



## Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

### A Preceptor:

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

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

# Deacons Wands



## The Wand of your office

## Deacons and their Wands and stuff

Saturday morning. Dispatched by domestically busy partners to do the weekly shop Fred and Charlie allowed their heavily laden trolleys to clash head on while negotiating a busy Waitrose aisle. 'Dr Livingstone, I presume', said one. 'Can it possibly be Mr Stanley?' retorted the other. With that and by now thoroughly disenchanted with the shopping experience they muttered a mutual 'Coffee?' and headed off for the cafe queue.

'How's your Nipper?' asked a solicitous Fred when they were seated at the sunniest table. 'Smashing', responded a delighted Charlie, promptly producing the stream of 'Proud-Dad' photos on his phone. As his coffee cooled Fred realised far too late it had been the wrong question. He manfully recovered the situation with a slow 'would you believe it' at the next picture, a brace of 'wows' at the one after and then an, oh so very casual, 'By the way I gather Sammy's ill – and you're stepping in as Junior Deacon for our 'First'. How do you feel about it?'

Charlie's facial expression might have persuaded a casual passer-by that he had just sucked an unripe lemon or his duodenal ulcer was rapidly approaching its end-game. Fred however recognised it as the early signs of a Masonic Steward's first night nerves when invited to contemplate his first venture on to the major stage. 'I know most of the words', Charlie admitted 'but it's all that foot work... The Candidate will be relying on me – I mustn't let him down'.

'True', smiled Fred, 'but a couple of brisk rehearsals will sort the footwork out. Believe me, the DC will make sure you're in the right place at the right time on the night...or else!.'

'It's all the business with the wands, too, Fred. Why do the Deacons carry 'wands' anyway? They get in the way and don't play any obvious part in our rituals.'

Fred inadvertently glanced at his, by now empty, cup. Charlie was swiftly back with two steaming replacements. 'Thanks, Charlie. That was a fair question you asked. It might help if we took a look at its origin.'

'The wand has a surprisingly long history - I believe they were even depicted in neolithic cave paintings. In essence a 'wand' (alias a staff of office, a mayor's mace, a conductor's baton or the Queen's sceptre) is simply a symbol of the power of the person who wields it.'

'Does a Deacon actually have real power then in a Lodge?', whistled Charlie. 'Sadly, no' laughed Fred. 'When it is impracticable for the dignitary to carry it then a junior official is detailed off to bear it on his or her behalf. In our Freemasonry the Deacon's wand represents the authority of his Warden who is a ruler of the Lodge; its certainly not that of the Deacon. That's why the wand has to be treated with the utmost respect and decorum at all times the Lodge is open. It reminds members of their rulers' authority.'

'But who carries the Master's wand of authority?' Charlie wondered.

'Another good question,' said Fred. 'In effect it is the Director of Ceremonies or his proxy. He is placed near to the WM and as he goes about the Lodge directing the ceremony on the Master's behalf he carries his wand or baton to remind his Brothers that the wand represents not his but the Master's authority to issue orders. Always remember, the WM apart, all Masons are equal'.

After a long and thoughtful pause Charlie enquired: 'Is there a proper or approved way to carry the wand, Fred?'

'There is nothing mandatory spelt out in the Emulation Ritual, Charlie, but the Grand Lodge team have informally offered some useful practical advice.'

*'During the ceremonies of Initiation, Passing and Raising when on the move the butt of the wand should be upright and held just a few inches above the floor. When stationary the butt should actually rest on the floor of the Lodge. Never ever lean on the wand for support. You normally carry it in your right hand and keep it perfectly upright. Obviously during Prayers and Obligations the ritual may require you to change that.'*

*'There is no one correct method of holding the wand, by the way Some hold it vertically with the butt of the wand resting on the ground and the forearm almost horizontal. It can then be held lightly between the thumb and forefinger and with the remaining fingers of the right hand steadying it When on the move you need only just bend your elbow. However most Lodges have evolved their own tradition and if it looks smart, dignified, uniform and stress-free then there seems little point in arguing the toss.'*

*Sometimes the Deacons move round the Lodge room without wands. Why's that, Fred?*

*'If the Deacon is carrying out work directly for the WM – say, when signing the Secretary's Minute Book - then he doesn't need to carry his Warden's symbol of authority with him. He has the Master's authority. Seems clear enough, Charlie.'*

*'But what about Prayers and stuff,' said Charlie. 'Why do we cross wands.? Is it like swords at a military wedding?'*

*Fred laughed. 'Not quite, Charlie – although there is a faint connection. There are occasions, during Prayer or Obligation for example, when Deacons are required to cross their Wands over a Candidate's head. It comes from old Jewish and Catholic customs. During a Blessing or Induction a protective shawl or canopy is held over the subject's head by means of poles or wands. Those swords, I suppose, indicate the congregation's protection.'*

*'In Freemasonry we then hold the wands in the left hand to leave the right arm free for the appropriate reverential or penal sign. It has been the tradition in many lodges for the Senior Deacon's wand to be to the east of the pair - although I have never read that this has any ritual significance apart from suggesting the Senior Warden's higher status'.*

*Charlie enquired thoughtfully: 'Given the importance of the right angle in Freemasonry – the Deacon's feet at right angles and so on - should the Deacons' wands make a ninety degree cross? They would then also form a second right angled triangle down through the Candidate with the base running along the floor below the Candidate's cushion.'*

*Fred paused for a moment. 'Clever. Hadn't thought of that. You're not just a pretty face, are you?. Mind you, holding two long wands at right angles is damned hard on the wrists. The wands might soon start to waver. Neat in theory but not in practise. My advice, make an angle that looks the part and one that you can hold steady'.*

*They sat in companionable silence. Eventually Fred mused: 'When you're holding that wand be warned that in ages past a wand was also be believed to denote special spiritual and esoteric powers!. Remember, a verger carries a wand in procession ahead of a priest and most magicians make use of a wand as well as abracadabra in their spells. ...So be careful how you use it, Charlie!'*

*Fred took out a page from his little Preceptor's Pocketbook (constantly carried as it contained useful names and numbers). 'Here's one for you - how long is a wand?'*

*Charlie began: 'It all depends...they seem anywhere between five and six feet'*

Fred laughed. *'Trick question. A wand was so important it became the basis of a pre-Norman system of measurement before they adopted the yard. It was about a metre and represented the distance from the breast bone to the finger-tip, a bit like the Jewish cubit.*

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Approximate Equivalence</u>
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1 Digit =	width of the long finger
10 Digits = 1 Span	thumb to forefinger
5 Spans = 1 Wand	1 yard (approx)
2 Wands = 1 Fathom	2 yards
10 Fathoms = 1 Chain	22 yards
10 Chains = 1 Furlong	220 yards
10 Furlongs	1 nautical mile

Fred added mischievously: *'Who said that there was no longer any daily advancement in Masonic knowledge, eh?*

Charlie suddenly glanced at his watch. *'Holy cow. See the time. I'm for it. Better grab a bunch of flowers on the way out...See you, Fred!'*

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