



Nugget

Rough & Perfect Ashlars

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Tradition and symbolism related to the 'Rough and Perfect Ashlars'.

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Origin, tradition and symbolism related to the 'Rough and Perfect Ashlars'.

Keywords

Rough, Perfect, Ashlar, Operative, Speculative

The Rough & Perfect Ashlar

The Rough Ashlar and the Tracing Board have long been symbols of Craft Masonry; but the origin of the Perfect Ashlar is another matter entirely.

In 1731, Samuel Prichard's 'Masonry Dissected',¹ described, '*A Tarsel Board, for the Master to draw his designs upon; today's 'Tracing Board'. A Rough Ashlar for the entered Apprentice to learn to work upon, and the 'Broached Thurnel'², there for the Fellow-Craft to try their Jewels upon*'.³

Look at the smooth Ashlar and imagine it with a pyramid on top, that would be a broached thurnel, which over time was decapitated to become the simple cube we see today.

The Ashlars and their symbolism developed from the working practices of early Operative Masons. Then as now, a finely dressed stone, sculpted to have even faces and bind with other stones. To make a Perfect Ashlar requires tools, skill, and a plan: -

- Tools must the workman have, for empty hands cannot chip away hard stone; mental tools must the Speculative Craftsman have, for an empty mind cannot make-sense of a complex life.
- Skill must the workman have to wield Chisel and Mallet; education and skill must the Speculative Craftsman have to develop the talents God gave him.
- A plan must the workman have, to see dimension and form; a plan must the Speculative Craftsman have, to achieve a goal to strive for and eager hands to reach for.⁴

It reminds us that the same face, square and true, is presented both to the Lodge and the world. Hence the Perfect Ashlar represents, '*The summum bonum, the highest good from which all moral values originate*'.⁵

The famous sculptor and ardent Freemason, Gutzon Borglum,⁶ who carved the famous 'The Presidents' on Mount Rushmore in the USA, was asked how he carved stone to create a beautiful sculpture? He replied, '*I merely knock away with a hammer, and chisel away the stone I do not need, and the statue is there. It was there all of the time*'.⁷

Perfection is already within, and once we remove the roughness and excrescences, and divest our hearts and conscience of the trappings and vices of life, we find the perfect man and Mason within.

That is purpose of our Masonic Journey, to find the man within!

##END##

Endnotes:

¹ The first of a series of exposures of Masonic Ritual was Samuel Pritchard's 'Masonry Dissected', (1730), London.

² **Etymology:** Broach or broche an old English term for spire, still in use in Leicestershire. Thurnel, from the old French, 'tournelle', a turret or little tower; disputed by modern research. In Scotland Broach means to rough-hew, whilst a Thurnel, is another word for 'chisel'. The Scotch also use 'boast' as an alternate for 'broach', and 'boasted Ashlar' can be found in modern dictionaries, meaning chiseled with an irregular surface. Ed Halpaus 'The Broached Thurnel & The Ashlars' - http://www.themasonictrowel.com/masonic_talk/masonic_matter/files/masonic_matter_2005_02_10.htm

The 'pierre-cubique', or 'cubical stone' is seen in early French tracing-boards. Albert. C. Mackey (1873) Mackey's 'Encyclopedia of Freemasonry', Revised Edition 1927 Hawkins and Hughan; Derived from the www.masonicdictionary.com, & Jack Brookbank 'Speculations on the Broached Thurnel', in the Skirret.

Evidence: George Oliver a Clergyman from Grimsby informs us that the Broached Thurnel was one of the original Immoveable Jewels and was used for the Entered Apprentice to learn to work upon. George Oliver (1853) *Dictionary of Symbolical Masonry* Brother Clegg in his edition of Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry says that on an inspection of an Entered Apprentice tracing board, where the Broached Thurnel is depicted, there can be seen three symbols on it: The Trestle Board, the Rough Ashlar, much as we see them depicted today, and a Cubical Stone with a pyramidal apex. Albert. C. Mackey (1873) Mackey's 'Encyclopedia of Freemasonry', Revised Edition 1929 Robert Clegg – see Ed Halpaus ante

³ Unknown: shared by Master Worshipful Brother Wayne Anderson in his Sunday Sharings (Sept 2014); and adapted for 'The Educator' by Very Worshipful Brother Norman McEvoy.

⁴ Derived from 'The Rough & Perfect Ashlar' in Lodge of Education.

⁵ Webster's Dictionary.

⁶ John Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum was an American artist and sculptor. He is most associated with his creation of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial at Mount Rushmore, South Dakota. [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gutzon_de_la_Mothe_Borglum).

⁷ Attributed to John Gutzon Borglum, Wayne Anderson in his Sunday Sharings (Sept 2014); adapted for 'The Educator' by Very Worshipful Brother Norman McEvoy; though some say Michel Angelo in respect to his sculpture of 'David'.

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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