



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and  
Accepted Masons of Virginia**



**Committee on Masonic Education**

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**DEO Presentation Program Paper**

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**THE BROACHED THURNEL**

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In our monthly ritual schools, we are concerned with perfecting our degree work and better understanding Masonic symbolism. You might, therefore, enjoy, from time to time, learning a bit about some of the tools and symbols of Freemasonry that we do not now generally come across.

One of these tools, a jewel of the Entered Apprentice, has faded into oblivion over the years, to be replaced by another - it is the "Broached Thurnel."

To begin, let me read to you a passage from a publication by one Samuel Pritchard, who in 1731 wrote and published, "Masonry Dissected," the first in a series of exposés on Freemasonry. In it, we find the following dialogue between an initiate and the initiating

officer:

Q: Have you any jewels in your Lodge?

A: Yes

Q: How many?

A: Six; three movable and three immovable

Q: What are the movable jewels?

A: Square, Level, and Plumb Rule (Note: these are today referred to as the **immovable** jewels)

Q: What are their uses?

A: Square, to down true and right lines; Level, to try all horizontals; and Plumb Rule, to try all uprights

Q: What are the immovable jewels?

A: Tarsel Board, Rough Ashlar, and Broached Thurnel

Q: What are their uses?

A: A Tarsel Board for the Master to draw his designs upon, Rough Ashlar for the Fellowcraft to try their jewels upon, and the Broached Thurnel for the Entered Apprentice to learn to work upon.

Mackey's Encyclopedia shows the Thurnel as being found in lectures and tracing boards of the 1700s, and also describes it as one of the immovable jewels along with the Rough Ashlar and Tarsel Board. It was later replaced by the Perfect Ashlar, which is more familiar to us today.

French Lodges, however, to this day preserve this symbol, referring to it as a ‘pierre cubique” or cubical stone. So what does the Broached Thurnel look like? Quite simply, it is a cube topped by a pyramid.

Worshipful G. W. Speth, a founding member of Quatuor Coronati Lodge\* # 2076 in London, England, explains in the Lodge’s publication ‘Ars Quatuor Coronatorum’ that the Broached Thurnel is a kind of blunt chisel used to roughly hew stones.

Brother Jorge Sanchez, writing in the “Masonic Magazine,” offers further suggestions on how we should view this tool by asking us to consider the shape of the Thurnel. In profile, it is the same shape as that of an Entered Apprentice’s apron. We can speculate, therefore, that the Thurnel, like the apron, must have some specific meaning in connection with the first degree. The shape itself, although 5-sided, is the union of a 3-sided shape (figure 1) and a 4-sided one (figure 2) giving us seven, the number required to open an Entered Apprentice’s Lodge.

The symbolism of the Thurnel is further explained. It is a tool used for rough work in the quarries where the Operative Entered Apprentice was occupied with hewing, roughly working, and

bearing heavy burdens. Each stone prepared and finished in the quarry was then taken to the Temple to be placed there with other finished stones. But the Entered Apprentice did not see the Temple taking shape on top of Mount Moriah.

Similarly, in Speculative Masonry, the work of the Entered Apprentice is done in faith; he does not see the finished product of his labors or know precisely where the work he is doing will fit in the greater scheme. When we work as Entered Apprentices, and in some respects we always do, we do not always know where a particular piece of information or Masonic knowledge will lead us.

Masonry is a progressive science, and it is impressed on the Entered Apprentice that he must be patient when learning the rough and unfinished preliminary work, knowing that it lays the foundation for what is to come. And, indeed, any Mason who has been raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason will recognize that many of the details given in the first two degrees took on further significance in the third degree.

One of Masonry's earliest goals was to educate, and much of education is knowledge for the sake of knowledge. How many of us during our days in school, when asked to find the measure of an angle or read a poem, asked "When will I ever use this?" With

time and maturity we have come to recognize that this knowledge has value. Also, the concept of knowledge for its own sake is one of the lessons of the Thurnel and the first degree.

When we take a more careful look at the Thurnel and consider the 3-dimensional aspects of this tool, we see that it has nine faces; four vertical faces representing the world through the four cardinal directions or the four elements. There is one horizontal face below representing where we currently stand. The four triangular faces of the pyramid could be seen to represent the four cardinal virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. Finally, the apex of the pyramid represents Heaven or Deity.

