



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

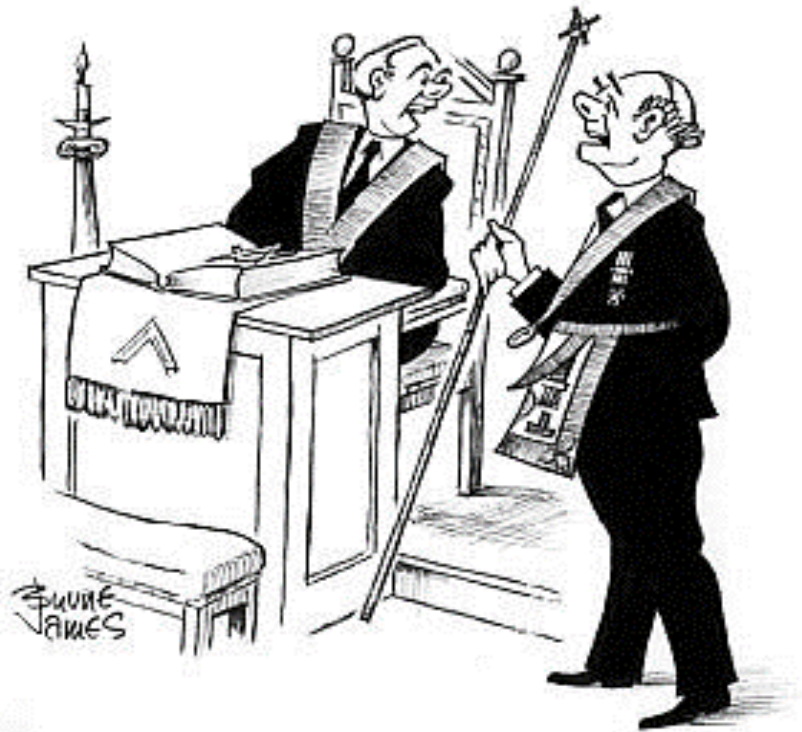
A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Thumb

Up or down????



"Never mind the Ritual Book. We'll do it our way"

'Giving them the thumbs up...'

Having closed the VSL the IPM steps forward and delivers the ceremony's final words '*Fidelity, Fidelity, Fidelity*'. Visitors surreptitiously peer around to see if this is a 'thumbs up' or a 'closed hand' lodge. The courteous will adjust their fingers in keeping; the dedicated will proudly maintain the posture of their own lodge. Which hand position *is* correct?

Across the United Kingdom there seems little if no uniformity between the national Grand Lodges, between Provinces or between and within private lodges. This being so can it ever be said there is one 'correct' version? May we suggest though that there is?

The use and misuse of the Sign of Fidelity and the Sign of Reverence have kept preceptors in business for generations. Let us start then with that Sign of Fidelity. Its purpose is explained in the Emulation Lodge of Instruction (which drives most forms of Masonic ritual) as '*emblematically to shield the repository of my secrets from the attacks of the insidious*'. It is defensive in nature and it seems logical therefore to expand the hand with the thumb to provide the greatest area of protection. For the thumb's position to be at right angles makes very good Masonic sense and also accords with the general instruction given by the Master on another occasion.

Turning now to those signs of reverence. We should remember that a Sign of Reverence was not recognised or taught by Grand Lodge even though - confusingly - it appears in the rubric of 'Emulation' working. However 'a sign of reverence' with fingers touching the seat of human emotion – the heart – has long been employed and respected *outside* Freemasonry throughout Western society. One can see it at the roadside as a cortège passes by, in a church service, at the loss of family or friend, even when an American President takes his Oath of Office. It is not defensive; it represents a positive outpouring of love, sympathy, respect or reverence. Its use is therefore quite appropriate inside a lodge when we unite in prayer to the GAOTU, indeed, it is the correct form when any prayer is said.

However 'a sign of reverence' with fingers and thumb aligned and touching the seat of human emotion is both simple and eloquent.

...but back to the Closing. Fidelity simply means faithfulness and is demonstrated by loyalty. The Emulation rubric does not say '*All give the Sign of Fidelity*'. (Indeed it cannot do so as the VSL and thus the Lodge are both now closed.) It says very simply but clearly '*All touch I b lightly with each word 'F'*', which very action mirrors a sign of reverence. The fingers of the hand lightly touch the heart to remind departing masons of the duty to keep faith and remain loyal to those moral principles stored therein – expressed as respect for one's Creator, of love for fellow man, of relief for his sufferings, of courage to be true to one's own nature. Indeed these are the principles that should govern all of our life, not least when we depart our Lodge building.

Such a daily demonstration within our community can well define Speculative Freemasonry from the world around us.