

Swords in Freemasonry

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In about Feb 2009 our Lodge was presented with a large and most elegant sword from a Brother, for whom our Lodge had recently conducted a Masonic funeral service. With the permission of the Worshipful Master I was afforded the opportunity of presenting it to the Tiler of our Lodge. In the course of the presentation I made an allusion to 'symbolism' of the Tiler and the sword, asking of the Brethren assembled, "In our Sacred Volume, where does the first sword appear?" One of more learned Brothers noted it was in the Book of Genesis upon the occasion of the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. He was, of course, correct (Genesis 3:24).

In contemplating the 'ritual' of the Lodge, as I have often done, it came to me that the speculative symbology of the Tiler related to this same 'flaming sword' as found in Genesis. There are many, if not most Brothers, who may take umbrage to such an interpretation of our ritual, but in recently looking up the American Union Lodge for another paper I found a fine reference to them on the internet in Volume 1 of Mackey's "Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry." (Revised and Enlarged by Robert I. Clegg – H. L. Haywood Memorial Edition, 1946, 9th printing 1966, Macoy Publishing). Having a rather fine collection of Masonic books I padded a mere four feet from my computer and pulled this volume from my bookshelf. For some odd reason I also pulled volume 2 and set both of them on the table at my left elbow. These two volumes lay there for a few weeks, when I picked up volume 2 and thumbed through the interesting graphics therein (from the middle of the book to the beginning) and was about to set it back down. On an 'impulse' I picked it back up and resumed looking at the graphics from the back of the book to the middle, when I came across a graphic on page 1001, adjoining the following:

"SWORD, TILER'S. In modern times the implement used by the Tiler is sword of the ordinary form. This is incorrect. Formerly, and indeed up to a comparatively recent period. The *Tiler's sword* was wavy in shape, and so made in allusion to the 'flaming sword which was placed at the east of the garden of Eden, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.' It was, of course, without a scabbard, because the Tiler's sword should ever be drawn and ready for the defense of his post."

Bro. Mackey has another reference in page 359, Volume 1, of this same Encyclopedia where he elaborates and appears to have a rather impassioned feeling for it and of having had some experience with the Lodge usage of the 'flaming sword' . . . :

"FLAMING SWORD. A sword whose blade is of a spiral or twisted form is called by the heralds a *flaming sword*, from its resemblance to the ascending curvature of a flame of fire. Until very recently, this was the form of the Tiler's sword. Carelessness or ignorance has now in many Lodges substituted for it a common sword of any form. The flaming sword of the Tiler refers to the flaming sword which guarded the entrance to Paradise, as described in Genesis (iii, 24):

"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a *flaming sword* which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life;" or, As Raphell has translated it, "the *flaming sword* which revolveth, to guard the way of the tree of life."

In former times, when the symbols and ceremonies were more respected than they are now; when collars were worn, and not ribbons in the buttonhole; and when the standing column of the Senior Warden, and recumbent one of the Junior Warden during labor, to be reversed during refreshment, were deemed necessary for the complete furniture of the Lodge, the cavalry sword was unknown as a Masonic implement, and the Tiler always bore a flaming sword. It were better if we could get back to the old customs."

I have often had such confirmations for my 'strange thoughts.' Bro. Mackey did not provide a reference for his entry, and quite likely a host of Brothers may not see it this way (or any way at all) . . . but it stuck me that I should at least record some further thoughts on this interesting matter.

From the outset, one is quite aware that Freemasonry is not a 'Masonic Club,' although within its jurisdictions there are many such 'Clubs.' Rather, the hallmark of Freemasonry is its 'ritual,' without which no Brother would ever be a member. Each Lodge 'opens' and closes in its peculiar manner, closely 'guarded' by the Tiler at the Outer Door. Most Lodges communicate on the Master's Masons Degree, which, according to the ritual is a representation of the 'unfinished' Sanctum Sanctorum of King Solomon's Temple. King Solomon's Temple, in turn was a representation of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness of Moses' time. In both Solomon's Temple and the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies, containing the Ark of the Covenant.

In the Royal Arch Chapters, Freemasonry portrays the High Priest in the East. In the Lodges, there is no High Priest, but a 'substitute' is given for the 'Lost Word,' and the center of the Lodge is adorned by the 'Book of the Sacred Law.' In some jurisdictions this 'Bible' is placed next to the Master in the East, but in either case, no one is allowed to step between the Master and the Bible during a 'Tiled' communication, signifying a link . . . a unity between the Master and the Bible which should never be broken.

If a Brother is a Master Mason, of what is he a 'Master?' A good question to consider.

There is an implication is ritualistic pursuits, such as, but not limited to Freemasonry the attainment of Edenic Grace, by whatever name it may be known, or a return to (attain) that state . . . that Unity with our Creator . . . in which we were before the 'fall from grace' in the Garden of Eden.

Returning to the Garden for a moment, Man . . . at one time is portrayed as a Unity in Adam, before the Duality occurred with the appearance of Eve. At that time a man and woman came into being, represented in Freemasonry (and Solomon's Temple) by the Pillars of Boaz (Terrestrial on the left . . . feminine) and Jachin (Celestial on the right . . . masculine). This 'duality' may be found in nearly all world religions and philosophies, along with a rite, ritual or 'process' by which we may attain to the 'Unity,' by whatever of the legion of means or name it may be known.

