

Good Evening Brethren

Tonight we celebrate 100 years of the "Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 776" and it is extremely pleasing to see so many visitors who have taken the time to support the Lodge and share in our celebrations this evening.

In celebration of the Lodge's Centenary, I've compiled this small booklet, which is a short history of the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 776.

You will be pleased to hear that I won't be spending the time reading the entire contents but rather just covering some of the events, which have taken place over the past 100 years together with some items of relevance. You will all receive a copy of the booklet at the Festive board, which can be read at your leisure. Those brethren who are not dining can obtain a copy from Brother Secretary.

The booklet is by no means comprehensive but aims to provide a short history of the Lodge and the origins of Mark Masonry in Rugby; it also includes some information regarding Mark Grand Lodge and the links between the Craft and the Mark.

Mark Masonry was first established in Rugby in 1922 when the Seymour Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 606, which, at that time met in Coventry, sponsored a new Mark Lodge which was to meet in Rugby. The Seymour Lodge advanced a number of Rugby brethren to enable them to become founder members of what was to be the newly formed "Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 776".

Grand Mark Lodge having signified its approval on 31st October 1922, of the formation of a Mark Lodge in Rugby, issued the warrant for the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons, and The Consecration Ceremony was arranged to take place on Monday 18th December 1922, at the Masonic Hall, Castle Street, Rugby.

The Castle Street premises where the consecration took place, was the first and only purpose-built Masonic Hall to be erected in Rugby. In February 1897 the members of the Lodge of Rectitude No. 502 purchased a piece of land in Castle Street to erect a purpose-built Masonic Hall at a cost of £1,230. The land on which the building was erected was previously the Deaf and Dumb College built in 1843. Between 1876 and 1884 the building formed part of the original Rugby Hospital and was eventually demolished in 1892.

The plans for the ground floor of the building consisted of a large dining room, adjoining kitchen, committee room and cloak room, whilst the upper floor contained the main Lodge room, with a retiring room and adjacent ante-room.

The building was completed in early 1898 and on Saturday 26th March 1898, the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of Warwickshire Craft, Worshipful Brother George Beech, Dedicated the New Masonic Hall in Castle Street, Rugby and placed a Memorial Stone in position.

The consecration ceremony was carried out by the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master, Right Worshipful Brother Lieutenant colonel, Zaccheus Walker, V.D; J.P. assisted by: V W Bro Felix Jones, Provincial Grand Treasurer, Deputy Provincial Grand Master and a number of acting Provincial officers as recorded on the Summons.

The Lodge being duly consecrated, W Bro William Edward Bullock, Provincial Grand Master Overseer, was installed as the primus Worshipful Master and the Officers appointed and invested.

Thirteen out of the fourteen founder members were members of the Seymour Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 606 with the remaining founder, W Bro Charles H Archer being a member of the Constantine Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 145 meeting in Colchester in the Province of Essex. A further eight of the founder members would later follow in the footsteps of the Primus Worshipful Master, W Bro William E Bullock and would become Worshipful Master of the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons.

The first Meeting of the Lodge took place by dispensation on Thursday 4th January 1923 at the Masonic Hall, Castle Street, Rugby. The first meetings were not without interest. A ballot was taken for Brothers Herbert Smith & Henry Hemmings as Candidates for Advancement. Both Candidates being Approved and after signing the declaration book were admitted in due form and Advanced to the honourable Degree of a Mark Master Mason. Bro John Cleaver, the suggested Tyler of the Lodge was prepared for election by the Worshipful Master; a show of hands was taken proving unanimous. Bro Cleaver was duly admitted and advanced to the honourable Degree of a Mark Master Mason and as a serving Brother was duly appointed and invested to the office of Tyler.

In its first year the Lodge Advanced eight brethren to the Honourable Degree of a Mark Master Mason with a further three Advancements taking place the following year. After which in 1925 the Lodge encountered a slump in activity due to a lack of Candidates and the passing to the Grand Lodge above of a number of Past Masters and Lodge officers in quick succession.

The situation might well have been disastrous to the continued existence of the Lodge, but for the enthusiasm and dedication of a number of Past Masters who managed to turn things around. The Lodge began to grow in numbers and soon blossomed into one of the liveliest Mark Lodges in the Province of Warwickshire. In its first decade with the exception of 1925, when no Advancements took place, the Lodge Advanced twenty seven Brethren and had one joining member.

With the expansion of Freemasonry in Rugby, which had seen the consecration of an additional two Craft Lodges, and twelve years after the formation of the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons, it was decided that the Castle Street premises were becoming inadequate for the number of members attending the various meetings. A meeting of all subscribing Rugby Freemasons took place in June 1934 and was held in New Big School, Little Church Street, now known as the Macready Theatre, Rugby School, when it was agreed to purchase Eastfield House, in Church Walk, which was formerly Eastfield Preparatory School for Girls.

