



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

Aprons and Insignia

Brethren, we should remember that everything in Masonry is symbolic and therefore has a meaning, sometimes more than one meaning or something that is open to interpretation. Aprons and Insignia of officer are no different.

Aprons

(Place on the floor of the lodge EA, FC, MM toward the WM's chair)

As you can see the aprons are set out to remind us of Jacob's ladder, mentioned in the Explanation of the Tracing Board of the First Degree, to explain progress toward the Chair of King Solomon.

When you first join Freemasonry you are invested with a plain white lambskin apron, to show that you are newly admitted and as a mark of innocence. This is the basis of all Masonic aprons. The apron was originally worn with the flap up: indicating that divine wisdom has not yet penetrated the gross matter of our bodies. Unfortunately, this custom has nearly died out.

In the second degree you have two pale blue rosettes, to mark the progress you have made. The flap is worn down to indicate that some wisdom has begun to enter. The 2 rosettes represent the 2 great pillars and they indicate that the triangle is incomplete, showing that a Fellowcraft is not yet a complete Mason, which corresponds with the position of the compasses when taking the obligation in the 2nd degree.

As a Master Mason, you have three rosettes and a pale blue border, the pale blue is the colour associated with the Virgin Mary but also of the High Priest of Israel. King Solomon appointed Zadok as a High Priest who wore a vestment unique to that office, amongst other items, a priestly robe – a sleeveless, blue robe, the lower hem of which was fringed with small golden bells alternating with pomegranate shaped tassels in blue, purple and scarlet. 'Tekhelet' (turquoise or blue) is a dye mentioned 49 times in the Hebrew bible. After the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem the sole use of this dye was in the dying of the tassels (known as 'Tzitzit') that were affixed to the corners of a 'Tallit', a garment used by the High Priest during prayer. The dye was extracted from a marine creature of that time known as a 'Hillazon'.

The basic design of the flag of Israel recalls the 'Tallit', the Jewish prayer shawl, hence the light blue stripes.

So what is the origin of the colour in our aprons? Does it relate to a vestment of the High Priest of Israel, the Jewish prayer shawl, or was it selected due to light blue's association with the Virgin Mary? For you to consider, research further perhaps or well just to reflect upon!



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

In olden times the aprons were fastened with string like the E.A.s and F.C.s. In the course of time tassels were added to the strings and then they were separated from the fastenings and added in the form of a ribbon with seven chains, each with seven links. The number 7 was chosen deliberately and has a symbolic meaning: it consists of 3 representing spirit and 4 representing matter; because, all matter, God and man, consist of spirit and matter.

Some say that the 7 chains and links represent the 7 years that Solomon took in building the temple and some that the 2 ribbons had pictures and names of the 2 great pillars painted on them. The hook and eye 'the snake' is one of the oldest and most venerated symbols: it is perhaps the most feared of all the enemies of primitive man, and so stands for evil: yet it is the wisest of all creatures and thus it represents the Divine Wisdom. The serpent biting its tail forming a circle, is regarded as emblem of eternity and therefore the eternal wisdom of God. This present form of apron was adopted soon after the union of the Ancients' and Moderns to form the United Grand Lodge in 1813.

All aprons are based, size wise on an Entered Apprentice apron with the boarders being added increasing that size through MM to GO to PGM, bigger and bigger, the white area always being that of a EA's.

Insignia

Lodge Officers (Please stand when you are referred to just to check you are all still awake!)

All lodge officers (except the Master) wear pale blue collars with the insignia of their office appended to it. These do not have the central silver stripe, as this is restricted to Past Masters, and the I.P.M.

1. The Master

The Master generally wears a fairly ornate collar, some of which carry stars and shields bearing the names of previous Masters. At the point it carries the plain square insignia. This is usually only worn in the Masters own lodge and therefore, it's easy to spot a visiting Master as he will wear a masters apron with the 'Tee Bars' but no collar.

2. The I.P.M.

This is a Lodge Office. He is entitled to the rank of 'Immediate Past Master' of the Lodge, because that is what he is. He wears a pale blue collar with the central silver stripe with a square appended at the point and a hanging square attached under this.

Now you'll all remember Pythagoras from schoolboy maths - born around 570BC, the first mathematician whose proposed the theory that, 'in a right-angled triangle the area of the square on the hypotenuse (the side opposite the right angle) is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares of the other two sides' (also mentioned in the Explanation of the Tracing Board of the First Degree). Euclid followed Pythagoras and was acknowledged as the 'father of geometry' around 300BC.



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

Well if you look at the hanging silver plate under the square you'll find a simile of Euclid's 47th proposition within it, which in brief highlights significance of the figures 3:5:7 (3 rule a lodge, 5 hold a lodge and 7 or more make it perfect) and the importance of establishing an architecturally true foundation based on use of the square.