If Adam and Eve were 'expelled' from Paradise (Eden / Grace) and 'flaming sword' was 'placed there' 'which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life' how, if ever, is anyone to ever return to attain Edenic Grace, or are we to wander endlessly for all Eternity in the limbo and illusion of duality?

Although it may not appear in the Hebrew or King James Bible in exactly such words, Archangel Michael is often portrayed in religious lore as being with a 'flaming sword,' as well as being the special patron of Adam. Supposedly he was the first angel in all of the heavens to bow down before humanity. Michael then kept an eye on the first family, remaining vigilant even after the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In the apocryphal "Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan," Michael taught Adam how to farm. The archangel later brought Adam to heaven in a fiery chariot, giving him a tour of the blessed realm. After Adam's death, Michael helped convince the Lord to permit Adam's soul to be brought to heaven and cleansed of its great sin.



In every well governed Lodge the Tiler (Tyler) stands at the Outer Door of the Lodge; he need not necessarily be a Master Mason, nor a member of the Lodge.

In this present discussion we should be aware that the sword appears in Craft ceremonial usage in several different contexts:

- The Tiler's Sword, of this present discussion – the 'Flaming Sword'
- The Grand Sword Bearer
 - An office held at Masonic District level
 - The office of Grand Tiler of a Grand Lodge jurisdiction.
- The Sword and the Book of Constitutions (the book of constitutions, guarded by the Tyler's sword) - Reminds us that we should be ever watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words, and actions, particularly when before the enemies of Masonry—ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, *silence* and *circumspection*.
- The Sword Pointing to a Naked Heart - Demonstrates that justice will sooner or later overtake us; and although our thoughts, words, and actions may be hidden from the eyes of man yet that all-seeing eye, whom the sun, moon and stars obey, and under whose watchful care even comets perform their stupendous revolutions, pervades the inmost recesses of the human heart, and will reward us according to our merits.
- The reception of a Candidate in the First Degree – usually on the Point of the Compasses, but not normally specified, other than the 'point of a sharp instrument. In some jurisdictions this may be a 'dagger' or in older times a sword (but any 'sharp instrument' is appropriate . . . for those who 'get the point').
- The sword used in 'Walking the Sword' while reciting the Tyler's Oath.
- In older times a sword was held to the heart while taking the obligation.
- The sword that in older times rested with the Worshipful Master in the East.
- Swords associated with the Concordant Orders, such as the Knights Templar.

The usage of a Tiler's sword apparently goes back to at least the time of William Preston, ca 1772, where we may find it recorded in his First Degree Lecture, General Section, Open, as follows:

Ref: Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, Volume 82, 1969, page 111/

W.M. . . . "what is the first care of every Masons?"

J.W. To see that the Lodge is properly tyled.

W.M. Bro. J.W., where is the situation of the O.G. (Outer Guard)?

J.W. Without the entrance of the Lodge.

W.M. His duty there?

J.W. Being armed with a drawn sword he is to keep off all intruders and cowans to Masonry and see that the candidate comes properly prepared.

Once the rest of the Opening has been completed, the W.M. then declares the Lodge open:

"In the Name of the G.A.O.T.U. I declare the Lodge opened for the purposes of Masonry in the First Degree.

Brother Preston, further, is quite specific regarding Masonry as a 'progressive science.' In this scheme of reasoning it would appear that 'morality' of which hear so much regarding the Craft is something that applies to the Entered Apprentice. It is relatively logical and in keeping with the teaching of the 'mysteries' that an *immoral* person should not be advanced to the . . . or any . . . 'higher mysteries.' It is in this degree that the 'exoteric' Masonic material is conveyed to the Candidate.

Upon arriving at the Second Degree, First Section of the Preston Lectures we may find (*italics added and format emphasized for clearer reading*):

Ref: *Ibid.* Volume 83, 1970, page 201.

"Masonry is a progressive science, and is divided into different classes or degrees, *for the more regular advancement of its professors in the knowledge of its mysteries.*

According to the progress we make, we are led to limit or extend our inquiries; and, in proportion to our genius or capacity, we attain to a greater or lesser degree of perfection.

Masonry includes within its circle almost every branch of polite literature. Under the sanction of its mysteries, is comprehended a regular system of science. Many of its illustrations to the confined genius may appear dull, trifling, and unimportant, but to the man of more enlarged facilities, they will appear in the highest degree useful and interesting. To please the accomplished scholar and the *ingenious artist*, Masonry is wisely planned; in the investigation of its latent doctrines, the philosopher and mathematician will experience delight and satisfaction.

The first degree of Masonry is well calculated to enforce the duties of morality, and to imprint on the memory the noblest practices which can adorn the humans mind.

It is therefore the best introduction to the second degree, which not only extends the same plan, but comprehends a *more diffuse system of knowledge*.

Here practice and theory join in qualifying the industrious Mason to share the pleasures which an advancement in the **art** must necessarily afford him.

Listening to the wise opinions of experienced craftsmen on important subjects, he gradually familiarizes his mind to useful instruction, and is soon enabled to investigate *truths of the utmost concern* in the general transactions of life."

In the opening of a Lodge of Fellow Crafts, the wording changes subtly the General Section:

Ref: Ibid, page 199

W.M. Bro. J.W. what is the first care of a Fellow Craft Mason?

