

THE LODGE AND ITS FURNISHINGS

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R.W.M., may I take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of Lodge Hope for this opportunity to address such an ancient and distinguished Lodge as yours. If I may, I would like to take this opportunity to explain to any of the brethren present who may be unaware that Lodge Hope is the research Lodge in Fife & Kinross Province and that our function is to explore, investigate and record freemasonry in all its aspects within Fife and beyond. The lodge is in all respects a working lodge except that we do not, in the normal sense, "make masons". We really only accept affiliate members and we only "work" from April to August so as not to clash with the meetings of other lodges in the Province. At all of our meetings, except the installation, highly skilled brethren give a lecture, usually on some aspect of Masonry. Any brother is more than welcome to attend, you can be sure of a warm welcome and, of course, we are now your neighbours meeting in this very hall. But enough of the adverts... let us move on to the main feature.

The Lodge and its Furnishings

Lectures are like curate's eggs - some good, some bad. It is tempting to guess their quality by their topic; for example, there are "sexy" topics; the Knights Templar or Rosslyn Chapel and there are "Oh my God! What have we let ourselves in for?" topics like *The impact of Enochian Judaism on Post-Modernist Freemasonry*'. The topic this evening is *The Lodge and its Furnishings*' so make up your mind which category of lecture you are going to get.

Bro. William Harvey

Many of you will have heard of Harvey, often in relation to ritual but this particular Brother can lay claim to having written a whole series of pamphlets and books on Scottish Freemasonry, mainly in the 1930's and 1940's. His work, however, lives on. I found a reference to Harvey on the Internet while looking for something else and it directed me to his little booklet *The Emblems of Freemasonry*'. This publication addresses a whole range of topics which the Freemason should be aware of regarding his Mother Lodge and it reminded me of just how ignorant I was about the furniture of the lodge and its meaning.

Most of us take what we see in our lodges for granted. It gives us a feeling of comfort that we are in our Mother Lodge. We spend time decorating and improving our fixtures and fittings. However, it is only when you go visiting that you realise the full richness and diversity of Scottish lodge rooms. If I may quote from a story by a Brother from Masonic Lodge No.2 Phoenix, Arizona who was visiting Scotland and who ended up in Lochgilphead. He recognised the Square & Compasses on the light outside the lodge and entered the open door. The downstairs bar was doing brisk trade and after giving certain assurances, he was welcomed into the Masonic community. He was shown the lodge apartments on the floor above. I quote, 'on the ceiling were painted stars, broken black clouds, the sun and the moon. Just below the ceiling were painted various Masonic symbols and murals. Their quality was spectacular. The Master's and Wardens' chairs were of walnut. On the floor was a black and white chequered carpet with a large blazing star in the centre'. The American brother stayed and talked and drank with his Scots brethren well into the night. I tell this story to make the point that all of us are familiar with and comfortable in the lodge room. We know what to expect but is it really as easy as that? As with all things in Freemasonry each of our buildings and the furniture therein have some hidden or moral message, which I am sure that we often overlook. Hence, this talk that for me was, and I hope that for you will be, a voyage of discovery.

The Entered Apprentice, having been admitted to the 'Light' gets his first impression of his lodge from the floor and was he not so overwhelmed by the enormity of the occasion he would have many questions about what he sees.

A lodge building should be, according to Masonic catechism, 'in form a double cube' sometimes called an 'oblong square': 'in length from East to West, in breadth from North to South, in depth from the surface of the Earth to its centre, and even as high as the Heavens'. This, we are told, is to 'represent the Universality of the Science'.

In practice, our lodges inhabit the buildings available to them like this building that we are in tonight. We meet in it for labour and refreshment and yes, it is meant to represent Masonry Universal. It is also supposed to be a model of the sanctum sanctorum of the Temple of King Solomon, ten cubits high, ten cubits wide and ten cubits broad. The furnishings derive from both and are not free from some confusion as to their meaning, purpose and form.

The Lodge Room

The lodge should be situated from East to West, and Masonic tradition informs us that this is for three reasons:

- (1) Because the Sunrises in the E. and sets in the W. thus lighting every part of the Lodge Universal,
- (2) Because Learning originated in the E. and then shed its benign influence on the W.,
- (3) Because the Tabernacle erected by Moses was, by God's special command situated due E. and W. and thus became the model for the Temple erected by the King of Israel to the honour and glory of the One True God.

Well Brethren "check it out"! In my Mother Lodge, the Master sits only emblematically in the E. its true geographical orientation being due north. This is only the start of Masonic allegory - we accept these inaccuracies because they do not impinge on the truth contained in the moral message.

