

The Chapter Officers

What Officers are there in a Royal Arch Chapter?

The Officers in a Royal Arch Chapter are listed under Royal Arch Regulation No 48 of the Book of Constitutions and Royal Arch Regulations: "According to ancient custom a complete Chapter of this Order of Freemasonry consists of the Three Principals who, when the Chapter is assembled are to be considered conjointly as the Master, and each severally as a Master, two Scribes, a Treasurer, a Principal Sojourner, two Assistant Sojourners, and other Companions, making up the number of 72 as a Council: and no regular Chapter can consist of more; but any number may be elected, exalted and received as Companions with all the privileges of membership save that they are not to hold the staff of office or to be considered as Councillors when more than 72 are present. In addition to the above Officers, a Director of Ceremonies, an Almoner, a Charity Steward, an Assistant Director of Ceremonies, an Organist, an Assistant Scribe E and Stewards may be elected or appointed as the case may be."

What is the correct precedence of Officers?

The precedence of Officers is also laid down in Regulation No 48 as: The Three Principals, the Scribe E, the Scribe N, the Treasurer, the Director of Ceremonies (if any), the Almoner, the Charity Steward, the Principal Sojourner, the Assistant Sojourners, the Assistant Director of Ceremonies (if any), the Organist, the Assistant Scribe E (if any), Stewards (if any) and Janitor.

It is worth noting that the procedure for the election or appointment of Officers is different from those in a Craft Lodge: RA Regulation No 48 states: "The Officers shall be elected by ballot on the regular day of election prescribed in the By-laws of the Chapter, provided that, except for the Principals and Treasurer who must be elected, it shall be in order for the Chapter on the day of election to resolve that they may be appointed by the Principals so elected." The Janitor shall be elected by a show of hands on the regular day of election. A Chapter may, however, resolve (annually) that a subscribing member of the Chapter shall be Janitor without emolument, in which case he may be either elected or appointed as in the case of the other Officers."

What are the qualifications for the Three Principals' Chairs ?

The qualifications are laid down in RA Regulations 49 and 50. In brief, all have to be elected annually by the members of the Chapter. To be eligible for election to the 3rd Principal (Joshua), a Companion must have served as a Sojourner or a Scribe. It is no longer necessary for him to have served as a Worshipful Master of a Craft Lodge.

To be eligible for election to 2nd Principal (Haggai), he must have served as Joshua and for election to 1st Principal (Zerubbabel), he must have served as Haggai.

The title of Past Zerubbabel (PZ) applies to those who have served as 1st Principal and is regarded as equivalent to the title of Past Master (PM) in the Craft.

Why Three Principals?

The Historical Lecture informs us that Zerubbabel, Haggai and Joshua presided over the rebuilding of the Temple, destroyed in 586 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar. These three characters are represented by the three Principals, who are considered conjointly and severally equal in status, which is different to the relationship between the WM and his Wardens in a Craft Lodge.

Why are we called Companions?

The term Companion adds distinction between Craft and Royal Arch. 'Companion' from the Latin, means 'one who eats bread with another', derived from 'com' meaning 'with' and 'panis' meaning 'bread'.

Then what does E Comp mean?

E Comp is an abbreviation for Excellent Companion. Members of the Chapter are called Companions, equivalent to Brethren in the Craft. Excellent Companion is a title conferred on a Companion when he is installed in his first chair, that of Joshua (J), and is retained by all Principals and Past Principals. It is worth mentioning that the Office of 1st Principal has the title 'Most Excellent' attached to it, but the Companion filling that Office is still known as E Comp. Only those Companions who are or have been the Principals of Supreme Grand Chapter are known as 'Most Excellent Companion'

Who was Zerubbabel?

Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah and governor of Jerusalem, a position to which he was appointed by Cyrus, King of Persia, when he permitted the captive Jews in Babylon to return to Judah. Born in Babylon during the period of their captivity, he was a descendant of King David and a grandson of Jehoiachin, King of Judah, at the time that the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar took them into captivity.

Who was Haggai?

Haggai was a prophet, about whom little is known apart from his prophesy that there would be pestilence and drought because of the failure of the people to finish the rebuilding of the Temple. Haggai declared that God was punishing them for decorating their own house before completing the house of the Lord, and urges Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, to rally the people to their primary task.

Who was Joshua?

Joshua was the High Priest during the rebuilding of the Temple. He was the son of Josedech and grandson of Seraiah who was the High Priest when the Temple was destroyed by the forces of the Babylonish General. He reinstated the correct Temple rituals, without which the older beliefs and practices of Judaism might have been lost forever.

Who was Ezra?

Ezra, a priest and scribe, was a leading figure in the revival of Judaism in the land of Israel after the Babylonian captivity. Ezra, a scholar and teacher, was given official sanction to teach the law,

appoint magistrates, offer sacrifices, and beautify the Temple. He was the person responsible for defining both Temple worship and the canon of scripture for his time. Ezra certainly had a part in making the 'People of the Book'. The book of Ezra describes the rebuilding of the Temple, which is reported in detail elsewhere only in the books of Haggai and Zachariah. Since this story is central to the Royal Arch, you may wish to consult it.

Who was Nehemiah?

Nehemiah was a 5th Century BC Jewish Leader. He held a position of honour in the court of the Persian King Artaxerxes and in 444 BC was appointed by the king to the governorship of Judea, with authorisation to rebuild Jerusalem. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reforms made during his administration are recounted in the book that bears his name.

What is the significance of the Sojourners?

A Sojourner (Journeyman Mason) is one who arrives as a stranger with every intention of moving on in due course. The ritual relates how the three Sojourners who arrived to offer their assistance with the rebuilding work proved pivotal in rediscovering the lost secrets, offering the message that those employed on the lowly tasks may attain the highest honours through zeal and industry.

An Observation by Peter Mason