

## **Provincial Grand Chapter of Wiltshire**

**ORATION by E. Comp. Michael F. Barratt, Provincial Grand Almoner, at the Banner Dedication Ceremony of Chapter Elias de Derham No. 586 held at Salisbury Masonic Centre on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017.**

Companions, we have gathered this evening to dedicate the Banner of Chapter Elias de Derham No. 586, a chapter which was originally consecrated on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1867 although by some mysterious mistake the records of the chapter for many years described the charter incorrectly as dated A.L. 5871, A.D. 1867. For those of you who are not familiar with Masonic tradition A.L., as opposed to A.D. (Anno Domini – years after the birth of Christ according to the Gregorian system) refers to Anno Lucis which is 4,000 years added to our current year to denote the number of years since the creation of the Earth (when light first appeared upon the earth). According to certain religious traditions, using the genealogy and history of the Old Testament, the Earth is only 6,017 years old. Although I am a theologian and church minister, I am also an amateur geologist, astronomer and palaeontologist and so I accept the more scientifically-enlightened view that the earth is somewhat older and dinosaurs did rule the Earth at some time – some say they still do!

However, for Masonic purposes and to assure you all today that we are indeed in the Chapter's sesquicentennial year (150<sup>th</sup> year of 2017) the charter was indeed correctly dated A.L. 5867, A.D. 1867. I think it rather fitting therefore that the chapter's 150<sup>th</sup> celebration should also share its year with the tercentennial year of the first Craft Lodge of England - a reminder of the complete integrity of Craft Masonry and Royal Arch Masonry.

In preparing this oration I am indebted to Excellent Companion Tony Oke and Excellent Companion Peter Dowden-Smith for providing me with histories of the chapter from 1867 until 1967 (written and published on the centenary of the chapter's founding by Excellent Companion John Dane) and 1967 until today's date (written and published by Excellent Companion Peter himself). These two admirable publications I recommend most heartily to all Companions present as they contain very detailed and interesting facts about the Chapter in particular and Salisbury Royal Arch masonry in general over those 150 years.

This is the second Royal Arch banner dedication this year for which I have been asked to give the oration – the earlier oration being given for the Chapter of Harmony No. 663 at Devizes in January of this year. That was also an old and very prestigious chapter having been founded just two years after Elias with neither having had banners until this year. I am extremely honoured to now be able to give this oration to such another old and outstanding chapter – the chapter from which grew my own chapter, Stonehenge No. 6114, many years later – but more of that in a moment.

I do not seek to give a long and detailed history of the chapter, as in the case of many orations, because of the first-rate written histories I have already mentioned but, as with the oration I gave to Harmony Chapter I would like to say a little more about the history and use of banners and, in particular, the symbolism of this great and beautiful banner now being dedicated to this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, Elias's charter is properly dated 7<sup>th</sup> August A.L. 5867; A.D. 1867 and it's consecration took place on 31<sup>st</sup> October A.L. 5867 A.D. 1867 at the Salisbury Masonic Centre. The first three minutes book were, like the secrets of the Master Mason and Royal

Arch itself, lost for many years until, in 1952, a complete and anonymous stranger approached the then Director of Ceremonies, E. Comp. S. R. Naish, asking him if he was a freemason as he had something of great importance to impart to him. In going through some papers belonging to a deceased friend, this stranger had come across some old books and papers wrapped up tightly in brown paper and string which proved to be the missing minutes books and signature books which at long last revealed the identity of those attending the consecration in 1867 together with a copy of that first summons. The full details of all the papers re-discovered will be found in John Dane's booklet. What we discover from those long lost papers is that the consecration meeting was presided over by the Grand Superintendent for Dorset and members of the Dorset Provincial Grand Executive as acting Haggai and Joshua. Thanks to the thoughtfulness of the anonymous stranger who delivered these old minutes books, we have a complete record of those proceedings now reproduced in John Dane's book. The minutes of that consecration meeting end with recording with gratitude the debt owed to the Province of Dorset and St. Cuthberga Chapter No. 622 in particular whose many members had assisted in that meeting and which had lent Royal Arch furniture to be used in Salisbury. At least three of the six original founders of this new chapter were indeed members of St. Cuthberga Chapter.

