

## **The Evolution of the Office of Warden in Freemasonry**

### **Introduction:**

MW GM, MW PGMs, RW DGM, RW AGM, Colleague RWs, Brethren All. A very Good evening to you all. My lecture this evening is of two parts. One, ***THE EVOLUTION OF THE OFFICE OF WARDEN IN FREEMASONRY***, which I will call Masonic Education and the other, ***LIGHTS AT THE VARIOUS STATIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL OFFICERS OF THE LODGE***, Masonic Information. When I undertook the task of delivering this lecture, I was acutely aware of the presence of the distinguished epitome, the top hierarchy, the top echelon, the crème de la crème of our GL, including our MW Grand Master himself, Past Grand Masters, many Past and current GL Officers and other senior brethren. Anyone who dares to give a lecture on any Masonic topic to such an array of distinguished and esteemed Masons must conduct thorough research on the topic to ensure accuracy and its acceptance. But let us remember, brethren, that Freemasonry, a progressive science as we are taught in our early Masonic life, rarely, offers a single definitive answer to any question. On one of the walls in the tunnel to Immigration at Terminal 4, JFK Airport, New York, there is this inscription that always arrests my attention whenever I visit or pass through New York. And I quote: "Every man reads his own meaning into New York." Unquote. So it is with Freemasonry. To paraphrase this in our masonic context, "every man reads his own meaning into Freemasonry". The constant flow of new Masonic publications, exemplified by Lewis Masonic's prolific output almost every week, underscores how dedicated writers continually unearth new insights into our cherished Craft. I am sure most of our senior and distinguished brethren here present might have come across such a lecture as that of this evening in their long and illustrious Masonic careers before. I assure them that it will either refresh their memories or that they will pick a leaf or two from this lecture. And to our younger brethren, this may come to increase their Masonic knowledge and appreciation of the Principal Officers of the Craft, especially that of the Warden.

Now, to our subject.

I love history. For over two decades, my journey through Freemasonry has been marked by a deep curiosity about its traditions, practices, and the origins of its offices. Among these, the office of Warden stands out as a position of great significance, not only within our fraternity but also in historical and ecclesiastical contexts. This exploration seeks to illuminate the roots of the Warden's role, its evolution, and its enduring importance in our Craft today.

### **The Historical Roots of the Warden**

The term "Warden" traces its origins to medieval times, introduced to Britain by the Norman conquerors. The Normans established Wardens as noblemen tasked with safeguarding the kingdom's borders, such as the Warden of the Welsh Marches or the Warden of the Cinque

Ports-an office that persists to this day as a ceremonial organization. Derived from the Norman French word *warder* (meaning "to guard"), the title evolved into *wardien* and eventually "*Warden*." These individuals were responsible for "*watch and ward*," overseeing and protecting castles and territorial boundaries.

Merriam Webster, my favourite online dictionary, defines "warden", among others, as

1. One having care or charge of something
2. A member of the governing body of a guild
3. One of two ranking lay officers of an Episcopal parish

These are the definitions of interest to us this evening. It also confirms its etymology as that already given above.

In ecclesiastical settings, the Warden's role expanded to include the management of a parish church's material affairs. As a symbol of authority, Wardens were granted a staff or wand as "princely token of status," a tradition still observed among churchwardens today. Notably, churches often had two Wardens: one representing the clergy (the rector, or "parson") and the other representing the Crown and the people, what we the Methodist call 'the lay'. This duality reflects the Wardens' role as a bridge between spiritual and secular authority.

### **The Warden in Guilds and Operative Lodges**

**The guilds** of medieval towns and cities adopted the Wardens' office, mirroring ecclesiastical and courtly practices. These guilds, which included tradesmen, were typically governed by a Master and two Wardens-Senior and Junior-who assisted in administration and succession planning. The Wardens were often next in line to assume the Master's role, ensuring continuity in leadership. They were not elected to these offices by all the people. They were elected by a ruling body called the Court, in which the reigning Master and his predecessors sat. Similar to our PMs' Meeting to elect a WM. By the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in England this was very much how all guilds or companies were ruled. This, as you can see, is similar to the governance of our lodges today.

