

***“Your work is rejected” – being a talk on some aspects of the inspection of the work portion of the Mark Masters Degree.***

***(Alan L. Hart 1 May 2011)***

**Introduction:**

Have you ever thought about why we seem to treat this part of the Mark Masters degree ceremony so lightly and almost rejoice in the apparent humiliation of the candidate? Equally have you ever thought about why it is important that “the skilful craftsman who made it” then finds the discarded stone again?

Like many of my talks this is one based on a personal interpretation of a small part of our rituals in what to me is a context of the overall plan or aim of Freemasonry. You may easily agree or disagree with my suggestions – that is your prerogative but at least I hope that at the end of this little talk you have given the issue some contemplation to this subject and “the Spirit of Truth has applied to your hearts the moral of these ceremonies”. As always the format will alter between occasions where I present this talk depending on your input.

The basis I will follow here is to ask that our First Principal allows me the latitude to have the Workmen’s Gates set up with the Overseers at their post and then for a volunteer to be guided through the ritual in a visual part of the talk. Commencing and stopping at each of the several parts to allow my observations and your comments. But before starting on that part of my talk let me provide some general comments

**Background generally & Masonically.**

The whole thrust of the Mark Masters Degree is a lesson in humility, perseverance and the treatment for dishonesty. As Neville Barker Cryer observes in his book “Tell me more about the Mark degree” when passing on a comment from a colleague “perhaps we are to learn that our work, however sincere, is not always appreciated as we might think it should be.” Which in many ways is a pertinent observation on much of our own lives.

The summary in our brochure gives a succinct insight into this part of our Order: i.e.

*The Degree of Mark Master is a continuation of the lessons taught in the 2nd (Fellowcraft) Degree. The Degree teaches that although we are often misunderstood, underrated and misrepresented, there is ONE who will make the rejected stone the Head of the corner. The Mark Master Degree is based on the ceremony of registering a Craftsman's mark in those years distinguished by operative craft masons and their temple building. Some scholars say it may be one of the earliest Masonic degrees.*

*The candidate for the Mark Master Degree represents a humble labourer in the quarries of King Solomon's Temple. This degree expands on the lessons of charity first introduced in the Entered Apprentice Degree and developed further in the Master Mason Degree. It also encourages the thoughtful student of the Craft to be true to his heart and be ever willing to stand up for what he knows to be right, even if that position is unpopular.*

*The degree of Mark Master teaches us to discharge our several duties punctually and with precision, the duty of assisting a distressed brother is forcibly illustrated. Historically the degree illustrates the process by which the work on the temple accomplished by each craftsman was identified.*

One point we often miss though is that this portion of our ceremony follows the entrusting of the candidate with approval for his mark. As you will be aware in the Scottish system this degree can be taken either in a Craft Lodge or a Royal Arch Chapter yet as has been observed by others it is more correctly only the Mark Man part of the ritual that ties in after the Fellow Craft working. The parts relating to the Mark Master Mason seeking to be allowed to preside over a Lodge of Operative Masons as Master rather than Warden seem to relate more to the Master Masons Degree. Yet for both the timing of the Ceremony ties in with the period before the loss of Hiram Abiff and both portions of the Ceremony are based around the time of the building of Solomon’s Temple not the attempted rebuilding by Zerubbabel. The Mark Man portion seems to be targeted at a workman presenting himself before the Lodge to gain preliminary admission and registration to the body of workers entitled to be paid for their work. That in some ways is a completely different talk but

consider if you will why the simple presentation of a Mark, no matter how “well chosen and clearly defined” could of itself entitle a workman to the “wages due to patient industry and merit.”

In many ways then the symbolism associated with both the Fellow Craft and Mark Man and in turn the Mark Master Masons degrees lies in the sense that we are taught lessons in the building of our earthly temple. The crises we face when our work is rejected seems to me to have been designed by the originators of our ritual to cause us to contemplate further the building of “that Spiritual Mansion” an House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

That said lets now look at some specifics of what is to me a ceremony within a ceremony; a vignette if you like, or even a voir dire for legal use being a mini hearing conducted while a trial is underway.

