

# History of the Royal Arch in Wigan



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# A brief overview of the development of RA Masonry in Wigan

By E Comp Raymond Dye

## Foreword

Companions,

As the recently appointed Group Royal Arch Mentor, one of the first things that I did was to look for a published history of Wigan RA Masonry. I thought that such a document would help in demonstrating to new Companions the ancient roots of our Order in this area, and also perhaps help to enthuse and inform them, along with our more experienced Chapter Masons.

Unfortunately, I couldn't find anything that was complete and able to fit the bill, and consequently decided to write my own concise version. I have tried to keep my focus on the Royal Arch development in Wigan, but it has been necessary to include some wider aspects of the history of Chapter Masonry to put this into context.

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Comp Fred Lomax and E Comp Eddie Forkgen for their invaluable help in identifying appropriate sources and to Fred for kindly reviewing the final draft. Without their assistance my job would have been far more difficult, and I doubt whether I could have turned up the type of information that they subsequently made available to me, helping to create an interesting story which I'm pleased to share with you.

It is worth explaining as a precursor, that the early Freemasons' Lodges effectively exercised power to confer any degree in which they felt they had competence. Consequently when the RA degree started to emerge in the early/middle parts of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it was worked as a "Fourth" Degree in Lodges, and, during this period, membership into Royal Arch was restricted to Brethren who were Installed Masters. The working of Chapter Masonry in Wigan is therefore set in the context of Wigan Lodges of the 18<sup>th</sup> / early 19<sup>th</sup> Century – Antiquity, Sincerity and Integrity – and it is to the enlightened Brethren of these Lodges that we Royal Arch Masons in this Group must offer our grateful thanks.

In this history I give an intriguing glimpse into an "irregular" ceremony practised in these early Lodges, called "Passing the Chair," which facilitated "unqualified" Brethren with access to Chapter Masonry. Fred Lomax provided me with a copy of a 1954 interview of some aged Brethren from the Lodge of Sincerity (which for many years operated independently, and outside the influence of UGL) who recalled this ceremony still being practised by members of that Lodge up to about 1911, just a couple of years before the Lodge re-joined UGL. In fact one of those interviewed, a Brother James Miller (Grandfather of W. Bro. James Miller currently a member of Prodesse Lodge 8678), was apparently one of the last members of Sincerity (and perhaps in the country????) to experience that ceremony.

Bernard E. Jones' "Freemasons Book of the Royal Arch," expands on this theme, and left me in no doubt that the ceremony of "passing the Chair," was irregular, but was difficult to stop, partially as a result of difficult communications and travel, but also down to the fact that some Lodges actively resisted any interference in what

They saw as their own affairs. There is also evidence that those in authority also broke the rules when the circumstances dictated.

Eddie Forkgen provided me with access to a "History of Masonry in Wigan", written in 1882 by the then Secretary of Lodge of Antiquity, J. Brown, which, amongst many details, gives the name of Brethren, associated with Lodge of Antiquity, who were made a Royal Arch Mason via "passing the Chair" in

1786/1787. These were the earliest reference that I can currently find to anyone in Wigan being made a Royal Arch Mason, even if it was via an “irregular” ceremony. Brown (and confirmed by William James Hughan) also identifies what I think was the earliest warranted Chapter in Wigan, Chapter of Temperance No. 65 which met from 1789 to circa 1813, and which was probably associated with Lodge of Sincerity. However, Chapter of Harmony 178 consecrated in 1826, and which was sponsored by Lodge of Antiquity 178, is the oldest Royal Arch Chapter still meeting in Wigan.

I don't claim that this history is complete, in fact I'm certain that in time more evidence will be uncovered which may alter perceptions of the way that RA developed in Wigan, and any relevant contribution to improve on this first version will be appreciated. At some point I would like to add a small section about each Chapter still working in Wigan to help make this document more complete. Perhaps there are hidden gems locked away in ancient, dusty Lodge and Chapter minute books, which may eventually be restored to light. It is also possible that the information I display may be challenged by more knowledgeable Companions. However, until other relevant information is uncovered, my meagre offerings will have to suffice.

I hope you enjoy the read.....

Raymond Pye

## **History of the Royal Arch in Wigan**

### **Early Days**

As with Craft Freemasonry, there is debate as to the origins of the Royal Arch, not helped by the scarcity of surviving evidence. From the little evidence we do have available we know that the Royal Arch was known in London, York and Dublin by the late 1730s. In extant Lodge Minute Books of the 1750s we know that the Royal Arch was being worked within Craft Lodges in England (attached to the Antients Grand Lodge and in some Lodges attached to the Premier Grand Lodge), and in Lodges under the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland. Also the Ancient Grand Lodge in York as well as several Grand Lodges in America.

One of the first references to, together with a definition of the Royal Arch, was provided by Dr. Fifeild Dassigny in his book dated 1744 when he refers to - “An organised body of men who have passed the chair.” Passing the chair was important to Brethren wishing to become a Royal Arch Mason, as in those days Brethren needed to be a Past Master to qualify them for the preferment. However, as will be seen later, a variation on this ceremony was used as a means by which “unqualified” Brethren could become Chapter Members.

