

## THE IMMOVABLE AND MOVABLE JEWELS

Masons refer to jewels with different meanings, depending upon the context. The lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree mentions six jewels, and says that three are immovable and three are movable. In this context, the term jewel means an emblem or a symbol. The immovable jewels are the Square, the Level and the Plumb. The movable jewels are the Rough Ashlar, the Perfect Ashlar and the Trestleboard. We call the first three immovable because they are associated with officers who are always located in the East, West and South in a Masonic lodge. The second three are movable because they can be located in different places in the lodge.

Officers of a Masonic lodge wear emblems on a ribbon or collar around the neck to indicate the office that they hold. The three principal officers, the Master, the Senior Warden, and the Junior Warden, wear the Square, the Level, and the Plumb, respectively. These emblems remind them – and the brethren of the lodge – that all Masonic actions should be measured by these three emblems. Our work should be square, or honest; it should be level, which means treating others as equals, and it should be upright, or ethical, which is the meaning of the plumb.

The other three jewels are not worn by the officers, but are symbolic of Masonic principles. The rough ashlar is a block of stone that has not yet received much attention – much like our lives at the beginning of our Masonic journey. The perfect ashlar represents the improvements in our lives which we should expect if we shape them in accordance with Masonic principles and teachings; and the trestleboard is a map of our future as we progress in Freemasonry. We are taught that we need to map out where we are going in our lives – to have a purpose instead of just drifting through life – and that we can learn more about this purpose by listening to others who have much to teach us (such as other well-informed Masons), and also by studying the broad range of human knowledge, and information which comes to us from our religious traditions. Masons call this the Great Book of Nature and Revelation.

In many countries, the immovable jewels are just the opposite – they are the Rough Ashlar, the Perfect Ashlar, and the Trestleboard. The two sets were transposed in the 1840's when imposters were trying to worm their way into Masonic lodges using exposés of the ritual. The switching of the emblems was a way to find out who was a *real* Mason and not an *imposter*.

The square is also used on the altar as one of the Three Great Lights in Masonry [[hyperlink to this article](#)] and is the jewel of the Master. A square is used to make sure

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that a stone is perfectly square on its sides and top – an essential feature if it is to support the weight of the stones above it in a wall. A stone that is thus square is an important symbol of an honest life. If a stone is not true – not square on its sides and top – it will cause the wall to be unstable. In a similar way, if our lives are not lived honestly, we create instability in our relationship with others. The square is also linked to the Masonic principle of Truth [[hyperlink to this article](#)]. To be honest is to be truthful with others. Masons act upon the square because being honest and truthful in all our dealings with others is essential if we are to lay a good foundation in everything that we do as Masons.

The level is the jewel of the Senior Warden. As a stone must be square in order to be of any value in building a wall, so must it be properly laid in relation to the other blocks that make it up. The level is said to represent *equality*, which is another way of saying that we must treat others in such a way as to respect their dignity and value. Masons don't believe that everyone is equally endowed with the same talents or experiences in life. Nor do they want to reduce everyone to the lowest common denominator. Masons respect the talents, abilities and achievements of others which contribute to our common culture and society. But, we are expected to treat others in such a way that we respect their individuality, and in a way which acknowledges the fundamental worth of each individual. To treat someone *equitably* is to recognize that there is a fundamental humanity which we all share, and which we must at all times respect.

The plumb is worn by the Junior Warden. Our stonemason ancestors used a plumb to keep a wall perfectly vertical as it was built. If a wall were out of plumb, it could topple over, rendering all the work of building the wall useless. In a similar manner, Masons believe that our lives have to be built in such a way that our conduct matches our beliefs. Uprightness of character is a strength which we expect all Masons to pursue. If we ignore our responsibility to lead ethical lives we run the risk that our lives, like a poorly built wall, will topple over and be useless. We need to test our actions against the plumb to make sure that the decisions we are making are those that will contribute to a lasting stability in our lives, and not contribute to an eventual collapse due to ignoring this important Masonic emblem.

The Rough and Perfect Ashlars are often found in a Masonic lodge near the Worshipful Master in the East, where they can be easily seen by all Masons in the lodge. These emblems have nothing to do with perfection in an absolute sense, because Freemasonry makes no attempt to make a man perfect. They are instead representative of the progress in life that we expect all Masons to make. Masons believe it a primary responsibility of each person to improve himself. He is encouraged to seek more knowledge - often referred to by a Mason's search for *further light* – and he is urged to improve his life by applying the symbols and teachings of Freemasonry to himself. We are not so much interested in what a Mason

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eventually becomes as we are in the fact that he is growing and learning, working to improve himself daily, in order to make his life more valuable to himself, his family, and to the world in which he lives.

The term trestleboard is peculiar to Freemasonry and comes from a time when Masons met at inns and taverns. In earlier times they would meet for a social occasion, such as a dinner, and also conduct their Masonic ceremonies in the same dining room. Tables in those inns were not permanent pieces of furniture as they are nowadays in restaurants. They were instead made up of planks of wood placed on portable frameworks, called trestles. The boards which formed the table were the trestle boards. Masons discovered that if these trestle boards were turned over that they made splendid chalkboards on which to draw Masonic symbols and diagrams. They also recalled that their stonemason ancestors often used such boards upon which to draw their architectural designs so that the craftsmen would know how to construct the building. It was from this original practical function that Freemasonry took the term trestleboard to describe a map of our lives.

The main idea here is that our lives should have purpose. If we don't know where we are going, anyway will get us there. But Masons of old needed a plan in order to build a cathedral or a castle, and today we need a plan to make our lives meaningful. Freemasonry does not tell us where to find that plan. Some find it in their religious tradition; some find it through a life of service to others; but most find it because they study the great accomplishments of humanity, and also anchor it in the teachings of the world's great religions. The main teaching of the trestleboard is that we do need a map if we are going to accomplish anything in life. Of course we all need help in constructing such a map. We don't need to do it all ourselves. Freemasonry encourages us to seek out those who have knowledge and wisdom to share, and of course, we are expected to share the knowledge and wisdom we have with others.