

Mark Master Mason Degree

Origins of the Degree

It has long been known that, throughout the history of stone buildings, Stonemasons have identified their work with a peculiar mark which they engraved on their work. It is also believed that these may be familial marks, passed from father to son. Whether these were placed as a mark of pride, or as a method for being paid for their work is not definitively known. What we do know is that these marks were never intended to be seen, as we shall see later.

The earliest mention of marks as part of a ritual are to be found in Operative documents originating in Scotland, including the Schaw Statutes of 1598 and Kilwinning Lodge in 1698, among others.

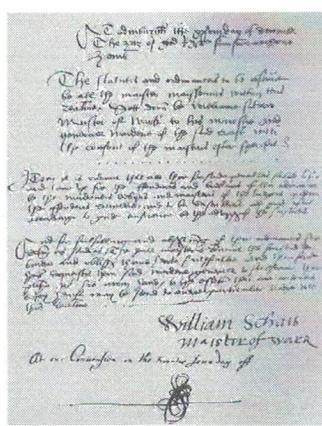


Figure 15 - The Schaw Statutes

However, the first mention of marks in Speculative Freemasonry appear after 1717, although most scholars agree a form of the Degree was worked much earlier than this. However, it would appear that such Degrees were not at all standardized, and probably grew up and developed in local pockets. The earliest record of Mark Masonry as a true, speculative body is on September 1, 1769 in the minutes of the Chapter of Friendship of Portsmouth, England, which mention that Thomas Dunckerley, Pro Grand Master, made a number of those present Mark Masons and Mark Masters, each choosing their mark. Interestingly enough it mentions that one Brother present was 'Thomas Webb'! Thomas Smith Webb was instrumental in establishing the York Rite Bodies in the United States – but there is no evidence whatsoever that *our* Thomas Smith Webb ever traveled to England. The earliest known Scottish record is dated

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October 8, 1770; and in Ireland August 27, 1775, granted by the ‘Knight Templars of Kinsale, County Cork.’

In England, after the Act of Union in 1813, Section 1 of the revised Constitutions stated that the only Degrees recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) were “...those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.” Since many Lodges had been practicing a progressive series which closely paralleled the York Rite (and our own system) in which it was a requirement for the Mark Degree to be conferred prior to receiving the Royal Arch Degree, this was now no longer necessary in England. However, it is interesting to note that in many of the British colonies, including Australia, India and South Africa, the Mark Degree was still conferred as a prerequisite; and even in England the Mark Degree, instead of fading into oblivion, gathered under the Grand Mark Lodge in 1856, which immediately started to issue Charters for Mark Lodges, with the blessing – or at least indifference – of UGLE.



Figure 16 - St. Bartholomew's Church,
Brighton, UK

Incidentally, the Royal Ark Mariner Degree, which is considered to be one of the oldest rituals, is ‘moored’ to a Mark Lodge in many countries, and conferred within that Lodge. Both Degrees embody old Masonic traditions: the telling of the story of King Solomon’s Temple and of Noah’s Ark. Both prominently feature a celestial arc: one as if made of water in the airy heavens; and one made of stone (or earth) soaring above the heads of those in the Temple. One possible reason for this is the fact that many of the early Guilds put on Miracle Plays in medieval times; and while each craft might have its Patron Saint, they would also delight in enacting Biblical stories of special significance to their trade. Stonemasons would naturally gravitate towards the telling of the building of the Tower of Babel, or King Solomon’s Temple; while the Woodcutters would very likely have been inspired by the tale of Noah’s Ark, with its wooden boat of literally biblical proportions. This fascination has continued until more recent times, as we see both in the obsessive searches for the remains of

Noah’s Ark in Turkey, and even in the proportion of St. Bartholomew’s Church in Brighton, England, built in the 1870s by Fr. Arthur Wagner to the exact biblical measurement of the Ark.

The Mark Degree in the United States

In the United States, early versions of the Mark Degree were brought across from England, and particularly Ireland by the military, and it is clear that there would have been a number of versions

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in existence around the colonies. Some of the Lodges also followed English tradition: for example, St. John's Lodge No. 1, A.Y.M., New York possessed a Charter from the Premier Grand Lodge (now sadly lost) which purportedly gave them the authority to confer the Mark Degree in addition to the Blue Lodge Degrees. This was not uncommon prior to the Act of Union. Similarly, Independent Royal Arch Lodge No. 2 make a strong claim to be allowed to confer the Royal Arch Degree, saying records demonstrate this permission dates back to the mid-1700s. However, two events served to unify and freeze the Mark Degree once and for all.

The first was a series of meetings or conventions held by a small number of early Chapters between 1796 and 1797, from which, on October 24, 1797 in Boston, the General Grand Chapter was created. In January 1798 the General Grand Chapter of the Northern United States was formally established. This body, while advisory, chartered Grand Chapters and provided guidance across the United States, and more recently across the world.

The second was the creation of a Freemason's Monitor in 1797, by Thomas Smith Webb. This compilation of Rituals included the Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch Mason Degrees. At the time there was already considerable standardization of ritual between the several States conferring them, so Webb did not *invent* the rituals we now use. However, he considerably expanded the Most Excellent Master Degree, introduced poems and music into the rituals (he was an accomplished musician and conductor) and most importantly, his printing of the Monitor helped solidify the rituals into an unchanging body of work. Although the body of Degrees as a whole is still commonly referred to as the 'York Rite', it would be more proper to call them the 'American Rite', for the versions we have used in the United States for over two hundred years were finalized here, in the former British colonies.

The Rule of Three

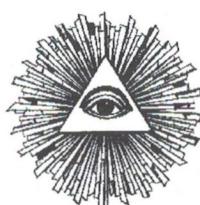


Figure 17 - Sacred Delta.

As we see in the Blue Lodge Degrees, the number three features prominently in this Degree. There are three Overseers, three Rulers of the Craft, the Candidate enters with two other Craftsmen carrying three stones for inspection. Once more this number reflects the Sacred Delta of Divinity, and implies that all work is performed under His sleepless eye. In some versions of the Mark Degree He is referred to as the Great Overseer.

The Overseers

The three key additional Officers in a Mark Lodge are the Junior, Senior and Master Overseers placed, according to the ritual, at the South Gate, West Gate and East Gate respectively. Effectively

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this means they double the positions of the Junior Warden, Senior Warden and Worshipful Master. Originally they did not exist and their functions were taken by the JW, SW and WM instead. However, over time they were included in rituals as an important representation of those Masons responsible for supervising the work – a theme which becomes increasingly important through the Capitular Degrees.

“Good Work, True Work, Square Work”

One of the interesting sections of the Mark Degree centers upon the presentation of three Ashlars for inspection. Two are accepted because they are ‘good work, true work, square work.’ In other words, those stones tested – and therefore presumably carved – using only a square as a guide are accepted. However, the design of the third stone requires both a square and compasses to create: the top is an arc and the mark is contained within a circle. This is a new Order of Masonry. Initially the stone designed by square and compasses is rejected, but later it is relocated and given a position of prominence in the building.

This indicates an important transition which takes place between the Blue and the Capitular Degrees. While the Square was sufficient to design the stones or ashlar required for general building in the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason Degrees, those of the Capitular Degrees now employ the compasses as well. The stone is recognized in the Mark Degree, positioned at the head of the Principal Arch in the Most Excellent Master Degree, and is one of the discoveries which ultimately leads to the recovery of the Master’s Word in the Royal Arch Degree.



