



Old Masonians West Lancashire Chapter No 7702

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT IN ROYAL ARCH

Companion 1: The Question

It has long seemed peculiar that the Coat of Arms of the United Grand Lodge of England prominently features the Ark of the Covenant as its crest and cherubim as its supporters. Surely the square and compasses should feature more prominently; the Volume of the Sacred Law would be a far more appropriate crest and two columns would be perfect supporters. The peculiarity becomes even more significant when we consider that the Ark of the Covenant plays no role in Craft Masonry.



These peculiarities beg answers to two questions; “What made the designer of the Coat of Arms include the Ark and the Cherubim?” and “Did the Ark previously feature in Masonic Ritual?”

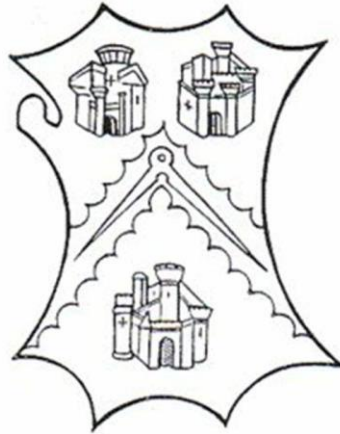
Companion 2: The History of the Coat of Arms

The College of Heralds formally recognised the Arms of Grand Lodge in 1919, over a hundred years after they were first approved and adopted by Grand Lodge. In 1933 the wide border bearing eight lions *passant* was added to commemorate the dedication of the Masonic Peace Memorial.

The basic design was drawn up at the time of the Union, in 1813, when the Arms were first accepted by the Duke of Sussex, the Grand Master, and then submitted to Grand Lodge for approval. The proposed design bore, on the right side (dexter) of the shield¹, the arms of the Moderns' Grand Lodge, which were themselves a representation of the Arms originally granted to the Worshipful Company of Freemasons of London in 1472. Alongside them, on the left (sinister), are the Arms originally adopted by the Ancients' Grand Lodge, bearing an ox, a man, a lion and an eagle: emblems from the

¹ A Coat of Arms takes its left (sinister) side and its right (dexter) side when viewed from behind the shield.

banners of the principal tribes of Israel, which are found in the Order of the Holy Royal Arch.



Arms of the Worshipful Company of Freemasons
London,

Neither the Ancients nor the Moderns original Arms bore a crest or had supporters, so the Ark of the Covenant and the Cherubim were new additions. It seems most unlikely that the designer simply came up with them from his own imagination. It is far more probable that the Ark played some central role in Masonic ritual up until the time of Union – probably in the Royal Arch.

The Duke of Sussex was elected Grand Master of the Moderns, while his brother, The Duke of Kent was the Grand Master of the Ancients. Thus time and circumstances were right for the two rivals to merge, and the Duke of Kent magnanimously stood down in favour of his brother, for the good of Freemasonry in general. Sussex however is reputed to have been strongly in favour of a Craft Masonic system which included only the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason, but the benefits of Union forced his reluctant acceptance of the Royal Arch. But only as “the completion” of the Master Masons Degree, even though it clearly meets, in every respect, the criteria for being considered a full degree in its own right, and was certainly considered as such by the Ancients Grand Lodge. In any event the compromise was accepted by both sides.

Companion 3: The Ark in Royal Arch Masonry

Our present Royal Arch ceremony, with some amendments, dates back to the revised ritual version commissioned by the Duke of Sussex after the Union of the two Grand Chapters in 1817, when he was Installed as First Grand Principal. He approved it in 1834. The Ark of the Covenant was certainly not central to the new ceremony and the sojourners discovered “something like a pedestal or altar of incense”. But if we look at the old American Royal Arch ritual, we discover that their ceremonies portray the sojourners actually discovering the Ark of the Covenant.

