THE OPERATIVE LEGACY WITHIN SCOTTISH FREEMASONRY

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It has been suggested by some that stonemasons have no connection whatsoever with modern Freemasonry.

For example: *The second one, that medieval stonemasons developed the Craft for their own moral improvement, is a theory that has found acceptance in virtually every quarter, Masonic and non-Masonic. Nevertheless, despite the apparent logic of this idea and the large number of books that have promoted this idea over many generations we found it difficult to substantiate once we considered it in depth. For a start, despite rigorous searching, we were completely unable to find any records to show the medieval stonemasons' guilds existed at all in England.*

The Hiram Key by Christopher Knight & Robert Lomas

Whilst this might be true of England, as suggested by the above quotation, it does not apply in Scotland. Scotland is known as the Stone Country; all its older buildings, with very few exceptions, are constructed from stone. Aberdeen, for example is known as *The Granite City*. During the Victorian era the then government came up with a new idea for a stealth tax (some things never change!) - a tax on bricks. When the first sums of money began to arrive in London, England, it was immediately noticed by the powers that be that there was hardly anything coming from Scotland. Initially believing that this was simply Scots tardiness some time elapsed before it was appreciated that no money worth speaking of was ever going to come from north of the border. Tax officials were despatched with strict instructions to collect the tax due. However, on arriving in Scotland the officials discovered the reason why no tax on bricks had been paid - the Scots did not then make bricks. The few that were produced were for decorative purposes rather than buildings.

Before proceeding further I wish to make an important point about the use of the word 'mason', especially when discussing Scotland. Some people have been heard to say, with evident pride, *the masons built Rosslyn Chapel*, or some similar statement. Ask a man in the street today what he thinks of when he hears others talking about *masons* and *the masons*, and almost always the reply will be that it is Freemasons who are being discussed. This is very unhelpful when talking about stonemasons and stonemasonry and Freemasons and Freemasonry. It is suggested therefore everyone be encouraged to use the terms Stonemasons and non-stonemasons. Although this is rather cumbersome it makes it absolutely clear exactly what one means. End of slight digression!

The Grand Lodge of Scotland (GLoS) was founded on St Andrew's Day, 30 November 1736. That is 19 years after the Grand Lodge of England and 11 years after the Grand Lodge of Ireland. The reasons for this delay may well lie in the different circumstances that existed in Scotland. Invitations had been sent to 100 lodges which then existed in Scotland. Unfortunately many have disappeared, their only trace being their names recorded in scattered records. Of these 100, only 33 lodges chose to send representatives to the inaugural meeting. Twelve of the number declined to have anything further to do with this *new fangled* body called the GLoS.

The new body was therefore off to a very shaky start with 79% of Scottish lodges, although not actively opposing it, declining to participate. This is at first sight a pretty damning verdict on the GLoS. When one looks at the nature of the lodges concerned, or more accurately the members of the lodges, we can suggest a reason. The 21 lodges which supported the formation of GLoS were mainly lodges whose membership was made up either of stonemasons and those that were not, or the membership was entirely made up of non-stonemasons. The membership of the 12 lodges which withdrew after attending the inaugural meeting appears to have been made up of stonemasons with a very few who were not.
By implication the 79 lodges which did not attend were also stonemasons' lodges. The reasons for this division lie at the root of Scottish Freemasonry, and are reflected in Scottish Freemasonry to this day.
Perhaps a question will serve to clarify the problem:

Why did those who founded GLoS, who were not, in the main, stonemasons, want this non-operative (or speculative) body to have jurisdiction over stonemasons' lodges? Or, putting it in today's context: Would the Grand Lodge of Tasmania claim jurisdiction over the men that build homes and offices in Hobart? That is what GLoS was trying to do in 1736. Exactly why is unclear. It may have been that there were already so many non-stonemasons who were members of lodges that GLoS felt able to claim them as their *own*. A more powerful argument is that those who were not stonemasons but who had joined their lodges were well aware that the origins of what they were calling Freemasonry had developed from stonemasons' lodges and their traditions and practices. Therefore, all such lodges were in effect proto-Masonic and fell within the jurisdiction of this new body.

