

Enabling The Masonic Explorer In All Of Us.

Kansas Lodge of Research was established in 1982 to conduct research, gather and preserve Masonic information, supply speakers, and enhance Grand Lodge endeavors to promote Masonic Education. This is the second in a series of articles written for the research lodge and published in Kansas Mason magazine. If you have a topic of interest specific to the in-lodge experience that you would like to see examined here or on which you have already written your findings, please contact us at klor@kansasmason.org or see our web page at kansasmason.org.

Examining the Working Tools

The Plumb, the Level & the Square

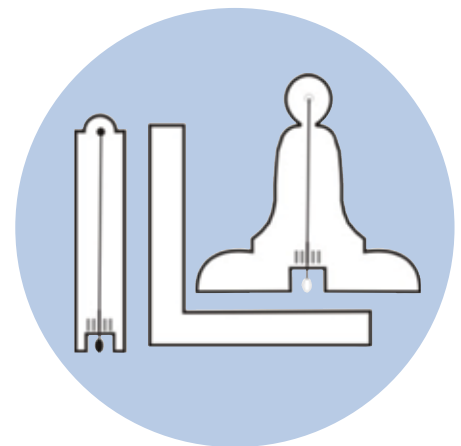
*Knowledge is not power; it is inventory.
Knowledge must be applied before it can empower.*

As Freemasons advance through the three degrees, they are shown representations of the Working Tools of Operative Masonry that are metaphorically explained as it being representative of something a Mason should do and be in daily life. As Speculative Masons, few of us have an opportunity to apply the Working Tools to actual stone, and we miss an opportunity to see the Light their Operative uses provide.

To explore this, let us first examine the three Working Tools used to represent the three principle officers of the Lodge: the Plumb, the Level and the Square. It is by no coincidence that these tools are those of a Fel-

low Craft. These are the three tools that are commonly used collectively by the Fellow Craft guild to do most of the Operative Work.

Much, but not all, of their Operative usage is self-evident. We are told the Plumb is used to check upright Work and is to teach us to deal in an upright manner with others. The Level is used to true horizontal Work and serves to remind us that the Level of Time on which we travel is finite. The Square is to be used to square the corners of Work so each stone will be better made able to be Plumb and/or Level. The Square also serves to remind us that we should “be square” in our dealings with others. Each of



these explanations is somewhat lacking and is deserving of further investigation.

THE PLUMB

We learn that the Junior Warden is represented by the Plumb and also by the Pillar of

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Beauty. It is the Tool of Alignment. It further alludes to Hiram Abiff and the due-guard of the First Degree. It is used to vertically align the stone above with the stone below—as *Above, so Below*. By applying the Plumb to the stone above the stone below it will show leanings or uprightness in construct.

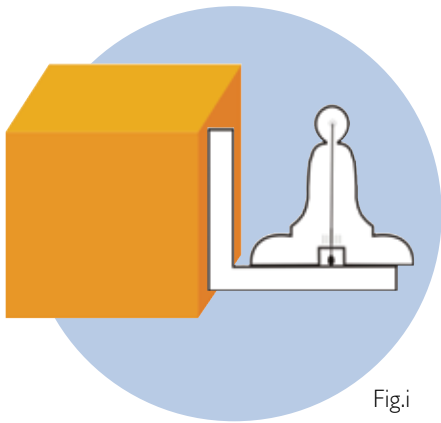


Fig.i

The word Plumb is from the Latin *Plumbum*, meaning lead. It is a tool consisting of one or more vertical flat edges with a small ball of lead suspended on a string that is allowed to freely move on a pendulum axis. The accuracy of the Plumb is not self-reliant and must be assured by calibration, comparison and registration against a known standard. A mark is then engraved noting the exact position where the string shows a perfect perpendicular. Other marks may also be applied that represent the amount of error from True Plumb, but they are only for reference and convenience and are thus superfluous.

