

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARK DEGREES

By  
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**T**he Mark Degrees (Mark Man and Mark Master Mason) are of hope and encouragement, and the ritual is built on a single verse from Psalm 118, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner." It appears that the degree grew out of an ancient ceremony in which each craftsman selected for himself a private mark with which he might designate his particular work, and this mark was duly registered with the constituted authority. It also involved how Mark Masons received their wages. It continued into non-operative Mark Masonry as each candidate still selects his "Mark."

The keystone is the symbol of a Mark Master Mason. It deals with the building of King Solomon's Temple and the various Craftsmen employed, but its real message is one of contemplation of human strength and weakness. The degree contains many messages for the discerning man and illustrates that the wisest of men can be mistaken, that the experts are often wrong, that the weakest often display perseverance far better than the strongest, that the insignificant has potential for distinction, and that we all have a part to play in the building of life.

While there is evidence that a form of Mark Degree was in existence in Scotland as early as 1599, according to the earliest known English records, Mark Masonry was introduced in a speculative body at Portsmouth on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 1769, when the ubiquitous Thomas Dunkerley, as provincial grand superintendent, conferred the degrees of Mark Man and Mark Master Mason

on brethren of the Royal Arch Chapter of Friendship 257 in Portsmouth.

Records do not show where he got the degree. It had to come from an operative Mason. No speculative Mason would have had the background to dream it up. Reference to the Mark is actually in *Anderson's 1723 Constitutions* at the close of "exordium." This is reported in a letter in the *Flying Post* 4712 – A.D. 1723.

The Mark Degree was conferred by operative Lodges on their Fellowcraft Masons about the time that the third degree was introduced and was the ritual they used when being assigned their Mark. It is believed that a part of the Fellowcraft Degree ritual was moved into the third degree when that was developed (the Mark Man ceremony is commonly believed to be the contents of what was removed from the original second degree), and that part was necessary before the Mason could become a Mark Mason, thus the need for the Scottish Masons having to wait until they were raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason before being advanced to the Mark Man and Mark Master. At one time, some operative Lodges advanced the Fellowcrafts to Mark Man, keeping the Mark Master Mason for after the raising of the Master Mason.

As the "incorporation" (similar to English guilds) in Scotland was the administrative body whereas the Lodge was the practice, training, socializing (even living place), and ceremonial body, some believe that it was the incorporation that controlled the Mason's mark.

It was the *Shaw Statutes* that required the use of the Mark by the Lodges. There was never any real direct relationship between the Mark Degrees and the Royal Arch Degrees. They were introduced well before the Royal Arch. The grouping of them with Royal Arch in some countries, including the United States, was one of convenience. It is unfortunate that the agreement at the union of ancient and modern Grand Lodges of England contains the strange statement about Masonry being only three degrees and then, as a means to get agreement, they added "including the Holy Royal Arch."

The number one article in the *Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Antient Free and Accepted Masons of Scotland* (GLOAFAAMOS) states:

"The GLOAFAAMOS is the corporate body governing the three degrees of Freemasonry within the Lodges under its jurisdiction, namely those of Entered Apprentice, Fellow-of-Craft (including the Mark), and Master Mason. Grand Lodge authorizes no other degrees but recognizes a ceremonial of Installed Master."

So the Scots have their anomaly of the Mark Degree, in their *Constitutions*, whereas the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) had its own with the Royal Arch Degree.

Following the union of the ancient and modern Grand Lodges and the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, the articles of union stated that Freemasonry consisted of three degrees only, including the Royal

Arch, thus excluding the Mark Degree. For this reason, while in the rest of the world (excluding Scotland) Mark Masonry came under the control of Royal Arch Chapters, in England it was actually proscribed from the union. Even though it may have been conferred in Craft Lodges, after the union this was prohibited. It was reintroduced into England in 1851, by a group of Scottish Masons living in London who procured a warrant from Bon Accord Chapter in Aberdeen to set up a Mark Lodge in London.

The Scottish Grand Chapter stated that this was illegal and demanded that the London Lodge of Mark Masons give up the warrant. They refused and continued illegally, and to resolve the matter, they established their own Grand Lodge of Mark Masons in England. An attempt to add Mark Masonry to the approved craft workings was defeated in 1856, and a Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons was created in response with Lord Leigh as the first grand master.

Happily, by 1860 a concordat, establishing a common ceremonial, was entered into by the English Grand Mark Lodge and the Grand Chapter of Scotland, and slowly the Mark Degree grew in popularity to make it, together with the Royal Arch, one of the most successful supported degrees in Freemasonry.

As Freemasonry spread around the globe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mark Masonry became well established, and it now has a worldwide presence, with six daughter Grand Lodges, and the degree is being worked under alternative administrative structures elsewhere.

I often think of the Mark degrees as the forgotten degrees in the United States. The order of Mark Master Masons is a worldwide appendant order of

Freemasonry that exists in many Masonic jurisdictions and confers the degrees of Mark Man and Mark Master Mason. In some countries, there is a separate Grand Lodge of Mark Masons, in others it is part of the Craft Lodge, or as in the United States, it is part of the Royal Arch. This produced and still produces interesting situations when Royal Arch Companions visit other jurisdictions.

Similar to Craft Freemasonry, the Mark Degree conveys moral and ethical lessons using a ritualized allegory based around the building of King Solomon's Temple. The events of the degree require the candidate to undertake the role of a Fellowcraft Mason, thus the degree is seen as an extension of the Fellowcraft Degree, and the philosophical lessons conveyed are appropriate to that stage in a candidate's Masonic development. The candidate chooses (or may be given) a Mason's mark and is introduced to another extension of the King Solomon's Temple allegory relating to the manufacture, loss, and rediscovery of the keystone.

