



Province of East Lancashire

**“Ancient Symbols of Office”**



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

One of these things that we can so easily take for granted is why the 2 Deacons and the Directors of Ceremonies have wands. What is sure is that they did not suddenly appear from nowhere. There is an explanation for why they are where they are today. Let us begin with the Deacons.

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 2 principal lay officers of each local 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 they were given rods which were later called 'wands'. To this day the wardens in a local Anglican church carry wands when on duty.

In the Middle Ages the lodge of stonemasons on a working site was ruled by a Warden who protected the rights of the working craftsmen and as a sign of his 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, and all three of them had 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 a 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 the new form of ceremonial encouraged by the Duke of Sussex required that the three principal offices of a lodge should not leave their places as they had done in the previous century. The office of Deacon which had been introduced into some of the Atholl, or Antients, lodges as assistants at the table, mainly for help with eating, drinking or bearing messages from the Master, were now given the duty of attending on candidates which had previously been discharged by the Wardens. To show that they were now acting with the authority of the Wardens they were given the wands of those senior officers and that is why, to this day, in the lodge rooms at Queen St., Sunderland and Old Elvet, Durham you will see the Deacons carrying wands that have a sun and moon on them. This proves to whom those wands really belong.

What is more it is when we understand how the Deacons originally behaved that we appreciate why, at the opening of a lodge, they are described as those who carry messages from the Master to the Wardens and it is only at the Installation that they are told of their further tasks of attending on the candidates. It is only right that we should know why the wands held by the Deacons no longer have a 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 a most apt symbol just because he carried messages and did so with promptness. Hence many lodges still have wands with his figure on them. Following the Union there was a happy return to a very ancient aspect of English Freemasonry, the presence of Noah in the 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 latter symbols accurately represent part of the Deacons' tasks they have obscured the original source of the wand's authority. At least we can now see them being used and appreciate better 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. It is worth noting that it was not intended that he should ever take charge of the gavel which was placed in the hands of the Worshipful Master at his Installation.

As another matter of interest it should be noted that 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 from the Master still has a cross at its top. It is also worth noting that the first conductors of an orchestra were provided with a wand but as this in time became unwieldy it was duly shortened to a baton or stick. That is why some Directors of Ceremonies now have a baton rather than a wand. In the end the authority it symbolizes is the Master's and not just that of the D.C. The latter always needs to remember whom he serves.

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