

225 YEARS OF GRAND CHAPTER

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On 22 July 1766 a group of Companions met in a Chapter at the Turks Head Tavern, Gerard Street, Soho, and signed a document which was to have a profound effect on the development of the Royal Arch in England. The document, now hanging in the permanent exhibition at Freemasons Hall, was the Charter of Compact by which the Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem was brought into being, the first Grand Chapter in the world. Thus, today (13th November 1991) we celebrate the 225th Anniversary of the formation of our Grand Chapter.

Foundations

The origins of the Royal Arch are not known. It was certainly being worked within lodges under both the premier and Ancients Grand Lodges by the 1750s. The premier Grand Lodge, however, was not happy with the situation and did not regard the Royal Arch as a part of pure Antient Masonry and began to object to its lodges working it *within the lodge*. As a result, certainly in London, its members began to work the Royal Arch separately. The Companions who signed the Charter of Compact had been meeting as a Chapter from at least 22 March 1765, minutes of their meetings from that date being preserved in the Grand Chapter Minute Book, and probably earlier.

The transformation from a Chapter to a Grand Chapter may have been not unconnected with the Exaltation of Cadwallader, 9th Lord Blayney within the Chapter on 11 June 1766, he being Grand Master of the premier Grand Lodge. Lord Blayney became Zerubbabel of the Chapter at its next meeting on 2 July.

A Dual Purpose

Despite having turned themselves into a Grand Chapter the Companions continued to meet monthly as a private Chapter regularly exalting new Companions. Those exalted did not, however, automatically become members of the Grand Chapter; they had to be further elected as members after their exaltation. Initially membership appears to have been of three types, founding members, members exalted within the Chapter and elected to membership, and associate members who were active in other Chapters. This duality of purpose, acting as a private and a Grand Chapter, was to continue until the formation of Supreme Grand Chapter in 1817. After that date Supreme Grand Chapter still maintained the right to exalt candidates but those exaltations were restricted to Princes of the Blood Royal, Peers and distinguished foreigners. The last occasion on which Grand Chapter exercised that right was on 2 May 1832 when the Marquesses of Salisbury and Abercorn and Lord Monson were exalted.

The Grand Chapter

The Charter of Compact included the first regulations of the Order, which called for a General Convention of Royal Arch Masons to be held on or near the Feast of St. John the Evangelist (27 December) to determine Royal Arch matters. The Grand Chapter Minutes, however, show a total confusion between the work of the private and the Grand Chapter, general business often being done in the private Chapter after an exaltation ceremony. The first Charters for new chapters were granted at a meeting of the private Chapter on 13 January 1769, one of them—the Chapter of Friendship No. 257, Portsmouth—still being in existence. In 1778 the first *Laws and Regulations* were issued and Grand Superintendents in and over Provinces were appointed. The ubiquitous Thomas Dunckerley was given

charge of Hampshire and Essex and over the next twelve years was to be Grand Superintendent of no less than eighteen Provinces stretching from Durham in the North to Cornwall in the West and Essex in the East!

Various attempts were made to separate the work of the private and the Grand Chapter. In 1784 a General Convention was called but the Minutes show it to have been an ordinary meeting with an exaltation and no other business. By 1790 sixty six Chapters had been chartered and a new attempt was made to make the Grand Chapter more representative. On 22 April 1790 it was resolved to form a General Convention and that it should consist of the Grand Officers and the three Principals of each Chapter. It was to be 4 May 1792 before the first convention was to assemble. On that occasion it was agreed that the two "general Chapters of Communication" called for in the Charter of Compact should be held annually, and that consideration be given to finding a way of separating the dual nature of Grand Chapter.

Unhappily these major changes coincided with a decline in Grand Chapter. Many of the principal figures who had nurtured Grand Chapter from its earliest days were called to higher service and a number of the Grand Officers did not pay attention to their duties. Grand Chapter carried on in a rather desultory manner for almost a decade until the Earl of Moira, Acting Grand Master of the premier Grand Lodge, was exalted in Grand Chapter in 1803 and in the December of that year was elected First Grand Principal. With strong leadership the affairs of Grand Chapter were soon put on a firm footing. Attempts were made to contact all the subordinate Chapters, those not replying being erased from the list. The Grand Chapter began to act as a true regulatory body summoning Chapters to attend, issuing new *Regulations* in 1807, granting charters and appointing Grand Superintendents.

