



What Is a Symbol?

WBro Blaine Newton, PM Red Deer No. 12, presented to Fiat Lux Lodge of Research, Red Deer Freemasons' Hall, 31 May 2014.

What is a symbol?

A symbol is simply a lie well told. An allegory is simply a string of symbols. That's what we do in Masonry. We present symbols wrapped in allegories. We tell stories. We tell lies. We tell great, big, beautiful, colourful, evocative lies. And apparently to no useful purpose.

Or do we?

Symbols were the first form of human communication. They are what creates myths, and myths are what add mystery and interest to our Masonic lectures. But symbols can also cause confusion and misunderstanding among our members. They can make our connection with the Fraternity more challenging. We grasp at meaning. We look for relevance. But more often than not we see only the lie but not the truth.

It has been said that man has two great impulses: the impulse to take for granted and unchallenged the facts of the world as they come to him; and the impulse to confront those facts with the eyes of wonder or inquiry.

Men are, therefore, of two kinds according to which of these impulses they obey. Masons, similarly, may be divided into two classes: those who take Masonry as a matter of course — a collection of quaint stories; and those who confront it with eyes of inquiry or wonder.

You see, all stories are lies! But the best fiction writers bury a truth within. And it's when we discover the underlying truth that we truly connect with the story. Suddenly it has meaning, relevance, and we have a connection with something greater than we had before.

Masonry delights to hide the truth in plain sight. The wisdom of Masonry is hidden not because it is subtle, but because it is simple. Its secret is profound, not obscure, as in the FC degree, for example.

We connect ourselves with the building of King Solomon's Temple. We tell stories of builders and craftsmen, kings and potentates. But is it all true? Did these people exist? The guard of the inner door? Jephtha? The Ephramites? Is any of it true?

Some yes; much no. Some direct; some merely a shadow of what was. But that's really not the point.

The goal is behind the story. The story is merely the rough hewn ashlar. If we don't ask questions — if we don't seek a greater truth within the story — then we will never achieve our perfect ashlar. We will never have the stone cut straight and true to build our temple. We will have missed an opportunity. We will be lesser for our inaction. To seek the truth we must ask: what is the fundamental purpose of Masonry? And the typical answer comes back: to make good men better.

So, let's start with that fundamental — that constancy of purpose. But like all good things, the desire to improve requires a choice — a choice to seek something more. It requires us to rise from our comfortable pews and seek something

we're not even sure exists: wisdom, whatever that means. It requires us to commit to a journey of self-awareness and self-improvement that really has no end.

But why should Masonry care about self-improvement?

Regardless of the truth of the far, distant past, Masonry truly took hold after 1717. It was the age of enlightenment. It was a time of ideas, but also a time when ideas could be seen as dangerous, when the mere discussion of possibilities could be labelled treason. Lodges were a place of trust. With politics and religion barred at the door, discourse on science or art could be carried on without worry, away from the watchful eyes of government or dogma. It was the enlightenment — the seeking of light.

When we first enter a Lodge we're hoodwinked — in utter darkness. We are told to seek light. In the first degree, we are taught the dimensions of the Lodge: no roof but the sky, as deep as from the surface to the centre. In the FC degree we take a journey into a great temple — the greatest of temples — the temple of King Solomon. King Solomon, known for his wisdom.

But let's assume there is no temple of stone. Let's as-

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sume the temple is the human soul — the human mind, if you prefer — the mind of the individual Mason. The Lodge room is the internal man — due east and west — seeking the light with the dark at our backs. Our goal is wisdom. Our dimensions extend from the sky to our centre.

This journey belongs to the individual. Although, as in all things with Masonry, we have a guide, the journey is ours alone. We climb the winding

stairs under our own power. We are free from our cabletow, free from our hoodwink.

At the door are two bronze pillars denoting strength and denoting establishment. If we are to rebuild ourselves, if we are to seek wisdom, we must have strength — personal introspection requires strength: strength of mind, strength of purpose. And we must have establishment — purpose, focus, stability.

The initial steps of our personal journey are simple. Three, defined as the three principle degrees of Masonry. Our ascent begins with Masonry. But three also represents youth, manhood, old age: the eternal journey.

The next steps are more involved. Five. We learn of columns. Architecture. The understanding that the structure of our lives can have simple, direct purpose, like the plain and simple Doric or Tuscan columns. Or it can have complexity and ornamentation, like the Corinthian or the Composite. But notice that Masonry discards the extremes — the Composite and the Tuscan — where ornamentation exceeds purpose or where purpose is reduced to brute force.

The five human senses are invoked. We are urged to be aware, to have our



The Winding Stair, Masonic Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah.

eyes wide open, to utilize the gifts given us, to recognize what is in the light as well as the dark — what is plainly before us, but what can only be found by seeking it.

