MAKING SENSE OF ROYAL ARCH HISTORY

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Despite more than a century of scholarly examination and speculation about the likely origins of the Royal Arch, which has intrigued all the great names connected with Masonic research, the most recent contributor to the subject, Bro. R. J. Barker, is forced to conclude that 'The early history of the Royal Arch itself is lost in the period before 1740'.[1] Much of Craft masonry itself, after all, still remains mysterious in its origin and depth of meaning. So it is perhaps particularly fitting that this uncertainty should apply *par excellence* to the English 'supreme' degree, that of the Holy Royal Arch.

There are, to my mind, two main strands which can be pursued in trying to relieve the obscurity within this hidden place. One consists of trying to pierce the gloom by taking the lid off the structure, and feeling around for the general shape. The other approach consists of going straight to the centre and noting carefully the figurative and allegorical emblems which may characterise its heart.

I suspect that researchers in the past have tried to do both simultaneously. Their focus has been diffused in the very partial light available. Consequently the exploration has tended to be unsatisfactory and confusing. There must be something there, something apparently of significance, but what is it exactly?

In this talk I propose to keep to the first strand, or line of approach, and to grope around the Royal Arch structure, deliberately avoiding too much temptation to speculate on the ceremonial features associated with the interior, fascinating though they are. The variants in ritual between Ireland, Scotland and England are enough in themselves for a seminar lasting a weekend, or two, or more!

But even taking this limited approach towards elucidating the Royal Arch degree I hope, by the end, to have convinced you concerning its conception, and to have inspired you (not that anybody here needs inspiring!) concerning its importance.

The first point which I would like to draw to your attention is that within a dozen years of the first clear, unequivocal mention of the Royal Arch in Youghall, Co Cork, in 1743 (when the Dublin press-using the definite article!- recorded that 'The Royall Arch was carried by two Excellent Masons') there are records concerning the degree in Ireland, Scotland, England and in Virginia. I do not need to cite these, they are well known, even if the Stirling record is somewhat tarnished.[2] 'Excellent' and 'Super Excellent' are the terms often used for the masons involved. The essential feature, surely, is that the Royal Arch degree had a surprisingly wide spread by the mid-1750s, too wide, I would suggest, for it to have been invented merely a decade or two before.

The second point is that the degree was valued, sought-after. Perhaps this was because it brought a cachet of superiority, of excellence and indeed of super-excellence. But would this, of itself, have been sufficient to inspire the hard-bitten Grand Secretary of the Antients, Laurence Dermott, lyrically to describe it as *the root, heart and marr*ow *of Masonry*?[3] It could be argued, has been argued, that this memorable expression coined by Dermott may have been just one more bit of hype in his campaign against the Moderns. In which case one could expect the Antients, under Dermott, to have made it a unique selling point. Yasha Beresiner, however, has pointed out that

> *the degree was not taken seriously by the Antients until at least 1766…in the intervening period Laurence Dermott kept the Royal Arch active almost single-handed.* [4]

Indeed, it was members of the Moderns themselves who, despite official disdain, were quite active in Royal Arch ceremonies, and who, like Thomas Dunckerley, directly promoted the establishment of the Grand and Royal Arch Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem, under the Irish peer Lord Blayney, in 1766. In the overall context I am inclined to take Dermott's expression of sincere regard at its face value, and it is evident that the condensed, golden, supremacy of the degree was also strongly attractive to those among the more-educated Moderns who could ordinarily have been expected to be ranged against him.

Why should this be so? It is indeed tempting to stop and pick up the apple, and begin chewing into the centre. Let us just say that in England, at any rate, anyone wishing to enter the Chapter working of the Royal Arch had to have passed the Chair

of his Craft lodge. This was definitely the practice maintained by the Antients, who had their own esoteric ceremony for the Installation of a Master, and was reflected also among early Moderns who opted to enter the Royal Arch. In Ireland and Scotland, I believe, the necessity of having passed through the Chair of a Craft lodge has been applied only to the First Principal's office. However, in those Constitutions anyone entering the Royal Arch must have been through additional degrees, such as the Mark. In all cases, therefore, admittance to Chapter meetings used to entail, and in Ireland and Scotland still does entail, passing through some additional qualification to that of a mere mason of the third degree.

