

The first recorded initiation in England

"At Neucastell the 20 day off May, 1641. The quilk day ane serten number off Mester and others being lafule conveyned, doeth admit Mr the Right Honera bell Mr Robert Moray, General quarter Mr to the Armie of Scotian, and the same bing aproven be the hell Mester off the Mesone of the Log off Edenroth, quherto they heave set to ther handes or markes. A. Hamilton, R. Moray, Johnne Mylln. James Hamilton."

(The following paper was read at the September meeting of the Lodge by Wor. Bro. Ray Douglas)

Thus runs the entry of the first ascertained recorded Masonic initiation on English soil into Speculative Freemasonry. It is the record of the initiation of one of the most remarkable men of his time. His name, by writers other than himself - for he always signed his name in bold characters as R. Moray - is spelt variously as Moray, Murray, and Murrey, and a singular mistake occurs in the standard edition of Evelyn's Diary, where the entries occur as Murray, while in the Correspondence, the only letter that appears from Moray is, of course, signed in the correct manner, with the result that both forms appear in the General Index. In Chester's Registers of Westminster, he is described as a son of Sir Robert Moray of Craigie, by a daughter of George Halket, of Pitferran, but Burke's History of the Landed Gentry and other authoritative works of reference state that he was a son of Sir Mungo Murray, and this undoubtedly is correct.

Sir Robert Moray was a descendant of an ancient and noble Highland family. He was educated partly at the University of St. Andrew's and partly in France, in which country he secured military employment under Louis XIII. He gained very high favour with Cardinal Richelieu, to such a degree that French historians have remarked that few foreigners were so highly esteemed by that great minister as was he. It was possibly through the influence of the all-powerful Cardinal-statesman that Moray was raised to the rank of Colonel in the French army. When, however, the difficulties of Charles I increased, Moray returned to Scotland and was appointed General of Ordnance when the Presbyterians first set up and maintained their government. He was in charge of the Scottish army at Newcastle at the time of his initiation, which took place two months before that city was evacuated by the soldiers. Moray was knighted at Oxford on 10th of January, 1643, by Charles I.

Moray was also on good terms with Mazarin and fought with his regiment in Germany, and in 1645, he was made a prisoner of war in Bavaria. About the same time he was appointed Colonel of the Scotch regiment in succession to James Campbell, Earl of Irvine, and he was nominated by the Scots as a secret envoy to negotiate a treaty between France and Scotland, by which it was proposed to attempt the restoration of Charles I. His release in Bavaria was therefore obtained and he returned to England. In December, 1646, when Charles was with the Scottish army in Newcastle, Moray prepared a scheme for the escape of the king. One, William Moray, afterwards Earl of Dysart, provided a vessel at Tynemouth, onto which Sir Robert Moray was to conduct the king, who was to assume a disguise. The king put on the disguise and even went down the back stairs with Sir Robert, but fearing that it would scarcely be possible successfully to pass all the guards without being discovered and judging it highly indecent, says Burnet, to be taken in such a condition, he changed his resolution and went back.

After the accession of Charles II to the throne of Scotland, Moray, in May, 1651, was appointed Justice-clerk, an office which had been vacant since the deprivation of Sir John Hamilton, in 1649. A few days afterwards, he was sworn as a privy councillor, and in the following month, was nominated a lord of session, though he never officiated as a judge. His various appointments were, however, merely nominal, in order to secure his support to the government, particularly if it be true, as Wood asserts, that he was presbyterianly affected. His uncle, the Rev. John Moray, was a great opponent of the bishops and suffered imprisonment for his opinions. However, at the Restoration, Sir Robert Moray was re-appointed justice-clerk and a lord of session, in addition to being made one of the lords auditors of the exchequer.

The Royal Society may be said to have been founded by Moray: it was certainly the outcome of suggestions made by him, and Bishop Burnet says that while he lived he was the life and soul of the Royal Society.

