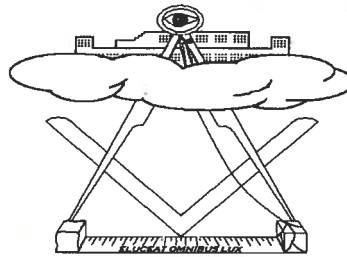


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## Working Tools of the First Degree

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*“Man cannot work without tools. The necessity for these has stimulated his powers of invention, and his invention of them has enabled him, everywhere in the material creation, to conquer and establish his supremacy. By them and through them he has also developed his higher nature and extended his mental and spiritual horizon.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. McBride, *Speculative Masonry – Its Mission, its Evolution, and its Landmarks*, Glasgow : D Gilfillan and Co, 1914, p. 24.

## **The Purpose of Masonic Tools**

The first question asked by the inquisitive mind in relation to Freemasonry might be ‘Why do Freemasons use “tools” when they do not build anything?’ The whole history of the transition from operative to speculative Masonry is a deeply involved one and the topic of a separate course of research.<sup>2</sup>

However, acknowledging at least that there was a transition made at some point from operative masonry – those that built, fashioned, and shaped great edifices – to speculative masonry – those who built, fashioned, and shaped great men – many of the trappings of operative masonry were retained for the purposes of moral instruction, or ‘to imprint on the memory wise and serious truths’.<sup>3</sup> Or in other words, Masons ‘ceased to build material temples, and devoted [themselves] to the erection of a spiritual one.’<sup>4</sup> Masonic tools, therefore, are used for a more noble and glorious purpose: as vehicles of instruction regarding the values which a Mason should pursue to improve and refine their spiritual and moral edifice. Rather than the operative instruments of labour, they have become the speculative implements of morality.

This paper deals with the tools applied allegorically in the First, or Entered Apprentice, Degree of Freemasonry and the teachings they aim to convey.

### **Jurisdictional Differences – The Third Tool in the First Degree**

Before launching into a brief discussion of the tools of the First Degree, it is worth noting the differences that occur in relation to the working tools across jurisdictions. It will be no surprise to know that some of the verbiage of the ritual will alter from place to place while retaining the central teachings of Masonry. Less well known, or expected, is the fact that there are some differences in the actual tools used for this degree.

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<sup>2</sup> One telling of the history has it that with the election of a Grand Master on 24 June, 1717, and the establishment of a Grand Lodge in England that the nature of Masonry “wholly changed” from an operative to a speculative one, see John Bennett, *The Origin of Freemasonry and Knights Templar*, Johnson and Hardin : Cincinnati, 1907, P 66. Others will refer to a more gradual transition, where some of the allegorical uses were also applied by Operative Masons, see for example C. W. Leadbeater, *Freemasonry and Its Ancient Mystic Rites*, New York : Gramercy Books, 1998, Chapter Nine. See also Joseph Fort Newton, *The Builders : A Story and Study of Freemasonry*, Richmond, Virginia : Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1951, particularly the comment that “Masonry is too great an institution to have been made in a day, much less by a few men, but was a slow evolution through long time, unfolding its beauty as it grew”, p. 139. There is also a useful treatment in Bernard E. Jones, *Freemason’s Guide and Compendium*, London : Harrap, 1979, Book Two, Chapter Seven, noting that “the modern history of speculative masonry starts with 1646” (p. 97) and in particular a suggestion that the original speculative masons of this period should not be confused with the “gentlemen non-operative masons” of an earlier period (p. 93).

<sup>3</sup> Charles W. Moore, *New Masonic Trestle-board*, Boston : Charles M. Moore, 1868, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Bennet, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

As Mackay outlines in his *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, there are differences between the American and British jurisdictions in which tools are presented to the Entered Apprentice.<sup>5</sup> This is also true of the Third, or Master Mason, Degree, but apparently not for the Second, or Fellow Craft, Degree.

In the United States the tools are but two, the 24" Gauge and the Gavel. In British jurisdictions is added to this number the Chisel. However, Brethren of the American jurisdiction need not be concerned about the potential to miss the moral edification presented by the Chisel; it constitutes part of the teaching of the Mark Master and will be instructive for those who continue that portion of the Masonic journey.<sup>6</sup> However, it warrants laying out briefly later as it does constitute a critical part of the moral teaching of the First Degree in many parts of the world.

### **The Gavel**

The Operative Mason used the Gavel to break off the superfluous excrescences of the rough ashlar, and thus fit it the better for the use of more expert hands. The Speculative Mason uses this tool analogously to remind him of the need to “knock off” from the rude matter of his untrained mind and conscience all the vices and impurities of life. He can thereby fit his body as a “living stone for that spiritual building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”<sup>7</sup>

The “British” ritual teaches that the Gavel has an additional symbolical utility; it teaches that “labour is the lot of man – that the heart may conceive, and the head devise, in vain, if the hand be not prompt to execute the design”.<sup>8</sup> In other words, unless man is ready to toil, the conceptions devised by heart and head are of little value and will remain unfulfilled. A corollary to this idea might be that the ability and willingness to toil are of little worth unless there be a clear design and conceptual direction.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Albert G. Mackay, *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, Philadelphia : Moss and Company, 1874, p. 162. For the purposes of the discussion here by “British” is meant the Commonwealth more broadly as these traditions have carried over to countries such as Canada and Australia. Specifically, where comparisons are made with “British” in this paper, the author has mostly referred to the ritual of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of NSW&ACT, knowing that the similarities with other common heritage lodges are deep.