This, I think, is a key fact in trying to appreciate Royal Arch history. Those in the Chapter are expected to be pretty fully experienced, hopefully being even of Super Excellent quality! This concept is one we should cling to when descending into the darkness before the 1740s.

Let us begin to view afresh some little-regarded evidence. That well-known Scot, James Anderson, in his seminal work for the London Grand Lodge of 1723, *The Constitution, History, Laws, Charges, Orders, Regulations and Usages of the Right Worshipful Fraternity of Accepted Free Masons collected from their general Records, and their faithful Traditions of many Ages*, says, in the second Regulation:

> *The Master of a particular Lodge has the Right and Authority of congregating the Members of his Lodge into a Chapter at pleasure, upon any Emergency or Occurrence, as well as the time and place of their usual forming…*

In other words, at the Master's command, a Chapter could be called into existence from among Lodge members (not necessarily all of them) when some special purpose arose, *any Emergency or Occurrence*, on the lines of an extra-ordinary meeting.

The General Regulations of 1723 use the word 'Chapter' a second time, most interestingly, as applicable to the Grand Lodge itself. Again, this is used in the context of transacting contentious or topical business of moment in a constitutional and democratic way:

> *The Majority of every particular Lodge, when congregated, shall have the Privilege of giving Instructions to their Master and Wardens, before the assembling of the Grand Chapter, or Lodge, at the three Quarterly Communications…and of the Annual Grand*

Lodge too; because their Master and Wardens are their Representatives, and are supposed to speak their Mind.

The term 'Chapter' is chosen by Anderson as the most appropriate (taking precedence before 'Lodge') when serious business matters, involving discussions, fall to be dealt with. Masters, reigning and past, with their Wardens, still have the right of attending Grand Lodge in England. Is this still found, more faithfully reflected, in Scotland, and in Ireland, than perhaps has been possible in England? This libertarian concept, expressed in 1723, of a democratic voice by majority vote in a private Lodge, transmitted though the representations of Master and Wardens to the senior governing assembly (here called by Anderson the 'Grand Chapter'), constituted indeed a Masonic privilege of some note. The principles involved, wherever we may think they derive from are, of course, diametrically opposed to those to evolve a few decades later on the Continent, eventually epitomised in the Strict Observances.[5]

Within the context of Anderson's words regarding special occurrence, and bearing in mind that a Chapter is represented by arches, it cannot be a co-incidence that the famous engraved frontispiece to the 1723 Constitution depicts, in a deliberately mind-expanding way, a pair of arches in the centre, between and above which the Deity is shown riding in splendour, while underneath the High Rulers of the Craft accomplish an exceptional act of Freemasonry.[6]

Taking a firm hold of the cord I have suggested, avoiding the temptation to divert towards inner secrets, and merely pursuing the theme of experienced masons coming together to deliberate, I now wish you to accompany me into the Middle Ages. We start in Germany. This is how a section of the ordinances of German Stonemasons, drawn up in 1462 in Torgau on the Elbe, 40 miles north-east of Leipzig, runs:

A master may hold a general court in his lodge over his fellows, and he shall judge righteously by his oath, and not of hatred, nor of friendship, nor of enmity…

Every master shall enquire of his fellows every quarter, on their oath, if any hatred or enmity be amongst them that may disadvantage the building; such shall he judge and put aside…

No master shall judge alone of that which touches honour or good repute; but there shall be together 3 masters who shall then judge such matters. [7]

