



# Province of East Lancashire

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## The Legend of the Royal Arch

The story relating to the secret vault which features prominently in the Exaltation ceremony is taken from a very old legend originally written in Greek, it goes back to at least the 4th century, of which there are many versions. It is also known in a slightly different form, apparently derived from Philostorgious who was born about 364 AD. The text was translated from the Greek by Edward Walford, MA.

*“When Julian bade the city at Jerusalem to be rebuilt in order to refute openly the predictions of our Lord concerning it, he brought about exactly the opposite of what he intended. For his work was checked by many other prodigies from heaven; and especially, during the preparation of the foundations, one of the stones which was placed at the lowest part of the base, suddenly started from its place and opened a door of a certain cave hollowed out in the rock. Owing to its depth, it was difficult to see what was within the cave: so persons were appointed to investigate the matter, who, being anxious to find out the truth, let down one of their workmen by means of a rope. On being lowered down he found stagnant water reaching up to his knees; and, having gone round the place and felt the walls on every side, he found that the cave to be a perfect square. Then, in his return, as he stood near the middle, he struck his foot against a column which stood rising slightly above the water. As soon as he touched the pillar, he found lying upon it a book wrapped up in a very fine and thin linen cloth; and as soon as he lifted it up just as he found it, he gave a signal to his companions to draw him up again. As soon as he regained the light, he showed them the book, which struck them all with astonishment, especially because it appeared so new and fresh, considering the place where it had been found. This book, which appeared such a mighty prodigy in the eyes of both heathens and Jews, as soon as it was opened, shows the following words in large letters: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In fact, the volume contained that entire Gospel which had been declared by the divine tongue of the (beloved) disciple and the Virgin. Moreover, this miracle, together with other signs which were then shown from heaven, most clearly showed that “the word of the Lord would never go forth void,” which had foretold that the devastation of the Temple should be perpetual. For that Book declared Him who had uttered those words long before, to be God and Creator of the Universe; and it was very clear proof that “their labour was but lost that built,” seeing that the immutable decree of the Lord had condemned the Temple to eternal desolation”.*

The Julian referred to in the opening line of the legend is the Roman Emperor Julian (331-363), surnamed the Apostate, who succeeded his uncle Constantine the Great in 361, and in tolerance of religion, gave the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, his motive being to annoy the Christians, with whom, now that he had been converted back from Christianity, he had lost sympathy. From this it might appear that the actual subterranean chambers of King Solomon’s Temple were disturbed not by Zerubbabel, but by Julian the Apostate, who undertook to rebuild the Temple of Herod (destroyed by Titus) in order to falsify the prophecy (Matthew xxiv, 2) that there should not remain one stone upon another: “Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another.”

But the effect of his reopening the subterranean chambers which had been closed for centuries was that, according to one version of the fable, explosions of accumulated gas killed his workmen and still further disturbed the masonry, so that far from falsifying the prophecy, he, in fact, helped to fulfil it.

There are several known versions of this legend which vary from one another and do not closely observe any precise order of events and historical names are used with little or no regard for chronological sequence.

Those who are members of the Allied Masonic Degrees will see a connection between the 'Grand Tyler's of Solomon' and the above legend.