Quoted from the American Royal Arch ritual:

In the next part of the ceremony, the three masons return and discover the keystone of the principal arch of King Solomon's Temple and the master's jewels. The account continues as they are questioned by the First Principal:

We repaired to the place as before, which I descended as before. The sun shone forth with such redoubled splendour that I was enabled to descend; in the easternmost part thereof was a trunk of curious form, overlaid with gold, having on the top and sides

certain mysterious characters; availing myself of this I gave the signal and ascended; on arriving at the top of the arch I found my hands involuntarily placed in this position to guard my eyes from the intense light and heat that arose there from above; with the trunk we repaired to the Grand Council.

Companion 3 will ask the questions and Companion 2 will answer questions

Q. *What was their opinion of the trunk?*

A. That it was the Ark of the Covenant.

Q. *What were its contents?*

A. A pot, a rod, and a book.

Q. *What was their opinion of the pot?*

A. That it was the pot of manna, which Moses by divine command, laid up in the side of the ark as a memorial of the miraculous manner in which the children of Israel were supplied with that article of food for forty years in the wilderness.

Q. *What was their opinion of the rod?*

A. That it was Aaron's rod, that budded and blossomed, and bore fruit in a day, which Moses also, by divine command, laid in the side of the ark as a testimony, to be kept for a token.

Q. *What was their opinion of the book?*

A. That it was the book of the law in which it was written, I am the Lord, I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac and Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by my great and sacred name was I not known unto them.

Q. *What does it contain?*

A. A key to the mysterious characters upon its top and sides, by which they found those upon its sides to be the initials of our three ancient Grand Masters, S. K. of I. (Solomon, king of Israel), H. K. of T (Hiram, king of Tyre), and H. Abif. Those upon its top, the Grand Omnific or Royal Arch word, which we as Royal Arch Masons should never give except in the presence of three Royal Arch Masons, we first agreeing by three times three, and under a living arch."²

Clearly the revised Royal Arch Ritual approved by the Duke of Sussex in 1834 removed the original reference to the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant and substituted the Altar of Incense, while the American Royal Arch ceremony continued to use the earlier, original version.

Companion 4: Brief History of the Ark

The Ark was constructed at the foot of Mount Sinai, during the time of the Exodus, by Bezaleel. It was made in strict accordance to the plans which the Most High revealed to Moses, and afterwards it was placed in the tabernacle. Subsequently it played a central role in the Israelites conquest of Canaan and was ultimately brought to Jerusalem by King David. Without going into the finer details, which would lengthen this paper beyond reasonable limits, we know that the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Inner Sanctuary

² Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor, or Guide to the Three Symbolic Degrees of the Ancient York Rite.

of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem around 950BCE. After the death of Solomon the country was split with Israel in the North and Judah in the South and little more is heard of the Ark.

Besides the battles between Israel and Judah, both came under attack from surrounding powers. Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital, experienced a decline in religious and social values under a stream of weak, ineffective kings. After three centuries the first Temple was in a sorry state of repair. Around 623 BCE King Josiah ordered the Temple to be rebuilt and re-purified. He then, according to 2 Chronicles 35, told the Levites to put the Holy Ark in the House which Solomon built. This statement indicates that during periods when the Temple was profaned, or when Jerusalem was threatened by foreign armies, the Ark was removed from the Holy of Holies and put in a safe place under the protection of the Levites.

About thirty years later the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem. Eventually they destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple by fire, having broken down the two pillars and taken everything of value. The items captured are listed in 2 Kings 25, but significantly the Ark is not mentioned. We have to accept that there are only three alternatives; either the Ark was captured by the Babylonians, or it was destroyed in the Temple when the building was burned, or it had been previously hidden in a place of safety. If the Babylonians had captured the Ark, it would surely have been recorded? Similarly, why would the Babylonians have removed all the other items of value and left the most precious of all to be destroyed in the fire? Thus we must assume, on balance of probability, that the Ark had previously been hidden in a safe place, where it remained concealed during the sacking of the Holy City, and during the period of the Babylonian captivity.

After Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians and captured their capital, the people of Judah were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Their treasures were returned to them and Cyrus provided funds for the rebuilding of the Temple. One can imagine that after the destruction and burning of Jerusalem, followed by seventy years of laying waste, the Temple Mount would have been a quite desolate place, yielding few clues as to the exact location of the original Temple. Perhaps this is why it took several years before even the foundations of the second Temple were laid. It would have been necessary to first clear the land, and then to carefully survey the top of the mountain in order to determine the precise position of the Most Holy Place and the exact alignment of the previous structure. Obviously they also searched thoroughly for the Ark and the other treasures. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no mention of their discovery, or to them being placed in the Second Temple.

Companion 5: Why the Ritual was Amended

Now lets return to the period after the Union of the Grand Chapters in England, and look at possible reasons for the alterations to the Royal Arch ritual.

At first thought it seems reasonable that the ritual was changed to more correctly reflect the facts of history. How could the sojourners have found the Ark when there is absolutely no biblical or even legendary support for that story? Yet they would have to have found something, otherwise the Royal Arch ceremony was pointless. Hence the invention of the pedestal or altar of incense.

Against this we must consider that the entire Third Degree Ceremony we use today is based on a character who is really only fleetingly mentioned in the Old Testament. We have to accept that the Hiramic legend is just that – it also has no support from the factual records of history or religion.

Now if we have no qualms about using one fictional story in our Craft ceremonies, why suddenly do we have serious misgivings about using a similar fiction in the Royal Arch? Surely it would have been simple enough to relate the rediscovery of the Ark, and to add a small section to the ceremony; “The circumstances at that time prevented it being removed from its vault. Ezra and Nehemiah approached the Ark with all due reverence, confirmed the sojourners discovery, and then veiled it according to tradition before the access was again sealed. Thereafter the Most Holy Place of the Second Temple was built directly above it, as further protection, until time or circumstance will permit the Ark to be transferred to its proper place”. Without falling into the trap of conspiracy theory, perhaps there was another reason for removing any reference to the Ark from the Royal Arch. To examine this we have to again go back in history.

Companion 6: The Templars and the Ark

The Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon came into existence in 1118, when nine knights arrived in the Holy Land. Their ostensible objective was to protect the pilgrims then travelling to the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, established 19 years earlier after the victory of the First Crusade. The Order had been founded by two crusaders, Hugh de Payen and André de Montbard, with the assistance and support of the latter’s nephew, Bernard, the Abbott of the Monastery at Clairvaux, and head of the Cistercian Order, later St Bernard. In truth, it may well have been Bernard who was the real instigator and founder.

The Cistercians were at the time heavily involved in deciphering and translating ancient Hebrew texts. Through these studies Bernard must have come to the conclusion that the Ark of the Covenant, and other Temple treasures, had been hidden in a secret place under the Temple Mount, in the bosom of Mount Moriah. It would therefore have been quite natural for him to solicit the assistance of his uncle and other Knights to attempt to recover this sacred treasure. Bernard could also give them substantial assistance, through his excellent relationship with the Pope, by putting pressure on Baldwin II King of Jerusalem, to accept and assist the group. There is also no doubt that Hugh, Count of Champagne, provided financial backing for the venture.

After the Knights arrived in Jerusalem they were given headquarters in the building on the site of the first Temple. Despite their supposed objective of protecting pilgrims, these nine knights spent their entire time in Jerusalem excavating under the Temple Mount. The only purpose for these excavations could have been that they were searching for the Temple treasures, particularly the Ark of the Covenant.

The Templars completed their work in Jerusalem at the end of 1127 whereupon the original nine all returned to France. Shortly afterwards, in 1128, they were granted their rule at the Council of Troyes, which gave them complete political autonomy and exemption from taxes. Effectively they now answered only to the pope. Pious members of the aristocracy gave them generous donations of land and valuables and the sons of virtually all the noble families in Europe soon became members of the Order. It seems improbable

that a handful of knights would have received papal recognition and be showered with grants of land and gifts of great value from royalty and nobility had they not made a discovery of importance – something definitely of great significance to the Christian Church.

