



Reviewed 08/02/20

Introduction to Brethren to Dine

Brethren can I offer you a warm welcome and thank you for attending this evening.

For those of you who don't know me I am John Turpin, Chairman of the Blackpool Group etc.

There are 6 Assistants who cover groups throughout the Province and their Royal Arch responsibilities have many similarities with those of an Assistant Provincial Grand Master in the Craft.

This **Chapter** is one of nineteen chapters on the Fylde coast, most meet four times a year and as a consequence subscriptions are less than those in craft lodges. There are at least two chapters in each of our masonic halls and all carry the same number as the lodge that originally sponsored their foundation.

I am sure you will be aware straight away that there are a number of differences in both layout and regalia from your craft lodge meetings but before exploring those differences possibly the obvious question on your lips is “where does the Royal Arch fit into our masonic story?”

The first part of the answer is that the story told in our ceremony takes place some 500 years or so after the completion of King Solomon's temple. That building has long been destroyed as has the city of Jerusalem and its treasures and sacred items have been looted by a succession of invaders who have ravaged what we now know as Israel. The inhabitants have, in the main, been carried off as slaves to Babylon.

Cyrus, king of Persia, allows those Jews who wish to do so, to return to Jerusalem and re-build both the city and more importantly, Solomon's temple, thus fulfilling a prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah.

Our story is concerned with those events and what occurred during the construction of the replacement temple.

The second part of the answer is that at your interview prior to joining freemasonry, you were asked if you believed in a supreme being. If you hadn't said yes, you wouldn't be here as a member of a lodge.

The craft story as told in the three degrees of masonry gives you a moral framework to try to lead your life by and thus be a good citizen and individual.

Your belief in a supreme being isn't really touched on, so the Royal Arch story picks up on this and is concerned with your relationship with that being and that is why the Royal Arch is described as the completion of your journey through freemasonry.

By joining a Chapter – the Royal Arch – you will have received a moral framework from your craft lodge and been reminded of your belief in a supreme being in your chapter meetings.

The book of constitutions you received at your initiation and which every new master of a lodge also receives, states at the start that pure ancient freemasonry consists of the three degrees of craft masonry and the Holy Royal Arch.

Everything in the Royal Arch is carried out in a different manner to that in your craft lodge. It isn't another degree in that craft lodge but an extension to those degrees through which you have already passed.

So to the differences. We wear separate regalia, which consists of an apron, just like the craft, though of a different colour and design. The colours in the royal arch are associated with the furnishings of king Solomon's temple as well as being reference to a former part of our ritual called "passing the veils." This was seen as the transition from the craft to the Royal Arch.

In the Royal Arch the apron is called a badge as originally our Royal Arch masonry was practised in a lodge and to emphasise the difference working a badge was pinned onto a craft apron. Nowadays the regalia is totally separate. We also wear a ribbon or sash and a jewel. The jewel you should have seen before, as it is worn by Royal Arch masons in their Craft lodges. The jewel is suspended from either a white ribbon for Companions, those members of chapters who haven't been through the Principals chairs, a red or scarlet ribbon for someone who has been a Principal of a Chapter and I'll come onto that shortly, or a tricoloured ribbon for Provincial and Grand Chapter officers.

Whilst craft lodges have a worshipful master and two wardens, chapters have three Principals who sit together in the east; they are called respectively – Zerubbabel, Haggai and Joshua and they separately and jointly lead a chapter. They represent the regal, prophetic and religious aspects of the Royal Arch. Summonses for meetings bear the name of all three Principals. There is an officer called scribe Ezra who is, in the main, directly equivalent to a lodge secretary though with additional ceremonial duties; a treasurer, his duties are identical; a director of ceremonies and an assistant director of ceremonies with the same duties as their craft equivalents and another scribe, Nehemiah, who acts as inner guard but who has, in addition, more important duties. The holding of this office is one which qualifies a companion for progress to the Principals chairs. We

also have three sojourners whose duties could be compared with the office of deacon in a lodge though they play a prominent role in telling the story contained within our ritual.

Seating arrangements for companions not in office or who are visitors are exactly the same as in your lodge.

You will notice that there are some banners behind the three principals chairs. These are of the principal divisions of the army of Israel and represent an ox; a man; a lion and an eagle. There is a further banner showing the jewel of the royal arch, the triple tau. These will always be on display at any chapter meeting. What you see before you is not all of the furnishings of a Royal Arch chapter as we have removed some items so as to retain a large element of surprise for your joining ceremony.

That ceremony, in which you enter as a master mason wearing a master mason's regalia, is in three main parts and takes place, as I said earlier, some 500 years after the completion of king Solomon's temple so in about 520 BC and after the Israelites have spent time in captivity and exile.

The first part is set in Jerusalem when the descendants of the children of Israel return to find the city in ruins and their temple destroyed. At the end of this section you retire from the chapter.

In the second part you re-enter along with the sojourners to offer your assistance in re-building the temple.

The third and final part is set in the grand Sanhedrim – the council of the children of Israel – which regulated the temple and religious

affairs, where the ceremony is explained and you are rewarded with the regalia of the royal arch and become a companion of the chapter.

The major difference to our craft story is that where the craft third degree ends with sadness at the death of Hiram Abif and the subsequent loss of the genuine secrets of a master mason, the Royal Arch ceremony ends on a note of joy at the rediscovery of lost secrets, thus completing our masonic journey.

As it deals with a journey from Babylon in the east to Jerusalem in the west, it brings a sense of understanding to the third degree opening when the wardens are asked, “whence come you” and “wither directing your course” etc.

You may be invited, or perhaps you already have been invited to join other orders in freemasonry and there are many, but I would sincerely stress to you that this is the first one to join after the Craft as your journey through pure, ancient freemasonry is not complete until you become a Royal Arch mason. Let me give you a quote from the former Pro Grand Master, the Marquis of Northampton:

“ In craft masonry a brother acknowledges a belief in a supreme being, yet this relationship is never explored. In the Royal Arch, the mason continues and completes his education and knowledge of craft masonry and is invited to consider his relationship and dependence upon god. Therefore it may justly be claimed to be the climax of freemasonry and no brother can consider his masonic life complete until he has joined the Royal Arch.”

Many of the Principal Officers of the Craft and the Royal Arch at both Grand and Provincial level are held by the same individuals; for example the Duke of Kent is both Grand Master in the Craft and First

Grand Principal in the Royal Arch and the Grand Secretary is also Grand Scribe Ezra.

At Provincial level James Anthony Harrison is both Provincial Grand Master of the Craft Province and Grand Superintendent of the Royal Arch Province whilst Peter Taylor is Provincial Secretary and Provincial Grand Scribe Ezra. Here at group level your Group officers and officials have responsibility for both Lodges and Chapters. No other masonic orders have this relationship with the craft.

I will now ask the chapter scribe Ezra – secretary = to tell you when the chapter meets and the treasurer to let you know what the subscription is.

Brethren, I hope you have enjoyed finding out a little bit of what the Royal Arch is about and it has given you food for thought as to what your next step will be. If you have any burning questions, please feel free to ask them, otherwise raise them at our festive board which will follow very shortly. Many thanks for your attendance and kind attention and we look forward to you joining us.