Does this, however unlikely, begin to sound familiar? An important function of the Master of a lodge was to make regular enquiry, *every quarter*, among his workforce, in a serious manner, *on their oath*, as to any issues arising which might be affecting co-operation and morale. On the evidence given within the privacy of the lodge, *in general court*, the Master, no doubt using wisdom to comprehend, was to arrive at a just conclusion and put an end to the matter. The process, to be effective, required judgement to discern, coupled with leadership and sound man-management, which could be paraphrased in those times as ability to enforce obedience to God's holy law. The implement of the square was then, as it is now, a symbol of the Master's authority and rectitude in righteously ruling his lodge. And you can see this tool or emblem depicted ceremoniously on the memorial entablatures of some eminent medieval masons on the European continent.[8]

But as regards matters not so easily judged and adjusted, touching the reputation and honour of a man or of his work, what we might call a serious disciplinary matter, or something which might cause the good reputation of the Craft to be placed in jeopardy, the Master of the lodge was required to call in the assistance of two other Masters so that his own partiality might not be called into question. This was, and continues to be to this day, good practice, as expressed through a multitude of professional human resources arrangements. In effect, and translating it into geometrical terms, the intangible matter to be judged could be triangulated. Triangulation is a modern professional term used by inspectors to check the veracity and extent of what they are told. Three Masters of lodges, under the German Constitution ratified at Torgau, were expected to come together and use their experience to deliberate in such circumstances.

Does this have any relevance? Yes, it does. The Torgau ordinances of 1462, from their form, could be regarded as supplementary provisions, viewed as from a lodge perspective, to the main ordinances of the German Steinmetzen laid down four years earlier in 1459 in Strassburg.[9] These specify regional districts, under the overall headship of the Master of the Craft at Strassburg. In the latter, the authority to call meetings and to levy dues is set. The assistance of the appropriate civil arm, under the auspices of the overlord, the Holy Roman Emperor, is enjoined. The terms very much invite comparison, for a modern researcher, with those of the more slender Cooke and Regius manuscripts which form the core of what is known of medieval English

regulation, where the civil regulatory and punitive power of the sheriffs of counties ('countries') or mayors of towns are invoked. No doubt the Deacons of Craft could dispense a similar disciplinary power in the towns of the Kingdom of Scotland, supplemented across the country districts perhaps by the innate authority of a mother-body, such as a Kilwinning, or through the King's Master Mason, or by appeal to a noble patron, such as a Sinclair. But the important circumstance relative to Germany which I want to emphasise is that the regional meetings, held in Speyer, Strassburg and Regensburg preparatory to the fundamental 1459 ordinances ratified at Strassburg, had been termed *Kapitelsweise*, literally *Chapters*! The deliberations in major regional centres in southern Germany, attended by delegates from across the Lander, were not described as lodge meetings, but as Chapters. When the ordinances needed certain revisions a century later (in 1563) the special meeting was attended by 102 members of the German Craft, namely 20 workmasters (seniors of each city or district), 52 Masters of lodges, and 30 Fellows, probably Wardens.

Should we now turn towards England? Here we find indisputable primary evidence of Masonic Chapters in medieval Acts of Parliament. One such in 1360, attempting to control inflation following the labour shortage caused by the Black Death some ten years before, laid down that masons and carpenters should be ruled by their Master as regards their terms of service and

> *All alliances and covines of masons and carpenters, and congregations, chapters, ordinances and oaths betwixt them made or to be made shall be from henceforth void and wholly annulled…*

Sixty-five years later, in 1425, occurs the famous edict which once again tries to outlaw price-fixing among Masons. It uses the term *Chapters and Congregations* to describe the meetings proscribed, which it says have been annual.

