



## Nugget

### The Skirret

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An exploration of the tool known as a 'Skirret'.

**Summary**

An exploration of the origins, usage, and symbolism associated with the 'Skirret'; one of the tools of a Master Mason.

**Keywords**

Third-Degree, Skirret, Operative, Geometry, Tool

## The Skirret

At first view the Skirret might appear the 'Orphan Annie' of the working tools in Craft Masonry. It is the only one of nine working tools that is not shown on your Grand Lodge Certificate and the explanation of its use is somewhat terse and ambiguous, *'The Skirret is an implement which acts on a centre pin, whence a line is drawn to mark out ground for the foundation of the intended structure. It points out that straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for our pursuit in the Volume of Sacred Law'*.

Even the origin of the word 'Skirret' is shrouded in mystery; the earliest known Masonic text mentioning this working tool by name is dated 1825, which may explain its absence from the Grand Lodge Certificate as the current design of the 'Pillars Certificate' dates from 1819.

It has even been suggested that, as a name for a working tool, the word is a Masonic invention. Nevertheless, as we shall see, our Operative forebears certainly used a system corresponding to the Skirret in the task of laying out the foundations of buildings.

It is just a holder for a length of string which can be drawn out to mark a straight line? In fact, the key to understanding its mode of action lies in the phrase 'centre-pin'.

When the foundations of a large building such as a church or cathedral were laid it was essential to get the proportions correct and to ensure that right-angles were right-angles; no easy task at ground level. It was here that a cord or chain and a centre-pin were so essential.

Firstly, a line would be drawn to mark the axis of the building often running due East and West in the case of ecclesiastical structures. The pin would then be inserted into the ground at a point on this line and, using the pin and cord as a gigantic pair of compasses, a circle of appropriate size would be marked out, perhaps by a series of pegs.

Next the centre-pin would be inserted at one of the two points where the circle crossed the original line and a second circle would be marked out.

This resulted in two overlapping and intersecting circles, the circumference of each passing through the centre of the other. A line drawn through the two points where the circles intersected would be exactly at right-angles to the first.

If the process is continued along the lines, eventually the site would be accurately divided into squares, oblongs and other geometrical shapes according to the Architects plans or designs. It is easy to see how the now ruined Glastonbury Abbey and the other buildings in its grounds would have been set out by use of this geometrical system and given its place in sacred architecture, it is not surprising that the image of two intersecting circles became a sacred symbol.

But what relevance does the Skirret have to those of us who seek to apply the symbolism of the working tools of the Craft to our thoughts, actions and indeed our whole lives?

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In many ways the Skirret was the most central and important of the working tools of the Operative Masons as it was by application of this implement that the building changed from a mere idea into the reality of the foundation from which the final edifice would rise in all its glory.

It was the first tool to be used in the actual task of building.

In this sense, we often reach points in our lives when we need to carry our intentions into positive and practical action, and we all know people who are full of grandiose schemes but who are remarkably inept in carrying any of them to fruition. An important lesson that we learn in Masonry is to translate our charitable intentions into practical action, not just in giving alms but in actively serving a Brother, Friend or the wider community in time of need.

In this sense some Brethren talk of the spirituality of Masonry, but the word spirituality is not easy to define; perhaps it is the act of using our inner resources of peace, love and compassion for the benefit of ourselves and others.

The place that Solomon made to worship in is not built of earth and water and stone, but of intention and wisdom and mystical conversation and compassionate action.

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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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