



# NUGGET

## The Four Tassels

**Summary:** Origin and symbolism of the Four Tassels and their association with operative masonry.

The Four Tassels are seen in the four corners of the indented border of a Lodge carpet and represent the four cardinal virtues; a symbolic meaning formed around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Their origin lies in the medieval methods employed by operative masons when laying out the ground plan for a new building. The Master Mason, or Architect, began by putting a pin into the centre of the ground and extending ropes from it to form the square or rectangle, they would then peg them down at what would become the corners of the building. By the simple use of



square and triangle, he would check that they were true. As the walls rose, every so often a piece of wood would be extended inwards from the corner, and a plumb line dropped down to make sure that the walls were perpendicular.

These corner plumb lines lingered on the walls of Lodges into the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as actual tassels hanging in the four corners of the Lodge room. It was to these hanging tassels which the four cardinal virtues were symbolically attached, implying a link with maintaining an upright life. In the Grand Temple at Great Queen Street London, the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice, are represented in mosaic on the four corners of the ceiling.<sup>1</sup> Like many other old and interesting customs, these tassels seem to be disappearing, and we are left with only a symbolic representation in the corners of the indented border of the Lodge carpet.<sup>2</sup>

### References

1. The Four Tassels symbolically represent the four Cardinal Virtues: South-East Corner - Temperance; South-West Corner - Fortitude; North-West Corner - Prudence; North-East corner - Justice. <https://theeducator.ca/the-four-tassels> They also refer to the Perfect Points of Entrance, originally called the Principal Points: **Temperance** - early Masons called temperance 'the guttural point' referring to the throat. **Fortitude** - early Masons called fortitude the 'the pectoral point' from the Latin 'Pectus' meaning breast. **Prudence** - early Masons called prudence 'the manual sign' from the Latin 'Manus' meaning hand. **Justice** - early Masons called justice 'the pedal point, from the Latin 'Pedes', meaning feet, referring to the fact that when the feet are planted on principle, there should be no shifting. Derived from Hunt, Charles C., (1984) *Masonic concordance of the Holy Bible*, The Masonic Book Club, USA.
2. Derived from: Haywood, Martin P.S. *The Four Tassels*; an article in *The Queensland Freemason*, February 2008.



### **Recommended use of Nuggets**

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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### **Acknowledgement:**

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