

The Ancient & Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord

The Rebirth of a Masonic Order

Talk for The Ronald Albutt Lodge of MMM No 1818 23rd April
2025

Good evening, Brethren.

Many of you this evening are probably wondering, why is the Deputy Grand Master of the Mark Degree giving a talk on the Ancient & Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord.

Well, I know that you are all very experienced Mark Brethren and have heard many lectures and updates from Mark Masons Hall, so in way of a change I thought it may be of interest to you to hear a little about one of the fastest growing Orders in Freemasonry, The Ancient and Masonic order of the Scarlet Cord

Scarlet Cord is widely regarded as being a new Order..... even the former Grand Recorder Ryan Williams described it as such in his talk about Companion Orders- and that of course is true- it was inaugurated in 2010. But in actual fact the 2010 inauguration was the re-birth of an Order that had originally come into existence towards the end of the 19th century.

So let's first look back to that time.

The Order of the Secret Monitor was formally established in England in 1887. It appears that one of the leading lights of that Order, Judge Frederick Philbrick, the first Grand Chancellor, decided very early on that the OSM needed an appendant Order, as several of the other masonic bodies had- an

Order that would strengthen and augment and assist in raising capital for its benevolent aspirations. Hence was born in 1889 the Royal Order of Knights of the Scarlet Cord.

It was governed by a Senatus, presided over by the Summus. There were six grades, the ritual for which Philbrick composed from several sources, including an amplification of elements from the new OSM second degree. The most significant aspect of promotion through the grades was to have made increasingly large contributions to the OSM's Benevolent Fund- in the higher grades eye-wateringly large contributions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, membership of the Order was never great. The first three grades were worked in a Lodge environment called a Consistory- there was only ever one- Metropolitan Consistory in London- but grades one and two could be worked in sub-Consistories of which there were five ,- Northern which worked in Yorkshire and others in South Africa, Central India, Madras and Burma.

But the Order didn't need to be large- in 1915, the Summus was the Earl of Warwick, The Past Summus was the Earl of Halsbury, The Regent Vicarius was the Earl of Londesborough and King of Arms was Field Marshal Lord Methuen!

Metropolitan Consistory worked regularly until 1914, when it went into abeyance but was revived in 1919. Sadly , All workings of the Order ceased in 1929.

Nobody knows why..... maybe it was just too expensive after the years of the First World War and the Great Depression. Maybe its pomp and splendour (they were wearing court dress and other relics of the Victorian era) were just outdated. Maybe because the founding fathers were all dead. Maybe because

its aim of raising a huge capital sum for the OSM Benevolent Fund had been achieved. Maybe the OSM's new Grand Supreme Ruler Charles Napier-Clavering was not a fan. Possibly a combination of all these. Suffice to say, that was it for over seventy years.

We now Fast forward to the 8 June 2001, Peter Glyn Williams, Grand Supreme Ruler of the OSM at that time, delivered a paper to the Supreme Rulers Conclave No 123 at Mark Masons Hall about this old Order. Peter said this was "in response to the interest shown by brethren in their questions when visiting Conclaves in the Provinces." The paper was widely distributed both in Great Britain and overseas and doubtless generated even more interest, but still the Order remained in abeyance.

In 2005, the concept of match-funding charitable donations by Provinces and Districts from the OSM Benevolent Fund was raised at the Executive Committee. The Grand Treasurer was in favour but pointed out that if the demand was high, the interest on the capital would be insufficient to cover the donations. The fund needed a significant top-up. It was then that the Deputy Grand Supreme Ruler one Brian Wareham whom I'm sure many of you will remember was the Mark PGM for Sussex suggested to Peter Glyn Williams the idea of resuscitating the old Scarlet Cord, with its system of payments to the Benevolent Fund being a requirement for entry and promotion through the grades

The donations should be much smaller it must be said rather than the huge ones set in the Victorian era.

Peter and Brian floated the suggestion past a few senior OSM members on a trip to South Africa in February 2006. They were all in favour and then spent a

considerable amount of time in searching the archives at Mark Masons Hall and Great Queen Street for documents and rituals.

On 17 November 2006, Peter as Grand Supreme Ruler and therefore guardian of the old rite created a small group as members of the Order, and then worked a revised first grade. It was also decided to consecrate a special Secret Monitor Conclave to introduce Princes (those that had taken their 2nd degree in OSM) into this appendant Order and eventually process them through the various grades.

