

The Origin of Freemasonry is not definitely known, although many believe that it originated from the ancient Egyptian religions. It is well known, however, that from very early times guilds or companies of craftsmen such as carpenters, builders, blacksmiths, etc., have existed in the community and modern Freemasonry may safely be said to originate from these. In the middle-ages these merchants guilds became very well organised. They admitted apprentices, and gave charters of proficiency to their members from whom they sometimes asked high fees for membership. On Corpus Christi day each guild used to parade in a dress peculiar to itself and present a religious play in the streets.

Now the guild of masons (or builders) differed from all the others: whereas, for example, the blacksmith would ply his trade in his own town, the mason frequently had to travel long distances, even to the other end of the country, to engage in his work. Arrived at his destination, the mason had to prove to his employer that he was a mason and, he also had to prove how proficient he was, i.e., he had to prove his rank in the guild from which he came. This he did by showing that he was in possession of certain secrets which he learned from his guild. Naturally the guild, or Craft, at first contained only Operative Masons (i.e. builders), but from the sixteenth century, Speculative Masons (i.e. non-builders), were admitted, and finally the Craft became entirely Speculative.

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About the end of the seventh century St. Vinnen, or Winning, founded a monastery near the banks of the Garnock, and the town of Kilwinning takes its name from this saint. The Abbey of Kilwinning, however, was built some centuries later, the chief benefactor being Hugh de Morville, High Constable of Scotland in 1157 and a friend of the King (David I). The date commonly assigned to the building of the Abbey is 1140. At about this period the Pope created corporations or fraternities of masons, endowing them with certain privileges and immunities, his object being to encourage the emigration of Italian artists capable of erecting religious structures in the Gothic style.

A party of these foreign masons is supposed to have come from Italy for the purpose of building the Monastery of Kilwinning and to have founded there the first regularly constituted Lodge in Scotland. The Lodge is reputed to have been held in the Chapterhouse, a chamber measuring 38 feet by feet, and situated on the Eastern side of the cloisters. On the broken walls and mouldering arches of the Abbey numerous and varied masons marks may be seen, some very beautiful in design.

From Kilwinning Lodge proceeded the Lodge of Scoon and Bertha (now Scone and Perth) in about the year 1193, as is confirmed by a charter now in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Scotland (The wording of this document is given in Wylie s history, p.24). Little else is known of the early history of Mother Kilwinning as all the early records have been lost. Whether these records were involved in the destruction which overtook the building at the period of the Reformation (1560), had never been clearly ascertained.

Tradition affirms that they were carried away by the Monks to France on the downfall of the Papal power in Scotland. It is also averred that with the destruction of the buildings perished the Abbey records, including the Pensile Tables which contained the genealogies of buried persons, registers of miracles, histories, etc. A search has been made of late in the Vatican, but without success. Mr. Fraser, in his memorials of the Eglinton Family says: It has generally been supposed that the Cartulary of Kilwinning was preserved in the Crater Room at Eglinton Castle, but after a diligent search in that repository, it has not been found.

A disastrous fire occurred at Eglinton Castle in 1544 and this may account for the loss.

After the establishment of the Kilwinning and York Lodges (the jurisdiction and antiquity of the Grand Lodge of York over other English Lodges has invariably been acknowledged by the whole

Fraternity), the principles of Freemasonry rapidly spread throughout both Kingdoms and several Lodges were erected in different parts of the island. The fortunes of the Craft rose and fell and experienced those alternate successions of advancement and decay which mark the history of every human institution. The Scottish Freemasons always owned their King as their Grand Master; he, when not a Mason himself, appointed one of the Brethren to preside as his deputy at meetings, and to regulate all matters concerning the Craft. James I (1406-37) was Royal Grand master until he settled a yearly revenue of four pounds Scots, to be paid by every Master-Mason in Scotland, to a Grand Master chosen by the Brethren and approved of by the Crown.

James II (1437-60) favoured the Lodges with his presence and granted the office of Grand Master to William St. Clair, the Builder of Roslin Chapel, Earl of Orkney and Caithness, and Baron of Roslin, and to his successors. The hereditary Grand Masters ruled their Lodges without interruption until 1736, when William St. Clair, the last heir in the direct male line, resigned the hereditary office into the hands of the Scottish Lodges.

