

A Short History of The Lodge of Journeymen Masons No. 8 Bro. Jan P. Watson P.M.

The Lodge of Journeymen Masons No. 8 Member of the Southern California Research Lodge

The Lodge of Journeymen Masons is a most unusual Lodge which has a unique place in Masonic history. There are many interesting and unique aspects connected with The Lodge of Journeymen Masons and its history: Probably none more so than in the fact that it has never, at any time, been granted a charter.

The story begins centuries before the actual formation of the Lodge. The forefathers of the City of Edinburgh were far sighted enough throughout the centuries to keep detailed written records – Acts of Parliament, Royal Charters, etc. In one of these Acts of Parliament, dated 1424, we find reference to the crafts- "It is ordained that in ilke (each) Towne of the Realm. of ilk sindrie Craft used therein, be chosen a wise man of that craft... Shall be halden Deakon or Maister-man... to govern and assat akk warjes that beis maid be the Craftes-men of that craft."

(In modern English, it would read, "It is decreed that in each town of the realm, each craft employed in that town shall choose a wise man of that craft and install him as Deacon or Master to govern and evaluate all work made by the craftsmen of that craft.")

In 1469 the Town Council of Edinburgh began granting Charters of Incorporation or Seals of Cause to various craft bodies so that the craftsmen could have some say in the election of magistrates. At the head of each Incorporation was a Deacon.

The mason trade organization began, in Edinburgh, with the issuing of a Seal of cause to the Wrights and Masons on the 15th October 1475. This Incorporation was also known later as The Incorporation of Mary's Chapel--from the building in which it met. Later, The Lodge of Edinburgh would also meet there and was known as the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel). Many of the craftsmen were members of both organizations. The Incorporation was the link between the crafts and the community.

In the very early years of the 18th century a serious rift began to appear which would effect both the Incorporation and the Lodge of Edinburgh. Several members of these bodies thought that funds, which they had contributed to, had been misappropriated.

The exact date of No. 8's formation is uncertain but moves were certainly being made prior to 1707 which is the accepted date. A minuted meeting was definitely held in 1708. On the 27th December that year a petition was received by the Lodge of Edinburgh from the unhappy Fellowcrafts – complaining that they did not have access to the accounts of the lodge. This matter was resolved in a manner agreeable to both sides until 1712 when more problems arose. This came to a head at one meeting, held on St. John's Day 1712, when all of the Fellowcrafts, except two, walked out, led by Bro. James Watson (Deacon of the Incorporation).

During the following year the Fellowcrafts, or Journeymen, entered (initiated) apprentices and passed Fellowcrafts in a public house which caused an uproar in The Lodge of Edinburgh. Following this, the Incorporation and The Lodge of Edinburgh obtained a warrant from the courts to inspect the books of the Journeymen. Also, at this time, they pushed for, and were successful in having two of the Journey men leaders (William Brodie and Robert Winram) arrested and put in prison for using foul language. These latest incidents caused the Journeymen to be outraged.

The proceedings had, by now, come to a crossroads and decisions had to be made. Should the Journeymen give up or should they take the only course of action left open to them – go to the courts. Since the Incorporation was the legal authority of the craft it was decided to target it.

The Journeymen took out actions for wrongful imprisonment and unlawful abstraction of books against James Brownhill (Deacon of the Wrights) and William Smeilie (Deacon of the Masons). The manuscript which contains the list of grievances was known as The Deed of Submission, The court decided that arbitration was the best solution to the problem. The Deacons of the Goldsmiths and the Surgeons, with the convenor of the Incorporated Crafts as oversman, were appointed as the arbiters. On the 8th January 1715 the arbiters presented their Decreet Arbitral. This Decreet Arbitral can be regarded as the equivalent to a charter for our lodge. Among the decisions the arbiters reached were:

1. The two Journeymen had been rightly imprisoned - then proceeded to award them damages of £100 Scots against the Deacons!
2. The books of the Journeymen were to be returned to them. However, these books must be presented to the Incorporation each half year for inspection. But most importantly...
3. The Journeymen were given authority to meet as a separate Masonic Lodge. This was still not the end of the matter since the Deacons refused to pay the damages and return the books. Legal documents, entitled 'Letters of Horning', were served upon them On the 13th July 1715.

When a reasonable conclusion had been arrived at, the Lords of Session presented The Lodge of Journeymen Masons with a red silk purse which is still in the Lodge's possession today.

The Lodge of Journeymen Masons has worked as a legal lodge since 1715 (the completion of the legal processes) but it is recognized by everyone, including the Grand Lodge of Scotland, that the true date of formation is 1707. It is recorded as such in Grand Lodge.

Instead of a charter being present in our Lodge we have The Deeds of Submission (including the Decreet Arbitral) and the Letter of Horning hanging on our walls. The new initiates are given a short lecture on our rights to charge fees and confer degrees in which these documents are referred to.

The Lodge of Journeymen Masons may be the Only lodge in the world which is allowed to charge fees and confer degrees and does not require a charter from a Grand Lodge. Many lodges which were formed before the founding of the respective Grand Lodges received charters retrospectively. In Scotland we call these Charters of Confirmation. The Lodge of Journeymen Masons does not even have one of these – we have our authority from the Court of Session of Edinburgh.

