

Rods and Columns

By Ed Halpaus, GLEO

Why do the wardens have columns? Why do the Wardens dispose them as they do, depending whether the Lodge is at Labor or Refreshment? What do those columns represent?

I was asked those questions a while back while visiting a Lodge. I thought I knew the answer and gave it since I was asked, but since I wasn't 100% certain neither were the Masons I was visiting with 100% certain I knew what I was talking about, so when I returned home I started cracking the books. I looked up the subject of "Warden's Columns" in Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia and this is some of what I found.

"The two Wardens' columns, it is possible but is not certain that these represent Jachin and Boaz."

Jones, in his 'Freemasons guide and compendium' says; "it seems that Jachin and Boaz do not stand like sentinels in English Lodges, for the two columns were formerly given more prominence by being placed on either side of the entry way so that one must pass between them to enter the Lodge."

Jones also says he is of the opinion that the two Wardens' Columns took the place of the larger columns which were abandoned. And evidently in English Lodges the two Wardens' Columns are all that is left of the three great pillars. Well if that's true they couldn't represent Jachin and Boaz, they must be Strength and Beauty, Doric & Corinthian. But why then do the Wardens Columns have round globe-like features on their tops?

Again Coils: "Early rituals (1730) spoke of "three Grand Pillars" which supported the Mason's Lodge, and represented the first three Grand Masters. In the 18th century [the pillars] stood before, to the side, or behind, the Master and one was similarly placed with respect to each warden."

In the Encyclopedia of Freemasonry it says this about the Senior Warden. "He represents the column of Strength. He has placed before him, and carries in all processions, a column, which is the representative of the right-hand pillar that stood at the porch of King Solomon's Temple. The Junior Warden has a similar column, which represents the left hand pillar."

I continued to look into books I have on hand and found that the Wardens Columns, and the Deacons Rods are related. And since someone also asked the question as to why the Stewards Rods are colored White, I pursued that too.

The Rod or staff is an emblem of power, and as with the Wardens Columns they are today a Badge of Office, when a King carries it, it is called a scepter, but when carried by an inferior officer it becomes a Rod, verge, or staff. At one time the Deacons, Stewards,

and Marshal of a Lodge all carried Rods. The Rod or Staff in addition to being an emblem of power and authority is a symbol of protection. "Thy Rod and thy staff they comfort me." In the Military the Rod became a "Baton" in the hands of the Marshal, and the Baton was adopted by Freemasonry as the badge of office for the Marshal of the Lodge.

"Smith's edition of the Pennsylvania "Ahiman Rezon" refers to a procession in 1778 where the Wardens carried "wands tipped with gold," and also the Wardens Columns."

At the time of Webb's Monitor, published in 1797, and as shown in Preston's Illustrations of Masonry, the Deacons received the Columns as the badges of their office. "A short time later" meaning soon after 1804 but most likely before 1807 the Columns were transferred to the Wardens and Rods were given to the Deacons. According to Mackey's Encyclopedia - after 1822 all the "Monitors" referred to the Columns for the Wardens and the Rods for the Deacons. So after about 1822 the columns were everywhere recognized as the insignia for the Wardens, and the Rods, Wands, or Staves, as belonging to the Deacons.

White as a color – Here is an explanation as to why they are white, "the Steward's Rod is an imitation of the White Staff borne by the Lord High Steward of the King's household." A real simple explanation as to why Freemasonry adopted the White Rods for the Lodge Stewards.

The Rod is the badge or ensign of the office of the Stewards of the Lodge, or of the Grand Stewards in the Grand Lodge, on the top of which is the same insignia as is the Stewards Jewel, and the same system of Jewels and Rod Tops follows for the Deacons as well.

The first formal account of the Stewards and their White Rods is found in the Book of Constitutions from 1738. On June 24, 1724, is recorded, the Stewards were walking "Two and two abreast with white rods."

The use of the White Rods comes from the political usages of England, where the Steward of the King's household was appointed by the delivery of a staff, the breaking of which dissolved the office. In those times, going back to the reign of Edward the 4th, at least, the "White Staff" was the proper insignia for both the office of Steward and Treasurer. In 1792 Preston wrote about the "Grand Treasurer with his staff." In America the custom of the Treasurer carrying a Rod has been abandoned. However, the custom was derived from the old custom of the Treasurer of the King's household to carry a staff as the ensign of authority.

"In the old "customary books" we are told that the Steward or Treasurer of the household received the White Rod as a badge of office from the King himself. The King would present the Rods with these words: "Tenez le baston de nostre maison." (Receive the Staff of our house.)"

An interesting comment in Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry is this about the Deacons of a Lodge. "The proper Badge or Ensign of office of a Deacon, which he should always carry with him in the discharge of the duties of his office, is a Blue Rod surmounted by a pine-cone."

Over time the color of the Deacons Rods, at least here in America, became Black. In the two-volume set of the "New Century Dictionary," which is from the beginning of the last century, (the 1900's,) not our New Century. Under the meanings and examples of the word "Black" I saw two words "Black Rod," and this is what it says about the Black Rods. "The chief gentleman usher of the Lord Chamberlain's department of the English Royal household; also usher of the Order of the Garter, whose principal duty is attendance on the House of Lords, in which he is responsible for the maintenance of order (named with reference to the Black Rod he carries); a similar official in British colonial legislatures."

And since the duties of the Deacon's is to carry messages from the Senior Warden and orders from the Master about the Lodge the Pine-cone was replaced with a Square and Compass as the top of the Deacons Rod. Inside the Square & Compass of the Junior Deacon is a representation of the Moon, and of the sun for the Senior Deacon. And as mentioned above the same S&C with the Moon or Sun is in the Jewels of the Deacons, which they wear because it alludes to the Three Lesser Lights, and why the Senior Warden is in the West and the Master is in the East.

So after all of that I still stand by the answer I had in the first place. The Wardens Columns represent the pillars at the porch of King Solomon's temple, Jachin and Boaz. If one would inspect the Columns in some Lodges we might find that in addition to Globes being represented on the Wardens Columns there are also Lilies, Network and Pomegranates depicted in the carvings of the wood. While the Columns of Doric, (representing Strength,) would be quite plain, and the Corinthian, (being the most beautiful of the 5 orders,) would have two rows of leaves and eight volutes sustaining the abacus, and it wouldn't look like an orb. But that is assuming that the Warden's Columns are an accurate depiction of what they represent – in the more modern production of the columns it would seem to me that they would be turned out on a lathe for a faster, simpler product, and thus be much plainer. I think that the appearance of the Warden's columns will vary from Lodge to Lodge.

I find it quite interesting that when looking up information about the Wardens Columns I was led to the Rods which was another question asked the same night, and on to other things that are also related in some way to the first question. In Speculative Masonry one thing many times leads to another."

So there is the answer to why the Warden's have Columns that they dispose when the Lodge is either at Labor or refreshment, and why the Deacons carry rods that are colored

black, and why the Stewards rods are white. The Stewards carry “White Rods” because it is reminiscent of the White Rod carried by the Steward in the King’s household. And the Deacons carry Black Rods because the Chief Gentleman Usher of the Lord Chamberlain’s department of the King’s household carried a Black Rod.