

## The letter G with Compasses and Square

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One of the most readily identifiable symbols of Freemasonry throughout much of the world is the compass and set-square motif with the letter "G" in the centre. The square and compasses has come to represent the world-wide fraternity of Freemasons. Whilst in all Victorian Masonic Lodges the letter "G" hangs prominently above the centre of the chequered pavement, directly over the blazing star.

Freemasons are informed that the letter "G" denotes God. The letter "G" is used so as to avoid any representation of a specific deity, whilst in some countries of the world the letter "G" is substituted for the first letter of the word for God in their language.

However we know from the old charges and fragments of ritual from the early days of speculative Freemasonry that the letter "G" represented the science of geometry.

The *Wilkinson MS*:-

**Q.** What is the Centre of your Lodge?

**A.** The Letter G.

**Q.** What does it signify?

**A.** Geometry

*Prichard's Masonry Dissected*:-

**Q.** Are you a Fellow-Craft? **A.** I am.

**Q.** Why was you made a fellow-Craft? **A.** For the sake of the letter G.

**Q.** What does that G denote? **A.** Geometry or the fifth Science.

The importance of Geometry is stressed in the early rituals with the letter G, from earliest records, denoting the science of geometry. However by the mid 1700's the letter G had acquired a dual meaning representing both geometry and God. Over time the G has come to represent God – the Great Architect of the Universe.

Interestingly, the first time the compass and set-square motif, with the letter "G" in it's the centre, appeared in print was in the ornamental margins of the 1525 Strasbourg edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*. Ptolemy was a second century Greek astronomer, mathematician and geographer.

The inclusion of this particular square and compass motif was the work of the Strasbourg printer of the text, Hans Reinhard, who had employed these symbols as illustrations in previous publications, but never before in this configuration. Was the use of this symbol just the chance work of an anonymous artist who just happened to combine the letter "G", square and compasses in the one emblem? Or was it an emblem that already existed in either operative stone-masonry or early speculative Freemasonry?

How did an emblem of geometry, published for the first time in a 16<sup>th</sup> Century German reprint of a geography book, come to be a universally recognisable symbol for the Fraternity of Freemasons?



**References:** 1) 'The Letter G' - by Bro Harry Carr, AQC Vol. 76, 1963

2) A Masonic Emblem in 1522 – by Bro Chris Impens, AQC Vol. 115, 2003

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