When the Plumb (Junior Warden) is missing, Masons (the Lodge) can recreate it

by the use of the Level and the Square. By aligning the Level upon one leg of the Square and rotating it until the registration mark on the Level is true, the other leg of the Square is Plumb and thus perpendicular to the surface of the Work to which this combination of tools is applied. (See fig. I)

This substitution of tools teaches us that when the Beauty of Uprightness and Honesty is missing, Masons can rely on Strength and Wisdom to provide a solution so the Work can continue in harmony.

THE LEVEL

The Senior Warden is represented by the Level and also by the Pillar of Strength. It is further emblematic of Equality, Hiram King of Tyre and the due-guard of the Third Degree. It is used to prove Horizontals. These Horizontals are the foundation to which the equality between Masons and others may occur in fairness. As the Level, a Mason must bring all his parts into balance to assure Equality.

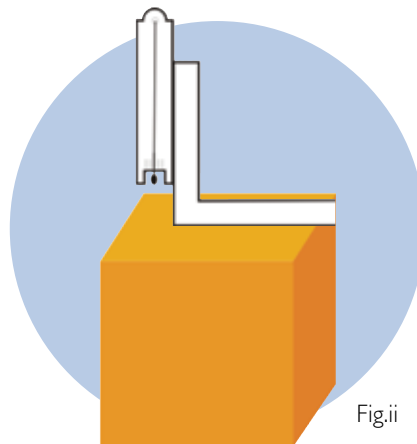


Fig.ii

In Latin, *Libra* was a balance and from it came our Level as an instrument by which a balance is provided, or by which a horizontal plane might be proven. It is a tool consisting of a flat horizontal edge with a small ball of lead suspended on a string that is allowed to freely move on a pendulum axis. The accuracy of the Level must also be assured by calibration, comparison and registration against a known standard. A mark is then engraved noting the exact point where the string shows a perfectly level surface. Other marks may also be applied that represent the amount of error from True Level, but they are only for reference and convenience and are thus superfluous.

When the Level (Senior Warden) is missing, Masons (the Lodge) can recreate it by the use of the Plumb and the Square. By aligning the Plumb upon one leg of the Square and rotating it until the registration mark on the Plumb is true, the other leg of the Square is Level and thus parallel to the surface of the Work to which this combination of tools is applied. (See fig. ii)

This substitution of tools teaches us that when the Strength of Fairness and Equality are missing, Masons can rely on Beauty and Wisdom to manifest a solution so the Work can continue in harmony.

This exercise proves the harmony of The Three yet exists when only two are present. It further dovetails with our Grand Lodge By-Laws that stipulate which Lodge Officers

must be present in order to conduct a regular and proper Stated Communication.

THE SQUARE

The Square is an emblem of Morality and is representative of the Worshipful Master, the Pillar of Wisdom, King Solomon and the du-guard of the Second Degree. It also alludes to the esoteric, and may be linked to revealing the secret of the Master's Wages.†

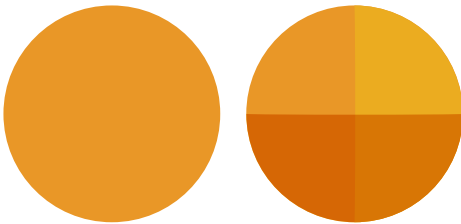


Fig.iv

How many times have we sat in Lodge and heard the Square defined as an angle of 90 degrees and the fourth part of a circle? The angle of 90 degrees portion seems fairly self-evident, but why would someone choose to define a right angle using a circle? The answer becomes a bit more apparent when it is drawn.

