



Nugget

Lewis

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The symbolism associated with a 'Lewis'.

Summary

A description of the Lewis and an explanation of its symbolism.

Keywords

First-Degree, Lewis, Ashlar, Tools

A Lewis

The '*Harris Manuscript*', written around 1690, defines a Lewis in a Lodge of Operative Masons as: '*One as hath served an Apprenticeship to a Mason, but it is not admitted afterwards according to the custom of making Masons*'¹, whereas, in Speculative Freemasonry, the Lewis is a Working Tool that symbolises the son of a Freemason.

In Browne's '*Master Key*',² said to be a verbatim account of part of one of Preston's Lectures³, the Lewis is defined in the following catechism:

Q. *What do we call the son of a Freemason?*

A. *A Lewis.*

Q. *What does it denote?*

A. *Strength.*

Q. *How is a Lewis depicted in Mason's Lodge?*

A. *As cramp [clamp] of metal, by which, when fixed into a stone, great and ponderous weights are raised to certain height and fixed upon their proper bases, without which, Operative Masons could not so conveniently do.'*

Q. *What is the duty of a Lewis to his aged parents?*

A. *To bear the heavy burden in the heat of the day, and help them in time of need, which, by reason of their great age, they ought to be exempted from, so as to render the close of their days happy and comfortable.*

In modern English Lodges, the Lewis is an iron clamp, shaped like an inverted keystone, or a pair of dove-tailed wedges attached to a ring. It is inserted into a specially prepared hole in the top of a piece of stone, directly above its centre of mass. When attached to a rope that is raised around a pulley hung from a tripod, it expands into the hole to grip it and so the piece of stone can be raised for positioning in the building. It was used by the Romans and mediaeval stonemasons. A Lewis known as 'St Peter's Keys' is on display in the Duomo (cathedral) in Florence, Italy. It is depicted on many Tracing Boards springing from the top of both the Rough and Perfect Ashlars.

The last part of the catechism quoted above relates to a son's duty to support and aid his parents, in particular his father, as his strength and power begin to fail in old age. This is a generally laudable wish, but it is also a reference to the fact that many sons of artisans followed their father into the same trade (reflected in surnames such as Smithson and Clarkson). Among Operative stonemasons, this was common and included being apprenticed to their Father and joining the same Lodge.

Endnotes

¹ *Harris Manuscript No. 1*, from Bedford Lodge, No. 157, London, available at: www.masonicencyclopedia.com

² *'Browne's Master Key'* in *Masonic Dictionary.com*

³ William Preston [1742-1818] originated a system of Masonic educational Lectures when Master of the Lodge of Antiquity. In his Will, he made a bequest to UGLE to pay for the writing and delivery of an annual Lecture, now known as the Prestonian Lecture.

##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.

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