> *Whereas by the yearly Congregations and Confederacies made by the Masons in their general Chapiters assembled, the good Course and Effect of the Statute of Labourers be openly violated and broken…Our Sovereign Lord the King…hath ordained and established…that such Chapiters and Congregations shall not be hereafter holden: And if any such be made, They that cause such Chapiters and Congregations to be assembled and holden, if they thereof be convict, shall be judged as Felons: And that other Masons who come to such Chapiters and Congregations be punished by Prisonment of their Bodies, and make Fine and Ransom at the King's Will.*

It has been traditional among Masonic historians to discount the significance and meaning behind these words. Their impulsions to do so have been different in different ages. Anderson was conscious of the glee with which Freemasonry was being attacked in his own time, and was quick to reject this apparent evidence of turpitude on the part of his operative Masonic predecessors. The Victorian Masonic giants, from the plush seats of their first-class railway carriages, considered national meetings of the primitive mason Craft to be unthinkable. Their worthy successors in Masonic scholarship, lacking any independent written evidence have, to a man, seconded this received opinion. This page of parliamentary evidence regarding English medieval Masonic association under the terms of Congregations and Chapters has been skipped over lightly.[10]

And what weight has been given to the specific terms of the Cooke Ms? Professor Prescott has recently surmised that the Cooke 'Old Charge' document may have been produced by the Masons around the same decade specifically to justify themselves in response to the increasing demands of central government on craft gilds.[11] Relevantly to our pursuit of possible Chapter congregations, the Points of Masonry in the Cooke document are characterised as having been made:

> *by divers lords and masters of divers provinces and divers congregations of masonry.*

The Cooke Ms goes on to say that the appropriate civil powers, which are quite closely detailed, should lend assistance to *the master of the congregation* if necessary:

> *When the master and fellows before warned be come to such congregation, if need be the Sheriff of the country [i.e.county] or the mayor of the city or Alderman of the town in which the congregation is held shall be fellow and associate to the master of the congregation, in help of him against rebels [i.e. those who do not comply with his authority] and upbearing the right of the realm.*

Penalties laid down include being removed from the Craft, possible imprisonment, and the taking of:

> *All his goods into the King's hand till his grace be granted him and showed, for this cause principally, where these congregations be ordained, that as well the lowest as the highest should be well and truly served in this art before said, throughout all the kingdom of England. Amen, so mote it be.*

The Cooke Ms therefore is framed as positively testifying that Masonic congregations may take place in counties, cities and towns, and that in ordinary times the penalties able to be imposed by the assistance of the law enforcement officers were very similar to those threatened by the parliamentary Act of 3 Henry VI, cap1 of 1425. This, I would remind you, referred to such meetings (*yearly*!) as *chapters and congregations*.

Why should the term 'chapters' have been applied? It is one borrowed from ecclesiastical, especially, monastic, use. When monks congregated together in formal sessions it was normal for a chapter (*capitulum*) of the Rules of the Order to be read, together with a commentary on it, before starting the business to be discussed. Here is a section of Chapter 3 of the Rule of the Cistercians[12]:

> *As often as any important business has to be done in the monastery, let the abbot call together the whole community and himself explain the matter. And, having heard the advice of the brethren, let him take counsel with himself and then do what he shall judge most expedient. […] Let the brethren give their advice with all deference and humility […] but in everything […] let all follow the Rule as master. […] The abbot himself, however, should do all things in the fear of God and observance of the Rule...*
>
> Incidentally, Chapter 2 of the Rule had included the statement that:
>
> *The abbot must know that the Father of the family will hold it as the shepherd's fault if there is any neglect of his flock.*

The daily reading of a chapter was thus central in maintaining both proper focus and a due sense of community, indeed *a fullness of unity*, among the brethren. The written Rule was highly important. One may care to compare this with the central importance of a written Constitution among Freemasons, which our earliest documents, such as the Cooke Ms, in the Craft supply, along with a traditional history. It would appear that the possession of an 'Old Charge' manuscript was deemed necessary for a lodge initiating a new brother in England, as well as sometimes in Scotland.[13] In medieval Germany, by the Strassburg Constitution we have heard extracts from, it was agreed that masters of important lodges (permanent ones) in regional centres, such as those attached to major ecclesiastical establishments, should have authority to keep a copy of the 'The Book' (whatever that might have been; we do not know). Lesser lodges could seek extracts from it if necessary (but not borrow it). Possession of 'The Book' was a mark of status. The