Dr. Oliver in his text *'The book of the Lodge'* states that the form of the lodge should be a double cube 'emblematical of the united powers of light and darkness in the creation and because the Ark of the Covenant and the Altar of Incense were both of that figure'.

This 19th Century view comes from a period when many lodges were for the first time acquiring permanent premises for the first time. Indeed the first recorded account of a Masonic Temple built exclusively for the practice of Freemasonry is the lodge of Marseille consecrated in 1765. However, Brethren we know that the French were latecomers to Freemasonry. We have the first written minutes from Mary's Chapel Edinburgh No.1 dated July 1599. Nevertheless, Mary's Chapel was essentially a peripatetic lodge until 1894, when they moved to Hill Street, meeting in a wide range of places until a permanent home was found. William Laurie, author of *'A History of Freemasonry'* 1853 informs us that the Lodge at Haddington (now Lodge St. John Kilwinning No.57) opened a Lodge in Gullane Church in 1599. It was common at this time for Lodges to meet in churches, taverns or even private houses. It was also common for Lodges outside the city of Edinburgh to go to the candidate rather than have the candidate come to the Lodge. The use of church buildings and the admission

of Ministers as brethren was both pragmatic and politic in 17th and 18th century Scotland where religion played a significant role in public life e.g. the Jacobites, etc.

If we look to the ceiling, we should see that the roof decoration represents the starry firmament. Thomas Paine the 18th Century radical writer in his *'Essay on the Origin of Freemasonry'* says that 'the Masons adopt the same practice as the Druids. The roof of their temples or lodges is ornamented with a sun and the floor is a representation of the variegated face of the earth either by carpeting or by mosaic work'. While it is clear that Paine was not a Freemason himself, the practice he describes of decorating lodges at least on the ceiling has not changed much in 250 years. He even got the bit about the 12 signs of the Zodiac right before "legging it" to France just ahead of the hangman's noose. For the modern Christian Freemason, there is little doubt that the starry roof is a symbol of Grand Lodge above where the G.A.O.T.U. rules and reigns forever.

While there is no confusion over our ceilings the same cannot be said for the floor and its covering. The Tracing Board, the Chequered Pavement and the richly decorated Carpet, which we are all familiar with, seem to be in stark contradiction to the definition of the symbolic representation of the fruitful earth. Early Masonic texts tell us that the mosaic pavement with the blazing star at its centre and the skirt work of the indented or tessellated border represents the diversity of objects both animate and inanimate, which form the whole creation. The blazing star refers to the sun and the tessellated border the planets, which in their revolutions form a beautiful border around it just as the carpet does in a lodge.

Do you recognise this description of the black and white carpet. It neither is variegated nor is it multi-coloured and it takes a huge stretch of the imagination to see it as a representation of the planets. Some students of Masonry have suggested that the carpets or floor cloths were early forms of the Tracing Boards placed for the purpose of instruction. (I will come back to this later in my talk). It must be clear that the black and white carpet or tiles that we now use is again an allegorical representation of the bounteous earth and more likely came about from a practical consideration - cost.

In Scotland there would appear to be no imposed standards, which set out how a lodge should be constructed, unlike the situation in Europe where many constitutions have rules to follow. In Switzerland, windows must be built at least two metres from the ground if it is not possible to light the lodge room from the ceiling. The lodge

room proper should be accessible from two doors on each side of the Senior Warden's station and there should be two rooms outside the main hall one to prepare the candidate and the other to accommodate the Tyler.

In some lodges, there is an elevated platform in the East to accommodate the Master. It should be reached by three steps and according to ancient tradition; it should have a floor covering of black and white squares, representing in the view of Dr. Albert Mackay the chequered pavement upon which the High Priest walked. This may be another explanation of why we have a chequered carpet on the lodge floor today.

According to Bro. Speth in *'Ars Quatuor Coronatum Vol. VI'*, it is only comparatively recently that the floor of a lodge was covered. He says 'As far back as we can go, we find that the tracing board was figured in chalk or charcoal on the floor of the lodge-room and washed out when the ceremony ended'. Bro E. A. T. Reed in *'Lodge of Research Transactions 1903-04'*, while writing about early Tracing Boards, stated 'The room in which they met being bare boards, was sprinkled with sand; when there was an initiation a space in front of the masters pedestal was left clear and in that space the Tyler drew with chalk, charcoal and bluestone, the ground plan of a building or other geometrical figure...' which was termed 'drawing the lodge'. If there had been an initiation, it was incumbent on the initiate to wash this drawing out before the lodge was closed. Neither rank nor position exempted him from the discharge of this office. This practice reflects the way of the medieval stonemasons who at the building of large structures such as York Minster or Dunfermline Abbey, created 'Masoun Ludges' where the stones were cut. Beside them would be found the 'Trasour' or tracing house. It was here that the master mason designed and produced the templates or plans for stones or mouldings. The room was floored with plaster of Paris and the mason using the square and the iron compasses drew out the designs in actual size. Once finished the designs were erased and the surface used over again.

