The Craft and the Holy Royal Arch

The ceremonies of the Craft, as we know them today, are the result of evolutionary changes that have occurred since the beginning of the 18th Century.

The two-degree system of Mediaeval Craft Masonry evolved into a three degree system during the 1720's, and the third Degree was well established by 1730.
It was perhaps inevitable that a further Degree would then emerge in which the lost secrets of the Third Degree were re-discovered.
This was the Holy Royal Arch. & exactly where and when it developed is uncertain, but there is no doubt that it was in existence by 1744.

When four London Lodges formed the first Grand Lodge in 1717, they represented some, but not all the Lodges in London and Westminster and none outside of that area. Nevertheless the Roll of Lodges under its jurisdiction grew rapidly and in 1723 the first Book of Constitutions was published. Because Freemasonry was "news" many broadsheets, pamphlets and so-called exposures of ritual were published.

This caused the Grand Lodge to make certain changes to ritual and ceremonial in order to prevent readers of these exposures from gaining admission to Lodges.

Many Brethren, who had remained independent from the Grand Lodge, found these and other changes unacceptable. These masons joined with a number if Irish masons living in England and formed a Second Grand Lodge in 1751 styling themselves "The Most Antient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons" and became known as "The Antients" The original Grand Lodge became known as "The Moderns"

The attitudes of these two Grand Lodges to the Royal Arch Degree were very different.

The Antients regarded the Degree as an integral part of Craft Masonry and worked it under the authority of the Warrant of the Lodge. In their 1756 Constitutions they declared:

" Antient Masonry consists of FOUR Degrees- the three of which are, that of Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the sublime Degree of Master ; and a Brother, being well versed in these Degrees, and otherwise qualified is eligible to be admitted to the Fourth Degree, the Holy Royal Arch. This Degree is certainly more august, sublime and important than those which precede it and is the summit and perfection of Antient Masonry"

It was the Grand Secretary of the Antients, Laurence Dermott, who described the Degree as "the root and marrow of Masonry" It was originally restricted to those who has passed through the Master's Chair, but this rule was gradually relaxed.

The attitude of the Premier Grand Lodge was vastly different. It considered the degree to be no part of Craft Masonry. It actively discouraged Grand Officers from becoming Royal Arch Masons and forebade Lodges under their Jurisdiction from conferring the degree.

Within a few years, however, members of Modern Lodges, having visited Antient Lodges and developed interests in The Royal Arch, set up meetings of their own in defiance of their Grand Lodge.
The Grand Master, Lord Blaney, and the Grand Secretary (Premier Grand Lodge) were both exalted as were many Grand Lodge Officers, but still non-recognition continued.
Finally, under a "Charter of Compact" granted by Lord Blaney in 1766, a Grand Chapter was created

It was a separate administration from Grand Lodge and although tolerated, was not to be officially recognized for another fifty years.

The Antients administered the Royal Arch by a committee of their Grand Lodge.
Although the later called that committee a **Grand Lodge,** its work remained unchanged, and the Royal Arch Degree was still the Fourth Degree conferred by Craft Lodges.

This was the situation when the two Grand Lodges united in 1813.
The position of the Chapter was a bone of contention which caused many problems. A compromise was finally agreed upon and the Preliminary Declaration of the Book of Constitutions stated, as it does now, that:

"Pure Antient Masonry consists of three Degrees and no more, viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, The Follow Craft and the Master Mason including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch"

So although it is called an Order and not a degree, and is conferred in another assembly called a Chapter, it is firmly linked to the Craft.
Chapters are subordinate to the Supreme Grand Chapter of England, whose Principal Officers and Officials are exactly the same as those of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Supreme Grand Chapter was formed in 1817. Since then the ceremonies of the Craft and Chapter have gradually evolved into their present form, always adhering to the principles and tenets of the Order and always observing the Antients Landmarks of the Craft.

It is natural for a keen Master Mason to enquire about other Masonic Degrees. If he enjoys his masonry and has friends in these other degrees he may be tempted to join one of them in order to increase his circle of friends and his knowledge of masonry.
In time it might be sensible for him to do so, but not before he has become a Royal Arch Mason.

There are good reasons for this. The Chapter is firmly linked to the Craft and is the only other Order officially recognized by Grand Lodge.
It is the sequel to the Third Degree and the Coping Stone of Freemasonry.

Without the Holy Royal Arch no Brother can claim to be a complete Mason and he should therefore become a member before contemplating ant further Masonic progress.

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Comment
I uncovered this paper when searching through my "Masonic Education" computer library today and once again I believe I have been led to piece of Masonic Education that is very worth sharing.
Due to my lack of knowledge on certain periods in Masonic history I am unable to confirm or deny some statements made by the writer, however, lacking factual evidence to the contrary, I am very willing to support the "Unknown" authors work.

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