

PURE ANTIENT MASONRY

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"When they have had an opportunity of assimilating the ceremony through which they have passed, the questions most regularly asked by newly Exalted Companions are: why, when it is worked in a Chapter with its own officers, is the Royal Arch not a fourth degree; and how is it the completion of the Master Mason degree? To find the answers we need to look at the historical development of the Royal Arch in England; its relationship to the Craft; and its place in the negotiations which brought about the Craft Union in 1813,

Although much has been written on the subject no one knows why, when or where the Royal Arch originated. We do know that by the late 1750s it was being worked within lodges under both the premier and the Antients Grand Lodges. Within a short period, however, the premier Grand Lodge began to object to its lodges working the Royal Arch *as part of the Craft*, resulting, in 1766, in the signing of the Charter of Compact which brought into being the Grand and Royal Arch Chapter with its own regulations, administration and Chapters, which were wholly independent of the Craft. It has often been stated that the premier Grand Lodge refused to recognise the Royal Arch. That statement needs qualification. They would not acknowledge the Royal Arch as an integral part of their system but had no objection to their members joining it *as a separately organised Society*.

The attitude of the Antients was one of total acceptance of the Royal Arch. When, in 1756, Laurence Dermott their Grand Secretary compiled his *Ahiman Rezon* as the *Constitutions* for the Antients, he characterized the Royal Arch as "the root, heart and marrow of Masonry." It was worked in their lodges as a fourth degree but always within a lodge opened on the third degree. The Antients had no Chapters as such, their Royal Arch members forming an inner circle of the lodge. Although a Grand Chapter was set up it was never more than a committee of qualified members of the Grand Lodge, having no independent power as all of its deliberations had to be confirmed by the Antients Grand Lodge itself.

Obviously two such opposing views must have caused discussion when the Craft Union was being negotiated, although the surviving records of those negotiations contain no reference to the Royal Arch. That some form of agreement was reached is clearly shown in Article II of the Articles of Union between the two Grand Lodges, which is a vital definition of what constitutes "pure antient masonry." So fundamental to English Freemasonry is that definition that it has been the preamble to the rules in the *Book of Constitutions* since the 1841 edition. The preamble states that "it was declared and pronounced that pure antient masonry consists of three degrees and no more, viz that of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

Thus the Royal Arch was recognised as an integral part of Freemasonry and directly connected with the third degree.

The inter-relationship of the Craft and the Royal Arch and the dependence of the Royal Arch upon the Craft were clearly shown by the administrative arrangements finalised when Supreme Grand Chapter came into being in 1817. The Royal Arch *Regulations* specifically state that any matter not covered therein is to be considered as being governed by the Craft *Book of Constitutions*. Certain designated officers In Grand Lodge, when properly qualified, automatically take equivalent offices in Grand

Chapter. Individual Chapters are not independent but are attached to and bear the number and name of the lodge which sponsors them. Should the lodge fail then its chapter can only continue by attaching itself to another lodge. Thus the Royal Arch is not a separate degree but is an Order growing out of and dependent upon the Craft.

It is generally assumed that the concept of the Royal Arch being the completion of the third degree grew out of the 1813 definition of pure antient masonry. I would suggest that the concept was implicit in the attitude and practice of the Antients. It was not, however, until the recasting of the ritual in 1834 that the First Principal's explanation of the Royal Arch being the completion of the third degree was introduced into the ritual.

How then does the Royal Arch complete the third degree? If we accept the address by the First Principal to the candidate it does so because that which was lost in the third degree is recovered in the Royal Arch. I have to admit that I have difficulty in accepting that statement. Taken literally, it is a claim that the Ineffable name is the long lost secret of a Master Mason. Before it was removed from our ritual there were those who believed that the three syllable word was the lost secret. I would suggest that there is a simpler explanation, for which I can claim no originality for it goes back again to Laurence Dermott who did so much to promote the Royal Arch within the Antients Grand Lodge.

Craft Freemasonry is essentially practical, Dermott described it as manual masonry. The principles and tenets of the Craft give us very practical rules by which we can live a life pleasing to God and of service to mankind. But man is not simply a practical being, he has a vital spiritual aspect to his nature. The Royal Arch teaches us reverence for God but it also, without defining them in any way and without usurping the prerogatives of religion, leads us to reflect on the nature of God and our relationship with Him. Thus the Master Mason who goes from the practical Craft to the more spiritual Royal Arch completes the practical lessons by considering: the spiritual. Viewed in this way we can only agree with Dermott that the Royal Arch is the root, heart and marrow of masonry. And if that is so, Companions it is the duty of all of us to bring this Supreme Order to the attention of all Master Masons."