

## Why We Research the Royal Arch of Freemasonry!

The Articles of Union, 1813, of the two Grand Lodges in England, use the term 'Holy Royal Arch' and the early Companions knew the Order by that name. There is history in the word 'Holy', as it is thought to have been derived more than two centuries ago from the 'Antient' Freemasons' motto "Holiness to the Lord", or to have been inspired by the Holy of Holies, the Inner Chamber of the Temple Sanctuary; or, again, to have reflected the religious, and even Christian, character of the primitive Royal Arch ceremonial. But it is to be noted that it is only sparingly used nowadays in the accepted rituals, and it does not form part of the titles of the Grand Chapters of England, Ireland, and Scotland.

In 1813, at the time of the Union of the English Grand Lodges, the Duke of Sussex (first Grand Master of the UGLE) expressed his hope that a single Grand Lodge would be established for the whole of the United Kingdom. It was doubtless for this reason that the Duke encouraged Alexander Leuchar, as First Grand Master of the Grand Conclave in Scotland, to convene a national committee to exercise control over the Royal Arch in Scotland. The Duke urged Leuchar to persuade the Grand Lodge of Scotland to take the Royal Arch under its wing. If this move had been successful, it would certainly have facilitated an eventual union between the English and Scottish Grand Lodges but, as we know, this attempt was unsuccessful and in 1817 a separate Supreme Grand Chapter was formed in Scotland, and this major difference in the institutional structure of Scottish freemasonry made a major contribution to the continuation of a separate Grand Lodge in Scotland.

The greatest obstacle in the path of any writer seeking to explain the early history of Royal Arch freemasonry is the comparative lack of information of the formative days of the Order - the mid-18th century period. The facts on record are not enough to preclude different interpretations and conflicting views. Perhaps it is a slight compensation that the traditional history upon which the ceremonial of the Order is founded was clearly anticipated in published writings to an extent considerably greater than in the case of the Craft, for whereas, for example, there is hardly any recorded foreknowledge of the Third Degree Hiram story, the Legend of the Crypt might well have been inspired by one known to have been in written form in the fourth century of the Christian era, while the sword-and-trowel motif, derived from the Old Testament account of the return of the Jews from exile, was the pride and glory of a Crusading Order of the early Middle Ages.

There has been long argument on how Royal Arch Masonry came into existence. Was it present in some slight form in the earliest fabric of speculative masonry or was it, frankly, just an innovation in the first half of the 18th century? Those accepting the first possibility believe that long before the earliest recorded dates of Craft Freemasonry - the Acceptation in the London Company of Freemasons in 1621 and the 'making' of Elias Ashmole in England during 1646 - there was a legend or a series of legends from which was developed (a) the Hiram Degree which was working in a few lodges certainly as early as the 1720's; (b) the Royal Arch Degree known to be working by the 1740's and 1750's; and (c) some additional degrees. All three were thought to have come from one common source and, although developed on very different lines, to have running through them a recognizable thread.

Some felt that the legends relating to Hiram and to the Royal Arch were the surviving portions of a Craft lore that originally contained other and similar legends, and that Freemasonry sprang from "a fruitful union between the professional Guild of Medieval Masons and a secret group of philosophical adepts. The Guild furnished the form and the philosophers the spirit.

Many others have thought that the Royal Arch was torn from the Hiram Degree and the 1813 Act of Union between the 'Antients' and the 'Moderns'. We know that the Hiram Degree was developing into a practicable ritual in the years following 1717, in which year the Premier Grand Lodge was founded, and that the Royal Arch Degree was going through a similar experience two or three decades later; this sequence in time is held to favor the idea that from the store of tradition came first the Hiram story of the First Temple and secondly the Sojourner story of the Second Temple.

Researchers cannot see even a slight possibility that the Royal Arch has developed from operative masonry. Some of the best-known symbols of Royal Arch masonry bear a close resemblance to those of alchemy. We must accept the likelihood that Royal Arch masonry borrowed directly from the alchemical store of symbolism. But this or any similar statement does not imply that Craft and Royal Arch masonry came from one common source, for while, on the one hand, there are suggestions in Biblical and medieval literature on which a sort of Hiram Degree could be based and, on the other hand, traditions which almost certainly supplied the basis of the Royal Arch story, we do not know of any traditions containing fundamentals common to both, although on our part that is far from proof that such a source never existed!

