hear me present this paper.

Thirdly, that I may have encouraged and/or enticed some or all of you to delve a little deeper into the mysteries and meanings of our ancient and honourable history.

Thank you.