



## The John Tunnah Manuscript

**Narrator** It is very clear that the Royal Arch was very much a major feature of Freemasonry in the area that we used to call Lancashire. This is mainly due to old records from the Bury area and a record of the Royal Arch ceremonial and lectures created for the Moderns. This evidence is in the form of a Lancashire manuscript, which is now in the Grand Lodge Library, and came into the possession of John Tunnah. The MS bears his name because his widow offered it to the Library and Museum in London, after his death, as it must have been among his personal collection of Masonic things.

John Tunnah was an accountant by profession and had some vigorous Masons as his colleagues in Anchor & Hope Lodge in Bolton. He became Provincial Grand Secretary of the Eastern Division of Lancashire in 1854 until 1879.

He was not responsible for the production of the manuscript since the document seems to date from around 1797, before he was born. It is not clear where the text originated, Bury is a firm favourite because from other evidence within the MS it appears to be a Moderns' text, and more specifically, one likely to have been produced or copied for John Allen. John Allen, who resided in London from 1765 until his death in 1807, was from a Bury family and appears to have been largely responsible for the Moderns' version of the Royal Arch after its establishment in 1766. John Allen was Provincial Grand Master and Provincial Grand Superintendent for the whole of Lancashire from 1769-1807. Coincidentally that would have included the Lodge of Lights No.148 who have just celebrated their 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Where did Tunnah obtain the document? Nobody really knows, but as Tunnah belonged to Anchor & Hope Lodge at Bolton it is generally thought that it was probably part of their archive. It could just as well have come from Bury, from the Lodge of Relief, for example, because the key man associated with the practical setting-up of the Moderns Royal Arch was John Allen.

The Tunnah MS has six sections which are lecture catechisms, no doubt to be delivered in stages as time and circumstance allowed. The first deals with the release of the Israelites from bondage and the crossing of Sinai. The second gives an explanation of the Tabernacle and the things connected with it, including the veils, all of which have universal meanings. The third is an account of the Ark of the Covenant and its journeys, with an interpretation. The fourth gives an interpretation of the 'mystery of the cherubims'. The fifth is an interpretative section dealing with Masonic objects and colour symbolism and making up the final section of the whole is an astonishing listing of 40 Analogies between Moses and Christ.

It should not need to be emphasised that a powerful feeling of revelation must have been felt by those Companions of the Royal Arch who listened carefully to the fullness of this extensive presentation explaining the Old Testament in terms of the New, and wherever possible relating it to the symbolisms within Freemasonry. Evidence for the impact the Royal Arch ceremony made can be seen in the explosion of Chapters within two decades of the start of the Moderns Grand Chapter so that by 1806 over 130 Chapters were nominally on the books. Not all succeeded. The appeal of the Moderns Royal Arch however was very marked in Lancashire as by 1823, after the Union of Antients and Moderns, the names of some 200 Chapters were published. Of these 20% were in Lancashire. In fact one eminent Masonic Historian ponders upon whether the essence of the Royal Arch was first dreamed up among the dark satanic mills of Colne, Brun and Calder, and embellished and promulgated by a forgotten native of Bury!

And now Companions to the John Tunnah Manuscript.

FOURTH PART (or Degree): First Section. M.E.Z. PART

Q. Of all the different Degrees of Masonry which is the most Sublime?

A. The Supreme Degree of the Royal Arch.

Q. Why is it the most sublime?

A. Because it is neither Manual, Instrumental, nor Scientific, but Speculative.

Q. Are you of one of those workmen commonly called Royal Arch Masons?

A. I am so admitted, taken and Accepted by the Excellent Companions of that DIVINE Order...

Q. How was you qualified to be a Super Excellent Royal Arch Mason?

A. By being loaded with Jewels and PASSING THE CHAIR in due form.

Q. How were you prepared to be a Super Excellent Royal Arch Mason?

A. I was neither naked nor clothed, a loose Garment thrown over me, my Shoes were slipped down at the Heels, a Rod was put into my Hand and a Cable Tow round my waist and in that manner led to the entrance.

Q. How did you gain Admittance?

A. By three Regular Knocks with the help of a fourth one...

Q. What did they do with you when you entered?

A. They made me put my Shoes from off my Feet, and they gave me a Sign and Password and let me pass on to the First Veil of the Temple.

Q. Where did it lead you?

A. To the Sanctuary...

Q. Where were you next taken to?

A. To the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies.

Q. Who did you see when you entered?

A. The High Priest.

Q. How was He dressed?

A. He was dressed in a Surplice of fine Linen which reached down to his Feet; a Mitre was upon his Head, a Plate of Gold in the front thereof with certain Words engraved thereon. A Linen Girdle was about his Waist and a plate of Gold, inlaid with precious Stones, upon his Breast.