J.W. To see that the Lodge is Tiled against all who are under that degree.

W.M. What is the second care of a Fellow Craft Mason?

S.W. To see that all the Brn. In the Lodge are in order.

W.M. To order, Brn., as Masons.

W.M. Are you Bro. J.W. a Fellow Craft Mason?

J.W. I am, try me and prove me.

W.M. By what instrument in architecture will you be tried?

J.W. By the square.

W.M. Then form the Lodge in the Second Degree, prove the Craftsmen and copy their example.

(The J.W. now leaves the south and takes his place on the left hand of the S.W. and they become Assistants).

[Note: at this point the W.M. becomes the 'Ruler.']

J.A.s Excellent Ruler, the Brn. Appear in order as Craftsmen and I copy their example.

When the Ruler then opens the Lodge of Fellowcrafts:

Ruler. . . . IN the Name of the Great Geometrician of the Universe I open the Lodge in the Second Degree and may the rays of Heaven shed their influence over us . . .

First seal of the Antient Grand Lodge



<http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/symbolism/sword.html>

SWORD, TILER'S. In modern times the implement used by the Tiler is a sword of the ordinary form. This is incorrect. Formerly, and indeed up to a comparatively recent period, the Tiler's sword was wavy in shape, and so made in allusion to the "flaming sword which was placed at the east of the garden of Eden, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life." It was, of course, without a scabbard, because the Tiler's sword should ever be drawn and ready for the defense of his post.

The Taunton Lodge in 1850 buried Brother Davey, their Tiler, and at the conclusion of the Church burial service, the Provincial Grand Secretary broke his wand and the Worshipful Master broke the sword of the deceased Tiler, casting the same into the grave with the customary exclamation on such occasions, "Alas, our Brother." This is the editorial answer to a question in the *Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror* (August 20, 1863, page 1).

[Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry](#). Also see [Ars Quatuor Coronatorum](#), vol xi. (1893), "[Notes and Queries](#)". p. 196.

Note: Unfortunately, Mackey does not give a source for ascertaining his assertion regarding the 'flaming sword.' - g.l.h.



http://www.rgle.org.uk/RGLE_18th_century.htm

An old Yorkshire Lodge [Const. 1793] still possesses and makes use of a 'Flaming Sword' - fixed in a wooden stand placed on the right side of the W.M.'s Pedestal, which remains with its naked blade uplifted during the whole time the Lodge is at Masonic labor. Bro. Welsford, P.A.G.St.B. informs me that in 1923, two 'Flaming Swords' [also with naked blades fixed upright side-by-side on a stand] were placed near to the Master's chair during the working of the ceremonies in two old Lodges in the North of England; clearly relics from the days of old. It is really difficult to understand the merit of Dermott's objection to the use of a sword in Lodge in 1761. It was the continuance of a well known custom, for we are told that at the Grand Lodge Feast held at Merchant Taylor's Hall on 24th June, 1724, "In the Procession round the Table, there preceded the Grand Master The Sword carried by the Master of the Lodge, to which the Sword belonged."

INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY THE MASTER MASON DEGREE

by Carl H. Claudy

http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/master_mason.htm

THE BOOK OF CONSTITUTIONS, GUARDED BY THE TILER'S SWORD

Before the door of all lodges stands a Tiler "with a drawn sword in his hand." Customarily it is a straight blade; such a shining shaft of steel as was carried by knights of olden time. According to Mackey it should have a snake-like shape in allusion to the "Flaming sword which was placed at the east of the Garden of Eden which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life."

"The Book of Constitutions, guarded by the Tiler's sword," is a comparatively modern symbol; its introduction has been traced to Webb, about 1800.

It reminds us to be **"ever watchful and guarded in our words and actions, particularly when before the enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection."** But the Book of Constitutions is not a secret work. It was first ordered printed by the Mother Grand Lodge, and a few original copies as well as uncounted reprints of the Old Charges and the General Regulations of 1723 are in existence to be seen by Mason and profane alike. Obviously neither silence nor circumspection regarding this particular Masonic volume is necessary. Some read into Webb's symbol the thought that it expresses the guardianship of constitutional government by the Masonic Fraternity but this seems rather far-fetched. It is easier to think that the Tiler's sword admonishes us to brook no changes in our ancient landmarks, to be guarded lest our words and actions bring the foundation book of Masonic law into disrepute before the enemies of Masonry, applying to the Book of Constitutions as well as to the secrets of Freemasonry "those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection." The second edition of Anderson's Constitutions sets forth that in 1731 the Grand Master, the Duke of Norfolk, presented to the Grand Lodge of England the old trusty sword of Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, that was worn next by his successor in war, the brave Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, with both their names on the blade, which the Grand Master had ordered Brother George Moody (the king's sword cutler) to adorn richly with the arms of Norfolk in silver on the scabbard, in order to be the Grand Master's sword of state in the future.

