



# Provincial Grand Chapter of Worcestershire

Provincial Office, 94 Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B61 0DF

## Early Royal Arch Regalia

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**by E. Comp. A R Hewitt, PGStB**

*This paper was delivered to Supreme Grand Chapter on 9th February 1972 and may be used in Private Chapters.*

Although little is known of the early history of Royal Arch Masonry one aspect of the Order's development is comparatively well recorded, namely, the wearing of regalia. Whereas few directions were given on the design of *Craft* regalia much before the Union of 1813, fairly explicit instructions have always existed for that of the Royal Arch, even before the founding of Grand Chapter in 1766. On the 12th June, 1765, the Companions who were to form the "Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter" a year later, ordered that all Companions should wear aprons (except those appointed to wear robes) which were described as of "white leather indented round with crimson ribbon and strings of the same with a T H in gold properly displayed on the bib, and purple garters indented with pink". The reference to "garters" was changed to "indented ribbon or sash of this Order" the following year(1). In these descriptions will be recognised the Companions' apron and sash of today, basically unchanged in more than 200 years and differing only in detail.

The Grand Principals, or Excellent Grands as they were then called, were required to wear "proper robes, Caps on their heads and adorned with proper jewels". The Secretaries (i.e. the Scribes) were to be "adorned with Robes, proper jewels, &c." and the Sojourners to "appear with the Emblems of their employment". As neither robes nor jewels were specifically prescribed for the Sojourners it must be assumed that they merely carried the crow, the pick and the shovel as their "emblems of employment".

Whilst we do not know what were "proper robes" in 1766 we *do* know what were "proper jewels" for, not only were they illustrated in the Charter of Compact (the instrument under which Grand Chapter came into being), but a rare specimen dated 1766 is in the Grand Lodge Museum - its design is almost the same as the breast jewel of today, even the wording on the obverse has remained unchanged, the only major difference being the absence of scroll work at top and bottom.

### Robes and Head-Dresses

Let us look first at the robes, the dominant feature of our Regalia. For 13 years they were merely referred to as "proper" but, in 1777, the celebrated Chevalier Ruspini designed new ones described as, for Z. "scarlet, faced purple, trimed sable furr"; for H. "Mazarine blue [i.e. dark blue] faced light grey, trimed sable furr"; for J. "light grey, faced light blue, trimed grey furr"; and for Past Masters (i.e. Past Principals) "scarlet, faced light blue, trimed sable furr"(2). Robes of the Scribes and Sojourners were referred to as "surplices", in addition, the Scribes were to wear "crimson scarfs" - crimson scarves or stoles are still worn in at least one London Chapter. Detail of the robes were laid down for the last time in 1807(3); thereafter they were regarded as traditional. Even today, they are not mentioned in the current Grand Chapter Regulations. Other than that the wearing of robes by Past Principals was discontinued at some date unknown only one change is recorded in 195 years, namely in 1956, when the description "dark blue" was officially substituted for "purple" in the manufacture of regalia.



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From 1765 the Principals were required to wear "Caps on their Heads", again without guidance as to design until 1796 when the head-dress worn by Z. was described as "a turban, with triple Crown rising from Centre"; that by H. as "an ornamental turban, or a plain Crown"; and that by J. as "a purple Hiera or Cap, with a silver plate in front having [certain Hebrew Characters] (Holiness to the Lord) engraved thereon".

These requirements disappeared from the next issue of the Laws and Regulations (1807) and it is not known when head-dresses ceased to be in general use - they were still on sale in the 1880s and are occasionally seen in a few historic Chapters today.

### Aprons

If robes are a dominant feature of Royal Arch regalia, the apron is probably the most important. It is, after all, a survival from the days of the operative stone masons who wore it for protection whilst at their trade.

Those aprons were usually whole skins, almost ankle-length, tied with leather thongs. The Royal Arch apron is, therefore, a symbol of our descent from those early craftsmen.

In 1765 it was described as indented with crimson ribbon with the letters T H in gold on the bib. It remained unchanged for nearly 40 years when, in 1807(4) it was laid down that it should be indented with two colours, red and purple, and that the T H should appear thereon in spangles and on purple satin. As a result of the Royal Arch reorganisation of 1817 major changes were again introduced six years later. The most significant change, in my view, was the disappearance of the emblem T over H and the substitution therefor of the symbol later to be known as the triple tau. As early as the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1766, Grand Chapter referred to the original emblem as meaning "Templum Hierosolimae or the true Royal Arch Mason's mark or badge of honour". Over the years the letters became joined and lost their serifs until, at last, they became the badge as we now know it. To our Royal Arch forefathers it was simply a symbol alluding to the Temple at Jerusalem (Templum Hierosolimae, hence the T H) and they and their successors in the 18th century had no part in its development into what was, in 1843 for the first time, referred to as three taus. Neither did they envisage the accretion of a different Royal Arch signification.