A quibble has frequently been raised over the statement made by writers that Moray was the first president of the Royal Society, since the name of Viscount Brouncker appears in that capacity on the Charter. Moray was the sole president of the Society from its first formal meeting on 28th November, 1660, until its

incorporation on 15th July, 1662, with the exception of one month from 14th May to 11th June, 1662, during which short period Dr. Wilkins occupied that honourable position, though in a Latin letter addressed to M. de Montmor, president of the Academy at Paris, dated 22 July, 1661, he styled himself Societatis ad Tempe Praeses. Nor is too much to say that it was through his influence the charter of incorporation was obtained. He was the bearer of the message from Charles II to the effect that his Majesty approved the objects of the Society and was willing to encourage it and, generally he was the organ of communication between the king and the Society. Moray was also the prime mover in the framing of the statutes and regulations.

Wood, the well-known Oxford historian, states that he was a single man and an abhorrer of woman, but here he is in error, for he married the Hon. Sophia Lindsay, elder daughter of the first Earl of Balcarres, who died, without issue, at Edinburgh, and was buried at Balcarres on 11th January, 1653. If the daughter inherited the tastes and pursuits of her father, the marriage must, indeed, have been a felicitous one, since it is recorded that Sir David Lindsay, the first Earl of Balcarres, chose a private life without ambition, was learned, and had the best collection of books in his time and was a 'laborious chymist'. There is in the library of Balcarres ten volumes written by his own hand upon the then fashionable subject of the philosopher's stone. He was raised to the peerage when Charles I visited Scotland in June, 1633.

After the death of his wife, which apparently affected him greatly. Moray lived, apart from his philosophical meetings, a hermit-like existence. In a letter dated 23rd February, 1658, he wrote to a friend who had accused him of being in love:

" If you think no more of a mistress not take more pains to look after one than I do, I know not why one may not think that you may lead apes, among your fellow virgins when you dy. You never met with such a cold wooer as I: since ever I came to this place I never visited male nor female but two or three cousins, and they never three times. The truth is, I never go out of doors but to the church except I have some glasses to make, and then I go to the glass house. Nor do I receive visits from anybody once in two months, except it be the commander, so that I am here a very hermit."

In his correspondence with Kincardin during that year (1658), he describes how he was making chemical experiments on a large scale. At one period, when he was at Maastricht, he had two rooms with a kitchen and cellar. One of the first he converted into a laboratory and there he spent his days in perfect content. "You never saw such a shop as my laboratory," he wrote, "so there's a brow name for you, though means matters. He constantly speaks of his chemical labours in the language of an enthusiast. "It is somewhat considerable that I afford you such volumes in the amount of my chemicall(sic) operations. I have had seven stills going these two days with one fire, most upon juniper berries, some with water, some with sack, and some dry."

Moray was naturally of a retiring disposition. During a portion of his life he was called upon to take up a prominent position, but he never cared to be in the limelight in politics and he did his best to keep out of the political arena altogether. His books, his chemical furnaces and retorts, his music, his medical and mechanical investigations, and his philosophical friends were more to him than such stuff, as he once impatiently called politics. He was happier, far more satisfied, to be President of the Royal Society than Deputy Secretary for Scotland, Lord of Commission, or Privy Councillor. There are few characters in history, particularly among those who have undertaken peculiarly difficult, and even dangerous, diplomatic tasks, so generally revered as was Sir Robert Moray. Birch, one of the historians of the Royal Society, describes him as being universally loved and esteemed and eminent for his piety, spending many hours a day in devotion in the midst of armies and courts. He had an equality of temper in him that nothing could alter, and was in practice a stoic, with a tincture of one of the principles of that sect, the persuasion of absolute decrees. He had a most diffused love to mankind and delighted in every occasion of doing good, which he managed with great zeal and discretion. His comprehension was superior to that of most men. He was considerably skilled in mathematics and remarkably so in the history of nature.

Nor is Birch a solitary appreciator of his character. Bishop Burnet, a historian of higher rank, styled him the wisest and worthiest man of his age; and, on another occasion, he wrote: "I have every joy that next to my father I owe more to him than to any other man". To Evelyn he was a deare(sic) and excellent friend; Sheldon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was absolutely won by his charm of manner: Pepys speaks of him, "as a most excellent man of reason and learning, and understands the doctrine of music and everything else I could discourse of very finely"; while his sovereign and personal friend, King Charles II, tersely gave expression to his independence of character by the statement that he (Moray) was head of his own church.

