

Official Visit to Ancient Landmarks / Doric No 654.
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“When all you have is a hammer, everything begins to look like a Nail”.

If only there was a single store for both men and women alike. My wife and I could then go shopping at the same time. One half of the store would be shoes and purses and the other half would be tools and hardware. I love tools and what they can do to simplify your life. I have quite a varied collection of tools; some bought, some inherited and some I just had to have, although I don't know why I ever purchased a pipe bending machine. Even though I may only need to use a certain item once in a blue moon, it has a very specific purpose for which it was designed. When used properly in the appropriate application, the particular tools will get the job done effortlessly and perfectly.

It's great to have a well-stocked tool chest, but you also have to know and understand how to use the implements and gadgets at your disposal. You can take a man to the Hardware store to buy a power tool, but you cannot force him to read the instruction manual. Failure to do so which seems to be male trait, may result in damage, embarrassment or a loved one taking you to the emergency ward.

Would it be fair to say that you have either assembled something bought from Ikea, or at least know someone who has?

I know fun has been poked in Ikea's direction about their instruction manuals and their funny cartoon character, but in reality, their directions are very straightforward.

There is a right way to assemble and a wrong way. You do it the right way according to the instructions and your kitchen cupboards hang level and securely and it will be a project of which you are proud. Not paying attention and doing it the wrong way or taking a shortcut; and your wife is telling you *"I told you so"* as your cupboard slopes and all your dishes are smashed on the floor.

I think you would agree; *"Knowledge is what you get when you read the manual; experience is what you get when you don't"*.

Are you well equipped and informed to deal with the challenges and opportunities that are likely to occur along your Masonic journey? What tools do you have in your Masonic Tool chest to get the job done right and level? When you were made a Mason you were presented with The By-Laws of the lodge, The Constitution of our Grand Lodge and as you progressed through our rites and ceremonies, were presented with the appropriate piece of Ritual for further study.

If you go through your Masonic career with these 'tools' only, your tool chest is somewhat inadequate and you may not be properly prepared.

I would suggest when you only have a hammer; everything *is* going to look like a nail. A true craftsman will have a whole array of tools to handle a wide range of projects within his discipline and will consequently see more than just the nail.

Just as the Craftsman will invest in quality equipment and continuing education, so should the Mason invest in his tools and knowledge. An investment in education is a lot less expensive than the embarrassing cost of ignorance.

I guess in a manner of speaking, a man will become ‘the product of his tools’. The better his collection; the better the craftsman he is likely to be. Lets bear in mind that having a collection of intellectual property does not guarantee knowledge, but does provide nourishment in the trough from which we must all must drink if we chose wisdom.

So I now wish to share with you some of the items I have in my collection and you can make your own determination of how great a tool I am. *[laugh]*.

First and foremost, the **VOSL**: This is the supreme rule and guide to our faith and contains the promises of just rewards for a well-spent life. Within the pages of this sacred volume we find comfort in our sorrow, a companion along our journey and a compass to help us stay on the correct path.

Exactly as the name implies, ***Meeting the Challenge*** is an informative volume covering the duties of Lodge Officers / Progressive Offices, the effective use of committees and making better use of Masonic Resources. From the very first paragraph in Chapter One, it states: “*The Lodge with well-informed and enthusiastic officers will have better attendance, will enjoy more fellowship and will show greater strength*”. If these are your goals, I think this might be a good read.

For me, ***The Masonic Manual*** is what I consider the Holy Grail of publications and I cannot recommend it strongly enough for your library. It served me well back when I was initiated and I refer to it quite frequently now.

What is the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge and who are the Board of General Purposes? How is the Masonic District organized? What about motions, rules of order and general purpose meetings? These are all reasonable questions and the mind of the inquiring mason will find answers in this book. Banquet room protocol and visitation of the DDGM are also covered in this Masonic Treasure.

When I was initiated on March 16th, 1988, M.W. Bro. David C. Bradley was our Grand Master. The craft will be ever grateful for his contributions to Masonic education and for the number of publications he authored.