With modern worldwide communications, allowing Secretaries and Scribes to receive directives from our Lords and Masters instantly via the internet, it is easy to forget that the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Century modes of travel and communications were extremely poor, and consequently in those early days Lodges tended to be relatively isolated, and made decisions in their own local interest. Many Lodges believed they had the right to work whatever degrees they felt competent with, and Wigan Masons were no different to those in other parts of the country.

As I understand the situation, there were 3 Lodge in Wigan which provided a link to the workings of RA as an extension to the Craft Degrees. These Lodges were:

1. (The Ancient Royal Arch Lodge) Lodge of Antiquity No. 235; this was a lodge, warranted in May 1786, belonging to the Antients Grand Lodge.

2. Lodge of Sincerity No. 492; this was a lodge, warranted in 1786, belonging to the Premier Grand Lodge.
3. Lodge of Integrity No. 74; this was a lodge, warranted in 1805, belonging to the Ancients Grand Lodge.

**Note:** It is unlikely that any of these Lodges were working as private/independent lodges, before 1786. However, I understand that this was a common practice across Lancashire and they worked the Royal Arch under their Craft warrant.

They were sometimes referred to as St. John's Lodges as they had two separate Installations, on 24<sup>th</sup> June (St John the Baptist's day) and 27<sup>th</sup> December (St John the Evangelist's day). In many Lodges, especially in the late 1700s and early 1800s, a Master would only serve for 6 months, hence the reason for two Installations.

### **Lodge of Antiquity No. 235.** (Ancient Royal Arch Lodge)

Antiquity was first warranted 26<sup>th</sup> May 1786 and was "Constituted" 21<sup>st</sup> June 1786. Its Ancients' Grand Lodge No. was 235, and the Lodge held a variety of other numbers after the Union:

- 1814 – 294
- 1832 – 207
- 1863 (to present) 178.

In those days this Lodge held meetings at the following locations:

- 1786 - *Queen's Head*, Market Place, Wigan, Lancashire.
- 1852 - *Eagle and Child Inn*, Standishgate, Wigan, Lancashire.
- 1867 - *Royal Hotel* (same place, name altered), Standishgate, Wigan, Lancashire.
- 1877 - *Masonic Hall*, Leader's Buildings, King Street, Wigan, Lancashire.

1. Brown (Secretary of Antiquity, who in 1882 published the "History of Masonry in Wigan,") reproduces the Warrant details from the original minutes of 1786, which go on to record Antiquity's Installation meeting:

*"After the Lodge was duly opened, the Right Worshipful Grand Master and the rest of the Worshipful Officers and members then proceeded to the Installation of Lodge No. 235, which was performed with the greatest solemnity, regularity and decorum...."*

The minutes also record on that day:

*"At one o'clock the Lodge was called to refreshment and continued while ye **Grand Lodge of Antiquity of England** was toasted and then called to work again. And continued open until the hour of three when the same was closed in the greatest Harmony in pursuance of the Grand Lodge instructions....."*

Brown also considers the evidence of whether Antiquity ever held an even earlier Warrant but concludes:

*"From what has been stated above it is quite clear that there never was one (earlier Warrant) in connection with Lodge No. 235, that the one we now hold is the original one granted to the Lodge, that Thos. Doncaster was its first Installed Master" ..... "At this time on all the papers, and until about 1860, on the circular, the Lodge is always called **The Ancient Royal Arch Lodge.**"*

The following copy of a blank front page of a Lodge of Antiquity Summons is reproduced from Brown's book and is unfortunately undated. However, from the inscription of the meeting place shown on the top of the summons, **Queens Head, Wigan**, (Antiquity's meeting place between 1786 and 1852); and its Roll

number 235 (which was applicable before 1814), it can be dated to between 1786 and 1814. So, this summons format is probably around 200 to 225 years old.

Additionally, the reference to Antiquity being an “Ancient Royal Arch Lodge” is indicated clearly on a Lodge emblem shown at the bottom of the summons, and which is appropriately surrounded by an arch. I think that this graphically demonstrates the importance of the Royal Arch to this Lodge and its members.

Lodge of Antiquity Early Summons



Brown refers to minutes about two emergency meetings of Lodge of Antiquity:

Firstly on 13<sup>th</sup> September (my birth date) 1786 – under the heading of “A night of Emergency” - when a Brother Morgan “*passed the chair on his emergency, there being a sufficient number of Past Masters present.*” It doesn’t explain what the emergency was but perhaps Brother Morgan was due to leave the district. In relation to this meeting, the minutes also suggest that “*This occurs very frequently, Brethren from Leigh, Chorley and other places coming to Wigan to pass the Chair.*” One can presume from this last statement that, in Wigan, Brethren experienced the ceremony of passing the chair earlier than 13<sup>th</sup> September 1786. In Brown’s record it suggests that a fuller account is given in minutes dated November 19<sup>th</sup> 1787, but no further reference is made available.