Figure 18 - George Washington placing cornerstone of Capitol

The Mark

In early times the Masons carving a stone would place an identifying mark upon it. This was so the inspectors of the work could identify the craftsman responsible for each component stone. As a sign of approval they often added their mark to the stone, to show that it had passed inspection and was ready to be employed in construction. A third mark was often added, to indicate which place in the building the stone was to be used. Nowadays we can see evidence of such marks on stones in castles, cathedrals and other buildings. However, it was never intended that these marks

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would be seen. Immediately after the walls were erected they would normally be covered in mortar or plaster and therefore remain invisible, unless the plaster fell off at a later period. Operative Masons' marks would be recorded in a Book of Marks, and marks would often be handed down within a family.

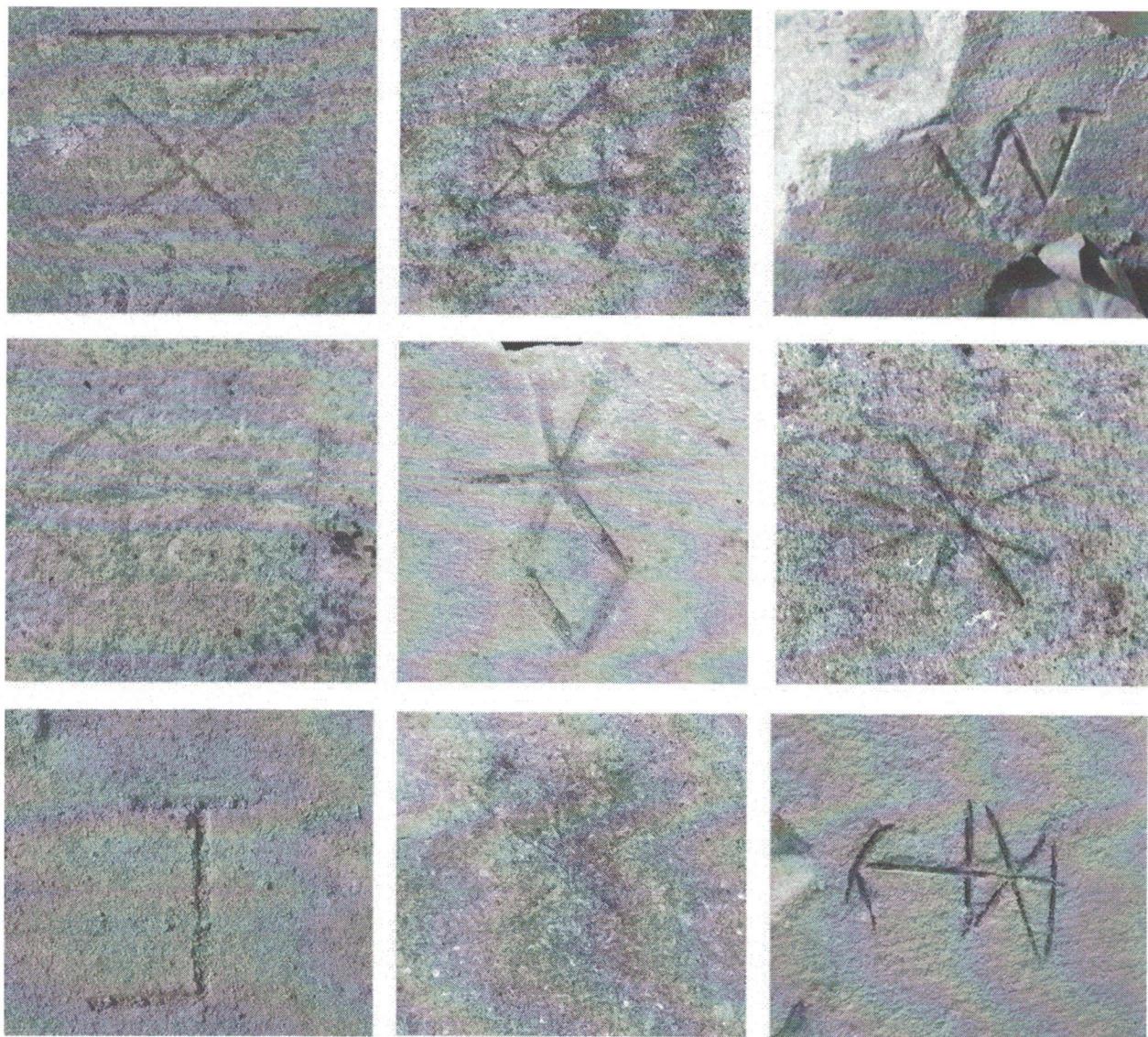


Figure 19 - Examples of Stonemason Marks ([source: <http://blog.underoverarch.co.nz/tag/masons-marks/>]

In the ceremony the Candidate admits the mark on the stone is not his own. Until he has had his work approved he is not entitled to a mark and therefore to collect wages. Later in the ceremony he is presented with a sheet of paper and told to select and draw his mark, which will then be recorded in the Book of Marks of the Lodge. In some other countries he is either given his mark, or offered a choice between two, but here he draws his own. While some early marks were quite elaborate, nowadays the Candidate is normally advised to select a simple design make up of

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straight lines. This task must be completed and his design handed in to the Secretary before he can receive the Royal Arch Degree.



Figure 20 - Example of the Hindu 'bindi' or red dot representing the Third Eye or pineal gland

However, we should remember that the word ‘mark’ has more than one meaning in the English language. As well as meaning a physical sign placed upon an object to denote authorship, it can also denote ownership, for example as in the branding of an animal, or in Biblical times, slaves. Again, it can denote a setting apart for religious or other purposes, such as the red dot placed over the ‘third eye’ by many Hindus, and the elaborate body paint used in tribes from the early Celts to Native American tribes. In the Bible we are also reminded that a mark can be a divine sign of separation as well. We have already noted this in the story of Moses, where the Children of Israel marked their doorposts with

blood to identify themselves as Children of ‘I AM’, to avoid the death of their firstborn sons. In the case of Cain it was a mark of shame, but which also preserved his life (Genesis 4:15, “And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him”). Again in Ezekiel we read that God tells the man clothed with linen to “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezekiel 9:4).

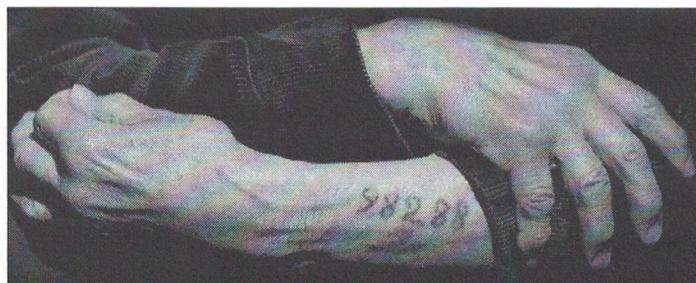


Figure 21 - The horror of branding a person set aside for persecution



Figure 22 - Self Made Man by Robbie Carlyle

So the idea of a mark has a number of significations. Whilst it is used by man at a mundane level to identify his creations (carved stones) and property (cows, sheep), it is also used as a means by which God identifies His own people. Man may be tasked with shaping himself into a Spiritual Stone, fit to be used in the Temple not made with hands; but God is not absent in the process. He is, after all, the Grand Architect, and all that we do is in conformity with His Will. We may provide the labor, but it is He who provides the blueprint. Remember God says: “...and (I) will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev. 2:17). Like the mark covered with mortar in an old cathedral, we receive the name known only to us and God, which he will use to identify us when He calls us home.