It should be added that many of the Journeymen who broke away eventually returned to The Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) and that for well over 250 years great harmony has existed between the two lodges. Indeed, Bro. James Watson, who led the original walkout, was again elected as Deacon of the Incorporation and also as Master of The Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel)

The original name of the lodge in the 'Letters of Horning' was, as at present The Lodge of Journeymen Masons but for a while the late 19th century it was officially known as Lodge Journeymen. It was, for a long time, the only lodge with the word 'Mason' in its title – even now there are still very few.

During its long history the lodge has met in many places. At first it was in some of the many alehouses and taverns which were to be found in old Edinburgh. It also used Mary's Chapel before, in 1741, meeting in the old Royal Infirmary for its principal meetings. In 1752 they moved to other premises in Edinburgh's old town. The lodge moved to its present premises on the 8th August 1871. These premises were consecrated by the Earl of Dalhousie who was then the Immediate Past Grand Master.

Many years ago it was not unusual for the Lodge to erect tombstones in memory of Past Masters and other distinguished brethren. In 1804 several of the brethren decided to visit the grave of a brother to see that it was in good repair: they resolved to visit the grave annually. This annual visit developed into an extended tour of several of the city cemeteries and became known as the 'Visitation of the Tombs'. This check on the condition of the tombs of deceased brethren existed up to within the past twenty years.

The Great War (WWI) took a dreadful toll of the brethren of the Lodge. Of the 196 members who served in the Armed Forces, 21 were killed or died from wounds, 28 were discharged on account of ill-health or wounded and one brother was drowned. At the Lodge's annual Installation one of the toasts still proposed is to 'The Imperial and Allied Forces'.

Of the very many records of visits to the Lodge two areas are worthy of mention here. On the 10th July 1889 sixteen brethren representing Lodge Priory, Tynemouth, No. 1863 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of England, visited No. 8. It is noted in the minutes that this was the first time an English Lodge had, in regalia and under the guidance of its Master, visited a Scottish Lodge.

At the end of the Great War many American Freemasons visited No. 8 - several of whom had the distinction of being made Honorary Members. Probably the best known of these brethren was Br. Samuel Gompers the American Labor Leader. Following is a list of those American brethren who received honorary Membership and the dates they received it:

Br. S. Gompers, Dawson's Lodge No. 16, Washington D.C., 12 September 1918

Br. John P. Frey, Lodge Norwood 190. 576, Ohio, 12 September 1918

Br. Frank O. Wells, Lodge Euclid No. 656, New York, 28 November 1918

Br. Louis Josephs, West Lake Lodge No. 392, Los Angeles, 12 December 1918

Br. Philip H. Crandon, Lodge Star in the East, New Bedford, 13 March 1919

The motif of the Lodge is the 'Blue Blanket'. The Lodge of Journeymen Masons No. 8 holds the right to carry the 'Blue Blanket' in Public processions since it is the oldest operative lodge in Edinburgh. As the crafts were included in 'The Incorporation of Hammermen'. which was responsible for the 'Blue Blanket', it was fitting that it be entrusted to the representatives of one of the constituent crafts. The 'Blue Blanket' holds a special place in the hearts of all our brethren.

*The history of the 'Blue Blanket' is a long and interesting one and an article relating solely to it will follow in due course.

The Lodge of Journeymen Masons had, until 1876, the honor of carrying the Working Tools of Grand Lodge in all public processions. Since then this has been restricted to the Metropolitan area.

There are many more interesting aspects relating to the lodge. Since it is so unusual many brethren from all parts of the country and, indeed, abroad make a point of visiting us.

ADDENDUM:

As to the term 'Blue Lodge' I, personally, feel there is an even simpler explanation although I have not investigated the matter. In Scotland each lodge can choose its own color(s) for its regalia. It is a great sight to see all the different colored regalia in a lodge – including tartans of many clans. The color of The Grand Lodge of Scotland is thistle green. I think the term 'Blue

Lodge' or 'Blue masonry' may come from English Freemasonry where all the brethren in a lodge wear blue edged aprons.

Editor's Note: We hope Bro. Watson will give us an article telling the story of the "Blue Blanket." We also know there will be questions about it and so include the section relating to the "Blue Blanket" from Coils Masonic Encyclopedia:

BLUE BANNER: blue blanket. Lodge of Journeymen No. 8 of Edinburgh, Scotland was the result of a split in Lodge of Edingurgh in 1705, with secession of the journeymen, who set up the new lodge. It possesses a banner, really a blanket used as a banner, which is supposed to have a history of great age. The legend goes that the Scotch mechanics who accompanied Allen, Lord Steward of Scotland, on one of the Crusades took with them a banner on which were displayed the following: "In Thy good pleasure build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.' On their return, they deposited the banner at the altar of St. Eloi in the church of St. Giles. James III of Scotland, in 1482, donated to the craftsmen, their old banner, called The Blue Blanket, and the privilege of displaying it in Masonic processions was granted to the journeymen. This blanket or banner is said to be extant, though necessarily in a much dilapidated condition. See Annals L. of Journeymen Masons No. 8 by Seggie and Turnbull; Edinburgh, 1930; and An Historical Account of the Blue Blanket: etc. by Alexander Pennecuik, Edinburgh, 1722.

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