

THE OLD CUSTOM OF "DRAWING THE LODGE"

By Norman B. Spencer, 27 June, 1929

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In reading the histories and extracts from the Minute Books of old Lodges, which existed between the years 1717 and 1813, we frequently come across expressions "Drawing the Lodge," "Framing the Lodge," or "Forming the Lodge." My purpose this evening is to enquire into the meaning of these expressions and to show how, from this old custom, the modern Tracing Boards with which everyone is familiar have arisen.

In those days a Lodge generally met at some well-known inn or hostelry. The furnishings of such a place were very bare and plain. There was no electric light or gas, candles being the only illuminant in those days, while the floor was bare boards, carpets being unknown. Down the middle of the Lodge room were tables set on trestles. On these tables were set out the bowls of steaming punch, bottles of wine, rum, brandy, sugar, lemons, and glasses, and also screws of tobacco for the smokers; for it must be remembered that smoking and drinking were allowed in the Lodge during the ceremonies in those days. Toasts were drunk and songs sung between different portions of the ceremonies, the Brethren sitting at the tables and the candidate passing round behind them.

The floor of the Lodge room, being bare boards, was sprinkled with sand. When, however, there was an initiation, a space in front of the Master's Pedestal was swept clear of sand. On this clear space it was the Tyler's duty to draw with chalk and charcoal a design in the form of an oblong square representing a building, with various Masonic Emblems. The chief items so delineated were the two Columns, Seven Steps, Tesselated Pavement, Dormer or Window, Laced Tuft, Flaming Star with the Sacred Letter "G," the Square, Plumb Rule, and Level. (The drawing is considered by some to have been a representation of the ground plan of King Solomon's Temple, whilst others deem it to have represented the form of the Lodge.) These were all carefully drawn in black and white, the floor being previously whitened to form a suitable background. These Masonic Symbols and Emblems were then carefully explained to the candidate. This was evidently found to be the best way to impress on the !

candidate's mind and memory the great lessons and symbolism of Freemasonry. After they had been carefully explained, the candidate was handed a mop and pail of water and compelled to wash out the "Drawing on the floor", that no cowan or intruder might learn any of their ceremonies. In some Lodges, such as the Old Dundee Lodge, portions of the ceremonies, including "Drawing the Lodge," were carried out in a small room opening off the main Lodge room and known as the "Making Room." The drawing on the floor appears to have been a very important part of the ceremony and a Lodge could not legally be held to initiate a candidate without it. It was a much greater part of the ceremony in a Lodge working under the "Modern" Grand Lodge than in one working under "The Ancient." In the quarrels between the two Grand Lodges the "Ancients" make frequent gibes at the "Moderns" custom of "Drawing the Lodge." Bro. Laurence Dermott, the Grand Secretary of the "Ancients," in the instruct!

ion to the "Ahiman Rezon" of 1764, referring to the "Moderns," writes, or twelve shillings for drawing two sign posts with chalk, etc.: and writing Jamaica Rum upon one and Barbadoes Rum upon the other, and all

this, I suppose for no other purpose than to distinguish where the liquors are to be placed in the Lodge."

There are two main sources from which we get our information regarding this old custom—the minutes of the old Lodges which were working in the 18th century, and the exposures and spurious rituals, of which there were a number published during that time. From the minutes of the old Lodges we find that it was the Tyler's work to draw the Lodge on the floor. Thus in the minutes of the Old Dundee Lodge, No. 18, one of the oldest London Lodges, we have the following: "1795, August 13th, paid Bro. Geo. Mills, (Tyler) for 'framing and forming the Lodge,' 2/6"; "1799, August 8th. paid Bro. Mills (Tyler) for 'forming 6 Lodge,' 15/," and in the minutes of the Grenadiers Lodge, "1763, November 14th, 'Agreed by this Lodge that Bro. Lister be a free member for drawing the Lodges except no Making or Raising in the quarter then he is under obligation to pay.'" According to the minutes of the Shakespear Lodge, a whiting box and penknife were bought on Jan. 26th, 1774, for the sum of £1/1 1/6, evidently for the Tyler in his work of drawing the Lodge. It seems to have been the custom to pay the Tyler for drawing the Lodge. This was known as the "Tyler's fee," and was quite apart from the amount he received for performing the usual duties of Tyling. This fee was usually paid by the candidate directly to the Treasurer and paid over by him to the Tyler. In a few of the old Lodges this payment by the candidate to the Tyler has been continued to the present day, though the services for which the payment was originally made have long ago ceased to be performed. The "Tyler's fee" in different Lodges varied from 6d. to 2/6. In the Old Dundee Lodge the amount was originally 6d. It was raised to 1/6 in 1771 and to 2.6 in 1795. It was 2/6 in the Lodge of Felicity in 1738 and also in the Old Kings Arms Lodge, No. 28, in 1752.

There are many references to the custom in the exposures and spurious Rituals published during the 18th century. The following two seem to be the most interesting. The first is from an exposure dated 1762 and known as Jachin and Boaz, and is as follows:- "The candidate is also learnt the step, or how to advance to the Master upon the drawing on the floor, which in some Lodges resembles the Grand Building termed a Mosaic Palace (Pavement?), and is described with the utmost exactness. They also draw other figures, one of which is called the Laced Tuft, and the other The Throne beset with Stars. There is also represented a perpendicular line in the form of a Mason's instrument, commonly called the Plumb Line; and another figure which represents the Tomb of Hiram, the first Grand Master, who has been dead almost three thousand years. These are all explained to him in the most accurate manner, and the ornaments or Emblems of the Order are described with great facility. The ceremony being now ended, the new-made member is now obliged to take a mop out of a pail of water brought for that purpose and rub out the drawing on the floor, if it is done with chalk or charcoal."

