

THE BEGINNINGS OF SPECULATIVE MARK MASONRY IN ENGLAND AND IN CHESHIRE 1769 - 1900

A short paper, researched, written, revised and delivered by W.Bro. PAUL BULLOWS PPrGSD on 8th September 2003, at West Cheshire Mark Lodge, Birkenhead.

Brethren,

I must firstly say that to present a definitive paper on such an important topic, would take a great deal of time, and we are of course limited tonight to just a little time.

I have therefore condensed a great deal of information into a short talk which will provide a potted history of the development of Grand Mark Lodge in England and the beginnings of the Mark Province of Cheshire and can perhaps be built upon over years to come, especially as regards this Province's history. I do not intend to look into the ceremonies, more than to say I have researched Mark Masonry as we currently know it to be, i.e. concerned with the rejection of the keystone and built around a single verse from Psalm 118, v 22: ***"The Work which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner"***, and the fact that the Mark Degree consists of two distinct parts, i.e. Mark Man and Mark Master.

Although the history of Operative Mark Masonry begins much earlier, this story has its outset¹ on 1st September 1769, where we find the first written record of any working of a speculative Mark degree, when at a newly 'Moderns' chartered Royal Arch Chapter, known as the Chapter of Friendship, held at the George Tavern in Portsmouth, the famous Thomas Dunckerley, son of the Prince of Wales, later King George II, Provincial Grand Master;

"bro't the Warrant of the Chapter and having lately rec'd the "Mark", he made the bre'n "Mark Masons" and "Mark Masters" and each chuse their Mark. He also told us of this manner of writing".

This is interesting as it confirms the degree was being worked in parts somewhere else earlier than 1769 and makes mention of what we now know as the Mark Cipher.

The state of the Mark Degree down to the middle of the Nineteenth Century was at best, chaotic. Many degrees of varying types had been worked in Craft Lodges prior to the Union of the two rival Grand Lodges in 1813, since when under the Articles of Union, the Mark Degree was not recognised as "Pure Ancient Masonry". The commonly heard part of Article 2 of the Act of Union reads;

It is declared and pronounced that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more, viz. those of Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.

It is interesting to note that the next sentence in article 2 reads;

But this Article is not intended to prevent any Lodge or Chapter from holding a Meeting in any of the degrees of the Orders of Chivalry, according to the Constitutions of the said orders.

From then on, it was questionable whether the Mark was a 'legal' degree. It must have seemed to the Mark Brethren that they were entering a 'Dark Era'. It was argued that as the Union recognised the Knightly orders, it must therefore acknowledge the degrees prerequisite for membership of those Knightly Orders, i.e. The Mark!

As might have been expected, the Mark did not become stagnant. It continued to be worked, although haphazardly and without any formal control, in Craft Lodges and in Royal Arch Chapters throughout England during the first half of the nineteenth century.

"The effect of the Union of 1813 on the additional degrees including the Mark, many of which had been worked under Craft warrants, was disastrous. Some continued for a few years to work the Mark clandestinely, until they wilted under the cold eye of the autocratic Grand Master at the time, the Duke of Sussex, until his death in 1843".

It must also have been a factor, that in 1799 the Government passed The Secret Societies Act", requiring lists of members of all lodges to be sent to the local Justice and was therefore "Public" information. Mark Lodges could not comply as to have done so would have made their working obvious to United Grand Lodge as well!

In Trevelyan Lee's book entitled "Craft Freemasonry in Derbyshire", published in 1926, we find a mention of The Lodge of Union, a Craft Lodge now numbered 268, which moved in 1828 from its meeting place in Manchester to The Devonshire Arms in Mellor, a small Cheshire village between Marple in Stockport, Cheshire and Hayfield in Derbyshire. The Lodge, despite being a "Moderns" Lodge, worked several degrees beside the Craft, including the Mark, Ark and Link. This degree is sometimes referred to as the "Link and Wrestle", which alludes to the Angel wrestling with Jacob. The Lodge minutes contain frequent references to Brethren being given the "Ark, Mark and Link". Today this Lodge meets at Ashton u Lyne in the Province of East Lancashire!

On 19th September 1851, a group of London Brethren founded a pure Mark Lodge, known as the Bon Accord Mark Lodge, under a Charter dated 17th September 1851, obtained quite illegally from the Bon Accord Royal Arch Chapter No. 70 of Aberdeen, Scottish Constitution and appointed Dr. William Jones as the first Master, an action which resulted in the Chapter's suspension by the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, in 1855, along with all of its members. It was never to meet again. At this first meeting, six brethren were advanced. The new Bon Accord Mark Lodge was very successful; by 1855 it had 120 members, growing to about 150 by 1856.

