

ROYAL ARCH MASONRY IN IRELAND

IN THE EARLY 19th CENTURY

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Read by Ex. Companion Joe McIlveen:

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One of the earliest known references to the words "Royal Arch" is to be found in the columns of *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* of 14th January 1744, wherein is described a Masonic procession of Lodge No. 19, Youghal, County Cork, on St. John's Day, 27th December 1743. The relevant passage reads:

"Fourthly, the Royal Arch carried by two Excellent Masons. Fifthly, the Master with all his proper implements, his rod gilt with gold, his Deputy on his left with the square and compasses."

The above reference to a Master and his Deputy tends to indicate the existence of two groups of Officers; indeed, reading on we find:—

"Sixthly, the two Wardens with their truncheons gilt in like manner. Eighthly, two Excellent Masons, one bearing a level and the other a plumb line."

It is very evident that the two Excellent Masons were deputies for the Wardens. Here we have two groups of Officers for the Master's part (MM), because in 1743 this was the name of the highest Masonic Degree known at Youghal. The Master and Wardens represented the three symbolic Masters for the Josiah Legend, the subject of the present Irish Royal Arch ceremony, and which is said to have occurred during the repair of the first Temple under King Josiah, dated approximately 855 BC. The Deputy Master and Deputy Wardens represented another three symbolic personages for the Zerubabel Legend, said to have taken place during the building of the second Temple by Prince Zerubabel after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and dated 515 BC approximately.

We find the same custom in other places, of having two groups of symbolic officers and indeed this custom was maintained until 1864, some Lodges (Chapters) practising one version and some the other.

Part of the Minutes of "Vernon" Lodge No. 123, Coleraine, for 8th June 1767 states that Brother D. Hyland was exalted to the Royal Arch, whilst part of the Minutes of Downpatrick Lodge No. 367 dated 20th January 1779 reads:– "Lodge opened in due form, raised to the Degree of Royal Arch, Super Excellent and Kt Templar by Br. Hodges of Lisburn."

Some noted Masonic historians and researchers, much more highly qualified to speculate on this matter than I am, have categorically stated that pre-1790 there were three distinctive Degrees in the Craft, but these three Degrees were not the same as those associated with Craft Masonry of today:–

The *First*, known as ENTERED AND CRAFTED, corresponding to our present day Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft Degrees.

The *Second*, known as MASTER MASON; it was based on the Hiram Legend and corresponded to our present day Master Mason Degree.

The *Third*, known as ROYAL ARCH; it was given in two parts, the first part was the Josiah Legend, more or less in accordance with our present day Royal Arch Degree, and the second part called the Super Excellent Mason, which was centred on the Zerubabbel Legend. This second part was, at a later date, called the Red Cross and is now more or less the subject of Knight Masonry. In passing, it is worth noting that the present English Constitution Royal Arch uses the Zerubabbel Legend based in the building of the second Temple.

The above reasoning is almost certainly verified in the writings of our late Brother Philip Crossle, in his "Irish Rite", where he quotes from several 18th century Lodge Minutes, showing that almost invariably, there were three distinct steps known usually as Entered, Passed and Raised. Yet in almost every case there is a sudden change to two, one called ENTERED AND PASSED and the other RAISED, and it is only after this change that we find any reference to the Royal Arch Degree.

No. 2 of the Bye-Laws, Rules and Orders of the Royal Arch Super Excellent Chapter under the sanction of No. 524 held in Carlow and drawn up in 1800 reads:–

"That any Fellow Craft (commonly called Master Mason) of approved good conduct as a man and a Mason, wishing to be exalted to this sublime degree, must be proposed and seconded by two of our members, but if one black bean shall appear against him when balloted for, he shall be rejected."

Part of the Minutes of Lodge No. 524, Carlow, dated 12th March 1803, reads :

"At a Royal Arch Super Excellent Royal Encampment held at Carlow, 12th March 1803, Br. Rochfort HP, Br. Edge 1st Sojourner, Br. Well 2nd Sojourner and seven other named brethren in offices etc. Three named brethren being first installed were then initiated in the Royal Arch Encampment."

The Rev. D. de P. Castells in his *Antiquity of the Holy Royal Arch* states that the Royal Arch existed and was functioning as a live Institution in 1725. The preliminary steps when the Degree was conferred under Craft Lodges were (after the 3rd Degree); 4th Degree, Past Master; 5th Degree, Excellent Master; 6th Degree, Super-Excellent Master and then followed the Royal Arch.

