

## **An Introduction to the Royal Order of Scotland**

**By Bro R H Montgomery**

There are several Masonic myths about the Royal Order of Scotland:-

1. "That it is the oldest Masonic organisation." Not true, but it is the oldest of the "Other Orders."
2. "That it has the oldest Masonic ritual." Only half true – it does have the oldest material in its ritual, but it is not Masonic in origin.

The Order contains material rejected by the Grand Lodge of England on its establishment in London in 1717, and in particular the degree called "Harodim of Kilwinning" which was being worked in London in 1724.

Even though the London people did not know the meaning of the word "Harodim", they did recognize the Scottish origin of speculative freemasonry, as did their Grand Lodge of 1717 (something which their successors have studiously ignored for the last 200 years) and tried to relate the degree back to a supposed origin in Scotland. The working came to Scotland in the late 1700s and was then named the "Royal Order of Scotland" and was recognised as compatible with craft freemasonry.

The working of the Harodim degree was strongest in North East England, particularly Northumberland and the ritual standardised in 1841 contains many Northumbrian influences. It also contains material from a religious poem of 1586 and some of the language, particularly in the verse parts is even older, but this material is NOT Masonic, operative or speculative, in origin.

The "history" told in the ritual relating back to the time of King David 1 and Robert the Bruce, and Kilwinning is also fanciful. The relationship is just historically and geographically impossible. One reference, of French origin, has "Mount" Kilwinning. While Kilwinning is in gently rolling countryside, there is nothing like a mount – the perpetrator of this did not realise that "Kil" meant church, therefore "Church of St Winning."

The King of the Scots is the Hereditary Grand Master and a seat is always kept vacant in the East for him. But there is no evidence that any Scottish King had anything to do with Masonry, operative or speculative, till the Schaw Statutes of 1598.

The Order has two degrees – Heredom of Kilwinning and Knight of the Rosy Cross – the latter suggesting some relationship with the 18<sup>th</sup> degree (Rose Croix) of the Ancient and Accepted Rite.

One peculiarity of the Order is that the tessellated pavement is processed anti-clockwise, thereby negating much of the moralizing that has been done on the clock-wise processing of the Craft degrees.

A feature of the Heredom degree is that the candidate has to have a characteristic by which he is known – some virtue, or an attribute of his life or person – thus I am "Hugh Research." Much of the work is carried out in question and answer form, some of it in quaint old verse. Many old Scottish names are used – such as "Icolmkill" for "Iona" – and many obscure biblical names of difficult pronunciation. It is a distinctly Christian ritual and even the Arab names have a biblical origin.

The candidate undertakes a journey to find enlightenment and this involves a castle, a dungeon, and the value of good works etc. This is straight out of medieval morality plays, which lingered longest in Northumberland.

What is the meaning of the word "Heredom"? Also previously "Harodim" and even "Harradin" (an evil tempered women!) There has been a lot of twisted conjecture in the English Masonic research literature, but all that was required was reference to a Scots dictionary instead of an English one. The "dom" part is the same as in "kingdom" or "dukedom" - i.e. the "realm of." "Here" was a Scottish word for "Chief" or "Leader", so really the closest meaning is "chieftainship."

The second ceremony is said to contain elements formerly used in the admission to the ancient Order of the Thistle (not the revival of 1687).

Regalia: Our apron with a triangular flap is somewhat unusual in being wider at the bottom than the top. It is tied by a tasselled cord. There are 2 sashes, called cordons or baldricks, with an emblem at the end of each; a jewel in the form of a star; and an armband with which this Provincial Grand Lodge has had some input. It is derived from a garter formerly worn with knee breeches, a tradition continued by those wearing a kilt, but is now worn on the arm only and is designated a “strap.”

In the absence of a King of the Scots, the Order is led by a “Deputy Grand Master and Governor” and a Grand Lodge. The present Deputy Grand Master and Governor is Sir Archibald Orr-Ewing, former Grand Master Mason, Grand Lodge of Scotland, who took over from Lord Elgin in 2009. Each group like ours is a “Provincial Grand Lodge” and our leader is Provincial Grand Master called in the Lodge-room “Tirshatha,” There is no intermediate level of administration between Grand Lodge and us.

We were the first Provincial Grand Lodge in New Zealand in 1919. There is now another in Christchurch and 2 in the North Island. We meet 3 times a year on a Saturday afternoon and current dues are \$40.00 per year.

Most of our ritual is a series of lectures, which we perform from the printed book but some Provincial Grand Lodges require some or all of it to be done from memory.

In Britain, the order is looked upon as being very exclusive – you can’t apply to join, you have to be invited. The minimum requirement for admission according to Grand Lodge law is to be a master mason of 5 years standing, but most Provincial Grand Lodges require a candidate to be Past Masters.

The Royal Order of Scotland is an important link to the early days of speculative Freemasonry before the era of Grand Lodges and a study of its ritual is most productive.

R. Hughes Montgomery  
4/9/2010