



Province of East Lancashire

“Care for the Brethren”



All of us are very familiar with the experience of hearing a representative of the Provincial Grand Master, or the Charity Steward of our own lodge, speaking about the continuing need for our support if we are to provide adequately for the care of our brethren and their dependents, as well as some wider needs of others in the local, or national, community. I do not think it would be unfair to say that sometimes the calls for our support might be described as 'laid on with a trowel'. It is not inappropriate to use that phrase because the jewel of the Charity Steward is precisely that - a trowel. It is about that, and why that was thought to be so fitting an emblem, that I want to talk to you for a while this evening.

There was a time, indeed, in our ceremonies when the trowel was regularly part of what our brethren saw and heard about in their lodges. This was in the days before the union of the two Grand Lodges, of the Moderns and the Antients, in 1813. Before that time there were no officers called Inner Guard, Director of Ceremonies, or Deacons who attended a candidate round a lodge. The work now done by the Deacons was performed by the Junior Warden who also ensured that the lodge was properly tyled at the opening and closing of the lodge.

When it came to the ceremony of admitting an initiate the person who was posted on the inside of the lodge door was the Mason who had been the last initiate. On his being made a Mason that latest member had been presented with a miniature silver trowel, a practice still continued in parts of the Province of Norfolk.

The trowel was chosen for this purpose because among working stonemasons that was the tool needed to spread the mortar that ensured the stones were held together to form a safe and secure building. It also helped to smooth over any cracks or divisions between the stones or openings in a wall. With such a recognized application it can be seen why this was thought to be the right tool for someone who guarded the door before another person came in to join the fellowship. At this point he was sealing up the entrance, keeping the lodge safe and ensuring that all the brethren were linked happily together.

When it came to the point of opening the door to admit the initiate the trowel could perform another essential task. With its sharp point the previous initiate could prick the flesh of the candidate's naked breast and thus ensure that the new apprentice was a FIT and proper person to be allowed into this society. When the candidate says that he can FEEL something he is sharing in the very old requirement that he be in possession of all his senses. We know he can see so we hoodwink him; he can walk because he has entered; we know he can hear because he responds and now we know he can feel. What he doesn't know is that the sharp point presented to his naked left breast is also the tool that represents the fellowship to which he seeks admittance.

Later in this ceremony the previous initiate would have another task. In the north-east part of the lodge he will be required to test the new apprentice's attitude to Benevolence. To do this he would, when told to do so by the Junior Warden, present the flat surface of the trowel to the candidate to receive any contribution. It is here that another aspect of the symbolism of the trowel was revealed. As the trowel cared for the best use of the stones so here it represented how to care for the well-being of the brethren. The trowel pointedly reminded each new brother of his constant duty to care for his brethren in Freemasonry.

It is just because there was this strong link in those days between an Entered Apprentice and the trowel that we have in the Charge to the newly initiated brother the words, "that Monarchs themselves have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the sceptre for the trowel". In this very important statement we are saying that some who have held the highest station in the land have not been ashamed to hold the newest and most junior one among Freemasons. That is a lesson for us all to learn.

We can now better understand why the jewel worn by the Charity Steward is a trowel and not a cheque book. A jewel representing something very real from the past has been reintroduced to teach us to be in charity with everyone.

Prepared by:

THE EDUCATION & TRAINING COMMITTEE

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