

Mark Master Masons



This degree is open to all Master Masons.

The 'Mark' portion of the title of the degree takes its name from the practice of the stonemason appending his unique mark on his work to identify it, either for the purpose of subsequent payment or simply for posterity or as a matter of pride in his work, a practice which has existed from time immemorial; cathedrals and other prominent buildings all over the world carry the marks of the men who built them which can still be seen quite clearly on masonry which is over a thousand years old.

Although there is no hard evidence to support it, in all probability the stone mason lodges, having been set up in the first instance as part of a medieval 'trade union' to protect the interests of time-served craftsmen and prevent infiltration by bogus builders, became refuges for its members and created a way of life and set of rules for its members to follow which would have certainly been based on religious principles (i.e. in those days Christianity). The ethical standards adopted by such lodges would have been high, and loyalty between its members would have been strong. The lodge therefore would have been a sought-after organization to join.

In looking for reasons why an operative lodge should open its doors to non-craftsmen, it can be readily seen that, when the work of the stone mason started to decline, there would be an incentive on the part of the lodge to maintain its strength by admitting non-operative or 'speculative' members.

There was, likewise, an incentive on the part of God-fearing men to join such a society, for the reasons already stated.

There is hard evidence for this transition from operative to speculative membership, by virtue of an entry in one of the earliest preserved Minute Books of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Minute dated 1599) which states that several speculative brethren appended their marks after their names.

This lodge must, therefore, have originally been a lodge of operative masons who had already embarked on the practice of admitting non-craft or speculative members.

There is every reason, therefore, to believe that the Mark is the likely link between the old craft lodges and the lodges we know today.

As regards the working of a specific Mark Degree, in the archives of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Durham there is a copy of the 1728 Book of Constitutions in which a copy of the By Laws has been affixed.

One of these By Laws, dated January 1756, states :

"There being met part of the body of the Lodge, they taking into their serious consideration that no member of the saide Lodge shall be made a Mark Mason without paying the fee of one Scots Mark....."

This is the first known reference to anyone being made a Mark Mason and implies some sort of separate ceremony. It is not known whether the reference is made to the degree of Mark Man (which is no longer worked) or Mark Master (the degree from which the current Mark Master Mason's degree is derived).

The scenario for the present Mark ceremony is, of course, King Solomon's Temple, during the final stages of construction. Completed blocks of stone are being brought by the craftsmen who prepared them, for examination by the Overseers, and the candidate plays the part of one of these Craftsmen. Events take an unusual turn and the candidate experiences both the joys and sorrows of professional life. Unlike the Craft, there is simply the one ceremony, the ceremony of Advancement, i.e. there are no subsequent stages to pass through.

Certain parts of the ritual contain some of the most impressive soliloquies to be found in masonry.

Currently, i.e. as at Autumn 2003, the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas comprised:

- 1,256 Lodges within 41 Provinces in England and Wales;
- 238 Lodges within 27 Districts;
- 3 Lodges in the Inspectorate of the Isle of Man;
- 4 Lodges in the Inspectorate of Western Atlantic;
- 3 Lodges in the Inspectorate of Ghana;
- 10 Lodges Unattached Overseas;
- 3 Lodges Unattached in the United Kingdom :
 - Grand Masters
 - Grand Stewards
 - Milestone Lodge No.1000

In all, 1,517 Lodges with a total membership of some 60,000 brethren.

For more information see: <http://www.markprovinceoflondon.org>