Early prints of lodge meetings on the Continent show the sword in use in the ceremonies; in this country the sword was never worn in the lodge room even during that era when a sword was as much a necessary article of a gentleman's dress as shoes or gloves. It was deemed then as now incompatible with meeting upon the level. Either as a weapon which made its possessor stronger than the man who was unarmed, or as a badge of rank, the sword has no place in the lodge, except that it is usually presented to the Tiler in the lodge at opening. It is almost universal for the Tiler to request military men in uniform to leave their swords without the lodge before entering. This custom, comparatively little known in this country because few military men in times of peace go to lodge in full uniform, was often broken during the war when soldiers clanked up and down lodge rooms with their arms at their sides. But it is as Masonically inconsistent to wear a sword in lodge as to appear therein without an apron.

The Tiler's sword is wholly symbolic; whether it was always so is a matter lost in the mists which shroud ancient history. The Tiler of the operative lodge may well have been armed with a sword for actual defense against the cowan, who wanted the word and the secret of the square without the necessity of serving a long period as an Apprentice and labouring to produce a satisfactory Master's Piece. The modern Tiler keeps off the cowan and the eavesdropper by the simple process of refusing to admit those he does not know; if they still desire to enter the tiled door, they must either be vouched for or request a committee. The Tiler's sword is but the emblem of his authority, as the gavel is the symbol of that possessed by the Master.

No symbol in Freemasonry but is less than the idea symbolized. The Volume of the Sacred Law, the letter "G," the Square, the Compasses, all symbolize ideas infinitely greater than paper and ink, a letter formed of electric lights or carved from wood, a working tool of metal. The Tiler's sword has a much greater significance than its use as a defense against invasion of privacy. The eavesdropper from without is no longer feared. The real eavesdropper is the innocent profane who is told more than he should by the too enthusiastic Mason. In the monitorial charge to the Entered Apprentice we hear, "neither are you to suffer your zeal for the Institution to lead you into argument with those who, through ignorance may ridicule it." The admonition of the Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tiler's sword applies here.

Constructively if not actively every profane who learns more than he should of esoteric Masonic work is an enemy.

Let us, then, all wear a Tiler's sword in our hearts; let us set the seal of silence and circumspection upon our tongues; let us guard the West Gate from the cowan as loyally as the Tiler guards his door.

Only by such use of the sword do we carry out its symbolism. To Masons the sword is an emblem of power and authority, never of blood or wounds or battle or death. Only when thought of in this way is it consistent with the rest of the symbols of our gentle Craft, winning obedience to the mandates of the Tiler by brotherly love, an infinitely stronger power than strength of arm, point of weapon or bright and glittering steel.

[> Walking the Tiler's Sword-](#)

TYLER OATH

The investigating committee administers the Tyler's Oath in the following manner:

The Past Master of the Investigating committee or chairman will hold the Holy Bible. The visiting Brother will place his right hand on the Bible and raise his left hand and repeat the oath as it is given by the P.M. or committee chairman.

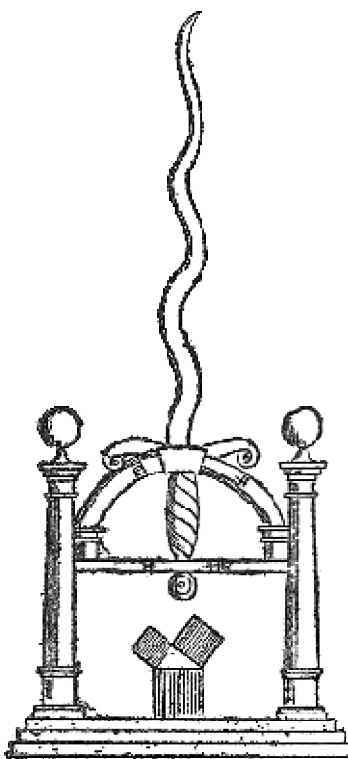
Walking the Tyler's Sword

The prelude to the Tyler's Oath (commonly known as "**walking said sword**"). The brother will retire four paces from the point of the sword. He will advance by three regular steps, giving the step, due guard and sign of the degrees in their natural sequence (EA, FC, MM). Then advance another step with the left foot, pick up the sword with the left hand, the right hand along shaft support in a said word and place near the heart and repeat the following:

I (state your name) do hereby and hereon solemnly and sincerely swear, that I have been regularly initiated, passed, and raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason, in a regularly constituted lodge of such; that I am not now under suspension or expulsion, and know of no just reason why I should not hold Masonic intercourse with my brethren. SO HELP ME GOD.

A Forgotten Emblem of the "Modern" Masons

http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/symbolism/modern_sword.html



In the satirical introduction to Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon*, 1764, p. xxxii., is the following passage:—"There is now in my neighbourhood a large piece of iron scroll work, ornamented with foliage, etc., painted and gilt (the whole at an incredible expense), and placed before the Master's chair, with a gigantic sword fixed therein, during the communication of the members, a thing contrary to all the private and public rules of Masonry, all the implements of war and bloodshed being confined to the Lodge door, from the day that the flaming sword was placed in the east of the garden of Eden, to the day that the sagacious modern placed his grand sword of state in the midst of his lodge."

The next edition, 1778, at p. xl., commences "There is now in Wapping a large piece" etc.

The remainder of the text is as above, and this is continued through the editions of the work down to that of 1813, the last. The above does not appear in the first edition (1756).

Now in the Constitutional Lodge, 294, at Beverley, there still remains a fine specimen of the sword alluded to by Dermott, and I enclose a sketch.

