

# MASONIC MUSINGS

*The Masonic Education Newsletter*

of Lodge Epicurean No 906 and Lodge Amalthea No 914

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Welcome to *Issue Seven* – the first for 2013. On this occasion I deal with the most iconic of all Masonic symbols – the *Square and Compasses*. As we will soon see, these symbols are exceptionally ancient... I also briefly deal with that noted symbol, *The Cable Tow*. And finish, as ever, with a *Question and Answer*...

Fraternal regards,  
Kent Henderson.

## THE SQUARE AND COMPASSES – FREEMASONRY'S UNIVERSAL LOGO

The Square and Compasses (or, more definitively – a Square and a set of Compasses which are joined together – each leg of the compass pointing in opposite directions) is the single most universally identifiable symbol of Freemasonry. Due to slight Masonic jurisdictional differences around the world, this symbol does not always look exactly the same to all Freemasons. Some jurisdictions call this symbol the Square and Compass (non-plural) and a number of jurisdictions (such as Victoria) omit the “G” at its centre. The use of the “G” in the centre is largely Scottish, and American, practice – but not English. However, no matter its slightly different look, all Freemasons are in unison as to what this symbol means to them within the fraternity.



### Speculative Masonic Symbolism of the Square and Compasses

In speculative Freemasonry, this emblematic symbol is used in Masonic ritual. The Square is an emblem of virtue in which we must ‘square our

actions by the square of virtue with all mankind’. The Compasses exemplify our wisdom of conduct... the strength to ‘circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds’. When these two Masonic tools are placed together with God (the Creator) as our central focal point... (just as King Solomon built God’s Temple, first... and then built his house around it), peace and harmony is the result.

### A Short History of the Square and Compasses

The Square — Morality

The Compass — Boundaries

Trying Square: In the operative stone mason era, the 90 degree angle of the square was a necessary tool used to test the accuracy of the sides of a stone to ascertain that the stone’s angles matched the square’s ‘true’ right angle.

Morality: In speculative Freemasonry, the square is a symbol of morality.

**Official Masonic Usage:** It is one of the three Great Lights (the Square, the Compass and the *Volume of the Sacred Law*).

It is the working tool of a Fellow craft.

It is the official emblem of the Master of the lodge.

In each of its above roles, it teaches the repeated lesson of morality, truthfulness and honesty.

**Common Usage:** The square is so universally accepted that it has found its way into colloquial language with which we communicate on a daily basis. We have all heard the sayings: *Getting a square deal*; *Are you on the square?* and *squaring off*. While the date with which the Masonic square became an official Masonic symbol is not known, it was one of the primary tools which an operative mason used in his craft.

In France, one leg is longer than the other due to the nature of its original construction. In English-speaking Freemasonry the square has equal length 'legs', however in some contexts it has been unnecessarily marked off in increments of inches, as if to measure length and breadth, which is not its true purpose.

**An Antique Square:** In 1830, an architect who was rebuilding an ancient bridge called *Baal Bridge* near Limerick, Ireland, removed the foundation stone of the bridge and found a much eaten away old brass square. On the surfaces of its two legs, was the following inscription:  
"I will strive to live – with love and care – upon the level – by the square." It was dated 1517.

**1725:** In one of the very earliest catechisms (rituals) we find these words:  
Q: "How many make a lodge?"  
A: God and the Squares, with 5 or 7 right or perfect Masons."

**1880:** Excerpt from a speech delivered by Brother Herbert A. Geles, Worshipful Master of Ionic Lodge No. 1781 at Amoy, entitled *Freemasonry in China*: "From time immemorial, we find the Square and Compasses used by Chinese writers to symbolize precisely the same phases of moral conduct as in our system of Freemasonry.

The earliest known passage which bears upon the subject is to be found in the *Book of History*, embracing the period reaching from the 24th to the 7th century before Christ. It is there, in an account of a military expedition that we read: "Ye officers of government, apply the Compasses!" In another part of the same records, a Magistrate (judge) is spoken of as: "A man of the level, or the level man."

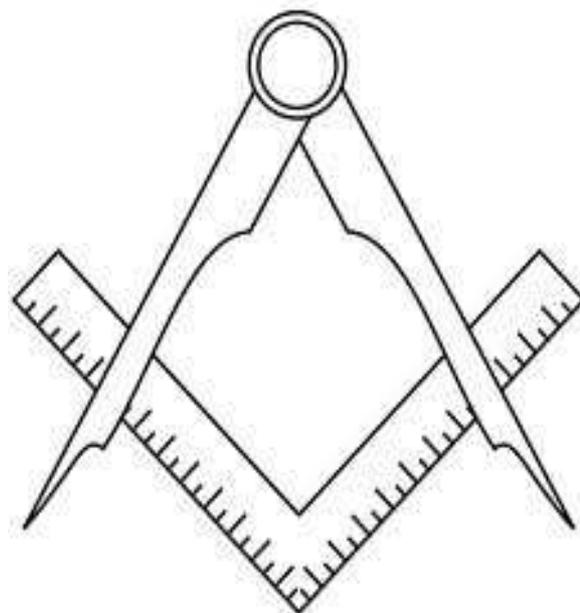
**481 BC:** The public discourses of Confucius provide us with several Masonic allusions of a more or less definite character. When recounting his own degrees of moral progress in life, the Master tells us that "only at 75 years of age could he venture to follow the inclinations of his heart – without fear of transgressing the limits of the Square."