Think for a moment about how the Lodge is defined in our Entered Apprentice's Lecture: "The form of a Lodge is an oblong square." It seems that this definition could, with a degree of imagination, lead us to view the Thurnel as a representation of the Lodge itself. Brother Sanchez, writes that *"The Thurnel is the Lodge, a place that is everywhere and nowhere, a place that is not a place because it is, in fact, not the building itself but rather, its constituent members. At the same time, the 10<sup>th</sup> face, where the top face of the cube meets the bottom face of the pyramid, could be seen as the Lodge, where heaven (figure 1) and earth (figure 2) meet, the true Temple itself (figure 3)."* By combining the two

shapes, the pyramid with the cube, we have created a tool which, in itself, can be said to embody the statement, “As above, so below.”

Imagine now what the actual tool may have looked like and how it would have been used. The union of the two shapes formed, as mentioned earlier, “a kind of blunt chisel’ which was held in the palm of the hand (cube shape) to “roughly hew the stones” with the pointed end (pyramid). The addition of a handle at some stage is entirely possible and should be expected.

Finally Brethren, consider for a moment where else we find a square topped by a triangular shape .....yes, it is the symbol of our Fraternity, the Square and Compasses (figure 4) which now takes on added meaning for each of us.

I thank you for your attention and hope that this examination of the Broached Thurnel, a forgotten and almost unknown symbol of our Craft, has given you a further glimpse of the wisdom, strength and beauty of our glorious Fraternity.

