

The Ancient and Masonic Order of the

Scarlet Cord

A History



Address to the Supreme Rulers' Conclave No.123 at Mark Masons' Hall on Friday, 8th June, 2001

In response to the interest shown by Brethren, in their questions when visiting Conclaves in the Provinces, I am going to talk to you about an Order developed in the British Isles in 1889 which was founded upon ancient 18th Century documents from the Amsterdam Masonic archives. The rituals and ceremonies were rewritten and enriched by one of the authors of the three rituals currently used in our Secret Monitor ceremonies. I refer, of course, to His Honour Judge Frederick Adolphus Philbrick, K.C., and the Royal Order of Knights of the Scarlet Cord.

Actively involved with Philbrick in the embryo stages of this appendant rite were several other founders of our Grand Conclave, Dr Issachar Zacharie, Colonel Shadwell Clerke, Grand Secretary of the Craft, General Charles Randolph, PGW, Colonel Sir Francis Burdett, Charles Fitzgerald Matier, Grand Secretary of the Mark, Richard Ede, W G Lemon, James Lewis Thomas and William Joseph Spratling; also Japheth Tickle, the D.R. of the Order, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Londesborough, the Earl of Halsbury, Lord Methuen, Charles Edward Keyser, The Maharajah of Cooch Behar, H H Nawab Waheed-ud-deen Khan Bahadur, H H Nawab Najib-ud-deen, J Waldie Pearson, Chancellor of the Diocese of Pretoria; C J Higgs, Madras; Frank Chatterton, Kerala; and many other distinguished Secret Monitors from Bangalore, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Natal, Transvaal, Burma, and the British Isles

Candidates for membership of The Royal Order of Knights of the Scarlet Cord were required to be Princes of the Order, and holders of a special Badge showing membership of the Fund of Benevolence of the Order of the Secret Monitor, a requirement I shall enlarge upon in due course. Further than this there was no bar to admission, except the usual ballot. Members were of six classes or Grades.

- (1) The **"Elected"** (Companions) called Ostiarii, or Doorkeepers C.S.C.
- (2) The **"Chosen"** (Readers) called Lectores or Readers R.S.C.
- (3) The **"Promoted"** (Fellows) called Exorcists or Healers F.S.C.
- (4) The **"Preferred"** (Court of Assistants) called Courtly Companion C.C.S.C.
- (5) The **"Dedicated"** (Revered Companions) called High Priests H.P.S.C.
- (6) The **"Installed"** (Knightly Companions) called Knights K.C.S.C.

The Knights of the Royal Order, the High Priests, and the Court of Assistants together formed the "Court of the Confedarati", and when attended by the officers appointed, the assembly was denominated the "Senatus". Presiding over all these Grades was the "Summus" in his office of Chief of the "Senatus" in the Court of the "Confedarati". It was to this body that all regulations were submitted, (when approved by the Court of Assistants), and if there sanctioned, the "Ordinances" of the "Court of the Confedarati" became "Statutes of the Order", and, thus, binding upon the whole body of "Prince Masons". Each "Prince Mason" was styled a Companion, but he may become entitled to the appellation "Courtly". "Revered" or "Knightly" according to his Office or seniority.

Members of the Court of Assistants were either "Acolytes" of High Priests, or "Aides de Camp" of Knights, and if the latter, they were appointed to a command, when qualified, and then wore the red epaulettes. Should they attain to the Presidency of the "Court of Assistants" they were entitled to wear "Golden Epaulettes". All Members of the Court of Assistants wore a Garter of nobility and a handsome Jewel, with a collarette of ribbon varying with their rank

The first three Grades of the Order met in a "Consistory" and such a Consistory was warranted for any Province or District of the Order of the Secret Monitor. A Sub-Consistory was an offshoot from a full Consistory, and in a large geographical area would usually be set up in a neighbourhood distant from the main big city location for the convenience of its members, but could work only in Grades (1) and (2), and was subject to all the rules and regulations prescribed by the Consistory of which it formed a part.

Consistories and Sub-Consistories were severely restricted in the number of subscribing members, which could not, in any event, exceed Fifteen for Grade (1)-Eleven for Grade (2)-and Nine for Grade (3); but there were certain arrangements for supernumerary and Honorary members subject to the assent of the "Court of Assistants" of the Order, in every case. Members of a higher Grade were not precluded from taking part in the ceremonies of Grades below their own Grade. Grades higher than the third were not worked out of London, unless by command of the "Summus" it was desired to institute a moveable "Court of Assistants" for any special purpose.

The Senatus met annually on the day before the meeting of the Grand Conclave of the Order, and at that convocation new Knights were invested and installed. The Court of Assistants met twice a year on the day afore-mentioned, and upon a day in November whose date varied with the Benevolent Fund Festival of the Order of the Secret Monitor. At either of those meetings proposals for preferment were received and dealt with. A Sanhedrim for dedicating a High Priest was called when desired under the authority of the "Court". All applications for the Higher Grades had to be made through the Registrar of the "Court of the Senatus".

