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THE  
❖ WRIGHTS ❖  
OF GLASGOW.

BY

Bro. William James Hughan,  
Past Senior Grand Deacon of England, &c., &c.

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LONDON:

GEORGE KENNING,  
16 AND 16A GREAT QUEEN STREET, W.C.



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# The Wrights of Glasgow.



THE Scottish Masons and Wrights were often united in Incorporations, and more or less—have worked together for centuries. In time, however, these Wrights (or *Carpenters*) developed independence and went in for separate organisation in some Cities, because neither Company or Society could possibly be a fair judge of the workmanship of the other. In 1475, the Masons and Wrights of Edinburgh were Incorporated by a Seal of Cause under the authority of the Magistrates and Council of the City. Ratifications took place in 1517 by the Archbishop of St. Andrews, by Royal Charter in 1527, by the Common Council in 1633, by Royal Charter again in 1635, and by Decree of the Court of Session in 1703. This the Grand Secretary tells us in his invaluable "History of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No. 1."

By the Act of 1475, two each of the Masons and Wrights were chosen by these Crafts as a quartette of Overseers, who were empowered to examine any Masons or Wrights who came "to the guid towne and schapis to work, or to tak wirk apoun hand," as to their operative qualifications, and if deemed worthy, they were admitted and then

"lay downe to the reparatioun  
of the altar a merk."

The same "*four men*" were also the *Essay Masters*, who tested each Apprentice of either of the two Trades, such as we *speculatively* do now as to "passing" and "raising"

"Gif he be sufficient or nocht  
to be a fallow of the craft."

On his "passing," he was admitted to the privileges of his Craft by becoming in due time "freman and fallow." They also saw to the two Companies or Crafts, taking their proper places "in all generale processions lyk as thai haf in the towne of *Bruges*," which at that period was one of the most prominent Commercial Centres of Europe.

As my esteemed friend, Bro. D. Murray Lyon has pointed out, and which has long been my view

"The presence of Wrichts equally with Masons at the passing of their apprentices to the rank of fellow, as provided for by the Charter of 1475 favours the opinion, which we have elsewhere expressed, viz., that the *Word*, and other secrets peculiar to Masons were communicated to apprentices on their admission to the Lodge, and that the ceremony of passing was simply a testing of the candidate's fitness for employment as a journeyman."



Of the 22 Trades or Companies noted in the "Blue Blanket," Edinburgh, of 1722 and other editions, of which the Arms are given, the two concerned are inserted as follows :

"VI.—WRIGHTS.

*As.* A square and compass *or*

VII.—MASONS.

*Ar.* On a chevron betwixt 3 towers embattled *sab*, a compass *or*."

These and ten others are duly reproduced in these wee Books, within artistic ovals.

"The incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow" dates from 3rd of May, 1600, on which day that Craft obtained a Charter, or Seal of Cause, from the Provost and Magistrates of the City. In their petition it was pointed out that they had been united with the Masons and Coopers under one Letter of Deaconry, but the latter had obtained separate Statutes and Rules for themselves only, and for the reasons stated they desired to be disunited from the Masons.

"The said Masons could not judge upon our work, nor we upon theirs perfectly, and without the partiality that they might have to their, and we to our Craftsmen."

It was difficult sometimes to define the precise work of the Masons and Wrights so as to avoid overlapping; the disputes under such trying circumstances involving open rupture and appeal to the authorities, who decided wherein the Wrights had violated their Charter by unfairly working.

"A part of Measonis Craft properlie belonging thairto,"

and, I presume the Masons were compelled to refrain from infringing on the liberty and privileges of the Wrights in like manner.

I have received a mass of most interesting and curious information as to the Incorporation of the Wrights, Glasgow, from the courteous and learned Clerk, Mr. James A. Reid, who (knowing my love for such studies) has been very kind in responding most promptly and fully to all my enquiries, as well as requests for documents and published Transactions, Regulations, &c., of the Company.

These papers have, in part, supplied the facts on which this article is based, and I desire heartily to thank that gentleman for his warmly appreciated attentions.

The octavo volumes on the "Incorporation of Wrights" (*Glasgow*, 1889), and Register of Acts, 1650—1710, with appendix (*Glasgow*, 1887), as also the Bye-Laws (1892), &c., have enabled me to form a general notion of the usages and customs of that trade from the year 1600, and I firmly believe

that for their own sakes, as well as for the Masons, they were wise in securing a strong and independent position for themselves. Naturally, in the ordinary needs of their Trade, the Craftsmen had much in common with their former brethren, the Masons; and with the necessary changes differentiating the two Societies, many of the Rules adopted by the one Body were used, or could be used, by the other. The defined duties of Deacons, Officers, Clerks, Masters, Journeymen, and Apprentices would, or could be, in many respects the same for both Incorporations.

From the Seal of Cause, of A.D. 1600—which is duly reproduced in the first volume, in two columns (*original text* and modernized)—I quote a few items, which are worth a close study. Like unto the “Old Charges” of the Freemasons, the Charter was desired “for the causes above written,” and for “the loving of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” &c.