For whatever reason, GLoS tried, and failed, to *take over* these lodges. Many of these lodges remained independent and ceased to exist without ever becoming a daughter lodge of Grand Lodge. Sadly, little is known of these lodges. However, a number survived and continued an independent existence for a very long time. It was not until 1891 that the last of these stonemasons' lodges joined the Grand Lodge of Scotland. In Scotland it is found that prior to the existence of any Grand Lodges there were three types of lodges:

* Stonemasons' lodges where the membership was composed entirely of stonemasons;
* Lodges where there was a mixture of stonemasons and non-stonemasons (the balance between the two varied, depending on where the lodge was located); and
* Lodges in which there were no stonemasons whatsoever.

This last *type* would today be unhesitatingly described as *speculative* (a description I dislike, especially in a Scottish context.) The non- stonemasons' lodge is represented by one lodge - although there were probably a couple of others - the Lodge at Haughfoot, which was established by members of the local gentry in 1702. Curiously, this lodge never joined GLoS, something in light of the above it would have seemed quite natural for it to do.

Not only, therefore, was GLoS rejected by the majority of stonemasons' lodges but at least one non-stonemasons' lodge also had doubts. The Haughtfoot Lodge continued an independent *speculative* existence until it ceased to exist in 1764. In other words, all forms, or types, of lodge existed in Scotland prior to what is termed the Grand Lodge era. It can be seen, therefore, that GLoS was born in a quite different situation from that which existed in London when the Grand Lodge of England was established in 1717.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to trace the *operative legacy* within Scottish Freemasonry and thereby give a brief outline as to why Scottish Freemasonry is quite different, not only in origin, but also in character. In a paper this size it is not possible to provide a detailed examination that the subject clearly merits. During the first 150 years of its life, Grand Lodge granted more than 200 Charters (Warrants), and 23 of that number were for the creation of Stonemasons' lodges. An extract of the Charter of the Operative Lodge of Dumfries, founded in 1776, reads:

> *To all and sundry to whose knowledge these presents shall come, greetings, in God everlasting. Whereas upon application to the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons for the Kingdom of Scotland by [a list of names is given here] all operative and Master masons residing in an about the town of being willing to associate together for the true end of Masonry as an Operative body only, they humbly made application to the Grand Lodge to grant them a Charter*

This is further evidence that GLoS considered the origins of Freemasonry to lie with stonemasons' lodges. Perhaps more important is that by this time some stonemasons believed GLoS was the supreme body over all types of lodges. This suggests that, despite the continued existence of independent lodges of stonemasons, the jurisdiction of GLoS was becoming accepted by those who had previous rejected that authority.

The wording is also interesting and reveals that there were differences in practice between stonemasons' lodges and those where non-stonemasons predominated, specifically relating to ritual. It is known from other research (see, for example, the paper on the *Airlie MS)* that prior to c 1725 stonemasons lodges possessed only two ceremonials, one for the Entered Apprentice and the other for the Fellow of Craft (or Master Mason) As many stonemasons lodges did not join the new Masonic (or Grand Lodge) *system*, they had no knowledge of the third degree introduced during the 1720's, by what we now call *speculative freemasons*, in London. The wording of the Charter (there are many others with the same or similar wording) seems to suggest that the lodge was intended to bring together stonemasons and Master Masons, by then meaning those who possessed the third degree - otherwise why mention it so specifically? In the same extract, those

petitioning GLoS declare they will *associate together for the true end of Masonry as an Operative body only*. It is unclear if this is a mutual, cryptic, acknowledgement by both that the *true end of Masonry* lies with stonemasons and their lodges. In the mid-18th century, Scotland had four types of lodges:

Lodges with no stonemasons as members
Lodges with only stonemasons as members
Lodges with a combination of both (in varying proportions)
Operative lodges created by the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

This apparently confused situation can partly be explained by the division created in 1736 when the majority of stonemasons' lodges were not in favour of the creation of GLoS. There were three characteristics of the stonemasons' lodges that highlight their differences and help explain why many eventually joined the GLoS.

As visiting between lodges has always been a part of the culture of Scottish Freemasonry, lodges which remained independent of GLoS became increasingly marginalised.

GLoS prohibited members of its daughter lodges from visiting independent lodges. For example: - Lodge Mother Kilwinning resumed its independence in 1743 and remained independent until 1808. Although the story has been related many times elsewhere, a brief explanation of the circumstances might be helpful.

When GLoS was formed, it decided to create a Roll of Lodges which had agreed to accept its authority. In order to do this, lodges were requested to submit documentary evidence of their earliest existence. The Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) produced its first minute dated 31 July 1599. Lodge Mother Kilwinning could only produce similar evidence from 1642. The Lodge of Edinburgh was placed at the head of the Roll and was, therefore, by implication acknowledged as being the oldest lodge in Scotland. The members of Mother Kilwinning *knew* that they were at least as old as The Lodge of Edinburgh, if not the oldest lodge, but in the absence of evidence could not prove this to GLoS. The dispute became so intense that in 1743 Mother Kilwinning felt it had no alternative but to withdraw from GLoS.