The two most notable for me are “***Penetrating the Veil***” and “***Towards the Square***”. Of the former you delve into the “development of Masonic ceremonies”. M.W. Bro Bradley said in the preface “The most basic resource is knowledge. The task is not simply to teach, but encourage members to want to learn”. Of the latter, M.W. Bro Bradley published this book with the intent to “educate junior officers in the organizational procedures, government and understanding of our Masonic meetings”.

And then there are those inquiries that I refer to as water cooler questions, general interest, but no less important. “How does the Deacon carry the box when collecting the ballot?” “What is the proper use of the Sign of Fidelity?” Does a visiting Worshipful Master who is leading a Degree Team, wear his collar when assuming the chair?” “May a Memorial Service be held on a Sunday?” Some of you may know emphatically the answers to these questions, however, there are those who may not.

In any event, I think we all would benefit greatly from ***Questions and Answers / Revised Edition 2013***. In this publication you will find answers to 360 questions broken down into sections by General Questions, Openings and Closings, Each of the Three Degrees, Banquet Hall Protocol, Installation and Investiture and finally Memorial Services.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the contributions of M.W. Bro. C. Edwin Drew, Past Grand Master and then Custodian of the Work from 1995 to 2006 for recording our questions and providing the much needed answers.

The publications I have previously referred to and which are readily available from our Grand Lodge offices would alone answer most of your Masonic questions of “How, when, where, why, who and what”.

At this juncture in my presentation I cannot help but think of the motto associated with the Boy Scouts; “Be Prepared”. Just as the Boy Scout has to study and exhibit skills to earn merit badges, we as Masons should study and make a daily advancement in our craft so we are prepared and skilled. Should we give out merit badges for such skills as ‘Banquet Room Protocol’, ‘Deacon Floor Work’ or ‘Obligations’? Would this then drive us to study and become proficient? Maybe we should be enhancing our skills knowing we would justly deserve them if they were handed out.

Do you realize just how lucky we are to live in an age where information is so instantaneous and readily available?

It was not that long ago when publishing of materials was so prohibitively expensive that family and friends might share a single edition of a particular book amongst them.

The King James Version of the Bible was first printed, only in 1611 and the earliest stages of what we now know to be large scale commercial printing were not perfected until the early 19-century.

I am sure the first brethren of our non-operative and speculative craft did not receive a printed copy of the ritual and other materials, but rather the lessons were passed from mouth to ear until the candidate was fully competent to pass them along himself. Anything he learned would have been greatly cherished and I suspect never forgotten. This would have been only several decades after the first publishing of the King James Bible for the first Free and Accepted Masons in Scotland. I would go so far to say that today we tend to take the information available to us for granted as it is so accessible.

In reality, there are brethren of our Craft today who have passed from initiation to Worshipful Master without having added any tools to their kit. This is a shame, because there is such a wonderful depth to our society. The more you know, the greater the meaning and the richer your experience will be. Winston Churchill said, and I apologize if I paraphrase, “I am anxious to learn, but I don’t always like being taught”. Although we do lecture our candidates, we invite them to “extend their researches”. I think this implies a process of self-study and discovery. Only something you alone can embrace.

What you may find fascinating is that while looking for something either in a book or on the Internet, you find something else and so forth and so on. You just need to 'turn the first page'.

I suppose it's rather ironic that tonight I would be giving a "show and tell" to a lodge that is known for the number of its members either currently engaged or previously employed in the teaching profession.

Brethren, I will gladly give you a fish so you might eat for a day, but I hope if I teach you *how* to fish, you won't sit in a boat and smoke cigars all day. Before I conclude I will leave you to ponder a quote from the Roman philosopher, Epictetus; "Be careful to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich, for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant".

I would strongly recommend the books I have referred to earlier to every lodge officer and I would encourage every lodge officer to persuade each new member to fill his tool chest with these valuable and useful resources. I will be forever grateful to my mentors for encouraging me to make a daily advancement in masonic knowledge and I can only share this gift with you in the hopes you may receive the same benefit and see more than just the nail.

Thank you for your kind attention:

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