While the Templars obviously searched for the Ark of the Covenant, we do not know for sure if they ever found it. There are certain clues however. The many written histories of the Templars make frequent mention of their ‘treasure’. When the Holy Land finally fell to the Muslims in 1291 mention is made of a Templar Knight named Tibald Gaudin as having carried the ‘treasure’ away. On his arrival at Sidon, Gaudin was immediately elected the next Grand Master. The Templar preceptory at Sidon, like all other preceptories, would have held adequate financial reserves. It simply does not make sense to believe that Gaudin warranted such a promotion immediately on his arrival just because he had brought some gold with him. If, on the other hand, he had saved the Ark of the Covenant, or something else of a similar unique value, then his promotion would have been a small reward.

The theme of the Templars saving their ‘treasure’ at times of greatest threat recurs shortly before their arrest by King Philip IV, when it is said that they spirited their treasure away from the Paris Temple in a hay wagon. Allegedly the treasure was taken to the Templar harbour at La Rochelle, where it was loaded onto Templar vessels. These fortuitously sailed just before they could be seized, mostly it is thought, to Scotland.

The treasure spirited out of France was believed to be gold and money. King Philip managed to arrest around 2,000 Templars on that fateful day and they were ordered to be imprisoned at various places throughout Paris, and the neighbouring countryside, isolated from each other. The interrogation and torture of the prisoners took a long time; many were in prison for up to five years. Now in those days’ prisoners had to pay for their own food by bribing their gaolers – it would have been impossible to survive for five years on the slops which were provided.

This suggests that the Templars had access to a huge supply of cash to pay for their own upkeep, the source of which could only have been the money previously held in the Paris Temple. It follows that if the gold and money was taken out of France, it would not have been available. So what was removed was not money, but some other treasure, which the Templars considered even more valuable.

On the exterior of Chartres Cathedral, by the north door, there is a carving on a pillar representing the Ark of the Covenant being transported on a wheeled vehicle. Persistent legends recount that the Ark was taken to Chartres on a cart by the Templars and hidden for a considerable time, deep beneath the crypt of the Cathedral. The same legend also claims that the Templars found many other sacred artefacts, and a considerable number of scrolls and other written records, in the course of their investigations.

While there has been much speculation as to the exact nature of these documents, a reasonable consensus is emerging that they contained scriptural scrolls, treatises on sacred geometry, and details of certain knowledge, art and science - the hidden wisdom of the ancient initiates of the Judaic/Egyptian tradition. Until very recently these legends were dismissed by academic historians, but that situation is changing. One modern

archaeological discovery tends to support the idea that the Templars knew what they were seeking and precisely where to search.

The Copper Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran, which was unrolled and deciphered at the University of Manchester, was a list of the sites used to hide the treasure of the Temple of Jerusalem. Many of these sites have been re-excavated since the discovery of the Copper Scroll, and several of them have revealed not Temple treasure, but evidence of Templar excavations made in the twelfth century.

The Templar tunnels under the Temple Mount were re-excavated in 1867, by Lieutenant Charles Warren of the Royal Engineers. The access tunnel descends vertically downwards for 25 metres through solid rock before radiating in a series of minor tunnels horizontally under the site of the ancient temple itself. Warren's party failed to find the hidden treasure of the Temple of Jerusalem, but in the tunnels excavated so laboriously by the Templars, they found a spur, remnants of a lance, a small Templar cross and the major part of a Templar sword. These artefacts are now preserved for posterity by the Templar archivist for Scotland, Robert Brydon of Edinburgh. Charles Warren is particularly remembered for the rediscovery of one of the original four gates to the Temple Mount, now named Warren's Gate in his honour.