The sword itself is nearly four feet long, with polished blade and gilt handle. The stand is wood painted and gilded. The central portions of the metal arch and beam, below are hinged to admit the sword, and fastened with pins.

I remember to have seen a similar sword and stand at the Old Globe Lodge, 200, at Scarborough, many years ago, but it has disappeared. In the Humber Lodge, 57, at Hull, there is a precisely similar sword, but no stand, probably it belonged to the extinct Rodney Lodge, (Modern). —M. C. Peck.

Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, vol xi. (1893), "Notes and Queries". p. 196.

<http://www.skirret.com/library/archive/stb/Stb1930-01.html>

SHORT TALK BULLETIN - Vol.VIII January, 1930 No.1

THE SWORD IN THE CRAFT, by: Unknown

Before the door of all lodges stands a Tiler (Tyler) "with a drawn sword in his hand."

Customarily it is a straight blade; such a shining shaft of steel as was carried by Knights of olden times. According to Mackey it should have a snake-like shape. Formerly such swords were the badge of office of the Tiler, so made in allusion to the "Flaming Sword which was placed at the East of the Garden of Eden which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life."

Properly no Tiler's sword is ever carried in a scabbard; its symbolism requires it to be ever ready at hand to "keep off cowans and eavesdroppers." Our lectures refer to the sword but twice; we are taught of "the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword," and we learn also of the "Sword Pointing to a Naked Heart." "The Book of Constitutions, Guarded by the Tiler's Sword," is a comparatively modern symbol; its introduction has been traced to Webb, about 1800. Its symbolism is rather obscure, the more so that it seems so obvious.

We are told that it "Admonishes us to be ever watchful and guarded in our words and actions, particularly before the enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection." But the Book of Constitutions is not, in any sense of the word, a secret work. It was first ordered printed by the Mother Grand Lodge, and a few original copies as well as uncounted reprints of the Old Charges and the General Regulations of 1723 are in existence, to be seen by Mason and profane alike.

Obviously, then, it is not the secrecy of the Book of Constitutions which the Tiler's sword guards; neither silence nor circumspection regarding that particular Masonic volume is necessary.

Some have read into Webb's symbol the thought that it was intended to express the guardianship of civil liberties (a constitutional government) by the Masonic Fraternity, but this seems rather far fetched. It is a principle of science never to formulate a difficult hypothesis when a simple one explains the facts. Surely it is easier to think that the Tiler's sword admonishes us to brook no changes in our Ancient Landmarks, to be guarded lest our words and actions bring the foundation book of Masonic law into disrepute before the enemies of Masonry, applying the Book of Constitutions as well as to the secrets of Freemasonry "those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection.

"The sword pointing to the naked heart" is a symbolical adaptation of an old ceremony not peculiar to Masonry, but used by many orders and secret societies, in which the initiate taking his vows is surrounded by swords with their points resting against his body, ready to pierce him upon the instant if he refuses obedience. The sword is so used at the present time in some of the "higher Degrees" of freemasonry and contemporary engravings of the eighteenth century show swords were once used in some English and many Continental lodges. How this comparatively modern symbol became associated with the "All-Seeing Eye" - which is one of the most ancient symbols known to man, and borrowed by Freemasonry from ancient Egyptian ceremonies - is too long and difficult a study for any but the Masonic student with plenty of time and Masonic sources at hand.

The sword appears in the Grand Lodge as the implement of the Grand Sword Bearer, an officer found in most, if not all Grand Lodges. It comes, undoubtedly from the ancient "Sword of State," which seems to have begun in Rome when the lictor carried - as a symbol of authority and power to punish the evil doer - his bundle of rods with an axe inserted. In the middle ages the rods and axe metamorphosed into the naked sword, carried in ceremonial processions before the sovereign as a symbol of his authority and his power over life and death; and his dispensation of swift justice. The custom in England was known at least as early as 1236 when a pointless sword (emblematical of mercy) was carried at the coronation of Henry III.

The second edition of Anderson's Constitutions sets forth, that in 1731 the Grand Master, the Duke of Norfolk, presented to the Grand Lodge of England "The Old Trusty Sword of Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, that was worn next by his successor in war, the brave Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, with both their names on the blade, which the Grand Master had ordered Brother George Moody (The King's sword cutler) to adorn richly with the arms of Norfolk in silver on the scabbard, in order to be the Grand Master's sword of state in the future."

Brother Moody was later appointed Grand Sword Bearer, so the office has the respectability of an antiquity almost coincident with the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge.

The idea the Grand Sword Bearer carries his implement to protect the Grand Master from enemies seems entirely fanciful; the sword is merely the emblem of his power, the evidence that he is supreme within the Masonic state over which he rules.

Early prints of lodge meetings on the Continent show the sword in use in the ceremonies; in this country the sword was never brought into the lodge room even during that era when a sword was as much a necessary article of a gentleman's dress as shoes or

gloves. It was then deemed, as now, incompatible with that "Meeting Upon the Level" which is so integral a part of all lodge communications; the sword, either as a weapon, which made its possessor stronger than he who was unarmed, or as a badge of rank or distinction; was held to have no place in the lodge. From this development the almost universal custom of the Tiler requesting all military men in uniform to leave their swords without the lodge before entering.