All members of the Court or Senatus had to appear in Court dress or in the uniform of a commissioned officer of His Majesty's Forces. A Companion holding office as Lord Lieutenant, or Deputy Lieutenant, could appear in the uniform belonging thereto, and permission was usually granted to members who desired to wear other official uniform. Ordinary evening dress, however, was not sufficient for members of either "Court" but it was de rigueur for Junior Officers. Companions from India were invited to appear in the costume which they would wear at a function in the presence of Royalty in their own native State. Diplomatic uniforms were also permissible.

All members of the Royal Order of the Scarlet Cord were admitted to the Senatus, but they had to be in Court, or evening dress at least. At the Convocation of the "Senatus", not only were Knights invested and installed, but it was the pleasure of the "Summus" annually to "anoint" some Companion who had attained to that rank, and it was from those so anointed that any vacancy in the office of "Episcopus" or "Diaconus" was filled.

All the other Officers were selected from the "Court of Assistants" but there were Junior Officers who were generally chosen from the Consistories. The High Officers all had to be within easy access of London, and it was the same with the other working Officers, but it was the custom to appoint as Deputy Officers five Companions who were domiciled overseas. All offices were yearly appointments, and for so long as it pleased the "Summus" to re-appoint the same Companion. It was clearly understood, however, that any Officer who was absent from two consecutive meetings, and had not attended the annual assembly for rehearsal, would not be reappointed without the special recommendation of the "Court of Assistants". Which was very rarely exercised.

Philbrick and a group of enthusiasts, first worked the first meeting of the Royal Order of the Scarlet Cord with its spectacular ceremonial, exotic regalia and dress requirements, in 1889, with all the panache and pomp of an Indian Durbar or State occasion. It was a full dress assembly of the whole Senatus and Confedarati, and as a foretaste of what was to follow it certainly whet the appetites of the Grand Originals who were present. The working of the various Grades with its intricate structure, however, had to take place in Consistories and their development in the British Isles and in Territories Overseas took some time to come to fruition.

Let us now return to the Benevolent Fund Badge requirement. The Secret Monitor Benevolent Fund was founded in 1901, and took its fund-raising activities to such a high level of sophistication that, with virtually no donations to the fund for the past sixty years or so, its assets today still stand at approximately £300,000. Scripture informs us that in the army of King David there were three bands of Worthies over which Joab, Zadok and Banaiah presided respectively.

These three chiefs are represented in the Fund by the three wings of the original scheme, namely:

Joab, Chief of the Centre – department for Old Age

Zadok, Chief of the Right Wing – department for Sickness

Banaiah, Chief of the Left Wing – department for Education

Each Wing had its own special charity badge according to the donation made.

(1) Education Left Wing; White Badge – Design sloping to the left.

Membership - Any Brother or Lady donating one guinea became a member of this wing and was entitled to wear the badge. Its funds were expended in furthering the education of children of Secret Monitors either by grants in aid, prizes for excellent work and conduct, or by collecting votes for the Masonic Schools in order to further the election of candidates whose fathers are or were members of the Order. This wing was arranged in two columns, one dealing with boys and the other dealing with girls.

Progress in the wing – one guinea per step.

(2) Sickness Right Wing; Red Badge – Design sloping to the right.

Membership - a personal contribution of ten guineas in a lump sum. or cumulative while a member of the left wing, or a personal contribution of three guineas, and a collector's list of twelve guineas at least, while serving a stewardship. Its funds are devoted to the assistance of Brethren and their families in Sickness or in Convalescence, including the support of special beds in Hospitals or in Convalescent Homes.

Progress in the wing – two guineas (personal) or three guineas (collected) per step.

(3) The Aged Centre Wing; Blue Badge – Design upright.

Membership – Personal contribution of twenty guineas, in one sum, or Personal contributions of five guineas, and collected list of twenty-five guineas while serving a stewardship, or, Personal contribution of five guineas after reaching the highest rank of the right wing. The funds of the Centre Division are

devoted to the care of the aged – comforting them in their declining years, and especially in collecting votes for the Masonic Charities for Aged Freemasons and their wives or widows.

Progress in the Division – five guineas personal, or ten guineas collected, per step

There were nine steps in each Division with each step entitling the donor to a specified number of votes at meetings of the Secret Monitor Benevolent Fund.

You will recall that the membership of the first three Grades of the Order of the Scarlet Cord was restricted to Fifteen, Eleven and Nine respectively: To fill a vacancy in the Fifteen and to be “Elected” a Companion of the Scarlet Cord (C.S.C.) it was necessary:

1. - Member of the OSM Benevolent Fund
2. - Prince of the Order, wearing full Prince’s regalia and a B.F.Badge

It was also desirable (*but could be waived by the Consistory concerned*)

1. - To be a Past Benevolent Fund Steward.
2. - Installed Supreme Ruler of a Conclave.

