

LOOKING BACK 200 YEARS
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The year 1774 was not particularly outstanding in our annals but 200 years, although but a moment in the history of the world, is a long time in the history of the Royal Arch. Only thirty years before had the first printed reference to the Order appeared, namely, in Dr Fifield d'Assigny's *Serious and Impartial Enquiry*, etc. published in 1774. The Order had, obviously, been in existence before that date but it is quite impossible to say how old it then was or how widespread its popularity.

In 1774 this Supreme Grand Chapter was a mere eight years old, having been established in 1766 under the famous Charter of Compact by which it had power to constitute subordinate Chapters. This power was not, however, exercised until 1769 when, in that year, eight Warrants (they were not then called Charters) were issued. Five of the Chapters established thereby are, happily, still in existence; they each had a Bi-Centenary Charter presented in 1969. After this burst of activity in 1769 enthusiasm seems to have abated somewhat and only one more Warrant was issued (in 1771 but which does not seem to have been acted upon) before the year now under review.

Exaltation or 'arching' regularly took place in Grand Chapter itself which seems to have served the Metropolis as a Chapter as well as a governing body. Brethren were also exalted in their Craft Lodges, both under the premier Grand Lodge and the Antients Grand Lodge. But what of the ritual as the year 1774 dawned? The Grand Chapter archives throw no light on the subject. The Minutes merely record that "Brothers so-and-so were 'exalted to this Sublime Degree' or were 'permitted to pass the Royal Arch'". In addition, it was customary to rehearse the lectures (not to be confused with the Principals' lectures so familiar today), the Minutes recording that the 'usual sections were gone through' or the 'usual sections being ended the Chapter was closed and adjourned', or some such wording.

Knowledge of the ritual at that date is fragmentary and source material scanty. Today is not the occasion (even if time permitted) to go into the subject at length, but it can be briefly stated that the candidate was prepared much as for the Craft initiation, that the familiar tools were

carried by the Sojourners when the candidate was received, that he was questioned by the Principals, that an obligation was required, that a legend of the discovery of a secret vault was enacted, that the 'word' was communicated, and that other ceremonial actions we know today were observed.

Much more is known, however, of the regalia of the 1760s and 1770s. The Companions wore aprons of 'white leather indented round with crimson ribbon and strings of the same with a T H in gold properly displayed on the bib' - the second colour was not introduced until much later. Both the indented sash and breast jewel were almost identical with those we wear today. The robes of the Principals were plain; the more decorative style, designed by the Chevalier Ruspini, were adopted in 1777. For a time the wearing of the R.A. apron ceased when, in 1773, Grand Chapter resolved that it be "disused until the Grand Lodge shall permit the Companions of this Chapter to wear them in the Grand Lodge and in all private Free Masons' Lodges". Grand Lodge never did so allow and it is believed the resolution was quietly ignored and the wearing of the distinctive apron resumed.

That Grand Lodge refused to allow the R.A. apron to be worn was not surprising as it did not recognise either the degree or the Grand Chapter. As far back as 1759 Grand Secretary Spencer wrote, "our Society is neither Arch, Royal Arch or Antient", and again, soon after the formation of Grand Chapter in 1766, "the Royal Arch is a Society which we do not acknowledge and which we hold to be an invention to introduce innovation and to seduce the brethren". This *official* opposition, or non-recognition, which continued until the union of the Grand Lodges in 1813, did not, however, prevent many Grand Officers from being exalted in the Order. Another distinguished Grand Secretary, James Heseltine, not only signed the Charter of Compact but became First Grand Principal in 1773 and again in 1786. Other contemporary distinguished brethren, members of Grand Chapter, were the Chevalier Bartholomew Ruspini, later to become First Grand Principal; James Galloway, who was Junior Grand Warden in 1781 and First Grand Principal four years later; and John Allen, Provincial Grand Master, Lancashire (1798-1806), First Grand Principal in 1782 and Grand Treasurer of Grand Chapter from 1794 to 1806. Probably the most distinguished of all was the celebrated Thomas Dunckerley, who later became Grand Superintendent in and over no fewer than 18

Royal Arch Provinces and Provincial Grand Master of 8 Craft Provinces.