Finally, the seven steps. The acknowledgement of the arts and sciences that nourish us — that define us as humans; that elevate us above the brutish. These include the analytical and the beautiful. These include language and communication: the

acknowledgement that beauty and science are not mutually exclusive.

So from our journey up the winding stairs we are presented with all the tools necessary in our pursuit of self-improvement, in our pursuit of wisdom.

But after that we are confronted. Just as in our personal journey we will be challenged by events, by circumstances, by people, in the ritual we are challenged — but by a Brother, who is ready to help in our progress if we can show commitment, knowledge, desire. We are challenged by a Brother because there is a need to connect: to seek out others, like-minded; to learn the value of the fundamental of human interaction. To know that although each undertakes his own journey, we are all alike in that we each have a journey.

And at the end is the reward: our corn, our wine, our oil; our plenty, our health, our peace.

The truth is simple. If there is no temple, then the temple is within. If there are no winding stairs, then the ascent is the ascent of the mind. The truth is the pursuit: wisdom is a journey, not a destination.

Obvious? Simple? Then why didn't we just say that?

A truth is more valuable for the work

we put into finding it. It's how we take ownership of that truth. It's how that truth becomes our own truth of self-awareness and growth.

We tell our Masonic stories — we tell our Masonic lies — for two reasons: to enlighten and to confuse. Our stories are also a layer of defense against those on the outside. The ones who just don't get it.

One of our Masonic lies is secrecy. Masonry uses the illusion of secrecy because it knows that it is the nature of man to seek what is hidden and to desire what is forbidden. Our stories are so simple precisely because simplicity is especially frustrating for those suspicious that there must be a deep evil. Others mistake the symbols for reality, the lie for the truth; those too lazy to distinguish what the underlying purpose is — the cowans, the ones who also try to build their structures with stone but have no mortar, no underlying foundation, and then wonder why their structures will not stand.

So the option is ours. We can enjoy the stories. We can smile at these lies well told. Nothing more is required of us. No one will force you to look further or to discover the truth before you. Once you have taken the figurative journey up the winding stairs, no-one will compel you to take the intellectual journey towards self-betterment it represents, to collect the true wages of a Mason — the wisdom which leads to plenty, health and peace.

And what is truth after all? To paraphrase the philosopher, it is a jewel in the hand of the wise man, a stone in the hand of the fool.

To close, let me share with you a quotation not from a Mason, but supposedly from a certain fisherman — a quote discovered long ago in a discarded scroll in Egypt.

Let him that seeketh desist not from his quest until he hath found; and when he hath found, he shall be smitten with wonder; and when he hath wondered, he shall come into his kingdom, and coming into his kingdom he shall rest.

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In Memoriam

William Charles Graves Grand Master 1985–1986

Most Worshipful Brother William (Bill) Graves was born at Shaunavon, Saskatchewan on 29 July 1929. He commenced his education in Shaunavon, and after moving to Regina, completed it in that city. MWBro Graves was initiated in Medicine Hat Lodge No. 2 on 14 March 1967 and became Worshipful Master in 1973. In 1977 he was invested as District Deputy Grand Master of District No. 2. He was elected to the Board of General Purposes in 1978 and served on the Board for two years. He also was the Grand Representative to Alberta for Chile from 1979 to 1985. He served on the Masonic Spring Workshop Planning Committee for several years and was General Chairman in 1984 with the theme “Responsibility to

Your Obligation.”

One of the highlights of his year as Grand Master was to attend his own Lodge for the celebration of its 100th Anniversary.

Bill married Doris Martin of Empress and they had two children. They moved to Medicine Hat in 1955 where he worked for CPR. He then joined the Medicine Hat Police Force where he rose to the rank of Sergeant.

In addition to Freemasonry, Bill enjoyed photography, fishing, cooking and woodworking. Indeed, he was well-known for making the finest of hand-crafted gavels, often presented to honour a Masonic Brother.

MWBro Graves passed away 9 July 2018 in Medicine Hat at the age of 89.



MWBro Bill Graves
1929–2018

Report of the Masonic Medal of Merit Committee

MWBro Calvin D. Shaver, Chairman

On this the completion of the 2017–2018 Masonic Year for this Grand Jurisdiction, I present this report on behalf of the Masonic Medal of Merit Committee.

Brethren, those of you familiar with the normal process of this Annual Report will sense a difference this year. No individuals or Lodges have been requested to organize in the entranceway. Accordingly, you are correct — this signifies there are no recipients this Masonic Year.