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Rejection of the Stone

The Junior and Senior Overseer pass the stone, but the Master Overseer calls a council of Overseers, and they collectively decide to reject the stone as neither being oblong nor square, nor having the mark of any of the workmen upon it. It appears the Overseers are neither familiar with stones which are not square, nor with the mark of Hiram Abif, since the keystone bears his name. The reason is revealed later in the ceremony, when King Solomon explains that this work was assigned to Grand Master Hiram Abif himself, and since he is usually responsible for the Designs, it is not until some Craftsmen look at the Trestleboard themselves that they see the ‘Peculiar Stone’ and Hiram’s mark.

They heave the stone over among the rubbish. The act of ‘heaving the stone over’ suggest it as thrown over a wall. In early days there is a tradition that if a workman offered up a faulty piece of work it was the workman who was heaved over the wall where he presumably fell to his death! In the Middle Ages the stone was carried away on a bier, as though dead. If we are taught to be Living Stones in our ritual, the lesson of being discarded if found unworthy should be particularly significant to us. However, in this case the lesson that the stone is in fact the most important in the edifice, and yet is discarded by those not recognizing its true worth is of particular importance.



Figure 23 - Two curiously familiar stones in front of the door of St. Polycarp in Lyons, France

“An Imposter!”



Figure 24 - a half shekel used as Temple tax

Following this the Fellowcraft depart to receive their wages. Interestingly, while we are told in the Blue Lodge that Entered Apprentices earned no wages, but received food, clothing and lodging while they trained, Fellowcraft received corn, wine and oil as wages. Now we see how the Mark Master Mason is paid in *specie*, a penny a day, received on the sixth hour of the sixth day of the week, or Friday before the Sabbath. Traditionally,

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in ancient times the Jews would divide the daylight hours into twelve equal periods, which means an hour was not necessarily sixty minutes. So the implication is, that work ceased around the middle of the daylight period, giving the workmen time to gather up their belongings, collect their wages, and be home before sundown.

In the Degree the Brethren assemble to receive their wages twice, and on each occasion a different important lesson is taught. In the Mark Degree we receive an explanation of something said by the Senior Warden of his duties in Blue Lodge: "...to pay the Craft their wages if any be due." Now we see him practice that duty, by repairing to his apartment (this simply means a room in the Temple) to pay the Craft their wages, which as we have learned, was one penny a day, or presumably six pennies a week. Remember this is all symbolic!

The Craftsmen thrust their hand through an opening to receive them, with their fourth and fifth fingers curled over a picture of their mark. This mark was compared to those in the Book of Marks, and if it was listed the coin was placed between their index and third fingers, which they then withdrew from the opening. In some older Lodges you can find a circular opening covered by a panel in the Inner Door. However, it is more customary to have a wicket, which is a custom box, or a vertical panel of latticework with a circular or triangular hold cut into it, so the Brethren can see the action.

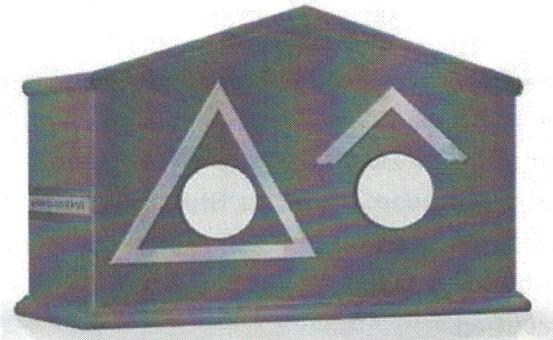


Figure 25 - Mark Degree Wicket used by the Senior Warden in English Mark Lodges



Figure 26 - Beware the left hand...

This first time the Candidate is not carrying a mark, so when he thrusts his hand through the opening it is seized and he is threatened with the loss of his right hand, a terrible penalty for a man making his living through the use of his hands. Remember, he is not just losing his livelihood: even in the Arabic cultures nowadays the left hand is seen as inferior and used for the more unclean roles such as cleaning oneself in the bathroom. He will now have to perform all his activities – including eating, and greeting colleagues – with his 'unclean' hand.

The Challenge

The Candidate is conducted to the Right Worshipful Master (in some rituals, the Senior Deacon drags the Candidate by his right ear), who challenges the Candidate, firstly by asking for someone to vouch for him, and then to prove himself a Fellowcraft by the grip and password. Since the

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Candidate is clearly not yet a Mark Master he neither has the correct grip nor the password. Requiring a Brother to vouch for him recalls an earlier version of the ritual, still practiced in Ancient Chapter No. 1, New York, when the Conductor of the now blindfolded Candidate is asked: “Has he made suitable proficiency in the preceding Degrees to entitle him to this, and is he vouched for?” The Conductor replies: “He has, and I vouch for him.”

He is told to return to the Quarries and this time to return with a suitable specimen of his work to pass the Overseers’ tests and to entitle him to receive the correct grips, signs and words to entitle him to receive wages. This he does, his work, being ‘an oblong or a square’, is accepted, and he is given permission to proceed in the Degree. And yet the fact that he never claimed the work to be his own is never considered. His crime, it appears, was to reach for something which it is not yet his right to aspire to: he must prove himself proficient in his existing duties before being granted access to higher wisdom.

Given that the Degree has a pass grip and word, and a real grip and word, it would be logical to expect the pass grip and word to be given here, as a reward for his work, and that he would give these to the Deacon in order to be admitted to the next part of the Degree. This is how all pass grips and words work in Blue Lodges in other countries. Strangely, however, the pass grip and word are given in the next section, immediately prior to the real grip and word. This is probably something which became confused at an early time in the ritual’s history, and has never been rectified.

Transition to Master Mason

All the preceding work has been a preamble to the actual Degree itself. Indeed, the Mark Degree is unusual in that it contains both a prologue and an epilogue. Prior to the Degree itself we have the scenes where the Candidate presents work not his own, is chastised for this, then returns with work accepted as his. Following the Degree, during the Lodge Closing, we have the further scene in which the Workmen discuss their wages, and the Right Worshipful Master issues his challenge to them.

At this point it is assumed that a passage of time has taken place. The Fellowcraft has proven himself by providing a suitable specimen of his work, and has been raised to the Degree of Master. To denote this he now wears his apron as a Master Mason.

He is again blindfolded and a cable tow placed four times about his body, and importantly, divested of metallic substances once again. He undergoes the usual challenges at the door, to emphasize that this Degree is a continuation of the Degrees he has received in Blue Lodge.

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The Engraver's Chisel and Mallet



Figure 27 - Engraver's Chisels

This time he is received on the edge of the engraver's chisel, under the pressure of the mallet. He is told that this is to teach him that the moral precepts of the Degree should make a deep and lasting impression upon him. This appears to be another link with the first three Degrees, since instruments are not used to challenge the Candidate in the rest of the Capitular Degrees; also, the gavel (or mallet) is a Working Tool of the Entered Apprentice Degree. It is also uniquely the only time two instruments are used in concert. One should also note that the Engraver's Chisels are a set of chisels with much finer blades than those used for shaping regular stones.