And secondly 28<sup>th</sup> April 1787 – under a heading of “*Lodge of Emergency*” – when a Bro John Green “*passed the chair*” and was duly declared Master for a “*certain space of time.*” I understand that at this time Lodges convened emergency meetings to suit the situation, particularly when candidates became available.

Brown also records from Antiquity’s minutes of 13<sup>th</sup> September 1786:

*“it was ordered that the following Brethren should on payment into the common stock of the Lodge, 2s 6d (12 and 1/2 pence), and 2s 6d., further towards the expenses of the evening, **pass the chair if found worthy.** Here follows the names of **fourteen** Brethren.”* Unfortunately the names are not included in Browns’ book

I have previously referred to the fact that, at the time, a Mason could not become a member of The Royal Arch until he had passed the Master’s Chair, i.e. been entrusted with the secrets of an Installed Master of the Lodge. These rules were circumvented by a ceremony which was apparently practised to enable a Brother to become a RA Mason, but it did not entitle him to rank as a Past Master of the Lodge. In other words it was simply a device to enable “unqualified” Brethren to become RA Masons. The Lodge History doesn’t qualify what the ceremony of passing the chair consisted of (but see later notes), although Brown considers it an “*irregular ceremony,*” and suggests that there was evidence (“*not from this Lodge*”) of a WM being brought before the Grand Lodge for making Arch Masons, previous to passing the Chair as Master’s of the Lodge.

Brown comments:

*“From the above we can suppose that the Royal Arch Degree was worked in conjunction with the Lodge, although I cannot find that they had a separate Warrant.”*

Bernard E Jones in his “Freemasons Book of the Royal Arch” suggests:

*“Over a long period bridging the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the reader is now well aware, none but Installed Masters were acceptable as Candidates for the Royal Arch. ‘**Passing the chair**’ was a device, a subterfuge, an evasion, originally designed for the one purpose of giving the Master Mason who had not ruled a lodge the status qualifying him as a Candidate. Originally, it is believed, it was introduced by the ‘Ancients,’ but was soon adopted by the ‘Moderns.’ It took the form of installing the Third Degree Mason in the Master’s Chair by means of the customary ceremony or one closely resembling it, and then facilitating his leaving the chair in the course of a very few minutes.”*

He further states “*A Brother wishing to be Exalted had customarily to get the consent of his Lodge to pass the chair, and commonly to be elected to that honour..... Care was taken to impress upon the “virtual Master” that he was **not** being qualified to rule over a Lodge for more than a brief time.*”

Jones goes on to say: “*It is often commonly stated that under the ‘Ancients’ Grand Lodge every private lodge was empowered by its charter to confer the Royal Arch Degree. Only in a sense is this true. The Royal Arch was not specified in the lodge charter, but was regarded as such a completely integral part of the Masonic scheme as not to need mention. It was just taken for granted. And to that statement must be added a further one: under their ordinary charters or warrants, the ‘Ancients,’ the Irish and many of the Scottish*

*lodges, and some few of the 'Moderns' lodges believed they had the right to confer any and every Masonic degree they pleased!"*

From the early Wigan Masonic history it is clear that the Royal Arch Ceremony was worked in connection with the Lodge of Antiquity from at least 1786. I think this information evidences the earliest record of a Brother being made a Royal Arch Mason in Wigan. (See also later an example of a ceremony of "passing the chair.")

Brown writing about the way that the Royal Arch was worked in Lodge of Antiquity suggests:

*"At this time in our Lodge, the Arch Degree was worked as the Fourth Degree and on the same evening as the Regular Lodge." And goes on to say "I have no doubt that a few of the Brethren who formed the Lodge were 'Arch' Masons, and as soon as the Lodge was in working order, commenced to work this Degree."*

From the RA Treasurer's book dated from 1788 the Royal Arch fee was given as 10s. 6d -(52,1/2p); Certificate, 3s - (15p) .

Brown goes on to say: *"We have Rules and Regulations for the Holy Royal Arch, revised and confirmed at a General Grand Chapter, held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1791 – Signed, Robert Leslie, G.S.1791."*

Apparently, these were revised "and corrected" as **"rules for the introduction and Government of the Holy Royal Arch Chapters"** under the protection and supported by the Antient Grand Lodge of England at a General Grand Chapter held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, London 1<sup>st</sup> October 1794.

