# THE INVESTIGATOR

**(Based on the premise that life is a continuous search for knowledge)**

**Presented by REC. Norman McEvoy June 2010 Edition**

Fraternal Greetings Companions:

As I have stated in the past editions of the "Investigator" my purpose in researching and sharing this material with you is to not only add to my own personal knowledge of Royal Arch Masonry but, by increasing our collective understanding, make us all not only more knowledgeable, but more comfortable in sharing that knowledge with others.

Personally I am convinced that unless we know and understand "Royal Arch Masonry" we will not be able to give it its rightful place in our Fraternity.

The attached article should assist in improving our understanding of our proud beginnings.

## The Early History of the Royal Arch

Since I am Grand Historian for Grand Chapter, in addition to being Assistant Grand Lecturer for District No. 1, (Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia) you are to get a little bit of a history lesson tonight.

You can thank the High Priest for this, because he asked me a question without limiting my responses, so I'll try to keep this shorter than two hours.

Comp. R. F. Gould, the well-known Masonic historian, stated that the Royal Arch had its inception in the so-called "Scots Degrees" which first saw the light of day in France, in 1740.

Comp. Findel, another historical writer of similar vintage, believed the degree to be essentially French in origin, with a somewhat different form in England than in France, with the inclusion of elements from the "higher degrees" which were flourishing on the Continent at that time.

Kloss tells us that the Royal Arch made its appearance in England in 1774, having previously been known only on the Continent, originating in Austria.

The Chevalier Ramsay stated that the Royal Arch was the "non plus ultra" of Masonry, French or otherwise.

**They were all wrong.**

The first documented evidence of the Royal Arch as a distinct degree comes from Ireland in 1741, referenced in the minutes of Lodge 21 at Youghall.

The oldest Chapter of the Royal Arch is Stirling Rock, in Stirling, Scotland and Laurence Dermott's "Ahimon Rezon" states the degree was worked in London from at least 1744.

This claim is supported by a book titled "A Serious and Impartial Inquiry into the Cause of the present decay of Freemasonry in the Kingdom of Ireland", by Fifield Dassigny, MD, (published in Dublin in 1744), which makes reference to the degree being known in London and York at that time.

A claim that is made for the Royal Arch is that it is the completion of the Master Mason degree, and if this is indicative that the degree was formed by splitting it from the Master Mason degree at some time previous to 1741, it would explain why no earlier references to the degree have been found.

The earliest written proof of the degree being present in England, “under the Moderns", is a minute book from Bristol, dated 1758; however, there is evidence supporting an earlier date for the degree, as it is recorded as having been worked by a Royal Arch Lodge in Virginia in 1753, under the warrant of a Craft Lodge in Fredericksburg. The records of the "Ancients" note reference to the Royal Arch in 1752.

**It's an old degree.**

The history of the Royal Arch is checkered with acceptances and rejections, with accommodations and fiddling about. The "Moderns" denied the degree a place in Masonry, and a Grand and Royal Chapter was created that was separate from that Grand Lodge.

The "Ancients" espoused the degree, and "Ancient" Lodges frequently worked the degree under the authority of the Lodge Warrants, calling it "the fourth degree". With this placing of the degree, a "Grand Chapter" was not considered necessary by the "Ancients".

Pre-requisite qualifications for the degree are a bit unclear. Initially, it seems that both authorities governing the Royal Arch conferred the degree only on “Installed” or "Past" Masters” of a Craft Lodge.

This definition gets a little "muddied", as, in the earliest days of the Master Mason degree, it is believed that what is now the Third degree was only conferred on a Brother elected to preside over the Lodge, similar in practice to what is now known as the Board of Installed Masters in the Craft Lodge.

This would explain why, in its earliest days, the privileges of the Royal Arch Degree were reserved to "Passed Masters" only.

It would also explain why, and how, the degree of "Virtual Past Master" &/or “Past Master Degree” (Scottish Ritual) later came into being, so that the benefits of the degree could be made available and accessible to Brethren who had not yet presided over a Craft Lodge.

In some Jurisdictions, this requirement, being a Past Master of a Craft Lodge has been maintained, with regard only to qualifying a Companion for election to the Chair of the Presiding Officer.

