

FREEMASONRY FROM AD 1600 TO THE GRAND LODGE ERA

A SKETCH OF THE TRANSITION PERIOD

by

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There is such an abundance of evidence in proof of the continuity of Freemasonry during the period selected, that it is only necessary to study the special records of the old Lodges, happily still preserved, the Rolls of the "Old Charges", and especially the extant minutes of the Masons' Company of London, to be assured that the Freemasons of the present day are the lineal descendants of the operative builders, who in the 17th century, and earlier, admitted speculative or non-professional members.

The 17th century operative Masons were most favourable to the speculative element in their midst, and encouraged their admission to such an extent, that sometimes the Lodges consisted almost exclusively of brethren in no way connected with building. Several examples of this remarkable feature may be cited, such as the Lodge at Warrington in which Ashmole was initiated in 1646. An extraordinary instance of the preponderance of gentlemen in an operative Lodge, is met with at Aberdeen in 1670, for of forty-nine members registered in the "Mark Book" with their marks attached, not a dozen were operatives; the Master was a Tutor at Airth and Collector of the King's Customs, while several of his companions were noblemen or of the educated class.

The oldest Masonic minutes known are those of the senior Lodge in the world, viz., No 1 Edinburgh. They begin in the year 1599, the Lodge having continued at work, as the records testify, from then to now, thus overlapping the transition period and the final predominance of the speculative branch, by the formation of modern Grand Lodges. The monopoly of the operatives gradually disappeared, and Masonry itself became as free practically as Freemasonry is at the present time. A silent revolution was going on in the Craft throughout the 17th century, and what with the changes in Society generally, and the failure of the Companies to enforce regulation, which had become obsolete and unsuitable to the times, Masonry, as with other trades, had to alter its laws and customs accordingly.

The Lodge of Edinburgh and others in Scotland were legally governed during the period in question by the statutes of 1598-9, promulgated by William Schaw "Maister of wark, Wairden of ye Masons," of Royal appointment. There were three "Head Lodges" in the kingdom, as recognised in the code of 1599, which were described as Edinburgh "the first and principall ludge," Kinwinning "the second ludge", and Stirling "the third ludge". This trio still exists, and the Lodges are now on the roll of the Grand Lodge of Scotland as Nos. 1, 0 and 30 respectively.

Naturally several of the clauses in the above-named statutes relate to matters common to all the crafts, but others are of a distinctive character and most suggestive. The Lodge of Edinburgh was a kind of Metropolitan Grand Lodge, having control of the local, but before the 17th century ended, its rights were often violated or ignored, and Lodges were formed in its vicinity or jurisdiction, that it was powerless to prevent, although issuing fulminations that were still-born. The "Canongate Kilwinning" Lodge No. 2, was formed in 1677, as an offshoot from "Mother Lodge Kilwinning", and in 1688, a secession from the Lodge of Edinburgh resulted in the establishment of the "Canongate and Leith, Leith and Canongate" Lodge, now No. 5, and notwithstanding all the means used by the Mother Lodge, only one of the seceders was induced to return to the fold. Then, again, early in the 18th century, the journeymen were not satisfied with the masters' regulation and control; they seceded and started a Lodge on their own account, and what is more gained a victory over their powerful opponents, though Master Masons, by persisting in giving the "Mason Word" to neophytes, the prerogative previously of their superiors. Two of their number were imprisoned for contumacy, but an appeal to the Court ended in their being allowed, as per the "Decree Arbitral" of 1715, to assemble as a separate organisation, and esoterically -- i.e., to communicate the "word" -- as well as generally, to conduct their own Lodge, then and since known as the "Journeymen", now No. 8 on the roll. The Masters were fined a hundred pounds for their high-handed conduct, which fine has not yet been paid.

The attendance of Apprentices at the Lodge during the making of Fellow-crafts is confirmed by the minutes of 1601, 1606 and 1637, while the "Schaw Ordinances" provided for the presence of six Masters and two Apprentices, in like manner, on the making of Masters, a privilege subsequently assumed by the Incorporation. Operative Essays were obligatory in relation to both classes, Essay Masters being appointed, and also "intenders for instruction;" represented in Modern Lodges by the questions preparatory to promotion, and the proposers and seconders of candidates respectively.

The first minute of the Lodge of Edinburgh containing an entry concerning speculative membership is dated 8th June, 1600, and is the oldest of the kind known in Great Britain and Ireland. The Brother was John Boswell, Esq., the laird of Auchinleck, who attended as a member, and whose name and mark attested the minutes, along with twelve operatives who likewise agreed to the business transacted, and acquiesced in the same manner. When he joined we cannot tell. The head of the Lodge was generally styled "Deacon," while the "Warden" was the medium of communication with the "Warden General", who was a kind of Grand Master, the prototype of our modern Grand Lodge Rulers. William Schaw was styled "Chief Maister of Maissonis" in the 16th century and later.

