I read with great interest the address delivered last December by RE Companion Michael Walker on Irish Royal Arch Masonry. Although the Scottish Royal Arch ritual, like the English one, deals with the rebuilding of the Temple, rather than the repairing of it as in the Irish ritual, and although our regalia is superficially similar, yet there are many differences in Scottish and English Royal Arch practice.

The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland is an autonomous Grand Body which governs the Order of the Royal Arch Freemasons of Scotland. Although operating independently of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, its regulations are broadly similar in many respects, and the two Grand Bodies are in amity. There are no Grand Office-bearers common to both Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand Chapter, no equivalent status. Chapters are not attached to Lodges but are formed independently, with their own names and numbers. How did this come about?

The Royal Arch degree is not native to Scotland, but seems to have been introduced from both English and Irish sources, often Military Lodges, towards the middle of the eighteenth century. The earliest reference to the degree is at Stirling in 1743. Many other degrees beyond the Craft were introduced by these Military Lodges, and when the regiments moved on, Lodges in the vicinity sometimes continued to work them. This situation continued until the end of the eighteenth century. However, the early Secret Societies Acts caused the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1800 to issue a warning to its Lodges against the working of any degrees other than those of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. Many Lodges heeded the warning, and the additional degrees associated with Royal Arch or Templar masonry had to be worked in assemblies separate from the Lodge. The feeling grew amongst the Brethren that these assemblies should be legitimised in some way. A few obtained warrants from the Grand Encampment of Ireland. Others petitioned the Templar Grand Body in England, and in 1810, under the patronage of the Duke of Kent, the Royal Grand Conclave of Scotland was chartered, and Alexander Deuchar appointed its first Grand Master. This Royal Grand Conclave was empowered to grant Charters for the conferring of the Knight Templar grades upon those qualified as Royal Arch Masons. Deuchar soon realized that it was unsatisfactory to have the first three degrees and the Knight Templar grades under proper control, but not the intermediate qualifying degree of the Royal Arch. In 1815 he convened a special committee, and all bodies in Scotland known to be working the Royal Arch degrees were contacted, with a view to setting up a Grand Body to exercise proper control. All
three Home Grand Lodges were consulted, so as not to infringe upon their interests. Advice was sought in particular from England where the United Grand Lodge of England had recently been formed, and where the status of the Royal Arch degree had been properly acknowledged, as the completion of the third degree. The Earl of Sussex was supportive, and advised Deuchar to make every effort to persuade the Grand Lodge of Scotland to adopt a similar stance, and take the Royal Arch under its wing. However, after an initially encouraging reply from the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the matter became inextricably bogged down in Committee. Eventually a meeting of interested Chapters could be delayed no longer, and in August 1817 representatives of 34 Chapters met in Edinburgh, and the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland was erected and consecrated. Charters were issued, and the new Grand Body grew slowly but steadily, and gradually all bodies working the Royal Arch degree in Scotland came under its control.

At its peak in the 1960s, the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland had some 650 active Chapters, many of which have subsequently left to form Supreme Grand Chapters of their own, as happened for example in Israel and in New South Wales. Currently we have some 470 active Chapters, 220 of which are overseas.

How did the Scottish Royal Arch system of degrees come about?

In 1819, the Royal Grand Conclave and Supreme Grand Chapter met and agreed upon a division of some 19 degrees relevant to both orders. Twelve degrees associated with Royal Arch masonry, as than practised, were placed under Supreme Grand Chapter's control. Some of these soon fell into disuse. Elements of others, namely of the Excellent, Super Excellent and Arch degrees, were combined as the ceremony of Passing the Veils within the Excellent Master degree. Others developed into the Royal Ark Mariner degree and into the Degrees of the Captivity or Babylonish pass, all of which could be worked by virtue of a Chapter’s Charter.

However, the progression in mainstream Royal Arch Masonry from the 1830’s was to take in turn the degrees of the Mark, Master Passed the Chair, and Excellent Master, before being exalted to the Holy Royal Arch degree.

Membership of Royal Arch Chapters had originally been restricted to Masters or past Masters of Craft Lodges, but this proved too restrictive, and Candidates not so qualified were obliged to take the Master Passed the Chair degree. It was therefore unnecessary to have the stipulation that before becoming a Principal of a Chapter, a Companion must first have been Master of a Craft Lodge. The qualification of Master Passed the Chair was removed from the middle of the nineteenth century. To this day, however, unlike the English or Irish regulations, there is no prior requirement to have been Master of a Craft Lodge before becoming a Principal of a Scottish Chapter.