Following the purchase of Eastfield House extensive building work was carried out to include a new Temple, ante-room, meeting rooms a dining room and kitchen. Eastfield House was renamed The Arnold House and continues to be the meeting place of Freemasonry in Rugby since the dedication of the new Masonic Building in March 1936.

In its first 50 years the membership of the Lodge continued to increase year by year and in its Golden Jubilee year had Advanced a total of One Hundred and Forty Six Brethren into the

Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons. At its peak in 1964 the Lodge had a total of Seventy Five members.

The Lodge qualified as a Keystone Lodge in 1939. The original Keystone Fund was established on the 3rd June 1930, the primary purpose of the Fund was to help finance major capital projects to improve the structure, facilities and quality of Mark Masons' Hall.

The 200th regular meeting of the Lodge was held on Monday 20th November 1972, when the Rugby lodge of Mark Master Masons celebrated Fifty years from the date that the warrant was first issued on Tuesday 31st October 1922.

The Jubilee meeting was honoured by the presence of the Provincial Grand Master, Rt W Bro Leslie G Seymour J.P. who was accompanied by the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, V W Bro Louis William Caulcott; and a number of acting officers of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of Warwickshire.

The 201st regular meeting held on Monday 15th January 1973 in contrast to the previous meeting was tinged with extreme sadness. At the second rising the Secretary of the Lodge reported receipt of a letter from the Provincial Grand Secretary with regards to the passing of the Deputy Provincial Grand Master.

The letter stated that the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master had declared a period of mourning to be held in the Province until 31st March 1973. All officers were requested to wear a black rosette at the point of their collar and that the front cover of the Lodge summons should be over-printed at the bottom to read thus: "The Province Mourns the loss of the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, V W Bro Louis William Caulcott".

Less than two months earlier V W Bro Caulcott had attended the Jubilee celebrations in Rugby and it came as a great shock to the brethren of the Lodge to learn of his passing.

In the past fifty years following the Jubilee meeting and since its formation over one hundred years ago, the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 776 has been and continues to be one of the most vibrant Mark Lodges in the Province of Warwickshire. Despite all of the trials and tribulations the Lodge continues to be well supported by the members and has been fortunate enough to continue to receive new candidates for Advancement, with a total of Two Hundred and Seventy Four brethren having been advanced into the Lodge since its first meeting 100 years ago.

The Lodge is extremely grateful to all of the Past Masters who have contributed greatly to the success of the Lodge. The Lodge is also highly appreciative of the support and guidance given over the years from the Rulers and the Provincial Grand Lodge Officers of the Mark Province of Warwickshire.

Like most Mark Lodges in the Province of Warwickshire, the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons has had its ups and downs and has suffered the sad loss of a considerable number of Past Masters, all of which are listed in the roll of Past Masters on Honours board in the Temple and whose names will undoubtedly bring back fond memories to all those who remember them. The most recent of which, was when the Lodge suffered the very sad loss of W Bro Brian Foster following his passing to the Grand Lodge above in November 2019 just six months after being installed as Worshipful Master of the Lodge.

In compiling the booklet I found that the history of the Mark Degree is to say the least complex and is undoubtedly a fascinating subject for Masonic research.

Although rejected by UGLE as part of Craft Freemasonry, the Mark Degree is an integral part of Freemasonry and is the most popular Degree outside of Craft Freemasonry with in excess of 1,500 Mark Lodges in England and Wales alone. And according to Grand Lodge that figure has increased to around 1,600 Mark Lodges, which shows just how popular the Mark Degree is in England and Wales.

The Mark Degree is still to be discovered by many Craft Masons in England. And surprisingly brethren, having spoken with a number of longstanding Craft Freemasons and they have told me that the Mark Degree was something that they knew little of and had never been invited to join.

The Mark Masons special emphasis on Brotherly love epitomises the fundamental principles of Freemasonry and encapsulates the happy and friendly spirit, which we as Mark Master Masons are fortunate enough to experience. It is undoubtedly one of the friendliest of Masonic Orders, known throughout Freemasonry as “the friendly Degree” which is reflected in its popularity amongst Freemasons.

So what I would say to each and every one of you this evening, please don't take it for granted that the members of your respective Craft Lodges know about the Mark Degree. I would encourage you all to take the opportunity to talk about the wonders of this beautiful and important Degree in Freemasonry with the members of your Craft Lodges so that our Mark Lodges can continue to flourish and receive new candidates, who in turn can experience the wonders of the Mark Degree.

The members of the Rugby Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 776 look forward to the continued success of the Lodge over the next one hundred years and thank you once again for your support on this special occasion this evening.

Presentation given by:

W Bro Gordon John Ferguson  *PProvGSO*