

A LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY INFORMATION SHEET

MASONIC BALL FOBS

When pocket watches were in fashion they were generally secured by a chain that attached to the owner's waistcoat and the end of the chain was often decorated with a charm or fob. Freemasons could choose a fob that could discreetly display their membership, such as a set square and compasses or a Mark Masonry keystone. However one of the most intriguing designs was that of the masonic ball fob.

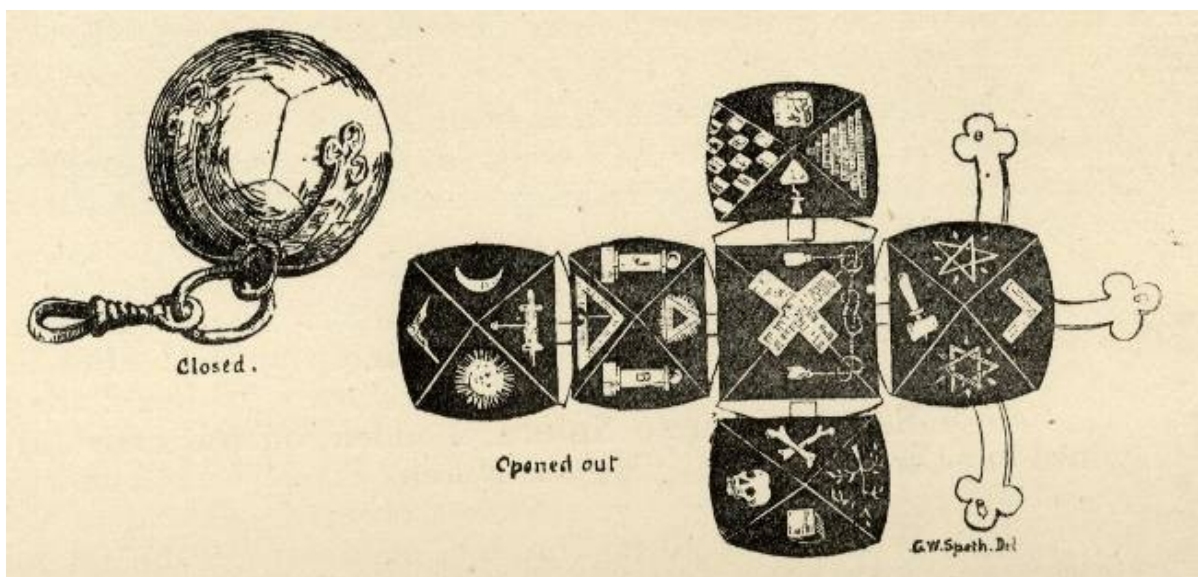
The most commonly seen examples date from the late 19th century but ball fobs are still in production today. The masonic ball fob at first sight appears to be a simple gold metal sphere with four hinged clasps holding it from the attachment loop at the top. However if the clasps are released the ball itself opens up, forming a cross-shape of six equally-sized pyramidal segments, each of the four pyramid faces bearing a masonic symbol.



Closed ball fob



Open ball fob



A drawing of a fob, closed and open, is here taken from the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No 2076 where a ball fob worn by members of a German Lodge was described by Gotthelf Greiner in 1896 and drawn by G. W. Speth.

The placement and exact variety of symbols on the faces of the exposed pyramids varies between individual ball fobs, but the ones on the fob in the drawing above, with some of their interpretations are as follows, first reading from left to right, then upper and finally lower.

1st Square- Compasses (the need to draw appropriate limits), Sun and Moon (night and day, the heavens), Plumb-line (justness and uprightness of life and actions).

2nd Square- Level (judgement and equality), Two Columns (Jachin and Boaz, for freemasons the names of the columns marking the entrance to Solomon's Temple), Delta (based on the Greek alphabet letter and symbolising the Architect of the Universe).

3rd Square- Cross and Cabletow (the bonds of Fraternity).

4th Square- Gavel (refining the individual, control of passions), Five-pointed or Blazing Star (numerous interpretations, including the five points of Masonic fellowship), Six-pointed Star (Seal of Solomon), Set Square (the proper balance between different values and qualities).

5th Square (top)- Rough Ashlar (natural man, ignorant and unrefined), Tessellated Pavement (the mosaic floor of Solomon's Temple often represented in black and white on the floor of a Masonic lodge, the contrast between good and evil, darkness and light), Seven Steps (seven liberal arts and sciences), Trowel (spreading brotherly love).

6th Square- Skull and Crossbones (memento mori, mortality), Acacia (death and remembrance), Perfect Ashlar (the refined and improved man).

Many of these symbols use the tools of stonemasons to represent moral values which is a key element of freemasonry. Other interpretations are possible. For example the fob layout can be seen as a representation of a lodge room, with the Master's square at the right, the two pillars and the level of the Senior Warden on the centre left and the cross in the middle. The left segment then represents the first degree, the upper segment represents the second degree and the lower segment represents the third degree.

A ball is not the only shape used. There are examples of cubes, pyramids (that open out into a star), and even ones in the shape of a maul. Additionally the usual ball version has been used for other things than watch fobs, below it is shown as the silver knob on the top of a cane.



Further information on masonic ball fobs and timepieces in general can be found here-
Masonic Timepieces, Rings, Balls and Watch Fobs, C. Clarke Julius, Printing Express Inc. 1983.

An extensive collection of fobs, of numerous shapes can be found online here-
http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/english_fob_collection.htm



Henry Neville, proudly displaying his watch chain with a key and horseshoe fob

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