A writer in the Scottish Review for January, 1885, said: "To the beautiful and remarkable character of Robert Moray justice has yet to be done". Few men of so strong and decided a personality have left behind them so

little trace upon the public documents of their time: except in a few Privy council letters, his signature does not appear at all. A writer in the *Biographica Britannica* says that his general character was excellent in the highest degree. He was beloved and esteemed by men of every party and station.

But these expressions of opinion found some exception. Was ever man placed in a position of responsibility and influence who did not encounter enemies? From 1660 to 1670 the influence of Moray affected the whole course of the Scottish government, and he guided, controlled, and supported Lauderdale against the cabals that were formed to oust him. Thus it was that Sharp, Alexander Burnet, and other apostles of repression came to look upon him as an enemy to be dreaded, and one, Lord Glencairn, made an attempt to break and ruin him. A letter was pretended to be found at Antwerp, as written by him to one William Murray, formerly whipping boy to Charles J. This letter gave an account of a bargain alleged to have been made by Moray with another man for murdering the king, the plan to be put into execution by William Murray. Sir Robert was questioned and put under arrest, and the rumour got abroad that he had intended to kill the king, hut, says Burnet, the historian, upon this occasion Sir Robert practised in a very eminent manner his true Christian philosophy without showing so much as a cloud in his whole behaviour.

It was in the society of such men as Andrew Marvell, John Evelyn, and Robert Moray that Charles II loved to linger; his delight was not, as some have asserted, in consorting with less noble types of humanity. Wood is of opinion that the degree of intimacy existing between Charles II and Sir Robert Moray was probably more upon a philosophical than a political basis for he was employed by Charles II in his chemical processes and was indeed the conductor of his laboratory. Birch says that it was Moray who first interested the sovereign in philosophical pursuits. Charles II was a frequent visitor to the laboratory in Whitehall, which, though nominally Moray's workshop, is said to have been conducted by him for and on behalf of the king, and there may be truth in the opinion more than once expressed that Charles II was also a royal initiate of the ancient and honourable order known as Freemasons. In any case, assuming, which is very unlikely and improbable, that Sir Robert Moray was the first non-operative to be initiated into the mysteries of the Craft in England, Freemasonry has no reason to be ashamed when it looks to the rock whence it was hewn.

Moray was the friend and benefactor of the well-known mystic, Thomas Vaughan," who", says Wood, "settled in London under the protection and patronage of that noted chymist, Sir Robert Murray, or Moray, Knight, Secretary of State for the kingdom of Scotland". At the time of the plague. Vaughan accompanied Moray to Oxford and the latter was with Vaughan when he died there. Vaughan was buried in the church of Aldbury, or Oldbury, about eight miles from the university city, by care and charge of the said Sir Robert Moray. This was in 1673, shortly before Moray's own death and but a few hours after he had informed Wood of the passing of Vaughan.

Moray's life came to an end in a very sudden manner. It occurred on 4th July, 1673, and Burnet, recording the event, wrote: How much I lost in so critical a conjuncture, being bereft of the truest and faithfullest friend I had ever known: and so I say I was in danger of committing great errors for want of so kind a monitor.

Under date of 6th July, 1673, Evelyn wrote in his Diary: This evening I went to the funeral of my dear and excellent friend, that good man and accomplished gentleman, Sir Robert Murray, Secretary of Scotland. He was buried by order of his Majesty in Westminster Abbey, and then he added in a footnote: He delighted in every occasion of doing good. He had a superiority of genius and comprehension. Moray was not only buried in the Abbey by the King's express command, but also at the King's personal expense. His grave is by the Vestry, door, close to the grave of Sir William Davenant, sometime laureate to Charles II, the name appearing in the register as Sir Robert Murray.

