

MASONIC DEGREES IN ENGLAND

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EVERYTHING that Masonry has to teach is to be found in the three Symbolic Degrees, and it is generally recognized that the Grades and Orders which have grown up around Craft Masonry are not positively essential, but are useful insofar as they shed further light on the fundamental teachings. Most of these degrees are of modern origin, and their number is legion. Many have been organized and placed on the Masonic market by some enterprising Brother, who has made them popular for a time, but when they were found to have no real value they quickly disappeared into that oblivion from which they had come.

There is no need to consider these Masonic mushrooms further, but there are a number of degrees outside the pale of the Symbolic Lodge which have a real utility, have spread over most of the civilized world, and have had an uninterrupted existence long enough to prove their real value.

At the present time, there are probably more of these degrees to be found in England than in any other English speaking country, and their organization and arrangement is very different to that in America, so that a short description of the systems of degrees in England may be of interest.

The York Rite of the United States and Canada, and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, cover almost all the degrees now actively worked in North America, but in England the York Rite is unknown. All the thirteen degrees, with the exception of the Degree of Past Master, are worked in England, but they come under six different governing bodies, and are not organized into one system.

The Craft is governed by the United Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of England, which came into existence at the Union of the Ancient and Modern Grand Lodges in 1813, and according to the Constitutions of this body "pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more, viz.: those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch." Consequently, outside St. John's Masonry, the only recognized Degree or Order is that of the Royal Arch.

The Grand Lodge holds communications every three months, the Officers being appointed annually. The jurisdiction is divided into Provinces and Districts, the former in England and Wales and the latter in other parts of the Empire. Each Province is ruled by a Provincial Grand Master who is appointed by the Grand Master. He selects his own Officers in his Provincial Grand Lodge, which usually meets annually. The government of a District is carried out in the same way by a District Grand Master. The boundaries of the majority of the Provinces coincide with those of the English counties; Lodges, however, in the city of London are not governed in this way, but are directly under the rule of the Grand Lodge. This system of government also obtains in the majority of other degrees.

Under this Constitution, the Apprentice is considered as a Mason and as well entitled to have a voice and to vote in the Lodge as any other member. For this reason, all routine work and general business is carried out in the First Degree. Lodges are opened first in the First Degree and then in the Second and Third Degrees successively, if required for ceremonial work.

The Master, Treasurer and Tyler of each Private Lodge are elected annually by the members. The Master appoints his Wardens and all the remaining officers.

The ceremonial work is, of course, essentially the same as that found in America. An interesting point in English Lodges is that the American form of Altar is unknown. The Greater Lights are placed on the pedestal in front of the Master.

The Holy Royal Arch is governed by the Supreme Grand Chapter which works in conjunction with the United Grand Lodge. Each Private Chapter must be attached to a Craft Lodge and carries the same number on the Register. The First Principal of the Chapter represents Z, the Second, H, and the Third, J. In the Ritual, the sequence of events is slightly different to that of America and the ceremony of "Passing the Veils" is omitted except in a few Chapters.

The Degree of Grand High Priest is not very widely known in Great Britain; it is conferred on installed Third Principals in the Order of the Holy Royal Arch, and is under the jurisdiction of the Grand Council of the Allied Degrees, and will be further considered in relation to that body.

The Mark Master's Degree is conferred on Master Masons under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons. This degree may be taken either before or after the Royal Arch. The Degree of Royal Ark Mariner is governed by the Grand Master of Mark Master Masons assisted by the Royal Ark Council, and is conferred only on Mark Masters. It appears to have had its origin in England about the end of the eighteenth century, and is little known outside that country. The time is symbolically that of the Deluge, and certain moral truths are inculcated.

Some years ago a proposition was made in the United Grand Lodge of England to recognize the degree of Mark Master. This was carried, but a great number of opposers to this innovation attended the following Quarterly Communication, with the result that the minutes of the previous meeting were not confirmed. Since then the question has not again been raised.

The Degree of Most Excellent Master is conferred by Councils of Royal and Select Masters, which also give the Degrees of Royal, Select and Super-Excellent Master. These degrees are conferred on members of the Order of the Holy Royal Arch who are also Mark Master Masons.

The Order of the Temple in England is governed by the Great Priory assisted by Provincial Priorities. The bodies conferring the Order are entitled Preceptories, the ruler of each being a Preceptor. Although essentially the same as the American work, the English Ritual is not so elaborate and the clothing is simpler. The frock coat and hat are unknown in the British Isles, and members of the Order on all ceremonial occasions wear the white tunic and mantle and a crimson velvet cap. The Orders of the Temple and Malta can be conferred on Royal Arch Masons whether they have taken any other degrees or not. The candidate is first installed a Knight of the Temple and the Mediterranean Pass is conferred as a preliminary degree to the Order of Malta.