In the 17th century, it was quite a common occurrence for noblemen and gentlemen to occupy the Chairs of Lodges, even if only Apprentices, as with the Earl of Cassillis, who in 1672 was Deacon of "Mother Lodge Kilwinning", being followed by Sir Alexander Cunninghame and the Earl of Eglintoune, also an

Apprentice. Harry Elphington, Tutor of Airth and Collector of the King's Customs, was Master of the Lodge of Aberdeen - now No. 1 - in 1670, the members of which were mostly speculatives, though an operative Lodge. Lord Strathallan was the Master or President of the Lodge of Dundee, -- known as the "Lady Luge of Dundee" in 1536. Other instances could also be cited.

The old Lodge of Kilwinning exercised jurisdiction even as far as Glasgow, according to the Code of 1599, and was to all intents and purposes a Provincial Grand Lodge, thus foreshadowing the present arrangement, whereby its R.W.M. for the time being occupies the honourable position of Provincial Grand Master of Ayrshire.

Then, again, the protectorate of the Craft in Scotland was hereditary in the St. Clair family, the Lairds of Roslin, being secured by charters of 1600 and 1628 circa, which led to the claim being made that they were Grand Masters, which the documents in no way countenance. The Lairds of Roslin were simply Patrons and Protectors of the "Masons and Hammermen" with other crafts, but that obsolete and purely honorary distinction was sufficient to secure the election in 1736, on sentimental grounds, of one of the family, as the first Grand Master of Scotland.

Other local magnates were appointed to the oversight of the Craftsmen in certain districts, such as Patrick Coipland of Udaucht as Warden of the "airt and craft of Maisonrie" over three sheriffdoms in Scotland in 1590. These were clearly the precursors of the general and local Craft bodies which sprang up during the 18th century in Great Britain and Ireland. But time will not permit any reference to such just now. This much, however, may be noted, that excepting the arrangement of separate Masonic degrees and ceremonies peculiar to the post Grand Lodge period, it is not easy to discover many important features of the Craft in the eighteenth century, which are not represented in the regulations and customs of the Scottish Craft in the present century.

Until the precise character of the Records of the Masons' Company of London was made known -- quite recently -- it was believed that the admission of Quarter Master General Moray, of the Scottish Army, at Newcastle on Tyne in 1641, by members of the Lodge of Edinburgh, was the earliest instance of the initiation of a "speculative" in England. Now, however, that the invaluable transactions of the before-mentioned Company are accessible, it is found that there was a speculative Lodge at work, under the wing of that body, the existing accounts of which go as far back as 1620. The meetings were termed "the Acception," and the candidates were received as "Accepted Masons;" the Company being then known as Free masons, though the prefix was dropped during the latter half of the 17th century. The dual character of the Company is established by reference to the accounts, for the actual minutes are missing prior to 1670. Beside those who obtained the "freedom of the Company" by patrimony or servitude, there were others who were admitted by redemption, and it is quite possible that being "accepted" by the Lodge, though not connected with the building trade, strengthened their application for the "freedom of the Company."

it appears to have been optional for the "accepted" brethren to join the Company, or for the members of the latter to enter the "Acception," but both financially and generally there was a most intimate connection between the two, as the Company received the balance, if any, after each "Acception" had been held.

This Lodge became so influential and important, that in the Inventory of 1663, and also in later ones, the names of the "Accepted Masons" are declared to be exhibited "in a faire enclosed frame with a lock and key." In the same Inventory was also "One book of the constitutions which Mr. Flood gave," and which was described in a subsequent list of 1676 as "the constitutions of the Accepted masons," as distinct from "One book of the Ancient Constitutions and Orders" of the Company. The Inventory of 1722 is still more explicit, the Constitutions of the Company being entered as of the year 1481, and the other "A Book wrote on parchment and bound or stitched in parchment containing an account of the Antiquity Rise and Progress of the Art and Mistery of Masonry." This latter was doubtless a MS. of the "Old Charges" but unfortunately it has not been heard of since the year 1839, when it is said to have contained "113 annals of the antiquity &c. of Masonry." The "Phillipps MSS" Nos 1 and 2 would answer to this description, and the first-noted has the name of Mr. Richard Bankes, a Member of the Masons' company, on the cover; the date of its caligraphy, however, does not answer, being of about the middle of the 17th century, therefore not old enough. Though not the original, which was doubtless much older, and used in the reception of the "Accepted Masons," it may be an exact transcript. The "G.W. Bain MS" has also an equal claim to be considered a representative of the missing book, having a similar text and qualifications. there are also other MSS with a different text from the "Phillipps," which may be copies of the original document, having the "New Articles," such as the "Grand Lodge MS No. 2," and the "Harleian No. 1942." These later regulations are quite suggestive of the rules in force for the "Accepted Masons," the term "Acception" is mentioned, and neophytes are termed "Accepted Free-Masons," while Certificates were provided just as in later times.