In both these books of rules the following appears:-

*"Antient Masonry consists of Four Degrees:- The three first of which are that of Apprentice, The Fellow Craft, The Sublime Degree of Master; and a Brother, being well versed in these Degrees and having discharged the offices of this Lodge, particularly that of Master, and fulfilled the duties thereof with the approbation of the Brethren of his Lodge is eligible to be admitted to the **Fourth Degree – The Holy Royal Arch**. It follows, therefore, of course, that every Regular Lodge possesses the power of forming and holding Lodges in these several Degrees, the last of which, from its pre-eminence, is denominated among Masons a Chapter."*

Brown records that:

*"the Moderns Grand Chapter, dated from about 1760. It originated by a few eminent Masons well versed in the ceremonies, taking the direction of the Chapter with which they were connected, and constituting it a Grand Chapter. They then proceeded to issue Warrants, and it is still styled the Grand Chapter in connection with the Grand Lodge of England."*

Lodge of Antiquity must have continued to work the Royal Arch as a Fourth Degree, but applied for a separate Chapter Warrant in 1799. Antiquity Minutes of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1799 reveal:

*"That Bro. James Dawson, Secy (secretary), do write the Grand Lodge for further instructions respecting a Grand Chapter to be held by us under the Warrant 235, and how far we have power to proceed thereon."*

Brown suggests that this Chapter (no name) was held until 1816, and that from 1816 until 1823 there is no record of it being held (*it is possible that the Lodge carried on working the RA Degree until its post union Chapter of Harmony was properly up and running*).

### **Chapter of Harmony**

Brown further suggests that in 1823 there is a letter from the Grand Secretary, in which he refers to a petition for a new Chapter, and gives the petitioners advice how to proceed:

*“In the year 1826 a new Chapter was granted, which is the one now held as the **Chapter of Harmony** in connection with the Lodge.”*

Brown also comments:

*“The Lodge (Antiquity) has now on its role 73 members. The amount of ninety pounds has been sent this year to the various charities, **ten of which was given by the Arch Chapter.**”*

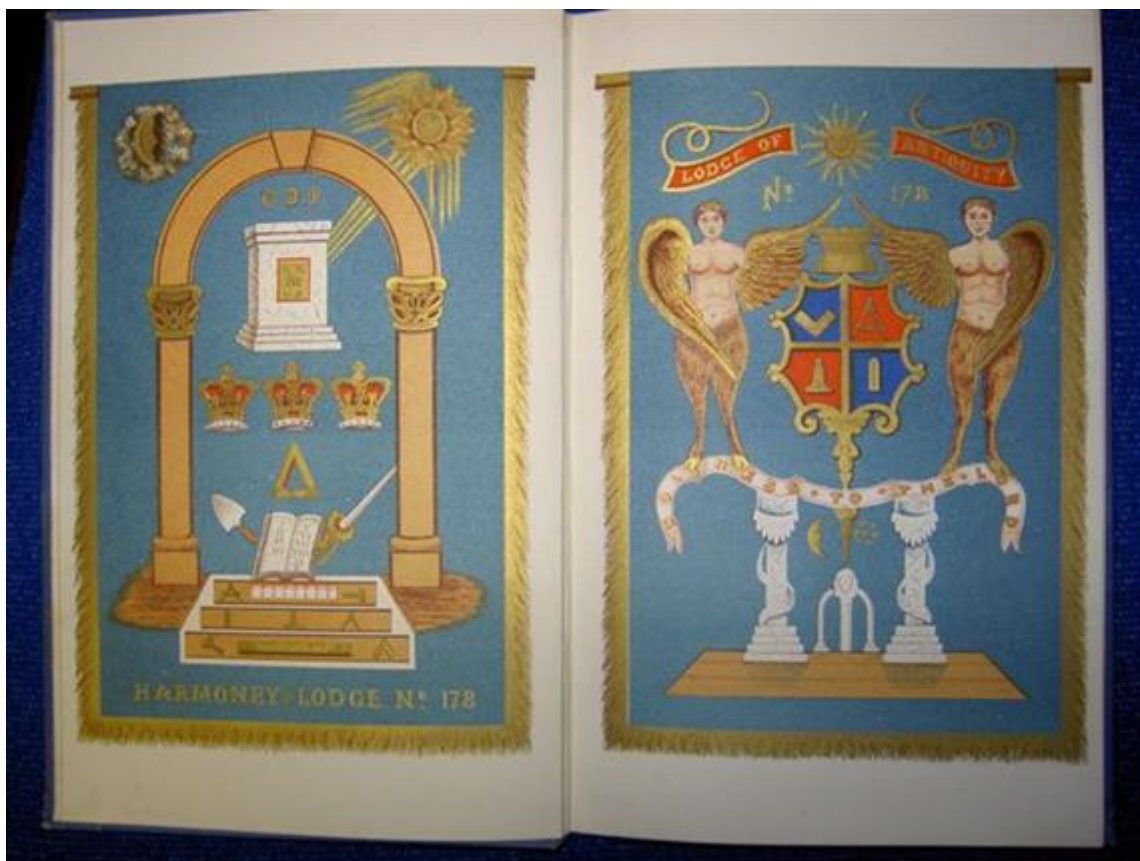
Harmony continues to meet as the oldest surviving RA Chapter in the Wigan Group, and the following images from Brown’s book depict a Lodge of Antiquity banner (date not known but must have been later than 1863 as the Roll number 178 is indicated), and also includes an image relating to the “Lodge” of Harmony 178 (Which I presume refers to the Chapter of Harmony). The image referring to Harmony obviously contains much Royal Arch Symbolism, although on the steps there is also a variety of Craft symbolism which may indicate the connection of Royal Arch with early Masonic Lodges in the early days.