As a general reminder to everyone, the Committee earnestly reviews all nominations to endeavour to ensure those receiving this recognition meet all the criteria we attempt to follow. Firstly, does the nominee actively participate in

working within the Lodge setting, which would extend to the Districts and other functions within the Grand Lodge? Secondly, the Committee looks to his work within in the community and, thirdly, any special considerations.

It is acknowledged there are many organizations within the Masonic family, and many Brethren have considerable involvement accordingly. Without this influence, where would the extended umbrella of Freemasonry be? However, as this is an award of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, it is dedication and support at the “Craft” Lodge level to which the Committee seriously gives its initial attention.

Brethren, remember your Commit-

tee remains ready, willing and able to work on your behalf to recognize those Brethren who meet the requirements for the Grand Lodge of Alberta Masonic Medal of Merit. If any individual, Lodge or District requires information, please do not hesitate to contact me and arrangements will be made for a member of the Committee to attend a meeting to assist in any discussions, or the special recognition of a recipient at the Lodge level.

I offer a sincere thank you to all the members of this Committee. It is through your wise counsel and with your enthusiasm and dedication that my duties as Chairman of this gratifying Committee are accomplished.

The Trowel — A Lost Symbol?

The trowel is a beautiful Masonic symbol which seems to be somewhat lost in English Freemasonry. WBro Steve Lourey, in *Freemason*, the Official Journal of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory of Ancient and Free and Accepted Masons, V 50: 2, June 2018.

We read in the Book of Amos,

Thus he shewed me; and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.

That wall would have been cemented to make it complete and that cement would have been applied by a trowel. The Vulgate Latin version renders it, “a plasterer’s” or “mason’s trowel”; with which they lay their plaster and mortar on in building.

According to *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopaedia*, its symbolism is that of spreading the cement which binds the Brethren together, thus the Lodge is strongly cemented with love and friendship, and

every Brother is duly taught secrecy and prudence, morality and good fellowship.

In North American jurisdictions the proper place assigned to the working tool of the trowel is the Master Mason Degree, as in operative masonry, while the Entered Apprentice prepares the materials, the Fellowcraft places them in their proper situation and, the Master Mason spreads the cement with a trowel, which binds them together.

According to Mackey the work of un-

skilled apprentices and craftsmen was not completed until the stones adjusted have been accurately examined by the master workman and permanently secured in their places by cement. This is accomplished by the trowel and, hence, this implement is entrusted to the Master Mason. Thus, the tools attached to each Degree admonish the Mason: as an Apprentice, to prepare his mind for the reception of the great truths which are hereafter to be unfolded to him; as a Fellowcraft, to mark their importance and adapt them to their proper uses; and as a Master, to adorn their beauty by the practice of Brotherly love and kindness, the cement that binds all Masons in one common fraternity.

The Master Mason is given the trowel because it is symbolic of his function in the great work of temple building. When that tool has done its work, there is nothing more to do because the structure stands complete, a united mass, incapable of falling apart; the stones which were many have now, because of the binding power of the cement, become as one. If the stone represents an individual man, and if the temple represents the Fraternity as a whole, it is evident that the trowel is the symbol of that which has power to bind men together. Charles Dana Burrage, in a 1912 address, states that the equilateral triangle was originally the trowel. It represented the greatest and most abstruse mysteries, signifying equally the Deity, creation and fire.

The trowel teaches that nothing can be united without proper cement, and that the perfection of the building must depend on the suitable disposition of the cement. So charity, the bond of perfection and social union, must link separate minds and separate interests; that, like the radii of a circle, which extend from the centre to every part of the circumference,



George Washington in bronze at the George Washington National Monument showing him holding a trowel.

the principle of universal benevolence may be diffused to every member of the community.

From some versions of the old catechism we learn that the junior Entered Apprentice was armed with a “sharp instrument” which was a pointed trowel. In exchanging the sceptre for the trowel it was the role of Junior Entered Apprentice being armed with the trowel as the means of keeping out all cowans and intruders. So the earlier use of the trowel may have been transferred to the sword.

The trowel was the emblem of circumspection and was called the “Jewel of the EA.” In an early ritual the EA was extolled to “emblematically... stop up all interstices in the lodge so that not a sound shall escape from within nor an eye pry from without, where by your secrets and mysteries

may become known to the popular world.”

In 1 Peter 2: 5, the author describes us as living stones, built upon a spiritual house. The cement of those living stones is charity and concord. The Christian writer Chrysostom (AD 347–407) writes:

“From solidity follows compactness, for you will then produce solidity, when having brought many things together, you shall cement them compactedly and inseparably; thus a solidity is produced, as in the case of a wall. But this is the peculiar work of love; for those who were by themselves, when it has closely cemented and knit them together, it renders solid. And faith, again, does the same thing; when it allows not reasonings to intrude themselves. For as reasonings divide, and shake loose, so faith causes solidity and compactness.”