Another member of Grand Chapter at this time was Bro. Captain George Smith, who, although he became Provincial Grand Master of Kent in 1777, ought to be described as notorious rather than distinguished. Whilst in the King's Bench prison for debt in 1783, with other Masons he held meetings of the Lodge of which he was Master actually *in* the prison, at which he 'conferred' degrees. He was duly called to account by the Grand Lodge. The following year the matter of a false Certificate, used by a beggar to collect alms as a distressed Mason, came before Grand Lodge. On investigation it transpired that the Certificate had been obtained from Smith who was, in consequence, summoned to appear before the Committee of Charity. He did not appear and was expelled the Craft.

In 1774 the Grand Principals were Charles Taylor, Charles Hanbury and James Bottomly, Companions about whom very little is known but who attended the Grand Chapter with great regularity - Taylor and Bottomly attending 7 meetings out of 8 and Hanbury 4 out of 8, 50 performing conscientiously the duties of their offices. Curiously enough Comp. Taylor, who had been Grand Treasurer since 1771, was requested "to continue the care of the cash" when he was elected M.E.Z., probably the only example of dual *active* offices.

Let us look more closely at the work of Grand Chapter during the year under review. The first meeting was held 14th January at the Mitre Tavern, Fleet Street, when two brethren "were severally permitted to pass the Royal Arch and Pd. the usual fine". HRH Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, fourth son of the Prince of Wales, was unanimously elected Patron of the Order. The M.E.Z., Taylor, was elected by ballot and the Second and Third Grand Principals were appointed, as were the Sojourners and Scribes. The Companions also "voted their thanks to Bro. Heseltine for his Care and Assiduity as the late P.Z. and a New Robe was ordered to be prepared for him". Four brethren were proposed, amongst whom was Stephen Sayre, a Sheriff of the City of London. The final minute is of particular interest and reads;

'After the usual Solemn Procession & All other Business ended The Cr. was closed in ancient Form & adjourned after which the Cms. dined together & in the evening a Ball was held to celebrate the Festival of St. Jon. at which about 70 Cms. Master Masons & Ladies were present. After which an Elegant Supper was provided & the evening conducted & concluded with that Harmony and Social Mirth which have ever been the peculiar Criterions of Masons and true Citizens of the World'.

The second and third meetings (held 11th February and 11th March) were of a routine nature. At the fourth meeting in the year, 8th April, Bro. Smith, to whom reference has already been made, "read to the Cms. a Dissertation on the 4th Degree of Masonry containing many Instructive & Ingenious Remarks & recd. the Unanimous Thanks of the Cms. from the Chair". Capt. Smith certainly showed ingenuity in his later activities as we have already seen. The most significant business of the evening, however, was communicated by Bro. Heseltine, the immediate Past M.E.Z. He "read some Despatches recd. by him from Bengal setting forth the great Desire of Som Brors. there to have a R.A.C. [?]& showing the Difficulties they labour under for want of a proper No. of resident Cms. to receive such authority". A Committee was thereupon appointed to consider the despatches and to prepare an answer. Presumably the Companions appointed went into Committee immediately because the minutes go on to record a Resolution "that a Patent be granted to Br. Durham of Bengal & any or. 2 regular Brors. he may know there to be R.A. Masons". And so the first overseas Charter was granted - it was numbered 10 and dated 8th April 1774. Unfortunately the Chapter seems never to have functioned as nothing more is heard of it.

On 13th May Capt. Smith again played a part - he "read to the Cms. a Dissertation in praise of Masonry".

At the October meeting the Introductory lecture was delivered, apparently taking longer than usual as "the Cms. not having time to go thro' the Sections they were postponed". The minutes also disclose a delicate approach to affairs of the day in that it was ordered "a genteel Lr. be wrote by E. & sent to Br. Martin desiring him to app. some Evening previous to the next Cr. Night to meet Br. Taylor & Br. Rich to settle the Accts relative to the last Anniversary".

On the 11th November a Bro. John Palmer, junior, a Merchant of St. James' Parish, Montigo Bay, Jamaica, was proposed, balloted for, approved and "permitted to Pass the Arch this evening" on account of his going abroad before the next meeting. A further minute is worthy of note in that it was ordered that Certificates be prepared for the said Brother Palmer and one other, the first recorded reference to Grand Chapter Certificates.

The final meeting of the year was held 9 December but is of little interest other than that two more brethren were exalted. So ended one year's work of the Grand Chapter. There had been 8 meetings, at which the average attendance was 16, and one Committee of Accounts. The Grand Principals and other Officers had been elected and a Royal Grand Patron appointed. Fourteen brethren had been exalted and one new Chapter authorised. The lectures were rehearsed on two occasions and two papers read.

I trust, Companions, that this brief review of what our forefathers were doing 200 years ago has been of some interest.

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