



**Internet Lodge 9659**  
**United Grand Lodge of England**  
**Province of East Lancashire**  
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

**Short Papers Competition 2007**

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**Paper 59/2007**

**Title**  
**Author**

**More Than Just Words**  
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One of the main features of Craft Freemasonry is the repetition of the three degrees and we will hear the words in excess of at least one hundred times in the course of our Masonic career. We learn them almost ad-nauseum and they are repeated to the best of our ability.

As we progress through the offices, I wonder sometimes if we really understand what we are saying and mean.

Picture the scene---

The Lodge is being opened. During this process, the Worshipful Master asks the Senior Warden "How many assistant officers are there?"

Eventually we arrive with the Tyler.

The Worshipful Master then asks the Junior Warden  
"The situation of the Tyler?"

Junior Warden replies "Outside the door of the Lodge"

Worshipful Master asks "His duty?"

Depending on the ritual being used the answer is usually "Being armed with a drawn sword to keep off all intruders and cowans to Masonry and to see that the Candidates are properly prepared."

No problems so far are there? Of course not. We've heard it so many times.

We then move on to the next part of the Opening of the Lodge.

**BUT WAIT---BUT WAIT**

Let us have a closer look at the duties of Brother Tyler. We know what an intruder is and that the Candidates are properly prepared. But what on earth is a **COWAN?**

Brethren, any offers?

The word **COWAN** was first heard of in the Scottish Schaw Statutes of 1598.

These were codes of practice and rules for OPERATIVE Masons drawn up by William Schaw, Master of Works and General Warden of Masons appointed in 1584 by James VI of Scotland.

The word **COWAN** is described in the New English Dictionary as "one who builds dry stone walls" and as he was not regularly apprenticed to the trade, it was applied as an insult to one who does the work of a Mason.

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Hence, he the (COWAN) was a working mason who had not properly joined the fraternity, not having been properly admitted into a lodge though failing to serve his term of indenture, for one reason or another.

No doubt there would have been many such men (COWANS) capable of doing fine work, but the official attitude to them is clearly indicated by the following regulation from the Schaw Statute;

That no Master mason or Fellowcraft receive a COWAN in his society or company nor send any of his servants to work with COWANS under pain of twenty pounds.

Brethren I've never seen a dry stone wall over four foot six high but there might have been in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The OPERATIVE Masons with their unique skills would have been guaranteed work and to move freely hence the word Freemason. They built magnificent cathedrals, churches and castles and would have served as an apprentice for seven years. This was one way of protecting themselves from outsiders.

Twenty pounds in 1584 must have been a vast amount. Thousands today.

References;

Opening of the Lodge from "Taylor" ritual

"Cowan" as described in the New English Dictionary.

Schaw Statutes 1598 & 1599

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