The Barons of Roslin assembled their Grand Lodges at Kilwinning, and the Masonic Courts were held there. The Roslin family had not only close, but, at one time, the highest ecclesiastical connection with Kilwinning. It is recorded that Henry Sinclair, a son of the House of Roslin, came to be taken much notice of by King James V. He became Abbot or Perpetual Commendator of Kilwinning in 1541, which office exchanged with Gavin Hamilton for the Deanery of Glasgow in 1550. In the Eglinton Papers it is also recorded that Henrie Sinclair, Dean of Glasgow, was a witness to the marriage between Hugh, third Earl of Eglinton, and Lady Jane Hamilton, daughter of James, Duke of Chattellarault, on 13th February, 1554. From the time of James II onwards, the Craft prospered, and on one occasion at least the King visited Kilwinning Lodge. In the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland published by authority of the

Lords Commissioners of the Treasury (Edinburgh) 1877, p.172, there is the following entry:--

“On Fryda, xiii Novembria (1491) in Kilwynnyng to the King before the super and efter, xx vnicornis”.

(The unicorn was a gold coin, valued about GBP £0.09. A very considerable sum in those days.)

It is very probable that this was a Masonic entertainment given at the expense of the King (James IV) when holding High Festival at Kilwinning.

The ancient Mother Lodge at one time possessed other degrees of Masonry than those of St. John. Laurie in his History of Freemasonry states, that the Knights Templar of Scotland, on the prosecution of the Order in the fourteenth century, took refuge with Robert Bruce. According to the French annalist of Freemasonry, M.Thory, Robert Bruce founded the Masonic Order of Heredum de Kilwinning after the battle of Bannockburn, reserving to himself and successors on the throne of Scotland the office and title of Grand Master. The last of the Stuarts believed that he possessed this hereditary right and distinction and granted Charters to Lodges abroad. There is also the strongest reason to believe that the whole system of Templary, advanced by Ramsay and other partisans of the exiled House, was based on the conviction that the Chevalier de St.George was the hereditary head of the Royal Order of Bruce. This Royal Order still enjoys the highest celebrity in France, where it was established by charter from Scotland, and even by the Pretender himself. It is now conferred as the highest and most distinguished degree sanctioned by the Grand Orient, under the title of the Rose Croix Heredum de Kilwinning. The introduction of this branch of Masonry on the Continent has been commemorated by a medal struck at Paris and bearing, amongst other devices, the Royal Arms of Scotland. The Brethren of the Lodge of Constancy at Arras still preserve an original charter of the Order granted to their Chapter in 1747 by Charles

Edward Stuart, and signed by that unfortunate prince himself, as the representative of the Scottish Kings. Nor can anything indicate more strongly the high estimation in which the chivalry of the Rosy Cross of Kilwinning is held in France than the fact that the Prince Cambaceres, Arch-Chancellor of the Empire, presided over it as Provincial Grand Master for many years, and was succeeded by the head of the illustrious family of Choiseul.

A note referring to the Lodge is appended to a poem published at Paris in 1820, entitled *LaMaçonnerie*. The translation reads, “James, Lord Stewart, received in his Lodge at Kilwinning in Scotland, in 1286, the Lords of Gloucester and Ulster, the one English and the other Irish”.

The oldest minute-book now possessed by the Lodge dates from 20th December 1642, although a document found at Eglinton Castle entitled. “The statutis and ordinances to be observit be all the maisters maissonis within this realme, sett doune by William Schaw, maister of Wark to his Majestie, and generall wardene of the said Craft, with consent of the Maisteris efter specifeit”, is dated 1598.

In 1736, St. Clair of Roslin, hereditary Grand Master of Scotland, assembled thirty-two Lodges in and about Edinburgh and resigned into their hands all right, claim, or title whatever, which he or his successors had, to provide as Grand Master over the Masons of Scotland. The Grand Lodge was then constituted and erected on 30th November, 1736. Mother Kilwinning was represented by proxy at Sinclair’s resignation and voted in the first office-bearers of the Grand Lodge she also continued to sit and vote in the same manner for several years, until it was agreed to rank the number of the lodges according to their seniority. The point of precedence was naturally claimed by Kilwinning, but was resisted by the Lodge of St. Mary’s Chapel (Roslin) who claimed to possess older written records than Mother Kilwinning. The Grand Lodge then put St. Mary’s Chapel as No.1 and Mother Kilwinning as No.2. This verdict greatly annoyed

the representatives of Mother Kilwinning, who withdrew from Grand Lodge. From 1744 until 1807 Mother Kilwinning remained outside the Grand Lodge of Scotland and continued to grant charters and hold meetings independently. However, it being undesirable to have two bodies issuing charters in so small a country as Scotland and most distressing to have a schism in the Masonic Fraternity, successful efforts were made to effect a reconciliation in 1807. The full term of the agreement were:-

