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The Warden's Column

(author anonymous)

One of the most frequently corrected errors in lodge procedure is the failure of a Warden to raise or lower his column appropriately. Let an absent-minded Junior Warden forget to lower his column when the lodge is called from refreshment to labour, and many a frantic gesture from the side-lines will remind him of his dereliction!

Almost every Brother sitting in the lodge room knows the proper position of the Wardens' columns during labor or at refreshment, and will hasten to signal a Warden if the emblem of his office is awry.

*“Up in the West during labour; down in the West at refreshment.
Down in the South during labour; up in the South at refreshment.”*

Every Brother knows that simple rule for positioning the Wardens' columns.

It is generally believed, as stated in Mackey's Encyclopedia, that the Senior Warden's column represents the pillar Jachin, while the Junior Warden's column represents the pillar Boaz, those having been impressive adornments on the Porch of King Solomon's Temple. Their names signify Establishment and Strength.

If asked for a symbolic explanation of these pieces of furniture, the average Craftsman will reply that the Junior Warden's column represents the pillar of beauty, the Senior Warden's, the pillar of strength. But what has become of the Worshipful Master's column? He represents the pillar of wisdom, “because it is necessary that there should be wisdom to contrive, strength to support, and beauty to adorn all great and important undertakings.” Some Brethren will explain further that the Wardens' columns are miniature representations of the pillars usually stationed in the West, where at one time both Wardens sat, one in the shade of Boaz, the other in the shade of Jachin. Such an arrangement of the Wardens' positions may still be found in some European lodges whose rituals have come from Continental sources.

There is no simple explanation of the origin of the Wardens' columns, nor of what they represent. Like much in Masonic ritual, they are the result of some interesting changes; yet all well-informed Brethren will agree that today they are emblematical of the offices of the two Wardens, and represent their authority, of the Senior during labour, and of the Junior while the lodge is at refreshment. As a matter of fact, the raising and lowering of the Wardens' columns made their first appearance in Masonic ritual as late as 1760, well into the period known as Speculative Masonry. The Three Distinct Knocks, a well-known expose of Masonic ritual published in London that year, contains the first description of the Wardens' use of their columns. An almost identical description of the Wardens' raising and lowering their columns, appears in another expose, Jachin and Boaz, published in 1762. Unfortunately, there has been comparatively little written about the Wardens' columns and their uses to show when they were allocated to those officers, or how and when the raising

and lowering of these miniature pillars became a part of the proper procedure in Masonic lodges. It is only from such exposes as those noted above that one can assign an approximate date to the beginning of the practice. Curiously, William Preston in various editions of his *Illustrations of Freemasonry* (1792-1804), in the section dealing with Installation, assigns the columns to the Deacons. Since the columns had belonged to the Wardens for at least thirty years earlier, and since many of the Craft lodges in England did not appoint Deacons at all, Preston must have been in error, or was introducing an innovation, which the passage of time has shown to have failed. Preston also taught that the Senior Deacon's column was to be raised during labor, and the Junior Deacon's at refreshment. To those who like Masonic traditions neat and historically logical, it may be disconcerting to learn that in some lodges the Wardens did not have columns on their pedestals. They had truncheons, whose modern function is to serve as billy clubs for policemen. An Irish lodge in the 18th century had a by-law reading: "there is to be silence at the first chap of the Master's haler, and likewise at the first stroke of each Trenchen struck by the Senr and Junr Wardens." The Rev. George Oliver (1782-1867), a prolific writer about Freemasonry, quotes an inventory of a lodge at Chester, England, in 1761, which includes "two truncheons for the Wardens." There are still lodges today which denominate the Wardens' emblems of authority as truncheons, not columns. There can be no doubt that the Wardens' columns are the result of Freemasonry's interest in the art of building, of architecture and its allied skills and sciences. The operative masons devoted much time and thought to the design, construction, and ornamentation of columns and pillars. The orders of architecture were an important body of knowledge with which they were continuously concerned.

