

Tylers Operative And Speculative

by Bro. P. J. Adrian

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Origin of The Word Tyler

Various dictionaries indicate that the spelling "Tyler" is simply an older form of the more modern "Tiler". Freemasonry with its leaning towards antiquity has merely adopted the older spelling. The word "tile" is derived from the Latin "Tegula" and became in Old English "Tigule". The word "hele" as used in our obligations is derived from the word "helan" in Old English with the meaning "to cover", and led to the common use of the word "helyer", for a tradesman who thatched with reeds, heled with tiles or daubed with plaster to cover in a dwelling or other building. In London Ordinances of 1382 we find the word "Tylere", from the Bristol Ordinances of 1450 - "tyler" and in 1475 - "tiler". Workers at the St. Mary Redcliff Church between 1509 and 1534 were described as tilars, tilers or tylers. In 1753 a list of London Companies contained that of the "Tylours".

The Early Tylers

The more permanent building materials such as bricks and tiles were introduced by the Romans during their occupation of Britain but after their departure the ancient Britains went back to building with wood and covering with thatch and straw. The population grew, houses were built closer together and the inevitable happened. After a number of devastating fires in 1077 and again in 1087 and 1161 in London and many more in other towns and villages, a London Ordinance was issued in 1212, requiring that in the future no roofs be covered with the inflammable materials such as straw and reeds but only with tiles, lead, shingles or plastered straw.

This was obviously a great boost for the tilers' trade, which was further enhanced when in 1362 an uncommonly heavy storm flattened many houses throughout Britain and unroofed many

more. The tilers' profiteering was quickly stopped by a Royal Order prohibiting the tilers from charging more for their labor and materials than they had done before the disaster. They were not to charge more than 6 pence per day for their labor and not more than 7 shillings per 1000 plain tiles.

A mere 20 years later, on 10 May 1382, another Proclamation settled the wages of a tiler at 12 pence per day, a rate of inflation of 100% in 20 years which is one we have not had the luxury of for many years.

It is not certain when the Guild of Operative Tilers was formed but it is likely to have been in the period around 1212 when tiles and slate were used in preference to straw and reeds. In 1461 another Ordinance decreed: "That the tilers of the City shall henceforth be reputed as laborers and shall not be incorporated nor deemed to constitute an Art or Society". In 1468, however, the tilers requested that "The Fellowship of the Craft of Tilers be re-instated" as indeed they were and their status as an Incorporated Society was redeemed. The Tilers' Guilds continued for many years and much of their activity is recorded. One of the last was at the coronation of Queen Victoria on the 28th June 1838: "Four Masonic Lodges, all members wearing regalia, took part in a procession. They were followed by various trade guild representatives, amongst which were the tilers and the stone-masons, each man with an emblematic apron."

The Tyler's Place in Freemasonry

Skilled workers have guarded their trade secrets through the centuries and the use of a member of their own group as a sentry to keep out intruders was an established custom in medieval times. That they were not always successful is evident and industrial espionage is today almost a respected occupation. These sentries are referred to in various Masonic documents as Outerguards, Junior Entered Apprentices, doorkeepers, guarders and janitors. After the word "Tyler" first appeared in print, these various other titles continued in use for many years thereafter.

So, when did the word first appear in print? Dr. James Anderson in describing the formation of the first Grand Lodge in 1717, in the second Book of Constitutions which was issued in 1738, wrote: "Sayer, Grand Master, commanded the Masters and Wardens of Lodges to meet the Grand Officers every quarter in communication at the place he should appoint in his summons sent by the Tyler."

So there it is ... but why was it not in the first edition of the Book of Constitutions, which was issued in 1723? There is no record that indicates that Dr. Anderson took part in or even attended the 1717 formation of Grand Lodge and it is therefore likely that the good Doctor (of Divinity) quotes Grand Master Sayer from notes taken by someone else. It might well be that the title had come into use subsequent to the formation of Grand Lodge and that Dr. Anderson in recording

an event that took place 21 years earlier might well have used the word in current use rather than the actual word used by our first Grand Master. We shall never know.

In the By-Laws of a Lodge, probably written towards the end of 1732, appear 16 rules, the ninth one of which reads: "That the Master or Secretary do give notice by letter to all members of the time of election or any other emergency that at any time shall happen. Also that the Tyler do require from every Brother, as soon as the Lodge is closed his apron. Also that the Tyler admit no visitor into the Lodgeroom except there be some present who can vouch for his being a regular Brother."