It is quite likely that the Company dropping the prefix "Free," and the speculative branch becoming independent, led to the union of the two prefixes as Free and Accepted Masons.

This is the Lodge that was visited by Elias Ashmole in 1682, for which he received a Summons, and which assembled in the Maosns' Hall, London, when six gentlemen were admitted into the Fellowship, four of whom were members of the Company. Nine of the "Acception" or Lodge attended, besides Ashmole, who says he was "the Senior Fellow among them." No particulars whatever of the ceremony are afforded, but subsequently they all dined "at the charge of the new-accepted Masons." All the nine Fellows were members of the Company, including the Master and the two Wardens.

It will thus be seen, that not a few customs of later days were anticipated in the 17th century, such as the use of Maosnic Certificates to aid in visitation, the

issue of Lodge Summonses, masons' marks used after the signatures, Essays and Intenders, as well as the promotion of good-fellowship.

The "General Regulations" of the premier Grand Lodge of England, printed in the year 1723, were for the use of "the Lodges in and about London and Westminster," being thus originally a Metropolitan organisation. At the time they were printed, there was a Provincial authority at work in the City of York, as a "time immemorial" Lodge, whose preserved records date from 1712, but the Lodge was a very old one at that time.

In Ireland, in like manner, there was a Grand Lodge holding its meetings in the Metropolis of that Country from 1725, and no doubt earlier; also a District or Grand Lodge, quite distinct, though not essentially different, assembling at Cork, for the Province of Munster, and having subordinate Lodges. these surely were anticipated in the 17th century by the Metropolitan Lodge of Scotland, which Masonically in olden time, governed the City, and "Mother Lodge Kilwinning," which was in charge of quite a large district, and authorised dependent Lodges, one of which is the "Canongate Kilwinning" of 1677.

I claim that Edinburgh and Kilwinning were thus, in not a few important respects, the Masonic prototypes of the London and York organisations, as well as of the Dublin and Cork Grand Lodges.

As the Masonic bodies in Ireland adopted the usage of Deacons long before those in England, which officers, nominally at least if not precisely as to duties, had been familiar to Scotland for centuries, it is just possible that Ireland was more indebted to North Britain for its Masonic laws and customs than has hitherto been recognised or acknowledged, and thus proportionately less to England accordingly.

whilst it is true that the Craft records in England are not so numerous and valuable as those of Scotland, some of the existing minutes and other indications of Masonic activity are of great importance, as already indicated, and though we do not know when and by whom these 17th century Lodges were originally started or constituted, they assuredly had much in common. Judging from the fact that Dr. Desaguliers, Past Grand Master of England, visited the "Lodge of Edinburgh" in 1721, and having been found to be "duly qualified in all points of Masonry, was received as a Brother," there seems no reason to suppose that Freemasonry of the 17th century in England, as regards essentials, differed from that of Scotland.

Esoterically there is much to be said as to the Lodges in England and Scotland, but that must be reserved to another time. I may note, however, in passing, that the "Mason Word" was acknowledged to be given in Scotland, and dues paid therefor, as late as 1715, and whilst a gratifying reticence is generally observed, an incomplete minute of 1702 at Haughfoot requires very careful consideration. It reads "of entrie as the apprentice did. Leaving out (the common juudge - Probably an operative "test"-) -- they then whisper the word as before, and the Master Mason grips his hand in the ordinary way."

It does not appear to me that this entry calls for any remark just now, as it tells its own tale consistently with other records, in relation to the simplicity of the Masonic ceremonial at that time.

The Presbytery of Kelso in 1652 sustained the action of the Rev. James Ainslie in becoming a Freemason, declaring that "there is neither sinne nor scandale in that word" -- i.e., the "Mason Word".

Along with the "Harleian MS" (No. 2054, British Museum), is a scrap of paper, which cites, "sevrall words and signes of a free Mason" as a portion of an obligation. this MS of the "Old Charges" is in the handwriting of Randle Holme (born 1627), the author of the "Academy of Armory", printed in 1688, wherein he says, "I Cannot but Honor the Fellowship of the Masons because of its Antiquity; and the more as being a Member of that Society, called Free-Masons." The Oath that was taken by the Brethren during this period, as given in various copies of the "Old Charges" &c., is not indicative of the separate degrees of the post Grand Lodge era.

A remarkable Register of gentlemen and others, with the MS just referred to -- Harleian No. 2054 -- states what each "giue for to be a free Mason." This is also in the handwriting of the same Randle Holme, and apparently belonged to a speculative Lodge at Chester.

