



## NUGGET

### Why do we wear white gloves?

**Summary:** A short explanation of why Freemasons wear white gloves at Lodge Meetings.

Before his Initiation Ceremony, most candidates are asked to buy a pair of white gloves; though some are given them by their proposer, seconder, or by the Lodge; but no-one explains why. Maybe that is because the old practice of formally presenting an Initiate with a pair of gloves as part of the Initiation Ceremony has largely disappeared; though some Lodges still do it and in those Lodges, being asked to present them is as honour.

In fact, the wearing of gloves is a practice inherited from operative masons, who wore them to protect their hands, and were often supplied by their employers at the start of each building project; sometimes by way of a formal presentation.

The first written evidence of the presentation of white gloves in a Masonic Lodge dates back to 1559, when the minutes of the Kilwinning Lodge in Ayrshire record the presentation of a pair to Brother Donald Ian Fraser after his Initiation. So, we can presume that they were part of Masonic dress. However, by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the custom seems to have changed. Such that by now, in some Lodges, the Initiate was expected to present a pair of gloves to each of the Brethren who attended the Ceremony. Whilst in other Lodges, he was presented with two pairs of gloves, one for himself and one for his lady.

Even today, some Lodges still present a pair of white gloves to every Initiate. Their colour matches their lambskin apron, and symbolically, has the same connotations of innocence and purity. Hence in most forms of ritual, the Senior Warden, who invests the Initiate with his apron, refers to it as, *'the Badge of Innocence and the Bond of Friendship'*.

The word 'innocence' is not used in the everyday sense of not guilty or unaware or with no experience of evil. In Freemasonry, it refers to the fact that the candidate has made a positive choice to embrace what is the good and reject what is the bad. A 'purity of thought and actions'; the characteristics of a man aiming to be the best he can. Whilst the 'bond of friendship' refers to Brotherly Love, one of the three great principles of Freemasonry.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *The others being Relief and Truth.*



There are also some parallels with the outside world. White gloves, or gauntlets, used to be worn by Bishops, Archbishops and the Pope, when they celebrated Mass, or gave blessings; symbolising that their hands were 'clean'. White gloves still form part of the ceremonial uniform of High Court judges, also to signify non-corruption, and are still worn by Standard-bearers in the armed forces on ceremonial occasions as a symbol of reverence for the Regimental Standard and battle honours, and are worn by the soldiers of many nations as part of their dress uniforms.

Finally, as you put on your gloves before each Lodge meeting, you are reminded of that special day when you were Initiated.





### 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.

\*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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