

Meeting the Mark

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the first recorded working of the Mark Degrees.

Dan Heath, Assistant Grand Secretary of Mark Masons' Hall, explores this compelling Order

On the first day of September 1769, a meeting of the Royal Arch Chapter of Friendship, No. 3 (now No. 257), was held at the George Tavern, Portsmouth. Here the

ubiquitous Thomas Dunckerley conferred the degrees of Mark Man and Mark Master on several brethren and companions. The link between the Craft, the Royal Arch and the Mark Degree was established. Fast forward to 1856: the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales, the Colonies and Possessions of the British Crown, as it was then known, was formally constituted. Since then, the Order has flourished, comprising 42 Provinces, 26 Districts, two Inspectorates and a host of unattached lodges.

The original two degrees, Mark Man and Mark Master, have been melded together so that the former now serves more as an introduction to the latter, together forming the ceremony of advancement, the degree of Mark Master Mason.

Set in stone

Chronologically, the degree falls between the Second and Third Degrees of the Craft, taking place during the building of King Solomon's Temple. It has its origin in the fact that an operative stonemason would be required to put a distinguishing mark on each stone he produced, so the craftsmanship could be easily identified.

To this day, every candidate who is advanced in the Mark Degree is required to select his mark, which is then recorded by the lodge's Registrar of Marks and subsequently entered on a brother's

record at Mark Masons' Hall. This mark can then be used when signing the attendance register at a Mark meeting and in correspondence with other Mark Masons. In the ritual of advancement, the presentation of a candidate's mark to another officer of the lodge in order to receive his wages forms an important part of the ceremony.

Ritual with flair

The officers of a Mark Master Masons lodge mirror those of a Craft lodge, with the addition of the aforementioned Registrar of Marks and three other important additions: a Master Overseer, a Senior Overseer and a Junior Overseer. These offices create an opportunity for theatrical flair when delivering the ritual: the candidate proffers the stone he has cut in the quarries for inspection, attesting for its fitness and suitability for the building of King Solomon's Temple. The stone (the keystone) is rejected and heaved over among the rubbish; the Overseers and Worshipful Master fail to realise its significance. The ceremony culminates in the retrieval of the keystone as an essential requirement for the completion of the sacred arch of the Temple. The keystone is, therefore, the emblem of the Order.

Mark Masonry is held in great affection by members, and a well-performed ceremony is enthralling, entertaining and, though meaningful, gives room for some levity during proceedings. Brethren enjoy visiting other lodges within their locality and further afield.

The Mark Token, with which a candidate is presented during the ceremony, is also a means of identification among brethren of the Order, and many special-edition tokens have been produced as collectable souvenirs.

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