

Provincial Grand Chapter of Cumberland and Westmorland



THE ROYAL ARCH INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT

A number of Chapters have recently expressed concern about the decline in attendance, particularly of those Companions who have yet to reach the chair of Third Principal, and have intimated that for many, meetings lack interest and enjoyment.

This booklet offers some positive recommendations towards making our meetings of more general interest by involving the Companions in the work.

There are a wide range of suggestions made. Please note that these are genuine suggestions and not an attempt to standardise ritual or mandate any particular practices. As experienced Royal Arch Masons will know, the ritual practiced varies very widely between Chapters. This underlines the fact that the Royal Arch has enough inherent flexibility to help Chapters make the ceremonies as enjoyable and interesting as possible.

The principle of sharing the work shown on the Royal Arch Website is an example of how the work can be shared. The same principle can be applied to any version of the ritual used by your Chapter simply by amending the names of the Officers delivering it.

Introduction:

Too often Companions, who have joined the Royal Arch because of a desire to complete their knowledge of the Craft, do not have an opportunity to become involved in the work of the Chapter for some time. Participation in our ceremonies helps in acquiring that knowledge which is essential to our understanding and purpose of the Order and its place in the Masonic scheme of things. Without understanding there cannot be abiding interest and without interest there cannot be enjoyment.

The Royal Arch ceremony is very different from what has become familiar in the Craft and without some explanation, the Candidate will be totally confused and will have difficulty in understanding where he is and what is happening in the ceremony. If we are going to keep him, it is absolutely vital that he should be informed, prior to entering the Chapter, that: *“The story about to unfold takes place some 500 years after the dedication of Solomon’s Temple. King Solomon has long since died. Jerusalem has been attacked by the Babylonians, the city and its once magnificent temple has been destroyed and the inhabitants taken into captivity in Babylon where they remained for 70 years. We are at that period in history where the Babylonian Empire has been attacked and defeated by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus has issued a decree allowing the descendants of the Hebrew exiles to return to Jerusalem. The Candidate represents one of those exiles returning to Jerusalem as a Sojourner or Journeyman builder. He discovers that the Temple and Holy city are in ruins and, with his colleagues, offers his assistance in building a new temple when, as he will eventually see, a discovery of very great importance is made.”*

By imparting this information to the candidate prior to him entering the Chapter, it will promote a better understanding of the ceremony about to unfold and will undoubtedly add to the enjoyment of it.

The Ritual:

Many members are hesitant about taking office because of the amount of learning required to deliver the ritual traditionally allocated to Zerubbabel and the Principal Sojourner. Because of this Supreme Grand Chapter are actively encouraging Chapters to ‘share the work’.

There is absolutely no reason why the ritual traditionally delivered by Zerubbabel cannot be shared between all three Principals and the Principal Sojourner’s part, shared between all three Sojourners.

Sharing the work does not change the format of your ritual, just the names of those delivering it and on reaching the 1st Principals chair all of it will have been enacted, the principal parts each being spread over three years instead of being expected to 'do it all' in one.

These recommendations and suggestions below are all approved by the Province and can make Chapter meetings more interesting, enjoyable and understandable to all.

Exaltation Ceremony:

Zerubbabel's Work:

As three rule a Chapter, and as the 2nd and 3rd Principals have virtually nothing to do, there is no reason why the 1st Principal's work cannot be shared by all three. A suggestion of how this can be achieved can be seen and downloaded from the C&W Royal Arch website:

<http://royalarch.cumbriafreemasons.org/ritual.asp>

The Principal Sojourner's Work:

As the 1st and 2nd Assistant Sojourners have little or nothing to do in the ceremony, the Principal Sojourner's work can be shared by all three Sojourners as natural transition points are evident. Indeed, any other Companion can get involved if keen and one or more of the Sojourners are not available for the Convocation. It is suggested that the 2nd Assistant, as the 'new boy' on the team, is allocated the first part, the 1st Assistant takes the second part and the Principal takes over for the final segment, thus reducing the load and encouraging involvement.

It is appreciated that every Chapter uses different versions of the ritual and there is absolutely no intention or suggestion of standardising it. The suggested format shows how the ritual can be divided at convenient places and can be applied to any particular version of the ritual used by any Chapter, thus preserving the original text. None of the words are changed, only the names of those delivering it are amended.

Again, a suggested format for shared Sojourners' work can be downloaded using the link above.

The Signs and Lectures:

The explanation of the signs can be shared by two Past Principals or other Companions. The Historical Lecture by four Companions. The Symbolical Lecture by Haggai and six other Companions and the Mystical Lecture by 3 Past Principals or Companions.

The Historical and Symbolical Lectures need only be given once in each year. We must be careful not to overload and confuse the candidate with too much information in one night.

As a general point, there is no reason why any Companion cannot deliver all or part of a lecture, if the Chapter is amenable.

Installation Ceremony:

It is important to give Companions an opportunity to witness as much of the Ceremony as is allowable and encourage them to participate where possible.