Q. How were You afterwards disposed of?

A. I was Veiled, and led Seven times round the ARCHES, certain Portions of Scripture being read unto Me.

Q. What were you ordered to do?

A. I was ordered to Stoop down to Try if I could find anything?

Q. Did you find anything?

A. Yes, the Key Stone of an Arch...

Q. Did you get it (the Key Stone) up?

A. I did not myself. I called a Companion to assist me, but we two could not get it up. We then called another Companion to help us and, when we all tried together, it came up easily.

I was let down into the ARCH by a small Cord tied around my waist, where I found a second Key Stone but could discover nothing else for want of Sight.

Q. Did you get up the second Key Stone?

A. Yes, with the assistance of my two companions.

Q. What became of you then?

A. I was let down a second time into an Arch, where I found a third Key Stone which... we fetched up...

Q. What became of you then?

A. I passed through low arches into a seventh higher and wider.

Q. Did you pass easily thro' those six Arches?

A. I did not. The roads were rough and the Arches low and narrow.

Q. When you entered the 7th Arch what was you ordered to do?

A. I was ordered to take four regular steps to the foot of the pedestal where, under the arches, I took and received the Great and Solemn Oath or Obligation of a Royal Arch Mason.

Q. Repeat the Obligation.

A. I, A.B., of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and this Grand Chapter of the Royal Arch, dedicated to the Grand Architect of the Universe, MOSES and King Solomon..... I will never be present, aiding or assisting in the making of a Royal Arch Mason, except it be in the presence of seven Companions, the Candidate included, nor then without the Principals of the Chapter or two of them are consenting thereto. I also swear that I will never deliver the Sacred Word I am about to receive to any single Companion, nor then to less than three such as we do meet and agree...., so help me God and keep me steadfast therein...

Q. When you was brought to light, what did you see?

A. The Bible opened at the first Chapter of St. John's Gospel.

Q. What were you then ordered to do?

A. I was ordered to read the first verse of that Chapter.

Q. What was then asked of you?

A. I was asked if I believed that to be the Word of God, to which I replied I did.

Q. What was then showed and EXPLAINED to you?

A. The four steps or Degrees in Masonry.

Q. Explain the first step?

A. In the first Step or Degree of an Entered Apprentice, whose precepts masonry was founded upon, the implements or Tools belonging to this degree are Manual only. They consist of such tasks as are performed by hand labour alone or by the help of some simple instruments, the uses whereof are not to be learnt by any problems or rules of art, but by labour and practice only.

Q. Explain the second step.

A. The second Step of a Fellowcraft qualifies us to put in practice the excellent Designs of the Master, sinking solids, laying levels, and raising perpendiculars. This Degree is called Instrumental and consists in the use and application of the common gauge, the Square, the Plumb Line, Level and others that may be called mathematical. To this part also belongs the use of various other instruments or machines such as the Lever, the Wheel and Axle, the Wedge, the Screw and the Pulley, which may be called Mechanical and enable us to perform actions with a single hand, which could not be done without many, and in some cases not at all.

Q. Explain the third Step.

A. By the third Step, Master Mason, we become acquainted with the Grand Designs of the Masters, giving directions to the Craft. This Degree is called Scientific and consists of the knowledge of SEVERAL of the Arts and Sciences so far as to enable us to discern the reason for the Operation of those increments, tools and machines used in the Craft's degree to clear up and arrange our ideas in such manner as to be able to delineate so clearly on our tracing board, that our Brethren of the 2nd Degree, may TASK them off and complete our design, and if intended for that purpose, erect a structure This is the part of our Brethren of the highest Degree of the Craft of Master Masons, Signs and Tokens and Watch Words, detect imposter and exclude the unworthy from our lodges; and the latter to strengthen the Memory, correct the judgments and habituate the mind by a due course of reasoning, to Face up causes from Effects, and thereby explode the dogmata of every false hypothesis. Thus by the instructions received in passing through the several probationary degrees of the Craft, Masons are prepared for the Fourth Step or the most Sublime Degree of the Royal Arch.

Q. Explain the 4th Step...?

A. The 4th Step or Degree of the Royal Arch lays aside the tools operative in Craft Masonry, and points out to our view the unlimited bounds of Speculative. It enables us to find out that which King Solomon makes mention of, that was lost in the Master's Part.

