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This document has been written and compiled by W.Bro. George Evatt OBE, PAGDC. W.Bro. George is a senior member of this Lodge, and is a very experienced Freemason in general. He has a substantial knowledge of Mark Master Masonry (amongst many other things).



## **The Friendly Degree**

### **The origins of Mark Masonry:**

It is well known that operative stone masons indented the stones they had prepared with special marks. These were of two types, those that indicated the orientation and position of the stone within the building together with a personal mark to identify the mason who prepared it.

Operative Masonry, as a major trade, began to evolve in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century with the Saxon builders and intensified in the centuries following the Norman Conquest. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century building had reached a scale that required the trade to be regulated in its customs and practices. The first regulatory body was the Masons' Company, formed in London sometime *before* 1375, later known as the London Masons' Company. It was granted a coat of arms in 1472. These arms were later adopted by the first Grand Lodge soon after its foundation in 1717, and still form one half of the arms of the present United *Grand Lodge of* England.

The earliest known document regulating the trade is the Regius Manuscript of c.1390. These and later documents, now referred to as the Old Charges, are the origins of the present charges found in the Craft Book of Constitutions, abbreviated forms of which are *delivered* to each new Mason and to the Master *before* his installation.

Although the origins of speculative Freemasonry are unclear, it is evident that it has borrowed heavily from the medieval operative stone masons' trade in a number of respects - including the symbolism of working tools and gauges in the Craft and other Masonic Orders, and the use of marks in speculative Mark Masonry. The earliest authenticated record of a man being made a truly speculative Mason - is that of Elias Ashmole (founder of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, among other things), who was admitted to a Lodge in Warrington in 1646.

The first Grand Lodge was founded at the Goose and Gridiron Alehouse, St Pauls Church Yard, in the City of London in 1717 and this marked the start of organised Freemasonry. Because of disputes about certain practices and principles, a breakaway rival Grand Lodge was formed in 1751. The two Grand Lodges eventually reconciled their differences and the Act of



Union was signed in 1813 when the present United Grand Lodge of England came into being. As to the ritual, we know (from early exposures) that a system of three Craft *Degrees* recognised by Mark Grand Lodge may become joining members of English Mark Lodges. Reciprocal arrangements exist for our members to join other recognised constitutions.

The minimum interval between the conferment of each of the Craft Degrees and between the Craft and the Royal Arch is 4 weeks. No specific period is stipulated for a Master Mason *before* he can be Advanced into Mark Masonry. To be an Installed Master in the Mark Degree requires that the candidate be an Installed Master of a Craft Lodge, unless special dispensation is granted.

### **Why Should a Craft Mason be a Mark Mason?**

Many reasons could be advanced, and some have already been alluded to, but three are of special importance. Firstly, it greatly enhances his knowledge of Craft Masonry. Secondly, it teaches, in a delightful way, many important practical lessons about life. Thirdly, it gives a greater appreciation of the Royal Arch and provides an essential qualification to other Orders in Masonry.

The first reason? There are many terms and phrases, even Biblical characters, introduced in the Craft that remain a mystery to many brethren. For example, what does the SW mean, at the closing of the Lodge, by the expression “having seen that every Brother has had his due?” This is but one of many peculiarities of the Craft that become much clearer in the Mark.

The second reason? Mark is not only a true craftsman’s degree but it also teaches invaluable lessons about life. For example, the studious application of skill and ingenuity, resulting in high quality workmanship, will, ultimately be rewarded, even if at first it is not understood or appreciated by others. We each have different skills to offer and different contributions to make, To be accepted we must always be honest and give of our best – the imposter will inevitably be uncovered and receive his due punishment. We cannot properly judge others unless we are sufficiently competent ourselves and exercise humility in the process. We must all accept responsibility for the tasks we agree to undertake and blame others for our own shortcomings. Such lessons the craftsman learns, in a dramatic way, in the ceremony. He is, of course, to apply them, not just to the immediate task of symbolically building the Temple, but in the way he conducts himself through life.

