



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

The Working Tools Part two.....

The Working Tools

Part Two - Speculative Freemasonry '

Evidence of the use of working tools in Speculative Freemasonry post-1717 can be found in the various 'Exposures'. (An 'Exposure' was a pamphlet or paper that purported to describe in detail the proceedings of a secret Masonic assembly. Some were written by Masons, many were not, but despite their differences a common thread could often be detected.).

These 'Exposures' revealed that tools of the trade gradually became used in four stages. Firstly there was occasional use of a mason's working tool in general discussion but without any explanation or symbolism. Next came just the mention of a tool in a catechism and again without symbolism. Later the catechisms of an apprentice included an explanation of certain tools without symbolism. Lastly, approaching the time of Unification, the catechisms – for the Entered Apprentice ceremonies only – began to offer both an explanation of the tools used on site together with their symbolic use affirming related moral values.

Around the beginning of the C18 mention was made in the Edinburgh Register House MSS of 1696, 1700 and 1714 of an Oath used by Freemasons which included: '*...as I am sworn by God, by St John, by the Square and Compass and common Judge...*' [A 'Judge' was a gauge or templet – a variation of *template*] No symbolism was implied.

The various 'exposures' of Freemasonry from this time on began to include the names of various Masonic tools but other than purporting to demonstrate an operative link with Freemasonry no attempt was made to moralise them.

One pamphlet of e.g. 1724 published a mason's catechism which included the phrase: '*the Square, the Compass, the Judge, the Ashlar, and the Diamond.*' [The ashlar was probably in use to sharpen tools; the diamond was a hammer for breaching hewn stones] In answer to a later question about the number of Lights in a lodge the reply was: '*Twelve – Father, Son, Holy Ghost, Sun Moon, Master Mason, Square, Rule, Plumb, Line, Maul and Chisel.*' [There was no mention of a compass]

By 1730 (from Pritchard's '*Masonry Dissected*') mention is made of a Candidate kneeling '*within the Square with the Compass at his n.l.b.*' and there is reference to the 'Moveable Jewels' of Square, Level and Plumb Rule as being Emblems of Master and Wardens.

Pritchard's text also begins to include some explanations: '*Square to lay down True and Right Lines, Level to try all Horizontals and the Plumb-Rule to try all Uprights*'. A comparably dated Wilkinson MS mentions: '*the Square to see thy Corner Stones are laid square, the Level that they are laid level and ye Plumb to Raise Perpendiculars*' [His lettering]

An exposure of 1744 refers to the following key masons' tools: '*square, compasses, level, plumb-rule, trowel and a mason's hammer*' [It is of interest that there is no mention of a gavel and this is the earliest known reference to *compasses* in the plural]

By 1760 in the '*Three Distinct Knocks*' we at last see the first mention of any tools being moralised: '*The Bible to rule and govern our faith, the Square to square our actions, the Compasses to keep us within bounds with all Men, particularly with a Brother.*'

An explanation is now given for the Square, the 24 inch Gauge and the common Gavel. For example: '*The 24 Inch*

Gauge represents the 24 hours of the day. Six hours to work in, six hours to serve my God, six to serve a friend or Brother as far as lies within my power and without detriment to myself or family, and six hours to sleep in.'

By 1801 Preston, describing an Installation Ceremony, lists the following tools: '*the Rule, Line, Trowel, Chisel, Plumb, Level, Square. Compasses and Mallet*' in that order and each is related to a moral quality..

Afterthoughts

By the late C18 the form of the Working Tools ritual that we know so well was gradually stabilising. It only remained for the Committee of Reconciliation circa 1813 to select the most promising material of the Ancients and Moderns and employ '*The Working Tools*' to embrace both meaning and morality not just for the First but for all three Degrees. The fruits of their labours – still substantially unchanged - can be seen in the Book of Emulation Ritual that is on our shelves (or in our pockets) to this day.

[The writer acknowledges extensive use of material from 'The Freemason at Work' by Harry Carr pps. 164-9 pub. By A Lewis.]

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