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Welcome Companion [Support Material]

A Royal Arch Narrative for the 21st Century Freemason

The following text is taken from a talk delivered to Supreme Grand Chapter in November 2023. It was written by E.Comp C.P. Noon, GStdB (Prestonian Lecturer, 2018) with input from others in the Archway Working Party and the Committee of General Purposes. Images from the slides used in that presentation are also included below.

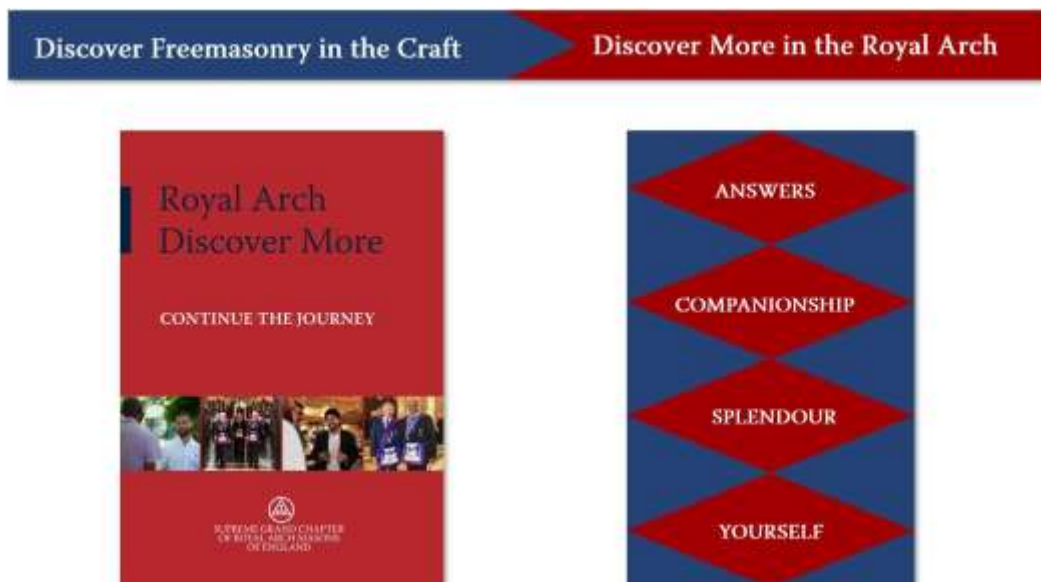
Not every section of this talk is suitable to reveal to potential candidates (Master Masons) as it may spoil certain aspects of the Exaltation ceremony (the Discover More booklet is better designed for that purpose) but the ideas in this talk may help members understand more about different ways of interpreting the Royal Arch and therefore they may be better prepared to answer any questions raised – especially by Master Masons who are not attracted by some of the more traditional interpretations of its symbolism.

Welcome Companion

For context, this talk is aimed at newly exalted Companions, but others may benefit from it as well, and those of you who have seen the new '*Discover More*' booklet will immediately recognise the four themes it contains:

They represent four key areas that capture what our members told us they most enjoy about the Royal Arch, the reasons they joined, how they interpret the ceremony, and what resonates well with them. They are not new ideas – they are simply existing themes and some areas that have been overlooked.

Each of these themes is also connected to the principal themes found within the Royal Arch – those of personal discovery and Enlightenment.





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So let me begin at the beginning:

When the Antient and Modern Grand Lodges came together to form the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, they declared that 'Pure Antient Masonry' consisted of three degrees—the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason *including the Royal Arch*.

The Royal Arch therefore completes the journey in 'Pure Antient Masonry' because you rediscover the Genuine Secrets of a Master Mason that were symbolically lost in the Third Degree, and where only 'substituted secrets' now remain.

The Royal Arch therefore gives you a more complete understanding of what it means to be a Freemason in the United Grand Lodge of England, and is an aspect of English freemasonry that is unique around the world—and one we should be proud of. However, this explanation may still leave you with many questions, so I will go through these four themes:

The first of these is 'Answers'

The Royal Arch represents the conclusion of the Masonic story—the Supreme Degree. But the secrets you discover and the ceremony itself, may not have been what you expected. They are not simply just another handshake and password to the next level.

In some ways, this difference is intentional. It shows you have moved on from the more practical, theoretical lessons in the Craft, and through the discoveries made in the Royal Arch you are now able to put these teachings into practice.

However, it is also important to remember that our ceremonies are not meant to be taken literally – they are simply allegories, and can be interpreted in different ways. So as you think more about what the Royal Arch may mean to you, it is useful to consider what you feel might be the most important discovery that *you* made in the Royal Arch.

Was it the discovery of the vault itself—the discovery of the name on the pedestal or its other contents—or understanding the legacy of the Master Architect, Hiram Abiff—or perhaps a discovery of yourself?

There are many different answers to what these discoveries represent, all of which may be equally relevant, equally personal and equally important to different people.

One of the core values of Freemasonry is the ability to explore and understand the different opinions and approaches to life found amongst our members without being judgemental.

And part of its enjoyment is finding out more about the meaning, symbolism and interpretation of our ceremonies, as well as learning more about the people you share these experiences with. Importantly, it is through these shared experiences that we usually discover that there is more that unites us as individuals, than which divides us.

The second theme is Companionship

Although no new working tools or practical skills are formally introduced in the Royal Arch, you are shown what can be achieved by working together.

There are three Principals, the main discovery is made by three Sojourners working together, and the Word can only be communicated with the help of other Companions.