<sup>6</sup> Charles W. Moore, *New Masonic Trestle-board*, Boston: Charles M. Moore, 1868, Pt II, p. 11; Cornelius Moore, *The Craftsman and Freemason's Guide*, Cincinnati : Jacob Ernst, 1854, pp. 80 – 81; Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 162; Robert Macoy, *The Masonic Manual*, New York : Clark and Maynard, 1858, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver Day Street, *Symbolism of the Three Degrees*, Part One - The Entered Apprentice Degree, Washington, D.C. : The American Masonic Press, 1929, p. 23; *First Degree*, Ritual Book of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory of Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons, 2005, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> This alludes to the need for productive Masons to be guided by a wider and more learned Brother whose use of the tools are more expert and whose designs for a strong and well-adorned edifice are described on the

Taking the preceding point further, Chalmers Paton notes that in the endeavour of moral and spiritual perfection “those who have the greatest progress themselves, are best able to render kind assistance to their brethren”. The Master of the Lodge could be considered such a person. Moreover, they provide clear design and conceptual direction, such as was provided by the Grand Masters of Antiquity in the building of the Temple. Thus could be one reason given that the Master holds the Gavel in the Lodge to maintain order, and assist the Brethren to strive towards their own moral and spiritual purity.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, a further point of difference between American and British jurisdictions is” that the latter uses the term “Common Gavel” rather than “Gavel” to distinguish clearly between the tool used by the Entered Apprentice and that used by the Worshipful Master.<sup>11</sup>

### **The 24” Gauge or Rule**

The 24” Gauge is a ruler divided into twenty-four one-inch lengths. The Operative Mason uses it “to lay out and measure their work” and thus prepares it for the further labour required.

Each of the twenty-four divisions can neatly be representative of the twenty-four hours of the day. Thus, the Entered Apprentice is taught the value of time and the need to allot time to the various aspects of life in such a way as to ensure a life that is productive and well-employed. Those aspects are the service to God and worthy, distressed brethren; labour; and refreshment and rest.

In some ritual, there is a clear direction that this division should be equally allotted to these three tasks.<sup>12</sup> In others, and more generally, there is no such direction and thus we can conclude that a Brother is to use his own discretion to determine how he should allocate his time, but nevertheless always reflecting on the need to satisfy each of these three aspects of life.<sup>13</sup> While rest and refreshment is necessary, Brethren are also reminded in the “British” ritual – perhaps with a recognition towards the precious, fleeting, and finite nature of time – to ensure that the portion given to refreshment does not impede on the requirement to devote time

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trestle board – this alludes, of course, to the Master of the lodge, without whose instruction the Lodge would fall into moral and physical disrepair.

<sup>10</sup> Chalmers I Paton, *Freemasonry : Its Symbolism, Religious Nature, and Law of Perfection*, London : Reeves and Turner, 1873, p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> See C. W. Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*, Madras, India : The Theosophical Publishing House, 1926, para 555.

<sup>12</sup> Such as in American jurisdictions, see Macoy, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Such as in British jurisdictions.

to work, civil duty, prayer and meditation, and charity. To do otherwise would be to squander a Brother's true potential and to do a disservice to the gift of life given him.

### **The Chisel**

Interestingly, the operative who wields the Chisel referred to in the American Mark Master ritual, according to Mackay, is "the artist", who uses it to give "form and regularity to the shapeless mass of stone".<sup>14</sup> In British jurisdictions, in keeping with the same terminology as the rest of the First Degree Working Tools, the generalised term "Operative Mason" is used to identify the wielder of this implement. Its allegorical utility is to admonish the Freemason to recognise the value of education to cultivate ideas and polish rude thoughts, thus "[transforming] the ignorant savage into the civilized being."<sup>15</sup> In British jurisdictions the Chisel also teaches the value of perseverance in working towards perfection;<sup>16</sup> it alludes to a long journey of development requiring "indefatigable exertion [to] induce the habit of virtue, enlighten the mind and render the soul pure".<sup>17</sup>

Discussion above noted the inclusion of the Chisel in British jurisdictions in the Entered Apprentice Degree while it is included in Royal Arch Masonry in America. In the United States, therefore, the Chisel is practically obsolete."<sup>18</sup> Some would consider its proper place to be within the Fellow Craft Degree (of which the Mark Master Degree is considered an extension and from which derived).<sup>19</sup> The Chisel allows an ability "to give a higher finish to the stone or to give it an ornamental shape or to engrave designs upon it ... The Chisel, therefore, symbolises those advanced studies and trainings which give a man polish and refinement and fit him for the highest stations in life. It is from this point of view that the inclusion of the Chisel in the Second Degree could be thought of as more appropriate than in the First; the work of the Entered Apprentice is expected to be rough and crude in making the initial preparation of the materials, while that of the Fellow Craft is more expert and refined.

### **Conclusion**

It is hoped the preceding discussion has provided a useful overview of some of the principle teachings evoked by the First Degree working tools, both those well-considered and

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<sup>14</sup> Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *First Degree, op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Carlile, *Manual of Freemasonry*, Leeds, England : Celephaïs Press, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Street, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

perhaps several often overlooked or providing a new approach. Similarly, that the discussion of some of the jurisdictional differences of the number and employment of the tools in the First Degree is enlightening to those with limited cross-jurisdictional Masonic experience.

The working tools of a Freemason should be seen as highly prized and valuable implements, just as the Operative Masons placed so much value in their physical tools, which were the implements which brought their livelihood.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, a serious transgression could be met with the impounding of such tools, such as that outlined in the second statute of the Lodge of Aberdeen in 1690, or that if dues were not paid, the tools would similarly be impounded until the debt erased, as outlined in the seventh statute. See Robert Freke Gould (Ed.) *et. al.*, *A Library of Freemasonry*, London : John Yorston Publishing Company, 1906, pp. 48 – 49.

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