Some recent research on floor cloths done by Steven Jackson in his doctoral dissertation at St. Andrews University shows that the practice of 'chalking the floor' died out in the mid 19th century. It was replaced by the use of painted floor cloths. This practice is noted in a rebuke administered to St. Andrews Lodge No.25 by Grand Lodge in 1759, presumably for breaching secrecy. However, records also show that lodges at Kelso, Thurso and Scone & Perth also purchased floor cloths between 1756 and 1766. The average cost of these 'cloths' was two guineas. To explain further 'floor

cloth' was waxed and painted sailcloth, often of large widths and made on huge sailcloth looms; hence the connection with the port of Leith. Some were painted to look like carpets and others were inscribed with geometrical designs. One of the most popular designs for domestic use was the familiar black and white square with a tessellated border. As such this 'cloth' would be readily available to the newly built lodges as floor coverings and thus could offer an obvious answer to the question of why the black and white pavement is used as opposed to the representation of the 'fruitful earth with the blazing star at its centre and the indented or tessellated border which points to the planets and their revolutions', which Harvey describes. That answer dear to all lodge treasurers is simply, cost. They were relatively cheap. Lodge minutes show that black and white flooring cost Lodge St. Paul of Ayr £2/10/0 in 1804. However, three 'Floor cloths painted with mountings', in other words cloths representing the Tracing Boards of the three degrees, cost Old Mother Kilwinning £6/18/6 in 1807.

By 1860, waxed floor cloths were being replaced by that Kirkcaldy speciality - linoleum. In time carpets were to replace both patterned floor cloth and linoleum, while at the same time Tracing Boards, as we know them, superseded the elaborate painted cloths.

It is generally accepted by Masonic authorities that the furniture of the lodge consists of the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square & Compasses and the Altar, which is the focal point of every lodge. There is as usual some dispute about its form. It is generally agreed that it should be a double cube but some, particularly in American freemasonry, believe that like its Jewish prototype it should have four horns, representative of the Ark of the Covenant. It is usually of wood and can be richly carved. Others maintain that it should be of white marble, a concept familiar to Royal Arch Masons.

The position of the Three Great Lights is also open to dispute. Some maintain that the V.S.L. need not be open, others that it should be open and placed so that the Master in the E. may be able to read it. Others favour the idea that it should be reversed so that the candidate may see and read it.

Once past this hurdle the question arises as to what chapters of the V.S.L. should be revealed. Interpretations from Oliver's *'Book of the Lodge'* recommend that *Ruth* IV be used for the 1st. *Judges* XII for the 2nd. and *1st. Kings* VII for the 3rd.

Grand Lodge indicates that they are happy to accept *Psalm CXXXIII*, *Amos VII* and *Ecclesiastes XII*. The reasoning for this is explained in the *Miscellanea Latomorum Vol. I*. This document states, that the passages referred to reflect their bearing on the several degrees for example the psalm referred to is in praise of brotherly love and *Ecclesiastes* is a reflection on the subject of death.

There is also disagreement on the position of the Square & Compasses. Some argue that the limbs of the square should point to the West because the brethren are obligated within it; others that it should point to the East because the Square is dedicated to the Master. Division also exists over the Compasses - some arguing that they should point to the East to signify to the Master that he should keep within the compass of his authority. The other view is that they should point to the West because just as the Compasses are dedicated to the Craft it is only right that the brethren keep themselves within its points. In addition, catechism sets forth that the Charter or Warrant must be displayed and the Lesser Lights must be in position when required; the Rough Ashlar should be found in front of the Junior Warden's pedestal and the Smooth in front of the Senior Warden. The Working Tools should also be conveniently to hand. For those of you who are wondering when this will finish I am now into the last lap - boxes, chairs and pedestals.

The first items of furniture to be made exclusively for lodges were the boxes and chests used to store the minute books and the lodge ready cash. The oldest recorded is the 'Lockit Kist' of the Lodge of Aberdeen referred to in documents dating from 1680, another of the period is the property of Old Mother Kilwinning. These boxes, with their three locks, required to be opened before witnesses and are similar to the boxes used by the trade incorporations.

