

## **THE SQUARE, THE LEVEL AND THE PLUMB RULE**

**An Address Given by WBro John Glew, PDistGDC,  
Junior Warden, Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305  
At the Regular Meeting Held on Monday, 7 May 2007**

Brethren, my lecture this evening is entitled *The Square, The Level and The Plumb Rule*. The idea of this subject came to me a few months back whilst carrying out my duties as Director of Ceremonies in my Mother Lodge.

Under instruction from the Master, I was preparing the lodge in readiness for a brother to deliver the explanation of the first degree tracing board. Apart from setting up Jacob's ladder on the Volume of the Sacred Law and exposing the circle and parallel lines on the pedestal (as in the Services Lodge of Hawke's Bay No 313, we have a Union Jack covering it), I also laid out the Second Degree Working Tools.

They were, as the lecture explains, on this occasion being displayed as the three movable jewels of the Lodge. The Square as worn by the Worshipful Master, the Level as worn by the Senior Warden and the Plumb Rule as worn by the Junior Warden and transferred to their successors at the annual installation of the Lodge.

Now this started me thinking as to how many different representations these three items have within our ritual. We are taught in the First Degree not only that they represent the three Movable Jewels, as I have already explained, but we are also told immediately after our first obligation that the Square is one of the three great emblematical lights of Freemasonry and is to regulate our actions.

Moving on to the Second Degree and where the lodge is opened and where candidates are received on the square, which is also, of course, one of the working tools of that degree. Therein we are taught of their operative uses, the Square to try and assist in bringing the rude material into due form, the Level to lay levels and to prove horizontals and the Plumb Rule to try and to adjust uprights whilst fixing them on their proper bases. Also of their speculative meaning to us as Freemasons with the Square representing morality, the Level equality and the Plumb Rule uprightness.

A similar explanation is also given to the Master and his Wardens as they are invested with their respective jewels during the lodge's installation ceremony. Here the Master is told his jewel, the Square, points out the high and dignified position he holds within the craft and calls upon him to practice all those moral virtues which constitute a good man and a true Freemason, the Senior Warden is told his jewel, the Level, is the emblem of equality and points out the just and equal measures he should pursue in assisting the master in ruling and directing the lodge, whilst the Junior Warden is told that his jewel, the Plumb Rule, the emblem of uprightness and integrity, points out the just and upright measures he should use in assisting the Senior Warden and the Master in carrying out their duties.

Then I started thinking, why do these tools have these moral significations? So I went searching for some explanations and came up with the following: -

I first went to the Oxford Dictionary and looked up "square". Apart from the obvious, a geometrical figure of four equal sides and an instrument for measuring and testing various angles, there were also a couple of interesting and appropriate entries. Firstly "on the square" - where the explanation

was given as “honesty or genuineness”. Secondly “be on the square” - meaning “to be a freemason”. This one jumped off the page at me a bit as it means, as we all know, that freemasons are honest and genuine men.

Moving on to the “level”, there were the obvious horizontal plane or instrument for checking horizontals, but also entries about being on the same level (i.e. being equal) and also at the same level or even equable or uniform.

Moving on to the “plumb rule”, whilst there was no direct entry under that word under the word “plumb”, meaning “upright or perpendicular”, there was an entry referring to a plumb rule being a mason's plumb line attached to a board.

Next I went looking for synonyms in the thesaurus. Here, under “square”, were words like “honest, fair, just, upright and ethical”, under “level”, words such as “equal, equable, sensible, well balanced and even”, whilst under “plumb”, I found “upright, erect and straight”. I must admit there were also a number of other words under the same titles not applicable to tonight's subject.

Applying a more modern approach, I next went searching on *Google* under “square”, “level” and “plumb rule” and bought up many thousands of entries, but by adding the word “Masonic” to each, the field was narrowed down considerably. There I found a site that had the following, and I quote:-

#### *The Square*

*The Square is the symbol of morality, truthfulness and honesty. The direction of the two sides of the square form an angle of 90 degrees or a right angle, so called because this is the angle, which stones must have if they are to be used to build a stable and upright wall. It symbolizes accuracy, not even varying by a single degree. When we part on the square, we go in different directions, but in the full knowledge that our courses in life will be going according to the angle of the Square (which means in the right direction) until we meet again.*

#### *The Level*

*The Level is a symbol of equality. We do not mean equality in wealth, social distinction, civic office, or service to mankind, but rather, we refer to the internal, and not the external, qualifications. Each person is endowed with a worth and dignity which is spiritual, and should not be subject to man made distinctions. Masonry recognizes that one man may have greater potential in life, service, or reward, than another, but we also believe that any man can aspire to any height, no matter how great. Thus the level dignifies labour and the man who performs it. It also acknowledges that all men are equal with out regard to station. The Level also symbolizes the passage of time.*

#### *The Plumb Rule*

*The Plumb Rule is a symbol of uprightness of conduct. In Freemasonry, it is also associated with the plumb line which the Lord promised Amos he would set in the middle of His people, Israel, symbolizing Gods standard of divine righteousness. The plumb line in the midst of a people should mean that they would be judged by their own sense of right and wrong, and not by the standards of others. By understanding the Plumb Rule, a Mason is to judge a brother by his own standards and not those of others. When the Plumb Rule is thought of in this way, it becomes a symbol of an upright life and has the conscience by which each must person live. This idea is closely tied to the concept of justice. For in truth justice is giving another man his due. Unquote.*

This is only a small part of what I found on this subject under these headings, but at the risk of repeating myself, or becoming boring, I now thank you for your attention this evening. If there are any questions I shall endeavour to answer them to the best of my ability.