

The Mark Degree

An introduction for those about to be Advanced

The English System of Freemasonry considers the Mark Degree to be of such importance that it has a distinct and separate organisation which operates Lodges of Mark Master Masons with its own Grand Hierarchy. The Scottish, Irish and New Zealand Systems on the other hand embody Mark Lodges within their Royal Arch Structures. Which does not mean that the other Constitutions considered it any less important than it is in the English System — just that its administration is handled differently. It is of interest that when the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand was formed in 1892 the inclusion of the Mark Degree was considered beneficial to its membership—they would not have to pay an additional subscription to a Mark Lodge.

Why is it considered of such importance?

To get a clear picture it needs to be remembered that early in the 18th century there were two degrees only in Craft Freemasonry — the Entered Apprentice Degree and the Fellow Craft Degree. A Brother was not deemed a “Master Mason” until he had been installed into the Chair of a Lodge. The Third Degree as we know it was introduced some time after the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in London on 24 June 1717. Of this Laurence Gardner wrote in “The Shadow of Solomon”¹:

“... a rather more than adequate 3rd degree already existed. It was much older, and had evolved quite separately from Craft Freemasonry, with records of a Scottish working as far back as 1590 in Stirling. Laurence Dermott, Grand Secretary of the Antients, explained to the Moderns that he knew of this degree, which existed quite independently of the Craft, and that he firmly believed it to be the ‘the root, heart, and marrow of Freemasonry’ ...”

Whether or not Gardner was right there can be little doubt that the Ceremonies of the Royal Arch explain the gaps in the story portrayed in the Ceremonies of Craft Masonry.

Why is the Mark Degree important to us?

The First Degree establishes the concept of a work ethic founded on the principles of labour, accuracy and perseverance; the Second Degree tells us that the work ethic must be supported by a parallel development of the intellect. The Third Degree introduces a spirituality reinforced by the principle of fidelity and illustrated by a legend based on the building of King Solomon’s Temple. They teach us a sense of hierarchy and a balance of discipline and equality. There are however, huge gaps in the stories.

- What is the relevance of Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft to the allegory of King Solomon’s Temple?
- How was the work force organised?
- How was it controlled?
- What was the relationship between Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft?
- How and where were the workmen paid?
- How was the status of the workmen protected?
- What was the command structure?
- Why does a Lodge have a Master and two Wardens?
- How was the quality of the work ensured?
- How were skill, ability and merit recognised?

The Ceremony of Advancement, the Mark Master Masons Degree, provides answers to these questions.

¹ Laurence Gardner “The Shadow of Solomon” Harper Element 2005 ISBN 13 978 0 00 720761 9, ISBN 10 0 00 720761 1