

**The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine
and the Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of
St John the Evangelist**



THAMES DIVISION



History of the Order

While St. Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, is credited with the discovery of the Cross of Christ and the erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (hence her canonisation), official records in the Vatican confirm that the knighthood of that name did not come into existence until after the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099. Godefroy de Bouillon as Advocate (defender) of the Holy Sepulchre, was requested by Daimar, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to form an exclusive troop of guardian knights to protect the holy site from the infidel. After Godefroy's death in 1100, subsequent novices were required to take their oath of fealty on his tomb situated within the church of the Holy Sepulchre. In due course, a red Jerusalem Cross was adopted as the insignia of the Order and the Pontiff Callixtus II formally approved it in 1122, from which time it has endured to the present day, becoming a Pontifical Equestrian Hospitaller Order with a Cardinal (Prince of the Church) as Grand Master

The Grand Imperial Conclave of the Military and Masonic Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and the Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of Saint John the Evangelist, are governed from the Registry of the Orders which is situated at 86 St. James's Street, London. The five ceremonies embodied within these Orders form a complete Rite comprising three individual 'rituals of admission' and two additional 'chair degrees'. The whole is considered by many to constitute the third pillar of Christian Freemasonry.

The earliest record of the degree, The Red Cross of Constantine, was in the late 1700's when the Early Grand Rite of Scotland actively conferred the ceremony as part of their series of forty-six Degrees: it appeared as twenty-third on the roll, the Holy Sepulchre being the twenty-fourth, and St. John the Evangelist the twenty-fifth, all bestowed in a Council of the Trinity.

There is also evidence that London publisher, William Finch, was selling the ritual of 'The Red Cross of Constantine' in 1812, while another entitled 'The Red Cross of Rome & Constantine' was published by Richard Carlile in his Manual of Freemasonry in 1825. This contains excerpts of a ceremony remarkably like that in use today. As far as England and Wales were concerned however, there was no regular Masonic authority controlling the degree until 1865, when a Grand Conclave of the Order was established at the instigation of Robert Wentworth Little, an employee at Freemasons' Hall.

Little asserted that the new body was a revival of a much older organisation, being anxious that the degree be acknowledged as a regular 'Order of Chivalry' in accordance with the Articles of Union, 1813. He went to great lengths to authenticate his claim yet was unable to establish a reliable pedigree; nevertheless, the Order spread at an unprecedented rate with over one hundred

Conclaves being erected in nine different countries within ten years. There is little doubt that the appeal of this chivalric Order was due to the impressive

nature of its admission ceremony coupled with subsequent advancement to the distinctive chairs (degrees) of Viceroy and Sovereign

Since its emergence in London, more than a dozen sovereign Grand Conclaves of the Order have been formed around the world. That in England remains the mother Grand Conclave for all others save those of Germany and Greece, though the latter remain in amity. The grand body in Scotland continues with the older title of 'The Grand Imperial Council of the Imperial, Religious and Military Order of Rome and the Red Cross of Constantine', a designation which had been discarded in England by 1901.

The basis of this Order derives from the life of the Emperor Constantine and the crucial effect he had on Christianity. On the death of his father Constantias, at York in July 306, he was proclaimed Caesar by the Legions. Over the succeeding five years his counterpart, the Emperor Maxentius, gravely impugned his reputation which induced him to march on Rome to seek retribution. During the intervening period he is said to have had a visionary experience when, as related by Eusebius of Caesarea, he witnessed 'the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens'. He subsequently ordered that a new battle standard be constructed depicting the symbol he had observed and appointed an elite troop of fifty legionaries to guard the standard in combat.

Red Cross of Constantine

Whilst every candidate for admission into this Order must be a Royal Arch Mason, he is also required to confirm his true belief in the Trinitarian Christian faith, as he is embarking on an experience demanding a clear sense of religious dedication. After undergoing the Rite of Lustration, he is received under the

aegis of the 'Thirteenth Apostle' and is enjoined to traverse the world in search of true enlightenment.

On completion of his figurative journey his attention is drawn to the imposing Standard of Constantine, around which much of the symbolism of the degree is centred. He is invited by the Sovereign to repeat an obligation of knighthood, following which he receives the accolade of a Perfect Knight-Mason. The mysteries of the Order having been communicated, he is invested with the Insignia of the Order, armed, installed, and duly proclaimed by the Herald. The historical legend of the foundation of the Order is then narrated, in which the Emperor's achievements are reviewed and wherein the new Knight is reminded of his commitment to uphold the tenets of Christian chivalry thus bringing the degree to a fitting climax.

The regalia of the Degree consists of a sash of Imperial purple and a Jewel of the Order, which comprises a red cross Flory bearing the gold letters IHSV which is worn on the left breast suspended from a purple ribbon

It is acknowledged that from the outset the Craft was Christian in character; after the decision to 'universalise' Freemasonry in the early 1720s a noticeable void was created, with the consequence that the emergence and development of the Christian degrees apparently took place. There is little doubt that a debt of gratitude is owed to the unknown erudite brethren who contributed to the ritualistic expertise which has resulted in the rich legacy of profound and beautiful ceremonies that were created in order to stimulate the search for 'the Lost Word'.

It was against this background of progress and change that the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and its Appendant Degrees eventually progressed to the unique position it holds within the structure of Freemasonry, rendering membership very desirable for every Christian Royal Arch Mason.