**In operative stonemasonry**, the Warden's role was distinct. On building sites, craftsmen gathered in temporary lean-to shelters called *allogements* (later "lodges"), where they prepared stones, rested, and discussed matters of common concern. To maintain order, especially in matters concerning admission and training of new apprentices, wage rates or their well-being etc. they elected a Warden to preside over these gatherings. Unlike guilds, the operative lodge had only one Warden and no Master; the Master Mason, who oversaw the entire project, remained separate from the lodge, interacting only when necessary. This historical practice underscores the Warden's original function as a leader among equals. Or as we say in Latin, *Primus inter pares*.

## **The Warden in Speculative Freemasonry**

When, after 1350, Stonemasons entered the guild system and formed companies of their trade they adopted the two Wardens and WM system. This structure honored the past while establishing a framework for governance. The Wardens' duties in speculative lodges reflect their operative roots, such as overseeing the lodge's opening and closing, ensuring order, and representing the craftsmen. In some lodges, remnants of operative practices remain. For example, in Bristol during installations, the Junior Warden temporarily assumes authority in the absence of the Senior Warden and Worshipful Master, symbolizing the historical autonomy of craftsmen. Similarly, the Wardens' involvement in lodge openings and closings—tasks once performed solely by them—highlights the enduring legacy of their office. Let us remember that to be a ruler or Master of an Accepted Lodge today, as we all here know, you still must have been a Warden which is a prerequisite qualification as amplified in our Installation Ceremonial. That, is the root.

## **The Symbolism and Ritual of the Warden**

The Wardens' role is deeply embedded in Masonic ritual and symbolism. In some jurisdictions, Wardens are associated with Mount Sinai (where Moses received the Ten Commandments) and Tabor (where the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ took place in the presence of three of his Apostles-Peter, James and John), references drawn from biblical tradition. These symbols, dating back to early 18<sup>th</sup> century rituals, signify divine revelation and the transmission of knowledge, reinforcing the Warden's role as a guardian of Masonic knowledge and wisdom. The catechisms conducted between the Worshipful Master and Wardens during lodge openings further emphasize the Wardens' importance. Now, let us take a look at the catechism at the opening of our own lodges as observed here a few minutes ago:

***WM: Bro. SW, your constant place in the lodge?***

***SW: In the West, WM***

***WM: Why are you so placed?***

***SW: To mark the setting sun, to close the lodge at the WM's command after having seen that every brother has had his due***

Again, let us look at the closing of a lodge:

***WM: Bro. SW, your constant place in the lodge?***

***SW: In the West, WM***

**WM: Why are you so placed?**

**SW: As the sun sets in the West to close the day so is the SW placed in the West to close the lodge by command of the WM after having seen that every brother has had his due**

**WM: Have all the wages been paid?**

**SW: So far as due and demanded, WM**

Then the WM says: ***“the labor of the evening been ended you have my commands to close the lodge”***

Let us now move a bit higher to both the PGL and GL:

At the Opening, the GM says to the Wardens: ***“let the RW Wardens declare to the brethren that it is my will and pleasure that GL be now open”*** whereupon the respective wardens respond to his command and thereafter, the GM proceeds to open GL. Why doesn't the GM go ahead and open GL straightaway or instantly?

Again, at closing: after 'almighty' GM instructs the brethren to stand “to order as MMs,” he rather defers to the RW SW to close GL. Have you ever thought about this oddity?

In our working, when a brother knocks the door the IG reports first to the JW before reporting to the WM. Why doesn't the IG report first to the WM for, as we say, his necessary action but involve the JW? Again, at opening and closing of the lodge, it is the JW who, by command of the WM, instructs the IG to see or prove the lodge tyled. Why is the JW first to be involved? This is so because before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the post of the IG did not exist. It was the JW who had to get up to attend the door to receive Brethren or see the lodge tyled. And more than that, it was the Warden in operative days who opened the lodge for business and also closed it. And that is why a Warden is still so addressed.

The catch here is that with all the powers vested in the WM and GM why don't they close the lodge right away but instruct the SWs to do so? This is in keeping with the ancient tradition when the Warden presided over the Operative Stonemasons' lodges.

In operative times the job as a Warden was to pay the wages that “were due and demanded” to them before they left the site and so he is the one who has to confirm that all have, indeed, “had their due”.

At the opening and closing of the lodge, these exchanges, rooted in historical practices, serve as a reminder of the Wardens' duty to uphold the lodge's traditions and ensure the brethren's understanding of their craft.

