

# The Apron: Distinguishing Badge of a Mason

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Why do we wear an apron, and what is its significance? Our Order is founded on Operative Masonry, and operative Masons in common with most other artisans, wear aprons for the protection of their clothing. Different trades used different types of aprons, each suitable for the purpose.

Originally the Entered Apprentice wore an apron with a bib secured with a tape around his neck. The bib was to protect the upper part of his clothing when clasping a heavy stone, such as a pillar, with both arms. Later, as he became proficient in his trade, he became an artisan and his job was then to smooth and prepare the stone for its place in the building. He then had no use for the upper portion of the apron, so he let it hang down over the lower part--thus we have our own badge with a triangular piece overlapping the square portion. There are several explanations of this triangular portion of the apron all or any of which may be correct, but the following seems the most logical of them.

The significance of the apron is "servitude." Certain dignitaries of the Anglican Church wear an apron as part of their clerical dress. Thus a person signifies the service that is expected of a Freemason to his neighbor.

When investing the Entered Apprentice with the badge he is informed that it is more ancient than the Golden Fleece and more honorable than the Star and Garter. The main object of my talk is to tell you something of these orders. First, the wording of the investiture was compiled in about 1717 (in the Grand Lodge of England or its Lodges) and was revised in 1813.

The Golden Fleece

According to Greek legend, King Pelias of Thessaly had ousted his brother Aeson and to rid himself of Aeson's son, Jason he persuaded the lad to fetch the Golden Fleece which hung on an oak tree at Ares in Colchis. It was guarded by a dragon. The adventures of Jason and his fifty companions, who sailed with him make one of the finest stories of Greek literature. (The fleece came from the mythical ram on which Phrixus and Helle escaped from death and was hung in the Grove at Ares by Phrixus, who alone survived the flight from his native land.)

The Order of the Golden Fleece was

founded by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, in January, 1429, on occasion of his marriage to Isabella, daughter of King John I, of Portugal. The order was instituted for the protection of the Catholic Church. The fleece was chosen as the emblem because wool was the predominate product of the lower European countries in which the order flourished. The number of knights of the order was twenty-four. In 1433 the number was raised to thirty-three, all gentlemen by birth. In 1477, on the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with Duke Maximilian, the grand mastership of the order passed to the House of

Hapsburg. The last chapter of the original Order was held by Philip II of Spain in the cathedral of Ghent. Up to that time the knights had filled the vacancies by their own votes, but Philip II obtained permission of Pope Gregory XIII to nominate the knights himself.

After the Spanish Netherlands were ceded to Austria in 1713-14, the Austrians claimed the office. The resulting dispute split the order into two parts--one in Austria and one in Spain.

The jewel of the order (which differs slightly in the two countries) is a golden ram hanging from a ring which is passed around its middle. This is suspended from a scroll in very elaborate design with the motto, (in Latin) The reward of labor is not trifling. The jewel, in turn, is attached to a golden collar made up of links. Each link is in the form of a capital "B" with rays issuing from it. The collar is usually worn with full dress. On ordinary occasions a broad red ribbon collar is worn in its place.

Since its inception this order has been considered as the most important and highest of all civil orders on the European continent. The order has no standing in England, hence we hear little of it. No British subject is permitted to accept this, or any other foreign order, without special permission from the sovereign. At the time of the dispute over the order between Austria and Spain in 1714, speculative Masonry was gaining a firm footing and its ritual was then revised and prominence given to the Golden Fleece.

The Roman Eagle

The Roman Eagle also has an interesting history. The eagle was highly esteemed among the Romans. It was usually depicted with outstretched wings, sometimes of gold and silver, but most frequently of bronze. It was carried at the head of a staff in the same manner as a banner.

The eagle borne upon a spear appears to have been used first by the Persians. The Romans took the idea from them, and used it as an emblem of honor, to be carried before the chief ruler. In 1804, Napoleon had metal eagles carried before his army. Austria and Russia both had double eagles as a symbol of their empires. The symbol of the United States of America is the bald eagle. In 1701, Frederick I of Prussia founded the Order of the Black Eagle. The number of knights was limited to thirty, exclusive of the princes of royal blood. The revisers of our rituals probably selected the reference to the Roman Eagle as it was the highest emblem of dignity, honor and power of that famous empire.

Order of the Garter

The Order of the Garter is, of course, something we know more about, being a British Order. It is the highest order of knighthood in Great Britain, and is considered the most honorable and exclusive in the world. Its full title is "The Most Noble Order of the Garter."

According to tradition, King Edward III, who was dancing with the Countess of Salisbury at a ball held on January 18, 1343, picked up a blue garter that had dropped from her leg and tied it around his own. Observing the queen's uneasy glances, and the consternation of the countess, he returned it to its

owner with the remark, Evil be to him who evil thinks.

At this time the king had been successful in the French campaign and was contemplating a second expedition. He resolved to institute an order of knighthood in honor of his success, as well as a means of rewarding his army favorites. He placed the order under the protection of St. George. For 179 years it remained practically as instituted by Edward III but in 1522, Henry VIII revised the statutes. The color of the emblem was blue, which at that time was the French national color. The motto translated, Let him be dishonored who thinks ill of it, was appropriate whether applied to the French expedition or to the order itself.

Formerly, the knights were elected by the members, but since the reign of George III all appointments have been made by the reigning sovereign. Originally it was called the Order of Saint George. It now consists of the sovereign, who is the grand master, the Prince of Wales and twenty-five knights companions. In addition it is open to all English princes (lineal descendants of George I ) and foreign sovereigns as may be chosen by the king or queen. On occasions, other companions are admitted for special reasons so that the whole order usually numbers about fifty.

The insignia consists of the garter, the collar, and the great George; the star, the ribbon and badge, or lesser George. The garter is of blue velvet ribbon--the particular tint being known as "garter blue." The ribbon is edged with gold and fastened by a gold buckle on the left leg below the knee. It bears the motto of the order in letters of gold, or sometimes in diamonds. When the sovereign is a woman, it is worn on the left arm above the elbow. The collar consists of twenty-five pieces alternately gold love knots and buckled garters enameled in blue, enclosing roses. From the center link of the collar hangs the badge of the great George. It is a figure of St. George as a knight in gold enamel and set with jewels. He is depicted on horseback, overthrowing the dragon with a spear.

A star was added by Charles I in 1692. It consists of eight silver rays encrusted with diamonds, issuing from a buckled garter bearing the motto and enclosing a white field of enamel with the red cross of St. George upon it. When the collar and great George are not worn, the "lesser George" as it is called, is used. It is similar to the great George but much smaller and hangs from a broad blue ribbon which passes slantwise over the left shoulder. The robes of the order are of equal magnificence.

The order became prominent in the 17th century after Charles I added the star to the insignia. On ordinary occasions the star is worn on the breast and the garter below the knee. Full regalia is only worn when grand chapter meets, or at a ceremony such as a coronation. The order meets at Windsor Castle. So, Brethren, we have our badge of white--of lamb's skin for innocence; more ancient than the Golden Fleece, which was founded in 1429, and the Roman Eagle, which was instituted in 1701; and more honorable than the Garter, which is the highest order of knighthood in the world. I repeat the charge given by the Senior Warden when investing the badge--Never disgrace that badge, for it will never disgrace you.