

This is a very special meeting of the Godson Lodge of Mark Master Masons in that Very Wor. Bro. F. H. Griffiths yesterday, 15th November, celebrated the 50th anniversary of his being advanced to the Mark Degree.

Quite obviously very few individuals have the opportunity to celebrate 50 years in Mark Masonry and very few Lodges are privileged to have a member of 50 years standing.

We extend to Very Wor. Bro. Griffiths our congratulations on attaining this unique anniversary.

When I was asked by the Wor. Master to deliver a Paper on this special occasion it seemed to me that since we were dealing with a 50 years celebration one could not do better than think in terms of the period 50 years ago when Very Wor. Bro. Griffiths became a member of Godson Lodge, but following that line of thought I came to the conclusion that that would be rather like starting in the middle and that it would probably be better to consider for the benefit possibly of our visitors or our younger members the circumstances in which Godson Lodge came into being and the important events of the past.

It may be thought that in choosing the title for this Paper which appears on the Lodge Summons I am wrong in placing "the Early Days of Godson Lodge" first and "Mark Masonry in Worcestershire" second, but the reason for this choice will, I think, appear in the course of this Paper.

The early history of Mark Masonry may well be the subject of a Paper which could be delivered on some other occasion and for the benefit of those present who would like to go into matters of history I can thoroughly recommend the History published under the authority of the General Board in 1969 written by the late Wor. Bro. Handfield-Jones, Grand Librarian, but for the purposes of this Paper and of leading into the early days of Godson Lodge I would like to commence with a look at the time of the Articles of Union between the two English Grand Lodges in the Craft in 1813, when it was:

"Declared and pronounced that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more namely the entered apprentice, the fellow craft and the master mason including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch 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 constitution of those Orders".

This latter part of the statement of Grand Lodge in 1813 no longer appears in the Book of Constitutions and though the second half of the article appeared to show a liberal and fraternal attitude to the extra-craft degrees, by the end of 1817 Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter took their stand upon the first sentence only and insisted that only the three Craft degrees and the Royal Arch constituted general

masonry and from that position the Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter have never withdrawn.

Though this must be accepted as being a rejection of the Mark Degree it was not until later in the year 1856 that the second and final rejection took place. Between 1813 and 1851 little or nothing was heard of the working of the Mark Degree in England but the Bon Accord Mark Lodge was then formed. In 1855 Grand Lodge (Craft) appointed a Committee to consider the position of the Mark Degree and that Committee reported that:

"Having obtained all the information in its power, the Committee is of opinion that the Mark Masons Degree so called, does not form a portion of the Royal Arch Degree and that it is not essential to Craft Masonry, but the Committee was of opinion that there was nothing objectionable in the Degree and that it might be considered as forming a graceful addition to the Fellow Craft Degree." This report of the Committee was accepted by Grand Lodge in

1856, but at the next quarterly communication of Grand Lodge it was resolved that the minute which referred to the Mark Degree should not be confirmed and thus Grand Lodge in the craft twice rejected the Mark Degree first in 1813 when the Articles of Union were ratified and secondly in 1856 when the minutes of the earlier meeting were not confirmed.

By that time that is to say in June 1856 it was quite clear that there was a considerable body of brethren who were interested in the Mark Degree and a meeting was called of all the officers of Bon Accord Mark Master Masons Lodge to be held for the purpose of forming a Grand Mark Masters Lodge. That meeting was duly held, and it was agreed to form a Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons and it is interesting to note that according to the records which are available the Grand Lodge in the Mark Degree was formed on the same day as the meeting of the Grand Lodge in the Craft, which inflicted the second and final rejection.

There appeared in the Time newspaper on the 28th June, 12th July and 19th July of 1856 a Notice that the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales the Colonies and Possessions of the British Crown had been formed and that all applications for warrants were to be addressed to one William Louis Collins who was described as Grand Secretary and whose address was given, in the advertisement.