These are used for ornamentation and the more subtle work of

engraving – in the case of the Keystone the circle and mark of Hiram Abif. The fact that he is now called to a higher and rarer work is reflected in the subtlety of the tools with which he is challenged and presented. This is not the last time he will be challenged, since he will soon move from a position of workman to one of Overseer or Supervisor, where he will be challenged one final time, and this time by an object which is ‘neither oblong nor square’, so show that he is truly passing to a new level of development.

- Later he is explicitly informed that these are also the Working Tools, and that they are used by Master Masons to “cut, carve, mark and indent their work.” This is reminiscent of the Entered Apprentice Obligation. The key word is *indent*. Up to now the Masons has been told to create perfect ashlar. Now he is introduced to a more refined tool than the common chisel used for breaking raw stone out of the quarries: he is presented with the engraver's chisel, and implement used to cut *into* the perfect ashlar, in order to place his mark upon it. He is told this to symbolize the refining work of the chisel upon the rough stone, as education refines the mind and ultimately leads him to aspire to the summit of human knowledge.

The description of the mallet is similar to that given for the gavel in the Entered Apprentice Degree, and could suggest it was a carry-over from that Degree.

The Circumambulations

The ceremony continues with the circumambulations. As the Blue Lodge Degree saw the blindfolded Candidate make one, two and three circles about the Altar and past the Senior Officers, so in the Mark Degree he now makes four. His circumambulations are invariably accompanied by pertinent readings from Scripture. Each time he passes the East he halts and gives the due guard

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and sign of the preceding Degrees; the fourth time he comes to fidelity since he does not yet know the due guard and sign of the fourth (i.e. Mark) Degree.

By proving himself in each of the preceding Degrees he is indicating his mastery over those Degrees, and his worthiness to be received into the next level in the American Degrees.

The first scriptural reference comes from Chronicles, and is a description of the transportation of the wood by sea to Joppa. This sets up the pass grip and word.

The next three come from the prophet Ezekiel, Chapter 44, verses 1 – 5. In a way it is an extraordinary passage to use, since Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of the temple, which has not yet been built in the Mark Degree, and how the Prince, High Priest and people must behave to avoid God's wrath. However, the most important part is verse 5, which give rise to the true grip and word of the Degree.

Following the scriptural readings he is challenged by the Junior and Senior Wardens, as in the preceding Degrees.

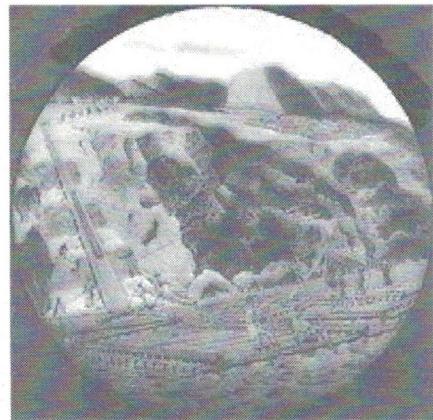


Figure 28 - The cliff at Joppa or Jaffa

The Step and Coming to Order

Again, as in the earlier Degrees, he is now re-conducted to the Senior Warden, and taught how to approach the altar for the fourth time. In doing so he also gives the steps, due guard and signs of the preceding three Degrees. He is brought to the altar and caused to kneel as in the previous Degrees.

This emphasizes the fact that the Mark Degree builds upon the previous Degrees. Indeed, both the Mark and Past Master Degrees take place in a Lodge and are considered part of the telling of the Blue Lodge story. It is not until the Royal Arch Degree that there is a significant movement in both time and circumstance.

The Obligation

The Obligation follows the usual structure. Here much is made of the mark, which is to be expected as a central theme of this Degree. There are three parts to this section. Firstly he agrees to receive another Brother's mark and grant his request for a loan, or at least to return it with its price, which

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Figure 29 - Mason's Mark found in Rosslyn Chapel

is a half shekel of silver. Secondly, he promises not to alter the mark he selects once recorded. Thirdly, he promises he will not lend or sell it, nor pledge it a second time.

This would appear to be a vestige of what might have been a promise made in operative Masonry. It would be important that a Mason didn't cheat by putting someone else's mark on his work. Why would he do this, if his mark ensured his payment? Perhaps it might dissuade him from putting the mark of an enemy upon a poorly executed piece of work in order to get him into trouble? Certainly one can also see how a Mason fallen upon hard times might be tempted to lend or pledge his mark to another person, since that person could then use it to obtain wages himself, perhaps at a different work site. Finally, one can also see how a Mason might use the mark as a sign of destitution, in order to obtain welfare from fellow Masons.

From a speculative viewpoint, however, the lessons are not to claim work not your own; to extend charity to your Brothers; and to be steadfast in your convictions. As the ritual claims, a Mason's mark was synonymous with his name, so he would no more alter, change, lend or sell his mark than he would his own name.

The penalties may give a Candidate pause for thought. Although a relatively recent development in Freemasonry, the addition of the word 'symbolic' to our Blue Lodge penalties may lead to surprise when the penalties of the American Rite are not 'symbolic' but 'actual.' Of course they are never carried out, which gives the lie to people who claim the Masons once carried out their penalties. The cutting off of the hand was already enacted in the ritual. However, the cutting off of the ear may refer to an earlier part of ritual now lost over time. The Due Guard, being the cutting off of the ear, may also reference the act of dragging the Candidate by the ear to the Master when he is detected as an imposter, as is practiced in some Lodges.

Another Lesson in Poverty

Almost immediately there is a small play enacted in which there is a knock at the door and an apparently impoverished Brother has his mark presented to the newest member of the Lodge, seeking relief. The Candidate being unable to comply is asked to return the mark with a quarter of a dollar, being the equivalent of a half shekel of silver. Having been divested of metal he cannot comply with this either. At this point all the Brethren offer to help the Candidate fulfill his obligation.

Interestingly, a variation in the oldest ritual in New York, practiced by Ancient Chapter No.1 which was founded some time prior to Webb's codification of the ritual, the Master slips the money into

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the Candidate's pocket. He is then told to 'seek and ye shall find', a reference to the gospel of Matthew 7:7. He does, and discovers he is not 'entirely destitute' after all.

The similarity of this action with what occurs in the Entered Apprentice Degree, when the Candidate is asked to deposit 'some metallic substance' with the Secretary, is apparent. Indeed, there are many signs which indicate that the Mark Degree developed at least in parallel with the Entered Apprentice Degree, and shared a period of cross-fertilization, resulting in a number of symbols and part of the ritual being common to both. In addition to the request for metallic substance from the Candidate, the reference to "seek and ye shall find" in an early form of the ritual mentioned above is remarkably similar to that section of the Lecture of Reasons in the Entered Apprentice Degree which reminds us that the three distinct knocks given at the door of the Lodge are related to the same passage of scripture. The Due Guard also reminds us of the 'attentive ear' and 'whispering wise counsel into a Brother's ear.'

