



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

The Gavel

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. The Gavel is no different.

The Gavel is small, simple, yet well-used and consists of a head and shaft (*pass one around the lodge*).

The origin of this important tool is cloaked in mystery; but certainly the word 'gavel' was introduced from America into England sometime in the nineteenth century. However, as with most American-English words it was probably taken there from this country during the 17th Century, as old English dictionary suggests the word 'gavel' came from the Anglo-Saxon word 'gaful' defined as a tribute or a type of hammer. This was thought to be partly derived from an ancient law in use around King Alfred's time relating to the distribution of land on an owner's death.

This type of hammer was used by medieval stone-masons to remove rough edges of stones and shape them in readiness for the hands of the experienced builder and is most probably our common gavel's most probable origin. A mason's tool used to break off the corners of the rough ashlar, an operation which was unsuitable for the common hammer or mallet that have no cutting edge. The gavel was actually like an iron axe or pick, having a steel edge or point.

The form of the gavel adopted for speculative convenience is a wooden mallet – itself a form of the maul. A chairman's mallet as well as the Master's gavel is simply a wooden hammer whose front outline is the same shape as the gavel or gable end of a house whence it is also said to have borrowed its name.

The gavel is referred to in our First Degree working tools where it denotes the force of 'Conscience' which should keep down all vain and unbecoming thoughts. We think of the gavel as the instrument that helps us knock off all superfluities, to admonish us of the duty of divesting our minds and consciences of all the impurities of life, thereby fitting our bodies as living stones for that spiritual building – not made with hands but eternal in the heavens.

The gavel is used in conjunction with the chisel, which we are told is used to prepare the stone for the hands of the more experienced workman – a refining and improvement of the work carried out by the gavel alone. We can relate this 'refining' to the benefit of 'Education' in our lives. The chisel needs the power of the gavel to do its job. Thus we have the Gavel of Conscience and Chisel of Education working together so that all of our knowledge and experience may be put to right and proper use.

The Worshipful Master, aided by his Wardens, uses the gavel presented to them at the Installation meeting as an emblem of power; at every lodge meeting to bring the assembly to order where peace and calm can reign. The gavel thereby assists in the well-ruling and governing of the lodge. It is also presented by the Master to any Ruler in the Craft that might be present to illustrate that they have the right to take the meeting should they so desire.