



PAPER

The Broken Column According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: An explanation of the symbolism behind the Broken Column Brooch.

Fred and Charlie huddled by the rugby touch line. Fred (a once quite useful No 8) having been given two tickets for the local Cup game, had invited Charlie, a soccer fan, to join him. A lively scrum close by suddenly erupted into 'handbags', then fists. Then the whistle mercifully blew for full time, and the smiter and the smitten immediately stopped their fisticuffs and amiably jogged off together for their communal bath and beer.

Amid the clubhouse chatter Fred carried to two foaming pints to Charlie's table.

'Enjoy the game?' invited Fred.

Charlie paused, *'I once thought that the definition of a gentleman was a chap who knew how to play the bagpipes, but didn't.'*

'And now?' queried a cautious Fred.

'I now know it's a man who might never kick a dog, but on a rugby, pitch can happily maim his best mate for life, and then insist on buying the first round', quipped Charlie. *'Yes, it was a good game, most enjoyable'*, he added quickly and courteously, suddenly remembering he was a guest.

Just then one of the afternoon's warriors hobbled past with his arm in a sling.

'That reminds me', said Charlie *'While I was acting as steward at our Widow's lunch last week two of the ladies were wearing a brooch featuring a broken column. Seemed to be Masonic, but new to me! Know anything about it, Fred?'*

'Those brooches normally depict an upright and shattered column with its Corinthian capital lying alongside. Many Lodges presented them to a Lodge Widow when their partner's life had been cut dramatically short. It was often given at an informal little ceremony in praise of her partner's contribution to Masonry or his community. They often added a scroll with a suitable Biblical reading or poem.'

'But why a broken column, Fred? What's that got to do with Speculative Masonry or sudden death for that matter?'

'Let's see what you remember about those Three Pillars, Charlie?'

'Well, I know the three great Columns in Masonic history were known as Wisdom (Ionic), Strength (Doric) and Beauty (Corinthian).'

'Good. And who did they relate to?'

'The pillar of Wisdom was identified with Solomon, Strength with Hiram of Tyre and Beauty with Hiram Abiff.'

'I shouldn't think even Hiram Abiff's mother considered him beautiful, so why pick Hiram?'

'You're testing me Fred. I seem to remember you saying that in 1 Kings:7, there were over 40 verses describing all the beautiful things that Hiram made to ornament a certain Temple, so it would seem only appropriate that his name should become associated with the pillar of beauty.'

'I'm glad someone listens to my talks in Lol, Charlie. As we relate in the Third Degree History, Hiram Abiff's task constructing King Solomon's Temple couldn't be completed because of his untimely death. So, symbolically, this failure was shown by breaking the Pillar of Beauty into two.'

'Seems obvious, really', mused Charlie.

After a long sip and a pause Fred continued. *'There was then a far wider use of the phrase Broken Column to represent all untimely Masonic deaths. It originated in America in the 19th century and was credited to a highly respected American Masonic historian, Bro. Jeremy L. Cross of New York. He was looking for a Masonic Symbol to use in a new Order that he was writing. Wandering around a churchyard, he found a memorial stone dedicated to a distinguished Civil War naval hero (Commodore Lawrence), victor of a famous battle between the frigates Shannon and the Chesapeake in 1813. Owing to the ravages of time all that remained of that great man's memorial was one supporting column, broken off at the base.*

This put him in mind of some verses from the Old Testament,

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do (Psalm 11:3)

and ...her (Egypt's) columns are broken down (Isaiah 19:10)

It reminded him that the pillar's symbolism was much older. In Hebrew culture, a prince or ruler was portrayed as a pillar of the State; we still use the phrase 'pillar of the community' today. A ruler whose life had been cut-short in its prime would therefore be depicted not as a whole pillar but as a broken one. When he was buried, a broken column was placed on his tomb as an indication that, although his life had been spent in supporting all that was good and just in his realm, his role as a pillar of the state had been severed or broken prematurely. Bro. Cross recognised how very apt this would be for Hiram Abiff and for over 200 years the phrase has been in use as a simple allusion to Hiram Abiff and also more broadly to all things Masonic.'

'That's my daily advancement in Masonic knowledge', muttered Charlie.

Fred smiled. *'Interestingly you can often see a Broken Column used well outside Freemasonry heading a list of obituaries in a local paper or national magazine. So, Charlie, next time you see a brooch depicting a broken column, enquire about it very gently from its owner. She may recount a very poignant story... and you will almost certainly have given her great comfort in knowing that her husband's memory is still alive and he has not forgotten.'*



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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

*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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Fred and Charlie character drawings courtesy of Eddie Wildman.

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