As Independent lodges could not be visited, officially, by GLoS lodges, it may be that such lodges came to be seen by the majority as being in some way *irregular*. Perhaps in response to this increasing isolation, some independent lodges began to grant Charters which created new lodges which were also independent. Mother Kilwinning was the most prolific in this, granting Charters to a total of 44 lodges prior to 1808. Four were not even in Scotland. Mother Kilwinning was certainly initially a lodge of stonemasons, but by the 18th century it had a mixed membership, with non-stonemasons numerically superior.

The dispute regarding the seniority of lodges was essentially a dispute as to which *stonemasons'* lodge was the oldest, Edinburgh or Kilwinning. The fact that the dispute took place between lodges (with GLoS attempting, and failing, to arbitrate successfully) which were originally those of stonemasons shows that all concerned had no doubt that the origins of Freemasonry lay with stonemasons' lodges. This is a crucial point in understanding how modern Freemasonry developed. Although Mother Kilwinning had particular reasons for competing with GLoS in the granting of Charters, at least one other independent stonemasons' lodge, the Lodge of Melrose St John, is known to have granted Charters (to five other lodges), albeit much later than those granted by Mother Kilwinning.

Are these examples of a belated reaction to the decline of the original stonemasons' form of Freemasonry?

There is one other clue worth considering. As mentioned previously, the third degree appears to have been the invention of *speculative* Freemasons and was unknown to independent stonemasons' lodges, as they had no experience of that ceremonial, being outside the new Grand Lodge *system* of Freemasonry. This would have been another major impediment to stonemasons visiting GLoS lodges. Those independent lodges which joined GLoS were then exposed to the third degree and adopted it, although grudgingly, as it was considered by them to be an innovation in Freemasonry.

In other words, a *speculative* ceremony was imposed on stonemasons -something they did not particularly like. It is intriguing to note that the Mark degree first appears, in Scotland (1770), in a stonemasons' lodge, Lodge Dumfries Kilwinning. The degree is subsequently mentioned in the records of the Lodge of Banff and the Lodge of Journeymen Masons (Edinburgh); both were also stonemasons' lodges.

Is it possible that this ceremony was one long disused by stonemasons? There is some slight evidence that The Lodge of Edinburgh expected members to have a mark. The first mention of this was in 1600, when six stonemason members of the Lodge of Edinburgh appended their marks in the Minute Book. In 1609 another reference to a mark is made. There are no further references in that lodge until much later (1713) when the lodge:-

> *... did pass and receave Andrew Miller, [stone] mason, a felloe-craft, who promised to be faithful in that station and took his mark and payed therfor accordingly.*

Whether this meant that he took his mark as part of the ceremony of the fellow-craft is not clear. The ***Lockit Bulk*** (1670) of the Lodge of Aberdeen shows that all the lodge members (many of whom were not stonemasons) had a mark which was drawn in considerable detail in the lodge records. These admittedly scant references do suggest that something was going on regarding a particular mark being ascribed to a particular individual. The possible connection to the ceremony of the fellow craft will be referred to later.

Of importance here is that when the Mark degree first appears in Scotland -it is first recorded in England in 1769 - it not only does so in stonemasons' lodges but the content itself is avowedly *operative*, albeit of a mythical nature. One might wonder if those of a stonemason's background took some pleasure in introducing a ceremony into Scotland in repayment of the earlier imposition of the *speculative* third degree.

This confused picture of what was happening, in Scotland during the 18th century confirms, if nothing else, that the *shape* of Scottish Freemasonry was being moulded by stonemasons versus non-stonemasons, and part of that process was who possessed the true *soul* of Freemasonry and what ceremonials could be considered as genuine. It took some considerable time, but GLoS did eventually resolve matters. In 1860 GLoS changed its definition of St John's Freemasonry to mean:

> *The Degrees of Freemasonry authorised and governed by Grand Lodges are those of Entered Apprentice, Felloe of Craft (including the Mark), and Master Mason and no other.*

St John's Freemasonry had previously always been claimed to consist of three degrees only. By including the Mark with that of the Fellow of Craft, GLoS could maintain the claim, if not the fact, that Freemasonry did consist only of three degrees. This re-definition of Freemasonry marks the end of the process of harmonising the different types of lodges which had existed in Scotland. By 1860 there remained only one independent stonemasons' lodge, the Lodge of Melrose.