### **ADDENDUM APRIL 2013**

I have recently been given a copy of a History of Chapter of Harmony originally written in 1977 by E Comp Richard Hart; and transcribed electronically by E Comp Derek Mason in March 2013.

This document fills quite a few gaps as E Comp Hart had access to minute books which I haven't been able to read. It essentially splits up the progress of the Chapter into 3 phases, and gives the reason why it only celebrated its Centenary in 1977, although being originally constituted in 1826.....

Depiction of Antiquity and Harmony Banners





Lodge of Sincerity's warrant of constitution is dated 30<sup>th</sup> November 1786, from the Premier Grand Lodge, just a few months after Lodge of Antiquity, and Sincerity also worked the RA Degree. It held a variety of role numbers over a period of time:

- 1781 – No. 492
- 1791 – No. 402
- 1814 – No. 486
- 1913 (to present) – No. 3677

Sincerity was erased 5<sup>th</sup> March 1828 for joining the Liverpool rebellion, which re-established the Ancients Grand Lodge in opposition to the United Grand Lodge. In fact by the 1860's, this Lodge was the last one working under the jurisdiction of the "Grand Lodge of Wigan," and carried on working as an independent Lodge until 1913 when it re-joined UGLE and was issued with a new warrant with a roll No. 3677.

Brown writes:

*"But although struck of the role (sic), it is a very curious circumstance and worthy of notice that the Lodge has been held regularly, on the Monday nearest to the full moon, until the present day (1882), and is at present held at the King's Head in the Market Place, and known as a Spurious Lodge. It has changed its meeting place many times. The room in which it now meets is in an ordinary public house room, used on Market days, and on all the furniture appears the name and number of the Lodge when as it was when struck off, namely Lodge of Sincerity No. 486. This Lodge has about fifty members with a Sick and Burial Society in connection with it, and a considerable sum of money invested. Its members work the Royal Arch Degree and have a **Knigh Templar Encampment.**"*

Sincerity had a variety of meeting places in the early days:

- 1786 - *Buck i' th' Vine*, Wallgate, Wigan, Lancashire;
- 1813 - *Ring of Bells*, Millgate, Wigan, Lancashire;
- 1823 - *Royal Oak*, Millgate, Wigan, Lancashire
- 1882 – Kings Head, Market Place, Wigan, Lancashire.

Brown refers to Sincerity 402 *meeting at the Ring of Bells*:

*"This Lodge was originally No.492 Lodge of Sincerity, and held its Warrant under the Moderns Grand Lodge, or, the parent Grand Lodge of English Masonry, bearing date November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1786, and was consecrated at the Buck i' th' Vine. In the year 1792, at the renumbering of the Moderns Lodges it was altered to No. 402 and it was held at the Ring of Bells. Previous to the Union no mention is ever made in our (Antiquity's) Minute Book of this Lodge, but afterwards they appear to have worked in harmony together."*

### **Chapter of Temperance No. 65** (thought to be associated with Lodge of Sincerity)

According to William James Hughan in his 1884 "Origin of English Rite of Freemasonry", Chapter of Temperance was warranted in 1789, and was still shown on the Roll of the "Supreme Grand and Royal Chapter" in 1813.

This Chapter was an early entrant into the Rolls of Grand Chapter, and is thought to be the earliest Warranted RA Chapter to have met in Wigan. Temperance was registered with the Grand Chapter belonging to the Premier Grand lodge, but may have been expelled around the same time as Sincerity. There is no record of it after 1813.

Brown also points to some evidence supporting Hughan's information and states:

*"I found among the papers of our Lodge (Antiquity), a circular headed, "**Royal Arch Grand Chapter of Temperance, Buck i' th' Vine, No. 65;**" and from a work on freemasonry in the Reference Department of*

Wigan Free Library, I ascertained that it was held the last Sunday in the month. I have no doubt, therefore, that this was a Chapter held in connection with this spurious Lodge (Sincerity) No. 486." (Chapters attached to the Moderns tended to meet on a Sunday).

Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find any further information on this ancient Chapter, but I will continue to search for any details as the opportunity arises.

**Note:** Pre-union, Chapters were numbered numerically. However a couple of years after the union, Grand Chapter decided that all chapters must take the number of their sponsoring lodge.

### **Lodge of Integrity No. 54**

I have no substantial information about this Lodge and no evidence to confirm that it worked the Arch Degree. However, it is thought likely that this Lodge will also have worked the RA as an extension of the (Ancients) Craft Degrees.

Integrity's date of warrant or constitution was 30<sup>th</sup> September 1805. Its Ancients Grand Lodge No. was 54. After the Union it was renumbered to 74 (1814) and was also shown with the same number on the role of 1832 even though the Lodge had been erased by United Grand Lodge in 1823! This Lodge was one of those which joined the Liverpool rebellion and joined the re-established Ancients Grand Lodge in Wigan.

This Lodge met at:

- 1805 - *Unicorn*, Standishgate, Wigan, Lancashire.
- 1818 - *Red Lion*, Wiend, Wigan, Lancashire.