For a time the wearing of the Royal Arch apron ceased when, in 1773, Grand Chapter resolved that it be "disused . . . until the Grand Lodge shall permit the Companions of this Chapter to wear them in the Grand Lodge and in all the private Free Masons' Lodges". Grand Lodge never did so allow and it is believed the resolution was quietly ignored and the wearing of the distinctive apron resumed.

The gilt triangle surrounding the badge on the flap was introduced in 1823 when the apron was enlarged and the bib or flap re-shaped as now worn. Gold fringe was added to the apron strings of Grand Officers and Principals and Past Principals of private Chapters, and silver to those of the other Companions - the strings were tied in front, under the flap, the tasselled ends on view hanging from the centre; here, then, is the origin of the present-day tassels, suspended by ribbon, which were approved 20 years later. At the same date Officers and Past Officers of Chapters were authorised to wear the emblems of office embroidered in the centre of their aprons - in gold for Principals and Past Principals, and in silver for other Officers.



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In 1886 were introduced distinctive aprons for Grand Officers, bearing the appropriate emblem of office and with the *double* indented border as now worn. Regalia for Provincial and District Grand Officers was also approved, with the emblem of office within a double circle to include the name of the Province or District. For the emblem on the apron flap the rather attractive spangles gave way to gold embroidery.

Gold fringe was added to Grand Officers' and Past Grand Officers' sashes in 1807 and to those of Principals of Chapters 16 years later (1823).

### Collars

At first jewels were worn upon the breast, pendant from mazarine blue ribbon for Grand Officers and white for all others. Broad collars, similar to those now worn, were authorised in 1807. In that year Grand Officers were required to wear their jewels from the neck by a broad purple or garter blue ribbon and Principals and Officers of Chapters for the time being also from the neck but by a broad crimson ribbon.

The broad tricolour collar for Grand Officers was introduced in 1823 and the narrow tricolour collar for Provincial Grand Officers in 1864(5). The active Grand Officers chains are of comparatively recent date, namely 1900, the year in which gold braid was added to Past Principals' collars. The colour of the ribbon from which the breast jewel is suspended has, in general, corresponded with the colour of the wearer's collar.

### Jewels

Examination of the collection of Royal Arch jewels in the Grand Lodge Museum reveals an amazing variety in design, most of which were entirely unauthorised. Even the publication of the first illustrations in 1807 (other than the three original drawings in 1766) did little to standardize designs. In early years, Officers of Grand Chapter and officers of private Chapters wore identical jewels, later differenced only by the colour of the suspending ribbon which, matched the collar. The jewels authorised in 1766 numbered only, three - one for the three principal Officers, another for the Scribes and Sojourners and a third for the rest of the Companions. A new and rather splendid Z jewel was introduced at the turn of the century which consisted of a pair of compasses, the points resting on a segment of a circle, a sun in splendour between the legs of the compasses, a square at the back, and the whole behind an Arch, but it disappeared, unfortunately, when distinctive jewels for all Chapter officers were introduced (1823). The jewels as now worn by the Grand Principals were first illustrated in 1843.

In the 19th century manufacturers produced the breast jewel in many guises, the most fashionable being set with brilliants. Others incorporated an indented two-colour border or the centre of the jewel within a red or blue circle; some had the whole of the centre in colour; some were under glass. Elaborate ornamental edging was another device to catch the eye of the buyer. These unauthorised jewels continued in vogue to the end of the century.

The year 1886 saw the introduction of new jewels for past Grand Officers and Provincial Grand Officers which were thenceforth to be mounted on a circle with the words "Supreme Grand Chapter" or name of the Province or District engraved thereon; even today some of the jewels worn do not



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conform to the Regulations. The double circle containing the two branches of laurel on which the emblems of office of Grand Officers of the year are superimposed was introduced as recently as 1933.

## Conclusion

To close on a homely note, it is of interest to recall that, in early years, Chapter officers wore the same regalia as Grand Officers and, in 1778, Grand Chapter enacted "in any Chapter whose finances would be hurt by the expense the whole or any part [of the regalia] may be dispensed with". This option, designed to assist the poorer Chapters, quickly disappeared from the Regulations, just four years later. The three colours customarily associated with the Royal Arch are purple, crimson and light blue and have been worn by Companions for some 200 years - may these splendid and beautiful colours long continue to be symbolic of our Order.

- (1) Charter of Compact, 1766*
- (2) Laws of the Society, 1778*
- (3) Laws and Regulations, 1807*
- (4) In that year they were illustrated for the first time*
- (5) District Grand Officers were first mentioned In 1875*

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