equivalent in England nowadays may be the warrant of the lodge, serving as its authority under the English Constitution. At modern Installation meetings Masters are formally asked to ensure that their brethren have the Bylaws and Constitution read to them during their year in office. That is never done (it is difficult to see how it could be) but it is not unusual among lodges, even now, for a section, one might say a chapter!, of the Ancient Charges of a Freemason to be read out soon after the opening of each lodge meeting. In this way the words of James Anderson are still living in the ears of many English freemasons! Such is the influence lent by the structure of the monastic Rule within Freemasonry to this day, if not, I am sad to say, within cathedral Chapters in England (despite their officers being called Canons, that is to say, supposedly living under Canon Rule).

However, of itself, this, the reading of a portion of the Constitution, would still not account for parliamentary clerks referring to congregations of masons as Chapters. The particular feature leading to the term is probably that one characterising *regular* comings-together for the purpose of communication, exchange of views and good governance. To take the example of the Cistercians once again, the practice was for a General Chapter to be held at Citeaux annually on Holy Cross Day, 14 September. The abbot, or senior representative, such as a prior, of each daughter house was expected to attend the General Chapter. This might entail a journey of several weeks, travelling where possible via other abbeys on the way. In France they were referred to as 'Citeaux storks', as they travelled, clothed in white, and began to congregate, perhaps in a rather ungainly manner, on this migration. The Chapter House, however, only had room for 300, whereas such had been the success of the Order that at its peak (towards the end of the 13th century) there were more than double that number of subordinate foundations. The British Isles accounted for about 15%, approximately 90 abbeys or priories. Of these, as a matter of interest, half were in England, a third (some 35) were in Ireland, and 11 were in Scotland; indicating strength in Ireland, but less so in Scotland (in that respect curiously mirroring the relative success of Royal Arch masonry in those countries). Because of distance, accommodation and other factors, such as poverty, as one can imagine, some daughter houses were excused from attending the Cistercian General Chapter in mid-France every year.

I probably do not need to spell out the correspondences which one can imagine in medieval Masonic organisation which might lead lawmakers of that period

to refer to Craft gatherings beyond the domestic lodge as 'chapters and congregations'. Similarly I do not have to labour the significance which may be attached to the mentions in our old Craft documents of masons being expected to obey a Summons to attend Craft meetings within a reasonable distance unless prevented by pure necessity. In this context I believe that it is perverse to take the line, which still prevails, that such meetings among masons did not take place.

What scraps of evidence exist? The first is James Anderson's mention of a tradition in the Craft that Queen Elizabeth:

> *…being jealous of any Assemblies of her Subjects, whose Business she was not duly appriz'd of, attempted to break up the Annual Communication of Masons, as dangerous to her government…*

In the 1723 edition of the *Constitution* he gives the place as York, and the time as St John's Day. In the 1738 edition he is more specific in stating that the St John's Day was 27 December 1561. He calls the meeting *the annual Grand Lodge*, and names Sir Thomas Sackville as *Grand Master*. In the absence of corroboration this apparently unlikely scenario has been dismissed as another piece of Andersonian fancy.

Of course, there was no Grand Lodge at that time, or Grand Master (Anderson is translating into his own terms whatever traditions he can muster) but if we substitute for *Grand Lodge* the idea of a General Congregation or Chapter the idea becomes less ridiculous. The place, and the timing of 1561, are both quite possible, and Elizabeth's nervous attitude towards occasions which might breed incipient discontent at that early period of her reign is in character.