### Some specifics

The **shape of the stones** – have you ever stopped to consider why the stones the deacons and the candidates are of a specific nature? The ritual clearly sets down that when the Deacons return with the Candidate who is only a Mark Man the senior deacon carries the **square** Ashlar, the Junior deacon the **oblong** Ashlar and the Candidate the Key Stone. In due course the **square** ashlar is placed at the Junior Warden's pedestal, the **oblong** ashlar at the Senior Warden's pedestal. But more of that later.

The **lack of a Mark** – which he has just had registered as part of the Mark Man portion of the ceremony – the Candidate is not instructed by the Deacons or anyone else that he must add his mark to his work to allow the inspectors of it (the Overseers) to see that the correct workman received payment. Again more of that on another occasion but keep this issue in mind as it was actually one of the major differences I noticed between the Irish working and our own.

**The plans** – while not being an architect I wonder at the time juxtaposition of the placement of the plans with the Overseers at the Gates. The lecture tells us that: “Every sixth working day it was the custom of the Overseers, or Mark Masters, to wait on the G.M.H.A. to receive the working plans as well as the instructions for carrying on the work, and keeping the men employed.” I haven’t yet worked this aspect through in my own mind so this will be part of this talk that will change with time.

**The gates** – have you ever stopped to consider why there are only 3 gates involved and whether they actually existed in the construction of the Temple? Mackey’s “Encyclopaedia” tells us that the reference to such gates is “wholly incorrect” and that “in the walls of the building itself there are no places of entrance except the door of the porch, which gave admission to the House.” He also opines “the Masonic idea of the Temple is entirely symbolic.” Thus to many they relate to the other symbolisms of our journey through life based albeit on a northern hemisphere concept of life and light travelling from the east to the west via the south. Consider also for a moment the passage of our ritual relating to the death of the builder and his confrontation at these gates.

Now to the participative part of this days work. V Ex with your assistance can we now set out the workmen’s gates as used in this Mark Lodge and also have some officers to take the roles of the Deacons, Candidate and Overseers?

I have copies of that part of the ritual we need for this next section.

### The Ceremony:

As you will recall the Candidate has taken his obligate and been told by the WMM “For the better elucidation of the secrets of this Degree, it is necessary that you should now proceed to the quarries in order to prepare a specimen of your work. You will then re-enter the Lodge as a Mark Man, under the guidance of the Senior Deacon”. We can dispense with the change of attire *i.e. the Candidate is prepared by being divested of Coat, Sleeves rolled to the elbow, with large leather apron*”- as are the Deacons – to my mind such is only designed to show that they are workmen seeking admission.

The ritual now commences with the Tyler giving an alarm, which is by way of use of the Fellow Craft knocks.

I.G. *Opening the door, asks the T.:* Whom have you there?

T. Workmen from the quarries.

I.G. Halt, while I report. *Closes the door.*

I.G. W.M.M., workmen from the quarries.

W.M.M. Let them be admitted.

If we could just briefly stop here we can observe a minor discrepancy in that neither the Inner Guard nor the Master seeks proof as to the identity of these workmen. Also while not stated here the Lecture tells us that the 80,000 operatives of whom our 3 were part “were hewers in the Quarries of Zaredatha”. My initial researches indicated that this is incorrect and the quarries of Jerusalem were actually in the northeastern part of the city. I have some issue with this little reference and may delve further in due course. I think it’s a reference to the area just outside the clay grounds where the bronze castings for the temple were made and seems to have been at the foot of the nearby mountain range. In the books of *Joshua* and *2 Kings*, it is called **Zarethan**, but in *2 Chronicles* it is called **Zeredathah**. *1 Kings* v 15 indicates that the quarries of the raw material stones was in the mountains and later v 18 seems to indicate that they were dressed separately by “Solomon’s builders and Hiram’s builders.” Conversely *2 Chronicles* ii v 18 refers to the “hewers in the mountains”. I think that there are 2 differing groups of stone masons here with some differences in skill levels and value to the overall work.

As mentioned above the deacons and candidate then enter with the Senior Deacon bearing the square ashlar, the Junior Deacon the oblong ashlar and the candidate the Key Stone.

I have given some thought as to why each bears their particular stone and what the meanings behind these are without final conclusion.