The references to the Craft in Plot's "Natural History of Staffordshire," published in 1686, are of a most important character, and should be carefully studied, as they concern admissions into the Fraternity, the reading of the "Old Charges", with prominent portions of their text, and the early history of the Society.

There are many ways of proving the existence of the Craft during the seventeenth century, but the foregoing must suffice for the present, the evidence being so plentiful, that it is quite embarrassing to make a selection. It cannot, in my opinion, be questioned, that modern Grand Lodges are the direct representatives of the old Lodges previously existing, many of which still continue working.

the records of one Scottish family offer eloquent testimony, to the continuous working of the Craft for centuries, as enshrined in the valuable Perth Charter, and in the "Lodge of Edinburgh" records. From these documents the following facts are gleaned. John Mylne came to Perth from the "North Countrie" and became the King's Master Mason and Master of the "Lodge at Scone" -- now No. 3 Scotland. He was succeeded by his son, whose name is mentioned in the remarkable "Contract" of 1658, who by His Majesty's desire entered "King James the sixt as ffreeman, measone and fellow craft." His third son John was a member of the "Lodge of Edinburgh," and Master Mason to Charles I., 1631-6; John Mylne the younger, his eldest son, succeeding, became in 1633 a Fellow Craft in No. 1, and was Deacon eleven times within thirty years. Alexander Mylne was entered an apprentice to his uncle in 1653, and was made a fellow-craft in 1660, becoming Warden in 1663-4, and Deacon several times later on. then William Mylne was entered an apprentice in 1721, and was Master in 1735, representing the Lodge at the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland the

following year, and holding the office of Grand Treasurer from 1737 to 1755. Another William was elected and initiated in the same Lodge in 1750, and a Robert Mylne became a member in 1754, receiving the three degrees in that year. He died in 1811 and "was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, having been surveyor to that edifice for fifty years." With his decease, terminated the family's connection with the "Lodge of Edinburgh", which had extended through five successive generations, and for a still longer period as craftsmen.

There are two Lodges of the pre Grand Lodge era, which also overlap that important period, which really require whole Papers to themselves, to do their proceedings anything like justice. A few words about each of these will fitly conclude my Address.

the records of the old Alnwick Lodge were brought to the notice of the Craft by me in 1871, and are of special value, not only because of their antiquity, but also in relation to their text. As with so many of these venerable Lodges, its origin is unknown, but it may be accepted as of the 17th century. A copy of the "Old Charges" precedes the "Orders to be observed by the company and Fellowship of Free Masons, att A Lodge held att Alnwick Sepr 29 1701 being the Genrl head meeting day." Apprentices had to be entered and be given their "Charge" within "one whole Year after" admission, and on the expiry of their term of seven years were "Admitted or Accepted butt uon the ffeast of St. Michael the Archangell." The Master and Wardens were elected by the members, and the frequent entries "made free", "made free Masons" or "made free brothers" are very suggestive and important. On 20th January, 1708, it was ordered that no member "should appear at the Lodge to be kept on St. John's Day in Christmas without his apron & Common Square fixt in the Belt," and to be similarly attired on attending Church on that day, when a special sermon was to be preached. Although the Lodge was active far on in the 18th century, it never, so far as is known, joined the Grand Lodge of England, although a Warrant issued by that Body in 1779 for Alnwick may have been applied for by some of its Brethren. It is of special interest to remember that on Christmas Day in 1755, Mr. "George Henderson of Alnwick. visiting Bro from Canongate Kilwinning Lodge" is duly noted in the minutes; he was initiated in the northern Lodge in 1751, receiving the two higher degrees on Nov 20th 1754. There is no mention of separate Masonic ceremonies in the minutes, -- 1703 to 1756, -- and the Lodge was operative from first to last, the proceedings of the modern Grand Lodge and its subordinate Lodges being entirely ignored.

The old operative Lodge at Swalwell, in its early records, had much in common with its senior of Alnwick, its "Orders of Antiquity" and its "Apprentice and General Orders" being virtually reproductions of still earlier "Old Charges." the three "ffraternal signs" are mentioned, and the minutes generally from the third decade of the 18th century are of considerable value and interest. the members accepted a Charter from the Grand Lodge of England in 1735, being now, and for a long time past, known as the "Lodge of Industry," No. 48 Gateshead. It was

thus another link in the union between the Grand Lodge and its operative ancestors.

It is the fashion of some to raise objections to our claim as being "ancient", as well as "free and accepted" Masons, but I trust that the facts herein submitted, will "at once and for ever" prove, that our beloved Society is fully entitled to the antiquity so long assumed by the Fraternity.

Wm. James Hughan

"Dunscore"

Torquay,

Jan 19th, 1904