### **Example of Ceremony of Passing the chair.**

Further excellent evidence of the practice of allowing Brethren to "pass the chair" is contained in the transcript of a document given to me By E Comp Fred Lomax. The original was written by a W. Bro. JW Asson, PM of Antiquity Lodge 178, when, in 1954, he interviewed W. Bro. James Miller (Grandfather of W Bro Jim Miller of Prodesse Lodge 8678) and other members of Lodge of Sincerity 3677. W. Bro. James Miller had been initiated in 1908, and had clear memory of this practice.

In 1954 W. Bro. Asson wrote:

*"W Bro. Miller informed me that it was a progressive ceremony conferred on brethren whom the Past Masters considered were sufficiently interested and enthusiastic to entertain hopes that someday they would attain the Chair of King Solomon – they usually waited until there were several in the category and to his knowledge never less than three for this preferment – the selected brethren were not entitled to any privileges or titles - but were ENTITLED TO SIT IN THE LODGE AND ACTUALLY WITNESS THE CEREMONY OF INSTALLATION, although he remembers several instances of the candidates not having reach the Junior Wardens chair."*

*Concerning the actual ceremony of PASSING THE CHAIR which would be on the agenda for the meeting and which was performed when the Lodge was in the Third Degree, the WM in his own chosen words, referred to the qualities and abilities of the brethren for ADVANCEMENT (there being no ritualistic oration) and then the candidates were place in a line at the left of the WM's pedestal (north) and he standing and taking the candidates right-hand walked backwards and placed the candidate in the Chair of King Solomon – afterwards from the front of the pedestal, saluted the seated candidate or NEWLY PASSED BROTHER with the penal sign of an INSTALLED MARK MASTER , but NOT THE WORD of an Installed Mark Master substituting the word 'Aplumb' and informing him – signifying 'UPRIGHT'.*

*As previously stated the ceremony of PASSING THE CHAIR was at intervals performed up to May 1911 and W Bro. James Miller was one of the last batch to be so honoured by Sincerity Lodge. No.486. (The ceremony was banned by Grand Lodge in 1846) but there are reports of the ceremony still being practised (by GL consent) in one or two very old lodges, but I am informed that candidates must have attained the Junior Wardens chair, or in most exceptional circumstances, such as great age or infirmity, may be unable to occupy the Masters Chair – But they are NOT ALLOWED TO WITNESS THE CEREMONY OF INSTALLATION.*

*To record the above ceremony as fully as possible I the undersigned wishes to state that having interviewed each and every one of the six members of the old SINCERITY No. 486 (still living during 1952-54) and getting a little from one and then another, seeing the more aged ones first whose memories were fading, can now give a picture of the ceremony as it was and had always been practised, (not only in 486) but in all of the Old Lodges prior to the GL veto and the reader may rest assured the above is an accurate account and that permission to record was granted.”*

*J.W.Asson PM 178*

Comp Fred Lomax comments on this document:

*“The PASSING THE CHAIR ceremony was a means by which Brethren who had not achieved the Chair in a Craft Lodge could progress into the Royal Arch. The requirement at the time was that candidates for the Royal Arch should be a Past Master.”*

*“At the time to which James Miller is referring, the Mark Degree would have been an essential step towards the Royal Arch and you will also notice the word ADVANCEMENT is used. This is somewhat unusual as most Passing the Chair information I have come across refers to the Craft. But Sincerity has always been different and so should it remain.”*

*“The ceremony was held in the Craft 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, so those selected would have been Master Masons. The WM used words of his own choosing and gave a word to the candidate for an Installed Master but not G....M. This then permitted them to be exalted into the Royal Arch as they were for all intents and purposes an INSTALLED MASTER, although in reality they were not. It was simply a means of getting round the rules.”*

*“Curiously in the USA they have a Past Masters (virtual) degree which sounds very similar to John Asson’s Description in which a candidate goes through the Mark Master degree prior to the Most Excellent Master which is a requirement for the Royal Arch over there. The ceremony does not entitle a brother to be regarded as a Past Master in the Craft”.*

Jones, in his book provides a further insight:

*“In spite of many attempts to bring this practice to an end, the practice of passing the chair continued to be worked in many Lodges until past the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.....The Past Masters virtual degree should have disappeared from 1822 when the qualification to be a Past Master before becoming a RA Mason was replaced by a qualification that a candidate for RA should be a Master Mason of twelve months standing. This qualification was further amended in 1893 to one month.....There was resentment in some Lodges that the Past Master’s degree had been suppressed.”*

Bernard Jones also gives some information about the working of the Mark and Royal Arch Degrees which may explain the reference in Asson’s Sincerity document to an Advancement and Installed Mark Master:

*“It is worth noting that RA Certificates of the period often include the phrase –*

*Given under our hands and Masonic Mark in Chapter this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_”*

He goes on to say:

..... *In England nowadays the MM is qualified to become a Mark Mason or a Royal Arch Mason, and in the order he prefers. But in Scotland Ireland and the USA the Mark Degree (as in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England) is still a preliminary to becoming a RA Mason.*

I think that it is reasonable to assume from this evidence relating to “passing the chair”, that Lodge of Sincerity was still working a version of this 18<sup>th</sup> Century ritual which led, via the Mark Degree, to Royal Arch until around 1911. Possibly the last Lodge in this country to do so?