As will be surmised, at that time there was no Provincial Chapter of Wiltshire and so Elias Chapter had to enlist the services of Dorset in order to be consecrated.

By the following year, 1868, there were three Royal Arch chapters in Wiltshire and so a petition was made in November of that year for a Provincial Grand Chapter for Wiltshire to be established resulting in Companion Samuel Whitty being appointed as the First Grand

Superintendent for Wiltshire in March 1870 having first had to pass through the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Principals' chairs in the previous single month of December – rapid promotion indeed! Unfortunately, Excellent Companion Whitty didn't hold office for very long for the chapter's minutes for November 1873 record the death of this Provincial Grand Superintendent.

Time doesn't permit me to say a great deal more about the history in this oration (it's all contained in these fascinating publications which I am sure Excellent Companion Oke would be pleased to send anyone interested) except to record that Elias remained the only Royal Arch Chapter in Salisbury until 1977. Elias's committee minutes for 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1969 record that the then Grand Superintendent, E. Comp. Sidney C. Cockayne, had requested the Provincial Scribe Ezra (E. Comp. Ivor Chant) to be received by the committee for the purposes of discussing a proposal that a second Royal Arch Chapter be formed in Salisbury. This resulted in the following proposal being put forward in open chapter at its next meeting:

*“That if a new Royal Arch Chapter is formed in Salisbury, the Chapter Elias de Derham will be pleased to lend it such equipment and regalia as may be agreed upon”.*

In other words, Elias would act in a similar manner to that of St. Cuthberga 110 years previously in fully supporting and assisting the new chapter. This was, then, the start of forming the second Salisbury chapter which culminated in the consecration of Stonehenge Chapter No. 6114 on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1977. The two chapters have worked solidly together ever since, supporting each other in a truly Masonic way and I am proud to be a member of Stonehenge and proud of our association with Elias. Between the years 1987 and

2000 new furniture and equipment was purchased as well as this new Royal Arch carpet which both Chapter Elias de Derham and Stonehenge contributed towards the cost. It is also pleasing to report that Stonehenge is now, itself, in the process of acquiring a banner which, in due time, will be dedicated in this lodge room and proudly displayed with that of Elias.

Let's have a closer look at this wonderful banner – and indeed it is one of the loveliest and symbolic banners I have ever seen and means much to me personally. Clearly the name and number are shown and as we have seen the chapter was consecrated in 1867 with the number 586 – corresponding to the number of the lodge bearing the same name. Below the name and above the portrait of Elias the man we see the triple tau within a triangle. The tau was in ancient times set upon those who were acquitted by their judges as a proof of their innocence and also military commanders placed it on those who returned from battle unwounded. It is, therefore, a sign of life and the union of three taus represents God by whom through creation chaos was changed into regular form. The triangle has also long been regarded as a sacred symbol and in times of antiquity names and symbols of God were usually enclosed in a triangle. We are therefore reminded of God's omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience in our lives.

The three elements below this symbol are much easier to explain. The figure is, as I have already stated, that of Elias de Derham himself, after whom the lodge and this chapter are named. Elias was a stonemason and much more, who died in the year 1246

Here we see an image of Magna Carta – a written part of our unwritten constitution and bill of rights. In 1215, at Runnymede, King John was urged to accept the demands of the barons, whom he had ig-

nored and ruled tyrannically, and agree Magna Carta by his half-brother, William Longspeé, whose effigy can be found in Salisbury Cathedral. Also present at Runnymede was Elias of Dereham, who at the time was steward to one of the key players in the constitutional crisis, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton.

Elias, as well as a stonemason, himself was a skilled negotiator and was at the very centre of the discussions between the king and the barons. Once Magna Carta was agreed and sealed he was entrusted with delivering ten of the thirteen copies made, one of which was given to the original cathedral at Old Sarum. Elias later became a canon of Old Sarum before masterminding the building of the present Salisbury Cathedral which is depicted here on the right hand side of the banner. Elias himself is depicted holding a pair of compasses – themselves a Masonic symbol, in his right hand and the plans for the cathedral in his left. What is often not known is that Elias was also responsible for the extensive building of Ely Cathedral as well. A statute similar to this image can be found on one of the pillars holding up the tower and spire and facing the South Transept – a gift to the cathedral by the Freemasons of Salisbury.

