

The Order

The Order of Royal and Select Masters, often known as the Cryptic Degrees, is open to those who are both Royal Arch and Mark Master Masons and consists of four highly dramatic degrees. These outline the initial steps taken during the building of the Temple to preserve copies of the holy vessels and sacred treasures in a secret vault, the burial of the Word by the two surviving Grand Masters after Hiram's death, the completion and dedication of the Temple and finally the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar and his army. It can be seen, therefore, that the Cryptic Degrees form a vital and interesting link between the Craft and Royal Arch, making the connection much more logical and completing the legend of King Solomon and his Temple

Nearly two hundred years ago the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master appeared in the USA being conferred by travelling Masonic Lecturers upon Master Masons whilst engaging in instructing in Craft (Lodge) and Capitular (Chapter) degrees. Around the same time when originally formed in 1846, the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in Scotland included the degrees of Select Master and Most Excellent Master, (later replaced by Excellent Master) amongst its "detached" degrees.

These beautiful degrees were not to remain detached for long and the state of Connecticut bore the first Grand Council in 1819. Virginia and West Virginia developed the degrees further in the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons where they remain today and eventually in the 1870's a General Grand Council was formed for the United States of America.

The Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of England and Wales and its Districts and Councils Overseas, (as it is now known), was formally constituted on 29 July 1873 by four Councils chartered just two years earlier by the Grand Council of New York. They organized themselves into a sovereign body under the patronage of the Rev Canon G. R. Portal, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, who was installed as the first Grand Master of the Order.

To find out more about joining our wonderful order please email: secretary@rsmllondon.org.uk or complete the form overleaf and send return to Mark Masons' Hall, 86 St James's Street, London, SW1A 1PL

Conclaves of the Province of London



The Degrees

Select Master

The preparations for the building of the Temple having commenced in the Mark Degree, the three Grand Masters are anxious that the form of the sacred treasures, including the Ark of the Covenant, could be lost forever in the event of the Temple being sacked. They therefore arrange for a small number of Select Masons, sworn to secrecy, to construct a secret vault beneath the Holy of Holies and deposit replicas therein.

Royal Master

The Temple is nearing its completion and certain Overseers are anxious to receive the Master Word and be honoured with the rank of Royal Master before their employment ceases. Shortly before his death Hiram Abif explains to one of these Overseers, Adoniram, that with patience and industry he will, in due time, receive it. This discourse is widely regarded as the most beautiful in any Masonic Degree.

Most Excellent Master

Hiram Abif has been slain and after a period of mourning, the holy relics are transferred into the completed temple. King Solomon prepares to dedicate it to the Most High and, to celebrate this joyous occasion, confers the Degree of Most Excellent Master on his most trusted and skillful workmen, amongst whom are those who built the secret vault.

Super Excellent Master

The Temple had stood in all its glory for nearly 400 years but had then fallen to Nebuchadnezzar and his army. The King and his principal citizens were taken into captivity in Babylonia. Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar's puppet King, has rebelled against him and fled, leaving the remaining citizens to defend the Temple and pledge their devotion to God.

The Degree of Thrice Illustrious Master

This degree, colloquially known as the **Order of the Silver Trowel**, has been performed in America for a number of years and was introduced into this country in 2009. A select number of Installed Masters from each District are approved each year by the Most Illustrious Grand Master to receive it. In the District of Surrey the degree is performed annually at the meeting of Weald of Surrey Council No.309. Recipients of the degree are entitled to have a hallmarked Silver Trowel attached to the flap of their apron. The degree is both extremely interesting and colourful and takes place during the final days of King David and recounts the abortive attempt of Adonijah, the half-brother of Solomon, to assume the throne and then the latter's anointment as King. It concludes with a remarkable discourse between David and Solomon

The Grand Council of Royal & Select Masters of England & Wales & its Districts & Councils Overseas

District Grand Council
of London



A journey leading from the death of Hiram Abif in the Third Degree to the recovery of the lost word in the Royal Arch

