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Title

The Mark Degree

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THE MARK DEGREE is one of the most successful of the Orders 'beyond the Craft'. In England and Wales it is regarded as a separate Order following the compromise that created the UGLE in 1813 which in effect alienated all degrees outside the Craft excepting the Royal Arch. Outside UGLE, Masons retain the traditional connection with the Antients, Mark being structured within Masonry in general. This is certainly the case in Scotland, where it is administered by Grand Chapter, and Ireland, and in America where it is part of the York Rite.

There is documented evidence that Masons 'made their mark' in Scotland as far back as 1599; but there is no evidence of an attached ritual. In England, the earliest mention is in Chapter of Friendship, at Portsmouth, in 1769, when Thomas Dunckerley made some brethren Mark Masons and Mark Masters. By 1777, John Knight documented a rite reading: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, Mark Man or Foreman of FCs, Master Mason, Mark Master.

Premier (1717) Grand Lodge (Moderns) insisted, for 70 years or so, that 'pure' Masonry consisted of only the three degrees (NOT including Royal Arch). The Antients incorporated it into their degree structure and Minutes of many Antient lodges show it being conferred between the Fellow Craft and Master Mason degrees.

Despite the protestations of the Premier Grand Lodge, many Lodges worked the Antient degrees - especially Mark. To avoid this, the Premier Grand Lodge created Grand Chapter, so that lodges could carry out further degrees without working them in the Craft.

After Union (1813), the position of the Mark was difficult: the new UGLE tried to ignore all the further degrees. However, by now the Mark was an integral in Masonry in Scotland, Ireland and the USA.

In 1851, six companions of the Bon Accord Chapter of Aberdeen obtained from their Chapter a warrant authorising them to meet as a Mark Lodge in London. The Chapter had no power to issue such a document and was reprimanded by Scotland's Grand Chapter and suspended in 1855.

But by this time the Bon Accord Mark Lodge had advanced a number of English brethren of note, including Lord Leigh, Prov.GM for Warwickshire (1852-1905), who was installed as Master in 1855.

In March 1856 an attempt was made to bring the Mark degree within UGLE as a 'graceful addition to the Fellow Craft'. A resolution was made: 'That the Degree of Mark Mason is not at variance with Craft Masonry, and that it should be added thereto, under proper regulations'. This was generally approved but at the following Quarterly Communication the motion was rejected.

London's Mark brethren were ready for this: on 23 June 1856, a Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons was created with Lord Leigh as the first Grand Master.

One of the first actions of the new Grand Lodge was to issue a Warrant of Confirmation to the London Bon Accord Lodge with no number and 'TI' or time immemorial status -which it retains to this day.

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