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Figure 1

The 3-sided shape

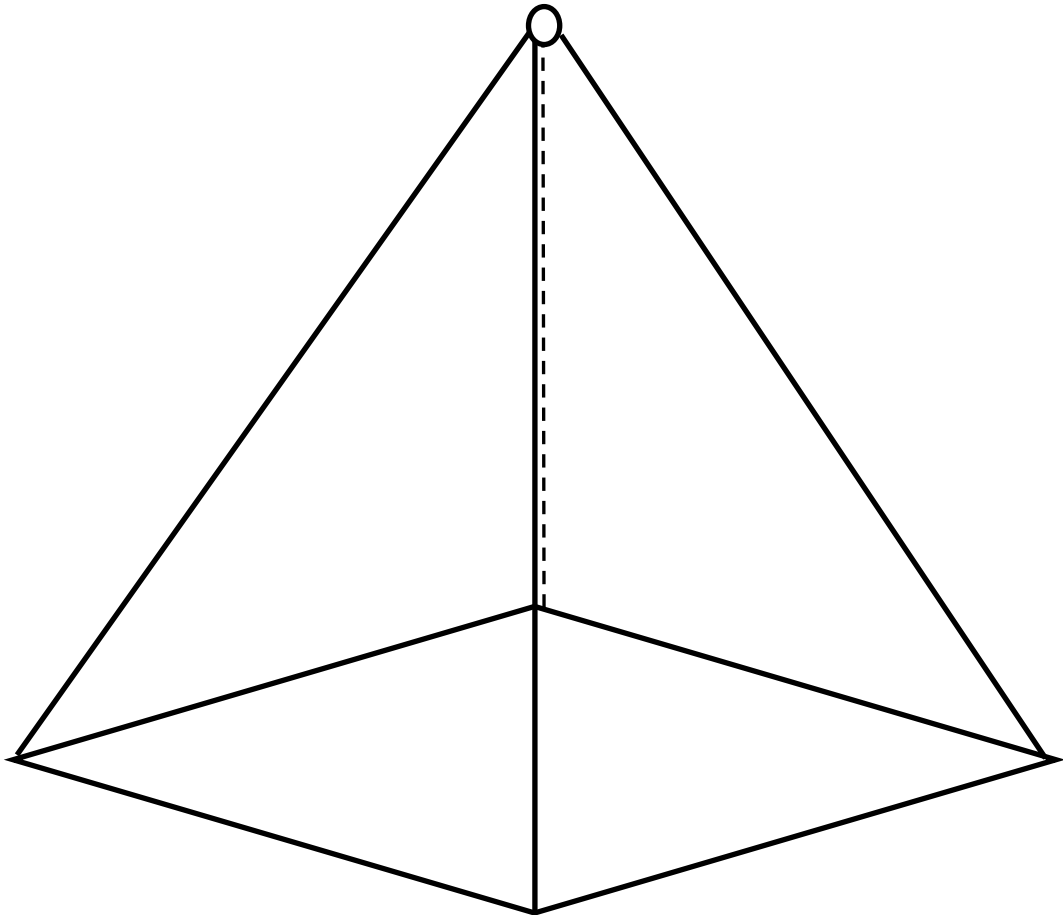


Figure 2

The 4-sided shape

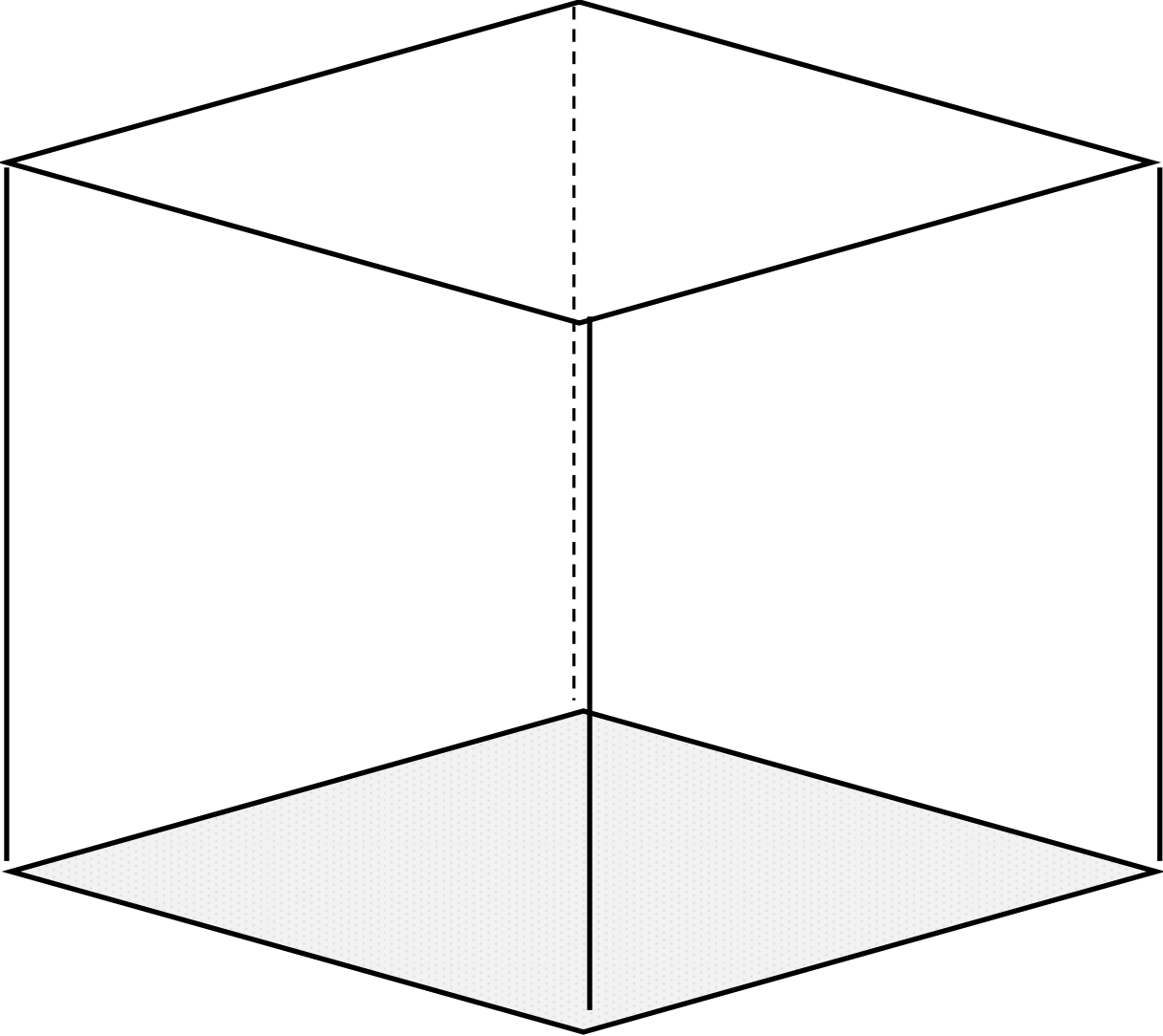


Figure 3

The combined shape

