



## PAPER

### Wands and stuff According to Fred & Charlie



**Summary:** An explanation of the significance and symbolism of wands in our Ceremonies.

Saturday morning. Dispatched by domestically busy partners to do the weekly shop Fred and Charlie's grossly over-loaded trolleys met head-on in the aisle of their local supermarket.

By now thoroughly disenchanted with their shopping experience, they muttered a mutual 'Coffee?' and set off for the cafe queue.

*'How's your Nipper?'*

Asked a solicitous Fred when they were seated at the sunniest table.

*'Smashing.'*

Responded a delighted Charlie, promptly producing the stream of 'Proud-Dad' photos on his phone.

As his coffee cooled, Fred realised far too late that it had been the wrong question.

He recovered the situation with a slow 'would you believe it' at the next picture, a brace of 'wows' at the one after, then an, oh so very casual...

*'By the way, I gather Sammy's ill and you're stepping in as Junior Deacon for our 'First'. How do you feel about it?'*

Charlie's facial expression might have persuaded a casual passer-by that he had just sucked an unripe lemon. Fred however, recognised it as the early signs of a Masonic Steward's first-night nerves, when invited to contemplate his first venture on to the major stage.

*'I know most of the words' Charlie admitted; 'but it's all that foot work... The Candidate will be relying on me, and I mustn't let him down.'*

*'True.'* Smiled Fred.

*'But a couple of brisk rehearsals will sort the footwork out. Believe me, the DC will make sure you're in the right place at the right time on the night... or else.'*



*'It's all the business with the wands, too, Fred. Why do the Deacons carry wands anyway? They get in the way and don't play any obvious part in our rituals.'*

Fred inadvertently glanced at his, by now empty, cup. Charlie was swiftly back with two steaming replacements.

*'Thanks Charlie, that was a good question. It might help if we took a look at its origin. The wand has a surprisingly long history. I believe they were even depicted in Neolithic cave paintings. In essence a wand (alias - a staff of office, a mayor's mace, a conductor's baton or the Queen's sceptre) is simply a symbol of the power of the person who wields it.'*

*'Does a Deacon actually have real power then in a Lodge?'* Whistled Charlie.

*'Sadly, no.'* Laughed Fred.

*'When it is impracticable for the dignitary to carry it, then a junior official is detailed to bear it on his or her behalf. In Freemasonry, the Deacon's wand represents the authority of his Warden who is a ruler of the Lodge. That's why the wand has to be treated with the utmost respect and decorum at all times the Lodge is open. It reminds members of their rulers' authority.'*

*'But who carries the Master's wand of authority?'* Charlie wondered.

*'Another good question'* said Fred.

*'In effect it is the Director of Ceremonies or his proxy. He is placed near to the Worshipful Master and, as he goes about the Lodge directing the Ceremony on the Master's behalf, he carries his wand or baton to remind his Brethren that the wand represents not his but the Master's authority to issue orders. Always remember, the Worshipful Master apart, all Masons are equal.'*

After a long and thoughtful pause Charlie enquired:

*'Is there a proper or approved way to carry the wand, Fred?'*

*'There is nothing mandatory spelt out in the Emulation Ritual Charlie, but the Grand Lodge team have informally offered some useful practical advice. During the ceremonies of Initiation, Passing and Raising when on the move the butt of the wand should be upright and held just a few inches above the floor. When stationary the butt should actually rest on the floor of the Lodge. Never ever lean on the wand for support. You normally carry it in your right hand and keep it perfectly upright. Obviously during Prayers and Obligations the ritual may require you to change that.'*

*'There is no one correct method of holding the wand, by the way. Some hold it vertically with the butt of the wand resting on the ground and the forearm almost horizontal. It can then be held lightly between the thumb and forefinger and with the remaining fingers of the right-hand steadying it. When on the move you need only just bend your elbow. However, most Lodges have evolved their own tradition and if it looks smart, dignified, uniform and stress-free then there seems little point in arguing the toss.'*

*'Sometimes the Deacons move round the Lodge room without wands. Why's that, Fred?'*

*'If the Deacon is carrying out work directly for the Worshipful Master, say, when signing the Secretary's Minute Book, then he doesn't need to carry his Warden's symbol of authority with him. He has the Master's authority. Seems clear enough, Charlie.'*

*'But what about prayers and stuff?'* said Charlie.

