



## *The Overy Papers*

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### **Fraternal Greetings Brethren**

The public generally recognizes us as Freemasons when they see us wearing our very distinctive Masonic Apron. This often leads them to wonder why we wear them and what they are supposed to symbolize.

In fact it is possible that many Masons have only a sketchy idea of the history of our Masonic Aprons. We all know well the reading that is given to the new entered apprentice that explains the importance of the Lamb Skin to our new brother and how we must never disgrace it, or we will disgrace ourselves. But where did it come from and what made it such an important badge of our fraternity.

There can be no doubt that the Masonic Apron originated from the apron worn by operative masons. Their aprons were usually made from sheepskin and it covered them from their neck to their ankles and had a neck-band and leather straps that went round the waist and were tied at the front. Today a woven apron of this style is still used by modern operative masons.

The Apron was an important "Badge" from the inception of Modern Speculative Freemasonry in 1717. These early aprons were also large and made from sheepskin and covered a man from his chest to his ankles.

By the middle of the 1700's the apron had changed to a more convenient size starting from the waist but it was still knee length but the heavy leather had given way to softer fabrics such as silk, or linen. The triangular flap was added about this time and ribbons or strings displaced the leather straps. The flap often had a button hole at the apex to secure the apron to a coat or waistcoat. It shows that the fashion of the day dictated the developing design of the Apron. In those early days it was usual to decorate the

Masonic aprons with symbolic designs such as the All-Seeing Eye, the Columns, and the Square and Compasses.

As the 1800s arrived the apron was reduced in size once more but there was still considerable laxity with the design and no definition was laid down as to uniformity.

So long as the material was white the face could be decorated with any number of Masonic symbols provided that it did not interfere with the privileges of the Grand Officers and quite often each mason would invent his own apron design if he wanted to.

It was in 1814 that the United Grand Lodge at last issued a decree to provide the Uniformity of the apron.

**The Entered Apprentice** wore a plain white lamb skin 16 inches by 12 inches, square at bottom, with white strings and no ornaments.

**Fellow Craft** wore the same apron as the entered apprentice but with two sky-blue rosettes at the bottom corners.

The **Master Mason** wore the same white lamb skin apron but with sky-blue lining and 1 1/2 inch deep blue edging. An additional rosette was added on the flap. No other colour or ornament were allowed except to officers and past officers of the lodges, who, may have the emblems of their offices, in silver or white, in the centre of the apron.

It can be seen that very little has changed in the last 150 years.

A very simple form of **Tassle** appeared in the early designs of the aprons and it is thought to represent the waist-strings that originally were tied at the front and hung down the front of the apron. When they changed to silver tassels is not known but they were officially introduced in 1841.

The origin of **rosettes** is unknown but in England they were officially added in 1815 to differentiate between the Fellow Craft and Master Mason The rosette is a very early design and it is generally thought to be purely decorative.

### **Should we wear it inside or outside of the jacket?**

This question has been around for many years and fashion has often dictated the answer. The wearing of uniforms, full evening dress, or double breasted suits or even on different occasions such as a funeral has often changed the rules. Some lodges even had standard aprons and formal aprons that be used at special occasions.

Our Grand Lodge has never enshrined in its Constitutions any rule and regulation as to the proper way to wear the Masonic Apron and the question of whether to wear it inside or outside the jacket has been left to the individual lodges as long as the Apron is visible.

As we all know brethren in lodge must wear an apron but there is one exception. If you are a Scottish Piper, properly clad in full dress, with kilts and sporran, you do not require to wear a Masonic apron while working in a Masonic Lodge as the Sporran is considered the Apron of his office.

Finally the apron holds precedence in Masonic symbolism and above all others is the distinguishing badge of a Mason and we should always wear it with pride.

It reminds us of the moral teachings of our Craft, and it is our duty to always try to live up to it.

It is a highly-visible symbol of what each of us should try to be - an upright man of solid and spotless character.

And finally, it is the initial gift of Freemasonry to a candidate, and at the end of life's pilgrimage it is often reverently placed on his mortal remains and buried with his body on his journey to the Grand Lodge above.

Thank you for listening and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

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