The Super-Excellent Mason Degree was exemplified as in an encampment in Jerusalem, in the time of King Darius, and the return of the Jews. Some time about 1810 the name was changed to Red Cross Mason and worked as a side Degree in the Order of the Temple (i.e. Preceptories) until 18th June 1923, when the Council of Knight Masons was constituted and the Preceptories relinquished the Red Cross Mason Degree from their ritual.

There was also a degree called Ark Mason (symbolised on old floor cloths as Noah's Ark). There is specific reference to this Degree to be found in the Minutes of Lodge No. 134, Lurgan, dated 16th August 1828 and here I quote:– "Emergency called to initiate five Brethren of Freemasons into the sublime degree of Ark Masonry," and the five names are there appended.

Brother Heron Lepper in his book, *The Antiquity of the Royal Arch Degree*, states that it is hardly necessary to recall the fact that all through the 18th century the Grand Lodge of Ireland made no effort whatsoever to control the Degree of Royal Arch. At the beginning of the 19th century it however became evident to the Grand Lodge that something would have to be done, since each Lodge had become a law into itself in conferring the Higher Degrees; all were uncontrolled and many threatened to become uncontrollable. Thus, in 1805, the Grand Lodge passed resolutions to establish a Grand Chapter for the purpose of establishing uniformity in the principles and ceremonies of the Royal Arch Degrees. Unhappily, this project had to be abandoned due to a perfect storm of objection being raised by various Masonic bodies.

Indeed, it was 24 years later before Grand Lodge took the step it had contemplated in 1805. At a preparatory convocation on 25th February 1829 to form the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Ireland, it was decided that the Officers of Subordinate Chapters were to be:– The three Principals or Grand Masters, three Sojourners, two

Scribes and one High Priest. Although placed last, the High Priest was the one who conducted the ceremonies in the Chapter.

In 1864 the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Ireland made certain revisions to Royal Arch working. The "Passing the Chair" was abolished, the Excellent and Super Excellent ceased to be known as separate Degrees, and, some parts were made portion of the Royal Arch. Drastic alterations were made to the names of the Officers: The three Grand Masters were converted into the Excellent King, High Priest and Chief Scribe. The functions of the former High Priest, who was in the Chair, were divided between the Captain of Hosts and Superintendent of the Tabernacle. The three Sojourners and the two Scribes were dispensed with and replaced by Royal Arch Captain, Captain of the Scarlet Veil, Captain of the Purple Veil and Captain of the Blue Veil.

As we see in the Minutes of the Carlow Lodge for 12th March 1803, the candidates for the Royal Arch were first installed. This does not mean the installation of the Master Elect of a Lodge as we know it today, it merely means that the candidate was placed in the chair, examined or tested and, upon being found of real worth and personal merit, the Fellow Craft was said to have "Passed the Chair". Nowadays, in the British Isles, "Passed the Chair" is known as our degree of the Installed Master. The "Arch" of the Degree of Passed Master, with certain alterations made in the mode of recognition, has been preserved in our Degree of Very Worshipful Master of a Lodge of Mark Master Masons. Amongst the Masons of the United States of America, our "Passed the Chair" or Installation is known as their Degree of Past Master and our old Arch or Degree of Past Master is their Degree of Excellent Master.

Before 1800, the Royal Arch was exemplified to depict King Solomon's Temple in the time of King Josiah. We can read about it in the Volume of the Sacred Law, 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 34, Verses, 1, 2, 8 and 14. For a description of the Temple we turn to 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 3, Verse 14.

'One part of the door, approximately 7 ft. by 7 ft., of the Sanctum Sanctorium, or Holy of Holies, within which was deposited the Ark of the Covenant, was left open, but the interior was partly concealed by three sets of veils, coloured Blue, Purple and Crimson. Behind the Ark one could see the three symbolical Grand Masters, namely King Solomon, King Hiram of Tyre and Hiram A'Biff. The High Priest was the mouthpiece of the Chapter and it was he who directed the candidate how to find the truth'.

Nowadays, Brethren when speaking of the Royal Arch are too apt to refer to it as one of the Higher Degrees, which is misleading. It really

was, and is, part and parcel of Ancient Craft Masonry. Although there was no Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Ireland in 1814, the resolution still holds good which "declared and pronounced that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three Degrees and no more, viz:– Those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Chapter of the Holy Royal Arch." (Minute Book, Grand Lodge of Ireland, 1st December 1814).

In Ireland, the education of a Brother of the Craft is not considered complete until he becomes a Royal Arch Mason.

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