The incorporation of the Mark degree into Craft Freemasonry was a victory for those who treasured the *genuine* (whether in belief or fact) origins of Freemasonry - that of the stonemasons.

There remains one important aspect of lodges which will shed further light on the unique nature of Scottish Freemasonry. It has been seen that the traditions, antiquity, even the ritual used by stonemasons' lodges, had a profound effect on the development of Freemasonry. However, there is one point that must be made very clear. The stonemasons were Freemasons, and their stonemasons' lodges were Masonic lodges. This duality only existed in Scotland and, surprisingly, it continued to exist well into the 19th century, and remnants of it can still be identified today. What then did stonemasons bring to their Masonic lodges which made them unique? The most obvious element was that their lodges played an active part in seeking work for their stonemason members. There is one example which will serve to illustrate this very well. Washington, the capital city of the United States of America, was named after its first president, George Washington. He was born in Westmoreland County on 22 February 1732. His father died when he was 12 years old and the family farm on the Rappahannock River was the total estate. His education was short and rudimentary, ending when he was sixteen. His elder brother, Lawrence, died in 1752 and, as a consequence, George succeeded to his brother's position as Major and Adjutant-General in charge of one of the military divisions of the State. Soon after, the Seven Years War (1755-1763) broke out in Europe and it spilled over into North America (where it was know as the *French and Indian War*) and Washington, by now Lieutenant-Colonel, was charged with holding the French until fresh forces arrived from Britain. However, he determined to attack, and was beaten back by superior French forces. He was demoted for this failure and resigned his post in disgust.

On 4 November 1752 George Washington was initiated in Fredericksburg Lodge. He was Passed on 3 March and Raised on 4 August 1753. It Is known that a Simon Fraser was a visitor to that lodge during that year, which shows that Washington had some contact with Scottish Freemasonry from the beginning of his Masonic career.

The lodge was what is known as a *self-starter* - a lodge formed by Freemasons without a Charter from a Grand Lodge. It should be remembered that 250 years ago communication was much slower. In retrospect, it is commendable that Freemasons decided to form a lodge even though it would, today, be considered illegal and clandestine, for had they not done so then the first American President might never have become a Freemason.

The remainder of Washington's life has been well documented and need not be repeated here except for that which relates to the subject under discussion.

Most people are aware that Freemasonry played a part in the formation of the United States of America, although perhaps not as much as some might wish or claim. For example, although George Washington's lodge at Fredricksburg was granted a Charter by GLoS in 1758, it would be dangerous to *claim* him as a Scottish Freemason, since he was initiated in 1752, when the lodge did not hold a Charter (although perhaps the Scots would *spiritually* claim him as a Scottish Freemason).

Although members of Scottish lodges played an important part in the Revolutionary War (how many are aware, for example, that Paul Revere was a member, indeed Secretary, of a Scottish lodge?), it is not the purpose to details this aspect of Scottish Masonic history here, but to focus directly on the stonemason/Freemason connection.

In 1791 Washington personally selected the site where his house was to be situated in the capital city of Washington, and James Hoburn, an architect from Ireland, was appointed to draw up the working plans. The foundation stone was laid in a Masonic ceremony in 1792 (Washington was not present but he did personally lay the foundation stone of the Capitol building on 18 September 1793 in another Masonic ceremony). The President's house could not be constructed from wood, which was abundant, but there were few stonemasons available. That fact must have occupied the minds of those in charge, even before any decision as to the design or location had been decided.

It can be no coincidence that James Traquair, a member of the Lodge of Journeymen Masons No.8, in Edinburgh, was in America by 1790. Traquair is recorded as being a member of the lodge as early as 1783. The lodge records show that in 1784 he paid sixpence every quarter, as was required by all members. From 1785 to 1788 his name continued to be recorded on the Roll of Members but no payments were entered against his name. This was unusual, since other members who failed to pay their quarterly dues were removed from the Roll after two years. The entry for the year 1790 showed James Traquair still on the Roll but, on this occasion, beside his name was written *america*. This continued until 1795 - in 1794 and 1795 the word *abroad* was written against his name but the 1795 entry was struck out. It is clear that those planning and arranging to build the city of Washington, recognised the shortage of skilled stonemasons. It seems that Brother Washington ordered that stonemasons be invited from Europe to undertake his Grand Design. He was even more specific. Stonemasons from Scotland were asked to undertake the work.