The only elements which must be conducted in the various Conclaves are those parts where the Passwords and their meaning are communicated, the entrusting, investing and presentation of the Sceptres. All other work – Obligations, Scripture Readings and Prayers can be presented in open Chapter. *Note: There is no need to open a Conclave to induct a Past Principal into his chair.*

Each of the Principals should be encouraged to learn and recite their Obligations rather than repeating them.

As the Scripture Readings illustrating the theme of each Principal's Office were regarded as being unnecessarily long, alternative forms were approved by Supreme Grand Chapter in 2004, copies of which can be downloaded from the Royal Arch website.

The Scriptures can be read by Companions other than Principals or Past Principals. The important thing is that they should be delivered in a manner which ensures that the import is clear; this requires prior preparation and understanding.

To achieve the full meaning and effect of the Prayers it is essential that they be read. The Prayers may be read by Companions other than Principals or Past Principals. Also, there is absolutely no reason why the Robe and Sceptre addresses cannot be delivered by Companions

other than Installed Principals. *Note: The addresses in some rituals may need minor adjustments to enable this to be done.*

Much time and tedium can be saved at Installation Convocations by revising the manner in which the DC attends to the appointment and investiture of Officers. The DC should place himself in the East in front of the Principals to make his announcements. The collars can be entrusted to the IPZ who hands the appropriate collar to the MEZ as each Officer is named. The Officer can then come to the DC under his own momentum to be 'collared'. He can then make his own way back to his seat (or if necessary – escorted by the ADC). When he is seated the DC asks the MEZ whom he appoints to the next Office.

Alternatively, the Scribe E can announce the names of the Officers to be invested from a pre-printed list *e.g.:* “*The Principals are pleased to appoint Companion AB as Scribe Nehemiah*” *etc., etc.* This eliminates the possibilities of mistakes being made and Officers invested in the wrong order!

Other Work:

Convocations for which no Ceremony is planned provide an ideal opportunity to further our understanding of the purpose and meaning of the Order. For example:-

Lectures, talks or discussions on topics ranging from ritual and symbolism to history and tradition.

An explanation of the Royal Arch Certificate or the Jewel.

An explanation of the Royal Arch Banners.

The above information can be downloaded from the C&W Royal Arch website. Visit:

<http://royalarch.cumbriafreemasons.org/ritual.asp>

or

<http://royalarch.cumbriafreemasons.org/companionresources.asp>

Understanding the ritual:

We can help to make more sense of the ritual by introducing a little more 'theatre' into it. For example:

1. We should not forget that the Candidate is hoodwinked for the first part of the ceremony so he will not fully appreciate what is happening when the arch stones and key stone are removed. It would help if the arch was rebuilt after the Sojourners and the Candidate have retired (for the second time, with the implements of labour) so that, on their return, the Sojourner delivering the dialogue says: *"accidentally striking it with my crow,"* he strikes the top of the arch instead of the floor. And after saying *"we wrenched forth two of the arch stones,"* he does just that and removes them with his crow and again when he states: *"we removed the key stone"*. The Candidate will now see and have a better understanding of what he did earlier in the ceremony whilst hoodwinked. The Arch can then be re-built, with the Candidate assisting, after the Sojourner states: *"We closed the aperture."* *Naturally this only applies if your Chapter has an arch !*

2. We should not forget that all Craft Masons have been 'programmed' to salute or bow to anything that moves, so the Candidate will not immediately be aware that there are no salutes given to any individual in Royal Arch. So, when he is instructed by Scribe Nehemiah to *"advance to the east by s...n steps to be further rewarded."* We can make it clear that the 'bowing' is towards the name on the pedestal and not to the Principals by adding a few extra words to the Scribe N's instructions: *"Advance by s...n steps halting and bowing towards the sacred word on top of the pedestal at the t...d, f...h and s.....th."*

3. We are told earlier in the ceremony that the Sojourners (including the Candidate) are *"of the Royal house of David and the princely tribe of Judah."* It is, therefore, quite proper, when the candidate is invested, to present him with the staff bearing the ensign of the tribe of Judah as *"his staff of office."*

4. We speak of finding 'the word' but, in most Chapters there is no word on top of the pedestal, it now being represented by the letters JHVH. Therefore we need to be particular in pointing out to the Candidate what those letters represent. It would help if, after the candidate has been invested, he was turned to face the West so that he can see the top of the pedestal and Zerubbabel points to the letters when making the statement: *"It is in this part of the ceremony that the manner of sharing the Sacred Name (give full name), here represented by the letters J, H, V, H., is communicated etc., etc."*

5. When explaining the Signs—Since the penalty was removed from the Obligation the explanation of the First Sign does not make sense to the Candidate unless we add - *"This is the Penal sign, in allusion to*

the Penalty at one time associated with this Sublime Degree, the only perfect sign given with the left hand” etc., etc.

By adopting these small additions, we can help the Candidate to have better understanding of what has happened during the ceremony, which is so different from his previous experience in the Craft and help us to eliminate the use of that all too familiar phrase - “The Royal Arch - I don't understand it !”

The Royal Arch is a wonderful colourful, friendly, enlightening and most enjoyable Order - Let's make every effort to keep it that way.

**Remember - You never get a Second chance to make a
First Impression !**

**Good well presented Ceremonies will attract new
Candidates !**