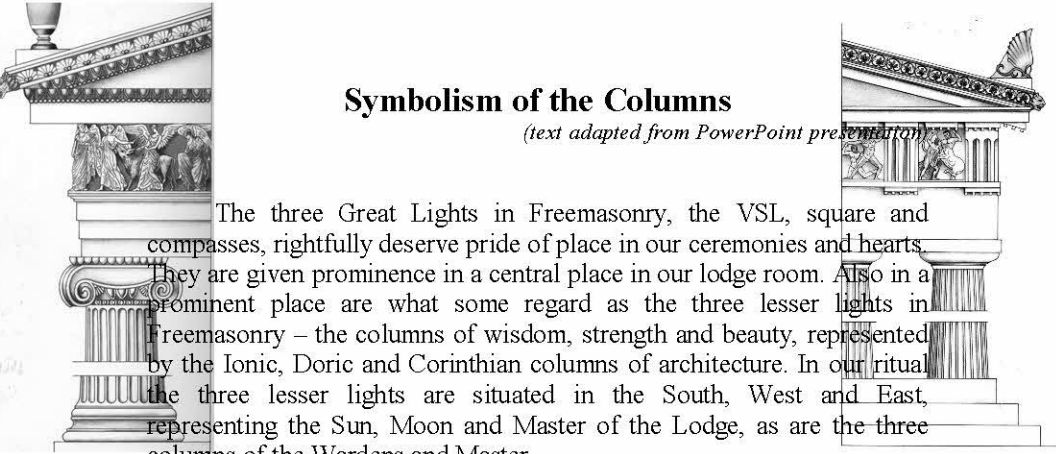


## Symbolism of the Columns

(text adapted from PowerPoint presentation)



The three Great Lights in Freemasonry, the VSL, square and compasses, rightfully deserve pride of place in our ceremonies and hearts. They are given prominence in a central place in our lodge room. Also in a prominent place are what some regard as the three lesser lights in Freemasonry – the columns of wisdom, strength and beauty, represented by the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian columns of architecture. In our ritual the three lesser lights are situated in the South, West and East, representing the Sun, Moon and Master of the Lodge, as are the three columns of the Wardens and Master.

This presentation aims to explore the significance of columns from its historical architectural viewpoint and the symbolic importance of columns from a masonic viewpoint.

You will all be familiar with the basic concepts, and I am not offering anything new masonically. I had a number of quandaries (at the back of my mind) and in the course of this exploratory exercise found answers to many of them (but not all).

The first point I would like to make is an obvious one – that **architecture** is central to our Craft, as for example in the first degree we acknowledge God as the GAOTU. We are encouraged to apply the principles of architecture to our lives, however sometimes the meanings can be very elusive. This presentation looks at some of the perspectives and meanings, arising from my research into columns in particular and architecture in general.

The oldest concepts of **Columns** or **Pillars** (words used interchangeably) go back to the **Tree** and **Pillar** symbols in Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenicia and Egypt. The tree is represented as a gateway to the Abode of the Blessed. Pillar symbols relate to a stylised form of tree, with the idea of an axis or antenna communicating with the Eternal.

For over a thousand years in the history of the West, beautiful architecture has been synonymous with a classical building, a structure with a temple style front, decorated columns, repeated ratios and symmetrical façade.

**Order** contributes to the appeal of almost all substantial works of architecture.

Architecture excites our respect for the highest of human aspirations.

The second point I would like to make is that we learn lessons from architecture about how to conduct our lives and build our society.

Prof. Curl writes in his book *“The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry”*<sup>1</sup> that in French Freemasonry, the allegorical and metaphorical aspects (of architecture) have much greater significance than in 18th century England.

**Order** and **Geometry** were associated with the structure of society. The temple was the greatest achievement in ancient society, linked to the establishment of values.

Freemasons sought to build a moral edifice based on what was noble, splendid and true from antiquity. They sought a return to simple, primitive and elemental truths. Hence foundations were formed from the simplified forms of architecture in the classical period dating back to the ancient Egyptians and Solomon’s temple.

My third point is that **Wisdom, Strength and Beauty** have a fundamental place in our Craft.

In our first degree Tracing Board, it states:

*The Universe is the Temple of the Deity whom we serve; Wisdom, Strength and Beauty are about His throne as pillars of His works.*

And in the 2nd degree Charge after Passing:

*Study the liberal arts which tend so effectually to polish and adorn the mind, especially the science of geometry which is established as the basis of our Art.*

The importance of classical architecture to Freemasons was also mentioned in “the Constitutions of the Freemasons” first published by James Anderson in 1723. James stated unequivocally that “the arts of building” attained their highest degree of perfection under the Roman Emperor Augustus, who was the patron of Vitruvius<sup>2</sup>. Anderson and his fellows expected masons to share their enthusiasm for the ordered architecture of the classical world and their determination to use the procedures of building to illustrate the process of spiritual development.

Another of the earliest known documents is a published work by Samuel Pritchard<sup>3</sup> in 1730 for “constituted regular lodges”, concerning their “regular proceeding in initiating their new members in the whole three degrees of masonry”.

**Q. What supports a Lodge ?**

**A. Three great Pillars.**

**Q. What are they called ?**

**A. Wisdom, Strength and Beauty.**

**Q. Why so ?**

**A. Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn.**

