

HOLY ROYAL ARCH TRACING BOARD



In an attempt to standardise the design of lodge tracing boards the Duke of Sussex, the first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England and the Past Grand Master of the Moderns, commissioned the artist John Harris to harmonise the tracing boards by creating an official model for each degree including the Holy Royal Arch, a degree within the Moderns that had been controlled by the Craft up until 1817. John Harris, (1791-1873) came from an artistic family and was a painter of miniatures and an architectural draughtsman. He was initiated in 1818 and from the beginning was fascinated by the symbolic portrayals on tracing boards. He soon revolutionised the concept of the designs, which ultimately led to the standardisation of tracing boards throughout the constitution.

In 1823, somewhat business minded, Harris dedicated a set of his miniature tracing boards to the Duke of Sussex, the first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England. This act naturally popularised his designs and his tracing boards soon became fashionable and in demand by

the majority of lodges. A true breakthrough came when an invitation by the Emulation Lodge of Improvement was made for artists to submit designs for tracing boards. John Harris' designs won hands down and he never looked back. He produced a series of designs for tracing boards including the Royal Arch, which are used in Masonic ritual to help explain the symbolism and moral system of freemasonry. Harris's designs were widely adopted, and form the basis of many still in use today.

By 1856, Harris had become totally blind, and in 1860 Harris and his wife moved to the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution, where they stayed until his death in 1873.

As different Masonic jurisdictions established standardised written degree rituals the creation of new tracing board designs began to decrease and those mostly in use today are representations of the various designs produced by Bro John Harris between 1820 and 1850.