

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROYAL ARCH

**The Order of the Royal Arch has long been considered a necessary part of Freemasonry.** The Royal Arch made its first appearance in England during the 1740s. We may assume that the seeds of this new ceremony were germinating for several years before we have records of it, but we cannot date the practice of the Royal Arch earlier than c. 1740.

It is impossible to say with certainty that the R.A. took its rise in any particular country, but it seems possible that the ceremony came into England from Ireland. Several of the earliest references to the R.A. are undoubtedly Irish, and when the second Grand Lodge, the "Antients", was founded in 1751 it recognized the R.A. as a more-or-less essential adjunct to the normal Craft degrees.

As to the development of the Royal Arch ceremony, there is every reason to believe that it was designed, originally, for Masters of Lodges or for men who had passed the Chair, and although there is some difference of opinion as to the interpretation of the evidence on this point, there is, in fact, a great deal of valuable evidence to support this view. In 1744, Dr. Fifield Dassigny published a book with an enormous title, *A Serious and Impartial Enquiry into the Cause of the present Decay of Freemasonry in . . . Ireland*, and, speaking of the Royal Arch, he described it as "... an organized body of men who have passed the chair".

The first known reference to the Royal Arch is found in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 10-14 January 1743, which reported that Youghal Lodge No. 21 celebrated St. John's Day with a parade in which "the Royal Arch was carried by two Excellent Masters."

If the question is asked, "Why did the Royal Arch appear?", the answer is that a further ceremony, or a separate "Fourth Grade", was inevitable, and this can best be explained by our knowledge of the evolution of the three Craft degrees.

If we go back as far as we dare in English Masonic history to the point where the separate grades or degrees were being evolved, it is almost certain that the first Masonic ceremony was designed for the Fellow or Fellow-craft, i.e., the fully trained Craftsman.

The system of apprenticeship in England makes its first appearance in the 1200s, and it is fairly safe to assume that the next degree was evolved as an admission ceremony for apprentices.

At this stage, and up to the late 1600s, it is certain that the Craft had no more than two admission ceremonies: one for the Apprentice or Entered Apprentice and the other for the "Fellow-craft or Master". Sooner or later it was inevitable that there would be a demand for a separate ceremony to distinguish the Master from the Fellow-craft; both were equal in their technical capacity, but the Fellow-crafts were employees, and those who were fortunate enough to be able to set up as Masters would quite naturally have wanted a separate degree to themselves.

The third degree appeared in England some time around 1724-1725 and, by 1730, it was already fairly widely known, though not widely practiced.

At this stage all three working grades within the Craft were covered by separate ceremonies only one grade remained unrepresented in this fashion. There was still no distinguishing ceremony for the men who had presided in a Lodge, i.e., for the Masters of Lodges, and inevitably a ceremony appeared around 1740. In England the first Grand Lodge, the "Moderns," (1717), gave no official recognition or support to the Royal Arch ceremony, although it was practised in several "Modern" Lodges, and it is interesting to notice that although the ceremony was not regarded as an integral part of the three Craft degrees, it was nevertheless worked in ordinary lodges. R.A. Chapters did not yet exist as separate organizations for conferring the new grade, and there was, of course, no supreme controlling authority. The first Grand and Royal Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem ("Moderns") was constituted in London in July 1767. The Grand Lodge of the "Antients" (1751), who had always counted the ceremony as the "root, heart and marrow of Masonry," had not realized the need for a separate controlling body, and their Grand Chapter minutes begin in 1782, after a series of resolutions in their Grand Lodge in December 1771.

When the rival English Grand Chapters were united in 1817, the "chair-degree" was officially abolished, but it continued to be worked in many places until the 1850s. The Act of Union refers to the Order but does not qualify it as a degree.

To this day, in many of the American jurisdictions, the entrusting, which forms a preliminary to their R.A., is a brief ceremony which contains recognizable elements of the Installation work in England. The first record of conferment of the R.A. degree was George Washington in the lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia, on 22 December 1753.

The Degree of Royal Arch Mason is founded upon the destruction of the first and the building of the second Temple. The ceremonies of the Degree have an interesting and graphic historical setting, and a profound and reverential moral significance.

The value of Royal Arch Masonry will be justly appreciated by all who are Exalted to that Most Sublime Degree, particularly by those who are seeking to complete their Masonic education.

The Triple T.: did not appear until c. 1820.

*In Peace, Love and Unity*