The term *interstice* comes from the late Middle English from the Latin to “stand between” and architecturally is an intervening space, especially a very small one, as in a, gap, opening, hole, cranny, crevice, chink, crack, or breach. For our ancient brethren, cementing interstices was vital in preserving cisterns. Cisterns are subterranean reservoirs, sometimes covering as much as 4,000 square metres of land, in which the rainwater is gathered during the spring or to preserve underground streams. Their extreme necessity is attested by the countless old, unused cisterns with which the Middle East is honeycombed. Cisterns were hewed into the rock and then lined with impervious masonry and cement. If the cement of the cistern gave way, the reservoir became useless and was abandoned.

So, too, with Masonry. If we do not take care to spread the cement of Brotherly love, relief and truth, there is a risk that we, like the ancient cisterns, may become abandoned and useless.

Preparing Proper Minutes — A Legal Document (Part I)

VWBro Richard Ashby, RPP

Grand Parliamentarian, The Grand Lodge of Alberta

Generally, in a meeting of a deliberative assembly, business is conducted using a formal procedure of motion, debate, and vote. A record needs to be kept of what happened during the meeting and that document is called the *minutes*. The meaning of the word “minutes” in Parliamentary Law use is “small” and has nothing to do with time. Minutes are a *short concise record of what was done at a meeting*, not a record of what was said.

It is not necessary to summarize debate, or *record* discussion on an agenda item in the minutes. In fact it is **not** a good idea to go to that extent. Furthermore there is no need for the Chair and Secretary to go through the ritual of calling for the next order of business, the Secretary stating “Nil” and recording such in the minutes. If there was nothing done, why record it? There is no requirement to record that nothing was done.

There is a difference between *minutes* of a meeting and *proceedings*. Proceedings are a word for word record of everything at some meetings/conventions or in the House of Commons. Very few organizations require records to such an extent. Minutes are different. Most organizations use “Minutes” since a word for word record of the meeting is not required. Even in organizations that use proceedings in their major meetings (an AGM), use minutes

for local groups, committees and board meetings.

Minutes are an official record of the meeting, so it is crucial that they are accurate since they are the legal record of the proceedings and actions, and as a legal document can be subpoenaed for a court case. Being such a legal document, Secretaries must be careful of what is recorded. The fewer personal details the better. Some of the things that should **not** be included are things like:

- The opinion or interpretation of the Secretary.
- Judgmental phrases, e.g. “heated debate” or “valuable comment.”
- Things said in debate.
- **Do not** record personal comments made, except at the direction of the Chair in preparation for possible charges against or trial of a member.
- Discussion: minutes are a record of what was **done** at the meeting, **not what was said at the meeting** — in this, “minutes” are different from “proceedings.”
- **Do not** record Motions that were withdrawn.
- **The name** of the seconder is unnecessary — just the fact the motion was seconded.

If things get out of hand, and a member starts making comments that are unsuitable, the Chair can direct the Secretary to record what is being said *for the purposes of making proper record for a court case or the trial of a member* — an extreme situation. Other than at the direction of the Chair, the Secretary should **not** record comments.

Robert’s Rules says that all **Main** motions should be shown in the minutes. However, at a meeting, the Secretary will need to record in his notes all motions, including amendments, etc. This is to assist the Chair in conducting the meeting and keeping track of what is to be done next.

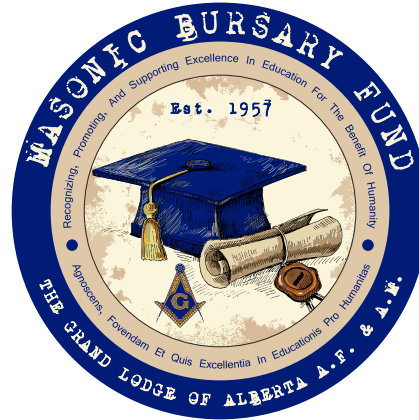
Recording details that are not intended to show up in the final draft to be submitted for approval at the next regular meeting: these notes are also considered a legal document so care must be taken here as well.



In the next part, what should be included is explained.

Please note: The preceding information is provided in good faith as BASIC information and does not cover all situations. The author accepts no responsibility for anything which occurs directly or indirectly as a result of using any of the sugges-

tions or procedures addressed in this article. All suggestions and procedures are provided in good faith as general guidelines only as not all circumstances and situations can be covered and suggestions above should be used in conjunction with relevant legislation, constitutions, rules, laws, bylaws, and with reasonable judgment.



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