### Summary

Royal Arch Masonry has probably been worked in Wigan from the time that Lodge of Antiquity was constituted in 1786, and many of the candidates will have “*passed the Chair*” in an irregular ceremony. The first evidence that I can find of this is a reference to a Brother Morgan in 1786, and, on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1787, Brother John Green “*passed the Chair and was duly declared a Master for a certain space of time*”. It isn’t clear whether these Brethren were Wigan Masons, as the minutes suggest that people from other districts came to Wigan to go through the ceremony.

I was completely oblivious of the use of the ceremony of “passing the chair,” until I read Brown’s History of Freemasonry in Wigan, and I suspect that many Royal Arch Masons will have been equally unaware of this ancient “irregular” practice. Of course in the current era a Brother needs only to have been a Mason for four weeks and upwards to be qualified to become a Royal Arch Mason, but in the early years a brother needed to be an Installed Master, and in those days Lodges obviously worked hard to get round the rules to ensure a flow of candidates to the Royal Arch. Lodge of Sincerity could well have been the Last Lodge in the country to have used this type of ceremony, and Brother James Miller of Sincerity perhaps one of the last to experience it.

Other ancient Lodges i.e. Integrity, and particularly Sincerity, also played their parts in establishing Chapter Masonry in Wigan, although I have limited information on these. Chapter of Temperance, probably connected to Lodge of Sincerity, was the oldest Warranted Chapter in Wigan, but unfortunately it disappeared off the radar around 1813, leaving little or no information about its 100 year+ life span. Lodge of Antiquity established the oldest surviving Chapter – Chapter of Harmony – which was consecrated in 1826. There is also a possibility that Antiquity petitioned for an earlier Chapter in 1799, perhaps the forerunner of Harmony 178, but I can’t find a name or other information to clarify this.

And so we can say with some certainty that the Royal Arch has existed in Wigan for around 225 years to date. We now have eight Chapters in the Group and a tremendous heritage to build on. I’m proud of that heritage and I’m sure that we all look forward to Chapter Masonry growing and prospering in the coming years.

### Time Line of Chapter Masonry in Wigan

The following chart provides an at a glance sequence of the way that RA Masonry has developed in Wigan since 1786. This was initially via Lodges working the RA degree as an extension of the Craft Degrees, with the earliest stand-alone warranted Chapter being Royal Arch Grand Chapter of Temperance No. 65.

<b>June 1786</b>	(The Ancient Royal Arch Lodge) Lodge of Antiquity No. 235 (current No. 178) Initially worked the RA as a Fourth Degree. (Possibly applied for a separate Chapter Warrant in 1799?)
<b>Nov. 1786</b>	Sincerity Lodge No. 492 (current No. 3677) initially worked the RA as a Fourth Degree.
<b>1789</b>	Royal Arch Grand Chapter of Temperance No. 65 Constituted (sponsored by Lodge of Sincerity 492?)
<b>1799</b>	Antiquity petition for a new Chapter (no name or records?)
<b>Sept. 1805</b>	Lodge of Integrity No. 54 (subsequently changed to No. 74) No records, but presume that it initially Worked the RA as a Fourth Degree.

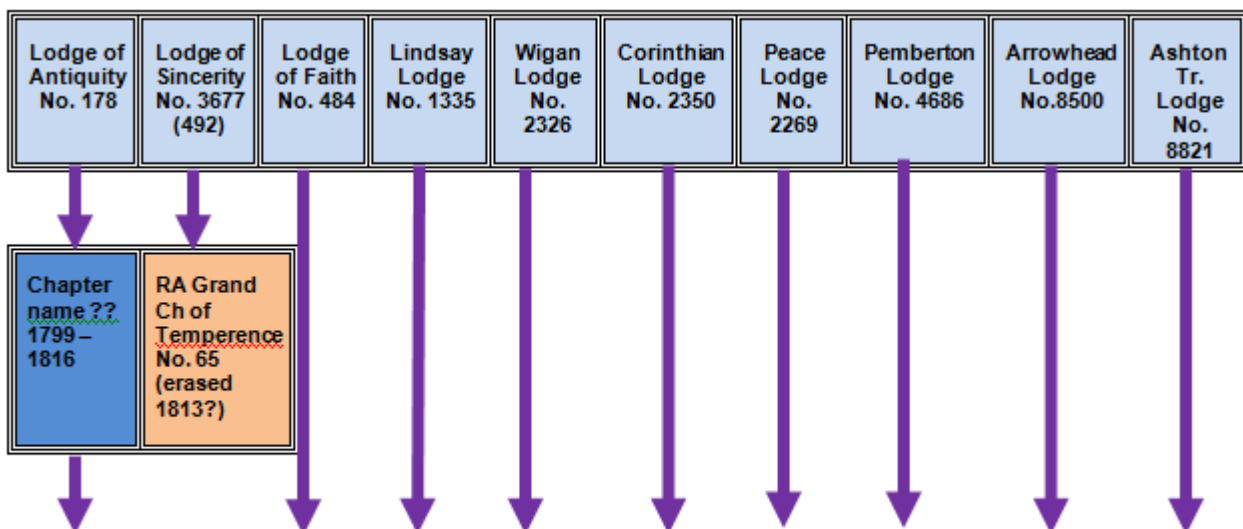
Aug. 1826  
 Sept. 1887  
 June 1892  
 March 1895  
 June 1932  
 April 1945  
 Sept. 1974  
 May 1981  
 April 2007