The Signs, Grips and Words

The first sign is the Grand Hailing Sign or Sign of Distress, and recalls how the Brother was shown to carry and present his work. Being a Sign of Distress it is not used elsewhere during the ceremony; it is largely added for completeness' sake, since Masons have a far more visible and well-known Sign of Distress given to them in the Third Degree, and no doubt would resort to that one if in trouble. The Principal or 'Heave Over' Sign refers to the rejection of the Keystone, which is made over the left shoulder. The Due Guard and Sign have been explained earlier. These latter three signs need to be known since they are used at the Opening of a Chapter. The pass grip and word derive from the first scriptural reading and the explanation that the wood from the cedars of Lebanon were floated down the coast to Joppa, where the coast was very steep, requiring those on top of the bluff to help the workmen ascend. The harbor is one of the oldest in the world. The password reflects this story, and the grip is what would indeed be used to drag a person upwards. From a symbolic viewpoint this grip also represents the act of raising a person from one level to a higher one, which is appropriate for a Degree which reminds us that we are advancing further in Masonry.

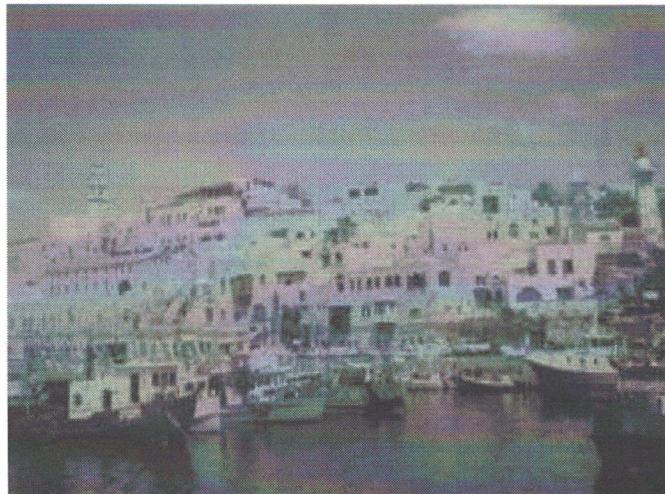


Figure 30 - The Harbor at Joppa shows the buildings rising up on what must once have been a steep scarp slope. Joppa - or Jaffa, is immediately South of Tel Aviv in Israel

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The real grip and word are taken from Ezekiel, and according to Duncan's Monitor the name is 'Siroc or Mark Well'. The body forms the outline of the letters and the hands now take on a grip which is far less robust than the pass grip. Now, instead of the strong fingers being bound in a grip, the two weakest fingers are locked, perhaps indicating the level of trust between the two Brothers.

Finding the Stone Which Was Lost

At this point in the ceremony three Craftsmen study the plans on the Trestleboard and realize the keystone is missing. It is interesting to note that, while many Mark Lodges use the Overseers for this part of the ritual, this is incorrect: if the Overseers had seen the design they would have immediately recognized both the shape and the mark upon the stone. This review must be performed by three different Brothers, who represent those supervising the work itself; while the Overseers represent an administrative role only.



Figure 31 - Royal Arch Penny

Once the lack of the keystone has been identified, the Senior Warden informs the Right Worshipful Master, who tells the Marshall to 'transmit the mark' to the Senior Warden. The mark he gives him to transmit is one of the coins – the Penny – which will later be given to the Candidates at the end of the ceremony. The Senior Warden uses this to show the assembled Overseers what the stone looks like, and they immediately recognize it as the one they rejected. The fact that the mark needs to be shown to the Senior Warden (Hiram King of Tyre) shows that the only two people who knew what it looked like were King Solomon and Hiram Abif. This may shed more light on the passage from Ezekiel, since it implies

that only the King (prince or ruler) was worthy to commune with God and receive the divine plans for His Temple. This idea that the design of the stone was somehow secret or 'hidden' is later reflected in the scriptural verse "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." (Revelation Chapter 2, Verse 17).

A search is made and the keystone is found. In some versions the keystone is subtly moved during the preceding part of the ritual, so it is not in the place expected. In other variants it is the Candidate himself who finds it. However, in the Webb version the three Craftsmen locate the stone 'among the rubbish' where it was placed at the start of the ceremony, carry it to the Senior Warden, who compares it to the mark, and has the Overseers carry it up to the Right Worshipful Master. He admonishes the disgraced Overseers with four scriptural readings, each emphasized with blows of

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the gavel. This is a most powerful moment, and yet it will seem unfair that the Master blames the Overseers who, due to his secrecy, had no idea what the stone would look like.

It is also of note that the scriptural passages refer to the cornerstone, which begins the foundation of a new edifice; while the stone in question is the key stone, which finishes off the building. However, the lessons applies to both, since both as critical to the establishment and endurance of the building. In the Entered Apprentice Degree the Candidate is told he is a cornerstone and positioned in the North East corner of the Lodge. Now he represents the completion of the building, as the symbolic keystone.

It is interesting to note the similarities of this section with the Master Mason Degree. Since we are taught that we are ‘living bearing a person’s mark – or person. As in the Master thrown into the rubbish, as if Masons. Its absence was made for it. On its being King Solomon who had thrown it over in the first recognized, and it will Temple.

A final point, perhaps, given of the Biblical references, is from the Gospel of Luke 15: talks of the Shepherd who, hundred, nevertheless goes he lays it on his shoulders They say a husbandman can recognize the cry of his animals, even to the individual sheep, goat or cow. Perhaps from this we can draw the hope that, even if we, as a Peculiar Stone, are cast aside and left in the rubbish heap, yet God who knows us and gave us a secret name will come to find us, hear our secret name, and laying us upon his back, return to his kingdom rejoicing that he has found us.

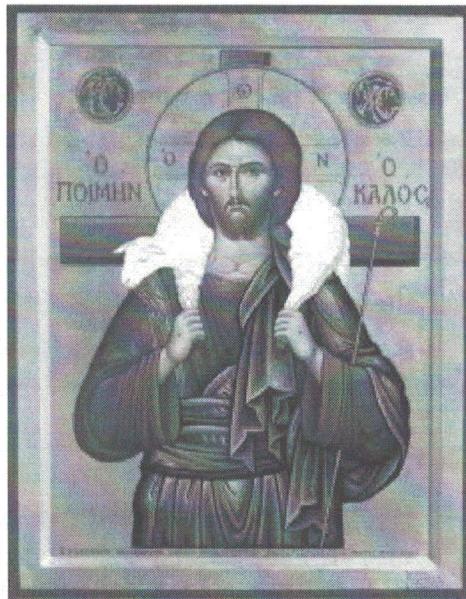


Figure 32 - Icon of 'The Good Shepherd'

stones’, this white stone name – stands in for that Mason Degree the stone was dead, by three senior noted and ‘strict search’ was found it was carried up to admonished those three who place. Now the worth is occupy a key position in the

the Christian roots of many a message of universal hope 4 – 6. In this the Nazarene losing one sheep out of a to find it, and when he does and comes home rejoicing.

Historical Lecture

The Lecture which follows offers a pause in the action. All are seated and the Master or assigned Brother gives an explanation of the ritual up to this point. He reveals the meaning of the letters on the stone (H.:T.:W.:S.:S.:T.:K.:S). It is noteworthy that these are written in in a circular

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pattern, between two engraved circles, which once again emphasize the use of the compasses in this second series of Degrees.

