

# The Distinguishing Badge of a Mason (II)

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## Introduction and History

*“More ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle; more honourable than the Star or Garter; or any other order in existence, being the badge of innocence and the bond of friendship”*. So is the Apron first introduced to the new Mason, and so was it presented millennia ago to initiates of the ancient mysteries, as a symbol of the control and restraint of the animal passions, and freedom from the base nature of Man. No Mason is considered “clothed” without an Apron. It is worn “to protect their garments from spot or stain” while engaged in building the spiritual temple.

The apron, in ancient times, appears to have been an honorary badge of distinction. The Israelites, in the investiture of priests, used a girdle. In the mysteries of Mithras in Persia, the candidate was invested with an apron, as it was in certain Japanese rites of initiation. The same applies to ancient Indian, Ethiopian, Egyptian, and Mayan ceremonies. Also in the Christian church, the apron is connected with certain senior dignitaries. In Masonry, there are two things essential to preserving the symbolism of the apron: its colour; and its material.

## Colour

In all ages and countries, the colour white has been seen to be symbolic of purity. For this reason, the Jewish priesthood were always clothed in white. The priests of the Romans wore white when they sacrificed. The Druids had different colours for each of their degrees – white being appropriated to the highest degree, the degree of perfection, and none were admitted unless they were cleansed of all impurities of body and mind. In early Christian rituals, white garments were placed on the newly baptized. Later, the colour blue is added – blue being a spiritual colour.

## Material

A Mason’s apron must be made of lambskin. The lamb has always been considered an appropriate symbol of innocence.

## Geometry

The ritual says *“Geometry, and Masonry, originally synonymous terms....”* Geometry is displayed in much of our Masonic symbolism, and is true of the apron, which consists of two basic geometric shapes: a rectangle; and a triangle. One is lain over the other. When the apron is made with the proper dimensions, some interesting geometry emerges:

- The point of the triangle is 3 units from the top, 4 units from the sides, and 5 units from the bottom. You will recognize that 3, 4 and 5 are the dimensions of a Pythagorean triangle, which is used to construct an angle of 90 degrees.
- If a line is drawn from the same point of the triangle to each of the bottom two corners of the apron, the resulting triangle has the same angles as that of the great pyramid of Giza.

## Symbolism

The four sides of the rectangular part of the apron bring to mind the four cardinal virtues: temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice.

The three sides of the triangle remind us of: the three great lights in Masonry; the three lesser lights; the three pillars (wisdom, strength, and beauty); faith, hope, and charity; the three attributes of the great Architect (omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence).

When the flap of the apron is worn by the entered apprentice in an upright position, as is done in some jurisdictions, there are five sides. This reminds us of the five who make a lodge, and the five noble orders of architecture, as stated in the ritual. It also represents the five senses.

Counting all the sides gives a total of seven, reminding us of the seven who make a lodge perfect, and the seven liberal arts and sciences, as the ritual says. Also, according to ancient teachings, man is a seven-fold being. Even in ancient times, the rectangle has been regarded as the symbol for matter. So, the rectangular part of the apron represents the the lower forms of our existence – our base physical nature.

The triangle has long been considered as the symbol representing spirit, and there is so much behind this that one could write a whole book on this symbolism. On the apron is shown spirit overlaying matter – spirit starting to dominate over our base nature.

The entered apprentice apron is totally white. To the Fellowcraft apron is added two blue rosettes. These represent body and mind (mind being the main object of the Fellowcraft degree).

The Master Mason apron has three blue rosettes, which represent body, mind, and spirit (spirit being the main object of the third degree). Blue edging encompasses the apron (blue being, as mentioned before, a spiritual colour).

In the first two degrees, there is no metal on the apron, representing the divestment of materialistic base metals. In the third degree, silver is introduced (silver being a representation of the soul). There are seven silver tassels, and I need not remind you of the significance of the number seven. The silver clasp has the form of a serpent, which is an ancient symbol representing wisdom.

The Installed Master apron has, replacing the rosettes, three Tau crosses. The Tau incorporates the square, level, and plumb rule into one image. They also represent the triple-tau, the significance of which I shall not go into in this paper.

The deeper blue of the Grand Lodge officers' aprons signifies a deeper spirituality. The gold is an ancient representation of spirit. The corn represents growth.

Note that the apron is presented in the West, not by the Master (or divine principle) but by the Senior Warden, representing the soul (or psyche). Try to determine the significance of this yourself.

## **Conclusion**

Brethren, the Apron, the distinguishing badge of a Mason, should be regarded as the most precious symbol of Masonry – one that, when you are about to wear it, speaks volumes about the Craft and all that it means.

## **References**

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