If you look at the simile you will see three squares surrounding a right handed triangle, the shortest sides of which in ratio are 3 and 4 in length. The square of 3 = 9; the square of 4 = 16 and the sum of those squares $9 + 16 = 25$; the hypotenuse or longest of the three sides of the triangle must therefore be 5 in length, which is the square root of 25. When writing the square of those first numbers (1, 4, 9, 16) by subtracting each square from the next you are left with the three significant Masonic figures 3:5:7 – the steps to the middle chamber of the temple and the numbers to form a Lodge.

However, enough of the maths and back to the insignia!

3. The Senior Warden

The Senior Warden wears a plain pale blue collar, with a representation of an old fashioned level, which, in olden times would have incorporated a lead weight on a string line. The level is for proving horizontals, which is an emblem of equality as we all meet upon the level.

4. The Junior Warden

Wears a similar collar with a Plumb Rule (or Plumb Bob) attached to it depicting the vertical, an emblem of uprightness representing the unbending or unwavering man.

5. The Chaplain

The Chaplains collar has the symbol of the V.O.S.L. attached to it. The Volume of the Sacred Law must always be open whilst the Lodge is in session. (This need not be the Bible, in some countries it will be the Koran or other Holy Book). The Chaplain's collar jewel is mounted on a triangle surmounting a 'Glory', (the Sun).

6. The Treasurer

The Treasurer has a key (to the cash box) appended to his collar.

7. The Secretary

The Secretary has 2 crossed (in saltire) quill pens (not biros) these are tied together with a ribbon. Saltire means a diagonal cross such as found in the Scottish flag.

8. The Director of Ceremonies

The D.C.'s collar carries two crossed rods (Marshal's batons) tied with ribbon for directing the brethren in the work.

9. The Lodge Mentor

His jewel has two chisels in saltire (crossed) pointed downwards.



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

10. The two Deacons

Both Deacons collars carry the emblem of a dove bearing olive branch. In some older lodges the jewels and wands have Mercury, the winged messenger and god of travel depicted on them, reminding us of the communications between the WM and his Wardens. With the dove and olive branch however, the insignia have a dual symbolism – the messenger (dove) as well as purity, peace and innocence (olive branch).

11. The Almoner

The Almoners collar has a representation of a purse with a heart implanted on it. Historically the almoner distributed alms to the poor and in a hospital setting interviewed prospective patients, responsible for patient welfare and after-care, hence in the lodge he looks after the welfare of brethren, including visits to the sick, aged and infirmed.

12. The Charity Steward

The Charity Stewards collar has a trowel for cementing the bond of perfection and social union. The trowel being also a symbol of brotherly love that even kings have been willing “to exchange the sepre for”. Historically the trowel was also the first tool that an entered apprentice was given so as he could give the knocks on the door when candidates sort admission, there being no Inner Guard in those days.

13. The Organist

The Organists jewel depicts the Lyre, which was an ancient Greek musical instrument which was originally made from a turtle shell with strings stretched across it, probably the forerunner of the harp.

14. The Assistant Secretary

His collar jewel is similar to the Secretary, with the word ‘Assistant’ added.

15. Inner Guard

His jewel has two swords in saltire (crossed) pointed downwards.

16. Stewards

All Stewards have the cornucopia (horn of plenty) symbol between the extended legs of the compasses. The cornucopia being a symbol of abundance and nourishment overflowing with produce, edibles or wealth.

17. Tyler

The Tyler or Outer Guard has a single sword pointing down appended to his collar to keep off all intruders and cowens to masonry. Historically the tyler was the doorkeeper to an inn. A Cowan is a word used to denote one who builds a dry stone wall. A mason smoothes and prepares work, attending to the mortar in the wall whereas a Cowan, due to dry nature of his work is believed to be an intruder who learns the Masonic way by some illegal method, a word originating from the operative masons in Scotland.



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

Provincial Honours

This appears to be a complicated subject for the younger Mason, with Past Ranks and Active Ranks and Red Aprons. So I will attempt to simplify the whole subject. Firstly, let me point out that Provincial Honours are not given automatically after a Brother has occupied the Masters Chair. Generally some 5-9 years after being a Master (varies in different Provinces) you could be considered for promotion to Provincial Rank by the Provincial Grand Master, and him alone. He takes into consideration the annual report of the various Lodge Secretaries and the Masters comments as these will show the interest the Brother has taken in Lodge affairs and his attendance at Lodge. All promotions to Provincial Rank, whether Active or Past have equal merit. It is also an incentive for future service to the Lodge. There are 88 Lodges in this Province of Somerset; one would think that there would be 88 brethren to be considered for new appointments each year. However as the appointments occur five years after a brother has been in the Chair, some may have left and some died, about 20 to 33% of the original 88 will have already been Provincial officers anyway. This can leave anywhere between 40 to 60 brethren to be considered each year, there are 20 officers that are changed annually – 4 Deacons, 4 ADC's, 8 Stewards, 2 StdB, 1 AsstStdB and Pursuivant (Inner Guard). It is obvious that some Brethren are not going to receive an 'Active' rank - they will receive the same level of office but in 'Past' ranking. A brother's chance of receiving active office is therefore approximately 30-50%. In addition there are a further 4 active officers – SW, JW, SwdB and DepDC. These are also changed annually and are used to promote brethren who are already Provincial Officers and who have given exceptional support over a number of years to their Lodge AND the Province.

