

# THE WARDENS

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The position of Warden within Freemasonry is an ancient one, predating any known references in related documents. The influence of medieval Guilds can be seen throughout the organization, sometimes easily and other times requiring a more analytical approach to infer similarities and interpret the document's spirit. It is widely accepted that Freemasonry's Wardens are descendants of Guilds, a conclusion that requires little critical examination.

During the Middle Ages, the Guilds operated with legal protection from Royal Charters, Warrants, or similar instruments granted by local authorities. This allowed them to work more freely for the benefit of all and gave the chartering authority some control. In the "Libre Albus" or White Book of the City of London in 1419, we can see the "Oath of the Masters and Wardens of the Mysteries," which applied to all Guilds, including weavers, metalworkers, masons, and others. The oath reads as follows:

"You shall swear that well and lawful you shall overlook the art or mystery of \_\_\_\_\_ of which you are Masters and Wardens of the Mysteries, for the year elected. And the good rules and ordinances of the same mystery. approved here by the Court, you shall keep and cause to be kept. And all the defaults that you shall find therein, done contrary there too, you shall present to the Chamberlain of the City, from time to time, sparing no one for a favor, and aggrieving no one for hate. Extortion or wrong unto no one, by the color of your office, you shall do; nor unto anything that shall be against the estate and Peace of the King, or of the City, you shall consent. But for the time that you shall be in office, in all things pertaining unto the said mystery, according to the good laws and franchises of the said City, well and lawfully you shall behave yourself. So God you help, and the Saints."

According to the Harleian manuscript, which is believed to date back to 1660, it is stated that: "For the future, the Sayd Society, Company, and Fraternity of Free Masons shall be regulated and governed by one Master and Assembly and Wardens as the said Company shall think to choose at every yearly General Assembly."

To modern ears, it may sound unusual, but it is true that before a certain date between 1723 and 1738, the Wardens of a lodge were exclusively selected from the Fellows of the Craft.

The first edition of "Anderson's Constitution," published in 1723, describes how to create a new lodge. The book outlines the steps that the Grand Master took at the time, the Duke of Wharton, to establish a new lodge according to the ancient customs of Masons. One important step was when the new Master and Wardens were elected from among the Fellow-Craft. Once the Master was installed, he would choose two Fellow-Craft to present to the Grand Master for

approval. After the Grand Master approved, the two Fellow-Craft would be installed as Wardens. It was also possible for a Deputy Grand Master to be chosen from the ranks of the Fellows if the current Deputy Grand Master was sick or absent. The Grand Master would choose this Deputy Grand Master temporarily. In 1738, when the Book of Constitutions was published, the Wardens, Tiler, Assistant Treasurers, and Secretaries were required to be Master Masons. The government of lodges by a Master and two Wardens is a universal custom of the Fraternity. It is recognized as essential in the formation, opening, and governing of a lodge by all Grand Lodges, whether they have adopted Mackey's twenty-five Landmarks or not.

In the Masonic ritual, the three main officers of a lodge are universally recognized as the essential elements a lodge must have. Only those who are not well-informed about Masonry view the positions of the Senior and Junior Wardens as mere stepping stones to the East, as necessary waiting posts that one must stand at for a year before advancing to the Oriental Chair. The wardens play a crucial role in every Entered Apprentices', Fellow Crafts', or Master Masons' Lodge, and they have specific powers, duties, and responsibilities. Mackey outlines these as follows:

The Master of a Masonic lodge may utilize individuals other than the Wardens to confer the degrees. Still, he is not authorized to strip the Wardens of their positions or exempt them from their duties. The government of a Masonic lodge is composed of three parts. However, in the absence of the installed Wardens, the Master can legally open, set to labor, and close the lodge with the assistance of temporary appointees. If the Master is absent, the Senior Warden presides; if both the Master and Senior Warden are absent, the Junior Warden takes charge.

Within the lodge, only one member holds the power, privilege, and responsibility outlined in this text. If a Warden must preside in the absence of his superior officer, he may request a Past Master to take over for him. However, it is not legal for a Past Master to convene the lodge in the absence of the Master. Only the Master, Senior Warden in the Master's absence, or Junior Warden in the absence of both are authorized to do so.

