



Have We Always Done It That Way?

When you hear that well worn and quite often miss quoted Masonic lament about the Royal Arch: “we’ve always done it that way!”, the Companion making that statement, more than likely, has absolutely no idea how much has changed in the Royal Arch since the Union of the two Grand Lodges and the official acceptance of the Royal Arch as part of the Craft in 1813.

As an example, here is a simplified resume of some of the major changes made since the Union:

1. Prior to the Union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813 all Candidates for exaltation into the Royal Arch had to be Past Masters in the Craft, which led to the use of a spoof ceremony called ‘Passing the Chair’.
2. 1813 - All Chapters in existence prior to December 27th 1813 had to apply for a new Charter of Confirmation attaching the Chapter to a Craft Lodge, which was one of the requirements of the Union of the two Grand Lodges and the acceptance of the Royal Arch as part of pure Antient Masonry.
3. 1817 - The final meeting of the separate (Moderns) Supreme Grand and Royal Chapter of Royal Arch Masons founded in 1766 took place on March 18th 1817 and immediately followed by the first meeting of the United Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England.
4. 1820 – As no direction had been given regarding the ritual to be used - A number of Chapters in the Provinces wrote to Grand Chapter requesting guidance on the ritual, from which the initial steps were taken towards the formulation of a standard uniform working.
5. 1821 – The United Grand Chapter changed its name to The Grand Chapter on November 7th and a change in regulations recommended that a Candidate under the age of twenty three is not to be admitted.
6. 1823 – The Royal Arch Constitutions were published including new rules regulating such regalia items as aprons, collars, sashes and jewels. Also, that the Principal Sojourner had the right to personally appoint two Assistant Sojourners. During that year, a rule was established stating that it is not necessary for a Companion holding an Office in a Chapter to have held the same type of Office in a Craft Lodge. The new Regulations no longer required a Candidate for the Royal Arch to have been an Installed Master in the Craft or to occupy the 3 Principals Chairs in a Chapter. The password into the Chapter was changed from the ‘Master’s Word’ to the current A... R.....h
7. The above change in the regulations removed the practice of ‘Passing the Chair’, a spoof ceremony used for those who had not previously occupied the Masters chair in the Craft to qualify them for exaltation into the Royal Arch.
8. 1825 – Richard Carlile published the first edition of his exposure the “Manual of Freemasonry.” Whilst it was unauthorised and there being no other printed information available, it was used extensively in Masonic circles as a substitute for a ritual book.
9. 1826 – The qualification for the Office of 3rd Principal of a Chapter was amended again (See 1823) requiring Candidates for the 3rd Principals chair to be an Installed Master in the Craft, the Second Principal had to be an Installed 3rd Principal and the First Principal and Installed 2nd Principal.
10. 1832 – The last exaltation ceremony carried out by the Grand Chapter.
11. 1833 – A committee was formed to consider a form of installation ceremony and other ceremonies of the Order. The Five Points of Fellowship were introduced as a test for the admission of Master Masons to the Third Degree and a new password for Installed Masters was established.
12. 1835 – The “new revised” Royal Arch Ritual was demonstrated in Grand Chapter. The Christian elements of the ceremony had been largely removed and the words on the Sojourners Scroll were also amended from St John Chapter 1 to Genesis Chapter 1. Although, strangely, the words of the Anglican Communion Collect were kept as the opening prayer. Representatives from all Royal Arch Chapters were requested to attend a demonstration of the ‘new’ ritual in London. Whilst there is no official ritual for the Royal Arch in England to this day, there are several different workings, each developed from two main workings – Domatic and Aldersgate, which are regarded as the nearest to that demonstrated. Not only does the RA ritual differ between Chapters belonging to the Grand Chapter, the different Royal Arch Associations all have their own versions and whilst the wording differs, the message and legend are the same in them all. The difficulties in travelling to London to witness a demonstration of ‘the new’ ritual obviously caused problems but even at that stage it was strictly forbidden to print the ritual or write it