We know from elsewhere (in particular the First Degree Tracing Board) that the **square ashlar** is a stone of true die and square upon which the craftsmen have worked and moralised over. Elsewhere we also have the symbolism of the perfect ashlar as being “a stone of true die, a perfect cube which can only be tried and proved by the square and compasses. It represents to us the mind of man in his declining years after a life well spent in acts of piety and virtue.”

The **Oblong Ashlar** borne by the Junior Deacon seems to me to resonate with the “oblong square” with which term we more often associate the form of a Lodge.

A **keystone** is the wedge-shaped stone piece at the peak or apex of an arch or vault which is the final piece placed during construction and locks all the stones into position, allowing the arch to bear weight. Although an arch or vault cannot be self-supporting until the keystone is placed, the keystone experiences the least stress of any of the associated stones due to its position.

Returning now to our little piece of the Ceremony the Deacons and the Candidate then advance from the entrance by way of the North turning across the pavement about mid way and then proceed **behind** the Master Overseers pedestal to the front of the Junior Overseer where the Fellow craft knocks are given by the Senior Deacon – and the ritual says emphatically by him **ONLY**.

J.O. Who comes here?

Senior Deacon: Workmen from the quarries with materials for the building of the Holy Temple, which we are anxious to submit for your inspection.

J.O. I will examine them with pleasure.

The Junior Overseer takes the square ashlar from the Senior Deacon, strikes it O OO with his mallet, examines its finish, applies it to the square, tests it on his copy of the plan then says:

This is fair work and square work, and such as I have orders to receive. I will therefore give you the Pass Word in order that you may pass to the West Gate.

The Junior Overseer whispers the Password to the Senior Deacon who then moves to enable the Junior Deacon to approach. The latter then presents the oblong ashlar with similar ceremony and conversation, and on moving to the left gives place to the Candidate who presents the Key Stone which is tested as before.

J.O. This is a curiously wrought stone; it is neither square nor oblong, and is not in accordance with my plans. I cannot receive it, neither can I give you the Pass Word to the West Gate

If we stop again here for a moment we can see that we have an apparent avoidance of what the Junior Overseer told the WMM his duty was at the opening i.e. To guard the South Gate, examine all materials for the Building of the Holy Temple, and, if approved, to pass them to the Senior Overseer for further inspection. Nowhere in this answer did he place a caveat to allow him to let the Candidate pass and in fact his subsequent response to the Master Overseer adds in something that doesn't actually occur except by negative action.

The reasons for the knocks on the stone are clearly defined later in the lecture as being to testing it "as to its soundness, by giving three blows on it with a mallet". The continued use of the Fellow craft knocks simply reflects the overall connection with that Degree and the previous Ceremony of Mark Man.

**Back to the work** - The three then proceed to the West Gate, where the same discussion ensues between the Deacons and the Senior Overseer, who receives the Pass Word in a whisper from the Deacons and permits them to pass to the East Gate. The Candidate then presents the Key Stone, which is tested as before.

S.O. This is a curiously wrought stone; it is neither square nor oblong, nor such as in any respect my instructions will enable me to pass. Give me the Pass Word you received from the Junior Overseer at the South Gate.

Candidate (*Prompted by the Senior Deacon*) He declined to give it to me, informing me that my work was not in accordance with his plans.

S.O. Neither can I give you the Pass Word at the West Gate Although the work is not in accordance with my plans, yet, from the masterly skill displayed in its execution I am unwilling to reject it on my own responsibility; you can therefore submit it to the Master Overseer at the East Gate, or return to the quarries and there prepare other evidence of your ability.

Again we have this partial dereliction of duty for as with his colleague the Junior Overseer the Senior Overseer had clearly told the WMM that his duty was to guard the West Gate, examine all materials for the building of the Holy Temple, and, if approved, to pass them to the Master Overseer for final approval or rejection." We should note that the reference by the Senior Overseer to not giving the candidate "the Pass Word at the West Gate" is clearly an allusion to his communicating the password, Joppa, given to the deacons by the Junior Overseer which they have in turn just proved themselves eligible to pass their work on for inclusion in the building of the Holy Temple.

The Deacons and Candidate then present themselves to the Master Overseer where after testing the square and oblong ashlar he demands the evidence that the Deacons work has each in turn been duly passed by the previous inspectors of the work: - i.e.