Also in that second edition (1738) Anderson mentions another such general meeting of Masons. He must by then have become aware of what had been written into the Roberts Ms version of the Old Charges:

> *According to a Copy of the old Constitutions, this Grand Master [Henry Jermyn, Earl of St Albans] held a General Assembly and Feast on St John's Day 27 December 1663 when the following Regulations were made… [including]*
>
> *That no person hereafter who shall be accepted a Free Mason, shall be admitted into any Lodge or Assembly, until he has brought a Certificate of the Time and Place of his Acceptation from the Lodge that accepted him unto the Master of that Limit or Division where such Lodge is kept: And the said Master shall enrol the same in a Roll*

> *of Parchment to be kept for that Purpose, and shall give an Account of all such Acceptations at every General Assembly…*
>
> *That for the Future the said Fraternity of Free Masons shall be regulated and govern'd by One GRAND MASTER, and as many Wardens as the said Society shall think fit to appoint at every General Assembly…*

Given the background I have previously sketched this also may appear quite possible. In this case it is known that Anderson was not inventing evidence, but the written source in the Roberts Mss has not as yet been triangulated. The most suggestive angle to this, to my mind, is the existence in York of a fine, apparently ceremonial, 15-inch gauge, also dated 1663, bearing the names of three senior brethren. One of those is from the famous Drake family. The gauge also bears a hexalpha. I gather that the hexalpha does not enter into ordinary Irish or Scottish ritual, but was associated with the later Moderns. A pentalpha was being used at this time by the esoteric Scottish Freemason Sir Robert Moray, of course, and is said to be associated with the working of the Antients.[14]

York provides other clues in its traditions. The body which, from 1725, began to call itself The Grand Lodge of All England, no doubt in response to the London initiative and expansionism, was previously headed not by a Master, nor by a Grand Master, but by a President. Its system differed from that of London in two ways. First, the lodges which formed part of its allegiance were regarded as merely part of the whole, simply branches of the fraternity. There was thus no rigid division between a Grand Lodge membership and those of daughter lodges in outlying areas. One might compare that concept to the monastic model. Secondly, and of even more relevance to our enquiry into the historical basis of Chapter masonry, is the York practice of having the Royal Arch as the senior grade of its system. The procedural minutes taken, reporting regulatory decisions, were those of the Royal Arch, and the role of the Grand Lodge seems to have been one of ratifying those decisions already taken in the upper body. Can we, from this model, begin to see how a Chapter concept, involving only experienced, at least *Excellent* masons, may have had its genesis?

It is tempting to make reference to York's tradition of holding meetings within the vaults under the Minster. That could never be verified and may be deemed inherently unlikely (though the undercroft could hold a good congregation). Early

lodge meetings could be held, of course, within the precincts of churches, such as the Tracing House itself at York, or in porches in the Scottish lowlands.

It is tempting to mention the snippets prior to 1740 which strongly imply esoteric workings related to the Royal Arch: from the 1720s, the *rule of three* and *trible voice* (from England), the *primitive word* (from Ireland) and in 1710, from Scotland in the Dumfries No 4 Ms, two references to the *Royal Secret*. One of these is:

> *No lodge or corum of masons shall give the Royal secret to any suddenly but upon great deliberation.*

This, and the other early references, may now begin to carry more significance. We may also start to appreciate a little better the note made following a house party at the Duke of Montagu's house, at Thames Ditton in Surrey, around New Year 1735:

> *Hollis and Desaguliers have been super-excellent in their different ways…On Sunday night at a Lodge in the Library St John, Albemarle and Russell [were] made chapters; and Bob [Webber] Admitted Apprentice.* [15]

The recipient of the letter, the second Duke of Richmond, had previously served as Grand Master and came from a family tradition of Masonic mastership in Sussex, near the ducal residence at Goodwood, dating from before the formation of the London Grand Lodge. (His father, the first Duke, is credited by Anderson as having also headed the Craft for a few years.) He would have been particularly well placed, I would suggest, to appreciate the jocular allusion.

