

## NOTES FOR LECTURE.

### EARLY ROYAL ARCH MASONRY.

Unlike Craft Masonry which is well documented from at least the Minutes of Mother Kilwinning Lodge in 1642, and the diaries of Elias Ashmore recording his initiation in October, 1649, no one knows when and how Royal Arch Masonry originated. The first printed reference to the term "Royal Arch" is in a newspaper, Faulkner's Dublin Journal, for January 10-11, 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 Royal Arch carried by two Excellent Masons".

This reference is dubious since masonic processions were, in those days, common and Arches are not uncommon in public processions, but certainly the inclusion of the term "Excellent Masons" gives the inference that the procession was indeed one of Royal Arch Masons.

In 1743 there is a Minute of the Lodge of Stirling in Kilwinning, Scotland which records:

STIRLING, July 30th 1743.

Which day the Lodge of Stirling Kilwinning being met in the Brother Hutchinson's house, and being peititoned by Mungo Nicol, shoemaker and brother James McEwan, Student of Divinity at Stirling, and being found qualified, they were admitted Royal Arch Masons of this Lodge, having paid their dues to the Treasurer, John Callendar, R.W.M.

The earliest English reference is in 1758 and refers to a Warrant issued to Kent Lodge, then number 9 (now 15) founded in 1752. It authorises them to admit, enter and make <sup>Mason</sup> according to the Honourable Custom of the Royal Arch.

The first official reference to the Royal Arch Degree is in a Minute of 1752 when Grand Lodge records "the Lodge was opened in ancient form of Grand Lodge and every piece of Royal Free Masonry was explained <sup>except</sup> the Royal Arch.

In 1759 we get a hint of the coming of regulations when a general meeting

of Master Masons having been convened, it was ordered that the Masters of the Royal Arch shall also be summoned to meet and regulate things.

There can be said to be three theories of the origin of the Royal Arch:-

1. That the Antients founded it and that it was originated in Ireland.
2. That the original Third Degree of the Craft was mutilated to supply the material and
3. That it was a French fabrication brought into England in the 1730's.

Most of these theories have been discredited and the best guess, but I should stress that it is only a guess, is that a small and limited degree originated in Ireland about 1740 and about the same time one of the many degrees invented on the Continent vaguely similar developed into a fully fledged degree starting from the idea of a secret sealed in a vault. The Ritual developed by borrowing from the Irish degree the Ritual elements and secrets from the Continent the imposing surroundings and robes.

In 1744 a Dr. Fiffield Dassigny published in Dublin a book entitled "A Serious and Impartial Enquiry into the Cause of the present Decay of Freemasons in the Kingdom of Ireland, in which he wrote of a propogator of a false system some years ago in the City of Dublin who imposed upon several worthy men under the pretence of his being a Master of the Royal Arch. His fallacious art was discovered by a brother who had attained that excellent part of Masonry in London and plainly proved that imposter's doctrine was false. Three conclusions can be drawn from this famous paragraph:-

1. That it was a well established ritual, for it was well known in both England and Ireland in 1744.
2. That it had been established for at least a few years in the year 1744.
3. It discredited the "invented in Ireland theory".

If the Royal Arch Degree had originated in Ireland how can it have been possible for an imposter to have introduced a false system into Dublin, the capital of the country, and for several months to have imposed upon "several worthy men" until he was eventually exposed by a genuine Royal Arch Mason.

The theory that the Craft Ritual was mutilated can hardly stand up as there is no evidence in England or Ireland of a non-mutilated degree being worked. If such mutilation took place how could the official Moderns have denied the authenticity. They would have been aware that the new Degree had been part of their accepted ceremony.

There is an interesting reference in Sceau Rompu, a French exposure dated 1745 to Lodges founded by a crusader who practised a ceremony commemorating the Israelites who worked at the re-building of the Second Temple, "trowel in hand and sword by their side" and it is interesting to note that there are paintings showing that the sash was originally worn on the left shoulder so that the scabbard could be held in the left hand and the sword drawn with the right. Somewhere over the years the position of the sash has become transposed.

You may well find a none Masonic book "The Temple and the Lodge" available in paperback, which traces the development of Free Masonry from the original Knights Templars, interesting reading.

There is a strong case for assuming that at the time when the Hiramic Degree had only recently found its way into masonic working, and but few lodges were capable of conferring it, some of the Fellow Crafts who aspired to be Master Masons went to Masters' Lodges. These came into existence in the 1730's, and are believed to have devoted themselves to working the Hiramic Degree, although they might also, perhaps in later years, have been working degrees that were not of a truly Craft nature. Nothing is known for certain, but it is a point of particular interest that the earliest recorded Masters' Lodge (No. 115, meeting at the Devil Tavern, Temple Bar, London) is described in the Engraved List (at that time the only approved list of lodges) as "a Scotch Masons Lodge." This description is thought to mean not that its members were Scots, but rather that the ritual or ceremony worked was known as "Scotch masonry," which may possibly (not probably) have been originated in France by the Jacobites, political refugees from Scotland. According to the historian Gould (who appears to have known something of the ritual), Scotch masonry had as its motif the discovery in a vault by Scottish Crusaders of the long-lost

and Ineffable Word. So if the lodge at the Devil Tavern was actually working a degree of French origina, then obviously a strong likelihood exists that some primitive form of the Royal ARch rite was actually being worked as early as 1733.

