

## GLOVES

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In Lodges in England it is the general custom for white gloves to be worn. Why, and what is the origin of this custom?

This is a tradition which has its roots like so many of our customs, in operative masonry. Operative stonemasons had to wear gloves as an item of protective clothing just as they wore aprons for the same purpose. Bro. A.C.P. Jackson in his Inaugural address to the Lodge (AQC 88 1975) commented that masons must have been enjoyed special privileges in this respect when there were certain prohibitions in the Middle Ages against the wearing of gloves and when there were also strict rules of etiquette about them.

In considering the use of gloves in speculative Freemasonry we need to remember the age in which the formal customs of the Craft were developing. It was an age of formality; formality in speech, dress, manners; the age of courtly elegance; the age of the beaux and fops (but beneath this veneer, lest we romanticize it too much, we must remember it was also an age course, brutal and depraved). Gloves were an item of formal male attire and, indeed, they persisted as such into modern times in formal evening and court dress. So there were two influences for the adoption of gloves as part of masonic clothing; as symbolic (like the apron) of the operative tradition and as part of the formal dress of polite society.

There are early references in masonic exposures and ritual documents to a newly made brother 'clothing the lodge', i.e., presenting each of the members with a pair of gloves and/or an apron. One of the earliest of these exposures which appeared as a letter in a London newspaper of 1723 under the title A Mason's Examination went even further by stating: 'When a Free Mason is enter'd, after having given to all present of the Fraternity a Pair of Men and women's Gloves and Leathern apron...' (and then going on to describe the ceremony). This tradition of a pair of gloves for the ladies also crops up in other places, especially in Masonry elsewhere in Europe, and a charming echo of this 18th century custom is still observed in Pilgrim Lodge No. 238 (EC), the London Lodge of German speaking masons

founded in 1779 which still today works its own unique degree ritual in German.

When a candidate is initiated, or a joining member admitted on election, the Master presents him with two pairs of white gloves, one a gentleman's the other a lady's informing him that one pair is for himself to wear in lodge and the other he is to present to 'your life's faithful consort as a token of our esteem and to renew to her your vow of inviolable fidelity.

But why white gloves as an item of masonic dress today?

White is an obvious symbol of purity and white gloves express the idea of one clean of heart and hands. One is reminded of the custom of a maiden assize (i.e. one at which no one was to be brought to trial) by which the sheriff of the county would present the assize judge with a pair of white gloves symbolizing the calendar was clear.

Masonry, the candidate is told, is founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue and then later he is invested with a plain white apron, the 'badge of innocence', free from all blemish. He will later learn how fifteen trusty Fellowcrafts were order to attend the funeral of H.A. clothed in white aprons and gloves 'as emblems of innocence.'

The very word 'candidate' in its original from the Latin expresses the idea of whiteness as a symbol of the purity and innocence of the aspirant; in ancient Rome the candidate for office wore a white toga, the toga candida. Similarly our word 'candid' from the same root carries a meaning of being clean and pure. The idea of a candidate as 'one clothed in white' is expressed in the custom observed in some lodges whereby the candidate for initiation is required to dress, as was the writer of this note, in a special loose-fitting white suit kept for the purpose.

So we wear gloves as a reminder of our roots in operative masonry and echoing the formal dress of a bygone age, and those gloves are white to symbolize and remind us of the tents of our profession, 'founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue'.