

# ORIGINS

## The Tyler and The Wavy Bladed Sword



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## The Tyler And The Wavey Bladed Sword

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In many jurisdictions, the Tyler is the first officer of the Lodge to be installed. When the sword is placed in his hands, the officiate reminds all present that: "As the sword is placed in the hands of the Tyler to enable him effectually to guard against the approach of cowans and eavesdroppers, and suffer none to pass or repass except such as are duly qualified, so should it admonish us to set a guard over our thoughts, a watch at our lips, and post a sentinel over our actions; thereby preventing the approach of every unworthy thought and deed, and preserving consciences void of offense toward God and man."

By this, we should understand that in addition to Tyler who guards the Lodge, all Masons should symbolically perform the same duties in their own lives and ward away temptations and unvirtuous actions.

It is only by "setting a guard over our thoughts" that we will be able to "subdue every discordant passion within us." Therefore, the Tyler and his sword also represents a Mason's moral consciousness and self-control.

### ORIGIN OF THE TITLE OF THE OFFICE

Much of what is found before 1977 about the origin and spelling of Tyler (or Tiler) was debatable. The term is seen in writings spelled with a "y" or an "i." That year, Harry Carr's *Freemasons at Work* was published. Carr was Past Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge 2076 in London. He was Secretary and Editor for twelve years of the premier research lodge.

We learn from Carr the earliest mention of the word in Masonic usage is in the minutes of the Grand Lodge of England in 1732; there it is spelled "Tyler."

In 1738 (and perhaps before) the officer of the Grand Lodge who stood without the door was called, "Garder of ye Grand Lodge." But apparently, this title was soon altered to Grand Tyler, and thereafter both in England and in America the brother has been stationed "without the door, armed with the proper instrument [a sword] of his office."

Various dictionaries indicate that the spelling "Tyler" is simply an older form of the more modern, "Tiler."





Observing the earliest usage of the spelling (1732, 1738) in Masonic records, it is certainly appropriate to use the spelling, *Tyler*.<sup>1</sup>

## EARLY TYLER ATTIRE

The coat or uniform of a Tyler in 18th century lodges, particularly in Britain, was often such as would appear startling or ludicrous to the 20th century. The Grand Tyler in England in 1736 wore a red waistcoat under a dark blue coat trimmed with gold lace. The Tyler of Scoon and Perth Lodge, Scotland wore a Turkish costume and carried a scimitar instead of a sword. Lodge St. John No. 279 of Leicester, England, in 1791, resolved that “the Tyler be clothed at the expense of the Lodge with a blue coat and waistcoat and corduroy breeches, the with yellow buttons, a pair of white stockings, and a 3-cornered hat; and also, that he be furnished with hairy cap to wear o public occasions, the latter to remain the property of the lodge.”<sup>2</sup>

An early description of the appearance of the Tyler in The Antients Boyne Lodge № 84 in Bandon, County Cork, Ireland survives in a book written on the history of the town. The Masonic lodge there was founded in 1738. In the book we find:

“Arriving at the landing, [the candidate] gently asked the Tyler may he go in; but the redoubtable Dick Baylie would not even allow him to put his nose inside the scarlet curtain which hung some feet in front of the lodge door. Even the dress the Tyler wore appeared in harmony with the sanguinary and mysterious deeds that are said to have been perpetuated within. A huge red cloak covered him to the very toes; the large sleeves, which hung below his hands, terminated in cuffs of orange velvet, on each of which was a representation of a skull and crossbones in lustrous black; the blue collar had on it moons and stars of bright yellow; and candlesticks, compasses, and other cabalistic [sic] symbols of the craft, nearly covered it [the cloak] with odd-looking devices. On his head was a gigantic cocked-hat, which would almost have served him for a boat, it was so large. This was surmounted with blue and red feathers; and in his hand was a flaming falchion [wavy sword].<sup>3</sup>

There are other accounts of early Lodges requiring their Tyler to wear a cloak, cape, or full robe of striking design. Some were deep blue and decorated with golden shapes of suns, moons, and stars. Others were red and orange, with similar decorations that suggest that he dressed as a cherub - a celestial being of fire. This belonged to the era when it more or less accepted practice to badger and scare the candidate, and the Tyler was expected to play his part.<sup>4</sup>

It is likely that over time, as the symbolism of this sort of costume was forgotten, it was seen as merely whimsical and thus fell out of fashion. But we should study the traditional form for the lessons and wisdom it contains.

