

Manor of Newland Lodge No 6403



Booklet No 9

Aprons and Gloves



figure 5. Satin Apron, English, c. 1800.

Foreword.

The views expressed in these pages are mine and do not necessarily reflect the views of any other Lodge Member.

When we were made a mason, we promised to “make a daily advance in Masonic knowledge.” Our Master undertakes to “... impart light and instruction to the Brethren of the Lodge.”

Those are our good intentions but time is always against us. We meet, have an enjoyable meal together and depart. We have our business commitments, our wife and family to consider and even the ritual to learn and memorise. Few of us , except old ‘crusties’ like me, have the time to do a little research into Masonic matters.

The purpose of these pamphlets is to give a brief overview of various topics that may interest you or about which you may be curious. If you are seriously interested then please contact me and I will point you to all of the sources I have used where there is a wealth of detailed information.

Remember, I am not an academic or a scholar but just a Freemason with curiosity and time. I have only scratched the surface, as best I can and used (pinched) information from various web sites and from the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati

There is no intention here to add to or subtract from our ritual. The ritual book is of primary importance.

Alec Hall January 2005

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Please let me have your views and comments.



Apron of the Provincial Grand Steward.

Modern Craft Aprons.

Dress embroidered apron of a Grand Officer.

The embroidered dress collar of a Grand Officer is of Garter-Blue ribbon, four inches wide, edged with gold lace and embroidered in gold with a sprig of acacia and an ear of corn.



Dress apron of holders of Senior London or Overseas Grand Rank or Provincial or District Grand Officer.

Introduction.

As always in these little booklets, I have collected together references from a number of sources to give an overview of the particular subject.

Each and every Paper that I have copied from are worth reading in their entirety but, unlike me, you probably don't have the time to do that. Hence these extracts too, hopefully, wet your appetite.

This booklet deals with Aprons and Gloves both of which, in my opinion, were worn as working 'safety clothing' by the medieval mason. We Accepted or Speculative Freemasons have inherited or adopted these clothes from our medieval ancestors.

Summary

Our operative ancestors of medieval times wore aprons made of sheepskin and gloves with gauntlets to protect themselves from the stone with which they worked.

There was a strict protocol connected with the wearing of gloves. They were not permitted when greeting a person or when in the presence of gentlemen or nobles because they could be used to conceal a dagger or another weapon.

Masons were 'honoured' by being permitted to wear gloves. This was prohibited among the general population.

When Freemasons adopted the apron there is one instance where a brother was censured for attending Lodge wearing his working apron. [could this be a minor indication of the existence or Transitional Lodges where both operative and non-operative masons met together?]

The apron and gloves changed in form over the years with many designs, some very intricate and colourful [see front cover], until we reach the modern design of which you are already familiar. Examples are on the last page of this booklet.

MASONIC CLOTHING

Mediaeval building accounts show that skins were bought to provide masons with aprons. The writer has examined a number of contemporary illustrations, English and Continental, but has found no examples of masons wearing aprons before the 15th century. An illustration of c. 1433 of building at Hunstanton (Plate 3) shows masons wearing aprons but it is not possible to distinguish the material.¹³ In a picture on wood, belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of London, c. 1450, several masons are shown as wearing aprons (Plate 5) while working on a church at Ely.¹⁴ The aprons seem to be leather and one has a bib. Nevertheless, there is no reason to suppose that masons did not wear aprons from the earliest times when working in the quarries or when cutting a stone in the lodge. Bibs seem to have been unusual, and were not in general use until mid-16th century. However, a very early non-masonic example of an apron with bib is in the Eglington MS., dated 1360, in the British Library, of 'Tubal the Smith'. In this case the apron is of leather with the bib pinned up by a brooch. When bibs came into use, the fastening was a buttonhole in the apron and a button on the coat or shirt.

There is no evidence to suggest that there was anything special about the aprons worn. Cloth aprons were normal for many trades, but some were of leather, made of the whole skin of the sheep or lamb, with leather thongs tied to the animals legs to form the belt.

This type of apron, with later the skin of the head of the animal forming a bib, seems to have been in use for all types of heavy workers, including of course masons, for several centuries.



PLATE 2: Masons building a Church at Ely
(Reproduced by permission of the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London W1)

Gloves have been worn since the earliest times. Homer, in fact, refers to the use of gloves by gardeners. Gloves had a special significance in the middle Ages. In the centuries before the Regius MS. even the wearing of gloves by the upper classes was restricted, while others had to make do with fingerless mittens or by using cloth wrapped round their hands. However, masons must have had special privileges. An illustration in the manuscript 'The Book of St Alban'⁵ has an illustration, probably dated c. 1220, showing mason-hewers wearing a gauntlet-type glove (Plate 4) presumably to protect their hands and wrists from the splinters of stone.¹⁵ Some of the masons in Plate 2 also wear gloves. It is not clear from these illustrations whether the mason-setters are also gloved, actually even more essential against lime burning.