This need for collaboration is introduced in the Craft in the Third Degree, when Hiram Abiff informs his assailants that he cannot simply give away the secrets of a Master Mason all by himself.

This is because these secrets are more than just a series of signs and words that can only be shared in a



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special way—they also include his experience as a Master Architect — skills that have taken him a lifetime to acquire — and that also take a lifetime to pass on and share with others.

The simple messages here are clear—as members of Society, and as Freemasons in particular, we are greater than the sum of our parts. It also recognises two other hugely important aspects of Freemasonry — that of service to our communities, and the role that friendship and Companionship plays in our lives.



So, if the metaphorical journey in the Craft is the transition from rough to perfect ashlar, then the Royal Arch represents the completion of that journey — the stage when the perfect ashlar becomes part of a larger, more complete structure — and an obvious metaphor for our role as Freemasons within Society as a whole — a Society that we also all strive to serve to the best of our abilities.

The third theme is Splendour

Many new Companions comment on how impressive the Ceremony of Exaltation can be, and how it involves a level of mystery, majesty and spectacle not seen in the Craft.

The ceremony provides a dramatic interpretation of a key part of biblical history: the building, destruction, and rebuilding of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

For many of our members these stories will seem very familiar, and the splendid reimagining of the rediscovery of the vault provides a wonderful jewel in the crown of their Masonic experience.

But how can you relate to these biblical stories if you believe in a Supreme Being, but were either not raised in the Judaeo-Christian traditions - or simply don't go to your own Church or equivalent any more - and so the stories and language in the Royal Arch seem less familiar, or even strange to you? Does this mean the central story of the Royal Arch is any less relevant to you?

Quite the opposite! The allegorical nature of Freemasonry is one of its key strengths. It can be equally applicable and meaningful whether you interpret the discoveries you make in the traditional, more literal and biblical way, or a more metaphorical and symbolic way—or perhaps even, somewhere in between.

After all, everyone's belief in a Supreme Being is unique, as is the role that organised religion plays in their lives.

You also do not need reminding that Freemasonry is not a religion — it is simply intended to be a companion for your life, and therefore equally compatible with a wide range of differing beliefs if we are to work together and serve others.

For example, one of the most symbolic parts of the ceremony is said to be the discovery of the scroll and the name on the pedestal, and the significance these have for your relationship with your Creator. But for others, a more symbolic interpretation is that what you discover represents long-lost knowledge.

What you find are not only the contents of vault, but also the structure itself, which many centuries after the destruction of the First Temple, is still fulfilling its duty of protecting those contents - just as its Architect did in his final hour with undiminished firmness.

This can also therefore be seen as a reminder that during your own lifetime, you too should act as an honourable and enduring example for others, both now and in the future.



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The final theme is the discovery of 'Yourself'

Having continued your journey into the Royal Arch to become a Companion of the Order, and one of its Council of Rulers, you now also find yourself in a position of leadership where you are expected to advise and inspire others, just as you were advised and inspired by those more experienced than yourself in other walks of life.

But to understand why the Royal Arch represents the completion of your journey in *Pure Antient Masonry*, we also need to consider why it makes you complete as a Freemason.

For many it is the symbolic discovery of the name of their Creator. But for others it is the completion of a journey that began in the North-East Corner when they were initiated.

There, as a new Entered Apprentice, you were told that you represent a foundation stone, and upon that strong foundation you were encouraged to raise a superstructure perfect in all its parts, and honourable to the Builder.

For many, this 'Builder' is clearly their Creator, whilst the superstructure represents their own life and actions.

But for others the Builder can also represent themselves, their service to their community and their role in Society, or their own, often complicated relationship with their God and Creator—all of the things that make an individual complete.

The profound discoveries we make in the Royal Arch can therefore also represent our own realisation of who that Builder is, and the importance of what this means to us.

However you interpret this, the central messages are similar—if these discoveries help you understand yourself, and help you realise why this makes you complete, then you are near a complete understanding of your journey in *Pure Antient Masonry*. The Craft starts you on this voyage, but it is only in the Royal Arch that you learn how to pursue it to the next level.



Realising that our ceremonies can mean different things to different people is also an important lesson, and represents a form of Enlightenment Philosophy upon which modern Freemasonry was originally founded over 300 years ago. Our Craft has been a model of tolerance and respect since its inception, and these values are still just as relevant now, as they were in the early 18th Century.

Therefore, we should be proud to stand up, and say that we belong to an Ancient and Honourable Society that still extols the virtues of service to others, and of working together across many of the boundaries that, so sadly, are now increasingly found elsewhere in our World.

These interpretations of the Supreme Degree of the Royal Arch only scratch the surface of the rich



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symbolism, the excellence and the beauty it contains — also historical variations in our ceremonies across the country mean there will always be more that awaits your discovery and enjoyment.

A complete understanding of the Royal Arch can only become clear when you progress through the Principals' Chairs — but once an initiate into our Craft has embarked on his fourth and final stage in *Pure Antient Masonry* we should all embrace them with open arms and say “Welcome Companion”.



Welcome Companion

A Royal Arch Narrative for the C21st Freemason



Welcome Companion

Welcome Companion provides interactive material on your Exaltation Ceremony and its associated allegory and symbolism. This module is part of the Solomon Academy for which you can earn badges and a downloadable certificate. This is where you can access the Solomon Academy Diploma.

You can access the course [here](#)



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