Scarlet Cord Conclave no 500 came into being on 5 December 2006. During 2007 the Conclave travelled all over England (and Scotland) to admit candidates into the Order. Such was the overwhelming demand that further Scarlet Cord Conclaves were consecrated both in England and overseas from January 2008 onwards. These local units gradually took on the burden of admitting candidates, leaving number 500 free to promulgate the subsequent grades, as they were being revised or written.

In April 2009 a steering committee was constituted to report on what the future might hold for this booming Order. The Grand Recorder at that time John Brackley, whom I'm sure many of you will remember, suggested the radical idea of constituting it as a sovereign Order in its own right, free from the OSM.

This idea was embraced enthusiastically by the steering committee, renamed the Way Forward Committee, they then set about a programme to produce this end result.

There was, as can be imagined, a phenomenal amount to do. Apart from the revising and writing of the grades which was ongoing, an inauguration ritual

had to be produced, Constitutions written, a structure at Grand Senatus and Provincial and District level established, regalia to be designed, appointments to be made, the list was almost endless.

Nevertheless, it was all achieved by a relatively small number of people in a short space of time. Some of those involved were well know brethren from the Midlands, namely Michael Guest, Brian Price and Andy Sweeney, The Inauguration of the Order was set for 21 July 2010 at Great Queen Street.

On that morning in Temple No 10, Scarlet Cord Conclave No 500 met for the last time and admitted multiple candidates who all wanted to witness the inauguration of an Order.

Subsequently, OSM Grand Conclave was opened in the Grand Temple and the 64 Scarlet Cord Conclaves were formally removed from the roll. A Scarlet Cord Consistory was then opened, and Grand Senatus was then constituted, dedicated and consecrated by Brian Wareham.

This was done with great pomp and ceremony, one of the central focus points was the Ark of the Covenant which was made specifically for the occasion.

The Ark was made in America, and when it arrived it was far larger than planned , The ark was over 5ft long 2 ½ feet wide and 2 ½ feet high and weighed over 50 kgs. I think the Americans had worked on feet and inches instead of centimetres. It took 4 very fit Companions called Priests to carry the Ark in and out of the Temple

Michael Guest the Grand Supreme Ruler of the OSM, was installed as Grand Summus by Michael Herbert and he then invested the Grand Officers including Provincial and District Grand Summi, dealt with administrative business and closed Grand Senatus. An excellent dinner at the Connaught Rooms followed.

All in all, a staggeringly impressive day, I was appointed and invested as the first Grand Director of Ceremonies.

The Order has progressed beyond belief since that day. Michael Guest was succeeded by Andrew Sweeney in 2012 and Ian Currans took over in 2018.

So where are we now?

Our memberships are in excess of 3800 Companions, distributed around 22 Provinces in England & Wales, 5 Districts overseas (South East Asia, Southern Caribbean, Southern India, Western India and Spain), Inspectorates in France and Eastern & Northern India, as well as unattached Consistories on the Isle of Man, in Switzerland, Hong Kong, Eastern India, Finland combined with Estonia and Greece. Additionally, Scarlet Cord ceremonies are worked in Australia, New Zealand and Canada under their OSM Grand Conclaves and in America under the Allied Masonic Degrees of the USA. We currently have 165 Consistories, with more petitions waiting to be approved. Our membership growth is such that we are easily the fastest growing mainstream masonic Order administered from MMH.

Now, the structure.

The Order's regulatory body is Grand Senatus and the structure of that is identical to the majority of other Orders. Similarly, a Province or District (overseas) is ruled by a Provincial or District Grand Summus with the usual compliment of officers. The individual unit is called a Consistory. At its head is the President, who apart from the usual leadership duties is responsible for performing third grade ceremonies within the Consistory. His Senior Warden equivalent is called the Primus of Lectores whose duty it is to perform second grade ceremonies and the Junior Warden equivalent is called the Primus of

Ostiarium, who performs first grade ceremonies. It is noteworthy that Companions will potentially reach the chair with two ceremonies already under their belt. Each Consistory has four lecturers, who deliver rather challenging pieces of ritual in the first and second grades to relate the appropriate Old Testament stories.

Many Consistories meet either before or, unusually, after an OSM meeting and then dine together. This has the advantage of keeping costs to a minimum. Some of the officers' titles are Latin names and are retained from the original Order. Primus of Lectores, Primus of Ostiarium and Episcopus for the Chaplainand at Grand level, Summus of course and Grand Regent Vicarius, a distinction bestowed on a very small number of Companions above the level of a Provincial or District head. The individual member is called a Companion, marking a distinction to the mother Order the OSM, where brother is used and reflecting the Brother/Companion relationship in the Craft and Royal Arch. The charity contribution for promotion through the grades is no longer a requirement.