Grand Lodge in the Mark Degree seems to have followed from that beginning an orderly pattern but it is very interesting for us in Worcestershire to note that when Grand Mark Lodge was so formed it originally met in London on two occasions each year called the half yearly communications at one of which the Grand Officers of the year were appointed. Shortly after the formation of Grand Lodge in 1856 it

was decided that in an endeavour to excite interest in the provinces movable Grand Lodges were to be held in different parts of the Country.

The first movable Grand Lodge was held at Hull on Thursday April 16th 1868, but we are told that no minutes of that meeting were taken or if they were taken, they were not preserved.

The second movable Grand Lodge is the one which is of particular interest to us in Worcestershire in that it was held at Worcester on the 21st October 1868 and was reported in full. It is said that there was a splendid muster of Grand Officers and a large gathering of the members of Lechmere Lodge No. 59 which Lodge had sponsored the meeting.

Lechmere Lodge was consecrated on the 22nd May 1863 only seven years after the formation of Grand Mark Lodge and indeed the number "59" shows that it was indeed one of the earliest Mark Lodges.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the notable events in connection with the province in our Worcestershire Masonic Year Book does not mention this meeting of Mark Grand Lodge at Worcester in October 1868.

In the history of Grand Lodge which I have referred it is noted by Wor. Bro. Handfield-Jones that it was at this movable Grand Lodge at Worcester that the question of ladies being invited to Festival Dinners to be seated with their men folk was first raised and it appears that this was the origin of the Festivals which are still part of

the regular Masonic year.

Lechmere Lodge No. 59 was as I have said consecrated in May 1863 and for approaching 20 years was the only Mark Lodge meeting in the geographical County of Worcester. There was no Provincial Mark Lodge and there was no Provincial Grand Master of Worcestershire in the Mark Degree.

In the year 1867 Augustus Frederick Godson was advanced in Lechmere Lodge No. 59 and in the year 1883 he was appointed Deputy Provincial Grand Master for Warwickshire. *became a Member of Shakespeare Lodge No. 40 (Warwick)*

A petition for the formation of this the Godson Lodge of Mark Master Masons was presented in December 1883 shortly after Wor. Bro. Godson became Deputy P.G.M. for Warwickshire and the warrant was granted on the 1st January 1884 fixing the dates of meetings as the third Monday in February, May, August and November at Kidderminster Masonic Hall and it was at the Kidderminster Masonic Hall that this Lodge consecrated on the 18th February 1884. It may be interesting to note that though Wor. Bro. Godson consecrated the Lodge he is also said to have been a founder member.

There were nine founders of whom four are shown as members of Lechmere Lodge, two of Howe Lodge and two of Foulke Lodge. Again, it is interesting to note that though Wor. Bro. Godson had been advanced in Lechmere Lodge, a Worcestershire Lodge, he is on the list of founders shown as being a member of Shakespeare Lodge No. 40,

a Warwickshire Lodge.

The arrangements at the consecration meeting strike one as being unusual at least in the light of our present practice.

Previous to the consecration ceremony a Mark Master Masons Lodge was opened by the Officers of Lechmere Lodge and a ballot was taken for sixteen candidates for advancement. It will be seen that the ballot therefore took place either in Lechmere Lodge or if it be considered that the ballot was in Godson Lodge then the ballot was taken before Godson Lodge was consecrated.

The ballot having proved in favour of these candidates, they were advanced to the Degree of Mark Master Mason and again it is observed that apparently they were so advanced in Lechmere Lodge.

Following the consecration Officers were appointed who included several of those who had earlier that day been advanced to the Mark Degree, namely what were then described as First and Second Overseer, Senior and Junior Deacon, the Secretary, the Inner Guard, the Registrar of Marks, the Director of Ceremonies and two Stewards.

At that meeting Wor. Bro. Godson by a gift of ten guineas qualified the Chair of the Worshipful Master of Godson Lodge as a life subscriber to the Mark Benevolent Fund.

The first Minutes of Godson Lodge conclude with the following words:

The whole of those present adjourned to the Banquet served

in the Dining Hall where the after proceedings terminated
in a manner worthy of the occasion and to the gratification
of all concerned.

