



## Nugget

# The Entered Apprentice's Apron

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The Entered Apprentice Apron

### Summary

It is aimed specifically at the Entered Apprentice but also looks at the wider historical significance of the wearing of Masonic aprons, the involvement of UGLE in their design and regulation and the symbolism associated with their use.

### Keywords

Apprentice, Apron, Operative Mason.

## The Entered Apprentice's Apron

We have all worn this at some point in our Masonic journey. It is the simplest and least ornamented of all the aprons worn in the Craft, and yet it is the closest garment we have to the aprons worn by the old operative Stone Masons. The wearing of an apron was an ancient feature of many skilled trades. Shoemakers and butchers, for example, traditionally wore aprons to protect their clothing; so, it was with Stone Masons. A sturdy apron was needed to protect its wearer from stone chippings and dust, and also to give coverage when heavy stones were being lifted and put in place. These aprons were traditionally made from sheepskin and would have covered the whole front of a Mason's body, with a bib as the upper portion to give protection to the chest. This bib portion may have been held upright by a button or lace attached to the wearer's shirt or tunic, while the lower part of the apron would have been secured by ties which passed round the waist to be secured by a knot or bow at the front. Being given a first apron would have been a symbolic entry into the craft of Stone Masonry and would have marked the man out as the newest apprentice. So, it is today that every new Freemason is invested with an apron which is tied around his body with strings and fastened into a bow by the Senior Warden.

One theory as to the potential source of speculative Freemasonry is that it developed out of the operative craft during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and that the practice of wearing aprons is part of that transition. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century these continued to be of plain white leather and were quite long though the bib portion decreased in size and gradually ceased to be fastened in an upright position. Aprons also began to be used to distinguish the various degrees within the Craft, though they were still fastened around the waist with strings. In many parts of the country aprons began to be very highly decorated with embroidery or with printed designs; we have many examples of such aprons in our Masonic Lodges and Museums. Aprons also began to be made from materials other than leather; silk was very fashionable for a while amongst those who could afford it!

It was not until after the Union of the two rival Grand Lodges in 1813 that some semblance of order began to emerge with regard to aprons, with the Book of Constitutions laying down the permissible ornamentation for the various aprons pertaining to the three degrees and the special status of the apron worn by those who are Masters and Past Masters of a Lodge. However, even today we may see in all aprons the vestigial remnants of the working dress of the operative Mason. The apron may have shrunk in its dimensions, but it still has a flap, though is permanently worn in the downward position by those who are Master Masons. The 'columns' and tassels on a Master Mason's apron are arguably representative of the ties which at one time were used to keep the apron in place. But Entered Apprentices and (sometimes) Fellow Crafts still wear aprons which are more primitive in shape and design. Their aprons are still tied in place, and in some Lodges, it is the practice still for the flap to be worn in the upright position by Entered Apprentices, an allusion to those early Masons and their working attire.

Much more can be discovered about the symbolism of the Masonic apron, but for the moment let us remember that it provides a precious link to our ancient heritage, whilst at the same time reminding us that we are all bound to work at Freemasonry, albeit in ways appropriate to our current time and that we should never 'coast along' or 'shirk our responsibilities' if we are to be worthy of that ancient badge which symbolises honour, innocence and friendship.

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##END##

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## 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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