The Red Cross Degree is unknown by that name but is substantially the same as the Red Cross of Babylon, which is under the jurisdiction of the Grand Council of the Allied Degrees.

This completes the list of degrees of what is known as the York Rite in America. The next series for consideration is the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, or, as it is known in England, the Ancient and Accepted Rite, the title "Scottish" having been

dropped by the Supreme Council some years ago. This system is very different to that under the two jurisdictions of the United States. Only five of the thirty-three degrees are conferred ceremonially, namely the 18th, 30th, 31st, 32d and 33d degrees. Chapters of Princes Rose Croix are chartered by the Supreme Council, and these bodies have power to confer the degrees from the 4d to the 17d in a short form, and the Degree of Sovereign Prince Rose Croix in full. This is the only degree conferred ceremonially by Rose Croix Chapters. There are no Consistories in this jurisdiction and the higher degrees are only conferred by the Supreme Council. Applicants for the 30d, which is the next conferred in full after the 18d, must have been members of the Order for three years at least, and installed as Most Wise Sovereign in the Chair of a Rose Croix Chapter. The degrees from the 19d to the 29d are conferred in short form on Candidates for the 30d. The Supreme Council select all members for the higher degrees, and the numbers are limited in the case of the 31d to 99 members, and in the case of the 32d to 63 members. The 33d is limited in a similar way and nine members of that degree constitute the Supreme Council.

The Degrees of Knight of the Red Cross of Constantine, Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and Knight of St. John the Evangelist are conferred in Conclaves of the Masonic and Military Order. Candidates for admission must be Master Masons and in the case of the two latter degrees, Royal Arch Masons. The supreme authority for this series is the Grand Imperial Conclave of England.

There is one other Masonic governing body of importance in England, namely, the Grand Council of the Allied Degrees, which has under its jurisdiction a very large number of side degrees. As in every country where the Craft has made great progress, a large number of honorary and side degrees have appeared in England from time to time. Some of these have been conferred in Lodges having no central authority, while others were communicated by one Mason to another. To give these degrees a common form of government this Grand Council was formed. It has under its jurisdiction over forty distinct degrees many of which are not now worked. Every Council under this obedience has authority to work the degrees of St. Lawrence the Martyr, Grand Tyler of King Solomon, Knights of Constantinople, the Red Cross of Babylon, Grand High Priest and Secret Monitor. The two former of these are, I believe, unknown in America, while

the third is slightly known. The Degree of Grand Tyler of King Solomon is very similar to that of Select Master in the York Rite. The Red Cross of Babylon is substantially the same as the Red Cross Degree conferred as a preliminary to the Order of the Temple in American Commanderies. The Degree of Grand High Priest which is conferred on installed Third Principals of Royal Arch Chapters probably came from the United States, and the Rituals in the two countries are almost identical. The Degree of Secret Monitor is well known as a side degree in some parts of America. In addition to being conferred by Councils of the Allied Degrees in England, it is worked in more extensive form in Conclaves under the jurisdiction of the Grand Conclave of the Order of the Secret Monitor, which is a body quite distinct from the Grand Council of the Allied Degrees. Of the remaining degrees, under the obedience of the Grand Council, some are conferred by the Royal Kent Tabernacle and Council at Newcastle-on-Tyne, while the remainder are not now actively worked.

In England, there are now five Provincial Grand Lodges of the Royal Order of Scotland. The oldest of these is the Provincial Grand Lodge of London and the Metropolitan Counties and this only confers the Order and Knighthood on Masons of the 30d:

An article on this subject would not be complete without mentioning the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia which was put into form in 1866 by Robert Wentworth Little. This organization is not Masonic in its nature but requires Candidates to be Master Masons. Its ceremonies are hermetic in origin, and its object is purely literary.

Of the hundreds of Masonic degrees which have been found in England at different times, very many have fallen into disuse. There still exist, however, a great number, and it has been no easy problem to make sufficient mention of the more worthy ones and yet to keep this article within reasonable bounds. All over the world it is the same; the Craft is the immovable basis on which a superstructure of explanatory degrees is being built. Some of these are useful and take a firm hold, but others have no sufficient reason for their existence. They last for a time and then fall into the abyss and are forgotten.