After the Six Day War in 1967, the Temple Mount came under Israeli control. This allowed for limited archaeological investigation of the Old City of Jerusalem. A tunnel was driven along the Western Wall northwards from the complex of buildings at Wilson's Arch, below the level of the present houses. Just inside the tunnel is an arch. This marks where Warren's Gate entered the Temple Mount, although the present arch is considered to date to the eleventh century. The significance of this entrance to the Temple Mount is that it is located opposite what is generally thought to be the site of the Most Holy Place, since the entrance to the temple was to the east.

Two rabbis, Yehuda Getz, chief Rabbi of the Western Wall, and Shlomo Goren, Chief Rabbi of the Holy Places in Israel, at virtually the same time, became involved with another excavation. Rabbi Getz and some students accidentally discovered an underground chamber. From this another lower chamber was discovered, heading in the direction of the Most Holy Place of Solomon's Temple, but it was filled with water. Now because they would be investigating under the Moslem mosque built on the site of the Temple, there was no possibility of obtaining the required permits to conduct the investigation. The operation had to be conducted in strict secrecy. After obtaining pumps and removing the water they cleaned the silt out of the chamber and discovered a set of steps leading downward. Working mainly at night, the team removed the mud from the stairway and found the end blocked by a stone wall. Removing the stones they discovered a passageway filled with heavy rocks. Taking many months of manual labour, they removed the rocks only to discover another wall. For nine years this clandestine task continued. Walls were broken down to reveal just another passage filled with huge rocks, with another wall at the end. Convinced that the tunnels would ultimately lead them to the site of the Ark, both Rabbis were determined to continue. Unfortunately, the Muslim authorities got wind of the excavations and a riot ensued. To pacify the rioters the Israeli police arrested the students working on the dig and sealed the entrance to the tunnel with reinforced concrete. The timing coincided with Israeli-Egyptian peace initiatives, and the government was keen to play down the whole matter.

Since then no known investigations have taken place. What is most interesting about this find is that there is general agreement that the walls blocking the passages date from the time of the crusades and were most likely erected by the Templars.

Perhaps our original Royal Arch ritual re-enacted the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant, not by the sojourners of Zerubbabel's time, but by the Templars? After all, the Roman Arch with its keystone was unknown at the time of the building of the Second Temple.

Companion 7: Operative Masonry and the Knights Templar

In recent years there have been a whole series of books published which link the Order of the Templars and Freemasonry. Most of these books attempt to show some direct link, almost as if the Templars must have somehow hijacked groups of operative masons and forcibly imposed aspects of Templarism into their ceremonies as a means of preserving their secret knowledge. Because of the three century gap between the suppression of the Templars and the rise of speculative Masonry, the possibility of any direct link is just not credible.

We do know that the Templars owned vast estates in England and Scotland, as well as throughout Europe. It is also fact that they built a huge number of buildings on these lands, including Temples, Castles, Churches and Harbours. Further, they financed the building of most of the gothic cathedrals. On most of their projects they would have employed stone masons, and there is definite evidence of stone masons becoming associate members of the Templar order.

After the arrest of the Templars in France in 1307 the Order went underground virtually everywhere, except in Scotland. A large number of the fugitives had building skills, so it would have been quite natural for them to have joined up with operative masons. Presuming that in many cases they escaped with a share of the Templar's wealth, they could have set themselves up as Masters, employing operative masons. For example there are apparently extant records of several Templars joining up with the Lodge of Operative Masons working on Kilwinning Abbey. With this close physical association, it seems highly unlikely that the operative masons would not have learned at least some of the Templar legends.

Companion 8: Templars & Freemasons – A Connection?

Considering the overwhelming evidence that the Templars spent years searching for the Ark, it seems both logical and plausible that they would have incorporated the story of that search into their Order. Over time, the legend would have developed. Perhaps Solomon's Temple came to play a central role in the story, both its building and its destruction? It is known that the Templars also styled themselves as 'The Guardians of the Temple of Solomon'.

