



martin steel

Paper

Tyler or Outer Guard

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Everything you would want to know about the Tyler.

Summary

Everything you would want to know about the Tyler; supported by evidence, example and anecdotes.

Keywords

Tyler, Outer, Guard, Sword, Lodge

The Tyler or Outer Guard

While today, the Tyler misses out on the ceremonies and Ritual in the Lodge, his office is very important and his duties in the past were much more extensive.

A French guide for Freemasons published in 1828 states: *‘Brother Tylers should always be selected from those who have the greatest knowledge and the highest rank’* and another publication from around 1750 states: *‘The greatest honour the Master can confer on a Brother is to make him Tyler, because not only are his own secrets known, but those of the Lodge are dependent on him’.*

The Reverend A. F. A. Woodford, in his *‘Kennings Masonic Cyclopaedia’* states that the word ‘tyler’ is derived from the Latin ‘teglator’, meaning a man who lays tiles. Albert Mackey’s ‘Lexicon’ states: *‘As in operative masonry, the tiler, when the edifice is erected, finishes and covers it with the roof, so, in Speculative Masonry, when the Lodge is duly organised, the Tyler closes the door, and covers the sacred precincts from all intrusion’.*

It difficult to see the link between someone who lays roof or floor tiles and a doorkeeper. Bernard E. Jones in his *‘Freemasons’ Guide and Compendium’* gives the following explanation: *‘Emblematically, a Tyler might be thought to he, or cover, his Lodge, so as to hide the interior from prying eyes, and in that sense he may ‘tile’, that is emblematically ‘roof’ the Lodge; but the simile is far-fetched and is based on an impracticable idea. It is out of the question to roof and unroof a building, and then roof it again, merely to hide it from prying eyes’.*

It does not seem likely that the name Tyler is derived from the practice of operative stonemasons, although we cannot be certain. If it is difficult to accept the Tyler as the Speculative Masons’ representative of the old time ‘helier’ or ‘roofer’, where does the name come from?

The first time we see the title ‘Tyler’ in print in England, is in the Second Edition of the Book of Constitutions of the Grand Lodge in 1738. Before this, the title used was ‘Guarder’, ‘Guard’ or ‘Outer Guard’.

A list of Lodge officers created in the 19th Century by Aberdeen Lodge lists Tylers going back to 1698. If the title was in use in 1698, this would be its earliest recorded use. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, Lodges began to appoint Tylers as doorkeepers to ensure that no non-Masons could enter the Lodge while the Ritual was being worked.

In an article published in 1921, entitled 'The Doorway to Freemasonry', William Harvey, a well-known Dundee Freemason, who wrote extensively on Masonic symbolism wrote: *'In olden Scots, the word 'tile' had a wider meaning than that of merely referring to roofing a house. To tile a thing was to cover, or hide, or keep it a secret, and in this sense, without reference whatever to the covering of the roof, it quite appropriately applies to the intention of Freemasons to guard their secrets from the uninitiated'*.

If this is correct, the most direct way for a Lodge to secure its secrets would be to keep it guarded or tiled by a 'Guarder' or 'Outer Guard' and he eventually became to be called the Tyler. I think this is as logical an explanation for calling the Outer Guard 'Tyler' as we are ever likely to get.

Another possibility, links to the fact that we know that the Tyler was responsible for preparing the Lodge by drawing the chequered pavement and Tracing Boards on the floor using chalk and charcoal. In those days, many of these floors were made of quarry tiles or slate tiles, so 'Tyler' may have started as a nickname of someone who drew on tiles, spelled with a 'y' as they did in those days.

The Tyler's Duties

As you know, In the early days of Freemasonry, the Tyler's duties included delineating the Lodge with lines of chalk on the floor as well as drawing key symbols, and he was paid a fee for this. The Minutes of Jerusalem Lodge, No. 197 show payments of two shillings and sixpence to the Tyler for 'forming' the Fellow Crafts' or Masters' Lodge. Tylers also delivered Summonses to Lodge meetings, plus any other urgent notices. Other Lodges paid the Tyler a fee for each Initiation, passing and raising ceremony performed.

Lodges gave their Tylers great discretion in refusing admission when the Tyler thought he had good grounds to do so. For example, in the 1730s, the Lodge of Probity, No. 61, instructed the Tyler *'to refuse admission to any member of the Lodge who is not clean and decently clad in clean white neck-cloth'*. There is an anecdote about a rather scruffy, dirty and smelly Mason presenting himself to the Tyler, who refused him entry. When the Mason asked why, the Tyler replied 'B. O.' to which the Mason duly replied 'A. Z.' and was admitted!

In the days when catechisms were popular and formed a large part of the our Ritual, we may reasonably assume that the Tyler would have been called into the Lodge to answer questions about his place and duties during the ceremony of opening the Lodge.

Today, the Tyler is the last Lodge Officer to be invested by a new Worshipful Master, who informs him of his duties. Other Lodges do things differently, in the Rokeby Lodge No. 6301 in Halifax, the Master summons the Tyler to the pedestal before the Lodge is opened, and hands him his sword with the words: *'You are armed with a drawn sword to keep off all cowans and Intruders to Freemasonry and to see that Candidates come properly prepared'*. Bringing the Tyler into the Lodge before it is opened and acknowledging him somehow seems preferable to letting him take his position outside the Lodge without acknowledging him.