**Circa 281 BC:** In the works of Mencius, a follower of Confucius, is a fuller and more impressive 'Masonic' phraseology:  
Book vi: "The Master mason in teaching his apprentices, makes use of the Square and the Compasses. Ye who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom must also make use of the Square and the Compasses."

**300–400 BC:** In the Great Learning. Chapter 10,

believed to have been written circa 300-400 BC, we read that a man should abstain from doing unto others what he would not they should do unto him; "this" adds the writer "is called the principle of acting on the Square." Of course, we are familiar with this statement today, as the *Golden Rule*, as also found in the Bible.

Possibly most interesting of all is the fact that the symbolism recorded of the Square permeates equally so many languages across the world (over nearly 2400 years) and, in each of them, the Square has preserved its original symbolism...as the symbol of morality.



**Tools of the Craft:** Historically, both the square and compasses are architect's tools to create true and perfect lines and angles. Operative stone masons used them as the tools of their trade. Like most tradesmen throughout history, operative stone masons began their career as an Entered Apprentice under the supervision of a Master Mason.

From Entered Apprentice to Master Mason: after several years, if their work was pleasing to the Master stone mason, the Entered Apprentice was elevated to the title of a Fellowcraft. More years passed and if the Fellowcraft's work was deemed acceptable to the Master, he was allowed to begin work upon his Master's piece (the word "Masterpiece" is another colloquialism we now commonly use in our everyday speech).

Upon the Fellowcraft's passing this final test, he became a Master Mason – as opposed to "raised to the degree of a Master Mason; there is no evidence of a third degree ceremony being worked as such until well into the Speculative era after the formation of the original Grand Lodge of England.

**Wisdom:** Like men, buildings are not erected overnight and the knowledge of any craft takes time to hone. Each building must have a sturdy foundation with which to build upon. Wisdom is the learned ability to utilize the accumulated knowledge of enlightenment, experience and intuitive understanding coupled with the capacity to apply them with good judgment toward achieving a prudent course of action.

**Strength and Beauty:** Operatively, the Square and Compasses were tools used to build strong foundations and to craft geometrically and precision cut stones, one atop another in symmetrical form to create a useful edifice (large and imposing building) which was both sturdy, durable and rock-solid against the elements (strength) as well as visually pleasing (beauty) to those who beheld it.

## THE CABLE TOW



Throughout the development of the Cable Tow, from its earliest reference in 1696, it was used consistently to denote the same Masonic ideal: secrecy. The Cable Tow has always been connected to keeping secrets, or to the price of not doing so.

Over the years, the Cable Tow has taken on other symbolic meanings, seemingly separate from its original intent. Yet, even now, echoes of secrecy are found in the application of the Cable Tow. In the lodges of today, we are aware of the placement of the Cable Tow in the first degree. It is mentioned in the Third Degree obligation of many rituals derived directly from England post 1813 (such as that of Victoria).

It is also commonly used in the rituals of the second and third degrees in American lodges. These placements usually corresponds to the penal signs, and ancient penalties, of not keeping one's secrets.

Time, development, innovation and desires for uniformity have led to changes in the way the Cable Tow is interpreted. Still, as a symbol it retains some of its initial intent. Masonic tradition is rich and multifaceted, and as a system of

allegory and symbols, it invites, if not requires, its initiates to seek greater spiritual and philosophical *Light*.

This act reinforces the fraternity as a vital and vibrant vehicle for personal growth. Yet throughout this process, we must heed the lessons here inculcated, and acknowledge and learn from the originally intended lessons as well.



*A Cable Tow T Shirt – yes, you can buy it on-line!*

## QUESTION & ANSWER

### What is the Pass Word of the First Degree?

Yes, there is one! – but it is NOT used, as such in our ritual, although it IS said (it is used as a Pass Word in Irish and American Rituals). Indeed, at the opening of an Irish Lodge, for example, the deacons will circulate the lodge and all present must whisper the Pass Word in the deacon's ear. The deacons will then report to the Worshipful Master that all present are Masons – and only then will the Worshipful Master open the lodge. The Pass Word? – *Free and of Good Report...!*