

CURSING CLOCKS

WHAT ARE WE MANAGING OUR TIME TO DO?

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The twenty-four-inch gauge is the first working tool given to an Entered Apprentice Mason. We find it described as an instrument of the operative Mason with no authority other than ritual cited.¹ The instrument is not mentioned in the Gothic Constitutions as used in early Masonic ceremonies. In the Edinburg Register House Manuscript (1696), we find it referred to as the “common judge” (a gauge or template).² It is first mentioned as the twenty-four-inch gauge in 1724,³ then again in 1762 in the Masonic exposure, *Jachin and Boaz*. The term is found again in Thomas Smith Webb’s *Freemasons Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry* (1797).

When we carefully read the 1762 exposure, we find what was said in Lodge about the gauge and the square. However, the square is not part of Entered Apprentice’s working tools later or today.

In the 1762 exposure, we find that the Master identifies to the candidate the working tools of his degree: the twenty-four-inch gauge, the square, and the common Gavel or Setting Maul (the square later vanished as part of the working tools of an Entered Apprentice).

The Master explains how to square and measure a man’s work using the square and gauge. The Master says, “Brother, as we are not all working masons, we apply them to our morals, which we call spiritualizing.” We then find, “The twenty-four Inch Gauge represents the twenty-four Hours of the Day” and how they should be spent. The answer: “Six hours to work in, six hours to serve God, and six to serve a Friend or Brother, as far as lies within my Power without being detrimental to myself or my family.”

Since those hours total eighteen, the assumption can be made that the remaining hours were recognized as a time for rest and sleep.



Time hereafter.
Mas. What were the next Things that were shewn you?
Ans. I was set down by the Master's Right Hand, who shewed me the Working Tools of an Entered Apprentice.
Mas. What were they?
Ans. The 24 Inch Gauge, the Square, and common Gavel or Setting Maul.
Mas. What are their Uses?
Ans. The Square to square my Work, the 24 Inch Gauge to measure my Work, the common Gavel to knock off all superfluous Matter, whereby the Square may fit easy and just.
Mas. Brother, as we are not all working Matons, we apply them to our Morals, which we call spiritualizing: Explain them.
Ans. The 24 Inch Gauge represents the 24 Hours of the Day.
Mas. How do you spend them, Brother?
Ans. Six Hours to work in, six Hours to serve God, and six to serve a Friend or a Brother, as far as lies in my Power, without being detrimental to myself or family.

¹ Henry C. Coil, *Coil's Masonic Cyclopedia*, Macoy, 1996.

² Robert G. Davis, *The Mason's Words, The History and Evolution of the American Masonic Ritual*, Building Stone Publishers, 2013

³ *Ibid.*

From this exposure, we get the hint that while early Masons were referring to managing time, it was more about how we manage our time and for what purposes.

Thomas Smith Webb's 1797 *Freemasons Monitor: Illustrations of Masonry* gives us the version most commonly used in today's ritual Lodges. One must conclude that Webb had access to the 1762 *Jachin and Boaz* exposure, William Preston's 1773 *Illustration of Masonry*, and his own first-hand experience since he had been a Mason since 1790, upon which he based his phrasing. It appears, however, that the division of the phraseology on the twenty-four-hours of the day into three equal parts was influenced by Preston's work, which was influenced by David Hume's *History of England*, published in six volumes in 1754, 1756, 1759, and 1761.⁴

Hume writes that Alfred the Great (King of the Wessex and Saxon kingdoms in southwestern England in the eighth century who prevented England from falling to the Danes and promoted learning and literacy) "employed himself in the pursuits of knowledge. He usually divided his time into three equal portions: sleep and the refection of his body by diet and exercise, the dispatch of business, and study and devotion."⁵

The *Twenty-four inch Gauge* is an instrument made use of by operative masons, to measure and lay out their work; but we, as free and accepted Masons are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of dividing our time. It being divided into twenty-four equal parts, is emblematical of the twenty-four hours of the day, which we are taught to divide into *three* equal parts, whereby we find eight hours for the service of God and a distressed worthy Brother; eight hours for our usual avocations; and eight for refreshment and sleep.*

When we compare the early ritual in *Jachin and Boaz* with Webb's later phrasing, we find an eight-hour time difference, which makes it difficult to explain how we should divide our time. Webb mentions "sleep," which figures into the twenty-four hours of the day and the four parts, but we still have members who question what "eight hours in the service of God and a distressed worthy Brother means."