The administration of this degree varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, though in all jurisdictions, the candidate for advancement is required to be a Master Mason to be eligible for this degree. In some places the Mark Man is conferred on Fellowcraft Masons but it is not considered a degree.

In North and South America and parts of Europe, Asia, and Australia, the Mark Master Mason degree is conferred as part of Royal Arch Masonry under the international York Rite.

In Scotland, the Mark Degree is usually conferred in a Craft Lodge and is seen as a component part of the Fellowcraft Degree. The degree may also be conferred in a Holy Royal Arch Chapter as a knight templar

prerequisite for progressing to the grade of Excellent Master and then for exaltation to the Holy Royal Arch. Should a candidate for a Scottish Royal Arch Chapter already have taken his Mark Degree in a Lodge, then he will affiliate to the Mark Lodge within the Chapter before proceeding to the Excellent Master and then Royal Arch degrees.

In England, the governing body is The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas, which also controls the Royal Ark Mariner Degree. This is a separate degree conferred on Mark Master Masons. Each Royal Ark Mariner Lodge is connected to a Mark Lodge and shares its number. The order is administered from Mark Masons' Hall in London. In England a Master Mason can be exalted as a Royal Arch Companion without being a Mark Master. This provides for interesting visitation dynamics as an English Companion who is not a Mark Master cannot visit a Scottish Royal Arch Chapter (they have a quick ceremony before opening so that they can).

In Ireland, the degree of Mark Master Mason is required to join a Royal Arch Chapter. A Royal Arch Chapter meets as a Mark Lodge and confers the Mark Degree on a candidate, making him eligible to become a Royal Arch Mason at a subsequent meeting. A Mark Lodge and a Royal Arch Chapter share the same warrant within the Irish system.

The Mark Degree not only spread to the British colonies as can be seen in the following table but also to other countries. The English Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons (GLMMM) spread to Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, and Gibraltar. In the Caribbean and Western Atlantic, there is a strong relation with

GLMMM, but the Scottish and Irish Lodges are also well represented. In South America, especially Brazil and Argentina, the Mark organizations are all warranted by the GLMMM. There is also a Grand Lodge and a Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Israel which follow the Scottish practice.

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## Comparison of Mark Degree History and Organization

COUNTRY	EARLIEST CONFERRAL	WHERE	ORGANIZATION	CURRENT AUTHORITY	COMMENT
ENGLAND	1769	Portsmouth	Royal Arch Chapter	Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas	Conferring of Mark Degrees died out due to confusion of UGLE and Grand LMMM. Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales formed 1856. GLMMM has NO connection to UGLE or SGRAC. <b>England is the only country that a Master Mason can become a RA Mason without first being conferred as a Mark Master Mason.</b>
SCOTLAND	1787	Edinburgh	Journeymen Masons Lodge No. 8	1. Grand Lodge of Scotland 2. Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland	In Scotland Mason's Marks in use prior to 1598. Earlier references to Mark Masons from 1770. SGRAC was formed in 1817. Mark degree is conferred in Craft Lodges. However, SGRAC can confer Mark Degree but seldom do. <b>Scotland and parts of western Australia are the only countries where the Grand Lodge is the authority for the Mark Degree.</b> This reflects the strong influence of operative masons on its attributes.
IRELAND	1839	Dublin	Royal Arch Chapter	1. Grand Lodge of Ireland 2. Supreme Grand Chapter of Ireland	In 1775 there is a reference to Mark Masons and again in 1782. The conferral of the Mark Degree is performed in Royal Arch Chapters.
CANADA	1782	Niagara	Military Lodge No 152	Provincial Grand Chapters	Although earliest practice probably followed English and Scottish Mark Degree conferrals, today Canadian Mark Degree is part of Royal Arch. Canadian Royal Arch is part of the Canadian York Rite.
USA	1783	Middletown, CN	Washington Royal Chapter	State Grand Chapters	Originally in the USA the Mark Degree was conferred in Craft Lodges as well as Royal Arch Chapters following English, Scottish and Irish connections. Thomas Web grouped it with the Royal Arch in his York Rite
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	1858				
QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA	1889				
NEW SOUTH WALES	1908	Geelong, Victoria	Provincial Grand Lodge of Scotland		In New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, the Mark Master Mason Degree is conferred by a Royal Arch Chapter under the United Supreme Grand Chapter of Mark & Royal Arch Masons. Warranted Craft Lodges under the United Grand Lodge of NSW & ACT confer a Mark Man ceremony which is not treated as a degree.
NEW ZEALAND					Many lodges are still affiliated with England (10 MMM), Scotland (11) Craft Lodges and Ireland (4) Craft Lodges and so follow their Mark organizations. However, the Mark Degree is integrated with the Royal Arch, as in USA for systems controlled by the Grand Lodge of New Zealand
SOUTH AFRICA					The District Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of South East Asia was constituted in 1917 with four Mark Lodges. It then grew to eight Mark Lodges and six Royal Ark Mariners Lodge when we were granted Sovereign Constitution by the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales.
INDIA	1848	Madras	Keystone Chapter Social Friendship Lodge No. 326	Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of India	Obviously all freemasonry was warranted from England Scotland and Ireland and this existed until 1961. In 1963 the Grand Royal Arch Chapter was formed using the English system. Thus the Grand Lodge of Mark Masons of India was formed in 1965