Speculative or Royal Arch Masonry is intended for the cultivation of EVERY art and science that the human mind in this sublunary abode is capable of. It is divided into as many distinct branches as there are art and sciences, and the parts as various as there are subjects for investigation. It must be observed however that when we use that expression, 'Say the Word', it is not to be understood as a Watch Word only, but also theologically, as a term, thereby to convey to the mind some idea of that GREAT BEING who is the sole

author of our existence, and to carry along with it the most solemn Veneration for his Sacred Name and Word, that is expressive of SELF EXISTENCE and Eternity, incomprehensible by a human capacity.

Q. What was next explained to you?

A. Three Crowns, the Sword, Trowel and Equilateral Triangle...

Q. What was next explained to you?

A. The Key Stone of a Royal Arch under which was deposited the Grand and Sacred word written in THREE different languages, Hebrew, Chaldean and Arabic...

Q. How was you then disposed of?

A. I was... reinvested with what I had been divested of, and thence brought back and recommended as a worthy Companion deserving of a CROWN and to receive the benefits of the Introduction, Section and Sections explained to me.

SOJOURNER'S PART

Q. ...How did you gain admittance to the Grand Chapter or Sanhedrim?

A. By four regular knocks and a Pass Word...

Q. Who comes here?

A. Three strangers who are released from captivity and are now come up to yield our utmost efforts to rebuild the City and Temple.

Q. What was then asked of you?

A. We were asked our names...

Q. What are they?

A. Shadrach, Medrach and Ebednego.

**Narrator** The P.S. would now report the arrival of the strangers.

Q. ...Have you examined them?

A. Yes

Q. What are their names?

A. S., M., and E.

Q. If they be S., M. and E., we desire you will bid them enter in the name of the G.A. of the Universe, for we have heard of their fame and their fidelity while in the furnace of affliction....

**Narrator** The familiar account of the Sojourners follows until the P.S. who was let down and in searching found the Roll wrapped in a white linen cloth and reports to the Sanhedrin

A. It being secured, I made the signal and was lifted up. On examining the Roll, we found it contained the Book of the Most Sacred Law written by the inspired Pen of Moses which at that time was supposed to

have been lost. Not content with this discovery, I entered a second time into the Arch TOGETHER WITH my two Companions and having with difficulty struggled thro' the Arches perceived at a distance, thro' a light reflected from the Artificial Sun, obliquely placed, which received the rays of the natural Sun and reflected them to that place, a marble pedestal supported on four steps whereon were the initials of our three Grand Masters... On searching further, we found the Rods and jewels belonging to the Grand Masters, Money for the repairs of the Temple, a White Stone which has the singular property, when touched, of turning black with characters engraved thereon, and some particular pieces of Coin with two heads and four faces. And this is all we have to report, Most Ex. Z.

Come forward and give us that Grand and Sacred Word

**Narrator** At this point the word is given.

For your care, fidelity and uprightness we invest you with these jewels, and present you with these Rods, and in token of our esteem for the honour you have merited in making this great discovery, we appoint you overseers of the work.

FOURTH PART - Second Section: SUPER EXCELLENT.

Q. Who was first made a S.E.R.A. Mason?

A. Moses, the chosen servant and prophet of the Most High God.

Q. Who made him (such)?

A. God Almighty.

Q. Where was he made?

A. At the back of the wilderness of Arabia near the N. or W. side of Mt. Sinai.

Q. How was he made?

A. God appeared to him in a burning bush and ordered him to pull his shoes from off his feet for the place whereon he stood was holy ground and Sacred to the honour of God: he then told him the words and taught him the Signs by which he was to deliver his Hebrew brethren from Egyptian Bondage.

Q. What are the Words?

A. Shem, Japhat, Ham.

**Narrator** (There then follows what is preserved, with the same words, in the ceremony of the Veils, as also AFTER the next passage.)

Q. Who was next made a S.E.R.A. Mason?

A. Aaron, Moses' elder Brother.

Q. Who made Aaron a S.E.R.A. Mason?

A. Moses.

Q. Where did he make him?

A. In the wilderness or Desert when God sent Moses to meet Aaron and told him he should be his assistant and spokesman...

Q. Who were the next who were made S.E.R.A. Masons?

A. The Chiefs of the elders of Israel, and afterwards the Elders themselves.

Q. Who made them..?

A. Moses and Aaron.

Q. How did they make them...?

A. They told them the Words and taught them the Signs which God taught Moses at the Bush.

**Narrator** (The Veils ceremony would now resume with the serpent rods, the plagues and the Passover of the Hebrews.)

Q. How and where were the Hebrews conducted in their departure from Egypt?

A. The Shechinah, or Symbol of the Presence of the Lord, went before them in a Pillar of Cloud by Day and a Pillar of Fire by night, and conducted them towards the borders of the Red Sea.