Webb did not go deeply into the symbolism of the gauge beyond this. Serious Masons of the period may have understood what he was teaching. However, as generations passed, fewer serious Masons embraced it and passed it on accordingly. Today, many Masons presume the lesson of the twenty-four-inch-gauge is merely a symbol that reminds us to manage our time if we are going to be industrious and productive.

Masons and scholars in the field have looked beneath the surface of Webb's designed explanation and found one that offers more reason. Preeminent Mason and influential Masonic writer, Carl H. Claudy, offers such reason in his 1933 Short Talk Bulletin, *The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge*.⁶

⁴ *Ibid*, Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry*, 1797, Carl H. Claudy, "The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge," *Short Talk Bulletins*, Masonic Service Association, Vol. 11, No. 9, September 1933.

⁵ David Hume, *The History of England*. Volume I., Chapter 2, "Anglo-Saxon," Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, reprint 1983.

⁶ Gary L. Dryfoos, "Carl H. Claudy, Father of the Short Talk," A page about Freemasonry The Masonic Service Organization, December 2011. Carl Harry Claudy was born in 1879 and died in 1957. The year before his death he was named a Mason Honorary Passed Grand Master of North Dakota. Claudy's association with Freemasonry began in 1908, when, at the age of 29, he became a Master Mason in Harmony 17 in Washington, DC. He served as its master and eventually served as grand master of Masons in the District of Columbia in 1943. His Masonic writing career began in earnest when he became associated with the Masonic Service Association in 1923, serving as associate editor of its magazine, *The Master Mason*, until 1931. Under his leadership the Masonic Service Association was brought to a place of preeminence through his authorship and distribution of the *Short Talk Bulletin* which made his name familiar to virtually every lodge in the country. He authored approximately 350 *Short Talk Bulletins*. In addition to the bulletins themselves, he wrote and distributed innumerable digests, special bulletins, and portfolios of an historical and factual nature. Carl H. Claudy, "The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge," *Short Talk Bulletin*, No. 9, September 1933.

Claudy explains that no other symbol cries louder for the accuracy of labor, the skill to work, and the care and pains in building than the twenty-four-inch gauge. He makes clear that this call reminds us there is no time to waste, to be lost, or for idleness. As he writes, nowhere in the wise counsels of prophets, patriots, preachers, or teachers [in any field of discipline] set forth that there is time to waste. The man who wastes his or another's time squanders what he cannot replace; once it is gone, it is gone forever.

He interpreted Webb's view of the gauge symbol as a reminder for Masons that if there is to be a "lighter side of life" on which time is spent, it must be taken from the eight hours allotted to refreshment and sleep. Sleep and work are necessary for life as we have to live it, and labor "in the service of God" must result in good work, true work, and square work.

Claudy believes Webb's claim "in the service to God and a distressed worthy Brother" is not meant to restrict a Mason's service to only other Masons and that men of the time knew that. The phrase and reference are victims of semantic drift over a dozen generations and how the lesson has been explained and taught. A brother, as Claudy writes, refers to "all men who own to a common Father."

...nowhere in the wise counsels of prophets, patriots, preachers, or teachers [in any field of discipline] is there set forth a time to waste time.

Attentive Masons should notice how frequently we find Masonic allusions to work and how rarely to refreshment. So, for those who find labor "irksome," this working tool must be "a painful symbol." For a man who enjoys and finds happiness in his work and devotes more time even when it encroaches on time set aside for refreshment, sixteen hours are scarcely enough. Those men curse the clocks, which go too fast.⁷ Such men have no time to waste.

The mightiest master in our life is Time. Its care, conservation, and employment are the meaning of the twenty-four-inch gauge. How we learn to use and apply it determines who merits the title of Master Mason.



⁷ Claudy.