



NUGGET

Deacons and their Wands

Summary: The creation of the modern day Deacons and the evolution of their wands.



The word 'deacon' comes from the Greek 'diakonos' and means servant, attendant or messenger and is therefore very appropriate to those whose main duty is to serve as the messengers of the Worshipful Master and Wardens. They also act as guides for those being initiated, passed, or raised to a higher Degree, as well as providing other general assistance.

In the early years of Speculative Freemasonry, not all Lodges had Deacons, and those that did may have had them perform different duties from those of today. In some Lodges, the Deacon was the presiding officer and the Wardens were the financial officers.

During the the period of rivalry between the Antients and the Moderns, the Antients had Deacons while the Moderns had Stewards. However, following the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England, it was recommended that Lodges appoint both Deacons and Stewards as they were seen as useful and necessary.

Today, both Deacons carry wands. Originally those wands were carried by the Wardens, following upon their predecessors, the Guild Wardens and were carried as a mark of their status.¹ Even outside the Craft, wands are not unusual as British symbols of office. Churchwardens and High Sheriffs carry them, as do some officials in Parliament and the Royal Household. In the early days, the Senior Warden's wand was topped with a moon, signifying the end of the day, whilst the Junior Warden's wand was topped with a sun, representing high noon.² Today, we see that these symbols have migrated to the top of their respective columns.

After the Union of 1813, a new form of ceremonial was adopted which required the Wardens to stay in their places. This meant that someone was required to assist by attending at the door or carrying messages - the two Deacons. To make everyone aware that they acted for the Wardens, they were handed their respective Warden's wand. That is why, in the Lodge rooms situated within Freemason's Hall, in Great Queen Street, London, in Sunderland and in Old Elvet, Durham, you will still see the Deacons' wands topped with the sun or the moon.³

Over time, the celestial symbols, appropriate to the role of a Warden, were seen as unsuitable,⁴ so new symbols were chosen. The first was Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and some wands still bear his effigy.⁵ However, after the Union, it was felt that the many new Lodges being created should have something to connect them with Noah, an ancient figure in old English Masonry, and so the dove, a messenger and symbol of peace and harmony was adopted.

Endnotes

1. According to the Bible, both Moses and Aaron carried a staff of office.
2. When after 1813, such Officers were required in each and every Lodge. In Selby in Yorkshire, you can still see the batons that were in the form of the original Wardens Wands. In certain very old Lodges such as Phoenix at Sunderland and Durham, the Wands of the Deacons carry a Sun and a Crescent Moon. *A Walk round the Lodge Room*, Noel Voice, (2017) - Province of Hampshire and Isle of Wight.
3. 'The proper Badge or Ensign of office of a Deacon, which he should always carry with him in the discharge of the duties of his office, is a Blue Rod surmounted by a pine-cone' Mackay, Albert G., (1929) *Mackey's Revised Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, Volume 2, p. 862, The Masonic History Company, Chicago.
4. Though in some Lodges both Deacons wear the old symbols on their collar jewel, captured within a compass, i.e. sun (Senior) & the moon (Junior); whilst others have the dove.
5. The caduceus (or magic wand) carried by Mercury, the messenger of Jove, who was known for his speed and mobility, and was able to resurrect the dead. It has three elements: a pair of wings, mounted on an olive branch which separates two intertwined serpents in combat. Mercury's staff was said to have the power of sleep and be emblematic of power and authority; so again very appropriate to the role. Richard. D. Carver, *Masonic Rods* and Dr. David Harrison, *The lost symbols of Freemasonry, Caduceus and Mercury*, 13th Nov 2015 <https://dr-david-harrison.com/freemasonry/the-lost-symbols-of-freemasonry-mercury-and-caduceus> [Accessed 21/02/20]



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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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