Q. Did not the Egyptians repent letting the Hebrews go?

A. They did, on which Pharaoh and a mighty Army pursued them to bring them back and nearly overtook them, but the Shechinah... removed behind the Hebrews, and between the two Armies to the Hebrews was a sight, but, to the Egyptians, it was a cloud and Darkness so that they came not near the Hebrews...

**Narrator** (The story of the Red Sea parting and the drowning is told.)

Q. Where were the Hebrews then taken too?

A. To the Wilderness of Sinai, near to Mount Sinai.

Q. How long did they remain in the Wilderness?

A. About 40 years, the Lord often causing them to remove from one place to another and changing the places of their Encampment, that he might punish their disobedience, cure them of the idolatry which they had been infected with in Egypt, give them time to learn and train them up by subjection and discipline for driving out the wicked Canaanites whose land they were to possess.

Q. How were they fed?

A. Moses cried unto God, and the same night a number of Quails fell about their tents and next morning, the Manna.

Q. How long did they eat Manna?

A. Forty years.

Q. Was any of this heavenly Manna preserved?

A. There was. God commanded Moses to lay a pot full of it up before the Testimony that their children might see the Bread which the Lord fed their forefathers with in the Wilderness.

**Narrator** There then follows a section concerning the Ark of the Covenant which was placed in the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies.

It was made of Acacia wood overlaid with gold and the lid was called the Mercy seat, because the Shechinah or symbol of a divine presence hovered upon it. The seat was made of gold with two golden cherubim, wings expanded touching each other, covering the Mercy seat, and with their faces turned to pore over it. The cherubim represent the Old and New Testaments; for as their wings touch one another, so the Old and New Testaments join together, where the first ended, the second began, and both had relation to Christ to whom the ministry of God was committed.

The Ark was carried before the people on the shoulders of the Priests by the two staves which went through two gold rings fixed in each side of the Ark. In Hebrew history the Ark was responsible for a number of amazing feats but was eventually lost to the Jewish nation after the Babylonian invasion of which much is made in our Chapter Ritual.

The catechism then continued and Companions who have seen or participated in the Passing of the Veils ceremony will recognize some of the following parts.

Q. Why were you loaded with Jewels when you were made a Past Master?

A. In memory of the goodness of the Lord when he gave the Israelites favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they borrowed off them jewels of silver and jewels of gold and put them on the children, which shows the first part of Masonry to be in its infancy.

Q. Why were your shoes slipped down at the heels?

A. Because I then represented Moses when the Lord appeared to him in the Bush.

Q. Had Moses his shoes slipped down at the heels?

A. No. God ordered him put his shoes from off his heels, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground and sacred to the honour and glory of God.

A. Why had you a rod in your hand at the time you was entering into this order?

A. Because when the Lord made Moses, he had a rod in his hand.

Q. Why was the cable tow put around your waist?

A. Because the H. Priest wore a linen girdle round his waist.

Q. Give me another reason.

A. Because I had a cable tow around my waist when I was let down to the royal arch.

Q. What Length is your cable tow?



A. Fourteen miles.

Q. Why is it 14 miles?

A. To keep in mind that Moses and Aaron and the 12 chiefs of the children of Israel were the first congregation of S.E.R.A. Masons that were assembled.

Q. Why did their Priest wear a breastplate of gold with twelve precious stones?

A. Because the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were inscribed thereon to put the Lord in mind of the everlasting covenants which he made with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Q. Why was it made of gold?

A. Because gold is an emblem of what is divine, pure, precious, solid, useful, incorruptible, or lasting and glorious. It is also an emblem of wisdom which excels all other gifts as gold does all other metals.

Q. What colour do R.A. Masons wear to distinguish their order?

A. Red.

Q. Why do they use that colour?

A. Because when the Lord resolved to destroy the first born of Egypt, he caused the Israelites to strike the lintels and side posts of their doors with Blood, that when the destroying angel saw that sign he did not enter their houses.

Q. What is Red?

A. A symbol of Charity which Royal Arch Masons possess in a superior degree than Craft Masons.

Q. What was the inscription on the Priest's mitre?

A. Holiness to the Lord.

Q. How long was the tabernacle in making?

A. 7 months and a half.

Q. How long was the Temple of Solomon in building?

A. Seven years and a half.

Q. Is it not astonishing that a structure contrived with such grandeur and magnificence and executed with such art and due proportion, which became the wonder of all travelers, should be finished in seven years and a half when the temple of Diana at Ephesus took up to 220 years building?

A. No, because the Lord was with King Solomon and strengthened the hands of the masons carry on the work with good order and harmony.

