

SUPREME GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER
OF
NEW ZEALAND

HAURAKI DISTRICT

THE DEGREES
UNDER THE
SUPREME GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER
OF
NEW ZEALAND

Prepared for the use of the Companions by
RE Comp JD Anderson Grand Superintendent

Introduction

The information following is derived from a lecturette by one of NZ's most erudite masonic scholars.

R Ex Comp Adams is fondly remembered for his knowledge, wisdom and above all, his extreme modesty as to his masonic knowledge.

The discussion which the lecturette evoked (recorded herein in full) changed our Companion's conclusions but little but did add significantly to the information imparted. M Ex Comp Glenie and R Ex Comp Major being legendary in masonic knowledge in their own right!

I have brought this "paper" to the attention of the Hauraki Companions to answer the oft asked question "how many degrees are worked under Grand chapter"?

J D Anderson

Grand Superintendent

HOW MANY DEGREES ARE WORKED UNDER GRAND CHAPTER?

by Comp. R. Adams, P.G. Lec., P.Z. 19th March, 1988

It was really for my own education that I elected to answer this particular question. It is one which I have often posed to others and to which I have received almost as many different answers as the number of Companions asked. Nor am I so naive as to expect complete agreement with my answer this evening as from my own short study of the subject the two main features which seem to prevent a concise number are:

- (a) Exactly what constitutes a degree, and
- (b) Ambiguity of terminology by the compilers of the Rituals.

However, having studied the question as thoroughly as time and ability would allow, my short answer to the question is this:-

“ There are seventeen separate degrees administered by the Supreme Grand Chapter of New Zealand which a candidate must complete to qualify for the relevant certificates of proof as issued by the said Grand Chapter.”

These are:

HOLY ROYAL ARCH

1	Mark Master	}	
2	Excellent Master	}	One Certificate
3	Holy Royal Arch	}	
4	{Third Principal		Certificate
5	{Worshipful Mark Master		Certificate
“CHAIR DEGREES” {			
6	{Second Principal		Certificate
7	{First Principal		Certificate

CRYPTIC

- | | | | |
|----|--|---|-----------------|
| 8 | Royal Master | } | |
| 9 | Select Master | } | One Certificate |
| 10 | Super Excellent Master | } | |
| 11 | 'CHAIR DEGREE' Thrice Illustrious Master | | Certificate |

RED CROSS OF BABYLON

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 12 | Knight Of The Sword | } | |
| 13 | Knight Of The East | } | One Certificate |
| 14 | Knight Of The East & West | } | |
| 15 | 'CHAIR DEGREE' Most Excellent Chief | | Certificate |

ROYAL ARK MARINER

- | | | | |
|----|--|--|-------------|
| 16 | Royal Ark Mariner | | Certificate |
| 17 | 'CHAIR DEGREE' Worshipful Commander Noah | | Certificate |

What Constitutes a *Degree*?

As I was unable to find a definitive description as to the exact composition of a degree perhaps it is best if I now give a brief account of the criteria I have used to arrive at the figure of seventeen.

Basically I believe a Masonic Degree to be a ceremonial approach to a truism of some kind which therefore must have a moral or philosophical lesson to impart. It must contain an ob. never to reveal its content to anyone not lawfully entitled thereto.

To keep it separate and distinct it must have an opening and closing ceremony, however brief. Finally, with the exception of the candidate, only those who have previously taken the degree themselves may be present. All the ceremonies enumerated above comply with this simple criteria.

Although the word degree can now mean a measured space on a thermometer or the 360th part of a revolution, its original meaning was simply a 'step'. A Masonic degree therefore can also be regarded as a step by which a candidate advances in masonic knowledge and understanding of the Craft and once again all

seventeen comply with this simple interpretation.

Ambiguities:

Regarding ambiguity within the rituals themselves. The title page of the ritual for the Installation of the Three Principals is headed thus "Ritual of Installation of the Principals of a Royal Arch Chapter and Investiture of Officers", i.e. no reference is made to them being degrees. Yet within the pages of the ritual all three ceremonies are called degrees, either within the rubric or the Obligations.

Clause 9 of the Constitutions and Laws of Grand Chapter deals solely with degrees recognised and here also all three ceremonies are termed Chair Degrees.

In another instance the Red Cross of Babylon is described in Clause 9 as "Red Cross Degree composed of three points, namely, Knight of the Sword, Knight of the East and Knight of the East and West. Here the three ceremonies are referred to as points.

However on page 46 of the Ritual they are definitely called degrees, which fact entitles them to be included in the seventeen.

Certificates:

There are eleven certificates available from Supreme Grand Chapter in respect to these seventeen degrees of which number seven are for the 'Chair Degrees, a Chair degree being that ceremony where the elected ruler is placed in his seat in the absence of rank and file.

While a Council may confer the degree of Thrice Illustrious Master upon any of its members holding present or past rank of Most Excellent or Right Excellent the recipient must actually take the degree. It is not possible to 'communicate' any of the degrees administered by Grand Chapter by name.

Of the eleven certificates issued by Grand Chapter only nine are signed by either the First Grand Principal or the Grand Scribe E. These same nine are also the only ones which require the candidate's signature to make them complete.

While both the Red Cross of Babylon and Royal Ark Mariner certificates are issued by Grand Chapter the only signatures required thereon are those of the Officers under whose authority the degrees were worked. Neither even provide a space for a candidate's signature.

This briefly is the rationale upon which my answer is based. I trust our readers will find it of some interest and while all may not agree with the answer I trust all will agree that it is made in all sincerity.

Discussion

Comp. Major said that the Red Cross of Babylon was a ubiquitous degree worked in many jurisdictions in the world, in the U.S.A. as a preliminary degree to Knight Templar and in England under the Council of Allied Degrees wherein it is clearly one degree although known as an 'Order' like an Order of Chivalry.

It is treated as a 'poor relation' under our Grand Chapter. He therefore reduced the number of degrees to 15 rather than 17. In our jurisdiction it is one degree comprised of three 'points'. He also suggested that the 'certificates' of chair ranks were more akin to 'patents' being the conferment of powers whereas the others acknowledge the passing through a degree.

Comp. Adams could not agree and said that each of the three points were referred to in the ritual itself, by rubric or otherwise, as a degree.

Comp. Ellyett agreed with Comp. Major and added that he was saddened that the degree had been shortened by removal of its central part.

Comp. Glenie said that it is now optional to work in full. He also questioned Comp. Adams's criterion for a degree of having an opening and closing. referring to the installation of the Principals being only opened as a conclave once for all three ceremonies.

Comp. Adams replied that he mentioned several criteria and not that one alone. A philosophical content and an ob. were also mentioned and he considered one of these components as necessary.

Comp. Johnston said he had been asked why the jewels of the

several degrees, presented in the ceremonies, are not worn. Was it because the certificates of some of them are not signed on behalf of Grand Chapter.

Comp. Adams considered it was just a matter of expense and the acquiring of the jewels. With the passing of the years these are not seen as they were but by passing the degrees one is entitled to wear the appropriate jewel.

