

## Baal Bridge Square - Limerick

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In 1830 in Limerick in Ireland a builder's square was found by a Freemason that appeared to confirm the operative masons' influence upon the development of Freemasonry, whilst also providing evidence of the antiquity of Irish operative masons. So is this story genuine or is it another case of a bit of 19<sup>th</sup> Century masonic inventiveness?



In the town of Limerick the *English Town* was connected to the *Irish Town* by an old structure dating from at least the late 1400' – early 1500's. The bridge consisted of four masonry arches spanning the Abbey River and connecting the old part of Limerick Town, situated on King's Island, with the newer part of town. The bridge is depicted in maps of Limerick from the 1500's, although the date of the erection of the original ancient structure is unknown.

In 1830 the old ancient 4 arch bridge was replaced by a single arch structure, a simple bridge design that displays a high standard of stone workmanship, with stepped conical coping and curved abutment walls. The architects were J.A & G.R. Pain and the contractor was a Mr Williams of the New Limerick Navigation Company.



During the course of demolishing the old bridge an old metal square was found. As James Pain, architect and Freemason, wrote in 1870, "...I beg to say I have a perfect recollection of the Square being found and given to me by the workmen – and I think I gave the Square to the late Brother Michael Furnell who I recollect thought much of it..."

In correspondence dating from August 1875 Bro Pain wrote, "...I was standing on the foundation of the Old Bridge, overseeing some labourers I had on the work. One of the labourers came to me: "See, Sir, what we have found among the stones of the Bridge we are taking up"..."

In February 1871 Bro Fredrick Furnell, son of Bro Michael Furnell, wrote that, "...How it got imbedded in the masonry of this old bridge no one can tell. I can only account that...some worthy Mason put it in the place where it was found..." The square apparently passed through the hands of the Furnell family until Capt. Furnell, a member of Irish Lodge no 13 presented the Old Square to the Lodge, neatly framed with a sketch of the original bridge, and with a small red square showing the location where the square was originally found.

This old square is still to this day carefully treasured by the members of Irish Antient Union Masonic Lodge No. 13. The reason for all the fuss about the square is that it is engraved with the date 1507 or 1517, but is so disfigured that the numerals are hard to make out. However what is clearly visible on this square is the engraved inscription on both sides that reads,

***"I will strive to live with love and care,  
Upon the level, by the square"***

So are you convinced that with one swoop this old square gives Irish Freemasonry an ancient antiquity as old as any of the Scottish evidence, and also confirms that medieval masons did reflect and speculate upon their working tools? (Ref – *The Builder Magazine* – January 1930 – Vol. XVI – No. 1)