- down. Whilst the ceremony of 'Passing the Veils' was discontinued, the ceremony continued into the 1850's in some parts of the country.
13. 1837 – The Grand Chapter ordered that the names of the three Grand Masters and the emblem of the Royal Arch should be represented on the pedestal in Hebrew or Roman characters, but not in Latin.
 14. 1839 – All RA Chapters were required to make an Annual Return of all subscribing members to the Grand Scribe Ezra.
 15. 1841 – Craft Regulation No 241 permitted the wearing of the Royal Arch Jewel in a Craft Lodge. It should be noted that Reg 241 does not allow Past Principals or RA Centenary Jewels etc to be worn in a Craft Lodge! Neither should a Past Principals Jewel be worn instead of the Jewel of the Order in a RA Chapter.
 16. 1843 – The requirement to have been a Past Master of a Craft Lodge before exaltation into the Royal Arch was removed from the Regulations. The new rule stated the 'no Mason shall be exalted into this sublime degree unless he has been a Master Mason for 12 calendar months at least, of which satisfactory proof shall be given'.
 17. 1845 – George Claret published the first RA Ritual Book entitled "The Ceremonies of the Royal Arch."
 18. 1853 – The new Book of Constitutions included Article II of the Articles of Union in 1813 and the Preliminary Declaration stating that Freemasonry consists of Three Degrees and no more, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.
 19. 1856 – An amendment was passed reducing the waiting period to be made a Royal Arch Mason from 12 calendar months to four weeks and upwards, although, this was not confirmed until 1894!
 20. 1880 – A proposal was made allowing all Companions to be present at the Opening of the Chapter instead of Past Principals only. The motion was heavily defeated. Although, after several attempts, a Rule to this effect was carried some 22 years later in 1902.
 21. 1884 – Craft Regulation No 241 (of 1841) was reflected in the Grand Chapter Regulation No 84 allowing the Royal Arch Jewel to be worn in a Craft Lodge.
 22. 1886 – The Principal Sojourner's right to appoint his Assistants was removed.
 23. 1893 – The Past President of the General Purposes Committee again referred to the question of allowing ordinary Companions to be present at the Opening of the Chapter without success.
 24. 1894 – A ruling was passed, stating that the ceremony of exaltation may be performed by three Principals, assisted by two or three Companions. The qualification period of 4 weeks allowing MMs to be exalted into the RA, reduced from 12 months, first proposed in 1856, was confirmed.
 25. 1896 – Renewed proposals to allow Companions to witness the opening of a Chapter fail again.
 26. 1902 – After three attempts, Supreme Grand Chapter finally resolves that 'it is expedient that all RA Masons be permitted to be present at the Opening of Chapters,' prior to which, the Opening (and in some cases, the Closing) ceremonies were restricted to Principals and Past Principals only.
 27. 1920 – The practice of awarding Past Grand Chapter and Past Provincial Grand Chapter Ranks commenced, prior to which, only Acting Ranks existed.
 28. 1941 – 'The Complete Workings of the Royal Arch Degree' (ritual book) was published under the pseudonym 'A Lewis' of its publisher named John Hogg.
 29. 1947 – New Regulations stipulated that the (Craft) Office of Almoner should not be applied to a Chapter and that the wearing of collars should not be obligatory in Grand Chapter.
 30. 1956 – The formal title of the Order is emphasised as the "Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England".
 31. 1960 – Changes to the RA ritual were devised, impacting upon the installation ceremony, the penalties, the historical and symbolical lectures, and the use of catechism, the exaltation ceremony and the mystical lecture. Changes in the RA ritual were introduced as a permissive variation in the form of the three installation Ceremonies, providing for the precedence for the installation of the three Principals in the order of Zerubbabel, Haggai and Joshua. The new changes allowed the three Principals Elect to be obligated in open Chapter in the presence of the Companions.
 32. 1967 - A resolution regarding the permissive variations of the penal clause in the Obligations was passed in Supreme Grand Chapter.
 33. 1972 – Changes in the use of the R or H Signs were approved by Supreme Grand Chapter. The R&H sign is not to be directed to individual Companions.
 34. 1977 – Supreme Grand Chapter agreed that the Principals' Lectures could be given in catechetical form. This format was in practice before 1834 and would, by sharing the ritual, involve more members in the ceremonies.

35. 1982 – The committee appointed in 1979 to consider the Mystical Lecture recommended the adoption of one of three options:
 1. Chapters continue working without change.
 2. The addition to the Lecture of a statement pointing out the errors which should be understood in their traditional and historic context.
 3. The introduction of a modified version explaining the Hebrew characters and the Word on the Triangle.
36. 1985 - Companions are reminded that the R&H Sign should be directed towards the Altar and not to individual Companions.
37. 1987 – Following the removal of the ‘penalties’ in the Craft Obligations, the penalty in the RA Obligation was also removed. A special committee demonstrated subsequent revisions made to the Mystical Lecture. Blasphemous accusations were made by the Anglican General Synod regarding the tripartite JBO word on the Triangle.
38. 1989 – Following a lengthy debate, important obligatory revisions were implemented by Supreme Grand Chapter. Within twelve months all Chapters were required to remove the contentious Hebrew characters and tripartite JBO word from the triangle, and that all obligations should be taken on the VSL, previous to which the 3 Principals took their Obligations on the circle and triangle. A new version of the Mystical Lecture, in two parts, was also introduced. The Altar should henceforth be referred to as The Pedestal.
39. 1994 - The Office of Almoner and Charity Steward were approved and adopted by Grand Chapter and the Regulations were amended accordingly.
40. 2003 – A recommendation was issued from Supreme Grand Chapter to Grand Lodge that a Royal Arch Representative should be appointed in each Craft Lodge. Article II of the Articles of Union of 1813, as it appeared in the preamble to the Book of Constitutions and relating to the status of the Royal Arch, is added to by the Grand Lodge. The new version of Article II describes the Royal Arch as "an extension to, but neither a Superior nor a Subordinate part of the Degrees which precede it".
41. 2004 – The new and amended RA Regulations of Supreme Grand Chapter now state that a Master Mason may be installed as the Third Principal in a RA Chapter (which since 1823, he had to be a Past Master of a Craft Lodge).
 1. A new password was introduced leading to the office of 3rd Principal, as the previous password was that of an Installed Master.
 2. The words ‘You may perhaps imagine you have this day taken a fourth degree in Freemasonry: such however is not the case. It is the Master Masons’ completed’ were mandatorily removed from the ritual.
 3. The Traditional dates attributed to the three Original Grand Lodges were removed from the Historical Lecture.
 4. The wording in the Mystical Lecture was amended to read‘..... it continually reminds us of that great hereafter when we hope to enjoy *eternal life*’, instead of ‘*endless life and everlasting bliss*’.
 5. A permitted alternative version of the exaltation ceremony was introduced as an option for Chapters to adopt.
 6. After much deliberation by a special working party, the Grand Chapter declared that the Royal Arch is a separate Degree in its own right.
41. 2005 – All the changes and amendments approved in November 2004 including the new password were to be implemented forthwith. The Supreme Chapter recommended that the R or H Sign should no longer be given before addressing the Principals for the first time.
42. 2013 – The Bicentenary marking the official recognition of the Royal Arch as ‘the completion of pure Ancient Freemasonry’ was celebrated in Supreme Grand Chapter on October 16th 2013.

I hope this clearly demonstrates that, contrary to what some of our members might think - In the Royal Arch, we haven't always done It that way!!

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