The third reason? A Craft Mason who joins the Royal Arch directly from the Craft, s most do under the English Constitution (it is not permitted in other Constitutions), is confronted with a sudden and bewildering change of symbolism. This is because an important intermediate step has been omitted – the Mark. The Mark adds essential background and symbolism on the construction of the Temple, the Principal Arch and the Keystone, thereby providing a clearer introduction to the Royal Arch ceremony.



A Mark Mason may be installed, by dispensation, into the Chair of his Mark Lodge *before* taking the Chair in the Craft. The Mark is also an essential qualification for the keen Mason desiring to progress further in Orders beyond the Craft.

### **The Relationship between the Mark and the Craft**

There is a well-known statement that was agreed upon in the Act of Union between the Premier and Antients Grand Lodges in 1813 - it appears at the front of the Book of Constitutions of the United Grand Lodge of England. It is a declaration that "Pure Antient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more, namely, those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch".

The fact that a second Grand Lodge (the "Antients") emerged in 1751 was largely because of a disagreement over ritual content. It is therefore hardly surprising that, eventually, in order to achieve harmony a considerable amount of ground had to be conceded by both parties. The Premier (or "Moderns") Grand Lodge did not recognise the Royal Arch, or even the Installation Ceremony, as part of pure Masonry - so they evidently conceded much to the Antients in order to achieve the Union. Against this background the Mark and other Masonic Orders were left in limbo. We had in fact a good old English compromise that left many brethren discontented.

However, none of this discussion alters the purely logical argument that the Mark is, in reality, as much part of pure Freemasonry as the Royal Arch. This is reinforced by the other stark fact that the Mark Degree is so recognised by our two Sister Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland - and indeed by most other constitutions throughout the world. In almost every constitution the Mark Degree is a pre-requisite for the Royal Arch.

### **Mark Ritual**

So why is the Mark so central to Freemasonry? It is sometimes said to be an extension of the Second Degree in the Craft. But this rather simple assertion belies the fact that the ceremony of admission, called Advancement, is longer in content than the Third Degree. The present ceremony is derived from the earlier practice of conferring the *degree* of Mark Man on Fellow crafts and the *degree* of Mark Master on Master Masons. Ideally the Mark, as is the requirement in other constitutions, is a logical step from the Craft to the Royal Arch and enables the candidate to more fully appreciate the structure and beauty of Solomonic Masonry.

### **Mark Regalia**

The regalia worn today was first designed for and worn by the members of the London Bon Accord Mark Lodge in 1856. A Mark Master Mason wears an apron similar to that of a Master Mason in the Craft except that the Mark apron is bordered with light blue with crimson edges. He also wears a breast jewel in the form of a keystone suspended from a ribbon of light blue and crimson. The Installed Mark Master's apron is likewise similar to a Craft Installed Master's apron. Also, like the Craft, when a brother receives Provincial Grand Rank or Grand Rank the light blue is replaced with *Garter* blue.



## **The English Mark Constitution Today**

The Structure of Mark Grand Lodge is similar to that of the United Grand Lodge. It has 41 Provincial Grand Lodges, 26 District Grand Lodges, and several unattached Lodges abroad. In addition to the Mark Degree, Grand Lodge also controls the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Royal Ark Mariners through a body styled The Grand Master's Royal Ark Council.

In size of membership the Mark and Royal Ark Mariners combined ranks second, after the Craft. Nationally, there are about 5.6 Craft Lodges to each Mark Lodge. In Cornwall the figure is about 2.5, which shows the popularity of Cornish Mark Masonry.

## **Qualification**

Admission to the Mark Degree in England requires that a candidate be a Master Mason of the English Constitution, or of a constitution recognised by the English Craft Grand Lodge. Mark Masons of other bodies.

If you are interested in joining a Lodge of very enthusiastic and friendly Masons, please contact the Lodge Secretary who will be happy to supply you with an application form on the completion of which we can set the wheels in motion for an early entrance into one of the most enjoyable areas of Freemasonry.

## **The Royal Ark Mariner Degree**

Although a separate Order, this degree comes under the jurisdiction of the Mark Degree and you must be a Mark Mason before you can be considered for membership. It is a beautiful degree in its own right and worthy of consideration after you have the Fourth Regular Step into the Mark Degree.