This rule, or custom, comparatively little known in this country because few military men in times of peace go to lodge in full uniform, was often broken during the recent war when soldiers clanked up and down lodge rooms with the arms of their profession at their sides. But it is as Masonically inconsistent to wear a sword in lodge as to appear therein without an Apron.

It goes without saying that the Tiler's Sword is wholly symbolic; whether it was always so or not is a matter lost in the mists which shroud ancient history. In the operative days of Masonry the workmen upon a Cathedral held meetings in the house erected for their convenience - the lodge. Operative Masons possessed secrets of real value to the craftsmen; the Master knew the geometrical method of "trying the square;" all those who had submitted their Master's Pieces and satisfied the Master's of the Craft as to their proficiency received the "Mason's Word," which enabled them to satisfy others, in "foreign countries" (which might be the next town as well as the adjacent nation) of their proficiency as builders. When the beginnings of Speculative Masonry made their appearance, they added, those secrets which only Masons possessed. Naturally, many desired to obtain those secrets. These were divided into two classes; the "eavesdropper," who listened under the eaves of a building and therefore received the droppings from the roof, and the "cowan," or, partially instructed Mason. As early as 1589 (Schaw Manuscript) appears this passage: "That no Master or Fellow of the Craft shall receive any cowans to work in his society or company, nor send none of his servants to work with cowans."

Mackey traces the word to Scotland. In Scott's Rob Roy, Allan Inverach says: "She does not value a Cawmil mair as a cowan." Scottish usage of "cowan," a term of contempt, an uninstructed Mason; a Mason who builds dry walls, without mortar, a "dry-diker." But there are other possible derivations of the word; for instance, it may have come from an old Swedish word "kujon" meaning a silly fellow, or the French, "conyon," meaning a coward, a base man.

The Tiler of the operative lodge may well have been armed with a sword for actual defense of himself, or the lodge in which his fellows were meeting, from the encroachment of the cowans who wanted the word and the secret of the square without the necessity of serving a long period as an apprentice and of laboring to produce a satisfactory Master's Piece.

The modern Tiler keeps off the cowan and eavesdropper by the simple process of refusing to admit those he does not know; if they still desire to enter the tiled door, they must either be vouched for or request a committee. The Tiler's sword is but the emblem of his authority, as the Gavel is the symbol of that possessed by the Master.

Occasionally a lodge member is a little hurt, perhaps offended, if the Tiler does not know him and demands that some one vouch for him before he is permitted to enter.

"Why, I've been a member of this lodge for fifteen years!" he may say. "Here's my good standing card. You ought to know me!" It is possible that the Tiler "ought to know him." But Tilers - even the very best and most experienced Tilers - are just human beings with all the faults of memory which beset us all. Many of us are sure that we know a face and are yet unable to say that we have seen it in a lodge. How much more true this may be of the Tiler, who must see and memorize so many faces!

To be offended or hurt because a Tiler does his duty is merely to say, in effect, "I'd rather you didn't do what you are supposed to than hurt my vanity by failing to remember me!"

Not very long ago a Grand Master paid a surprise visit, all unaccompanied, to a small lodge. Their Tiler did not know him. The Master, sent for, to vouch for the distinguished visitor, was highly mortified and said so in lodge. The Grand Master stopped him. "You must not be mortified, my brother," he said. "You are to be congratulated on having a Tiler who knows his duty and does it so well. I commend him to the brethren."

All of which was a graceful little speech, which carried a wholesome lesson on the reality of the authority and the duty represented by the shining blade which no Tiler is supposed to put down while on duty.

No symbol in all Freemasonry but is less than the idea symbolized. The Volume of the Sacred Law, the letter "G," the Square, the Compasses; all symbolize ideas infinitely great than paper and ink, a letter formed of electric lights, or carved from wood, a working tool of metal. Consequently the Tiler's sword (like the sword of state of the Grand Sword Bearer) has a much greater significance, not only to the Tiler but to all Masons, than its use as a tool of defense against an invasion of privacy.

As not all cowans which may beset a lodge come through the Tiler's door, every Master Mason should be, to some extent, a Tiler of his lodge and wear a symbolic Tiler's Sword when on the important task assigned to the committee on petitions.

Some "cowans" slip through the West Gate, are duly and truly prepared, properly initiated, passed and raised; yet, never become real Master Masons. This happens when members of the committee have not heeded the symbolism of the Tiler's sword. All of us know of some members who might better have been left among the profane. They represent the mistaken judgment, first of the committee, then the lodge. Had all used their symbolic Tiler's sword - made as accurate an investigation of the petitioner as the Tiler makes of the would-be entrant through his door - these real "cowans" would not be a drag upon the lodge and the Fraternity.

The "eavesdropper" from without is longer feared. Our lodge rooms are seldom so built that any one may listen to what goes on within. The real "eavesdropper" is the innocent profane who is told more than he should hear, by the too enthusiastic Mason. In the monitorial charge to the entered Apprentice we hear: "Neither are you to suffer your zeal for the institution to lead you into argument

with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule it." The admonition of the emblem of the "Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword" applies here - we must "be ever watchful and guarded of our words and actions, particularly before the enemies of Masonry." Constructively, if not actively, every profane who learns more than he should of esoteric Masonic work is a possible enemy.

Let us all wear a Tiler's sword in our hearts; let us set the zeal of silence and circumspection upon our tongues; let us guard the West Gate from the cowan as loyally as the Tiler guards his door.