The Provincial Grand Stewards are appointed for 1 year after that they become Past Stewards. There are no first appointments to past steward. Unlike all other ranks to be a past steward you must have been an active one. Until recently the rank was largely a sinecure but today Stewards are required to accompany Provincial Rulers on Fraternal Visits and act as their DC for the evening. Provincial Stewards are considered for further promotion after eight years in common with all other Provincial Officers, unless of course they render service above and beyond what would normally be expected to their Lodge and the Province. Stewards wear the distinctive Red aprons and collars, which date back to 1731 when Grand Lodge decreed that the Grand Master, his Deputy and Wardens should line their aprons with blue silk, officers of private lodges with white silk, and Stewards for the year in Red silk.

Provincial Grand Officers

Provincial Officers can wear two types of dress, i.e. Full Dress or Undress. Undress has a 4 inch Garter Blue collar, trimmed with a narrow gold cord and a Garter Blue apron and badge with an ornamental gold cord surround. The badge usually contains the name of the holders home Province, (this could also be Metropolitan (Lodges within 10 miles from London) or Senior London or London Grand Rank). This mode of dress is usually worn at regular lodge meetings. The Full Dress collar and apron is decorated



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

with gold frill and lace and used to be reserved for Grand Lodge, Provincial Grand Lodge and Installations. However, due to the present cost of this regalia, some Brethren choose to purchase Full Dress and wear it at all meetings. You may on occasion, see a Brother wearing a dark blue apron and collar without the gold or blue levels, but instead, with dark blue rosettes. This Provincial award is given to brethren who have not occupied the 'Chair' but have served their Lodge with distinction as in the case of an Organist, Treasurer or Secretary.

There are some additional collar jewels for Provincial Grand Lodge Officers that are not seen on private Lodge collars, i.e. Provincial Grand Registrar, who wears a scroll with a seal appended. Provincial Grand Sword Bearer who wears two upright crossed swords with a ribbon across the centre. The Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works has a semi-circular protractor. The Provincial Grand Standard Bearer has two crossed banners bearing the coat of arms of Grand Lodge and the Grand Master tied with ribbon. And the Provincial Grand Pursuivant (Inner Guard) has the arms of Grand Lodge with a crossed sword and rod.

Grand Lodge Collars and Jewels

Grand Lodge Officers can also wear either 'undress or full dress' regalia. The undress collar is 4 inches wide in Garter Blue without any gold cord. The apron has a wider border and belt than Provincial aprons and does not have any gold embellishment but on the white central panel it bears the rank of the wearer surrounded by a wreath of Acacia and corn. The Full Dress collar is a 4-inch wide Garter Blue edged with gold lace and embroidered with an ear of corn and a sprig of Acacia. The apron is fully embroidered with gold lace and frills with the badge of rank and the Acacia and Ear of Corn wreath.

Chains of Office

The chains of office worn by The Most Worshipful Grand Master, Pro Grand Master etc. and down to the Provincial Executive are all taken from the same basic design. They have a series of stars within circular disks connected with a combination of scrollwork and rectangular plates. The rectangular plates contain the initials of the rank of the wearer. The number of stars designate the rank (and are believed to correspond to the number of salutes that the holder is entitled to):

The Grand Master and Pro. Grand Master. ***** 11

The Deputy and Assistant Grand Master. ***** 9

The Provincial, District Grand Masters and Grand Wardens ***** 7

The Grand Chaplain, President of the Board of General Purposes, Grand Registrar, Grand Secretary, President of the Grand Charity, President of the Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys, President of the R.M.B.I., President of the Masonic Samaritan Fund, Grand Director of Ceremonies, Grand Sword Bearer and Grand Inspectors***** 5

and all other Grand Officers *** 3



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

The Deputy Provincial (and District) Grand Masters collar is a series of interwoven links with stars on a circular plate and circular disks bearing the letters.

The Assistant Provincial (and District) Grand Masters collar has a series of interlinked chains supporting circular discs with the letters A.P.G.M and does not have any stars.

Grand Collar Jewels

The Grand Masters' collar supports a pair of compasses extended over an ark of 45° with a segment of a circle at its points and a gold plate included, on which is an eye within a triangle this is on an irradiated 'Glory' (the sun). The Pro Grand Master is the same. Past Grand Masters and Past Pro Grand Masters are similar but without the central gold plate. The Deputy Grand Master has a united square and compasses with a five pointed star in the centre. The Assistant Grand Master only has the extended square and compasses. The Provincial (and District) Grand Masters have the compasses and square with a five-pointed star in the centre surrounded by a double circle with the name of the Province or District engraved thereon.

I trust that these few notes and the items that have been displayed, will have given you all a better insight into our regalia and for our Junior Brethren, inspire you to progress!