The Mark degree has since the 1830s been regarded as an essential preliminary to the Royal Arch degree under the Scottish Constitution. Since 1860 the Mark degree has been under the jurisdiction conjointly of both Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand
Chapter. The Grand Lodge of Scotland regards the Mark degree as the second part of the Fellow Craft degree, but to prevent confusion, permits it to be conferred only upon Master Masons. So far as Royal Arch Masonry is concerned, the Mark degree is reckoned as the Fourth degree in Masonry. A candidate for the Royal Arch degree who has not received his Mark degree within a Craft Lodge has to be advanced in the Mark Lodge held within the Chapter. If already qualified, the Candidate has only to take an obligation of affiliation.

Normal Scottish practice is to open the Chapter, read the minutes and conduct any business, then, if a candidate be present, adjourn the Chapter. English Constitution visitors who are not Mark Master Masons or Excellent Masters must retire for a time. It is not necessary for Irish Constitution visitors to retire as they work an equivalent system of degrees. A Mark Lodge is now opened, the business of advancement or affiliation is completed, then the Mark Lodge is closed. A Lodge of Excellent Masters is then opened, and the candidate is obligated and instructed, then passes the blue, purple, and scarlet veils, receiving at each the appropriate sign, token and word which will be required of him later in the R.A. degree. He is then received as an Excellent Master. The Lodge is closed and the Chapter resumed, and English Constitution visitors are readmitted.

Upon the Altar, when fire regulations permit, is placed a brass bowl of spirits of wine, which is ignited, otherwise the Altar is illuminated from within. Surrounding the central flame or light are six further lights or burning candles, making seven lights in all. The Candidate is received in prayer, then is taught to approach the Altar in a particular manner with seven steps. An obligation is administered, and sealed seven times on the VSL. The Candidate then retires and the lights are removed. Strictly speaking, English Constitution visitors should again be asked to retire for a short time, but are often allowed to remain. He, upon readmission, has to pass three guards, bearing standards of blue, purple and scarlet respectively, to whom he must give the sign, token and word of the appropriate veil. The Candidate is now permitted to approach the white veil, to request permission of the Sanhedrin to help rebuild the Temple. The next part of the ritual dealing with the discovery is very like your own.

Some Chapters have a vault constructed beneath the floor, some have a model of a vault. In some Chapters six Companions interlink rods in the form of a hexalpha above the double cube or pedestal, symbolically representing a vault. In any case, the first Sojourner (in your terminology the Principal Sojourner) enacts a vivid representation of the discovery, then takes the Candidate to report the same to the Sanhedrin. As a reward for his discovery he is invested as a Royal Arch Mason and instructed in the secrets, which are further explained in the lecture given at the end of each ceremony of exaltation.

There are two further lectures which are not routinely given, but reserved for occasions when time permits. The Second Lecture describes the Scottish Royal Arch Jewel, which is different from the English one, and goes on to explain the significance of the seven lights present during the obligation. The Third Lecture elaborates upon the significance of the double cube and further explains the
traditional JBO word, which we in the Scottish Constitution still retain in our ceremonies. The Candidate is welcomed, fraternal greetings are exchanged, and the Chapter is closed.

Turning briefly to Chair degrees, there are the three associated with the Three Principals. In addition, First Principals and Past First Principals of Chapters under the Scottish Constitution are entitled to receive the Chair degree of Installed Master in the Mark Degree, which is none other than the Master Passed the Chair degree discontinued as a qualifying degree in the mid nineteenth century.

Other degrees also come under Supreme Grand Chapter's control. In 1916, the Cryptic degrees, introduced into Scotland from Illinois in 1877, were taken under its wing and Charters issued. In the same year, it was made obligatory to obtain separate Charters to continue to work the "Lodge and Council" series of degrees (Mariner and Babylonish Pass degrees) hitherto worked by virtue of a Chapter's Charter. Some 350 Cryptic Councils or Lodges and Councils are administered by the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, in addition to its 470 Chapters. All together ten ordinary degrees and seven chair degrees are controlled by Supreme Grand Chapter, which makes for an interesting and varied workload. There has only been time today to touch briefly upon some of the many differences in Scottish and English Royal Arch history and practice. The differences serve only to make visiting more interesting, and we are firmly united in the aim of seeking to help Companions to prepare for that Second Temple, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Companions, it has been a pleasure to be invited to address you and I thank you for your attention. I hope that it will not be too much of an imposition if I salute your Most Excellent Pro First Grand Principal in the Scottish manner [Done]. Thank you.