



## Nugget

# Winding Staircase Second Degree Tracing Board

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Symbolism of the Winding Staircase and its connection with the ‘seven liberal arts and sciences’.

### **Summary**

Thoughts on the Second-Degree Tracing Board concerning the Winding Staircase and its connection with the ‘seven liberal arts and sciences’.

### **Keywords**

Second-Degree, Winding-Staircase, Seven, Arts, Sciences, Trivium, Quadrivium

## Some thoughts on the Second-Degree Tracing Board



The greatest symbol on the Second-Degree Tracing-Board is the winding staircase whose seven steps represent the seven liberal arts and sciences, as well as incorporating references to the other important masonic numbers, three and five. The seven steps symbolise the ultimate attainment of a Fellow Craft Freemason, but the steps are not independent stages, rather they are an interdependent sequence which illustrate the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in this world.

The first step is 'Grammar' which relates to the ordering of words and is the foundation of language. This enables us to communicate and converse with our fellow men and to broaden and increase our knowledge. But words alone are not enough they must carry conviction and argument, and hence the second step represents 'Rhetoric', the art of speaking fluently. Fluency by itself, however, is nothing unless it is guided by the third step, 'Logic' without which words are merely an empty senseless flow of sound. In operative times the acquisition of these three steps of knowledge made a man literate and they were given the Latin name 'Trivium'. Thus Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic make us literate.

**Second-Degree Tracing Board by John Harris c,1825  
Courtesy of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry**

The next step is 'Arithmetic' which is the science of numbers. Understanding number sequences enables us to measure and estimate and compare quantities; it is the necessary forerunner to the step of 'Geometry'. This fifth step is the predominant number of the degree and is central to the entire structure of Freemasonry which is based on the conception of a perfect geometric building, King Solomon's Temple. Geometry has been described as the science of harmony in space, and its laws apply to both the minute world of atomic physics and the vast world of the astronomic universe.

Then we encounter the step known as 'Music' which in this context does not mean making up nice tunes, but is the application of geometry to sound. Every note in the musical scale is exactly double the wavelength of the corresponding note in the preceding octave, and each note in the scale is a logarithmic progression. Music moves in measured steps and cannot free itself from this geometry without becoming discordant. In operative times, the entire cosmos was conceived as a series of spheres each one of which moved in harmony with those within and without it. These spheres all gave of a musical note which was in perfect harmony with the others; the 'Music of the Spheres'.

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This brings us to the final step, that of 'Astronomy' by which we are able to contemplate the wonder and awesome magnitude of the Heavens. We begin to appreciate the massive task of trying to understand infinity with our finite human minds and thus begin to acquire a sense of awe at the wonder of creation.

In operative times, the four final steps of the winding staircase were given the Latin name of the 'Quadrivium'. By acquiring knowledge of these steps, a man progressed beyond being literate to being fully educated. These final steps therefore assist us to put the whole of our lives into an enlightened perspective and assist us to expand horizons. More than that, they also assist us to 'estimate the wonderful works of the Almighty', and in this context 'estimate' has nothing to do with working out prices and quantities, but rather bears its old meaning of 'esteem and reverence'. The seven steps are thus, crucial to understanding the vast wonder of creation and to start the task of realising our own place in that created order.

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##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.

**For further nuggets and other learning materials visit 'Solomon' at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>**

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