The Antients

Whilst members of the premier Grand Lodge were forming and organising the Grand Chapter the members of the rival Antients Grand Lodge were not inactive. Their prime mover in the early years, Grand Secretary Laurence Dermott, did much to establish the Royal Arch as a fourth degree within the Antients system. The lodge warrant was regarded as sufficient authority to work any of the known masonic degrees and no thought was given to the formation of separate governing bodies for them. In 1771 Dermott, by now Deputy Grand Master of the Antients, referred to meetings of the Royal Arch and engineered a debate in the Antients Grand Lodge as to whether it was a suitable body to debate Royal Arch matters, particularly as there would be brethren present who were not members. Those present agreed with Dermott that the Grand Lodge had authority to discuss any matter pertaining to Freemasonry but that details of the Royal Arch should first be discussed by those qualified so to do. So came into being the so-called Grand Chapter of the Antients. In reality it was no more than a Committee of qualified members of the Grand Lodge. From the Antients Grand Lodge Minutes the Committee appears to have met on a number of occasions but its Minutes have not survived. It had no separate Grand Officers, issued no Charters and its decisions and its code of *Regulations* (first published in 1783) had to be approved by the Antients Grand Lodge before they could be promulgated. When, in 1790, the Antients began to issue Grand Chapter certificates signed by the Grand Principals and Scribes an examination of the signature against those offices gives the impression that whichever senior Grand Officers of the Antients Grand Lodge happened to call in at the Grand Secretary's office when certificates were being made out was asked to sign against one of the available offices.

The Craft Union

From 1809 committees of the two rival Grand Lodges were negotiating for an equitable Union. With divergent attitudes towards the Royal Arch—the Antients wholeheartedly accepting it, the premier Grand Lodge only acknowledging it as a separately organised society—the Royal Arch must have been a

major point of discussion between the negotiators. The archives relating to the Union, however, are remarkably silent on the question. The only reference in the Grand Chapter Minutes comes as late as 30 November 1813 when HRH the Duke of Sussex, who had become First Grand Principal in 1810, reported to the Grand Chapter that the two Grand Lodges had entered into preliminary Articles leading to a Union under one Grand Master. More importantly these Articles recognised the importance of the Royal Arch defining it as a part of pure antient masonry and the completion of the third degree. Grand Chapter thereupon gave the Duke full powers to negotiate a Union between the Grand Chapter and the *Grand Lodges* under the Grand Masterships of the Dukes of Sussex and Kent. It cannot be over-emphasised that the proposed Union was to be with the former rival Grand Lodges and not the Antients Grand Chapter.

The Royal Arch "Union"

The Craft Union, with its recognition of the importance of the Royal Arch, was achieved on 27 December 1813. Apart from recognising the Royal Arch nothing was said at or immediately after the Union as to arrangements for the Royal Arch. Edwards Harper, joint Grand Secretary, with William White, of the new United Grand Lodge was given special responsibility for administering the Royal Arch but proved dilatory in the discharge of his duties and the Royal Arch simply drifted. By 1817 it was clear that something had to be done and sufficient of the Craft arrangements having been achieved the Duke of Sussex briefly turned his mind to the Royal Arch. On 18 March 1817 the Duke summoned the Royal Arch members to Freemasons' Hall. The Grand Chapter was opened in one room and the former Antients Companions opened a Chapter in another. Both groups then processed to a third room where they were greeted by the Duke of Sussex who formed them into the United Grand Chapter, addressed them on the Royal Arch, appointed Grand Officers and a Committee to provide *Regulations* for the Order. To placate the former Antients the meeting was referred to, and announced to the Grand Lodge, as a Union but that was a pious fiction. There had been no Antients Grand Chapter, the Antients Grand Lodge and its committees had ceased to exist on 27 December 1813 and the "new" body was simply a continuation of the original Grand Chapter with the addition of those former members of the Antients Grand Lodge who were Royal Arch Masons. The fiction was continued by styling the body the United Grand Chapter, but that was quietly changed to Supreme Grand Chapter in 1821.

Supreme Grand Chapter

The Committee appointed on 18 March 1817 to compile *Regulations* worked quickly and presented their deliberations to Grand Chapter on 15 April. These were accepted, with two minor amendments, and set the seal on the future arrangement and development of Grand Chapter. They also demonstrably marked the new relationship between the Craft and the Royal Arch and the interdependency of the two. To mark that interdependency certain designated officers of the United Grand Lodge, provided that they are qualified, were automatically to hold equivalent office in Grand Chapter. Chapters were to be no longer independently chartered but were to be sponsored by a lodge to whose warrant the Charter was to be attached and whose number and, later, name they were to bear. Chapters already in existence were to surrender their Charters in return for new ones attaching them to a lodge of their choice, and former Antients Lodges had to cease working the Royal Arch and to petition for a Charter forming them into a Chapter attached to their lodge. As a rider to the *Regulations* it was stated that anything not specifically covered by the *Regulations* was to be considered as being governed by the *Book of Constitutions* of the United Grand Lodge.