His memory remained green with John Evelyn, for six years afterwards - on 11th July, 1679 - writing to Dr. Beale, he said, referring to the Royal Society: You know what pillars we have lost, Palmer [Dudley Palmer, d. 1666, one of the first council, with Moray, of the Royal Society], Moray, Chester [Dr. John Wilkins, Bishop of Chester], Oldenburg, etc.

Evelyn made frequent mention of Moray in his Diary, as will be seen from the following excerpts:

9th March, 1661. I went with that excellent person and philosopher, Sir Robert Murray, to visit Mr. Boyle at Chelsea, and saw divers effects of the coliple(sic) for weighing air.

9th May, 1661. At Sir Robert Murray's, where I met Dr. Wallis, Professor of Geometry at Oxford, where was discourse of several mathematical subjects.

22nd August, 1662 (the day after Evelyn was sworn one of the Council of the Royal Society), I dined with my Lord Brouncker and Sir Robert Murray.

25th January, 1665. This night being at Whitehall his Majesty came to me standing in the withdrawing room, and gave me thanks for publishing The Mystery of Jesuitism, which he said he had carried two days in his pocket, read it, and encouraged me; at which I did not a little wonder; I suppose Sir Robert Murray had given it to him.

19th July, 1670. I accompanied my worthy friend, that excellent man, Sir Robert Murray, with Mr. Slingsby, Master of the Mint, to see the latter's seat and estate at BarrowGreen in Cambridgeshire.

Wood, recording the demise of Moray, wrote: "He had the king's ear as much as any other person and was indefatigable in his undertakings.... He was most renowned chemist, a great patron of the Rosi-Crucians, and an excellent mathematician. His several relations and matters of experiment, which are in the Philosophical Transactions (of the Royal Society, many of which referred to the phenomena of the tides) show him to be a man well vers'd in experimental philosophy".

After his initiation into the Craft, there is only one other record of his attendance at a meeting of the Lodge of Edinburgh, which was on 27th July, 1647, on the occasion of the admission of William Maxwell, doctor off Fisick ordinate to his Maj'stie nines, when he signed the minute of the meeting. In his correspondence, however, he frequently made use of his Masonic mark (five-pointed star), particularly in his correspondence with Lauderdale, and this has been reproduced in the Lauderdale Papers without comment, beyond the mere statement that Moray frequently made use of his Mason mark when he referred to himself or had anything of importance to communicate. If this had been an unusual occurrence in correspondence at that day one would think that more notice would have been taken of such an incident.

An interesting story might be woven around Moray and his circle, for the men who composed that circle bore names which are familiar to every student of the history' of the Craft. Such men as Wren, Ashmole, Brouncker, and others, all of whom are accredited with having been initiated into Freemasonry. Moray's name, together with that of Christopher Wren, is to be met with on almost every page of the early volumes of the Journal of the Society.

It is also of interest - may it not even be said, of significance - to compare the constitutions of the Royal Society with those of the Masonic Order. Sprat, the earliest historian of the Royal Society, says that they freely admitted men of different religions, countries, and professions. This they were obliged to do, or else they would come far short of the largeness of their own declarations. For they openly profess not to lay the foundation of an English, Scotch, Irish, Popish, or Protestant Philosophy, but a Philosophy of Mankind. Members were elected by ballot, being proposed at one meeting and balloted for at another. The duties of the President were to call and dissolve the meetings, to propose the subjects for discussion or experiment, to regulate the proceedings, to change the enquiry from one thing to another, to admit the members elected. The President, on his installation, took an oath as follows: "I . . . do promise to deal faithfully and honestly in all things belonging to the Trust committed to me, as President of the Royal Society of London for improving Natural Knowledge. So help me God."

Whatever, however, may be the deductions on this ground, it will unhesitatingly be admitted that none could more have sought the study of the liberal arts and sciences that came within the compass of his attainment than did Brother Sir Robert Moray, the first known initiate into the Craft of Freemasonry on English soil.

(The Builder, Dudley Wright. 1921.)

(Note: The above paper generated a great deal of discussion, in view of Moray having been a noted early freemason with whom all members were familiar. It also was of note in the origins of the modern name 'Murray', a Lodge within the District of Carpentaria.)