



Paper

Rough and Perfect Ashlars

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The origins and symbolism associated with the Rough and Perfect Ashlars.

Keywords

Rough, Perfect, Ashlar, Operative, Speculative

Rough and Perfect Ashlars

Cutting stone to uniform shapes and sizes requires the skill and experience of a true craftsman with many years of experience. This is why, historically, only large buildings were made of ashlar (stone) rather than bricks or timber, due to the requirement for skilled craftsman who could:

- lay foundations
- lay dressed stones one atop another to great heights
- build stone arches
- sculpt and carve stone into ornamental shapes.

In the days of the operative stonemasons, Apprentice Masons cut and raised the rough ashlar from the quarry under the supervision of more experienced Fellow Crafts, and under the overall watchful eye of the Master Masons, who had proved their ability and skill to the satisfaction of their employers.

For the operative stonemasons, a rough ashlar was a rough, unprepared or undressed piece of stone. In speculative Freemasonry, the Rough Ashlar represents the Freemason before he discovers enlightenment.

For the operative stonemasons, a perfect ashlar was a uniform, smooth piece of dressed stone after it had been worked with the working tools, the gavel (hammer) and the chisel. Once dressed, it was ready for placing into the building. In speculative Freemasonry, the Perfect Ashlar is an allegory for a Freemason who, through Masonic education, works to achieve an upstanding life, and diligently strives to obtain enlightenment.

We all started our lives as Rough Ashlars. With education, cultivation and brotherly love, we are shaped into beings tried by the Square of virtue, with boundaries set by the encircling Compasses given to us by our Creator.

In the Fellow-Craft (Second) Degree, the Rough Ashlar represents a man's unrefined state and his need for improvement. He learns that the goal of being a better man includes spirituality of thought and striving for perfection of conduct. Through duties, expectations and obligations, he is charged to work toward these goals of self-improvement. The lesson to be learned is that, by means of education and the attainment of knowledge, a man improves the state of his spiritual and moral being. As the Freemason smoothes his rough edges, internally and externally, he becomes a better man and, therefore, a better Freemason.

Once a man has perfected his 'ashlar' to the best of his ability, it is his duty to help others become better men and better Freemasons.

All Rough Ashlars have within them the potential to be made into a Perfect Ashlar. The Rough Ashlar must be made of sound material and have a minimum of flaws which may cause it to weaken the building. It must be capable of being worked into a Perfect Ashlar. This is why Candidates for the Degrees are asked many questions about their qualifications and character and why they wish to become Freemasons. An imperfect stone may be made perfect, but major flaws are difficult to overcome, and when assembled into a structure, the entire structure can be weakened by improper use. This is as true of men as it is of stones.

Freemasonry has a glorious history. Admitting a flawed Rough Ashlar would bring reproach upon the Fraternity from non-Freemasons in the outside world, and therefore, these can have no place in Freemasonry.

However, let us not forget that Perfect Ashlars are not found lying about the quarry already in a perfect state. They all have to be hammered, chiselled and polished to make them perfect. There are very few Freemasons who have not been in both the rough and perfect states at some point in their lives.

Freemasons must give serious consideration to their personal responsibility to educate their Brethren towards self-improvement. Like the Good Samaritan in the Bible, it is in giving assistance to others that we will find the true jewels of enlightenment. True Master Masons not only exemplify the tenets of the Craft, but they teach what they have learned.

Lodges should carefully judge the potential of each Candidate, weighing both their character and their potential for growth.

Each Freemason is charged to extend the hand of brotherly love and affection to help their Brethren become better men, to strive to live on the Square, to stand upright with the Plumb-Rule and to take their places as men who would make their Creator proud.

The Rough and Perfect Ashlars symbolise our moral and spiritual lives. The lesson of the Ashlars applies to all men who will class themselves as Brethren, and who have a heartfelt wish to progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from darkness to light.

##END##

Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.
Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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