Given that this Degree is a combination of two original Degrees, Mark Man which required a Fellowcraft to produce a piece of ‘good work, true work, square work’, and Mark Master, which required the employment of compasses to produce a keystone, we need to seek what lesson the rejection and rediscovery are trying to teach us.

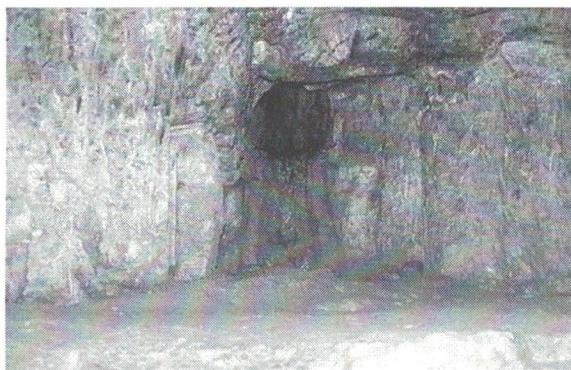


Figure 33 - Zedekiah's Cave (King Solomon's Quarries)

We must remember that it is not only the Overseers who are ignorant of the function of the keystone. The Candidate is also alleged to have “found it in the quarries and concluding it designed for some portion of the Temple, brought it up.” The ritual implies he was working on a regular (i.e. square) piece of work and set that down in order to take this stone instead, since he emphatically tells the Overseers that it is not his own work. The Candidate comes with clean hands.

Why did the Fellowcraft lay down his square stone and pick up a stone which contained elements designed by compasses? We are taught in the Blue Degrees that the compasses represent God (indeed, who can forget the magnificent *Ancient of Days* by William Blake?). While he cannot see the true significance of the keystone, he senses that his development, which up to now has focused on duty, has lacked a spiritual element. By gravitating towards a stone which contains arcs and circles, he is reaching out to that spiritual side just as the physical Temple is nearing completion. He is sound in mind and body: now he seeks to work upon his soul. But what of the Overseers? They represent those who mechanically go through the motions, who are accomplished enough in the basic skills but who have not yet grasped the higher purpose of speculative Freemasonry. It also tells us that even the lowly Fellowcraft can rise above his situation and make this journey if he applies himself diligently enough.

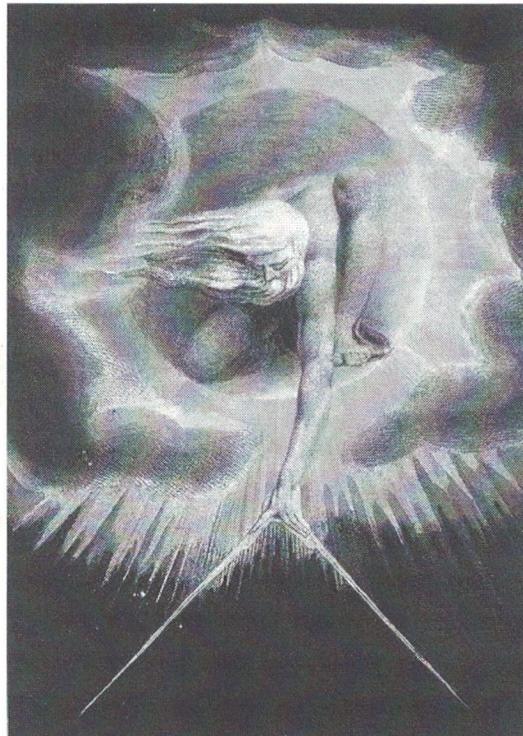


Figure 34 - William Blake: ‘Ancient of Days’

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At the simplest level, the Degree teaches us that life is fraught with disappointments, and that we must persevere before our initially rejected ideas or actions are finally recognized for what they are, and we finally receive our just reward. But it is man's lot in life to endure hardship, misunderstanding and unjust treatment. In this he reminds us of King David, Solomon's father, who designed the Temple but was forbidden to build it himself. The Address to the Candidate refers to this, and remind him that, even if he is rejected of men and persecuted, he will always find reliable and constant friends among Mark Master Masons, and that his rejected labors will one day be recognized and rewarded.



Figure 35 - As Above So Below

Another theme is that the stone now bears a name or mark. Previously we, as Masons, have labored upon the Spiritual Temple. The Hermetic axiom 'As Above, So Below' has led us to realize that, just as we symbolically build the Temple of stone below, so we are creating that Spiritual Temple not built with hands in heaven; and that our actions on earth will be judged on another plane. We are now sufficiently advanced in our Masonic career to place our name or mark upon our work, so that it will be clearly identified as ours. We now take personal responsibility for our actions.

The lesson on charity is more emphatic in this Degree than in the Entered Apprentice Degree. In that Degree we were asked for some metallic substance to be placed in the annals of the Lodge. However, in this Degree there is a direct and personal application to our charitable nature. This is appropriate at this level, for we are forcibly reminded that we are judged by our

actions, and if Charity is the greatest of the theological virtues, the practice of charity will accelerate our success in creating the Spiritual Temple.

In this Degree much is made of the keystone being the 'stone which was lost but now found', a theme which will be reintroduced in the Royal Arch Degree. Perhaps the most important lesson here is the fact that – especially if we consider the Most Excellent Master Degree as the second part of the Mark Degree – we have the completion of the earthly Temple. Already, while the Temple is nearing completion we see fleeting images of the true purpose of the Masonic cycle: that the Temple must be destroyed and rebuilt within ourselves for us to discover Truth. Hiram is an avatar, and while we watch his death from afar in the Drama of the Master Mason Degree, we dimly perceive that we ourselves must die in order that the germ of Truth within us must grow and blossom. Our contentment with receiving a substitute for Truth in the Master Masons Degree has

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been gnawing at us, and on finding a stone in the quarry which represents the last step in the earthly Temple and the first step of the spiritual Temple, we run to grasp it, not yet understanding its full meaning, but aware that it is of great importance. We are told that this wisdom is not yet for us, and we return to the quarries to continue work on the earthly Temple. However, our reward later in the Degree is to learn that there is indeed a purely spiritual Temple, and that the stone we found, while being temporarily rejected for the physical Temple, will play a major role in the Temple to come.

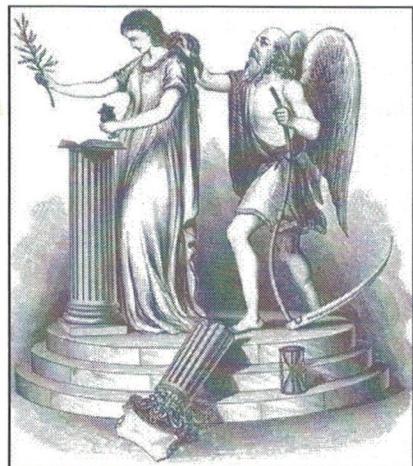


Figure 36 - Time braiding the hair of the weeping virgin

Confusion in the Craft

The Lodge is closed in full form, and since work ends at the sixth hour of the sixth day the Senior Warden is again told to pay the Craft their wages. This also becomes an opportunity for the Lodge to distribute Mark Tokens or Pennies, if they employ them. It is a tradition that, once a mark has been selected and registered with the Lodge Secretary in the book of marks, to have that mark engraved in the center of the metal mark. This may be done by an engraver, but since the mark selected should be simple in design and made of straight lines, it is more appropriate if the newly-made Mark Master Mason does it himself. The very act of creating his own Mark Token is a salutary exercise in meditating on the precepts of the Degree.