If all this adds up to real evidence of the existence of a 'Chapter' level of Masonic membership, how can we explain the attitude of the Grand Lodges? All the Grand Lodges (with the exception of the York body) were initially apathetic, if not downright hostile, to the Royal Arch in their first decades after formation. They gradually came round, and as we heard at the beginning of this paper, many keen masons of the officially hostile English Premier Grand Lodge were, as individuals, privately, glad to participate and even, separately, to promote it as a new Order. The Antients, perhaps reluctantly, were impelled to follow five years after the Moderns with their own *General Grand Chapter of the Royal Arch*. This was at first merely composed of qualified members of the Grand Lodge as Antients' lodges had had discretion, borrowing Anderson's 1723 formula, to carry out Royal Arch ceremonies

in Chapter form. Formal rules and regulations for the *Grand Chapter of the Holy Royal Arch* (*Holy* had been added) *under the Protection and Supported by the Antient Grand Lodge of England*, were laid down as late as 1794.[16]

From this slow development I think we have the clue as to why the official line of the Grand Lodges was lukewarm. At their respective institutions in 1717, 1725 and 1736 the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland had taken unto themselves the supreme regulatory authority for the Freemason Craft in their territories. In effect, I would suggest, they had usurped the old traditions of assembly. They therefore were not keen to favour the continuance of any rival to what they had now set up. Underlyingly, however, there were lingering traditions from the past. Hence James Anderson's rather equivocal mentions of *Lodge or Chapter at pleasure*, and the stating of a concept of representation, through Masters and Wardens of lodges, to the *Grand Chapter or Lodge* at its Quarterly *Communication*. Thank goodness, the special esoteric qualities associated with the Royal Arch Chapter working were considered so special, in England, Ireland and Scotland, that within a surprisingly short compass of years they were reasserted and, no doubt, adapted or improved upon.

That, brethren, is the best I can offer to date regarding my attempts to make sense of Royal Arch history. I have held very firmly to the rope which dangles around the outlines of the dark hole. I have too much humility to approach the centre of the mystery, the essence of allegiance, the veritable *root, heart and marrow* of Freemasonry.

But on my way hither I did have a glimpse of something leading towards the centre of this darkness. In searching I found something like a paper or pamphlet, dating from 1679, recording the procession and festivities accompanying the Installation of Sir Robert Clayton as Lord Mayor of London. James Anderson, in his so-much derided *Constitutions of Masonry* (of 1738) had said:

> *Sir Robert Clayton got an Occasional Lodge of his Brother Masters to meet at St Thomas's Hospital Southwark, A.D. 1693. And to advise the Governours about the best Design of rebuilding that Hospital as it now stands most beautiful; near which a stated Lodge continued long afterwards.*

From the words written on the paper or pamphlet I could deduce, by the allusions thereon recorded, that even in 1679 Sir Robert Clayton had indeed been a

Freemason. In his life and friendships he had displayed many of the virtues associated with Freemasonry, plus some of his own. His mayoral procession and entertainment, like the old masques, celebrated them. And among the allegorical figures in that parade was one which caught my notice above all others. This was the female decked out to represent the figure of Unity.

Unity.

To mark the fullness thereof the maiden bore

The emblem of a Triangle within a circle Or.

Here we have a senior mason, in Robert Clayton, who on occasion called together his brother masters to deliberate and advise, himself non-dogmatic (a friend of bishops and equally of non-conformists) but strong supporter of religious belief in God, heralded, along with other objects, by the display of a curious symbol: a golden triangle and circle representing Unity. This was in November 1679.[17]

I think, with this new evidence, and in the overall context in which I have chosen to place it, the history and significance of Royal Arch Chapters is much longer and more profound than we have hitherto realised. I look forward to proceeding onwards with pick, crow and shovel, and learning of further discoveries which my companions in this task may deem of importance.

