Internet Lodge 9659
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Province of East Lancashire
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Short Papers Competition 2007

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Paper 46/2007

Title **Why the Square and Compasses?**
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The Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition in the *Book of Constitutions* of the United Grand Lodge of England states at No. 6 'That the three Great Lights of Freemasonry (namely, the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses) shall always be exhibited when the Grand Lodge or its subordinate Lodges are at work, the chief being the Volume of the Sacred Law.'

Why did we choose the Square and Compasses as the outward signs of Freemasonry? Well they probably stem from our medieval ancestors and it may not have been uncommon in the middle ages to have an hostelry which displayed as its sign the Square and the Compasses to indicate that stonemasons and other craftsmen were likely to meet there. And, as many craftsmen travelled from place to place to find work in those days, they might find suitable employment by visiting such an establishment.

Incidentally, the sign of the square and compasses were also used by other craftsmen such as carpenters but mainly by the stonemasons.

But how many of us know that the Square and the Compasses signified two different classes of craftsman for which a long seven year apprenticeship had to be served before you became elected a 'fellow of the craft'?

The square in stonemasons terms relates to 'straight' or 'square masons' the makers of stone with straight edges which sit one on top of the other with remarkable precision as can be seen in many of our splendid cathedrals and other notable buildings.

The compasses, on the other hand, denote the 'round' or 'arch mason' a different, and some would say a superior, skill to produce the beautiful arched naves of churches and doorways at the entrance to many of our buildings(1)

On the Coat of Arms of the Society of the Free Masons, first granted by Edward IV, (1442-1483) we see two supporters on either side of a shield, the one on the left-hand side, a craftsman, had a square in his hand and he was wearing a jacket which was blue, whilst the craftsman on the right is holding the compasses and his jacket was red(1)

Now perhaps you can see the connection between the Craft and the Royal Arch, but those colours are of course also significant in the Mark Degree reflecting its connection too with the Craft and the Royal Arch.

(1) Neville Barker Cryer; The Arch and the Rainbow P26-27

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