

# UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND

## APPROVED ORATION



“THE WORKING TOOLS”

ORATION NUMBER: OR09037

LEVEL: BEGINNER

Third Degree

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# THE WORKING TOOLS

The Working Tools form a very familiar part of the furniture in all our Lodges, symbols of which every Mason knows at least a little, having had them presented to him as he progressed through all his ceremonies – different tools to symbolise the different stages of the candidate’s progress on his journey of discovery.

The Working Tools are always on view; being displayed as soon as the Lodge is opened for business, and not put away until after the closure of the Lodge. Like the Volume of the Sacred Law, they are an essential part of our Masonic symbolism. In addition to being presented with the Working Tools in all three Craft ceremonies, very often the first piece of ritual that a new-made Brother learns after being Raised is to present the Working Tools to the Worshipful Master at Installation, or to a fellow Brother in a ceremony. There can be no doubt therefore that the Working Tools are very central to our rituals, forming a double connection. First, they form a direct and obvious link between Speculative Freemasonry and Operative Masonry; in the words of the ritual, “but, as we are not all operative Masons, but rather free and accepted or speculative”. Secondly, they provide a direct link between all the degrees as an explanation of them is an integral and critical part of each Craft Degree. They are presented to the candidate at the end of each ceremony, possibly because each explanation encapsulates the symbolic message of the degree in a few memorable words.

Although it is normal practice to change the tools progressively as the Lodge opens in the different degrees; some older Lodges display the Working Tools of all three degrees at all times; and in Bristol, the Working Tools of the degree to be worked that evening are laid out by the Tyler at the beginning of the evening, and not progressively changed as the degrees are changed – but whatever the variations, the Working Tools are always displayed when a Lodge is open.

It is quite clear that our ancient operative Brethren were the skilled artisans who constructed the great structures of the medieval world that still survive today – cathedrals, castles, palaces. Although the Saxons in pre-Norman England built with stone, it was only after the Norman Conquest that one of the greatest building booms

in history took place. When we consider that the population of England was probably no more than one and a half million, the scope of this boom is difficult for us to understand. The percentage of the national resources that were put into this great construction boom was enormous, and reminds us that the skills of the masons and their craft were held in a special place in the life of the nation. The Working Tools that they used were an essential ingredient of the Craft of Masonry and held an importance far greater than our present perception of hand tools could possibly hold for us.

When the writers of our ritual were looking for a link between the three ceremonies they chose tools – the most important aids to the medieval mason - as the most suitable theme for the very important moral lessons they wanted to convey to us through the three degrees – to mark the progress of the candidate on his journey of discovery.

The Working Tools were selected for their suitability to each particular degree, as well as for their overall progressive symbolism; as we shall now see.

The First Degree Working Tools are the 24 inch Gauge, The Common Gavel, and the Chisel - the tools of the Entered Apprentice who was accepted as one being deemed suitable to learn the great skills needed and capable of progressing to even higher skills. If he did not prepare the stones correctly the work could not continue. We must, therefore, never think of the Entered Apprentice as some sort of unskilled medieval building labourer. His skills were fundamental skills. Accordingly, the Working Tools of the First Degree teach us not only of the skills of the Apprentice, but also some fundamental things about the use of our most precious asset – time – what to do with it as well as what not to do with it, and they also point out that education is the central foundation of what the ritual describes as “regularly organised society”. The point is as valid today as it was then.

The Second Degree tools are the Square, Level and the Plumb-rule, the tools of the Fellowcraft, or the Fellow Of Craft as he is sometimes called. This degree is sometimes considered to be of as less important than the others, squeezed between the Initiation and the Raising, yet this is to misunderstand it. It is indeed shorter but that

is because a lot of its content was transferred to the Third Degree when it was established in about 1725. In learned societies and universities a “Fellow” is a very high rank, and in masonry it signified a mason who was qualified and able to do the work. The Working Tools of this degree are of a higher level than those of the First Degree, as they are the structural tools for the establishment of the whole edifice. Without the square and level the foundations could not be established, the floor could not be laid; and without the Plumb-rule nothing could be raised above ground. The symbolic meaning of the tools likewise guides our reflections to the basis of our conduct towards all our fellow human beings, and not just to those within our own Masonic society.

The shorter version of the Second Degree Working Tools omits a lot of the reasoning behind the meaning. The long explanation includes phrases such as “The Level demonstrates that we are all sprung from the same stock, partakers of the same nature, and sharers of the same hope”, and “The infallible plumb-rule, which like Jacob’s ladder, connects heaven and earth, is the criterion of rectitude and truth. It teaches us to walk uprightly before God and man”. Although these and other phrases are omitted from the short version, we find in both versions some of the best known phrases in Masonry today - “Thus the Square teaches morality, the Level equality, and the Plumb Rule justness and uprightness of life and actions”.

The Third Degree Working Tools, the Skirret, Pencil and Compasses, are the tools of the Master, or Architect, or Designer of the building, and refer to the skills of intellect, conception and execution; without which there would be no framework within which to apply the more artisan skills promulgated in the former degrees. In the practical world of the operative mason, he may have known how to square a stone, how to raise a column and how to create a level; but the decision of the site, the height and the proportions of the edifice was in the hands of the architect or Master.

Morally, the Working Tools of the Third Degree extend the principles of the first two degrees, but now they talk of our ultimate relationship – that with our Creator - and how our behaviour should always be predicated with eternity in view. They point us to the Volume of the Sacred Law, and by implication, all that it teaches us.

But the nine Working Tools, as presented to the candidate, are not their only representation in the Lodge. Let us not forget that the Square and Compasses are always present with the Volume of the Sacred Law on the Worshipful Master's pedestal. The Jewels of the Master and the Senior and Junior Wardens, the Square, Level and Plumb Rule, are the Second Degree tools always visible whatever the degree - a reminder that in earlier times Masonry was a two-degree system only. These are just two of the presence of tools and many other symbolic objects to be found at all times in our Lodges.

The overall picture teaches us that the practical skills illustrated by the Working Tools in the three degrees harmonise together to make the building possible, for although it is the skill of the architect that gives conception to the structure, it cannot be raised without the operative skills of the stone-squarer and column-raiser. Together they make a whole, and together the symbolic lessons we can learn from the Working Tools make sense as a moral structure to underpin our lives. In our Lodges, we superficially construct in order to emulate King Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem in its outward form. But the real purpose is the symbolic construction of a virtual Temple within our lives; and the Working Tools in all three degrees are constituent parts of that purpose, and essential waymarkers on our Masonic journey.