Begin by drawing a circle and dividing it into 4 equal parts. (See fig.iv)

The ancient Alchemists believed that all things abounded from four elements—the Classical Elements: Earth, Wind, Fire and Air. They believed all things were one of these elements alone or resulted from a combination or composite of them. These Classical Elements are

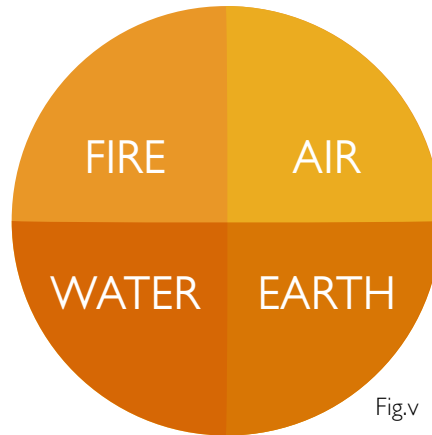


Fig.v

often used as a “key” to the esoteric. Add them into our quartered circle. (See fig. v)

We have learned that the Wages of the Fellow Craft are Corn, Wine and Oil. These wages would allow a man to sustain himself in meager comfort, but little more. Yet, it is said that the Master's Wage is such that it grants him excess whereby he is able to travel and to contribute to the relief of others.

Alchemists chronicled Corn as the composite of Air and Earth, Wine the composite of Earth and Water, and Oil the composite

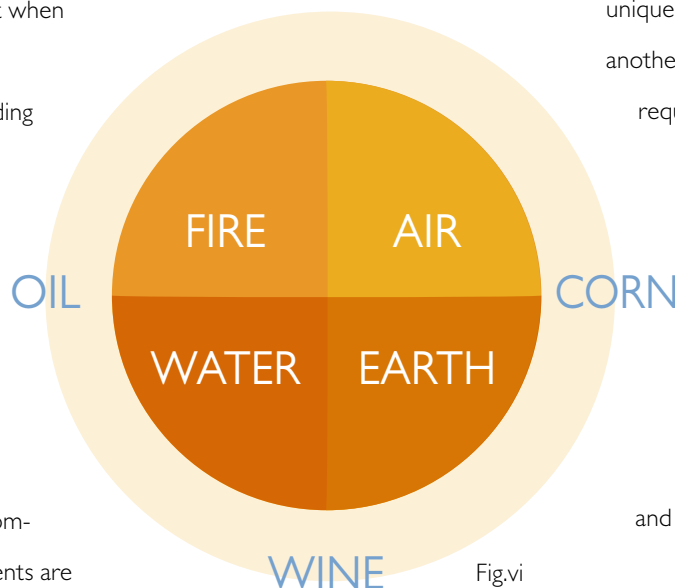


Fig.vi

of Water and Fire. Add them into our drawing, each at the appropriate juncture of the Elements that form them. (See fig. vi)

This leaves the zenith of the circle where Air meets Fire to yet have a wage defined. Classical Alchemy tells us that the composite of these two elements results in a crystal or salt. History tells us that salt was often used as currency (payment) in ancient times and was regarded to be of great value as a preserving agent. Salt made it possible to preserve food for longer periods of time, as would be necessary to allow travel. I propose for your consideration that in addition to Corn, Wine and Oil, the Master's Wage was paid in Salt.

Still not convinced? How about this: salt originates from the Latin root *sāl* of which formed the word salary, which literally means “continued wages.”

While the Plumb and Level are quite similar, the Square stands alone in both uniqueness and in its difficulty to replicate in another form. A proper and Perfect Square requires no calibration or registration marks. Once proven accurate, a Perfect Square remains so without further interpretation. Many representations of Masonic Squares contain various scales of measure applied to the legs, but these are as of convenience to the craftsman and are not integral to the ability of the

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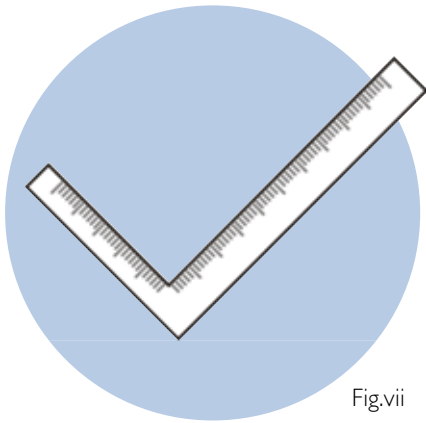


