

During the ceremony analogies are drawn between the dangers of the flood and the dangers of life. We are reminded of how we should strive to reach the Ark, the haven of rest, just as did Noah's family and the other occupants of the Ark in the Biblical tales of the deluge.

Most Royal Ark Mariner Lodges meet three times per year, usually on the same evening as their Mark Lodge. In some instances the RAM installation may be held at a different meeting so as to allow the incoming Worshipful Commander to preside over the Festive Board and to have "his own" evening. The oldest Royal Ark Mariner Lodge in the Province of South Wales is St. John's Lodge No 28 whose warrant is dated from 17th September 1874

The officers of a Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners are similar to those in a Mark Lodge although they bear different names. The Master is known as The Worshipful Commander, the Secretary as the Scribe, the Inner Guard as the Guardian and the Tyler as the Warder.



RAM JEWEL

The principal officers represent Noah (Worshipful Commander) and two of his sons Japeth (Senior Warden) and Shem (Junior Warden). The Wardens sit, as in the craft lodges of old, in the North West and South West of the Lodge room respectively, the Deacons being stationed together in the West.

There is only one ceremony (apart from installation of a Worshipful Commander) and that is the ceremony of elevation which at around forty-five minutes is relatively short. Only one ritual is used throughout the constitution.

INTERESTED? Contact your Mark Secretary or Grand Lodge Officers or anyone wearing a rainbow ribbon.

www.southwalesmarkmastermasons.co.uk

This leaflet is adapted from an article published on the Website of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of Northamptonshire and originally written by W Bro John Oakley-Smith, RAMGR, DPGM - based on an article by V W Bro Brian A Vickers, RAMGR (Past DPGM (London)).



THE ROYAL ARK MARINER DEGREE

HISTORY

The history of the Degree is an obscure and difficult subject and the number of historical facts that have emerged over the years have indeed been small. As a result the precise origins of the Royal Ark Mariner Degree are unknown.

The Degree is around two hundred years old and, as its name suggests, it has a nautical flavour taking for its setting the circumstances leading up to the Great Flood and the steps taken by Noah to build the Ark by which mankind was preserved from perishing in the 'Universal Deluge'.

Like the Mark Master Mason's Degree, which is based on an established fact (i.e. the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem), so the Degree of Royal Ark Mariner is also based on an actual happening, i.e. the Great Flood, as recorded in the Bible and as verified in 1929 by the archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley, who not only found clear evidence of the flood, but established that it had occurred some 6,000 years previously.

The legend of Noah, his sons, the Ark and the Deluge were enacted in the Mystery Plays of the seventeenth century and continued as catechisms in many of the early Masonic rituals. By the 1750s there was a Degree of Noachites or Prussian Knights. However, the first authentic record of the Degree appears in the minutes of a meeting held in Bath in 1790. Numerous records exist throughout the country of the ceremony of Elevation being performed since that date.

The claims that a Grand Lodge of Ark Mariners was formed in 1772 and presided over by HRH The Duke of Clarence are not substantiated by the

known facts and thus later claims that this Grand Lodge had fallen into disuse, only to be revived in 1871, do not really stand up to any Degree of scrutiny.

Whilst the Degree seems to have been practised in a variety of ways and in a host of different Lodges, there was almost certainly no Grand Lodge presiding over the Degree. We are, of course, reminded of the widespread practice of the Degree every time we enter a Craft Lodge and observe the use of the dove bearing an olive branch by the Deacons rather than Mercury, the messenger of the Gods, which we see in Mark Lodges.

Morton Edwards, having been Passed to the Chair of Noah, seems to have been fired with the ambition of reviving the Grand Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners. Accordingly a meeting was held on 13 May 1870 in the Bow Road, London house of Brother Dorrington and it was agreed to reconstitute a Grand Lodge.

Since a number of Mark Lodges had also begun to work the Degree there was some conflict with The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, which had been formed in 1856. This came to a head when Brother The Reverend Canon Portal, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons announced, also in 1870, that since the Degree of Ark Mariner had been worked in Mark Lodges since 1790, the Mark would protect the Royal Ark Mariner Degree under a new Grand Master's Royal Ark Council. This is the reason for Mark Grand Lodge's current control of the Royal Ark Mariners.

The conflict and dissension continued well after 1870 until the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons simply purchased the Degree from Morton Edwards for the sum of £25! The receipt for this transaction still hangs in the library of Mark Mason's Hall in St. James's Street, London.

Since that time the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and its Districts and Lodges Overseas is automatically Grand Master of The Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Royal Ark Mariners. The Degree of Royal Ark Mariner may only be conferred on Mark Master Masons, the government of the two Degrees is inextricably linked and a Royal Ark Mariner Lodge is said to be moored to a Mark Lodge bearing the same number, irrespective of age, and generally bearing the same name.

More recently the Tracing Board has been re-introduced, it having been out of favour for over one hundred years. That it could be re-activated was in no small measure due to Gladsmuir Lodge No. 367 (of the Province of Hertfordshire) who had kept a copy of their tracing board and with the assistance of the then senior members of the Province they persuaded the 'powers that be' that it would add value to our Lodges and their ceremonial. Royal Ark Mariner Lodges are also starting to revive the use of a special floor cloth which adds much lustre to the ceremonies.

THE DEGREE

This degree, although worked under the aegis of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, and requiring every candidate to be a Mark Master Mason, has no historical connection whatsoever with that degree. Mark Grand Lodge's rule over the 'Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Royal Ark Mariners' is simply a quirk of fate. It stands entirely alone and totally unrelated to any other degree in Freemasonry.

The qualification for "elevation to membership" is, as mentioned above, that of being a Mark Master Mason.

Elevation into the Royal Ark Mariner Degree commemorates the providence and mercy of God and relates to the legend of the deluge. The subject matter being taken directly from The Bible is naturally both beautiful and instructive. When the candidate enters the Lodge room his attention is directed to three pillars and at one stage the Ark is momentarily symbolised in terms similar to the Ark of Salvation. The candidate is finally instructed to advance in the spirit of the Cardinal Virtues.



ROYAL ARK MARINER APRON

The teaching of the Degree emphasises the importance of the family strengths and the need for each member of society to play his part for the benefit of all. We are taught that out of chaos and catastrophe mankind can survive and that we should face adversity together, helping to look after those less fortunate than ourselves.