The Grand Chapter was to be comprised of the present and past Grand Officers, the three Principals of every Chapter and, for the first time Past First Principals who remained subscribing members of English Chapters. The Grand Chapter was to meet four times a year with Convocations in August, November and February and the Annual Investiture on the day following that of the Craft. In 1948 the August meeting was moved to July as so many companions were absent on holiday in August, and the July meeting was

dispensed with in 1960, there rarely being enough business to justify the meeting. For the first time a Committee of General Purposes was instituted, to be comprised of members appointed by the First Grand Principal and others to be elected by Grand Chapter from amongst the present and past First Principals. The Committee was to have no executive powers but was to formulate policy and report on matters referred to it by Grand Chapter. The prerogative of appointing Grand Superintendents was to remain personal to the First Grand Principal but their powers were clearly defined. All Chapters within a Province or District came under the authority of the Grand Superintendent who had to call a meeting of his Province at least once in every year at which he was empowered to appoint Provincial Grand Officers. Appointments in Grand, Provincial and District Grand Chapter were only to active office. Past ranks were exceedingly rare. Towards the end of last century limited appointments to Past Ranks were permitted as part of national or Masonic celebrations but the general awarding of past ranks or promotions in the past ranks did not begin until the 1920s. Thus in 1817 our present system of administering the Royal Arch was firmly set.

Early Problems

Once Supreme Grand Chapter had been established in 1817 minds turned back to the Craft and the Royal Arch was left to grow on its own. Unhappily Edwards Harper continued to have responsibility for the administration of the Royal Arch and little was actually done. In particular nothing had been done in the area of the ritual. Chapters writing in for guidance rarely received it and matters became so confused that in 1834 the First Grand Principal appointed a Special Committee to decide what the ceremonies of the Royal Arch were. The Committee deliberated, demonstrated its ideas to Grand Chapter and the resulting ceremonies, for the exaltation and installations, were ordered to be adopted by all Chapters. Having, as they thought, sorted out the ritual, Grand Chapter adopted the position that it still maintains: that matters of principle in the ritual are the concern of Grand Chapter but matters of detail are the concern of individual Chapters and the governing bodies that grew up towards the end of last century to superintend the various workings that developed. That attitude was very clearly demonstrated in the last few years when the ritual again came under consideration and the basic principles were argued out in Grand Chapter but the detail of the wording of the changes was suggested rather than being made mandatory.

The work of the 1834 Special Committee, combined with William White taking over responsibility for the Royal Arch from Edwards Harper, breathed new life into the Royal Arch. The 19th century was to be a period of quiet growth both at home and abroad.

External Relations

The earliest reference to external relations in the Grand Chapter Minutes comes in 1808 when it was ordered that Companions exalted in Scotland and Ireland should be admitted to the Grand Chapter and its subordinate Chapters. With the new arrangements after the formation of Supreme Grand Chapter and the growth of Grand Chapters in other constitutions a nice question arose. Although Supreme Grand Chapter was sovereign over the Royal Arch it was not wholly independent of the United Grand Lodge. Could it, therefore, accord recognition to other sovereign bodies? A neat compromise was achieved. Grand Chapter does not accord formal recognition to or exchange representatives with other Grand Chapters but if a foreign Grand Chapter draws its membership from a Grand Lodge recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England then intervisitation and fraternal relations will happily take place.

Conclusion

In the present century (being 1991 when this paper was delivered) with the exception of the discussion of ritual in the 1970s and 1980s Supreme Grand Chapter has had an untroubled existence. At times it

may have felt itself to be a poor relation of the Craft but the Royal Arch has grown steadily and today more brethren are realising, with occasional prompting, that the Royal Arch is an essential part of pure antient masonry and are taking the right steps to completing their Craft. In two hundred and twenty five years Grand Chapter has passed through vicissitudes and low periods but has always emerged from them strengthened. Those founders who came together on 22 July 1766 can look down with pride in what their action has produced. Today (13th November 1991) we begin a year of celebrations: the 225th Anniversary of Supreme Grand Chapter; the 275th Anniversary of Grand Lodge combined (we hope) with the 25th Anniversary of the MW The Grand Master and the 40th Anniversary of the Accession of HM The Queen; and finally, in November next year (1992), the 25th Anniversary of the ME The First Grand Principal. As the Royal Arch is the completion of the Craft it is perhaps fitting that our major celebrations in the Craft should be preceded and concluded by two such notable anniversaries within Supreme Grand Chapter.