In others, it has been discarded in its entirety, leaving only a faint memory that, at one time, something extra was required in order to become a Companion. (I will remind you, in case you have forgotten, that the degree of "Virtual Past Master" &/or “Past Master” that is conferred in the Chapter is not the same as that conferred in a Board of Installed Masters of the Craft Lodges, and does not confer the privileges of an "Actual Past Master" of a Craft Lodge. **It is a Chapter degree only.**

The change came about as a result of the influence of the "Ancients", based on their arrangement of degrees, where the Royal Arch was their **4th degree**.

At the time of the Union of the Ancients and the Moderns in 1813, the Ancients were of sufficient numbers, and had been patronized by a sufficiently large portion of the "gentlemen" from "Society" that they wielded significant votes in the process of uniting the **TWO** opposing Grand Lodges, and the Royal Arch degree, which the "Moderns" had declined to favour with their official support, became recognized as a part of the defined Craft Masonry that the United Grand Lodge was to become. In **England, the Royal Arch is still considered the completion of the 3rd degree**, and remains under the control of the United Grand Lodge through the Supreme Grand Chapter, which organization is essentially a Committee of Grand Lodge, with the Craft Grand Officers simply wearing a different collar for the Grand Chapter meeting.

In other countries, the development of the Royal Arch was somewhat different, resulting in the differences in structure seen around the world's Capitular Jurisdictions today.

In our Work, the completion of the Master Mason degree is complemented by the Mark Mason degree, as the completion of the Fellowcraft degree, with the Virtual Past Master &or Past Master Degree fulfilling the traditional requirement for entry into the Chapter, and the Most Excellent Master &/or Excellent Master, which serves as a preparation for the Royal Arch degree .

In fact, it is generally considered likely that the degree we know as Most Excellent &/or Excellent Master was also a part of the original Third degree when it appeared complete with Hiramic Legend around 1720.

It is known that, at this time in our history, many so-called "side degrees" were often conferred in regular Craft Lodges. Additionally, at this time, the influence of our Operative Brethren was declining, and the opportunity was thus available for expansion of the Masonic story by the inquiring minds who were becoming prominent in Masonry; some Lodges conferred not only the degrees we know as the first Three degrees, but also the Royal Arch, the Knight of the Temple, the Order of St. Lawrence (which had been an Operative degree) as well as several others of French or even American origin.

Why have I piled all of this information in one place and made you all listen to it, tonight? Well, first, as I said, the High Priest made a small error of judgment, and asked me for a lecture for tonight.

Second, because I want you all to remember that the Holy Royal Arch, (Capitular Masonry), has been a jewel in the Crown of Freemasonry for over two hundred years.

It has grown into nearly every country in the Free World, and even operates in some countries where the claim to the title of Free is something of an exaggeration.

Capitular Masonry, and its close relative, Cryptic Masonry have been part of our Masonic experience for a long time. The degrees conferred in this Chapter room, and rooms like it all over the world, continue to attract the thinking men of the Craft.

At one time, and for a lengthy period of years, “Capitular membership” was artificially bolstered by brethren heading through the “Chapter” on their way somewhere else in Masonry.

That circumstance has changed. Those brethren who were passing through can now arrive at their intended destinations by a shorter, more direct route.

We may experience some drop in membership over the next three or four years (written 2001) and that drop may even be alarmingly large.

But it will stop when all of those who really weren't interested in finding that which was lost and have become lost themselves.

The ones left, you and I, Companions, the ones who attend, and work the degrees, and make the lunches, and serve the coffee will still be here, and we will find others like ourselves, and we will find ways to interest them in the wonders of the Royal Arch, and the Work will go on, as it has done since 1740 (or so).

(amended, in part, from a presentation made in 2001 by
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**Comment**

As it is virtually impossible for me to reach each and every Companion in our Jurisdiction, may I ask that those Scribe Ezra's, who have the capability, consider sharing this presentation with the Companions of their Chapters.

For those who have access to distribution lists for Craft Lodges this may be worth passing on.

Should anyone receiving this presentation wish to be omitted from future issues, please advise to theinvestigator@shaw.ca and your wishes will be immediately attended to.

Also remember that feedback is encouraged and appreciated.

Have a wonderful day & God Bless

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