*'Why do we cross wands? Is it like swords at a military wedding?'*

Fred laughed.

*'Not quite, Charlie, although there is a faint connection. There are occasions, during prayer or Obligation for example, when Deacons are required to cross their Wands over a Candidate's head. It comes from old Jewish and Catholic customs. During a Blessing or Induction, a protective shawl or canopy is held over the subject's head by means of poles or wands. Those swords, I suppose, indicate the congregation's protection. In Freemasonry we then hold the wands in the left hand to leave the right arm free for the appropriate reverential or penal sign. It has been the tradition in many Lodges for the Senior Deacon's wand to be to the east of the pair, although I have never read that this has any ritual significance apart from suggesting the Senior Warden's higher status.'*

Charlie enquired thoughtfully:

*'Given the importance of the right angle in Freemasonry – the Deacon's feet at right angles and so on, should the Deacons' wands make a ninety-degree cross? They would then also form a second right angled triangle down through the Candidate with the base running along the floor below the Candidate's cushion.'*

Fred paused for a moment.

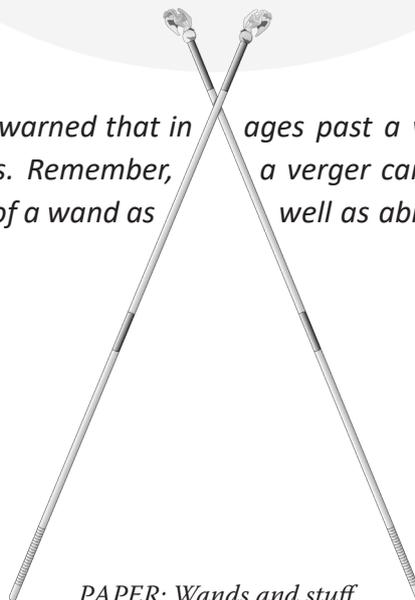
*'Clever. Hadn't thought of that... you're not just a pretty face. Mind you, holding two long wands at right angles is very hard on the wrists, the wands might soon start to waver. Neat in theory but not in practise. My advice, make an angle that looks the part and one that you can hold steady.'*

They sat in companionable silence.

Eventually Fred mused:

*'When you're holding that wand, be warned that in special spiritual and esoteric powers. Remember, priest and most magicians make use of a wand as how you use it, Charlie!'*

*ages past a wand was also be believed to denote a verger carries a wand in procession ahead of a well as abracadabra in their spells. So be careful*





Fred took out a page from his little Preceptor's Pocketbook (constantly carried as it contained useful names and numbers).

*'Here's one for you, how long is a wand?'*

Charlie began:

*'It all depends... they seem anywhere between five and six feet.'*

Fred laughed.

*'Trick question. A wand was so important it became the basis of a pre-Norman system of measurement before they adopted the yard. It was about a metre and represented the distance from the breast bone to the finger-tip, a bit like the Jewish cubit.'*<sup>1</sup>

Fred added mischievously:

*'Who said that there was no longer any daily advancement in Masonic knowledge, eh?'*

Charlie suddenly glanced at his watch.

*'Holy cow. See the time? I'm for it... better grab a bunch of flowers on the way out. See you, Fred!'*



## Endnotes

1. Fred's Useful measurements: taken from his 'Preceptors Book'.

Measure:	Approximate Equivalence:
1 Digit	width of the long finger
10 Digits    1 Span	tip of thumb to tip of little finger
5 Spans     1 Wand	1 yard (approx.)
2 Wands    1 Fathom	2 yards
10 Fathoms 1 Chain	22 yards
10 Chains   1 Furlong	220 yards
10 Furlongs	1 nautical mile

## 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

\*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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