The following is an extract from "The Three Distinct Knocks" (1760): "The explanation of the following figure which is all the drawing that is use din this sort of Masonry called the Most Ancient by the Irishman. It is generally done with chalk or charcoal on the floor; that is the reason that they want a mop and pail as often as they do: before when a man has been made a Mason, they wash it out; but people have taken notice and made game of them about the "Mop and Pail," so some Lodges use tape and little nails to form the same thing and so keep the world more ignorant of the matter. This plan is drawn on the floor East and West."

The custom of drawing the Lodge prevailed from the earliest time of Speculative Masonry, right down to the time a little over a hundred years ago, when the Tracing Board, as we know it, came into general use. There were probably several reasons for the decline of the custom of drawing the Lodge. As time went on, Lodge rooms were made more comfortable and the bare floors were covered with carpets on which it would be impossible to draw with chalk or charcoal. Another probable reason was the ridicule cast on the custom by contemporary writers. Probably also there were many Tylers who were not very good artists, and the resultant drawing may have left a good deal to be desired. While the custom of drawing the Lodge was dying out and before the introduction of the Tracing Board, as we know it, various expedients were resorted to. Some Lodges, such as the Royal Alpha Lodge and the Old Dundee Lodge, had metal templates cut to represent the object to be delineated. It is not clear however, whether these pieces of metal were used, as is suggested by Bro. Heiron, to help the Tyler in his drawing, or whether the pieces of metal themselves were placed on the floor instead of the drawing. It has been suggested that the use of these metal patterns by the Tyler in making his drawing gave rise to the expression "Framing the Lodge." Tape and tacks were also sometimes used. In Bristol these metal representations were laid out on a board with a painted border. This method is used to the present day in their Lodge of Instruction. Another expedient which was widely used, was the drawing of the Symbols and form of the Lodge on a piece of cloth or linen, which could be placed on the floor when required for use and rolled up and put away when not in use. It is undoubtedly in these old Tracing Cloths or Floor Cloths that our modern Tracing Boards have their origin. For the sake of convenience, these cloths were placed on boards held up by two trestles and known as trestle boards. Gradually the custom seems to have arisen the drawing on the floor was known as "The Lodge" this board became known as "The Lodge Board" or "Trestle Board." It seems impossible to lay down a definite rule for the change from the drawing on the floor to our present Tracing Boards. During what we might call the period of transition, there was very little uniformity. Some Lodges appear to have had the cloths before they had the boards, some to have had the boards first and some to have gone straight from the drawing on the floor to the drawing on the board, at first done afresh at each meeting and later permanently painted. Some appear to have had both at the one time. In fact, one Lodge at the present time (the Phoenix Lodge, No. 257) uses its old floor cloth as well as a Tracing Board. The modern name for it, "The Tracing Board," appears to be a misnomer, as the Tracing Board is one of the emblems which appears on it. This seems to be quite clear, from the lecture on the first Tracing Board. It is described as one of the three Immovable Jewels "for the Master to lay lines and draw designs upon," and after describing the rough and perfect Ashlars, the lecture goes on: "They are called immovable jewels because they lie open and immovable in the Lodge for the brethren to moralise upon." It would appear that two separate boards must have been referred to in the lecture, otherwise the description is incongruous, since it would not be possible for the Master to lay lines and draw designs on the board as now in use, and on the other hand there would be no sense in moralizing on a perfectly plain board such as could be used by the Master to lay lines on. It seems clear, therefore, that what we know now as the Tracing Board is in reality the Lodge Board or Trestle Board, which the brethren are invited to moralise on and which has the emblems painted on it. The real Tracing

Board - for the Master to lay line on - is the plain drawing board, one of the Emblems depicted on the Lodge Board.

Although the above facts seem to be generally accepted, it has been maintained by some, notably Bro. Speth, that the present board is the original Tracing Board which the Master used to lay lines on and which was quite blank. Gradually, he maintains, the emblems which were depicted on the Drawing of the Lodge on the floor or later on the cloths or floor cloths, as they were called, were transferred to the blank drawing board, making it as we have it now, and the floor cloths preserved only the pavement and tessellated border which we have at the present time.

The drawing on the floor was always known as "The Lodge." Thus in the description of the Procession at the dedication of the new Grand Lodge Hall in 1776, we have "Four Tylers carrying the Lodge covered with white satin." The Lodge referred to was undoubtedly a board with the "Form of a Lodge" drawn on it and was placed on trestles in the centre of the Grand Lodge room. In the engraving by Antoine Benoist of the Mock Procession of the Scald-Miserable Masons in 1742, we see a large floor cloth being carried as a banner. On it are painted the symbols of the third degree and in the explanatory key underneath it is described as a "Master Mason's Lodge." We have a survival of this use of the word "Lodge" in our present day ritual. When a candidate is placed at the N.E. corner of the "Lodge" he is placed at the N.E. corner of the Lodge Board, which is near the centre of the Lodge room (and not at the N.E. end of the Lodge room). In some of the provinces in England, at the consecration ceremony, the phrase "let the Lodge be uncovered" is still used. The brethren who sign the petition for the Warrant are placed round "The Lodge," that is, round the Tracing Board of the First Degree.

There seem to have been no regulations as to what emblems should be drawn on the floor; just as at the present time there seem to be no written rules as to what should be depicted on the Tracing Board. Custom, however, seems to have decreed that certain emblems should be depicted, though how they should be is left to the artist.

Though the facts which I have given you this evening, brethren, regarding the old custom of "Drawing the Lodge" and the origin of our modern Tracing Boards, are no doubt familiar to most of you. I hope that in what I have said there may be some new information, however small, for every one of you.