Notes

1. Barker, R. J., A Private Lodge Royal Arch Certificate, AQC Vol 111 (1998), p. 149.
2. Jones, B.E., Freemasons' Book of the Royal Arch (1957, 1972 reprint) pp. 45-51.
3. Jones, op. cit., p. 57.
4. Beresiner, Y, Royal Arch: The Fourth Degree of the Grand Lodge of the Antients, Batham Royal Arch Lecture 2000.
5. Briefly referred to in Pick, F.L. & Knight, G.N., The Pocket History of Freemasonry (1953, 8th edition 1991), pp. 230-231.
6. That engraving by John Pine may draw some of its inspiration from Inigo Jones' design for the stage set of Salmacida Spolia of 1640, but Pine has skilfully rendered the orders of architecture, and the arches, into dramatic focus around his characters. The whole format of classical weight and receding depth (including, it must be admitted, arches) is traceable from Andrea Palladio's design for the Teatro Olympico at Vicenza (1579-1580). This design, and its realisation by Scamozzi, is beautifully illustrated in Mann, A.T., Sacred Architecture, (Vega, 2002) pp.166-167.
7. Gould, R.F., The History of Freemasonry (London,1883) Chapter 3, p.138: Articles 39 and 40.
8. Such as Hughes Libergier of Reims (d. 1263) and the de Bernevals of Rouen (c. end 15th century) shown, for instance, with many other illustrations, in Erlande-Brandenburg, A., The Cathedral Builders of the Middle Ages (New Horizons,1993; English translation 1995).
9. Gould, op. cit.. Chapter 3 deals in detail with the medieval German regulations and Gould's sources.
10. As, for instance, in Gould, pp.166 and 182. However, Prof. A. Prescott, in commenting on this observation, cautions that it is by no means unusual for acts of parliament at this period to speak of congregations and chapters when referring to assemblages of workpeople.
11. In a paper on the historical context of the Regius and Cooke manuscripts presented at the Canonbury International Conference November 2003.
12. Cistercian information which follows is taken from Leroux-Dhuys, J.F., Cistercian Abbeys: History and Architecture (1998, Konemann English edition).
13. See, for instance, Jones, B.E., The Freemasons' Guide and Compendium (Muller,1950: 1975 reprint) pp. 86-87.
14. Jones, above, p. 521.
15. Jones, Royal Arch op.cit., p. 41.
16. Beresiner, op.cit.
17. London in Luster (1679). Unique copy in Guildhall Library, London.
18. Should it be objected that the symbolism of circle and triangle does not currently signify unity, it is to be noted that the holding of broadly-based Masonic meetings in chapter form was, in former times, very much concerned with producing a unity of purpose and outcome. Take, for example, the clause introducing the constitutions (alle punct und articul!) of the Association of Stonemasons and Wallers of Klagenfurt, in Carinthia, of 4 May 1628:
19. …haben wir maister und gesellen desselben handtwerchs, alle die da in capitels weise bey ainander gewesen seindt zu Speyr, Strassburg and Regenspurg, im namen und anstat unser und aller ander maister und gesellen unsers gantzen obgemelten gmainen handtwerchs solches altes herkumen erneuert, geleutert und uns diser ordnung und bruederschaft guetlich und freundlich verainigt, dieselbig auch getreulich zu halten, in massen wie hernach gescriben stehet, fur uns und alle unsere nachkommen ainhelliglichen gelobt und versprochen.
20. (…we masters and fellows of the aforesaid crafts, fully in the chapter manner conducted for one another at Speyr, Strassburg and Regensburg, for and on behalf of ourselves and of all other masters and fellows of the whole aforesaid joint crafts, have renewed such old usages, clarified and unified well and amicably these our regulations and fraternity, uprightly and faithfully to hold, in accordance with what hereafter stands written, [and have] unanimously promised and sworn for ourselves and all our successors…)
21. [my amateur translation]
22. Quoted in Neuwirth, J., Die Satzungen des Regensburger Steinmetzentages im Jahre 1459 auf Grund der Klagenfurter Steinmetzen- u. Maurerordnung von 1628 (Wien, 1888)