



Provincial Grand Chapter of Warwickshire

The Triple Tau

Q. When was the triple tau first used in the Royal Arch?

A. The triple tau probably came into the Royal Arch in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Its origin, so far as the Royal Arch is concerned, is the letter T over the letter H, signifying Templum Hierosolymae, the Temple of Jerusalem. This is borne out in a letter written by Thomas Dunckerley, a well-known and highly respected eighteenth century freemason, a Grand Superintendent of many Provinces.

The form T over H is shown in the Charter of Compact dated 1766, the document setting up the first Grand Chapter. In a reference to the apron to be worn by Companions it said that the badge as shown in the margin of that document was to be properly displayed on the apron; and the form shown was quite clearly the letter T over the letter H. There are aprons in the Museum at Freemasons' Hall, Great Queen Street, London, showing this badge.

The same form appeared on the Jewels of the Order, breast jewels as they are now more familiarly known. The first traces of the triple tau on jewels is in about 1810; the last example I have seen of a jewel bearing the T over His dated 1821. What happened was that the letters gradually lost their serifs and the tail of the T dropped on to the crossbar of the H, thus forming what looked like three capital Ts or tau crosses, the lower part of each tail meeting at a central point. Remembering the significance of the tau cross in the Christian faith and remembering too the Christian nature of early Royal Arch masonry, the new arrangement could easily be used to illustrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

E. Comp. Harry Mendoza