## THE TYLER’S SWORD

A Tyler has not always been armed with a sword. In early Masonry the Tiler was “armed with the proper implement of his office,” which was appropriately a trowel used by operative stone masons to spread cement or mortar, which binds bricks together and setting tiles. Later, the trowel became a symbolic instrument in the Craft, representing the tool that spreads the cement which binds brethren together men (along with the ceremonies and practices of Masonry) to help each other and all society.



<sup>1</sup> Henry Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, McCoy, 1996, p. 653

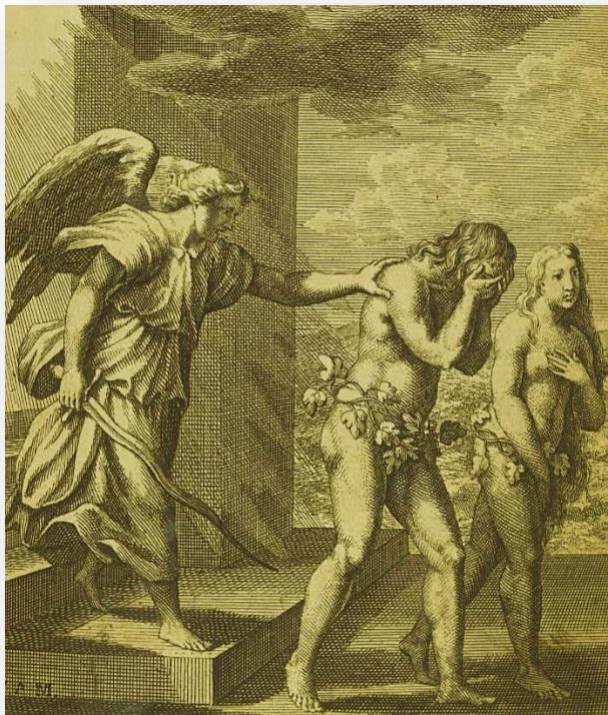
<sup>2</sup> Coil.

<sup>3</sup> George Bennett, *The History of Bandon and the Principal Towns in the West Riding of County Cork*, 1869, p. 411.

<sup>4</sup> Coil.

By 1738, at least in English lodge jurisdictions, we know the Tyler was armed with a sword instead of the trowel.<sup>5</sup> The blade of that sword was originally described as curved or wavy to represent the shape of fire. According to *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, "In early days, the Tyler's sword was always of that kind."<sup>6</sup> Wavy blade swords, of course, were not commonly manufactured. Over the centuries, lodges began using what was available in standard shapes.

A sword whose blade is of a spiral or twisted form is called by the heralds (angels) a flaming sword because of its resemblance to the ascending curvature of a flame of fire. In Masonry, until the late in the 19th century, this implement was referred to as "The Flaming Sword of the Tyler," making the wavy blade the truest form of the instrument of the office of Tyler.



The design of the wavy Tyler's sword was not intended for mundane purposes such as actual defense, nor to inspire fright. The Masonic writers of the eighteenth century inform us that the fiery blade represented a sacred allusion to the flaming, flashing, turning sword wielded by the angels who were tasked to guard the way to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, after the first humans were expelled. As found in Genesis 3:24, "So He drove out

the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

In a way, the position of Tyler may be considered akin to a Sergeant at Arms (serjeant-at-arms) for his lodge – an essential head of security, as it were, who ensures that all who pass his station are worthy and qualified to pass.

The Tyler's Sword, however, remains a symbol representing the collective obligation Masons to share responsibility to monitor our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to carefully reflect on the importance of preserving intact the aim and purpose of the Craft. The flaming sword may also symbolize the reality that men, being spiritual beings and their war is not with "flesh and blood," but with spiritual foes.



<sup>5</sup> Yasha Beresiner, *William Hogarth, The Man, the Artist, and His Masonic Circle*, Pietre Stones Review of Freemasonry, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/beresiner11.html>, accessed June 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Coil.





Franz von Stuck's "Angel with the Flaming Sword" of 1889 (shown on the left). The work is also known as "The Guardian of Paradise." This painting by the German master depicts the angel of the Genesis story who was set to guard the Garden of Eden against the return of Man. The original painting is in the Museum Villa Stuck in Munich.