By the end of the 13th century the prohibitions about gloves were dying out. A drawing of peasants working in the fields wearing gloves is in the Luttrell Psalter, c. 1340 now in the British Museum. However, certain rules persisted; gloves not being worn when entering the presence of a stranger or when greeting a superior. This would be the reason why the Master Masons in Plate 2 [not included here] are shown as gloveless in the presence of the King. These complicated rules seem to have been primarily a protective measure against assassination as the gauntlets of mediaeval gloves, even those worn by mason-hewers, could hide a dagger and its hilt.

Masons were presumably the only trade that could not work properly without gloves and must, therefore, have had special permission to wear them. This may be the reason for the references to gloves which appear in early masonic documents. To be allowed to wear gloves at a time when they were forbidden generally would give them a significance which might, in due course, become a valued tradition.

(Extracted in part from AQC Vol 88 pp7 The Medieval Mason of the Regius Manuscript by Bro. A.C.F. Jackson.)

Another early reference to Aprons and Gloves occurs in AQC Vol 98
A NOTE ON MEDIEVAL MASONRY IN YORK
 BY BRO. J.S. PURVIS

..... One of the most full and clear references is of the year 1472, in which year the list of masons is headed by Robert Spilsby, 'Master of the Masons'; then comes William Hyndley, 'Warden of the Masons' Lodge, Robert Spilsby having been removed

*Then brithers let a halesome sang
 Arise your friendly ranks along .
 Guid wives and bairnies blithely sing
 To the ancient badge wi' the apron string
 That is worn by the master mason!*

Attributed to the Poet but not found in Burns anthologies.

Christened Robert Burness, the celebrated Scottish poet was born January 25, 1759 in Alloway, near Ayr. His Poetry is known around the world and—somewhat controversially—he is well known to freemasons as the of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, No.2.

He joined Saint David's Lodge No. 2174, Tarbolton in 1781, the first of six masonic lodges he was to join. By 1784 he was Depute Master of , in the same town. In 1788, two years after publication of his Kilmarnock edition, he was master of a lodge in Mauchline.

A childhood bout with rheumatic fever led to a gradual deterioration of his health until his death on July 21, 1796 at the age of 37.

FROM AQC V104 page 10.

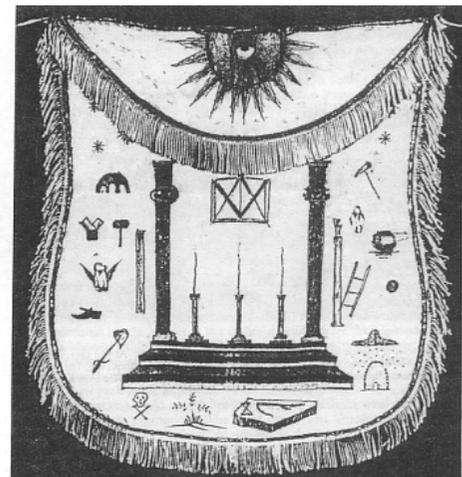


Fig 5: Silk apron 'wrought in Canton' in 1799, from the Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, Mass. (Sketch by the author based on the Museum's catalogue.)

The Image shows an apron embroidered silk and metallic thread wrought in Canton (China) about 1799 and now in the Museum of our National Heritage, Lexington, Mass.

I wish I could see this apron in colour because I think it looks wonderful.

Wish I had one like that don't you?

of Antony Sayer, the first G.M. of the modern Craft. (1717), and on the frontispiece illustration of Anderson's first Book of Constitutions (1723). In the former, unfortunately, only the upper part of the apron is visible, and what appears to be the bib or flap is raised. In the second example a Tyler is bringing into the hall a number of



aprons ; these have long tie-strings which seem to be of leather. They are also large, well capable of covering a man from chest to: ankles. The method of tying-on the apron was that of operative masons, with the bow and strings in front ; this method was continued later, even when silk or linen strings were used.

The leather apron died hard. Despite the use of softer materials from possibly 1740 onwards, it survived in use until at least 1811. The evidence of this is the first official reference to the apron found in the G.L. minutes of 17th March, 1731 :

2
Masters and Wardens of particular Lodges may line their white leather Aprons with white silk, and may hang their Jewels at white Ribbons about their Necks." (A.Q.C., x, p.

146.)

This regulation was repeated in the 1738 and in subsequent editions of the Constitutions up to and including Noorthouck's edition (1784), which was the last edition before 1815. And finally, from the web site of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and the Yukon.