As has been noted, the Warrant provided for the regular meetings
of the Lodge to be in February, May, August and November. The
consecration having been held in the February, the next meeting was
in May 1884 followed by a regular meeting on 18th August 1884 when it
was recorded that:

"It is proposed that the Grand Mark Master Earl of Kintore
be solicited that he will under Regulation 54 of the
Constitution of Grand Mark Lodge grant a Provincial Grand
Mark Lodge for the Province of Worcestershire, that Province
having now two successful Mark Lodges. And this Lodge
further recommend that the Worshipful the Deputy Provincial
Grand Master of Warwickshire, Worshipful Bro. A. F. Godson,
be the first Provincial Grand Mark Master".

The Motion was put from the Chair, was carried unanimously and
ordered to be entered in the Minutes of this the Godson Lodge, so
that it was properly be said that this Lodge sponsored Provincial
Grand Lodge.

There is no further reference to this Resolution in the Minutes
of subsequent meetings of this, the Godson Lodge, but it is evident
that the Petition was acceded to by the fact that a Provincial Grand

it was resolved that:

"That the next Meeting of this Lodge be held at the Saracen's Head Hotel, Dudley and that a Dispensation be obtained for that purpose".

The experiment of meeting at Dudley met with instant success and at the first meeting held at the Saracen's Head Hotel on 18th August 1890 there were elected to be member of this Lodge seven members of Harmonic Lodge and two members of Royal Standard Lodge of whom five were present who were there and then advanced to this Degree.

Since the Meeting at the Saracen's Head Hotel on 18th August 1890, the Lodge has met at Kidderrinstor on only four occasions, all the other meetings having been held at the Saracen's Head Hotel until the present Temple was dedicated.

In fact, it is noteworthy that the Saracen's Head Hotel, Dudley was referred to from November 1907 as "the Freemasons' Tavern".

During the years from the constitution of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Worcestershire two members of this Godson Lodge have been Provincial Grand Masters, namely, Augustus Frederick Godson a Founder Member of this Lodge who was Provincial Grand Master from 1884 to 1906 and our present Provincial Grand Master, who was appointed in 1969.

During a similar period no fewer than seven members of this Lodge have occupied the office of Deputy Provincial Grand Master,

Mark Lodge was constituted and held its first meeting under the Banner of Lechmere Lodge of Mark Master Masons Number 59 at Worcester on December 8th 1884, when Worshipful Bro. A. F. Godson was installed as the First Provincial Grand Master, an office which he continued to hold until his death in 1906.

It will now be seen why in the title to this paper Godson Lodge was referred to first and the Province of Worcestershire second, that being the order in which they came into being.

Until the end of 1890 the Lodge met regularly as provided by the Warrant on the third Monday in February May August and November at the Kidderminster Masonic Hall, though it is interesting to note that there are no Minutes of a meeting in May 1885, a page having been cut from the book at this point, though it is doubtful whether any importance is to be attached to this fact or not. The Minutes of February, 1885 were signed as confirmed in August 1885, thus implying that there was, in fact, no meeting in the May.

For a period of over three years from November 1885 no new candidates offered themselves for advancement and attendances generally were very small. In 1888 it was suggested by Very Wor. Bro. George Taylor, then the Deputy Provincial Grand Master for Worcestershire, that the Lodge should be made movable and that some of the meetings should be held in Dudley, but that suggestion was not acted upon until 19th May 1890 when, on the proposition of Wor. Bro. Abraham Green,

namely, George Taylor 1887 to 1891, Abraham Green from 1891 to 1902 and 1905 to 1911, E. J. Chambers from 1902 to 1905, James Jones from 1919 to 1928, H. V. Stanton from 1932 to 1937, H. R. Bewley from 1961 to 1969, whilst amongst those who have carried out the duties of Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies is Very Wor. Bro. F. H. Griffiths who occupied that office from 1950 to 1962.

When Provincial Grand Lodge was constituted in 1884 the Province consisted of two Mark Lodges and remained so until 1907 when a further Lodge was consecrated.

By 1930 the three Lodges in the Province had become seven.

When our present Prov. Grand Master assumed office the number had grown to ¹⁵19 and is now ¹⁷17.....