Q. How many principal masters were employed in the building?

A. Five thousand and fifty who had their names inscribed on the different pillars of the temple, but not one

could be found that had the names of the three Grand Masters till the discovery was made thro' the arches.

Q. Can you assign any reason why the three Grand Masters had their names in secret?

A. Because it was their usual custom when they were at Jerusalem, every day at high twelve noon, to retire privately into the arch and there to kneel upon a stone at the foot of a pedestal which had their names inclined thereon to offer their praises to Almighty God and worship him by his most secret Name.

Q. How came this grand and sacred Word to be preserved when the Babylonian general had laid this temple in ashes and ruins?

A. Because it was deposited in the royal arch and there the Lord preserved it for His name' sake, for where His Word is, His eye is there also.

Q. How long did the children of Israel remain in captivity before they were restored to their native country?

A. Seventy years that the word of the Lord which he spoke in the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah might be fulfilled.

Q. Who released them from captivity?

A. Cyrus, the great King of Persia, having conquered the kingdom of Babylon and put their king to death, gave the Israelites permission to return to Jerusalem to their own country, and rebuild the city and temple according to the prophecy of Isaiah which he long before foretold.

Q. Did they meet with any obstructions?

A. They did; many enemies arose who strove to obstruct them during the reign of King Cyrus, but, before the Temple was finished, Cyrus died, which put a stop to the workmen. Yet, notwithstanding the various artifices of his succession, it was finished in little more than 20 years which happened in the reign of Darius.

Q. Was it equal in grandeur and magnificence to King Solomon's temple?

A. No, it was inferior both in extent and decoration, but being of a true Solomonian style was supposed to be one of the finest buildings at that time on the face of the earth.

Q. From whence came you, Companion?

A. From the place where the light shined in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not.

Q. What place was that?

A. The Royal Arch which I regularly descended and ascended.

Q. How shall I know you have been in the royal arch?

A. From the things I found in it.

Q. What was the first thing you found?

A. An artificial sun, obliquely placed, which reflected the rays of the natural one at high twelve at noon and reflected its rays to the arches, upon those things that have been grand and magnificent described there, and the heat imbibed preserved those things from the decay occasioned by moisture. By this light, the three Grand Masters went privately into the Royal Arch before it was finally closed after the death of the Grand Master, HAB.

Q. Which was the next thing you found in the Royal Arch?

A. The Book of the Law which was written by the inspired hand of Moses; Solomon, foreseeing the captivity of the Jews, kept only standard copies of it in his Temple, but concealed the original in the search to be found in a more unenlightened day.

Q. What was the next thing you found?

A. A marble pedestal, supported on four steps, on the sides of which were inscribed the initials of our three Grand Masters... On the top of this pedestal was a plate of incorruptible gold whereon was engraved the Grand and Sacred Name of God, in 3 different languages, Hebrew, Chaldean and Arabic, not to be given to any single companion, and to none but in Syllables and then to no less than such as we do meet and agree.

Q. What did you find next?

A. The Robes and jewels belonging to the Grand Masters and money for the Repairs of the Temple.

Q. What was the next thing you found?

A. A white stone which had the singular property of turning black, with Characters engraved thereon and is the same stone which Adam brought up out of Paradise as a Memorial of his being there. It received the property of turning black when touched and a Memorial to us that Sin came into the World with the Fall of Man.

Q. Did you find anything else in the Royal Arch?

A. Yes, several pieces of Coins with two heads to four faces.

Q. What were these four faces engraved on the Coins?

A. On one such was engraved the Image of Noah, the one face looking back on the Antediluvian World, the other looking forward to the New World.

Q. What was engraved on the other Coins?

A. Solomon's Image and superscription, the one face looking back at the sacred Mysteries of the Tabernacle, the other looking forward on the more perfect Glories of the Temple of which the Tabernacle was a Type.

You said you came from the place where the Light shined in Darkness but the Darkness comprehended it not. Explain it.

The Light that shined in Darkness was the Book of the Law, which was the light to guide our feet to walk with God, and, being concealed in that dark place, the Darkness could not comprehend it.

Q. What is the Signification of the White Stone?

A. I conceive it to be the Urim and Thummin or lights and Perfections which was in the Breast plate of Aaron!

Q. Can you produce a Reason in support of this Opinion?

A. When the Chief Priest enquired of the Lord, he always wore that Breast plate, and whenever the Almighty was disposed to grant their requests, the Stones in the Breast plate always displayed a supernatural Brilliancy.

**Narrator**

Companions that concludes this presentation of what has become known as the John Tunnah Manuscript. It gives us a glimpse of some parts of the Royal Arch ritual that our Chapter forefathers worked in those quite different social, economic and political times.