



Nugget

Hele and Conceal

Index

Origin and pronunciation of the word 'hele'.

Summary

This nugget, gives a a variety of explanations for the origin and pronunciation of the word 'hele', ending with a relatively definitive one.

Keywords

Hele



Hele, Conceal and Never Improperly Reveal

There are always two common arguments about this phrase in Freemasonry. The first is about what it means and the second is how it is to be pronounced! So, let's consider what the word 'hele' might mean, given it is not a word in common usage.

We are all familiar with 'heal' in the sense of 'make better, and 'heel' in the sense of a 'foot joint'. Indeed, there is an argument that the masonic word 'hele' may derive from the act of 'heeling in' with which all gardeners will be familiar as a way of ensuring that a plant is safely established in the earth. So, that argument runs, 'to hele' is to ensure that a secret is safely learned and is well established in the breast of the Mason. It may sound plausible, but perhaps it is somewhat speculative and a little far-fetched.

Another answer might lie in the old Anglo-Saxon word 'hale', which means a valley, such that Halesowen in the West Midlands, translates as the valley of Owen, who was a Welsh Prince. So, 'hale' could refer to a defined area known to be someone's special property. Hence, when a Mason undertakes to 'hele' the secrets entrusted to him, he is acknowledging that they are special property which must always be kept safe and secure.

Another meaning could be derived from the expression 'hale and hearty' which means that a person is in good health. To be 'hale', a person must be whole and of sound mind and body, and it is well established that in operative times Masons' Lodges would never admit a man who was suffering from some physical or mental defect. 'hale' also has overtones of 'wholesomeness' which means pure and unsullied. So, once again we come back to that notion of the need to keep the Masonic secrets safe, secure and unpolluted.

But, how is the word 'hele' pronounced? Some Lodges rhyme it with 'conceal' and 'never reveal', so that it is pronounced 'heel', while others will stoutly maintain that ever since they were founded the word has always been pronounced as 'hale'. Pronunciation varies, and may derive from tradition, custom and practice, or from the interpretation of a particularly forceful Director of Ceremonies, present or past, (often described to younger members as, 'Old Tom Whatsit. He ruled this Lodge with a rod of iron'.)

The fact is, that there is no one single accepted pronunciation for 'hele' which is an archaic word deriving from the Old English 'helan' which later became 'hele' in Middle English and Dutch, and which meant to conceal, cover or hide. In the even earlier Proto-Germanic languages it meant 'conceal' or 'stash away' and predating those, in the Proto-Indo European languages, it was spelled as 'kel' again meaning 'to hide.'

So 'hele' clearly has connotations of the need to treat the masonic secrets as something which are personally special and which must be protected and concealed, but whether it is pronounced as 'heel' or 'hale' is simply down to the practice of each lodge. All of which adds to the wonderful diversity and colourful character of the Craft, and long may that continue.

##END##



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.

For further nuggets and other learning materials visit “Solomon” at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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