Exactly how he knew who to approach is not known for certain but it is highly likely that he, or his advisors, had met James Traquair, and it was probably he who arranged for members of the lodge to go to America. It is known that in 1791, or soon after, at least six other members of the lodge migrated to America and were employed in building the president's house.

Their names and dates of initiation were: Alexander Crawford (1747 – Master in 1782), George Walker (1783), George Thomson (1788) James White (1788) Alexander Scott (1770) and James Mcintosh (1788). They were all present at the Foundation Stone laying in 1792. The building took some years to complete because the six stonemasons found it difficult to find anyone of sufficient skill to assist them in their work. There was plenty of unskilled labour available and they chose the best to train as stonemasons. It is recorded that, initially, they were instructed to train slaves in their craft, whereupon they went on strike. Of course, they could not explain that for them stonemasonry equalled Freemasonry (and vice versa), and to train slaves as stonemasons, by implication, also meant providing them with Masonic secrets, and to impart Masonic lore to those who did not own their own bodies was forbidden.

This must go down as the most unusual labour dispute in history, whereby the cause of the dispute could not be explained and therefore no negotiations could take place. However, the pragmatism of the Scots soon won out and they resolved the dispute by agreeing to train other men as stonemasons, provided they were not slaves. To overcome the problem of the Masonic element, a lodge was formed and the men initiated into

Freemasonry. But even with the addition of more stonemasons, the building was not completed before the death of George Washington in 1799.

On 1 November 1800 John Adams (1735-1826) arrived in Washington to take up residence in the new building. In 1814, during the American war (1812 - 1815), British forces invaded the United States and attacked Washington. The city was sacked and many buildings set afire, including the home of the President. However, so well built was the President's house that the fire merely caused the roof to collapse, leaving the walls standing. After the British forces withdrew, the damage was repaired. The roof was replaced and, in order to disguise the damage of smoke and soot, the building was repainted white. So, whenever you see the President of the United States standing on the White House lawn, making an important announcement, remember that the building behind him was built by Scottish Freemasons

During the presidency of Brother Harry S Truman (1984-1972), the White House was stripped down to its foundations. Each foundation stone was seen to bear a mason's mark. By comparing photographs of these marks with those recorded in the Mark Book of the Lodge of Journeymen Masons No 8, not only could individual stonemason-Freemasons who travelled from Edinburgh to Washington be identified, but also the precise stones they cut for the White House foundations.

Perhaps it is fitting that the last words should be those of the White House's first resident, John Adams, writing to his wife, Abigail, 2 November 1800:

> *Before I end my letter, 1 pray Heaven to bestow the best of Blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise Men ever rule under this roof.*

This is one example of the connection between stonemasonry and Freemasonry in Scotland. There are others. Scottish stonemason-Freemasons also exported their skills to places such as Jamaica and Russia, but those details must wait for another occasion.

The operative legacy within Scottish Freemasonry continued in its most obvious sense until 1962. In that year the Grand Lodge of Scotland realised that there were a handful of lodges in Scotland which were actively discriminating against men who were not stonemasons. In other words these lodges, in an attempt to maintain a connection with their origins, were seeking only candidates who were stonemasons and would not admit men from other professions. While having mixed feelings on the matter, it was clear to Grand Lodge that this form of discrimination was contrary to the ethos of Scottish Freemasonry, and these lodges were instructed to cease this form of discrimination. This coincided with a dramatic decline in traditional building practices in Scotland, with the introduction of modern steel-frame construction techniques from America. But these lodges can often be identified by the use of the word *operative* in their title, and many do try to maintain a connection with their stonemason origins by recruiting primarily from men who are engaged in the building industry.

There are other, less obvious, practices within Scottish Freemasonry which remind us of the *operative legacy*. For example, the title of the grandmaster of the Grand Lodge of Scotland is the Grand Master Mason, which reflects the stonemason connection at the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Other manifestations include the fact that Scottish Freemasons wear their aprons under their jackets, and the flaps of their aprons are semi-circular rather than the speculative' triangular flap of most other Masonic constitutions. The gavel (a small hammer) is commonly used by the Master and Wardens in Masonic lodges, but in Scotland the stonemason's maul is used, as a reminder of the operative connection. This very different history of Freemasonry in Scotland has imbued Freemasonry in that country with a quite different character from that which exists elsewhere.

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