The mediaeval cathedral builders, however, attached greater significance to the ancient pillars erected by the children of Lamech than to those on the porch of King Solomon's Temple. On these ancient pillars were engraved all the then known sciences to preserve them from destruction by fire or inundation. As such, they symbolized the esoteric importance of the knowledge of the builder's art to be guarded and preserved by faithful craftsmen. In many of the earliest documents of the Craft, the so-called "Old Charges" or "manuscript constitutions", some of which antedate the period, of Speculative Freemasonry by at least 300 years, those primitive pillars of the sons of Lamech are a part of the "history" of the operative Craft. The Temple of Solomon is inconspicuously mentioned, but the two pillars on the porch of that temple do not appear at all. It was not until approximately 1700 that King Solomon's Pillars began to appear in Masonic writing and ritual documents. The Dumfries, No. 4 MS, usually dated 1700-1725, mentions those pillars and gives them a strong Christian symbolism. It also answers two test questions about pillars as follows:

*"How many pillars is in your Lodge? Three.
What are these? Ye square, the Compas and ye bible."*

Because of the secrecy maintained by Masons about ritualistic matters, it is on the ritual texts of 18th century exposes that we depend for knowledge of the part played by pillars in the development of the Craft's rituals and ceremonies.

The Grand Mystery of Freemasons Discovered, 1724, mentions the pillars of Solomon's Temple, but gives them this significance: *they represent the "Strength and Stability of the Church in all ages."*

Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, 1730, the first expose to reveal a third degree in Masonic ritual, refers to "Three Pillars" that "support the Lodge . . . Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty." This seems to be the earliest mention of those three virtues symbolized by pillars, which of course had no reference to those in the "Old Charges" or to those on the Porch of Solomon's Temple. They were purely symbolic; they had not yet become a part of the lodge furniture.

In those early days of Speculative Masonry, the Wardens' duties were probably different from those they have now. Some writers believe they had duties similar to those of the Deacons today. They had no pedestals or pillars, because the latter were usually drawn on the floor, or "floor cloth", to be referred to during ritualistic instruction, but were certainly not then a part of the Wardens' equipment. The other interpretation of the Wardens' Columns as representations of Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars of Solomon's Temple, was also introduced into Masonic ritual at an early period of Speculative Masonry. Again, it is in the exposes of the early rituals that this development can be traced.

In *A Mason's Examination*, 1723, appears this test question:

"Where was the first Lodge kept? In Solomon's Porch; the two Pillars were called Jachin and Boaz."

Nothing, however, establishes a connection between the pillars and the Wardens. The Grand Mystery, etc. mentioned above also names the two pillars Jachin and Boaz. A number of other such publications in the 1720's and 1730's also identify them by those names. How miniature representations of Jachin and Boaz came to the pedestals of the Senior and Junior Wardens is still a matter for speculation; obviously it is a part of the variegated development of Masonic ritual in the 18th century. As symbols of the pillars on the Porch of King Solomon's Temple, or as representations of the three principal orders of architecture which the three principal officers of a lodge symbolize, they are to be found in the earliest catechisms and lectures of Speculative Freemasonry. Undoubtedly, as suggested by contemporary references and illustrations, the pillars soon became artistically designed pieces of furniture to stand in the lodge room as objects for study. There was probably no uniformity of practice in this development. Some lodges had large columns, some small, some drew them on the floor cloth. Some had no pillars at all. From the creation of such pillars, and from their association with the three principal officers of the lodge undoubtedly came the columns of the Wardens. They are relics of those earlier larger pieces of lodge furniture. From the traditions of operative craft lodges had lingered the conception of the Senior Warden as the officer in charge of the workmen; his column naturally represented his authority and superintendence. To give the Junior Warden some similar authority, an imaginative speculative ritualist probably hit on the idea of putting him in charge of the Craft during refreshment. That idea had been foreshadowed in Anderson's 1723 Constitutions; Regulation XXIII put the Grand Wardens in charge of the annual Feast.

By 1760, as suggested by the publication of Three Distinct Knocks, the Wardens of a lodge had acquired miniature columns representing the pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which they carried in processions and raised or lowered on their pedestals to indicate whether the lodge was at labour or refreshment. That procedure was apparently confirmed by the Lodge of Promulgation which paved the way for the union in 1813 of the "Modern" and "Ancient" Grand Lodges in England. Thus the raising and lowering of the Wardens' columns became sanctioned by custom and Grand Lodge approval. It is not a complicated or mysterious symbolic act; it is a simple means to indicate silently to entering Brethren the status of the lodge.

Since the Junior Warden's column is erect during refreshment, logic suggests that it be similarly arranged when the lodge is closed, i.e., not at labour. Generally, however, the Wardens' columns are left just as they happen to be placed at the time of closing, except in those Jurisdictions whose official ritual has decreed a proper positioning of the Wardens' columns at closing.

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