Figure 37 - Paying the workmen their wages

The Lodge members line up and receive their wages. However, for a second time there is confusion in the Craft (the first was when the keystone was found to be missing). This time the longer-standing members of the Lodge complain that those who have just become Mark Masons are receiving the same pay as them: a penny a day. At this moment the Right Worshipful Master goes to the altar and reads from the Volume of the Sacred Law. This is a powerful moment, since in the preceding

Degrees the Bible has been a powerful, yet static symbol lying upon the altar. Now the Master physically turns the Bible around and reads from Matthew, Chapter 20. The lesson taught is reiterated in the Keystone Lecture.

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The story would have been completely familiar to almost all who passed through this Degree a hundred years ago. Sadly, nowadays, this famous parable is rather less known, as is its context. The story itself is about the owner of a vineyard who goes out to find workmen to harvest his grapes. He goes out four times, and at the end of the day pays them all the same wage. Those who labored all day complain that those who only began working in the evening should receive less than them. The owner tells them that he fulfilled his contract with each of them, and that it is his right to do as he will with what is his. And he makes the following point: the last shall be first and the first last.

This passage has vexed commentators for centuries. It is important to read also what comes before, in Matthew Chapter 19. A wealthy young man asks Jesus what more he must do to obtain everlasting life, if he has faithfully obeyed all the Commandments. Jesus replies that he must give away all his wealth. He tells his disciples that a rich man shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. At this the disciples ask Jesus who, then, will be saved. He replies that all things are possible through God. Peter then makes an important point. He reminds Jesus that the disciples have indeed given up everything, their wealth, their livelihood and their families to follow him. What then will be their reward? Firstly Jesus reassures them that their loyalty will be rewarded: "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Of course by this Jesus implies that they shall each rule a tribe of Israel (remember Judges were the first rulers of the Children of Israel before they decided they wanted a king to rule over them). But then he adds: "But many that are first, shall be last; and the last shall be first."

Now he tells the parable, which is cautionary, and ends once more with the 'first shall be last' comment. Debates have focused on whether he was referring to the disciples needing to realize that anyone who returns to God before they die shall have an equal inheritance in the Kingdom; or whether he is comforting the disciples by implying that all those Jews who have faithfully followed God through the centuries have no greater claim over the Kingdom than the disciples, who have only followed but a few months. Either way, it is a powerful message, which is reiterated in this section of the ritual.

For us, we perhaps learn that some may have to strive a lifetime to understand the lessons understood by others in only a short time. We do not all develop at the same speed. If we see some younger than ourselves or newer to the Craft grasp points still obscure to us, we must not be tempted to jealousy, or to attack and ridicule those fortunate Masons. We should be content with what we have and strive al the harder to make sense of the symbols and allegories given to us, so that we, too, may understand the divine principles they are intended to portray.

While the attraction of fancy titles and colorful aprons may distract some, the lessons are not in the trappings of Masonry, but in its teachings. True wealth and happiness come from devoting

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one's time to understanding the meaning behind the rituals, and applying those powerful lessons to our everyday lives. We are also reminded that such inspiration does not come from doing nothing, but through applying ourselves with diligence and a strong sense of duty, building on the strong moral foundation we have hopefully erected during our time in the quarries of the Blue Lodge. This sense of morality provides the foundation upon which the will build our spiritual Temple. *Mens sana in corpore sano.* A healthy mind in a healthy body. Without a strong foundation to withstand the attacks of man and nature, we will labor on our spiritual structure in vain. Now we put our name upon our work, so it will be judged by others, and by the Great Overseer. We have been content with a substitute for the Word, for Truth. Now we will seek the True Word with renewed vigor, for Truth is not a physical, man-made creation, but spiritual, and a divine gift.

Music in the Degree

The Sabbath Ode and the Mark Masters Ode were written by Thomas Smith Webb especially for the Degrees. Webb was an accomplished musician, flute and fife player, singer, composer and conductor. He joined the Boston Philharmonic Society in 1814, becoming its Vice President. He was also a performing member of the Brattle Street Church Choir, and President of the Handel and Haydn Society, conducting a number of concerts for orchestra and voices.

MARK MASTER.
HEBRON.

1st TENOR.
2d TENOR.
1st BASS.
2d BASS.

I. An - other six days' work is done, An - other Sabbath is begun;
I. An - other six days' work is done, An - other Sabbath is begun;

Figure 38 – Sabbath Ode, words by Thomas Smith Webb

instrument to hand, and knowing the popularity of singing and music making at that time, especially within families, his songs, set to well-known tunes, provided an appropriate group activity in the Degrees when no words were being spoken, which punctuated the ritual in appropriate places.

Given this interest in music, it is hardly surprising that Webb wrote a number of songs for the Degrees. Recognizing the power of music to add dignity to ritual, while at the same time not wanting to prolong the Degrees, he wrote processional music, to be performed while the Brethren were parading around the Lodge room. Since most Lodges would not have had a musical

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The Sabbath Ode would have provided an opportunity for the Chaplain to show off his solo abilities, while the Mark Masters Ode, sung at the end of the ritual while the Brothers were assembling and processing to collect their wages would have provided a common outlet for the assembled Brethren. The words of both Odes are worth careful reading: they are true poetry.

Biblical References

Of all the Degrees the Mark Master may contain more biblical quotations than any other – indeed it contains more New Testament quotations than any Degree or Order other than the Templar Orders. This may be partly explained by the fact that we are moving from purely earthly to more spiritual education. Indeed, in his Freemason's Monitor, Webb devotes a significant portion of his comments on the Mark Master Degree to enumerating all the biblical references and reproducing them.

As well as expected quotations from Chronicles (which along with the Book of Kings details the building of King Solomon's Temple), and a couple of quotes from Psalms and Ezekiel, much of the scripture cited is from the New Testament. This may again reflect the probability that the ritual traces its origins in the actual ceremonies used by Operative Masons, which, due to the fact that Christianity was – and is – the established religion of the British Isles, this ensured that any ceremony, in order to meet the approbation of Crown and Church, was liberally sprinkled with passages from the New Testament.

Be this as it may, the New Testament passages are used sensitively, and only two types of passage are used. Firstly, the parable of the wages paid in the vineyard is used to emphasize a key lesson. Secondly, passages which have sometimes used to draw a parallel between prophetic commentaries in the *Tanakh*, or Jewish Bible, and the Messiah, are here used rather to underscore the passage in the Psalms which talks of the stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone. In this context it refers to our own spiritual development as Masons.