So what of the ceremonies?

The first grade (for which a candidate must be a Prince -second degree- of the Order of the Secret Monitor) relates the biblical story of Rahab, who hid Joshua's spies before the capture of the city of Jericho. To protect herself and her family during that battle, Rahab tied a Scarlet Cord in her window.

Rahab is widely believed to have run a "house of entertainment" and the Scarlet Cord in her window is reckoned by some to be the origin of the term "red light district." Possession of this grade brings with it the title "Ostiarium" meaning gatekeeper.

Rahab went to live among the Israelites and married the son of one of the spies. They had a son, Boaz- yes, the very same Boaz who is mentioned so fleetingly in the Craft. The second grade is about Boaz and his marriage to Ruth, events which are related in the eighth book of the Bible. They have a son called Obed, who had a son called Jesse who was the father of King David. So thanks to Scarlet Cord, you can now see that Boaz was indeed the great grandfather of David. Candidates for this grade receive the title “Lector” meaning reader.

The third grade is unique amongst Scarlet Cord ceremonies in that it is not based upon an Old Testament story. Much of it is lifted straight from the original Order’s third grade and is much concerned with honour and the hope of resurrection in the life to come. Candidates become “Fellows.”

As I alluded to previously, the first three grades of the Order are conferred in an individual Consistory. There is of course an Installation ceremony which brings with it the title “Distinguished,” but before a suitably elected Companion can be installed, he must go through the Preparation ceremony, which is based on the early life of the prophet Samuel and is usually conducted at Provincial level. A prepared Companion bears the title “Eminent.”

Three years after installation and upon recommendation by the Province or District, a Past President can be nominated for the fourth grade. This ceremony is conducted by the Grand Summus and the Grand Officers of the year, with significant contributions by the four Grand Lecturers, as we return again to the events leading up to the capture of the city of Jericho and elements of the battle itself. This is always a wonderfully spectacular occasion with lots of colour, music and singing- very much a “Ben Hur” production, bringing with it the appellation “Councillor.”

This is in complete contrast to the fifth grade ceremony, which is on a much smaller scale, reflecting its exclusivity. The Grade is only conferred on Grand Officers of three years standing on recommendation of the local rulers and is limited to two recipients per Province or District per year. Here we learn of the story of the Prophet Jeremiah- a name mentioned almost as an aside in the Royal Arch Exaltation ceremony- and Jeremiah's role in preserving the Temple treasures before the attack of the Babylonians. "Keeper of the Hidden Secret" is the enigmatic title bestowed here.

The sixth grade is only conducted when necessity dictates and is conferred very sparingly and entirely at the discretion of the Grand Summus. Various episodes in the Wars of the Maccabees form the basis of this, the most dramatic of all the grades. The Maccabees were essentially Jewish freedom fighters some 150 years before the birth of Christ and their triumph left the Jews in peace and in command of their own destiny until the Roman invasion around 100 years later. Those in possession of this grade are designated "Prince of Jerusalem."

So what of the regalia?

A companion of the Order wears a Scarlet Cord, either around the waist or over the shoulder, depending on his grade. Additionally, he wears a jewel, suspended around his neck for the first and second grades or a breast jewel for the third grade. Officers of a Consistory wear a sash, and the President, Primus of Lectores and Primus of Ostiarii wear collarettes, which reflect their responsibilities for conferring the first, second and third grades. Provincial and District officers wear strident yellow sashes, while those of Grand Officers are of course scarlet. Holders of the fourth grade have breast jewels, while those with the fifth and sixth grades wear splendid but slightly ostentatious stars-

silver for the fifth grade, gold for the sixth... The members of the Grand Summus's personal bodyguard, the Tzaddikim, wear purple sashes and special red sheathed swords, while the Grand Summus himself of course has plenty of bling, including a collarette, baton, chain and purple robe.

And finally, what is special about the Scarlet Cord

The rituals fill in gaps in the Craft and Royal Arch (even though Chapter is not a requirement). You would certainly understand much more clearly the position of the Craft second and third degrees and the Royal Arch Exaltation and Installations in the historical timeline if you were a Scarlet Cord Companion.

Rt Dist Comp Francis C Spencer

Deputy Grand Summus

23rd April 2025