“*Item.* That no person of the said craft, contained in this present letter, *set up Booth* to work in this city, [*corresponding with a Mason’s Lodge*] until he be first made burgess and freeman of the same, and be examined by three or four masters of the said Crafts if he be a sufficient workman, and able to work good and sufficient work to serve our Sovereign Lord’s lieges.”

“*Item.* That every apprentice, at his entry, to the said Craft, if he be a freeman’s son of the said city, shall pay the sum of twenty shillings money; and if he be an unfreeman’s son, he shall pay the sum of forty shillings money to the said box, to be bestowed as said is.”

“*Item.* That every out-townsman, not being apprentice within the town, before he be admitted to serve any master within the same, shall be first examined if he be able thereto; and shall bring with him a testimonial from his master to whom he was apprentice before,” &c.

“*Item.* It is statute and ordained, that no freeman of the said crafts shall take an apprentice for a shorter time than seven years,” &c.

“*Item.* It shall not be lawful to any persons to sell, make, or work any kind of work of the said work and crafts within this city, except they be first free with the town, and next with the said craft,” &c.

“*Item.* This clause provides that when, at any time, freemen of the Craft can not be had, it is lawful for masters “to take any craftsman, *free or unfree*, that they please to do and make their work.”

Thus, "*cowan*" Wrights were permitted to labour, as stated. The Deacon was required to have these Regulations read "four times in the year, in their Quarter Conventions, to the whole brethren of the Craft."

The statutes, articles, rules, &c., having been "frequently heard, read, understood and maturely advised with and considered . . . to the Glory of God, the common weal of our Sovereign Lord's lieges, and also of the said burgh and city, and for good order in time coming to be had among the said craftsmen, and to the profit of them and their poor decayed brethren," were duly ratified, approved, granted, and confirmed by the Provost, Bailies, and Council accordingly.

In the very interesting Historical Memoranda, it is stated that the monopoly thus created in 1600 and subsequently confirmed, was "rigidly upheld and defended." In 1744 it was reported to the Court of Session that it had been the constant practice of the Incorporation, "past memory of man," to present such rights and to forbid or hinder non-Burgesses from working, and even if needs be to seize the "unfreemen's tools and sometimes confiscating the piece of work," or proceed to fines and incarceration!

The report was made in consequence of an action by the Wrights Masons and Artisans of the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel of Edinburgh, "against an *unfree Wright* who was found, not only repairing, but making new work within Burgh."

The Act of 1846 (9 Vict. Cap. 17) put an end to all such Trade monopolies, and it became lawful, as well as possible, "for any person to carry on or deal in merchandise, and to carry on and exercise any Trade or handicraft in any burgh, and elsewhere, in Scotland, without being a Burgess in such Burgh, or a Guild-brother, or a member of any Guild, Craft, or Incorporation."

Otherwise, however, the rights of the Incorporation remain intact, and By Laws were adopted, in accordance with the new state of things in 1849 (latest edition being of 1892) and are duly printed after the Seal of Cause of 1600.

An *Essay House* is still maintained by the Incorporation, and every precaution is taken that the *Essayist* shall not procure assistance in his work. In 1781 there were *four* Essay Masters noted, and to prevent "fraudulent Essays, the door of said Essay House shall be sufficiently secured with a new lock of four throws, with a key to each throw." The windows and vent-heads were also grated to prevent access through such openings. The same number of Essay Masters continue, but means are now provided, under certain conditions, for the Essay to be commuted for a Fine, unless operatives desire the benefit of "*Passing*."

The Coat of Arms is thus described in Anderson's "Armorial of Scottish Trade Incorporations" (Aberdeen). "*Argent* a chevron engrailed *sable*, between two Wright's compasses expanded in chief, and a square and compasses conjoined in base, proper, on a chief *or*, on a pale of the second between two roses *gules* an escallop of the first."

Motto "*Foin all in one.*"

"They have never been matriculated in the Herald's College, and heraldically, they are in some respects, incorrect."

The earliest Roll of members extant, dates from 1687 and then numbered 58, in 1889 they mustered so many as 596. The meetings took place in various buildings, until of late years, when they have been, and still are held in the Trades' Hall.

The Stock Account, in 1896, shows Lands, and other Properties, to the extent of fully £33,000, including £102 for the Gold Medal and Chain, worn from the year 1851 by the Deacon (an earlier Badge having long been missed). Over £1000



appears to have been spent in providing Pensions and Educational Charges, &c., during that year, much to the credit of the Incorporation, and for many years the members have been laudably ready to respond to claims for Public objects in a most generous manner.



A Collection Box is still preserved which has the year 1678 painted upon the top, with 1736 on one of the sides. It is considered to be at least 200 years old. The Deacon's Box is of much later construction. They are both reproduced from a photogravure, which forms the frontispiece to the chief volume referred to. The "Seal of Cause" A.D. 1600, is a handsome looking document and in fine condition. There is a complete Register of the names of Members from 1839, and an alphabetical List of the members of the Incorporation from 1800 to 1889. Mr. James A. Reid has been the courteous Clerk from 1885.

W. J. HUGHAN.









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