

## The Tracing Board It's Origin and Symbolism

We are all familiar with the words of the lecture on the First degree Tracing Board...."the Immovable Jewels are the Tracing Board, the Rough and Perfect Ashlars. The T. B. is for the Master to lay lines and draw designs upon ..... They are called the Immovable Jewels because they lay open and immovable in the Lodge for the brethren to moralise upon."

Although at first sound this passage may appear inconsistent, this impression will be corrected when it is realised that in fact it refers to two separate and distinct Tracing Boards. The genuine T.B. is a plain drawing board, in these days usually depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup>. degree tracing board in front of the altar: the second, the Lodge Board, is that which is commonly referred to as the Tracing Board, which has various symbols and emblems painted upon it and for convenience is placed in a conspicuous position in the lodge room.

Briefly, the evolution of the 'Lodge Board' may be traced through three stages: the tracing board used among operative masons, the practice of drawing the Lodge on the floor as adopted by the earliest speculative masons, and the development of our modern Tracing Boards from the lodge boards and cloths which first came into general use at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup>. century.

Among the ancient craftsmen, including the Indians, the Egyptians, and the Persians, tracing boards were in general use in conjunction with the mosaic floor or pavement, by which designs and templates or patterns were worked out for the guidance of the workmen.

The tracing board, used by the master craftsmen to trace or line out his design, was divided into squares in a fashion similar to the mosaic pavement of the lodge. The Master Masons of the middle ages employed such a board on which the squares were marked out in perspective, each being a unit of measurement - corresponding to sixteen & half feet in the English and twenty three & half feet in Continental lodges.