In France, stone masons, as well as carpenters, joiners and metal workers allied to the building trade, were members of the Compagnonnage. Each group were known as 'Children' of a particular traditional Master. The 'Masters' were Maitré Soubise, Maitré Jacques and Maitré Solomon. The stone masons all belonged to the Children of Master Solomon. This branch of the Compagnonnage were instructed in the art of sacred

geometry by Cistercian monks and it was the Knights Templar who, acting with the agreement of Bernard of Clairvaux, gave a 'rule' to the Children of Solomon in March 1145, which laid down the conditions required for living and working. This sounds remarkably like the Ancient Charges in Freemasonry. Interestingly the members of the Compagnonnage were called compagnons – companions – the same as the members of the Royal Arch.

The Masonic researcher and author, Lionel Vibert, studied the Compagnonnage and found a large number of points of coincidence between that body and Freemasonry. Although he never went as far as to suggest that either owed its origins to the other, it seems quite likely that both organisations had some contact with a common third body in the past, from which both inherited elements of legend and ceremony. Vibert was most interested in the Compagnonnage legend which relates the role of Hiram Abiff in the construction of Solomon's Temple, and his subsequent murder in an attempt to extort the secrets of architecture from him. This legend quite possibly originated from the Cistercians/Templars.

Considering that the Compagnonnage legend and the Masonic legend are so similar, it seems unbelievable that each developed independently. The probability is far greater that early speculative Masons heard of the story from sources which link back, indirectly, to the Templars, even though over 300 years had elapsed between their suppression and the rise of speculative masonry.

Next, each Templar Preceptory contained what were known as the *Fixed Emblems* or *Fixed Standards*. These were in contrast to the Standards or Arms of the individual Knights, which were movable, being taken elsewhere when their owners moved. There were four Fixed Standards, each with a different emblem. They depicted a Lion, a Man, an Ox and an Eagle – exactly the same as the Main Banners in the Royal Arch, and exactly the same as the Arms of the Ancients' Grand Lodge. Surely this is too much of a coincidence to be accepted as mere chance?

Numerous authors have pointed out the definite connections between the St Clair family, Barons of Roslin, and the Knights Templar. The St Clair, or later Sinclair, family also had distinctly strong ties to Scottish Freemasonry. These are so well known to all Masonic scholars that I will not repeat them here, but it is pertinent to add that many other prominent Scottish families, including members of the Scottish nobility, were descended from, or had direct links to, members the Templar Order.

Another point of similarity is the Templar's reverence for St John the Baptist. Certainly there are records showing that the Templars held ceremonies in their preceptories on St John the Baptist Day, 24th June, each year. After their arrest in France one of the charges, which may or may not have been true, was that they worshipped John the Baptist as the true Messiah, which constituted heresy. It is equally well known that from time immemorial the two Saints John (the Baptist and the Evangelist), were considered the patron saints of Masonry, and that their respective days, June 24 and December 27, were kept as special Masonic Festival days.

Companion 9: The Grand Lodge Era

From the early 1600's in England there was a fascination with all things esoteric. There is a body of evidence which shows a number of early speculative masons were Alchemists, Rosicrucians and Kabbalists. In the development of the ritual it was quite natural for them to include elements which today we regard as mystical and arcane. Our rituals contain references to elements from the Pythagoreans and other Greek Mystery Schools, ideas taken from the religions of the Ancient Egyptians, Persians and Canaanites, even things which would have been considered heretical six or seven centuries ago. The sources surely included the Knights Templar legends, since from the time of their suppression it was popularly believed that they were the possessors of secret wisdom and sacred mysteries. In fact many people assumed that this was exactly why the Catholic Church conspired with Philip of France to act against them. Of course the developers of our ritual intended that it be an allegory, only understood in its proper context by Masons, but there seems to have been a general understanding that the ceremonies of Freemasons contained a distillation of ancient wisdom and hermetic secrets, and that it was a lineal descendant of the societies and orders which had kept and transmitted those secrets throughout the ages.

