The Plumb Bob as a Symbol

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The plumb or plumb rule is an instrument of antiquity. The earliest craftsmen used a weighted cord as a plumb. The Greeks of yore formed a bob of lead on a cord and they gave it a name: MOLUBDOS, meaning lead. From this working tool evolved the name MOLYBDENUM, the name of a well known metal. The ever practical Romans took the word and latinized it to become PLUMBUM, the tool to measure perpendiculaires of structures, walls, aqueducts, and fortifications in every corner of the roman empire. The Gauls adopted the tool, and their successors, the Normans, shortened the word to PLOMB. The Britons added the letter "a" to coin a new word: APLOMB, meaning not easily upset -- not off center. Later, Englishmen revised the spelling to PLUMB and it became a verb as well as a noun. Early English mariners used this tool. Shakespeare called it a plummet: "Deeper than ere a plummet sounded."

It was the French who began to call the lead bob a ball. In French BOULE, meaning a ball of lead small leaden balls or boules were the primitive BULLETS. The Latins modified the word to BULLA. They used very small bullas which they compressed into a thin wafer, utilizing it as a legal seal for documents. Thus was born the Papal BULL -- it is definitely not of bovine origins!

While originally a simple lead weight on a string, the plumb, when required by expert craftsmen, evolved into the shape of the Junior Wardents jewel, and specifically adapted for operative stonemasons. It is interesting to note that this jewel or tool is sometimes found to be richly embellished with symbols (sun, moon, all-seeing eye, etc.) and at other times very plain.
Plumb bob or plummet, a small, pointed body of metal the weight of which is used to draw a string vertical under tension, refers to the fact that they were originally made from lead.
Lead is a chemical element in the periodic table that has the symbol Pb (L. Plumbum) and atomic number 82. A soft, heavy, toxic and malleable poor metal, lead is bluish white when freshly cut but tarnishes to dull gray when exposed to air. Lead is used in building construction, lead-acid batteries, bullets and shot, and is part of solder, pewter, and fusible alloys. Lead has the highest atomic number of all stable elements.
For World AIDS Day on 1 December 1993, United Colours of Benetton fitted an enormous condom over the obelisk on Place Vendôme in Paris. Provocation, and publicity.
Anakh (Biblical Lord of Life)

Plumbline

a symbol of the searching moral investigation
In the Bible, references to the handicrafts are almost entirely incidental, and not many tools are named.

The Lord said to me, ‘What do you see, Amos?’ I said, ‘A plumb line.’ The sovereign one then said, ‘Look, I am about to place a plumb line among my people…’”

According to this view, the plumb line symbolizes God’s moral standards by which he will measure Israel to see if they are a straight or crooked wall.
The weighing of the heart ceremony
In the Egyptian weighing of the heart ceremony when the soul of the dead are judged so that their hearts should not outweigh the feather of Ma-at (Truth, Honesty and Justice) the plumbline is an essential part because it is a law of unerring certainty that passes from heaven to the centre of the earth and back again to the stars from which we all came both spiritually and scientifically.
Egyptian plumb bob
Coptic Cross: The addition of the plumpline to the cross divided into mathematical angles allowed the measurement of the Sun revealing the fundamental Laws of Nature that govern our birth, life and death on Earth.
“Death as the great leveller”, Pompeiiian frescoes 1st-century BC
• In a first-century mosaic tabletop from a Pompeiian triclinium, the skull is crowned with a carpenter's square and plumb-bob, which dangles before its empty eyesockets (Death as the great leveller), while below is an image of the ephemeral and changeable nature of life: a butterfly atop a wheel.
“The Shadow of Death”
by William Holman Hunt 1869
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Our Saviour Subject to His Parents at Nazareth
John Rogers Herbert, 1810-1890
Christ in the House of His Parents John Everett Millais 1849
“Visit the interior of the earth and through rectification (repeated distillation and experimentation) you will find the hidden stone”
Die Melancholie, 1514: Albrecht Dürer
Goosen van Vreeswijk, 1676
The tombstone of Lucius Aebutius Faustus, of the first century B.C. and is in the Museo Civico at Ivrea in Northern Italy
The groma was the principal surveying instrument of the Roman agrimensores, the land surveyors. The instrument itself was simple in design, crossed arms resting on a bracket and attached to a vertical staff. The four arms each had a cord with a hanging plumb bob. It was designed to survey straight lines and right angles.
Fig. 107 a e b - Rappresentazione grafica della flumines varatio. Disegno di G. Moscuta.
Bayside Cemetery
Corpus Christi, Texas
The plumb bob & Freemasons

Like the Square and the Compasses, the Level and the Plumb are nearly always united in Masonic Ritual
Freemason’s plumb bob
Masonic sash worn by Benjamin Franklin, ca. 1782
• As the Level teaches unity in diversity and equality in difference, so the Plumb is a symbol of rectitude of conduct, integrity of life, and that uprightness of moral character which makes a good and just man. In the art of building accuracy is integrity, and if a wall be not exactly perpendicular, as tested by the Plumb-line, it is weak and may fall, or else endanger the strength and stability of the whole. Just so, though Freemasons meet upon a Level and must each build an upright character, by the test of the Plumb, or we weaken the Fraternity they seek to serve and imperil its strength and standing in the community.
P. Lambert, *Freemasons at work*, London 1789
“Masonic Board” Amsterdam, 1745
A Freemason, formed from the materials of his lodge, 1754
“Masonic Board” J. Bowring, 1819
Acorn shaped plumb bob
As the seed of the “mighty oak” the acorn is a whitespread symbol of life. In Scandinavia it is sacred to Thor and as a symbol of infertility, life and immortality.
Acorn shaped plumb bob, Nelson Denny collection
Acorn shaped plumb bob, Nelson Denny collection
Acorn shaped plumb bob, Nelson Denny collection
Acorn shaped plumb bob, Nelson Denny collection
“Plumb Bob in Janus Head”
Wellington E. Webb Municipal Building
Denver Colorado
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In **Roman mythology**, **Janus** was the **god** of gates, doors, doorways, beginnings, and endings.

These Janus heads look to the future and to the past and hope to be centered on truth and wisdom.
Roman bust of Janus, Vatican Museum
Larry Kirkland: Civic Center Denver, Colorado
“This installation is reinforcing the notion that Civic Center is the place that we try to find a sense of truth about our cultural and built environment”
If you drop a plumb bob line across a level line, you again have two straight lines crossed at 90° angles. Unless there are particular reasons for this not to be so, everything on a construction job is set up to be in line with a major compass line (axis) and to be plumb or level. That means that almost all things on a plant site are either parallel or perpendicular to each other.
National Amblem of Cape Verde
Mining in Ontario, 1968, Alan Caswell Collier
Jacob A. Pfeiffer
Newton’s Apple,
“I have always been fascinated by the “Plumb Bob” which is one of the oldest carpenter tools that is still used today. The Plumb Bob points to the center of the earth. I liked the idea of grouping two objects that have gravity related themes and combining them in one composition”