Having described our new banner and explained the symbols on it let me say just a few words about the importance of banners throughout history. As we are all probably aware, banners, standards or ensigns have long been used by a variety of organisations, to establish identity and be a focus for all who range under them. There are so many examples of this in history:- armies following their banner into battle and rallying around it when needing to regroup. The modern day study of flags is called vexillology – the word deriving from the Latin word Vexillum meaning a flag or banner as used by the Roman Legions. Flags or banners have existed long before the Romans and were used by the Chinese to denote clan and rank. Indeed, as recently as 1912 the Chinese Chin'g Empire still had 8 special clans of nobility known as Bannermen available to provide troops to the Imperial

Army. Even more recently trade unions and benevolent institutions have marched behind their banners as a mark of solidarity and commitment; youth organisations, such as the Scouts, Guides and Boy's Brigade parade them to identify the respective units of their organisation; religious groups too where they are used in acts of worship, as a focus for their belief especially in Evangelical churches where flags are waved in praise of God.

In Freemasonry banners have always been an integral part of the furnishing and equipment of Masonic units. In both the Craft and Royal Arch; Lodges, Chapters, Provinces, Districts and of course Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand Chapter, have felt it necessary to have their own banner to mark their identity within the fraternity, but in the Royal Arch, banners and ensigns have an additional, very significant and important purpose. Whilst individual Chapters have, only fairly recently, introduced a banner specific to their Chapter, the splendid colours and pageantry of the Royal Arch could not be created without the four Principal banners and twelve ensigns.

We are, or should be, fully aware of the symbolical significance of the four Principal banners; representing, man - **intelligence & understanding**, lion - **strength & power**, ox - **patience & assiduity** and the eagle - **promptness & celerity** that the will of the True and Living God Most High is executed.

The twelve tribes, named after the ten sons of Jacob [Genesis 29,30 and 35] and two grandsons of his son Joseph – Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Jacob adopted before his death are represented by the 12 banners displayed: In the East - **Judah**, Issachar and Zebulon; In the South - **Reuben**, Simeon & Levi and Gad; In the West - **Ephraim**, Mannasseh and Benjamin; In the North – **Dan**, Asher and Naphtali. They all rallied around these four Principal banners when they gathered together at the Tabernacle – thus obeying another command given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The, device on the Standard of **Judah** was a **Lion**; The device on the standard of **Ephraim** was an **Ox**; The device on the standard of **Reuben** was a **Man**; The device on the standard of **Dan** was an **Eagle**.

It is thought that they gathered in a square formation, with an equal number of tribes on each side. Here they are gathered before offering up their praises to the Most High. For us as Royal Arch Masons, this should remind us to rally in equality behind those principals depicted by the four Principal banners. Being armed with the faith in our God, and ever wishing to praise him for favours already received, we are expected to be prepared to face the world with strength, to patiently, and with the care of others foremost in our minds, bring to all an understanding and awareness of the values for which we stand, ever bearing in mind that the Most High will reward us or not according to our actions. Indeed, not only are our own banners an illustration of our love of God but in the Book of Song of Songs Chapter 2, verse 4 we read *“He has taken me into his banquet hall and his banner over me is love”*.

This evening, this Chapter Elias de Derham No. 586 has been presented with and had dedicated a glorious banner which its members can rally behind. We should give thanks to those who initiated its creation and those who made it..... We should also give thanks to all those who contributed towards its cost.

This glorious banner illustrates and celebrates a seamless record of work for 150 years, some of which were difficult ones. It represents the faith and loyalty of its members in the belief they have had and shown through the ceremonies and through those troubled times – including two World Wars.

From this day on, let this banner be proudly displayed at all your meetings and on other occasions when called upon by Provincial Grand Chapter.



I thank you for the honour you have bestowed upon me today by allowing me to give the Oration on this wonderful occasion.

May the True and Living God Most High forever bless your banner and the members of this venerable, noble and historic Chapter.

**E. Comp. Michael F. Barratt**  
**Provincial Grand Almoner**

20 September 2017