We cannot hide the fact that there is a considerable body of opinion in favor of the theory that Royal Arch masonry was a creation, a 'fabrication,' of French origin, brought to England round about 1730. The French had taken their freemasonry from England, and in their eyes it must have lacked the qualities of color and drama, or so we must conclude from the fact that the ceremonies that came back from France had become dramatically effective. The sword had found a place in the Initiation ceremony, as one example. Something different from the original rather colorless English rite had been brought into existence, and in the light of this innovation many researchers have come to regard the Royal Arch as a degree deliberately contrived by the imaginative Frenchman to appeal to the English Master Mason, to whom it might have been presented quite naturally as a fourth degree. The Royal Arch idea might have been French, although the development was English.

The great majority of freemasons feel that the Third Degree is not complete and may not have been intended to be. Certainly to the 'Antients' the Royal Arch 'completed' the Hiram Degree; in it was regained something which in the Third Degree was declared to be lost; to them the two degrees were parts of the same time-immemorial fabric of Masonic tradition and legend. The 'Antients' were, of course, at this time very busy with the Royal Arch, and we find in 1757 a minute of their Grand Lodge summoning "The Masters of the Royal Arch" to meet "in order to regulate things relative to that most valuable branch of the Craft." And the 'Moderns' also were quick to accept all this unofficially, but on the part of their Grand Lodge there was a frigid lack of recognition which continued to the end of the 18th century, all the more baffling because quite a large proportion of the 'Moderns' Grand Lodge officers became in the normal course Royal Arch masons.

The first printed reference to the term 'Royal Arch' is in the year 1743. It is in a newspaper, Faulkner's Dublin Journal, for January 10-14, 1743-44, and occurs in an account of a Masonic procession at Youghall, County Cork, Ireland, on St. John's Day in winter (December 27), when the Master of Lodge No. 21 was preceded by "The Royall Arch carried by two Excellent Masons." The 1740's provide reasonable evidence that an R.A. ceremony was worked in Stirling, Scotland. There are two dates, 1743 and 1745, and it is claimed that in the earlier year the minutes shows that two men were admitted R.A. masons.

The earliest date for which we have definite and undisputed knowledge of the Royal Arch in England is March 4, 1752. In Ireland the first exalte was in 1752; in America (not yet the U.S.A.) in 1753; in Scotland in 1756 (but if the Stirling record is accepted, then in 1743 or 1745); in England in 1758; and in London in 1767.

It is extremely likely that the Craft freemasonry practiced in the Youghall lodge in Ireland stemmed directly from the English system, the sea connection between Bristol and many Irish ports being much closer early in the 18th century than the road connection between Bristol and many inland English towns. We have Thomas Dunckerley's own assertion that he was exalted in a lodge in Portsmouth (a port on the south coast of England) in 1754. Dunckerley was later acknowledged as the natural son of the Prince of Wales, afterwards King George II. The Royal Arch has a long and important history in Ireland.

What is still thought to be the earliest minute definitely recording a Royal Arch Exaltation is of "Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons" in Fredericksburg, Virginia, on December 22, 1753. The first of the exaltees was Daniel Campbell, who was actually the Master of the Craft Lodge; the second candidate, Dr. Robert Halkerston, was the actual Junior Warden; and the third was the Lodge Secretary. The Craft Lodge itself was not at that date, 1753,

warranted by any recognized Grand Lodge, but it received a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1758. The Lodge charter is, apparently, still preserved, and its place in history is well assured, for it was on November 4, 1753, that this Lodge initiated George Washington, later to become the first President of the United States of America.

Lord Blayney, Grand Master of the 'Moderns', who had been exalted in a new chapter in London - later the Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter - entered into a Charter of Compact which brought into existence the first Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the first not only in England, but in the world. That Charter was signed in London on June 11, 1766. The present "Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England" was formed by a union in 1817 of the original Grand Chapter of 1766 and the Royal Arch masons under the former Grand Lodge of the 'Antients.' Ireland founded its Grand Chapter in 1829 under the title of "The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Ireland," and Scotland its Grand Chapter in 1817 under the title of "The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland."

## **Holiness to the Lord**

By Nigel Gallimore,

Member of Golden State Chapter of Research of the Holy Royal Arch