The Tyler's Appointment and Clothing

In many Lodges, especially in London, the Tyler is paid a fee and works for several Lodges. He prepares the Lodge for meetings, guards the door during meetings and tidies the Lodge after meetings, taking the regalia and portable fittings into secure storage until the next meeting.

In Lodges where he is paid from Lodge funds, to which all members contribute, the Tyler is elected by the members, rather than appointed by the Master. (Lodge Treasurers, who managed Lodge funds, are also elected.) In Lodges where the Tyler is not paid, he is appointed by the Master. This is summed up in Rule 113 of the Book of Constitutions: *'The Tyler shall be elected on the date of election of the Master. A Lodge, however, may resolve that a subscribing member of the Lodge shall be Tyler without emolument, in which case the Master will appoint him with the other Officers'*.

In the past, it was customary to appoint a senior Brother who had fallen on hard times as Tyler, so his fee could be a form of relief. In Scotland in 1745, the Brethren of the Lodge of Scoon and Perth lamented that their Tyler, 'being a poor man', frequently attended meetings in torn clothes, and so they instructed the Treasurer to buy him a new coat, so he looked respectable whilst on duty. This desire to use the Tyler to create a good impression of Freemasonry in general developed through the 18th century, when many Lodges provided splendid uniforms for their Tylers, beyond the usual hat and coat. For example, the Tyler of the Grand Lodge of England in 1736 was dressed in a red waistcoat under a dark blue coat, trimmed with gold lace. The Lodge of Saint John, No. 279, of Leicester, resolved in 1791 that its Tyler be clothed at the expense of the Lodge in a blue coat and waistcoat and corduroy breeches, with yellow buttons, white stockings, and a three-cornered hat. And also that he be furnished with 'a hairy cap' to wear on public occasions, the latter to remain the property of the Lodge. A Lodge in Preston in the 1790s dressed its Tyler in scarlet, also with with 'a hairy cap'.

The trend seemed to affect Lodges in Scotland too. For example, the Minutes of Mary's Chapel Lodge No. 1 in 1770 record that the Tyler should be provided with *'a suite of Light Blue Clothes similar to the colour of the Lodge Ribbons, with a silver lace round the neck and cuffs; also a hat with silver lace, button and loop'*. He must have cut quite a dash in Masonic processions! In 1813, the question of the renewal of the Tyler's dress came before the Lodge and it was agreed that a blue coat and cocked hat, richly trimmed with gold lace, should be purchased for the Tyler, in time to be worn at the procession on Saint Andrew's Day. In the Lodge of Scoon and Perth, mentioned earlier, they yearned for something more distinctive for their Tyler and nothing less than the style of a 'Grand Turk' would satisfy them. The Treasurer and a committee were appointed *'to get the dress done in a masterly fashion'*, resulting in an outfit of white trousers (which were laundered from time to time at a cost of sixpence), a royal-blue velvet tunic, a light-blue vest on which was embroidered the Lodge name and number in white, a royal-blue cloak trimmed with ermine, and a feathered turban! To add to the ferocity of the Tyler's appearance a false moustache, and, later, a false beard were supplied. He was also armed with *'a sword of ample proportions'*. The result was more comic than intimidating.

The inventory of the Lodge Ancient of Dundee, dated 2 January 1812, includes a suit of Tyler's clothing, consisting of a coat, vest, kilt and bonnet. There is no mention of the tartan or style, but on 3 January 1816, a new bonnet was purchased for the Tyler. It must have been quite something, because it cost thirteen shillings.

The Tyler's Remuneration

When the Thistle Operative Lodge, No. 158 was formed in Dundee in 1758, it set up a charity fund and undertook to see deceased Brethren properly and decently buried. One of the by-laws stipulated that the Brethren were to 'attend the funeral in clean clothes' or pay a fine of sixpence. The Tyler was instructed to summon the Brethren to attend, and for this he was paid a day's wages from the Lodge. Another way of remunerating Tylers was to allow them to attend Festive Boards free of charge.

The Brethren of St David's Lodge No. 78 in Dundee, who were mainly businessmen and professionals, each contributed a shilling a year to the Tyler, who also received a recognised scale of gifts from every new member. Others gave him a dram of whisky. The Lodge accounts for 1776 include eight items of expenditure of one shilling for a bottle of punch for the Tyler.

The Symbolism of the Tyler

We have looked at the duties of the Tyler, but he also plays a symbolic role. I can do no better than to quote Brother William Harvey: *'The Tyler at the door of the Lodge armed with his sword should impress the postulant who seeks admission and when, later, that admission is gained, the Candidate should learn just what The Tyler's sword and office mean'*.

The Tyler marks the dividing line between the Lodge and the world outside. In a moral and spiritual sense, he forms a barrier between right and wrong. It is our common hope that the day will come when the light of truth shall gladden the whole earth, and our constant aim is towards the diffusion of that light. But, so long as the Light of Freemasonry is not shared in the hearts of all men, there will be a need for a Tyler with a drawn sword to guard the threshold of our beliefs and secrets.

##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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