The verse of Robert Burns

Detail from an unsigned, undated oil painting owned by Ancient Light Lodge No.88 in Delta, British Columbia. You can also download a grayscale version or silhouette.

The Master's Apron

Ther's mony a badge that's unco brow ;
Wi ribbon, lace and tape on ;
Let kings an' princes wear them a' ,
Gie me the masters apron!

The honest craftsman's apron,
The jolly freemason's apron,
Be he at hame or roam afar,
Before his touch fa's bolt and bar,
The gates of fortune fly ajar,
Gin he but wears the apron!

For wealth and honour, pride and power
Are crumbling stanes to base on;
Fraternity suld rule the hour,
And ilka worthy mason!
Each free accepted mason,
Each ancient crafted mason!

from the midst', that is having died, 'and the office of the Master of the Masons being vacant'. Then come the names of fourteen other masons not distinguished by any rank, and finally two Apprentices.

A class of masons to whom frequent reference is made is that of the 'Setters', evidently engaged more in the placing of the stones in position than in the shaping of them. It is from these men, the Setters, that masonic aprons and gloves are derived, as the following extracts will show: Date about 1460.

'... in remuneration given to the masons called Setters at the walls with aprons and gloves.' Date about 1470.

'... 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 time 4d.' Date 1444.

'... and in **gloves with aprons of leather** given to the masons and for gloves also given to the masons 7s. 8d.'

Date uncertain but before 1490.

'... and for two skins bought and given to the masons for making aprons according to custom 12d. And in 10 pairs of gloves given to the same at the time of the setting of the stone 8D.'

Incidentally there appears to have been some kind of banquet or celebration whenever a notable piece of work was begun, and perhaps also when it was completed, for the following appears in a Roll of about the same date as the last:

'... in expenses for the masons on the first day of placing the stones on the Bell Tower; in bread, beer, and meat all told 18^d'. It seems also that the Dean and Chapter paid for drinks for the lodge, perhaps at Christmas, for in 1442 there is an entry '... in payment given to the masons for their drinks according to custom this year 10.8d' and this was no small sum, being equivalent to at least £17 in present-day money.

It is a Fabric Roll undated but of about the year 1480 which gives the fullest entries: 'Wages of the Masons.

In money paid to Thomas Pak Master of the Masons for his fee this year £10 (say £350 to £400 in modern terms).

And in wages to Robt. Neubiggyng for 29 weeks taking for a week 3s. £4.7.0.

And in wages to John Lanom for 51 weeks taking for a week 3s. £7.13.0' [and 16 other Masons at various sums]

Then come the items for **leather for aprons and for ten pairs of gloves**, which has already been mentioned. Then:

'And for the expenses of the auditor and of the Master of the Masons riding from York to the quarry of Hudleston for stones to be prepared and inspected there twice this year 3s 8d'.

'And in reward given to Roger Grissop for the keeping of divers instruments of the masons belonging to the fabric this year as tubs, buckets, and other necessaries 3s 4d'.

'And in money paid to Robt. Johanson the smith for sharpening and making divers instruments of the masons divers times within the time of this account. 31s 9d'.

Entries for the sharpening of the working tools are not uncommon as in 1543;

'Item paid for sharpynge the maison toles 2s 8d.'

The Master of the lodge and the others who were probably master masons were paid usually at the rate of 3s 4d a week and 3s a week respectively; Apprentices were paid at rates varying from 2s to 2/6d a week, which figures should be multiplied by at least 35-

40 to obtain modern equivalents.

There is an indication that the Warden of the lodge was sometimes if not usually promoted to Master on a vacancy. The 1498 reference to William Hyndley, who was Warden in 1472 and Master in 1478, indicates that apparently he continued as Master until 1498 at least, which suggests that mastership then was usually terminated only by death.

Although not related at all to the matter in hand, I find the next quotation from the same Paper quite fascinating.

There are two references, in the reign of King Henry VIII, to the 'Masons' Lodge' at York Minster; a certain mason was threatened with expulsion from this lodge unless he mended his ways, which suggests that the lodge was something more than an actual workshop. Two other references have an importance quite out of proportion to their mere words. One of these dates from 1612 and gives the familiar phrase 'evasion, equivocation or mental reservation' in the form 'without any equivocation or mental evasion or secret reservation whatsoever'

In a Paper "Our Predecessors - Scottish Masons of about 1660" by Bro. A. C. F. Jackson (AQC 91 p10) reference is made to the wearing of Gloves and Aprons in Scottish Lodges of the period.

