

## HOWE MARK MASTERS LODGE - TIME IMMEMORIAL

### THE EARLY YEARS 1850-1878

Whenever a new member is to be Advanced into the Lodge, I write to him detailing the formalities and add a few brief details of the history of the Lodge, but apart from those few details, newly Advanced brethren know nothing of our origin and I think that they should be aware of our history.

The first minute book makes fascinating reading and dates from the Consecration in 1850 to its reconstitution in 1878. The founding members were brethren who were about to form the Howe Craft Lodge and the purpose of the Mark Lodge was to Advance brethren from Howe Craft into the Mark though it was agreed that brethren from other Craft Lodges could be Advanced into Howe Mark. However, the Howe Craft ran into some problems and the Mark Lodge was Consecrated before the Craft Lodge and as a Mark Lodge had then to meet under the Warrant of a Craft Lodge the first meetings of this Lodge were held under the Warrant of St. Paul's Lodge No. 51.

Consecration took place on the 15th day of October 1850 and was carried out by a deputation from Newstead Lodge of Mark Masters from Nottingham. The first meeting after that did not take place until 4 years later on 9th day of February 1854. The delay doubtless due to the delay in the founding of the Craft Lodge. In 1850 there was no Grand Mark Lodge, no Provincial Grand Mark Lodge and no standardised ritual of the Degree. Scattered over England, Scotland and Ireland were Lodge and Chapters which claimed the right by immemorial custom to confer the degrees of Mark Mason and Mark Master according to rituals of their own which differed widely in form and intention and also the further right to constitute other Lodges which could in turn confer the same degrees.

Having read the first minute book several times I never fail to marvel at the responsible manner in which our founders conducted the affairs of the Lodge. On several occasions the ruling Master is recorded as reminding brethren who were to

take office that they should only accept if they were prepared to a regular and prompt attendance and a better knowledge of the ritual such as then existed.

In its early days the Lodge was temporarily placed under the superintendence of the St. Paul's Lodge but upon the issue of the Warrant for the Howe Lodge No. 857 the Mark Lodge was handed over to that Lodge which continued to manage its affairs for the next 20 years. The union with the Howe Lodge No. 857 was affirmed at the meeting on the 9th day of February 1854 and the authority of that Lodge recognised in its management. The Warrant which had been granted by the Newstead Lodge was altered by erasure and interlineation to serve as the Warrant for the Howe Mark Masters' Lodge No. 857, as it was called. The position of the Mark Lodge as an adjunct of the Craft Lodge is clearly illustrated by the fact that all Candidates for the Mark Degree were balloted for in the Howe Craft Lodge No. 857 to whom the fees were also paid. There was no annual subscription of any kind and the ordinary running expenses of the Mark Lodge were covered by the Advancement fees. Howe Mark Lodge enjoyed early success and Candidates came forward from Craft Lodges throughout the Midlands. The Lodge gave its support to the formation of other Mark Lodges including the Shakespeare, now No. 41 T.I, the Bedford No. 115 and the Athol No. 174. It actually granted a Warrant of Constitution to the Athol Mark Lodge on the 16th day of June 1802. It also Advanced certain brethren into the Mark Degree to further their efforts in founding a Mark Lodge in France.

In consequence of the Grand Lodge of England to recognise the Mark Degree many of the Mark Lodges combined in 1857 to form a Grand Mark Lodge with Lord Leigh the Provincial Grand Master of Warwickshire as the first Grand Mark Master. Howe Mark Lodge debated the matter over more than ten years as to whether to join the Grand Lodge and in 1868 appointed a deputation to wait upon the Howe Craft Lodge to obtain approval to the affiliation of the Mark Lodge to the Grand Mark Lodge. Alas the Craft Lodge appears to have been too busy to see the deputation and in consequence the Mark Lodge did not meet again until 1873. When the members passed a formal resolution to affiliate with Grand Mark Lodge.

The Worshipful Master informed the Craft Lodge of this decision and received a reply to the effect that the Mark Lodge only existed to serve the needs of the Craft Lodge and thought of

a separate existence was intolerable. The Mark Lodge was the property of the Craft Lodge and had no powers to discuss anything, but only to Advance brethren into the Mark Degree.

This snub dealt the Mark Lodge a death blow and the meeting of April 1873 at which this answer was read is memorable as the last meeting of the Howe Mark Lodge No. 857. There is little doubt that the failure of Howe Mark Lodge to affiliate with the Grand Lodge delayed the founding of the Provincial Grand Lodge. Regulations required there to be three Mark Lodges to form a Provincial Grand Lodge and without Howe Mark there were only two in Warwickshire. Eventually Wulfruna Mark Lodge in Staffordshire joined with the other two Warwickshire Mark Lodges to form the Warwickshire and Staffordshire Provincial Grand Mark Lodge.

Following the failure of the Lodge to agree to affiliation with Grand Lodge, Howe Mark Lodge did not meet again until 1878, but in the meantime brethren who had joined Bedford Mark Lodge had obviously worked industriously to reconstitute the Lodge and their success was crowned at the meeting on 29th day of January 1878, when a meeting of Provincial Grand Mark Lodge was held at which the Howe Mark Lodge was reconstituted a Time Immemorial Lodge under the Grand Mark Lodge. Rt. W. Bro. Isaac Hawker Bedford, a founder of the Lodge and Prov. Grand Master in the Mark Degree for Staffordshire and Warwickshire became the first Worshipful Master under the new Warrant.

The brethren who had previously seconded to the Bedford Mark Lodge rejoined the reconstituted Howe Mark Lodge and whilst supporting the Lodge declined to take office. So after perishing in the flame of fraternal strife the Howe Mark Lodge, Time Immemorial rose like a phoenix from the ashes of its former self, reconstituted and rejuvenated and back to its rightful place as the head of the Province where, we trust it will ever remain.

With acknowledgements to the late W. Bro. Leslie J. Biddle P.A.G.D., Past Master of Howe M.M. Lodge, T.I.

PAGD.