We have already seen that the word was not used in the first edition of the Book of Constitutions. In Old Regulation XXXIII we read: "Another Brother, who must be a fellowcraft should be appointed to look after the door of Grand Lodge but shall be no member of it. "The same regulation in the 1738 second edition reads: "Another Brother and Master Mason should be appointed Tyler, to look after the door, but he must be no member of the Grand Lodge.

In the same second edition is this interesting paragraph; "In ancient times the Master, Wardens and Fellows on St. John's Day met, either in a Monastery or on the top of the highest Hill near them, by peep of Day and having there chosen their new Grand Officers they descended walking in due form to the place of the Feast, either a Monastery or the House of an Eminent Mason, or some large House of Entertainment as they thought best tyled."

Before dismissing Dr. Anderson as having misquoted our first Grand Master it needs to be remembered that the second Grand Master George Payne, elected in 1718, was a member of the committee formed to issue the third edition of the Book of Constitutions, that the relevant paragraph was the same in that edition and that George Payne was present at the formation of Grand Lodge. But how good was his memory for words actually used in 1717 when the third edition came out in 1756, nearly 40 years later?

The Tyler's Sword

The trowel now seen as a working tool or symbol, was used differently in the early days of Masonry. From the minutes of a Lodge in Carmarthen we learn that they paid for "5 trowels and mending 12 others". From some versions of the old catechism we learn that the Junior Entered Apprentice was armed with a "Sharp Instrument" which was a pointed trowel.

Bernard Jones suggests that the sentence in the Charge after Initiation: "that in every age monarchs themselves have been promoters of the art; have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the scepter for the trowel" refers to the practice of the most recent initiate, the Junior Entered Apprentice being armed with the trowel as the means of keeping out all cowans and intruders. So the earlier use of the trowel may have been transferred to the sword .

The Tyler's Dress

First impressions being considered as very important, Tylers in days gone by were decked out in colorful clothes. The Grand Tyler in 1736 wore a red waistcoat under a dark blue coat trimmed with gold lace. A Tyler's coat in the possession of the Eaton Lodge No. 533 E.C. is of black serge, lined, faced and edged with red while the collar, cape and cuffs are edged with light blue flannel. How proud they must have been, these Tylers of old. Dressed in their blue and red coats with yellow trousers and cocked hats going around delivering the notice papers to all the Brethren. Everyone must have known them as being Freemasons. There was no secrecy about being a Freemason. They walked in processions in all their regalia, carrying their swords.

A beautiful illustration of the wearing of regalia in public is the well known painting of Brother Hogarth "Night". Thomas Johnson, who was Grand Tyler in 1784, had a business card which had various Masonic emblems on the front as well as his name and that he was "Tyler to the Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons." On the reverse it stated where he lived and where letters or messages for him could be left, which he undertook to duly answer.

The Tylers (of Old) Duties

Unlike the Tyler of today who keeps off all cowans and intruders and sees that the candidates are properly prepared, the Tyler of old had in many Lodges the job of "Drawing the Lodge"; the delivery of the summonses, now better known as the notice paper and was also often in charge of the various assets of the Lodge.

The drawing of the Lodge stems from the days when the speculative Masons were meeting in taverns. The rooms available in those inns were usually pretty sparsely furnished and with bare floorboards. On a clear space in front of the Master's pedestal the Tyler would draw with chalk and charcoal a rectangle and therein various Masonic emblems, such as the Pillars, the Tesselated Pavement, the various Working Tools and many others. The Tyler was also paid for the delivery of the summonses. In the second half of the 18th century the delivery of a note in an envelope by the postal service would cost 4 pence, where the Tyler was usually paid about 12 pence for delivering all the summonses, so obviously a good moneysaver for the Lodge.

Tylers Today

Bernard Jones in his Freemasons' Guide and Compendium writes "The officer responsible for the preparation of the candidate is the Tyler, who should be an experienced craftsman well able to ensure, both by his knowledge and personality, that the candidate enters upon his preparation in the right spirit." Although today the preparation is usually done by a steward or one of the deacons, it is still the Tyler's job to actually see that the preparation is properly carried out. And, as noted earlier, the Tyler is also responsible for ensuring that each Brother will enter the Lodgeroom properly "clothed" and to admit only properly vouched for Brethren!

The written history of Tylers does not go beyond 1732 but from various Lodge Minutes and reports we have been able to form a reasonably good picture of the duties of Tylers and how they appeared to the outside world. No more important injunction can be given the Tyler than the advice of Brother Bernard Jones, who wrote that " the Tyler should be an experienced craftsman, well able to ensure that the candidate enters upon his preparation in the right spirit"

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