*Master Masons, when they were burgesses, presumably wore their long robes of office in lodge and possibly wore chains of office as well. Were these the fore-runners of collar jewels? There is no doubt that gloves were formal masonic dress by this time. The Schaw Statutes (No. 9 of 1599) directed that all new Fellow Crafts should provide ten shillings 'worth of **gluffis**' and the wearing of **gloves** is also mentioned in the minute-book of the Lodge of Aitchieson's Haven of the same year. Murray Lyon refers to Lodge Kilwinning's wearing gloves about 1650 and there are other references.²⁶ There is less evidence about aprons. The Lodge of Aberdeen, in 1670, directed that all Entered Apprentices on entry should provide 'ane linen **Aprone and a pair of good gloves** to everie person concerned in the forsaid lodge.' Operative masons at this period wore long leather aprons as their ordinary daily dress and it may be that the linen ones referred to were a sort of light substitute for wear in lodge, as well as providing masonic clothing for the many non-operatives in the lodge.*

Still in the 17th Century, (AQC 89 p 28) there are further references to Gloves and Aprons.

There is evidence of masons wearing aprons and gloves in the mid-18th century in Scotland, but the only reference to masonic clothing in England about this time comes from Dr Plot who refers to gloves being presented by candidates 'to Antients of the Order'. Though Ashmole's entries in his diary about Masonry are so scanty, it is difficult to believe that, as an antiquary, he would not have mentioned such a curious custom if it had happened to him. However, in view of Dr Plot's reference, it is clear that gloves were worn as masonic clothing in some cases. Aprons had been worn by masons since mediaeval days. Whether English non-operative masons wore them in the 17th century is not known.

We now move forward to the 18th Century after the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge. (AQC 90 p201)

*In the early period **aprons** were the property of the Lodge and in some instances*

Candidates were required to 'clothe the Lodge', i.e., to provide new in replacement.

They were purchased in bulk the cost being about 1/6d each:

To purchase 3 1/2 dozen aprons for the use of the Lodge.

(Minutes, 18 November 1742, Lodge at Crown and Anchor, Seven Dials, London.)

Safe-keeping of aprons was another responsibility of the Tyler:

The Doorkeeper to take care of clothing of members and utensils of the Lodge and to keep the key of the Apron Box etc. ... (By-laws, n.d., Lodge of Friendship, No. 6.)

*There was no difference between the aprons worn in Lodge and those worn by stonemasons at work. Indeed, in 1741 a **Brother was fined for wearing his working apron** (Minutes, 21 January 1741, Lodge at Duke of Bedford's Head). The aprons shown in all early illustrations and engravings are long ones with a bib and reached from chest to knees or lower.*

The long aprons are depicted in vastly different circumstances and one of great interest is the frontispiece of Anderson's Book of Constitutions which shows the Duke of Montagu, Grand Master in 1721, handing the Constitutional Roll to his successor the Duke of Wharton (see Plate No. 3). Several persons are in attendance but because none are specifically mentioned it has given rise to speculation. However, one has some long aprons draped over his right arm and some white gloves are grasped in his left hand. I cannot think that a senior Grand Officer would be in charge of such items for it is a task more in keeping with those allocated to the Doorkeeper or Guarder.

In AQC Vol 75 p 212 there is an excellent Paper by Bro. James Harvey entitled "Initiation Two Hundred Years ago" (Say c1760) Here is the first reference I have to the Golden Fleece and Roman Eagle.

THE APRON AND TOOLS

On the candidate's return he was brought to the N.W. corner, where (under instruction) he said: —

"Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, Senior and Junior Deacons, and the rest of the brethren of this lodge, I return you thanks for the honour you have done me in making me a mason and admitting me a member of this worthy society.

The Master [then] call'd me up to the north-east corner of the lodge, or at his right-hand. He presented me with an apron, which he put on me. He told me it was the badge of innocency, more antient than the Golden Fleece or the Roman Eagle; more honour'd than the Star and Garter or any other Order under the sun that could be conferr'd upon me at that time, or any time hereafter."

By Bro. F.R. Worts, M.A., P.A.G.D.C. Grand Lodge of British Columbia and the Yukon web site.

HISTORY OF THE APRON

There can be no doubt that the Masonic apron has been developed from the apron worn by operative masons in the middle ages. The few examples surviving show that the operative apron was fashioned from the skin of an animal, most probably a sheep. It was large enough to cover the wearer from chest to ankles, and its fall was held by a leathern thong which passed round the neck. From each side a thong, firmly stitched, enabled the mason to tie the apron round his waist, and the tied bow tended to fall as end-strings. The use of this rough apron continued for many centuries; the woven apron used by modern masons is comparatively late; it came into use in the eighteenth century. The earliest representations of the Freemason's Apron are seen on the engraved portrait