

The Broached Thurnel

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Brethren,

I want to present to you one of the jewels of an Entered Apprentice, the Broached Thurnel. Many of you might not have heard of this tool before now as it has faded into oblivion over the years, to be replaced by another. To begin, let me read to you a passage from a publication by one Samuel Pritchard, who in 1731 wrote and published "Masonry Dissected" the first in a series of exposes on Freemasonry. In it, we find the following dialogue between an initiate and the initiating officer:

Q: Have you any jewels in your Lodge?

A: Yes

Q: How many?

A: Six; three movable and three immovable

Q: What are the movable jewels?

A: Square Level, and Plumb Rule (these are, in our day, considered the immovable jewels)

Q: What are their uses?

A: Square, to down true and right lines; Level, to try all horizontals; and Plumb Rule, to try all uprights

Q: What are the immovable jewels?

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A: Tarsel Board, Rough Ashlar, and Broached Thurnel

Q: What are their uses?

A: A Tarsel Board for the Master to draw his designs upon, Rough Ashlar for the Fellowcraft to try their jewels upon, and the Broached Thurnel for the Entered Apprentice to learn to work upon

Mackey's Encyclopedia shows the Thurnel to be found in lectures and tracing boards of the 1700s, which describe it as one of the immovable jewels along with the Rough Ashlar and Tarsel Board, as we just heard. It was later replaced by the Perfect Ashlar which is more familiar to us. French Lodges, however, to this day preserve this symbol, referring to it as a "pierre cubique" or cubical stone.

So what does the Broached Thurnel look like?

It is a cube . . . topped by a pyramid.

Worshipful G. W. Speth, one of the founding members of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076¹ in London, England, in "Ars Quatuor Coronatorum" explains that the Broached Thurnel is a kind of blunt chisel used to roughly hew stones and that its name comes from a Scots word meaning to "rough hew (broach)" and a derivation of the word "Turner", meaning a working tool.



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¹ Quatuor Coronati takes its name from the 4 Master Masons put to death by Emperor Diocletian on November 8, 300 A.D.

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Brother Jorge Sanchez offers further suggestions on how we should view this tool:

Let us consider the shape of the Thurnel. In profile it is the same shape as that of an Entered Apprentice's apron. We can therefore speculate that the Thurnel, like the apron, must have some specific meaning in connection with the first degree. The shape itself, although 5-sided, is the union of a 3-sided shape (trace) and a 4-sided one (trace) giving us seven, which is the number required to open an Entered Apprentice's Lodge.

The Thurnel is a tool for rough work, used by the Entered Apprentice in the quarries where, hewing, roughly working, and bearing heavy burdens, he does not see the Temple taking shape on top of Mount Moriah. Each stone was prepared and finished in the quarry and then taken to the Temple to be placed there with other finished stones.

Similarly, the work of the Entered Apprentice is done in faith; he does not see the finished product of his labors or know precisely where the work he is doing will fit in the greater scheme. When we work as Entered Apprentices, and in some respects we always do, we don't always know where a particular piece of information or Masonic Knowledge will lead us. Any Mason who has been raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason will recognize that many of the details given in the first two degrees took on further significance in the third degree.

The work of the Entered Apprentice must be considered preliminary work and requires a great deal of patience. Masonry is a progressive science; we all know that but it must be impressed on the Entered Apprentice that he be patient when learning the rough and unfinished preliminary work, knowing that it lays the foundation for what is to come. Similarly, I personally have the utmost respect for 1st and 2nd grade school teachers who lay the foundation for our children's continuing education. Both my children were blessed with outstanding educators in their early years and have done well since, as a result of

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this. In fact, one of Masonry's earliest goals was to educate and much of education is knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

How many of us said, back during our days in school, when asked to find the measure of an angle or read a poem, "When will I ever use this?" With time and maturity we have come to recognize that this knowledge has value. This concept of knowledge for its own sake is one of the lessons of the Thurnel and the first degree.

Now, let us look at the Thurnel and consider the 3-dimensional aspects of this tool.

The Thurnel has 9 faces; 4 vertical faces representing the world through the four cardinal directions or the 4 elements. There is one horizontal face below representing where we currently stand. The four triangular faces could be seen to represent the four cardinal virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice.

The apex of the pyramid represents Heaven or Deity.

Think for a moment on how the Lodge is defined in our Entered Apprentice's Lecture: "The form of a Lodge is an oblong square . . . "

It seems that this definition could lead us to view the Thurnel as a representation of the Lodge itself.

The Thurnel is the Lodge, a place that is everywhere and nowhere, a place that is not a place because it is, in fact, its constituent members. At the same time, the 10th face,

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where the top face of the cube meets the bottom face of the pyramid, could be seen as the Lodge, where heaven meets earth, the true Temple itself.

I thank you for your attention and hope that this examination of the Broached Thurnel, a forgotten and almost unknown symbol of our Craft, has given you a glimpse of the wisdom, strength and beauty of our glorious Fraternity.