



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

The Trowel

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 Trowel is no different.

Egyptians of old are said to have regarded the trowel as an emblem typifying the profound secrecy which binds the initiate, which is referred to in some rituals of today as the emblem of circumspection. When the pyramids were built we are told as the stones were put into place they were faced with limestone using flat stones as smoothing implements, however it is difficult to discover exactly when the implement as we know it was first used.

Early in the 16th century there was a Society of the Trowel in Florence where the hammer, square, level and trowel were used as symbols.

In the 18th century our ancient ritual suggested, "The trowel is used to spread the cement by which the various stones are held together, and signifies the noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of Brotherhood and affection, which unites us in a sacred bond as a Society of Brethren amongst whom no contention should ever exist". The trowel played a great part in the ceremonies of that day. A lodge in Carmarthen in June 1754 paid for 15 trowels and the mending of 12 others, however no-one seems to know for what purpose.

The Grand Lodge of Ireland resolved in the 1700's that the design of lodge seals should be a Hand and Trowel. An Irish masonic crest of 1738 shows a hand holding a trowel posing as a stabbing weapon, which gives an idea how they were used in lodges as well as operatively in those days. It was also in England the Tyler or Inner Doorkeeper's weapon, whilst in the late 17th and early 18th century the trowel was the Junior Entered Apprentice's weapon as that brother's duty was to act as Inner Doorkeeper, later known as the Inner Tyler and now Inner Guard.

A lodge in Falmouth in 1808 records in its minute book, "There should be two Tylers, one to act inside the door and one to act outside – the one inside should wear a trowel as a badge of his office".

The only time the trowel is now mention in the Craft though is in the charge rendered to the initiate, "where Monarchs themselves have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the Sceptre for the Trowel". When one considers how, in the 18th century, the newest initiate was armed with this sharp instrument one can see why perhaps the ritual makes reference to exchange of the trowel with the Monarchs sceptre.

Today for us though the trowel symbolises charity, borne perhaps from the 1800's when the flat of the trowel was presented to the candidate, then in the second degree, when inviting him to give in that cause.

In a dictionary of 1752, "To lay on with a trowel", was to flatter, but in the dictionary of today it means exactly the opposite. We are perhaps all guilty at some time in our lives of accusing someone of, "Laying it on with a trowel". How times have change!