Only by doing so may the integrity of our beloved Order be preserved, and "the honor, glory and reputation of the Fraternity may be firmly established and the world at large convinced of its good effects." For only by such use of the sword do we carry out its Masonic symbolism. To Masonry the sword is an emblem of power and authority, never of blood or wounds or battle or death. Only when thought of in this way is it consistent with the rest of the symbols of our gentle Craft and wins obedience to the mandates of the Tiler by brotherly love, an infinitely stronger power than strength of arm, point of weapon or bright and glittering steel!

The Symbolism of the Sword

http://www.njfreemason.net/symbolism_of_the_sword.htm

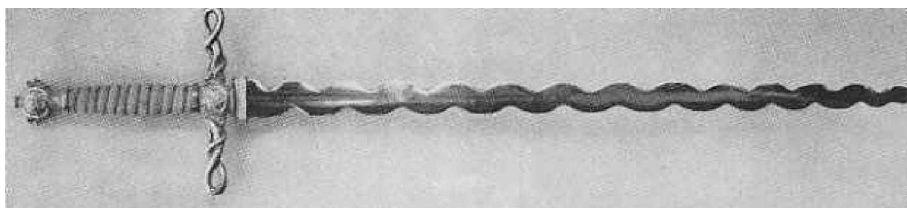
The sword used to play an important role in Freemasonry, and still does so in many of the so-called "higher" degrees. In ancient times, it was a regular part of the dressing of a gentleman, but Masons were required to leave their swords in the Tiler's room before entering a Lodge. Its importance can be seen that even today, many Grand Lodges, still appoint a "Swords Bearer". Why is the sword so important?

The sword has a classic duality to it. In most cultures, any weapon symbolizes power - but this power can go both ways. On the one hand it kills and destroys, yet on the other it protects and is a central symbol for chivalry. No man was considered a true knight unless he was presented with his sword in an often elaborate ceremony. The Japanese Samurai went one step further, considering the sword to be their own spirit, and it was never to leave one's side [see below 'The True and Wondrous Sword of Tai-a']. For this reason, even today, forgers of swords go through an elaborate ceremony before, during and after forging a new blade.

The Knights Templars swore that they would never draw their swords unless convinced of the justice of the cause in which they were engaged, nor to sheathe it until their enemies were subdued. Many swords, especially those from Spain, often had the following engraved on them

*"No me saques sin rason. No me embaines sin honor";
(Do not draw me without justice, do not sheathe me without honor.)*

The Tiler's sword should traditionally be one with a "wavy" blade, to symbolize the flaming sword that was placed at the east of the garden of Eden, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). It should also never be sheathed, as it is the Tiler's duty to keep off, at all times, "cowans and eavesdroppers."



An example of a traditional Tyler's sword

The True and Wondrous Sword of Tai-a

by Takuan (1573 - 1645)

Note: This may be read exoterically, at face value alone, or esoterically for a deeper inner or mystical 'meaning.' – g.l.h.

THE ART OF THE SWORD consists of never being concerned with victory or defeat, with strength or weakness, of not moving one step forward, not moving one step backward, of the enemy not seeing me, and my not seeing the enemy. Penetrating to that which is fundamental before the separation of Heaven and earth where yin and yang cannot reach, one instantly attains proficiency in the Art.

A person who has attained such mastery of the Art does not use the sword to kill; he uses the sword to serve people. But when killing is in order, it kills; when giving life is in order, it gives life. It is free to kill and it is free to serve life. Without seeing good and evil, he clearly sees good and evil; without discriminating, he clearly discriminates. He sets foot in water as if it were on earth, and he walks on earth as if it were in water. When one gains this freedom, he is a great-earth-person, and no one can obstruct him. He stands supreme by himself.

If you wish to realize this, strive unceasingly to see things, including the self, as they are, sharply endeavoring to see them from every angle and so gain insight into their true nature - whether walking, resting, sitting, or lying, whether talking or remaining quiet, whether drinking or eating. With the accumulation of months and years suddenly of itself true wisdom will appear like a Light in the

darkness. Then you will have gained the insight that no teacher can teach you and manifest the miraculous movements of actionless action. Truly at that moment you will be simply part of the ordinary, yet you will go beyond the ordinary. This is the true and wondrous sword of Tai-a.

This sharp sword of Tai-a is possessed by everyone and lies perfected in each person. When it is made Bright, demons fear it; but when it is unpolished, demons will play tricks upon it.

When a superior person meets another superior person and they cross swords, there is neither victory nor defeat, like the Buddha holding up a flower and Mahakasyapa smiling. To know the other three when only one is mentioned, or to discern the weight of gold or silver merely by looking - these are examples of ordinary intelligence. But one who has attained perfection in the Art will cut you into three parts even before one is mentioned or the three clarified, even more so is the case if you stand face to face before him.

Such a person will never draw his sword. His quickness cannot be matched even by the flash of lightning; his swiftness is beyond even the sudden gush of wind. But those who have not mastered the Art become attached to the sword or cling to their thoughts, breaking the blade or hurting themselves. They are far from being skilled. Do not try to figure this out with ordinary thinking. It cannot be explained by words, nor taught by any kind of examples. This is called the transmission outside of conventional teaching.