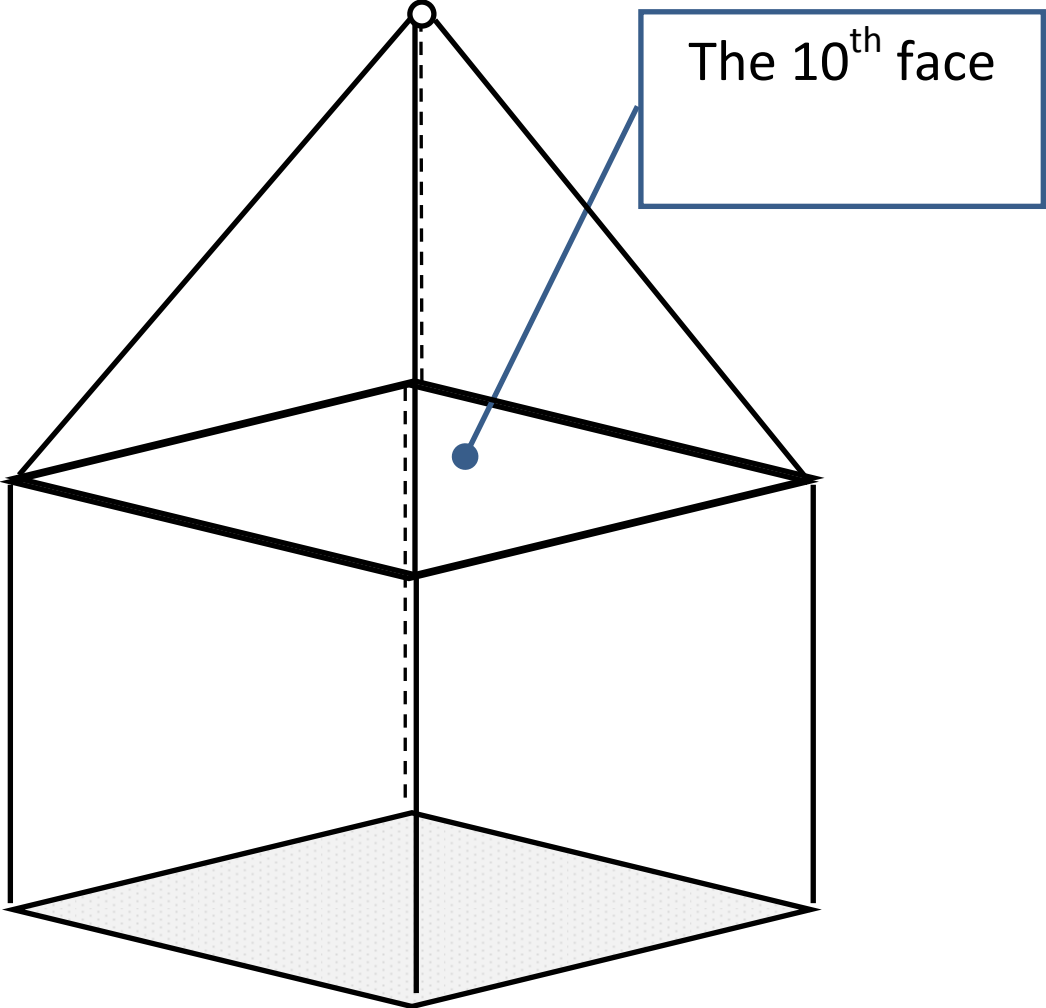


Figure 4

Square and Compasses



## Sources:

- Mackey's Revised Masonic Encyclopedia
- *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, xii, 205
- *Masonic Magazine*, No. 6, Winter 2006