

Old York Mark Lodge TI Sesquicentenary Nov 2023

Oration: WBro Revd Roger Quick, Provincial Grand Chaplain

Right Worshipful Assistant Grand Master, Provincial Grand Master, Worshipful Master, brethren all.

Congratulations to Old York! It is a great thing to live to be 150 years old. Let alone however long you were in existence before the days of Mark Grand Lodge.

That itself provides us with an interesting difficulty. I would normally at this point in an Oration consider the name of a Lodge. But the name Old York, as you know, was given to you for especial reasons relating to your history, while your earlier history was within the Lodge of Hope, from 1794, as ratified in 1813.

I might then proceed immediately to consider the *number* of a lodge, its mathematical significance and its meaning in Gematria. But you don't have a number, so we cannot do that.

I would then consider the date of your Consecration, and report what else of note had happened on that day: what was in the local newspapers, what was reported in Hansard. We might even consider the astrological meaning of your birthdate. But we don't unequivocally know your date of Consecration, so we cannot do all that either.

Neither can we say which Mark Lodges were consecrated immediately before you, and after you. In fact, we have nothing to go on at all.

WM, the work is at a standstill!

On all counts, therefore, we are on a hiding to nothing: and I might as well shut up and sit down now. Brethren, you are not to be so fortunate. Clergy are especially trained to talk for a very long time about absolutely nothing.

And in fact, as in every other case of doubt or difficulty, the VSL can help us. Have you ever wondered about the origin of the Masonic Year; the *Anno Lucis*?

Back in about the year 1650, the Irish Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, decided that although no-one knew when the world was created, there were various clues in the bible. Not least in the ages of many of the patriarchs, from Adam to Noah, for example. So he got back as far as he could with the historical records, which took him to Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BC, then totted up the ages of the patriarchs. From this he came to the indisputable conclusion that the Earth was created in the year 4004 B.C. In fact, to be specific, around 6 pm on 22nd October. This was so widely accepted that dates were printed in the margins of the Bible, and indeed were accepted by Grand Lodge; hence *Anno Lucis*.

Now, we could apply the same sort of rigorous logic to the records of Old York. Have you ever noticed that the least successful toast of any masonic evening is the toast to the health of the WM?

From 1873 to 1973, according to WBro Holgate's superb history, you had 97 masters, all of whom - despite the regular toast to their health - have passed to the Grand Lodge above.

Grievous though this may be, it may yet help us. All we need to do is to work out their average age on attaining the Chair of Adoniram,

calculate the number of WM's from your beginning, and we have the year of your birthday!

The age we live in worships youth. This was not always the case. Certainly it was not the case in the early days of Old York, nor through all the Victorian years, when age was equated with wisdom, and people actually tried to look older. Well, the men did anyway. That's why in stained glass windows, the disciples are always shown as old bearded men. But as we know, beards are now back in fashion. Again, for men at least.

And yet, our speculations about age are by no means fruitless. You see, there is a legal definition of *Time Immemorial*. You may be even older than you think. In English law, *Time Immemorial* is a legal phrase defined as common law existing before the start of Richard I's reign, which was 3rd September 1189. So maybe this should be not just your 150th birthday, but your 834th birthday. You appear to be wearing well.

But *tempus immemoria* means literally *time out of mind*. This does not mean to imply that you are *out of your mind*. Even though there is nothing in the Constitution which requires a Mark Mason to be sane. And quite a lot which may suggest the opposite.

The name *Old York* may of course suggest a historic link to the city of York; and your banner proudly displays a depiction of old Boothamgate. You may, like me, remember the *Jorvik* exhibition in York, which portrayed the history of Viking York, complete with smells. We may be glad that you have not taken it that far.

Brethren: humour is more available to us in our beloved Mark degree than in any other part of masonry. There is a good reason for this. There is a considerable level of tension in the ceremony of Advancement. The Candidate's work - and so, by implication, the Candidate himself - is rejected. We often make light of this, because we know it to be a moment of what in psychological terms is called *cognitive dissonance*. We do not want to be rejected. And humour, as Sigmund Freud said, is *the release of psychic tension*. Though we may remember that, on hearing that analysis, Ken Dodd remarked that *Freud never had to play third house on a Saturday night at the Glasgow Empire*.

On one level, the Mark degree teaches us not to be too careful; not to interpret the rules of life so strictly that we miss the underlying meaning. We can see the Overseers as nothing but inflated Jobsworths. But even that is unfair; the Junior and Senior Overseers at least are not prepared to reject this beautifully wrought stone, displaying *such masterly skill*, on their own authority. It is really only the Master Overseer who so strictly interprets the rules. Even that is understandable, in a work-environment where a mistake could cost you your right hand!

But as we know, the Candidate is in due course rewarded for two especial reasons. The first is the skill his work has displayed; the second is his *good fortune* in finding it again. This rings true for us - and *ringing true* is what the stone is being tested for when tapped by the Overseers: a cracked stone will not *ring true*.

That is why the rubric requires that the stone is held up to the left ear when being tapped with the mallet; a point often neglected. Be

that as it may; both skill and good fortune - or we might rather say Divine Providence - are both needed if we are to succeed as craftsmen.

So today we look back with great thankfulness; but we also look forward. As we celebrate the sesqui-centenary of this fine old lodge, so we pray its continued flourishing in all the years to come, and trust that generations as yet unborn will range themselves under its banner, and recall even this night's celebration with pride, with hope, with faithfulness to the *sublime precepts of the order: do justice, love mercy, practise charity, maintain harmony, and endeavour to live in unity and brotherly love.*

So may those precepts be passed on as faithfully as you have received them, from one generation to another, that they too may say that we marked well; until time with us shall be no more.

And now, may the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; the Angel of the everlasting Covenant who has redeemed us from evil; the Holy one who sanctifieth us; bless, preserve, and keep you evermore.

So mote it be.