Fig.vii

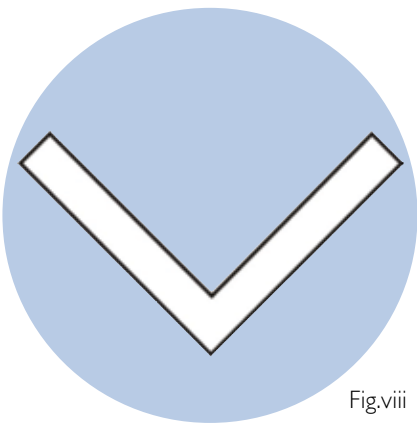


Fig.viii

Square to prove an angle of 90°. (See fig, vii)

The modern Square is often oblong and may have varying widths of each leg. When the Apprentice has not done The Work, he is like this Oblong Square. Apprentice Work trues your Square, sets your Plumb and lengthens your Level. Only when he has done The Work of the first two Degrees will he become the Perfect Square. (See fig, viii)

When the Square (Worshipful Master) is missing, Masons (the Lodge) can create a representation of it by the use of the Plumb

and the Level. By aligning the Plumb across one leg of the Level and rotating it until both registration marks are true, a Square is manifested. (See fig, ix)

This provides a poor, time consuming substitute and serves to further emphasize the need for the presence of a strong Worshipful Master. This substitute tool serves to teach us that when Wisdom appears to be missing, Masons can rely on Beauty and Strength to provide a solution so the Work can continue in harmony.

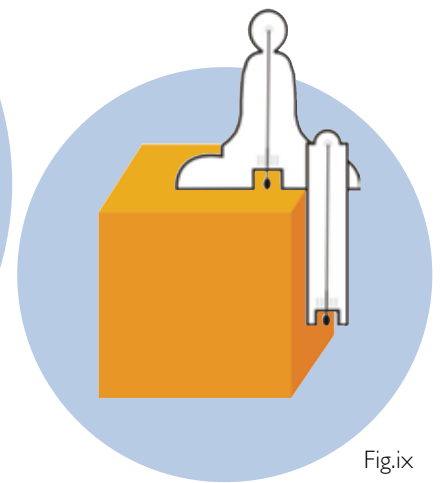
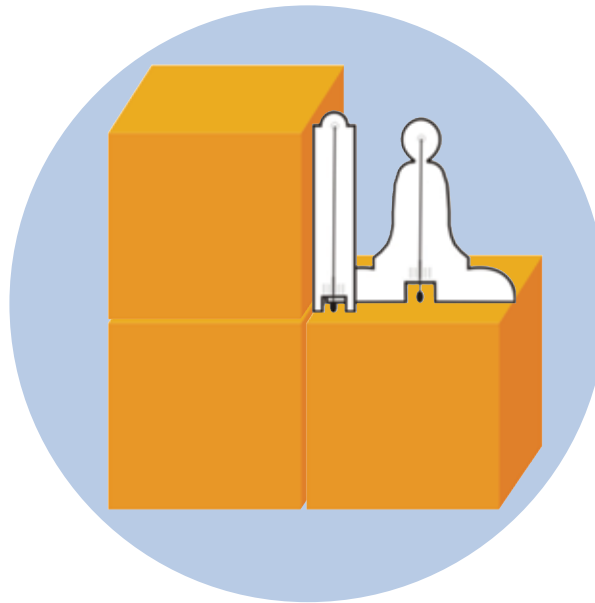


Fig.ix

About The Author

Rick Carver is the Past Master of Inner Quest Lodge 456 (Traditional Observance) and current Secretary and perpetual life member of Shawnee Lodge 54. He is also a member of Scottish Rite, York Rite, Kansas Lodge of Research and several other Masonic organizations. You can read some other works by Brother Carver on the Inner Quest Lodge web site at innerquest456.org.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to again thank Dr. John S. Nagy and his books Building Hiram and Building Perpendis for his many contributions, inspiration and guidance in this endeavor.

†Please note the use of the word *may* in this statement. It is my intent to provide a plausible and logical definition of a Master's Wage, however it is the opinion of this author only and it is not approved, sanctioned or recognized by The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Kansas or any other Masonic order.