On 5th March 1856, a joint committee of The United Grand Lodge of England and the Supreme Grand Chapter of England, consisting of seven members from each, reported in United Grand Lodge;

“That after obtaining all the information in its power, this committee is of the opinion that the Mark Mason’s Degree, so called, does not form a portion of the Royal Arch Degree, and that it is not essential to Craft Masonry; but they are of the opinion that there is nothing objectionable in such degree, nor anything which militates against the universality of Masonry, and that it might be considered as forming a graceful addition to the Fellow Crafts Degree”

The report having been received, it was on motion duly made, “Resolved Unanimously”

That the Degree of Mark Mason or Mark Master is not at variance with the Ancient landmarks of the Order, and that the degree be an addition to and form part of Craft Masonry; and consequently may be conferred by all regular Warranted Lodges under such regulations as shall be prepared by the Board of General Purposes and approved and sanctioned by the Grand Master.

However, the senior members of Bon Accord Mark Lodge were not too happy to see their beloved Mark Degree become ‘a graceful addition to the Fellow Crafts Degree’. They had hoped it could form an order within the Craft similar to the position held by the Holy Royal Arch. It is the opinion of some historians, that they engineered the ‘rejection’ of the minutes in Grand Lodge, in order that they could retain the Mark as a separate order.

At the following Quarterly Communication of the United Grand Lodge of England, on 4th June 1856, when the minutes were read, W Bro. John Henderson PSGD a member and Past president of the Board of General Purposes, moved the non-confirmation of the section of minutes regarding the Mark Degree. He said that the United Grand Lodge of England did not have the power to make so great an innovation in the body of Masonry, as to add another degree to the order. His amendment was carried by a majority of one, and therefore the Mark Degree was not accepted into the fold.

Within four weeks, Grand Mark Lodge as we know it today was established, with the Rt. Hon Lord Leigh, the first Junior Warden of Bon Accord Mark Lodge and Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire in the Craft, as the first Grand Master and gradually, almost all the bodies conferring the Mark Degree in England and the existent Mark Lodges, acceded to or came under its authority. All nineteen Grand Officers then appointed came from the Bon Accord Mark Lodge in London. Three other Mark Lodges were chiefly involved, namely Northumberland and Berwick in Newcastle upon Tyne, Royal Cumberland in Bath and Old Kent in London.

It must be remembered Brethren, that to form a new Grand Lodge in the face of such opposition took the greatest courage, twinned with the highest levels of integrity and tact. We must never forget the efforts of Lord Leigh, who was only 31 years of age at the time, so ably assisted by Lord Methuen, Deputy Grand Master,

the Earl of Caernarfon, the second Grand Master, the Rev Canon GR Portal, Grand Chaplain (and later to become the Grand Master who founded the Mark Benevolent Fund), and Alexander Ridgeway, Grand Registrar, for without their united efforts and determination, we would not be here today!

In May, 1857, the newly constituted Lord Leigh's Grand Lodge convened a special meeting to consider whether it would be better to unite under one Constitution, or continue separately under the existing English, Scottish, or in a few cases, American Warrants.

The result of this meeting was that a resolution in favour of unity and uniformity was unanimously agreed, and on the 16th of June 1857, we find that several Lodges had joined it, and that seven Provincial Grand Masters had been appointed.

From then on, the Mark Degree prospered and grew rapidly. In just twelve months it had more than trebled with 15 lodges and by 1861, just 5 years after its formation, Grand Mark Lodge had 53 lodges on its roll, including 20 newly formed ones and by 1881 there were 281 Mark lodges in England and Wales, and around the colonies, owing allegiance to it.

This was in spite of the continuing opposition from the Craft. The Grand Lodge of England continued its policy of treating the other Orders as artificial. The Mark Degree was its largest 'competitor'.

The lead of the London Bon Accord Lodge encouraged some Mark Lodges to cut themselves loose from their parent bodies and go it alone. The new Grand Lodge was said by some to have been 'born in sin, and shapen in iniquity'. This was a new development. One such lodge was the Newstead Mark Lodge at Nottingham, with a semi-independent history probably going back to the 1700's. It made itself independent in 1858, and even warranted two other lodges.

In February 1859 The Thistle Mark Lodge No 3 SC (now No.8 EC) bowed to Grand Mark Lodges authority. This almost certainly gave a lead to the other 15 Scottish Warranted Lodges which included Joppa Mark at Birkenhead, as they had previously been slow to change allegiance. Thistle Mark also provided Fredrick Binkes, who took over as Asst. Grand Secretary, and later in 1861 as Grand Secretary, in London, making many notable improvements in the administration of the order.

In 1865 Grand Mark Lodge began handing out benevolence, raising funds at 'charity festivals' in a similar manner to the Craft. The stated aim was a speedy response, as opposed to the Craft's slow. The Mark Benevolent Fund was established in 1868 at the suggestion of the Grand Master, Canon Portal.