The earliest items of Masonic seat furniture recorded are two chairs presented to the Lodge of Aberdeen in 1709 and 1710. They are commemorative of their donors and are consistent with the local tradition of giving chairs. The Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen have 20 similar chairs. Research in Ireland has found three chairs – a Master's and two Wardens'. On the Master's is carved the date 1691 and on its back are carved a Harp, Square & Compasses and a Level. The Watson family, in whose house the lodge met, preserved the chair and they kept hold of the chair when the lodge, Lurgan No. 134, moved. Another chair of similar design is found at St. Nicholas' Church Carrickfergus and it is dated 1685.

It is a feature of the history of lodges that it is not until the 1730's that lodges began to have permanent meeting places and so a need for their own furniture. For example, the minute book of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning records that on the 25th of March 1735 it was agreed 'to pay the steward 12/0' to be used to pay for the furniture of the lodge. It is believed that this extract refers to the chair visible in Stewart Watson's painting 'The inauguration of Robert Burns as Poet Laureate'. Sadly, this chair is now believed to have been destroyed. A separate bill dated 1735 exists for the gothic canopy shown in the painting. In 1736, a Wright was commissioned to make 'forms covered in baize sufficient for the lodge'. By December 1736 the lodge buildings were completed and the furniture installed at a total cost of £400/0/0. The furniture would appear to have cost no more than a few pounds.

It was quite common to specifically commission a Master's Chair. They were often much larger than domestic furniture and were used to highlight the special nature of the Master's position. Where funds permitted larger chairs were also constructed; for the Wardens but this was less common.

In 1739, Lodge Scone & Perth commissioned a chair 'to be put in the Trades Hall'. It had emblematic decoration of fret cut Square & Compasses and there were inlays representing the Maul, Chisel and the Axe and Saw - Wrights emblems. The chair was for use by the Stonemason Deacon at meetings of the Incorporation of Wrights as there were insufficient masons to form their own incorporation. However, the chair was used by the Master of Lodge Scone & Perth.

By the 1790's, as more lodges became established in permanent premises, Chairs of unusual designs with ornamentation of a Masonic character began to appear. A good example of this is the Master's Chair from Biggar Free Operative Lodge, formed in 1727 but not chartered until 1795. Made in that year to celebrate the Charter the chair is carved with the Square & Compasses, a Level and a Skull. The Compasses are gilded and set on a blue background. An ornamental cresting was added later with an additional Square & Compasses, a Bible, the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. There are Corinthian columns and iron urn finials. The back pillars are topped with globes painted with lines of latitude and longitude.

Characteristic of the time is the 'tall chair'. Made between 1790 and 1815 this form of chair has particular resonance in Fife. These chairs, which top 6' 6", have several local examples of note. There are the three chairs belonging to Lodge Elgin

and Bruce, which were originally made for Lodge Dunfermline No.26. Commissioned by the then Master, Baillie Robert Button, who drew up the original design, the chairs were made for £4/18/0 by a newly entered brother, one John Williamson. The original size of the Master's Chair is not known because of the extensive repairs that have been made to it but as the Wardens' Chairs are 6' 5"; it is reasonable to assume that the Master's Chair would be bigger.

In this hall tonight are the five Kirkcaldy Chairs, commissioned by the lodge from James Barnet in 1816 for the sum of £8/15/0. The Master's Chair is 6' 6" tall. Each chair bears the emblem of its office with the exception of the Master's, which bears several.

Not to be outdone, in 1809 Old Mother Kilwinning asked Bro. Alexander Cunningham to make three chairs; 'one for the Master and one for each Warden, of higher elevation than ordinary so that they may appear in their proper station when seated in the lodge'. The lodge ended the year in debt - the major item of expenditure being the chairs - the only other significant sum being charity in the amount £3/5/0.

Lastly pedestals. Pedestals seem only to have come into regular use in the mid 19th century; before that, tables were used. The oldest existing pedestals belong to the Lodge of Dalkeith and date from 1750. They were painted with emblems and have been painted over many times since. Locally a fine set of mahogany pedestals were made for the Lodge of Kirkcaldy in 1821. This was followed by a massive bench, which was displayed in the east. Each has symbols inlaid into the mahogany.

All these pieces of lodge furnishings have a place in our Mother Lodges. They have significance and importance in our rituals and ceremonies. I hope that this exposition will encourage you to look at your lodge and enquire about its furnishings and their meanings. Thank you for your attention and courtesy.

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