I might mention here that there is a strong possibility that English Free Masonry was subject to Jacobite influence and high-jacked by the Hanoverians, and the red and blue colouring of the Regalia are the

Jacobite colours *which support the theory that the Regalia demanded Jacobite & symbols which would lead*

To understand the development of the Royal Arch Masonry it is necessary for me to refresh your memories on some Craft history. You will recollect that the Premier Grand Lodge of England, nicknamed "the Moderns" was founded on the 24th June, 1717, but its early years were fraught with difficulties and by the middle of the 18th century conditions within the Premier Lodge had become most unsatisfactory. Discontent was widespread and something like a quarter of its Lodges had ceased to meet.

The time was right for the formation of a rival Grand Lodge and that is exactly what happened on the 17th July, 1751 when a meeting at the Turks Head, Greek Street, Soho resolved to establish a Grand Lodge "to show posterity how much we desire to revive the ancient Craft upon true masonic principles". This new Grand Lodge was nicknamed "the Antients".

The Antients would probably have continued to languish behind the Moderns, and like most splinter groups eventually disappeared, were it not for the fact that on the 5th February, 1752 a remarkable man Laurence Dermott was appointed Grand Secretary and from then until his death in 1791 the story of the Antients is largely the story of Laurence Dermott. He was a great disciplinarian and an excellen administrator. Above all, for our purposes, he was a strong exponent of the Royal Arch into which he had been received in Ireland in 1746.

This degree was *by 1752* already in existence and gaining favour in England, but was disapproved of by the Moderns, who refused to recognise the Degree, and steadfastly maintained their implacable attitude made quite plain by various oft-quoted pronouncements:

In 1759 the Grand Secretary, Samuel Spencer, wrote:-

(i) Our Society is neither Arch, Royal Arch, or ~~Antients~~ *ancient*  
Again in 1767 *the units*

(ii) The Royal Arch is a Society which we do not acknowledge, and which we hold to be an invention to introduce innovation and to seduce the brethren.

Then in 1768 Thomas French, Spencer's successor, wrote:-

(iii) There is only one circumstance in your minutes which you are requested to correct, and that concerns Royal Arch Masonry, which comes not under our inspection.

James Haselton, another Grand Secretary, said in 1774:-

(iv) It is true that many of the fraternity belong to a Degree in Masonry which is said to be higher than the other, and is called Royal Arch ...but it is not acknowledged in Grand Lodge.

And again in 1775:-

(v) ...a further degree, called Royal Arch, is known in England.... as a separate Society, without connection with Grand Lodge.

There is a Minute in 1772:-

(vi) That this Grand Lodge do agree with its Committee that Grand Lodge has nothing to do with the proceedings of Royal Arch Masonry.

In point of fact this is the official attitude, most of the brethren had been exalted in private Chapters.

Seeing this rigid opposition and being well aware that there would be a keen interest amongst the brethren for a Degree in which the genuine secrets of a Master Mason thought to have been lost in the Third Degree were restored Dermott took immediate steps to make the Degree popular. This was done:-

(a) By declaring it to be a integral part of pure, ancient Masonry that had come down from time immemorial, thereby giving it an air of both authority and antiquity.

(b) By permitting it to be worked in ~~their~~ Craft lodges by virtue of their Craft Warrants.

(c) By making it not a separate form of Freemasonry but the Fourth Degree in the Craft.

(d) By emphasizing its value and its importance.

In other words, Laurence Dermott placed himself in a position to say *to the Moderns* come over to us we can give you Fourth Degrees and the genuine secrets of a Master Mason, which were lost in the Third and are restored in the Fourth.

The Freemasons of those days were, in the main, of a deeply religious bias, and the Hiramic legend naturally prepared them for the sequel.

The Royal Arch proved to be the solution especially when the gap between the Craft and Chapter was breached by an installation ceremony because originally the degree of Royal Arch was restricted to Installed Masters.

With the rise of its popularity this rule proved unworkable. It was too restrictive for whilst, on the one hand there was a growing demand for exaltation, there was, on the other, the bottleneck created by the rule, an embarrassing condition quickly, but unofficially, remedied by a subterfuge of passing a brethren through the Chair for the sole purpose of qualifying him as a candidate for exaltation. He went through an abbreviated ceremony soon to be known as the Past Master Degree and became a virtual Past Master. It was made clear to the candidate that he was not being qualified to rule over a lodge, other than for a brief moment. In spite of many demands to bring the practice to an end the ceremony of passing the Chair was worked in many Lodges until long past the middle of the 19th century.

The Royal Arch is probably the Fourth Degree and is certainly not the *craft!* Third. Why then does the Ritual say to the contrary. The reason is probably in the union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813 which necessitated a great deal of negotiation and compromise on both sides.

To the Antients the Third Craft Degree and the Royal Arch Degree comprehended essential Masonry. The Moderns officially, at any rate, were not prepared for the Royal Arch to rank in parity with the Third Degree.

In 1813 the Moderns agreed to acknowledge the Royal Arch as being part of pure ancient Masonry, although the Antients were magnanimous in victory as they agreed that control of the Royal Arch could be detached from the United Grand

Lodge of England, and that no longer would it be considered as a Craft Degree. Obviously a compromise was agreed after much hard bargaining.

Outside England the Royal Arch is still a Fourth Degree.

The curious antipathy of the Premier Grand Lodge prevailed through the remainder of the 18th century.

On March 18th 1817 the Supreme Grand Chapter of the Royal Arch Masons of England was formed by the union of the two Grand Chapters, the Modern Grand Chapter of 1766, and the Antient Grand Chapter of 1771. The two Grand Chapters met and opened in separate rooms, proceeded to a third room where the two Chapters then joined as one.

If you will forgive the pun another chapter of Royal Arch Masonry commenced.

Time does not permit any comment on the evolution of the Ritual and this is a convenient point to break off.

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