In 1871, Grand Mark Lodge took charge of the re-emerged Royal Ark Mariner Degree, which had been suppressed along with all the additional degrees by the Craft Grand Masters, the Duke of Sussex until his death in 1843 and by the Earl of Zetland after that. The 1st Marquis of Ripon, who was invested as Craft Grand Master in 1870, was more tolerant. However, A 'transparently illegal' (Handfield-Jones:44) and fraudulent 'Grand Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners' had been 'revived'

in 1870. It operated, in a small way, under a Brother Morton Edwards. The Grand Mark Lodge announced its protection in 1871, but had to play along with Edwards until it was at last, in 1884, able to buy him out.

In 1872 the Craft commissioned a report into the Mark, and as a result, a statement was issued. Included in that statement from the United Grand Lodge of England was -

"21 May 1872. The Grand Lodge (*Craft*) firmly forbids all their officials salaried from mixing themselves up in any way with other parties and especially the schismatic body styling itself the 'Grand Mark Lodge of England'.

We can see Brethren, that some 18 years after its founding, there remained enduring opposition to the existence of Grand Mark Lodge. This was not to last for too long however.

HRH The Prince of Wales, Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, and Grand Master of the Masonic Order of Knights Templar, was Advanced into the Mark Degree in 1883 by his Brother, HRH The Duke of Albany, becoming Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons in 1886. He expressly stated that he wished to see the Mark remain independent of the Craft or any other body.

The redoubtable Binkes completed 28 years of service as Grand Secretary in 1889, and was succeeded by Charles Matier. Matier was responsible for getting many of the Additional Degrees housed under the same roof as the Mark in London.

In 1889 the 'Provincial Grand Lodges' in the colonies became 'Districts', and were charged to largely run their own affairs. In that year also, the first 'daughter' Mark Grand Lodge was formed, in New South Wales.

In Cheshire Brethren, the oldest Masonic Craft Province in the world, the Mark was slow to make formal progress. Many looked on the Grand Mark Lodge as Illegal, including the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, which had continued to issue Mark Degree Charters after the formation of the English Grand Mark Lodge. I mention this because one of our oldest of lodges in Cheshire was first warranted in Scotland, this being Joppa No. 5 at Birkenhead, now numbered 11, which first met without a warrant on 23rd May 1856 at The Angel Inn, in Campden Street in Birkenhead. At this meeting, none were Mark Masons, but at their next meeting in June, they were inducted as Mark Masons by members of the Travelling Mark Lodge of Dukinfield, now known as Ashton District TI. Apparently, the masons from Dukinfield travelled to Birkenhead on horseback. We will never know whether such an arduous journey caused them to grumble about it.....however, had they experienced the cost and reliability of today's west coast rail line, they would no doubt have been happy to remain firmly seated on their saddles!

Continuing on as regards the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, this body went as far as to constitute an English Mark Province and appointed Thomas Entwistle as the first Provincial Grand Master in 1870, in Lancashire! They finally recognised the Authority of the English Grand Mark Lodge in 1879, being the last sovereign

body so to do.... except arguably the “The Honourable United Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of the Ashton-under-Lyne District”.

Talking of Cheshire’s finest, indeed our oldest and most senior Mark Lodge is now styled the Ashton District Mark Lodge, commonly known as ADTI, and formerly known as the Dukinfield Travelling Lodge and The Sunday Mark Lodge. This Brethren of this Lodge travelled all around North Cheshire, South East Lancashire and even into North West Derbyshire, commonly meeting within the confines of a Craft Lodge, usually on a Sunday, and conferring the Mark Degree and demonstrating the ceremony. There is undoubted proof that this Lodge has been working the Mark Degree since 1830 and very strong evidence that had existed in some form since at least the 1790’s if not earlier.

The members of Ashton District clearly did not take well to the formation of Grand Mark Lodge in London and in 1857 decided to form their own Grand Lodge which had the fancy title “The Honourable United Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of the Ashton-under-Lyne District”. It is not certain how many subordinate lodges this Grand Lodge constituted, but it is known that Joppa No.5SC meeting at Birkenhead (now numbered 11EC, and which incidentally, according to Handfield-Jones in his book “A History of Grand Mark Lodge”, was allocated No. 11 by oversight, and of course should have been TI)), which was warranted by the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, was originally Ashton District’s subordinate lodge, having Advanced all of its founders at the second meeting. One writer said of Joppa Mark, that it is unique in having both a Mother and a Step Mother! Its Mother Lodge was Ashton District TI, and its Step Mother Lodge was St. Johns Mark Lodge TI of Bolton, as they had sponsored Joppa Charter from the Supreme Grand Lodge of Scotland.

