

## **Gilkirke Mark Banner Dedication 21 Nov 2023**

**Oration: WBro Revd Roger Quick, Provincial Grand Chaplain**

Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master, Assistant Provincial Grand Master, Worshipful Master and Brethren.

Banners and flags stir strong feelings. Our national flag is held in great honour, and rouses the passions; try flying the Union Jack upside down and someone will tell you off pretty smartly. Other countries are much the same; the American flag never dips in salute, and must never touch the ground. You may remember the controversy in this country as to whether a flag should be flown at half-mast following the death of Princess Diana. The Royal Standard is never flown at half-mast, for the sovereign is succeeded immediately.

What a great pleasure, and privilege, therefore, it is for us all to be here for the Dedication of your new banner.

For all of us as freemasons, we have a specific reference to Banners at our Initiation: you will recall *that peculiar moment* when your charitable feelings were stirred on behalf of all those who *range themselves under its banners*.

And we do indeed range ourselves under the banners of freemasonry. We are proud to belong, and to call ourselves Masons, and the moreso to belong to our own wonderful order of Mark Masonry.

This is therefore a red-letter-day in the life of your lodge, not least because you have not previously had a banner. So how appropriate it is for you to have one now, matching the new

beginning you have made in moving to a splendid new building. You may know that the church of St Mary-le-Gill was built around the year 1160; not on the site of the original church, but by the side of the beck which divides this parish from Thornton. So, by your moving to a new building, you have been faithful to an ancient tradition in Gilkirke!

And how especially appropriate that this beautiful banner has been made by Mrs Eleanor Berry, the wife of your own WBro Keith.

The Banner is a *symbol*. That is so obvious a thing, we might easily miss it; but it is important, because *symbolism* is at the heart of Masonry. That, also, we learned at our Initiation: *What is Freemasonry? ...a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and **illustrated by symbols**.*

Symbols are important to us then; more than to *the rest of the popular world who are not Masons*. We are taught to see everything in these terms - to look beyond the outward, material form - and to find its true meaning. Even the rest of the popular world does this with flags and banners as with almost nothing else. They *mean* something.

But what, then, of your new splendid banner?

It has a blue background. That reflects the colour of the sky; the colour blue we know refers to the Canopy of Heaven and teaches the universality of Masonry. Blue was used for the veil of King Solomon's Temple, and in parts of Scripture it is the primary colour associated with God himself. You will remember that the

Secrets of the Mark Master are preceded by a passage from the second book of Chronicles, (which any of us could doubtless recite at a moment's notice):

*And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding... skilful to work in... blue....* That is, with blue dye, which was made from a marine mollusk or from the skin of pomegranates. It makes you wonder how they found these things out!

And upon the blue ground is our own special symbol, the Keystone; *aptly chosen and clearly defined.*

The keystone is the final piece placed during the construction of an arch. It locks all the stones into position, and so allows the arch or vault to bear weight. It is thus *literally* the most important stone in the building. Without it, no arch can function, no building can spread the stress which an arch allows. For us, as speculative masons, it tells us that we can only function when we act in concert together, relying on one another to share the heat and burden of the day.

And inscribed upon the keystone are those initials, familiar to all of us, standing for *Hiram the widow's son sent to King Solomon.* (Other interpretations are available). This, like the central theme of the Mark degree, is a sign to us of adversity, difficulty, and rejection overcome. The children of widows were often very vulnerable; without adequate means. But Hiram the widow's son became, as we know, the most skilled craftsman in the land. Traditionally, we were told, we could have had our own mark engraved on it. But here on your banner, that area is blank; I

take that as a sign that all of you can see your own mark there. The banner belongs to you all.

The banner bears a gold fringe, and gold tassels. Gold is the colour of glory and divinity; it does not tarnish or corrode; it signifies both glory and divinity. Gold and silver are not a creation of man, but occur naturally. It is said that the Almighty designed them to be intrinsically valuable and beautiful, for gold neither tarnishes nor corrodes. Riches in the VSL are measured in terms of gold. It can be hammered so thin that a single ounce can spread over an area of 100 sq.ft.

Then you have the Crest itself. The church depicted is of course Ghyll Church, dedicated to St Mary, on which are depicted clearly the ashlar shaped by our operative forbears. You may know that the three swords come from the coat of arms of Kirkstall Abbey, the monastic community which began its life here, and then moved to Kirkstall. (I think the monks would regret it now....) The swords came in turn from the benefactor of the monastery, William le Peitevin, who held the lands from the de Lacy's. The three swords are carved into a credence table in the sanctuary of the church.

The crest is fittingly outlined in dark blue which reminds me at least of the shape of a Lewis.

The whole banner is thus a most worthy symbol of Gilkirke Mark Lodge.

It is indeed a beautiful thing to behold; a worthy symbol to you of all that is good in Gilkirke Mark Lodge; a sign of your thanks for the past, and hopes for the future.

So we pray that this banner, fitting symbol of this fine old lodge, will remind you in years to come of all that is everlasting; and, when time with us shall be no more, that brethren yet unborn will range themselves under it, and bless the name and memory of those who have gone before. *So mote it be.*