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What (not) to Say about the Royal Arch [Support Material]

WHAT (NOT) TO SAY ABOUT THE ROYAL ARCH

A national survey of Royal Arch Companions revealed that one of the most effective ways of encouraging a Master Mason to join the Royal Arch is simply for them to be asked by someone they trust and respect. All Companions should therefore aim to become confident at explaining the Royal Arch and the value of completing your masonic journey to potential candidates. However, the narratives used to explain the Royal Arch and its link to the Craft changed several times between 2004 and 2008.

Due to these changes some printed literature and websites still contain these older explanations that create confusion. Members should therefore be aware of this and know what older phrases are not helpful to use. The following phrases and definitions may therefore be useful:

What is our name?

Even highly-experienced Royal Arch Masons often struggle to describe the correct name of the Order. This is perhaps not surprising because since 1765 when the first *Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter* was established, this name was changed over thirty times before settling on the *Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England* in 1956. As a result, many masons just refer to it as *Chapter*, and in all correspondence by Supreme Grand Chapter it is simply referred to as *The Royal Arch*.

However, its name is often incorrectly truncated to the *Holy Royal Arch*. This error results from over two centuries of casualised abbreviation of its original full name (*The Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem*). This is a name that is now rarely used except in certain parts of the ritual. In this context, the word *Holy* refers the Arch itself, not the Order—it is therefore incorrect to include it in this truncated form. It is also unhelpful to use this term in any public facing literature because it implies a formal religiosity to our ceremonies that does not exist but which our naysayers are often quick to exploit and criticise.

The answer is therefore quite simple: the ritual books do not need to change and the original name remains as it is. But in regular use when the name is truncated and in all other printed and electronic media when the truncated name is used it should just be referred to as *The Royal Arch*.

Discover Freemasonry in the Craft, Discover More in the Royal Arch

This phrase builds upon the highly successful *Discover Freemasonry* booklet used to promote the Craft. The popular *Discover More* booklet summarises the main messages within the Royal Arch and the discoveries made in a format suitable to discuss with a Master Mason—and even someone who has just been initiated. The booklet can be downloaded [here](#) and is recommended reading. It is also available in Welsh [here](#).

‘Completion of the Third Degree’

This phrase should **NOT** be used. Its use stems from older versions of the ritual and was discontinued in 2005 because the Third Degree is considered complete in itself—to suggest otherwise diminishes its value. Instead it is a Freemason’s journey through Pure Antient Masonry that is considered incomplete.

‘An extension to, but neither a superior nor a subordinate part of the degrees which precede it’

This phrase should also **NOT** be used. It can be misunderstood and was discontinued in 2009. It derived from an attempt to formally rewrite the Preliminary Declaration at the beginning of our Book of Constitutions.

The Preliminary Declaration

This declaration derives from the Articles of Union between the two original Grand Lodges in 1813. It was a compromise—often referred to as the ‘[Sussex Fudge](#)’—because the words were altered at the very last



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moment to accommodate differing views of the Royal Arch. The resulting relationship between the Craft and Royal Arch makes English Freemasonry unique around the world. The declaration therefore represents an important part of our history and heritage that we should be proud of. Instead of attempting to rewrite our history, what is more important is how we interpret it today.

Completion of your Journey in Pure Antient Masonry

Today we simply interpret the Preliminary Declaration as meaning that *Pure Antient Masonry* consists of three degrees—the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason *including the Royal Arch*. Therefore, a Freemason's journey in Pure Antient Masonry is incomplete unless they become a Companion of the Royal Arch. This phrase can therefore be helpful in communicating this.

One Journey, One Organisation

This reminds us that our journey in Pure Antient Masonry is a single one from Initiation to Exaltation. It is only for historical reasons that the three Craft degrees are governed by UGLE and governance of the Royal Arch delegated to Supreme Grand Chapter—in real terms they are one organisation with a common leadership. These shared values are reflected in the new [Strategy for Freemasonry, 2022 and Beyond](#) and in a recent [annual report](#) from UGLE/SGC.