Again, when a lodge is opened, the SW's column stands upright. This signifies his position of overseeing proceedings when the lodge is at labor. In like manner, at the Festive Board, which is deemed an extension of the lodge meeting, "from labour to refreshment" the JW's column stands upright to signify that he is in charge of proceedings there. This shows the important roles that both Wardens play at our meetings

### **The Wardens' Wands**

You will recall earlier in the lecture I mentioned that the Ecclesiastical Wardens carried wands as symbols of their authority, divine guidance and esoteric wisdom. These wands reflect Masonic values of leadership, communication and spiritual direction. They (wands) came with the Wardens when operative Stonemasonry transitioned to speculative Freemasonry. The WM also had a Wand in the initial stages of speculative Freemasonry. So where are these Wands? In an Irish lodge, the brethren assembled will have to give the password in each degree to the Deacons before the WM opens it. This was because after 1813 the office of Deacons was introduced. Due to the "constant place" of the Wardens at their respective stations, the Wand of the SW was lent to the SD, that of the JW, to the JD and finally, that of the WM to then newly created office of DC so they will perform the respective duties of the Wardens moving around the floor of the lodge on their behalf.

### **The Warden's Legacy**

The office of Warden is a testament to Freemasonry's rich history and its ability to adapt ancient practices to modern contexts. From medieval guardianship to guild leadership and operative stonemasonry, the Warden's role has evolved while retaining its core principles of service, authority, and continuity. Today, Wardens remain pivotal figures in lodge governance, embodying the fraternity's commitment to tradition, education, and fellowship.

As Freemasons, we honor the Wardens' legacy by preserving its rituals, understanding its history, and ensuring that future generations appreciate the profound significance of this ancient office. In doing so, we strengthen the bonds of our craft and uphold the timeless values that define Freemasonry. And remember once again, you have to serve the office of Warden before being installed as a WM.

My esteemed, Brethren, this ends the Masonic Education. Now, to the Masonic Information.

### **LIGHTS AT VARIOUS STATIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL OFFICERS OF THE LODGE**

This is supposed to be Masonic Information rather than a lecture. We attend lodge meetings and observe the uncoordinated and haphazard manner in which the lights at the Principal Officers' stations are switched on at opening and switched off at closing. I decided to research into this and the history behind it. It was difficult getting into it, so I sounded it right on

MasonicLight, an online Masonic forum, where I got this information from. Unfortunately, it has ceased to function, to my disappointment. In the ancient days when there was no electricity, the three lesser/alter lights and the lights at the various stations of the Principal Officers of the Lodge were lighted candles. After opening the lodge, the alter lights would be lit first before the VSL was opened. Please note, especially, Bro. DC, the alter light should always be on before the VSL is opened. The word of God should never be in darkness. Likewise at closing, the VSL should be closed before the alter lights are turned off. Before the office of the Deacons were created circa 1814, the WM would go to the alter and light his candle. The SW would come to the WM's station to light his. Then the JW would also light his from that of the SW. However, when Deacons were introduced as messengers of the WM and SW, they undertook the ritual of lighting these candles in like manner as the WM and Wardens did. So the mode of turning on the lights at the various stations of the Principal Officers at opening is this: WM first, SW second and JW last. This mode of lighting is to keep the meeting in Harmony and also to continue the ancient tradition. At closing, the reverse happens: JW extinguishes his light first, SW second and WM last. In fact, in our jurisdiction, the convention is that, the JW's light goes off at first fidelity, SW's at second fidelity and WM's at third fidelity. Understanding the history behind this ancient ritual will not stampede us, the Principal Officers into turning on and off our lights at the erroneous prompting of other Brethren present.

My esteemed Brethren, many thanks for this opportunity to deliver this lecture. From the commendable rapt and undivided attention you appear to have given to the lecture, I am led to believe that you have received it well.

I will now resume my seat. If any brother has additional information to share, we will be glad to receive it. At the end of the day, Olympus, being a PMs' Lodge will be the richer in Masonic traditions and practices.

RW Bro. Kofi Nti Ofori, Worshipful Master, Olympus Lodge

Dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 2025

References:

- : Let me tell you more *by Revd. Neville Barker Cryer*
- : MasonicLight (Online Masonic Platform)
- : Standard Ritual of Scottish Freemasonry
- : The Ceremonial for Installation of Worshipful Master and Other Subordinate Lodge Officers (GLOG)