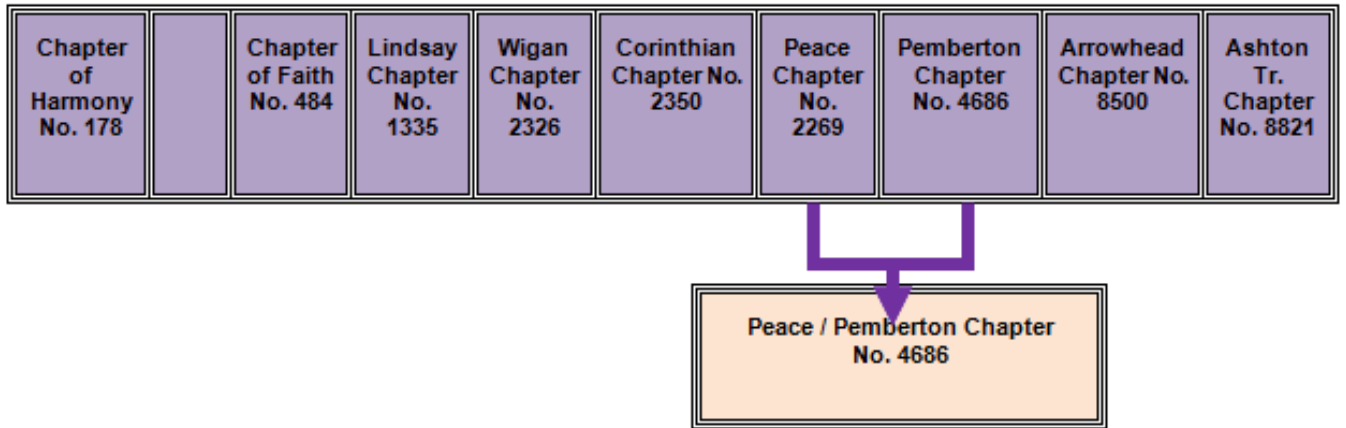
Chapter of Harmony No. 178 constituted (sponsored by Lodge of Antiquity 178).  
 Lindsay Chapter No. 1335 consecrated (sponsored by Lindsay Lodge 1135)  
 Peace Chapter No. 2269 consecrated (sponsored by Peace Lodge 2269)  
 Corinthian Chapter No. 2350 consecrated (sponsored by Corinthian Lodge 2350).  
 Chapter of Faith No. 484 consecrated (sponsored by Lodge of Faith 484).  
 Wigan Chapter No. 2326 consecrated (sponsored by Wigan Lodge 2326).  
 Pemberton Chapter No. 4686 consecrated (sponsored by Pemberton Lodge 4686)  
 Arrowhead Chapter 8500 consecrated (sponsored by Arrowhead Lodge 8500).  
 Peace and Pemberton Chapter No. 4686 certificate of amalgamation of the two Chapters.  
 (Pemberton Chapter Roll No. retained)

**Current RA Chapters in the Wigan Group:**

Chapter Name	Chapter No.	Date of Warrant	Date of Consecration
Harmony	178	1 <sup>st</sup> February 1826	12 <sup>th</sup> August 1826  (Constituted)
Faith	484	4 <sup>th</sup> May 1932	29 <sup>th</sup> June 1932
Lindsay	1335	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 1886	29 <sup>th</sup> September 1887
Wigan	2326	1 <sup>st</sup> November 1945	18 <sup>th</sup> April 1945
Corinthian	2350	9 <sup>th</sup> February 1895	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 1895
Peace and Pemberton	4686	25 <sup>th</sup> April 1974	19 <sup>th</sup> September 1974
Arrowhead	8500	11 <sup>th</sup> February 1981	22 <sup>nd</sup> May 1981
Ashton Trinity	8821	10 <sup>th</sup> February 1982	29 <sup>th</sup> November 1982

**Relationship between Wigan Lodges and Chapters** (Peace and Pemberton Chapters amalgamated 26<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and adopted the Pemberton Lodge/Chapter roll number 4686)





## Acknowledgements

- Lane's Masonic Records.
- J. Brown's "History of Masonry in Wigan.
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- William James Hughan "Origin of English Rite of Freemasonry" (1884).
- Bernard E. Jones "Freemasons book of the Royal Arch."
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