It was also a time of political turmoil in Britain. In 1603 James VI of Scotland became James I of England, the first of the Stuart Monarchs. He was protector of the Craft of Masonry, and it has been said that he was initiated into a lodge in Scotland. Apart from commanding an English translation of the Bible, which would be freely available to the people, he also encouraged an environment which promoted thought and philosophy. Further, he was a direct descendent of the Merovingian Dynasty of France, which purported to carry the bloodline of Jesus, and he was also a successor to the Templar heritage in Scotland. During his reign the Thirty Years War in Europe saw many German Protestant refugees entering England, bringing with them Rosicrucian philosophy. In 1625 James I was succeeded by his second son, Charles I, who was deposed in 1642 after he dissolved Parliament. The Civil War ensued, during which time Freemasonry, as well as the esoteric and philosophical societies, prudently kept a very low profile.

On the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, and the coronation of Charles II in 1661, those organisations re-emerged, and the so-called Invisible College, which had met secretly at Oxford for 11 years, established itself as the Royal Society with the new king as its patron. Many of the founders were Freemasons. Charles II died in 1685 and was succeeded by his brother, James II, after a bid by the House of Commons to preclude a Catholic from the throne failed. James II proved fervently pro-Catholic in his military, civil, judicial and even religious appointments. This intensified friction with parliament. In 1688, after the birth of a son by his second wife promised the start of a Catholic dynasty, parliament deposed James and offered the throne to his anti-Catholic daughter, Mary and her husband, William of Orange.

James went into exile in France, but raised an army which landed in Ireland, where he believed he would find popular support from Irish Catholics. After the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, where James' army was disastrously defeated, he returned to permanent exile in France.

William of Orange died in 1702, eight years after Mary. Anne, the second daughter of James II, then became Queen until her death in 1714. Having no surviving children, Anne

was succeeded by her German cousin, George, Elector of Hannover, as King George I of Great Britain. This move was highly unpopular in Scotland, as well as in Tory circles in England, where there was strong support for the son of James II, Prince James Francis Edward Stuart. In 1715 Scotland rose in open revolt – the Jacobite Rebellion – which was eventually put down, but still simmered for nearly two years. The Stuart threat was to last another thirty years, until the defeat of Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) at the Battle of Culloden Moor.

The English population was split into supporters of the Stuart cause and the supporters of the reigning Hanoverian monarchy. The Stuart supporters included many of the Masonic Lodges by then in existence, possibly prompted by the thought that many of the early, speculative Masons, including Elias Ashmole, Christopher Wren and Dr John Wilkins, were supporters of the Stuart – Scottish – Templar traditions.

Masonry in general, through its speculative founders, Scottish links and the patronage of James I, was publicly seen as a Jacobite organisation. After the Scottish Rebellion this was definitely not politically expedient, and there are reports that the initial meeting of the Premier Grand Lodge on the 24th June 1717 included speeches and songs which were distinctly and deliberately pro-Hanoverian in nature. In fact some authors have suggested that the Grand Lodge was primarily formed to repudiate the charges that Masonry was a Jacobite society, and it constituted a schismatic body which deviated from the „true“ traditions. Ultimately, in 1817, the offshoot supplanted the genuine mainstream with the formation of the United Grand Lodge.

Now the Duke of Sussex, first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge, was a son of King George III, as was the Duke of Kent, the last Grand Master of the Ancients. There is simply no way that either would have tolerated any ideas of a Stuart/Scottish/Templar connection with Freemasonry. The Union, of course, provided an ideal opportunity to revise the rituals and ceremonies, under the guise of harmonising the differences between the practices of the Ancients and Moderns. And thus disappeared the Ark of the Covenant from the Royal Arch ritual, together with its Templar connotation. It was too late to do anything about the Coat of Arms, which had been accepted and approved some years previously, and which still today depicts the clues to Freemasonry’s true history and heritage.

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