To fill a vacancy in the Eleven and be “Chosen” a Reader of the Scarlet Cord (R.S.C.) it was necessary:

1. – You are recommended from a C.S.C.
2. – Wearing Jewel of Grade 1 and a B.F.Badge

It was also desirable (*but could be waived by the Consistory concerned*)

1. – You are a Past Grand Steward
2. – You are a Commissioned Supreme Ruler
3. – Also a Grand Officer in the Order of the Secret Monitor

Duties – To assist in demonstrations of the Prince’s Degree Ceremony.

To fill a vacancy in the Nine and be “Promoted” a Fellow of the Scarlet Cord (F.S.C.) it was necessary:

1. – You are recommended from a R.S.C.
2. – Wearing Jewel of Grade 2, and wearing Red or Blue B.F.Badge
3. – You are a Supreme Ruler or P.S.R. in the Order of the Secret Monitor

It was also desirable (*but could be waived by the Consistory concerned*)

1. – To be a Grand Officer in the Order of the Secret Monitor
2. – To be a Past Grand Steward and a Past B.F.Steward

Duties – To assist at Conclaves of Mourning when desired.

To fill a vacancy in the Seven and be “Preferred” a Courtly Companion of the Scarlet Cord (C.C.S.C.) it was necessary:

1. – To be a Past S.R. who has installed a Supreme Ruler
2. – A Past Grand Steward in full regalia, with sash and sword.
3. – Wearing a F.S.C. Jewel
4. – Wearing prescribed dress and a Red or Blue B.F. Badge, and bearing garter (1)

It was also desirable:

1. – To be a Principal or Past Principal of a Consistory
2. – A Grand Officer in the O.S.M., in full regalia, with sash and sword.

Duties. – To conduct Installations in the O.S.M.

To fill a vacancy in the five and to be “Dedicated” a High Priest of the Scarlet Cord (H.P.S.C.) it was necessary:

1. – To be a Principal or Past Principal of a Consistory
2. – Wearing full regalia of Court of Assistants, with garter and Blue B.F.Badge
3. – Bearing Hat with red cord, jewel, and garter with Two.

It was also desirable:

1. – To be a Past President of the “Court of Assistants”.

Duties. – To conduct Consecrations.

For Arch Priest (A.P.S.C.), after presenting a Scroll of your Masonic Titles,; it was necessary: and could only be waived by a Dispensation from the “Court of Assistants”.

1. – To be a President or Past President of the “Court of Assistants”.
2. – To be a High Priest, in full regalia, with Blue B.F.Badge, jewel, and garter
3. – To be wearing a white robe
4. – Bearing a “ring of power” and garter with Three.

It was also desirable:

1. – To be a Past 1st Principal of a Royal Arch Chapter.

To be Knight of the Royal Order of the Scarlet Cord, (K.S.C.) after presenting a Scroll of your Masonic Titles and Coat of Arms, it was necessary:

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1. – To be wearing the full regalia of the “Court of Assistants”.
 2. – To be wearing the Blue B.F.Badge and O.S.M. Sash.
 3. – Bearing garter with Three, sword, and Hat with feather.
 4. – Bringing an Esquire bearing banneret with Coat of Arms and Jewel of a Knight.

It was also desirable:

1. – To provide a Knightly Robe and Scarlett Cord.

Meetings of the Court of Assistants, the Senatus and the Confedaratati were convened on the day before the meeting of the Grand Council and Grand Conclave Festival, and when these days coincided with a Benevolent Fund Festival the whole three-day convention was designated a Grand Festival. I referred earlier to the slow development of Consistories in which, you will recall, the first three Grades were worked. During the relatively short life of the Order there was only one Consistory in the British Isles – the Metropolitan Consistory – which met at 10, Duke Street. Sub-Consistories, which could only work the first two Grades, existed in the North of England, in South Africa, in Central India, in Madras and in Burma.

The rituals were based on incidents in the Wars of the Maccabees, and the ceremonies were elaborate with high-sounding titles for the High Officers. The Metropolitan Consistory worked regularly until 1914, went into abeyance for the period 1914-1918, was revived in 1919 but ceased operations in 1929. In that year it was resolved that “All ceremonial work in connection with the Royal Order of Knights of the Scarlet Cord should cease.

Chapter 2 in the Book of Joshua relates, in detail, the events on which the Order is based and, prior to revision of the Princes Degree, most of the story was required to be read as a charge to the candidate being Admitted. It is essentially one of mutual help and the Benevolent Fund, the particular interest of Philbrick, was instituted to help those of the Order of the Secret Monitor in time of need. The Royal Order of Knights of the Scarlet Cord was unquestionably designed to increase membership and, being inextricably linked to the Benevolent Fund Badge system, the financial power of the Fund.

Peter Glyn Williams

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