When this dynamic function becomes manifested, all rules and conventions disappeared. Sometimes it asserts itself, sometimes it negated itself, and even Heaven cannot figure it out. What does all this really mean? The ancients said, "When there is no picture of the evil-devouring monster in the house, there are no evil spirits." When one trains the body-mind and attains this wisdom, the single sword will pacify the world. If you seek to master this Art, get rid of all frivolous talk!

Translated by Taitetsu Unno
July 1978



In a brief posting to a Masonic egroup, I once wrote the below query regarding the Tiler and his sword. Various replies follow the query.

Greetings,

From the broad representation of this group, and view of some research I am doing, I would interested in what your Lodge does regarding the Tiler and his sword.

1. What kind of sword does your Lodge use:
 - a. a straight sword.
 - b. a curved sword.
 - c. a 'wavy' sword.
 - d. a Templars sword.
2. Does your Tiler ALWAYS have his sword at each communication?
3. Is the sword in a sabbard or not?
4. Why is Tiler there, and why does he have a sword?
 - a. according to your ritual.
 - b. relative to visitors (cowans, evesdroppers &c)
 - c. relative to the Brothers in the 'Tiled' Lodge room
 - b. in your speculative opinion. . .

May sound a bit strange or silly, but there appears to be several different views on this subject.

Fraternally,
Lee Miller,
Liverpool, NY

For the record, ours is presently a large, beautiful double-edged ceremonial sword engraved with the name of our Lodge (without a scabbard); sorta like a 'broad sword' . . . but that doesn't make is symbolically 'correct' (symbolically speaking).

Hello Bro. Lee,

1. In my lodge, the Tiler's sword is an oversize ceremonial object. After years of using any one of the several different old implements that had accumulated in the closet in the wakes of various mergers and consolidations, the brethren opted to purchase a large, decorative piece. I wouldn't say it's a broadsword, but it is a wide blade held by a large handle.

Most other lodges use a straight sword, with a narrow blade. Sometimes you'll find an old Templar sword left over from long ago. **Mercer Lodge No. 50 (Trenton, NJ – Warranted 1858) has a Flaming Sword, which I'm convinced once belonged to a Rose Croix Chapter that met in the building ages ago.**
master@merc50.com master@merc50.com
secretary@merc50.com secretary@merc50.com

2. In the Opening ritual, our WM gives the Tiler his sword.

3. No scabbard.

4a. To observe cowans and eavesdroppers, allow only credentialed Masons to enter, etc.

4b. To check membership cards and other credentials, question visitors, etc.

4c. To see if anyone can vouch for the visitor. Sometimes to give the Master information written out by the visitor for introduction purposes.

4d. He is the 'cork in the bottle,' who prevents pollution and prevents leakage of energy.

- Jay

Brother Lee,

1. E. My mother lodge in NY doesn't use a sword, except when the tyler is given one at installation, which is slightly curved.

2. No. See above. I'd never seen the sword outside of installation.

3. No. The blade is bare, on the one occasion per year it's present.

4. A & B

As for the lodge I often visit in Indiana:

1. D.

2. Yes, but it's always hanging on the back of the tyler's chair and always sheathed.

3. See above: the scabbard for this sword is the metal one with the rings for attaching to a uniform, I think.

4. For this lodge, I'm not sure why the tyler is there: once the lodge has opened, **he comes in and sits in Lodge**, leaving the lodge door open. I'd asked on several occasions why this was the custom, as I thought it ran contrary to the idea of tiling a lodge, but no one had an explanation. But I think according to theory: A & B.

S&F,
Steve

Bro. Lee, my answer may not be relevant to your research, because our customs are totally different from the norm in Anglo-American Freemasonry, but this is how it is in the Swedish system.

Question 1: Straight sword is worn by all attending. The WM's Sword is usually a little bigger and more ornate than the rest, as it is laid on top of the bible at the beginning of the meeting. All officers use swords provided by the lodge, engraved with the symbol of their office. Plain swords are provided for all and you can also bring your own.

Question 2: Tiler is not one of the officers present. It is the duty of the JW to ensure the lodge is properly guarded. While that is performed all stand at attention (or are prepared) with the swords drawn. When echoing the knocks the SW and JW use their sword to hit on with their hammers.

Question 3: Officers swords are in scabbard, but not the plain swords provided for the rest. In the higher grades you can use different colored scabbards.

Question 4: Does not apply, but swords are a big part of the ritual and used on numerous occasions.

Hope this enlightens.

Steinarr

Greetings,

Thank you for your input regarding the Tiler's Sword.

The general consensus, from a very limited sampling indicates that a straight, unsheathed sword is used by Lodges. The significance of the Tiler reported is to, according to our ritual, keep cowans & evedroppers from our communications (or other such persons not properly entitled). Some of the exceptions to this are of interest:

There were not comments tendered regarding Bro. Mackey's assertion regarding the flaming sword and the Garden of Eden. This may be attributed to:

1. No one read the posting.
2. Those who may have thought it was humbug . . .

Using the *Book of Genesis*, and other histories, Archbishop Ussher determined that the universe was created in the year 4004 BCE. From this reckoning, one may wish to note (Gen. 1:26-27) that ". . . God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." This would put their birth dates at about October (23rd) 4000 BCE (rectifying for the four year 'error' on the birth year of Jesus . . .