

## Gloves.

'Gloves' are another of those Masonic items which provide a link from the mediaeval operative Mason through the early Speculative years to the present day. This brief article attempts to explain the roots and development of 'gloves' in Masonic ritual. Whether we have adopted the ways of the medieval Mason or inherited them is another matter entirely.

The custom of wearing white gloves is of great antiquity. In the Christian Churches from the earliest times, Bishops and Priests always wore linen gloves when performing their ecclesiastical functions. Symbolically, the gloves indicated that their hands were clean and not open to bribery.<sup>1</sup>

In an indenture of covenants made in the reign of Henry VI between the church-wardens of a parish in Suffolk and a company of Freemasons, the latter stipulate that each man should be provided with a pair of white gloves and a white apron.

In medieval times, dress code was very strict. The statute of Edward II in 1363 laid down sumptuary laws for peasants who were allowed to wear 'no clothe' except blanket, wool or linen. Gold, silver or enamelled ornaments were also prohibited items. Masons were bound by these restrictions although the Master who controlled the site labour was 'middle class' and therefore exempt from these restrictions.

In the centuries prior to 1400, even the wearing of gloves by the upper classes was restricted and others had to make do with mittens. The medieval operative masons were a special class and wore gloves as a part of their health and safety clothing but those gloves, with gauntlets, were far more substantial than the thin white gloves we wear today.<sup>2</sup>

It is from the 'Setters', who were evidently engaged in placing the stones in position, that Masonic aprons and gloves are derived. We have evidence of this from the surviving records of the Archbishop of York.<sup>3</sup>

Date c1460.

'... in remuneration given to the masons called setters with aprons and gloves.'

Date c1470.

'.. and for two aprons of leather for the setters by the space of two months 12d. And for two pairs of gloves for the same 4d.'

The excerpt below, from the Schaw Statute of 1599<sup>4</sup>, addressed to the Lodge of Killwinning, required that all fellows of craft were to pay £10 Scots with ten shillings worth of gloves at their admission to commemorate this very special occasion. The ten pounds was to pay for the feast that followed his admission.

*Itemtis ordanit that all fallows of craft at his entrie pay to ye commoun bokis of ye luge the soume of ten pundis monie, wt x s. worthe of **gluiffis** or euire he be admitit and that for the bankatt, And that he be not adrrtitit without ane sufficient essay and pruiife of memorie and art of craft be the warden deacon and quarter mrs of ye lug, conforme to ye foimer and qrthrow yai may be ye mair answerable to ye generall warden.*

In the ensuing years, it has become a custom and tradition for all Masons to include a pair of white gloves as part of their regalia, and their duty is to put them on prior to entering a Freemason's Lodge meeting.

In his **Nat. Hist. Staffordshire 1686**<sup>5</sup>, Dr. Robert Plot wrote. *“Into which Society [Freemasonry] when any are admitted, they call a meeting (or Lodg as they term it in some places) which must consist at lest of 5 or 6 of the Ancients of the Order, whom the candidat present with gloves, and so likewise to their wives, and entertain with a collation according to the Custom of the place..”*

By 1730, according to Samuel Pritchard's exposure, "Masonry Dissected", things the tradition had become modified. Instead of the candidate giving gloves, he received gloves. Pritchard says that after the apprentice had taken his obligation, he was presented with "a pair of white gloves for himself and another pair for the lady he most esteemed".<sup>6</sup>

It is sad that this tradition albeit recent, of presenting the candidate and his lady with white gloves, has been lost in many UK Lodges but it is still practiced in other jurisdictions as this note from a brother in Hong Kong illustrates.<sup>7</sup>

*“We just had a group of Turkish brethren and their wives visiting us in Hongkong. While they were here in HK, there was a Ladies Night function at our masonic centre. When the Ladies were invited upstairs to the lodge room, all the Turkish Ladies wore white gloves before entering the lodge room. The HK Ladies were intrigued by this and wanted to know the reason for this. The Turkish Ladies explained that when their men were initiated, they were given one pair of white gloves for themselves and another pair of white gloves for the most important Lady in their life. Therefore, in appreciation of this symbolic mark of respect and affection from their men, the Ladies wear white gloves whenever they visit any lodge room.”*

There is a similar note concerning 'gloves' from Bro. Dan Doron. *“In Israel an EA is given a pair of gloves on his Initiation and is told the traditional explanation: if ever his wife will be in need of help, she should send his glove to the WM of the lodge as a sign. We, brothers, have signs of distress. His wife can use the glove for the same purpose.”*

Many of us receive invaluable support from our lady throughout our Masonic career. Is it time to resurrect the tradition of presenting, with a suitable explanation, two pairs of white gloves to the candidate following his Initiation into the Craft? One pair of gloves for him and the other, a pair of longer gloves, for the 'lady he most esteems.'

Bro. Alec Hall.

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<sup>1</sup> Masonic Papers by R.W.Bro. Zeldis. "The Gloves"  
<sup>2</sup> "Our Predecessors: The Medieval Mason of the Regius Manuscript" By Bro. A. C. F. Jackson AQC88  
<sup>3</sup> "A note on Medieval Masonry in York". Bro. J. S. Purvis. AQC Vol 98.  
<sup>4</sup> The second Schaw Statute is available at <http://www.philbrick2255.org.uk>  
<sup>5</sup> See <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/plot.html>  
<sup>6</sup> "Two Pairs of White Gloves" by Bro. Harry Carr. AQC Vol 75.  
<sup>7</sup> From Bro. Ashok Mahbubani. Hongkong.