According to Mackey, the Senior Warden assumes the role of the Master in the East when he is absent. However, the Junior Warden does not automatically assume the role of the Senior Warden in the West when he is absent. Each officer has specific duties assigned to them during their installation ceremony. The Master has the authority to appoint temporary replacements for any unfilled positions. In the absence of the Master, the Senior Warden is the only brother who can assume the East and lead the lodge. This is generally accepted as the standard practice, but some Grand Lodges have local regulations that contradict the traditional Masonic laws and practices. For example, suppose a Grand Lodge rules that the oldest Past Master present can lead the lodge in the absence of the Master and both Wardens. In that case, it only applies to that specific Grand Lodge and is not in line with the fundamental laws of the Fraternity.

The Wardens can be found in all Masonic bodies, Rites, and all countries. The word's meaning is derived from the Saxon word "guardian," which means to guard or to watch. In France, the second and third officers are called "Premier" and "Second Surveillant," in Germany, "Erste" and

“zwite Aufseher,” in Spain, “primer” and “Segundo Vigilante,” and in Italy, “primo” and “secondo Sorvegliante.” These words mean to oversee, see, watch, keep ward, or observe. Whether the title came from the provision of the old rituals that the Wardens sit beside the two columns in the porch of the Temple to oversee or watch the Fellowcrafts and Apprentices, or whether the old rituals were developed from the custom of the middle ages Guilds having Wardens (watchers), is still a question open to debate.

Both Wardens are situated in the West, near the columns in the French Rite and Scottish Rite. In the Blue Lodge, the Junior Warden’s placement in the South somewhat diminishes the symbolism. Still, it is compensated by providing each Warden with a replica of the column under which they once sat. Interestingly, these columns were previously known by a different name. Oliver cites an inventory of a Lodge in Chester from 1761, which lists “two truncheons for the Wardens.”

The symbols of authority for the Warden are Truncheons or Columns, and their placement is significant. The Senior Warden’s column stands upright, while the Junior Warden’s column is laid on its side during labor. During refreshment, the Senior Warden’s column is laid flat, while the Junior Warden’s column stands upright. This allows the members to quickly determine whether the lodge is at labor or refreshment by looking towards the South or West. The leadership structure of the Craft, consisting of a Master and two Wardens, is crucial for the initiate to understand and for the Craft to follow. The Senior Warden has the responsibility to “assist the Worshipful Master in opening and governing his lodge,” and the use of his setting mallet or gavel to enforce orders must be respected. He also has a designated officer to deliver messages to the Junior Warden or other places. The Senior Warden is accountable for the conduct of the Lodge during labor, second only to the Master.

The Junior Warden’s role within the lodge is less significant than that of the Master and Senior Warden. His primary responsibility is to keep track of time and announce when it’s time for the Craft to take a break or return to work, as directed by the Master. Additionally, he is tasked with ensuring that the Craft members do not indulge in excessive drinking during their breaks. This practice may have originated when wine was the refreshment of choice. Even though wine is no longer the beverage of choice within the lodge, the Junior Warden still plays an essential role in supervising the conduct of the Craft members during refreshment. It’s his responsibility to report any instances of Masonic misconduct, which can be an unpleasant task. Only Wardens are eligible to succeed the Master, except in Nevada, where this rule does not apply. This requirement has existed for a long time, with some exceptions, like when a new lodge is being formed.

The fourth of the Old Charges reads:

“No brother can be a Warden until he has passed the part of a Fellowcraft; nor a Master, until he has acted as Warden; nor Grand Warden, until he has been Master of a Lodge, nor Grand Master unless he has been a Fellowcraft before his election.” The old law holds wisdom, and the modern practice of electing the Junior Warden as Senior Warden shows wit. Simply

observing from the benches does not teach a man how to become a Master of a lodge. Testing is necessary to observe a brother's fitness to be a Master. Serving as Wardens enables brethren to learn and be tested on their performance and abilities before aspiring to the Oriental Chair.

In most jurisdictions, the Wardens hold a prestigious position as lodge representatives alongside the Master at all Grand Lodge meetings. However, some Grand Lodges may exclude the Wardens from participating, with membership limited only to the Master of constituent lodges and the current and past officers of the Grand Lodge.

Before establishing the Mother Grand Lodge of England in 1717, every Mason had the right to attend the General Assembly and participate in its proceedings. However, after the Grand Lodge was founded by the "four old lodges" of London, the Masters and Wardens were responsible for representing the interests of all Masons.