The important point is not necessarily which Holy Book is being used, since Freemasonry came into being in a Northern European country where Christianity was the predominant – and official

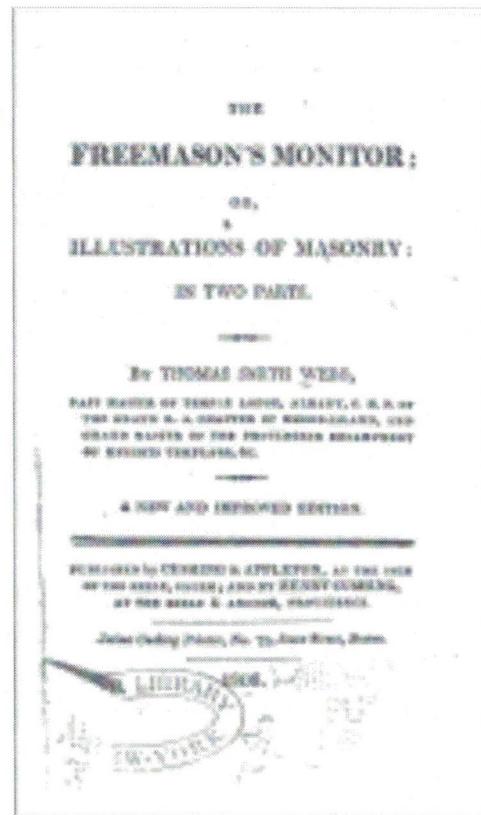


Figure 39 - Thomas Smith Webb Monitor

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– religion. The passage extracted are universal in their messages of tolerance, assiduity, self-improvement and charity to others, and are lessons which can be applied by men of all faiths.

And so the Mark Degree uses symbols, scripture, music, links to prior Degrees, and the usual mixture of drama, lecture and catechism to transmit a powerful message: that in the Capitular Degrees the Brother is going to be transformed from a Master Builder to a Spiritual Builder. In this Degree he takes the first steps towards the sublime revelations of the Holy Royal Arch Degree.

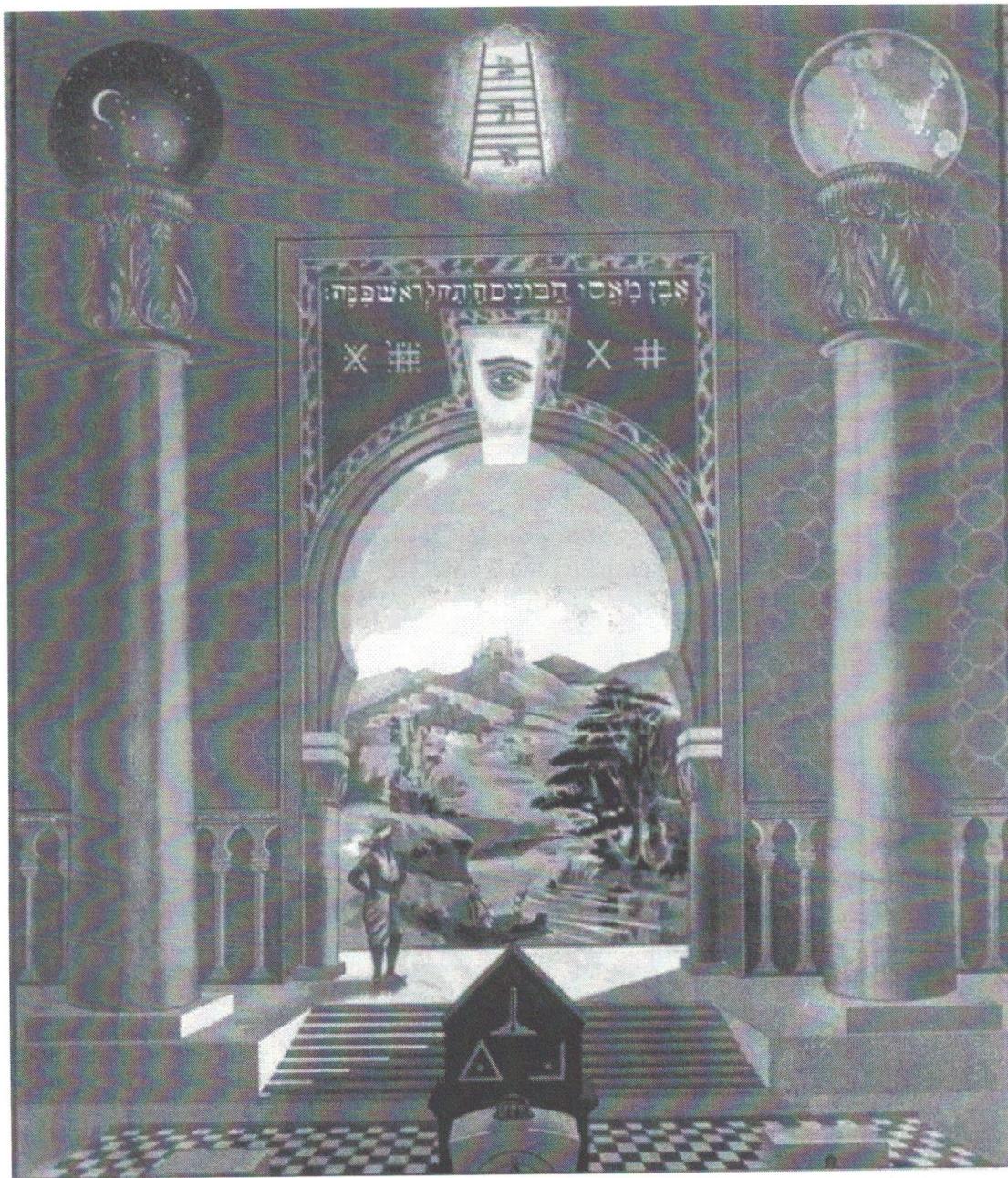


Figure 40 - Mark Degree Tracing Board (grandchapterofwashington.org)

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MMM Discussion Questions

- 1 Some scholars have put forward the theory that the Mark Man and Mark Master Degrees existed in their own right as an alternative system of Masonic Degrees to the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Degrees (remembering that the Master Mason Degree was a later creation).

Do you think the Mark Master Mason Degree could serve as a First Degree in Freemasonry if the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Degrees did not exist? What would we gain and what would we lose as lessons?

- 2 The three Degrees of the Blue Lodge are full of profound teaching, and that no Degree is considered higher than or superior to that of Master Mason. Similarly, the Degrees of the Concordant and Appendant Bodies help to expand upon and explain some of the history and more complex ideas contained in these three Degrees. However, some argue that the Concordant Bodies are unnecessary and a distraction to the teachings of the Blue Lodge Degrees.

Do you think that your understanding of the Blue Lodge Degrees has been enhanced by going through the Mark Master Degree, or not? Do you think the Appendant Bodies help to expand and explain the messages of the Blue Lodge Degrees?

- 3 A common concern often expressed in Regular Lodge is that joining the Concordant Bodies takes a Mason away from his Blue Lodge, and makes it more difficult to run the Lodge effectively.

From your personal experience, have you found that joining Capitular Masonry has made you attend your Blue Lodge less frequently or offered to help less? What about other Masonic friends who are active in Concordant Bodies? Are they more or less active in Blue Lodge since they joined? Either way, why do you think this is?

- 4 Why did the Craftsman abandon his own work in order to carry someone else's work up to the Overseers? How would you react if you were asked by a friend to do something for him, and then found yourself blamed because it was not the expected action? For example, you might have been asked to check on an elderly relative, who was very unfriendly and unpleasant when you tried to visit with them.

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Has this happened to you in real life? How did you feel towards the person who asked you to do them the favor? What was the outcome?

- 5 The Degree contains many lessons about life and how to live and act. What is the single lesson which was the most important for you? How do you intend to implement that lesson in *your* life?

