

Academia Lodge № 847

[About Our Lodge](#)
[Statement of Principles](#)
[Lectures & Symposia](#)
[2012 MRF Symposium](#)
[Library Articles by Our Members](#)
[Visual Arts Reference Shelf](#)
[Resources](#)
[Traditional Lodges](#)
[Masonic Research](#)
[Bodies Search](#)
[Contact Us](#)

The Vesica Piscis & Freemasonry

by Shawn Eyer, P.:M.:

The **vesica piscis**, or “bladder of the fish,” is a simple geometric shape formed by the intersection of two circles. It has a long traditional history, both in operative and speculative Masonry.

In Masonic literature, the vesica is first stressed by George Oliver. Oliver argues that the vesica is “a universal exponent of architecture or Masonry, and the original source or fountain from which its signs and symbols are derived— it constituted the great and enduring secret of our ancient brethren.”

(**Discrepancies of Masonry**, 1875, p. 109) In his Prestonian Lecture for 1931, noted Masonic historian W.W. Covey-Crump calls this statement “quite right,” and expresses that “the Vesica Piscis had even from the time of the Primitive Christians possessed a sacred symbolical significance, though the purport of that significance was variously interpreted owing to the secrecy of its transmission.” (**The Collected Prestonian Lectures**, vol. 1, pp. 146–47)

A.F.A. Woodford recorded that many considered the vesica to be an early Masonic emblem, and that the renowned scholar and cleric Moses Margoliouth declared that “formerly our Grand Masters wore a silver fish.” (**Kenning’s Masonic Cyclopædia**, 1878, p. 224)

Such artifacts may have disappeared over time—however, the Masonic use of the vesica may be confirmed in the case of lodge seals. As Albert G. Mackey wrote in his **Encyclopædia of Freemasonry**:

As a symbol, it was frequently employed as a church decoration by the Freemasons of the Middle Ages. The seals of all colleges, abbeys, and other religious communities, as well as of ecclesiastical persons, were invariably made of this shape. Hence, in reference to the religious character of the Institution, it has been suggested that the seals of



Vesica as part of an emblem denoting Past Masters, from Hughan’s 1899 reprint of the **Constitutions, 1723–1896**.

Masonic Lodges should also have that form, instead of the circular one now used. (1921 edition, vol. 2, p. 827)

As will be seen below, there are surviving examples of the vesica being used for lodge seals both before and during Mackey's time.

J.S.M. Ward, writing in the early twentieth century, noted that the collars of the officers of a lodge are properly in the shape of the vesica. To Ward, this symbolizes that the officers are intended to be passive or receptive to the influence of "the ancient landmarks and unchangeable rules of the Order itself." (**An Interpretation of Our Masonic Symbols**, pp. 34–5)

Early Masonic portraiture supports Ward's notion that the vesica collar is a traditional, and not entirely accidental, form. The very earliest reports describe the jewels as hanging from white cords or blue ribbons. By the mid-eighteenth century the simple ribbon had developed into a more pronounced collar. Pictorial evidence shows both Antients and Moderns wearing collars in the vesica shape. While in the nineteenth century increasingly elaborate oval-shaped and triangular collars also appeared, the vesica collar is still in wide use today.

Ceremonially, it is possible to find the vesica within certain ritual forms. For example, under those jurisdictions wherein the Senior Deacon uses the most direct path rather than "squared corners," it may reasonably be said that the steps of the initiate as he journeys between the Master in the East and the Senior Warden in the West trace a vesica on the floor of the lodge—provided of course that the lodge arrangement is, as the lectures specify, in the form of an "oblong square."

The vesica piscis was a major symbol within the ancient tradition of sacred geometry. It was also an ubiquitous feature of the Gothic architecture that was based upon those ideas, and which was so intertwined with origins of the guilds of operative masonry that most believe eventually gave rise to our Order. Though not mentioned explicitly in extant lectures, it is present in the visual arts, regalia and ceremonial forms of the Craft from an early period. Therefore, as Mackey asserts, it remains an excellent and appropriate form for Masonic seals, especially for lodges that emphasize Masonic tradition.



1787 portrait of W. Bro. Thomas Dunckerley (1724–1795) wearing a vesica-shaped velvet jewel collar similar to those still in use today. Bro. Dunckerley belonged to the Moderns.



1809 portrait of W. Bro. John Cole, a Past Master of many Lodges, both Ancient and Modern. He chose to be depicted wearing the PM jewel of the Antients, suspended by the traditional collar.

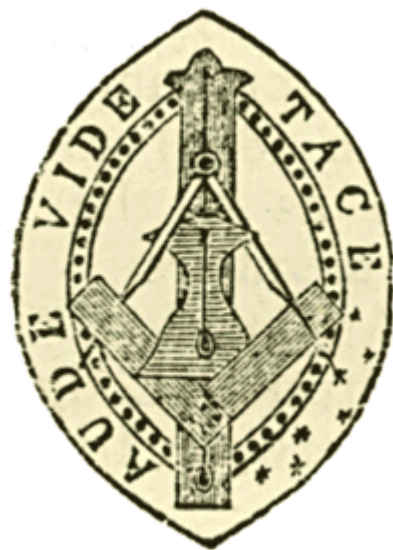
Examples of the Vesica in Masonic Visual Arts



vesica as the moon
Kirkwall Floorcloth
prior to 1780 (potentially pre-1700)



emblem used by German operative
masons
latter half of 1600s



English Lodge medal
moderns
1780-1810

emblem used among Antients in
England
latter half of 1700s



seal of Ancient St. John's Lodge № 3,
Kingston, Ontario
1794



seal of Doric Lodge № 58, Ottawa,
Ontario
1869



seal of The Royds Lodge № 1204,
Malvern, England
1870



seal of Academia Lodge № 847
2009

IN VIAM
INITIATORVUM

Copyright © 2004–2019 Academia Lodge № 847