In 1870 the Deputy Provincial Grand Master visited Ashton District TI, trying to persuade them to submit to the authority of the Grand Mark Lodge of England. He stressed his view that there must be uniformity. Whose uniformity? Ashton saw value in diversity, and refused to submit. Like Scotland had, and arguably correctly at the time, it saw the English Grand Mark Lodge as irregular. In 1898 the editor of the *Masonic Record* asked questions about this Ashton District Mark Grand Lodge which no doubt stirred Grand Mark Lodge into action. The Grand Secretary dispatched a letter to Ashton District Grand Lodge in March 1899, abruptly stating that the ‘so-called’ Grand Lodge would be declared a ‘Clandestine Lodge’ in May, and all Masonic connections to it would be severed, unless it submitted. Could it have been that London had forgotten its own treatment by Scotland?

Ashton District replied, pointing out that, far from being clandestine, it had been working its old ritual, and openly, for over one hundred years. The lodge then asked that the term “clandestine” be withdrawn. They wanted to know in which way London could put down such a strong, popular, body.

In June 1899 Grand Mark Lodge in London declared Ashton District as “spurious and clandestine”.

A very strange and unexpected turn in events then occurred. Instead of sticking to its no-doubt well founded integrity, it actually gave in and submitted. It appears

that this was due to the new presence of a very persuasive person, a Dr Foreman (Cryer³).

London was ecstatic. Suddenly Ashton was not spurious. Dr Foreman received his reward by being made a Past Grand Master Overseer of England. This Grand Lodge had been very stubborn, being the last external authority to submit to the Grand Mark Lodge of England on 17th February 1900, when it received its *Time Immemorial* status and now meets at Dukinfield. It was placed third following Bon Accord and Old Kent Mark Lodges in the precedence of the 14 unnumbered TI Lodges.

In 1903, in a publication celebrating the Masonic golden jubilee of W.Bro. Richard Newhouse, the first Mark Provincial Grand Secretary in Cheshire, we find the following interesting information.

“Up to 1872, there had been no Provincial Grand Mark Lodge for the Province of Cheshire. The consecration of the Stamford Mark Lodge No. 148 in March 1872, now meeting at Sale, brought the number of Mark Lodges in Cheshire at the time, to five, the other four being Ashton District at Dukinfield, Benevolent No. 67 (now Benevolent TI) at Stockport, Joppa No.11 and Fidelity Mark No.31 at Birkenhead (although fidelity had been dormant since 1861). With the addition of North Wales, it was deemed desirable by several eminent Mark Master Masons, that a Provincial Grand Lodge should be established for the area of Cheshire and North Wales. In 1873 therefore, ostensibly through the united exertions of Brothers Bulkeley Hughes, William Romaine Callender MP (who incidentally was the Mark Provincial Grand Master in Lancashire and who two years earlier, had established the Mark Province of West Yorkshire)), J. Chadwick, Lt. Col Wilkinson, J.A. Birch, and Richard Newhouse, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of Cheshire and North Wales was Constituted and Consecrated under the command of The first Provincial Grand Master, RW Bro. The Hon. Wilbraham Egerton (later Earl Egerton of Tatton). W.Bro Newhouse was appointed as the first Provincial Grand Secretary (and indeed, he held the same position in Craft).

The Province of Cheshire began to grow. 1873 saw the founding of Egerton Mark Lodge No. 165 and by 1880, the Earl of Chester Mark Lodge No. 196, sponsored by Joppa Mark Lodge, had been working for four years. With two Mark Lodges working in North Wales, the total number of Lodges in the Province was nine.

The combined Province separated in 1880 and The Province of Cheshire as we know it today was born, with the original magnificent seven forming the solid foundation on which they were to consolidate and build steady growth.

At the outbreak of World War One in 1914, the Province had added 6 new lodges to its total of 13, those being Sincerity 327, De Tabley 396, Wythenshawe 532, Staley 597, Wallesey 600 and Warren De Tabley 622.

Currently, from the list of 41 Mark Provinces and 27 Mark Districts under Grand Mark Lodge, Cheshire is the 8th largest outside London, having 43 Mark and 21 Royal Ark Mariner Lodges under its authority with 1052 Mark Masons and 483 Royal Ark Mariner Masons proudly practicing the degrees.

Thanks to W.Bro. Peter Carroll, our Provincial Grand Secretary and W.Bro. David Grisdale, our Provincial Deputy Grand Secretary for allowing me to conduct research using papers and documents held at the Provincial Office and for providing current statistics as regards membership. I must also thank W.Bro. Ray Raynes of ADTI, W.Bro. David Sayce of Joppa Mark and W.Bro. Frank Smith of Fidelity Mark who all sent me invaluable information regarding their lodges history