M.O. Give me the Pass Word you received from the Overseer at the South Gate (on this being *given in a whisper the ashlar is handed back to each of the deacons respectively and the Master Overseer continues*). Your work is approved and shall be passed on to the builders.

You will note that there is an assumption that if they have the Pass word from the South Gate that they would not otherwise have been allowed to approach his inspection as they should have been turned back by the Senior Overseer at the West Gate.

The **square** ashlar is placed at the Junior Warden's pedestal, the **oblong** ashlar at the Senior Warden's pedestal. Note here the location as this could have some deep meaning, which just for the moment eludes me.

The Candidate then presents the Key Stone to the Master Overseer with all of us in the audience now anticipating what is to come.

M.O. *After examining and testing it.* This is a curiously wrought stone, and does not in any respect conform to my plans, or to the instructions I have received for the inspection of materials. Give me the Pass Word you received from the Overseer at the South Gate

Candidate: I cannot. He declined to give it to me. (etc)

M.O. And yet you have presumed to make your way to the East Gate and present yourself before me! Stand aside (*brushes Candidate aside*) while I call a council of my Bro. Overseers.

*The M.O. sounds his gavel. The Senior and Junior Overseers stand with the Fellow Craft Sign.*

Stopping briefly here we actually have an adherence to the duty of an officer as stated at the opening i.e. the Master Overseers duty is to guard the East Gate, examine all materials for the building of the Holy Temple and in any case of doubt or difficulty, to call a council of his Brother Overseers which he now does.

M.O. Bro. Overseers, notwithstanding the ample instructions you received when entrusted with the care of the Gates of the Holy Temple, you have allowed this stone to pass although it in no way answers to our plans or description. I am bound, therefore, not only to reject it, but to demand from you an explanation of this neglect of your duties.

J.O. I confess that this stone was presented to me at the South Gate, but, before permitting the Craftsman to enter, I informed him that his work was not of the description I had orders to receive; nevertheless from the extreme beauty of the stone and the skill displayed in the workmanship, I was unwilling to reject it on my own responsibility, and allowed the Craftsman to proceed to the West Gate without giving him the Pass Word.

You will note here the extension to what actually occurred earlier at the inspection at his gate when he “allowed to proceed”.

The Senior Overseer then states as his excuse “Prompted by feelings similar to those which actuated my Bro. J.O., and also being unwilling to take responsibility of rejecting the stone, I left the Craftsman free, either to return to the quarries or to pass onto the East Gate if willing to incur the risk; but I declined to give him the Pass Word to which his work did not entitle him”.

Again an opting out – which since the Nuremberg Trials is not a legal option! The Master Overseer then should in my view ponder on the responses before responding.

M.O. Bro. Overseers, I accept your explanations as some excuse for what I had previously regarded as neglect of your Masonic duty; but as the orders of our Grand Master are peremptory, as to receive only such stones for the building of the Holy Temple as are either square or oblong, and marked and numbered by a regular M.M.M., we have no alternative but to condemn and reject this stone as unfitted for the work. You will therefore **cause** it to be heaved over among the rubbish.

*This is done by the Deacons in the proper manner. This as you will observe is not actually what the Master Overseer has directed be done. It is interesting that Master Overseer clearly says that the Junior & Senior Overseer are to cause the stone to be heaved over amongst the rubbish yet it is actually the deacons who do so without further instruction. It seems to me that this sentence is misdirected. Perhaps an additional rubric is needed clarifying who he is talking to at that brief stage. The Lecture’s actual reference is to this being the fate of a Fellow craft.*

*The Senior Deacon now instructs the Candidate how to give the Sign of Dismay. – “Alas; Alas My Labour is Lost”! (Although these words are not uniform.)*

M.O. To Candidate. Your work is rejected.

*As you will recall the Candidate is conducted to a seat in the S.E. part of the Lodge Room.*

And so ends our little play.

So what then do you make of this part of the ceremony?

Have you seen aspects of rejection and redemption?

Did you note that the only stones which were to be received by the builders at the temple were those marked and numbered and yet the candidate at no time was directed so to do.

**Comments and Questions please:** these may help you and I both to discover more about what this degree represents in the overall scheme of Masonic knowledge.

Some odd/no longer used words for now and later:

Peremptory = leaving no opportunity for denial or refusal