

RAISING AND LOWERING THE WARDENS' COLUMNS

This is an interesting point

THE FREEMASON AT WORK – Harry
Carr 21

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1. Why do the Wardens in a Craft Lodge raise and lower their Columns? The usual explanations in the Lectures, etc., seem trivial, in view of the importance many Brethren seem to place on the Columns being moved at the right time and placed in the right position.
2. To find an acceptable answer to this question, we have to go back to early ritual. There was a time in 18th century English practice when both Wardens stood (or sat) in the West; this is confirmed by a passage in *Masonry Dissected*, 1730:
3. Where stands your Wardens?
4. In the West.

Incidentally there are several Masonic jurisdictions in Europe which retain this ancient practice; but some time between 1730 and 1760 there is evidence that the J.W. had moved to the South, as shown in *Three Distinct Knocks*, 1760, and *J. & B.*, 1762, both using identical words: Mas. Who doth the Pillar of Beauty represent? Ans. The Junior Warden in the South.

The business of raising and lowering the Wardens' Columns made its first appearance in England in *Three Distinct Knocks*, in

which we have the earliest description of the procedure for 'Calling Off' from labour to refreshment and 'Calling On'. The 'Call-Off' procedure was as follows:

The Master whispers to the senior Deacon at his Right-hand, and says, 'tis my Will and Pleasure that this Lodge is called off from Work to Refreshment during Pleasure; then the senior Deacon carries it to the senior Warden, and whispers the same Words in his Ear, and he whispers it in the Ear of the junior Deacon at his Right-hand, and he carries it to the junior Warden and whispers the same to him, who declares it with a loud Voice, and says it is our Master's Will and Pleasure, that this Lodge is called from Work to Refreshment, during Pleasure;

At this point we find the earliest description of the raising and lowering of the columns and the reason for this procedure.

then he sets up his Column, and the senior lays his down; for the Care of the Lodge is in the Hands of the junior Warden while they are at Refreshment.

N.B. The senior and junior Warden have each of them a Column in their Hand, about Twenty Inches long, which represents the Two Columns of the Porch at Solomon's Temple, BOAZ and JACHIN.

1. & B. gives almost identical details throughout.

Unfortunately, apart from the exposures, there are very few Masonic writings that deal with the subject of the Wardens' Columns during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Preston, in several editions of his *Illustrations*, 1792-1804, in the section dealing with Installation, allocates the Columns to the Deacons [sic]. It is not until the 1804 edition that he speaks of the raising of the Columns, and then only in a footnote, as follows:

When the work of Masonry in the lodge is carrying on, the Column of the Senior Deacon is raised; when the lodge is at refreshment the Column of the Junior Deacon is raised. [There is no mention of 'lowering'.]

Earlier, in the Investiture of the Deacons, Preston had said:

Those columns, the badges of your office, I entrust to your care . . .

Knowing, as we do, that the Columns had belonged to the Wardens since 1760, at least, and that many of the Craft lodges did not appoint Deacons at all, Preston's remarks in the extracts above, seem to suggest that he was attempting an innovation (in which he was certainly unsuccessful).

The next evidence on the subject comes from the Minutes of the Lodge of Promulgation, which show that in their work on the Craft ritual in readiness for the union of the two rival Grand Lodges, they considered 'the arrangements of the Wardens' Columns' on 26 January 1810, but they did not record their decision. We know, however, that most of our present-day practices date back to the procedures which that Lodge recommended and which were subsequently adopted' – with occasional amendments – and prescribed by its successor, the Lodge of Reconciliation. It is thus virtually certain that our modern working in relation to the raising and lowering of the Columns was then adopted, following the 1760 pattern, not only for 'Calling Off and On' but also for Opening and Closing generally.

Up to this point we have been dealing with facts; but on the specific questions as to why the Columns are raised and lowered, or why the care of the Lodge is the responsibility of the J.W. while the Brethren refresh themselves, we must resort to speculation.

In the operative system, c. 1400, when the Lodge was a workshop and before Lodge furniture was standardized, there was only one Warden. His duty was to keep the work going smoothly, to serve as a mediator in disputes and to see that 'every brother had his due'. We have documentary evidence of this in the Regius and Cooke MSS of c. 1390 and c. 1410, and this idea apparently persisted into the Speculative system

where the S.W.'s duty in 1730 now included closing the Lodge and `paying the men their wages`.

But in the Speculative system there were two Wardens, with the Senior, by ancient tradition, in charge of the Lodge (or the Brn.) while at work. It seems likely that in order to find a corresponding job for the J.W., he was put in charge of the Lodge (or the Brn.) while at refreshment.

There was no mention of Wardens' Columns, or procedures relating to them, in the exposures of 1730 or earlier. We may assume therefore that they were a more or less recent introduction in the period between 1730 and 1760, that the `raising and lowering` procedures came into practice at about the same time and were subsequently authorized at the Union in 1813.

The 1760 explanation is still in use today. It may seem inadequate, but that is invariably the case with such problems as `one up and one down`, left-foot, right-foot`, left-knee, right-knee`, etc., because each interpretation has to give a satisfactory explanation for a particular procedure and for the reverse of that procedure, which is virtually impossible. The only satisfying explanation in this case is the simplest of all, i.e., the procedure was laid down to mark a distinction between the Lodge when open, and when it is closed or `Called Off`.

During the 18th century, there is ample evidence that much of the Lodge work was conducted at table, punctuated by `Toasts' and drinking, while the Lodge was still Open. If the Lodge was `Called Off', while a meal (as distinct from liquid refreshment) was to be taken, and the Brethren remained in their seats at table, then some signal – recognizable at a glance – would have to be shown, to indicate whether the Lodge was at work, or at refreshment. (I am indebted to Bro. Colin Dyer for this final paragraph, which emphasizes the practical reasons for Columns up, and down.)

Further info can be obtained from

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