



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SOMERSET

The Wands of Office

Brethren, we meet in our lodge room so often that it is easy to take for granted the things that we see around us in the temple and what takes place. There are times, however when those new to Freemasonry want to know why certain things are as they are or happen as they do.

One of these things is why the two Deacons and Directors of Ceremonies have wands. They did not just appear from nowhere. So why are they used today?

Let's begin with the Deacons. One interpretation is that as with the very name of this office the source of our practice lies in what took place in the old parish churches of our land. The two principal lay officers of each church had for a thousand years been called the Wardens, which name came from the old Northern French word 'wardein', meaning 'to protect' or 'to guard' and was the word the Anglo-Saxons used. The Wardens protected the rights of the people in the church and as a sign of their authority were given rods, which were later called 'wands'. To this day the wardens in a local Anglican church carry wands.

In the Middle Ages the lodge of stonemasons on a working site was ruled by a Warden who protected the rights of the working craftsman and as a sign of authority he too had a rod. When the masons created their trade guild they followed the church custom of having a Master (instead of the Rector) and two Wardens, all three having wands. Eventually this practice was also adopted in the guild lodge and that is why, when the guild and lodge separated, the custom of having a Master and two Wardens remained.

In some old lodges the wands were further adorned with a cross for the Master, moon for the Senior Warden and sun for the Junior Warden. The cross originally represented Christ the head or cornerstone. The moon represented the close of the day and the sun was at the meridian. After the 1813 Union of Grand Lodges a new form of ceremonial required the three principal officers of a lodge not to leave their places and they had done during the previous century. The office of Deacon, which had been introduced into some of the Atholl or Antients lodges pre-union as an assistant at the table for help with eating, drinking or bearing messages to the Master, were now given the duty of attending upon the candidates, which had previously been discharged by the Wardens. To show that they were now acting with the authority of the Wardens the Deacons were therefore given wands of those senior officers. That is why to this day in lodge rooms at Great Queen Street, Sunderland and in Durham you will see the Deacons carrying wands that have a sun and moon on them reflecting to whom they really belong.

When considering how the Deacons originally behaved we can appreciate why at the opening of the lodge they are described as those who carry messages from the Master to the Wardens and why it is only at the Installation that they are told of their additional duties of attending upon the candidates.

So why do the wands no longer have the sun and moon?

In some 18th century lodges the knowledge of the classics suggested that the figure of the messenger of the gods, Mercury, was the most apt symbol because he carried messages and did so with promptness. Hence many lodges still have wands with his figure on them.



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Following the Union there was a happy return to a very ancient aspect of English Freemasonry, the presence of Noah at ceremonies. Since the dove was the creature that symbolized peace and was also the messenger that showed Noah a leaf of a tree emerging from the subsiding flood, this was adopted as the most common new attachment to the wands.

Whilst these later symbols accurately reflect part of the Deacon's tasks they have obscured the original source of the wands authority. At least we can now see them being used and appreciate their significance.

What is even more intriguing is the fact that because the Worshipful Master was also not allowed to move from his place, his wand or rod was given to a new post-Union officer, the Director of Ceremonies. He was the one who now controlled the work on the floor of the lodge, made sure that all the officers were present and accompanied, or even introduced any special visitors on their entry.

Interestingly just as the original rod or wand of a church rector was surmounted by a cross so the wand entrusted to the Director of Ceremonies or his assistant from the Master still has a cross at its top.

It is therefore easy to understand why our Provincial Stewards carry rods without any adornment on the top.