- i. That Mother Lodge Kilwinning, shall renounce all right of granting Charters, in come in along with all the Lodges holding under her, to the bosom of the Grand Lodge.
- ii. That all the Lodges holding of the Mother Lodge shall be obliged to obtain from Grand Lodge, confirmation of their respective charters, for which a fee of three guineas only shall be exigible.
- iii. That the Mother Kilwinning Lodge shall be placed at the head of the Roll of the Grand Lodge, under the denomination of Mother Kilwinning; and her Daughter Lodges shall, in the meantime, be placed at the end of the said Roll, and as they shall apply for confirmation; but under this express declaration, that so soon as the roll shall be arranged and corrected, which is in present contemplation, the Lodges holding of Mother Kilwinning shall be entitled to be ranked according to the dates of their original charters, and of those granted by the Grand Lodge.
- iv. That Mother Kilwinning and her Daughter Lodges shall have the same interest in and management of the funds of Grand Lodge, as the other Lodges now holding of her; the Mother Lodge, Kilwinning contributing annually to the said funds a sum not less than two shillings and sixpence for each entrant

and her Daughter Lodges contributing in the same manner as present Lodges holding of the Grand Lodge.

- v. That the Master of Mother Kilwinning, for the time shall be, *ipso facto* Provincial Grand Master for the Ayrshire District.

The above agreement is the Mother Lodge's bond of Union with Grand Lodge. Unlike other Lodges, Mother Kilwinning possesses no charter since she, herself issued charters prior to the formation of Grand Lodge.

For 176 years this agreement produced an amicable working agreement for Mother Kilwinning and the Grand Lodge. However the need for change in Masonic traditions was placed upon Mother Kilwinning and after much discussion with Grand Lodge, a new agreement was reached in 1983.

Once again Mother Kilwinning gave up previously held traditions, the most important being that of its Worshipful Master becoming Provincial Grand Master of Ayrshire, and gained new traditions, these being that Mother Kilwinning nominates for all time coming a suitable brother to take the office of Grand Bible Bearer in the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and there to be erected and consecrated the Provincial Grand Lodge of Kilwinning, thereby preserving the autonomy and her singular position in the Masonic world.

Mother Kilwinning, although possessing few early records (for reasons already explained) could claim precedence over other Lodges for three reasons (i) The fact that she had issued charters for the erection of other Lodges from time immemorial. (In the Schaw Statutes (1598), Kilwinning is referred to as an ancient Lodge.) (ii) The existence of documents relating to the Lodges of Scoon and Bertha founded in 1193, and preserved in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. (iii) The fact that the Lodge of Canongate was

constituted by Mother Kilwinning in 1677, and would not at that period have come so far west as Kilwinning to ask for privileges to hold meetings in Edinburgh if there had existed in the Metropolis any body of whom they could have derived such authority; it was no later than the year 1736 that the very lodge applied for, and obtained from Kilwinning a renewal of their Charter.

The later history of Mother Kilwinning may be found from the Minute Books of the Lodge. The brethren took part in many processions and ceremonies. Details of these may be found in Wylie's "History of the Mother Lodge Kilwinning" (John Tweed, Glasgow, 1882) and Rev. W. Lee Ker's "Mother Lodge Kilwinning" (Alexander Gardener, Glasgow) and John Ness's "The History of the Ancient Mother Lodge of Scotland" to which acknowledgement has already been made, for most of the information given in this pamphlet. The most important of these occasions were as follows,-

- 1806 Laying of the foundation-stone of Ardrossan Harbour.
- 1807 Agreement between the Grand Lodge of Scotland and Mother Kilwinning.
- 1814 Laying of the foundation-stone of the new Tower of Kilwinning.
- 1818 Laying of the foundation-stone of Ayr County Buildings.
- 1820 Laying of the Burns' Monument Ayr.
- 1821 Loyal Address to the King from the Ayrshire Lodges.
- 1821 Erection and consecration of Blair Dairy Lodge.
- 1828 Laying of the foundation-stone of Ayr new Spire and Town-house.

- 1833 Laying of the foundation-stone of New Pier at Largs.
- 1834 Laying of the foundation-stone of St. Marnock's Church. Kilmarnock.
- 1844 Burns' Festival on the Banks of the Doon.
- 1846 Laying of the foundation-stone of Ballochmyle Bridge Cumnock.
- 1847 Laying of the foundation-stone of a new hall at Burn's Cottage.
- 1848 Laying of the foundation-stone of Sir-James Shaw's Monument, Kilmarnock.
- 1858 Laying of the foundation-stone of New Towns' House Ardrossan.
- 1859 Inauguration of monument to General Neil at Ayr.
- 1863 Laying of the foundation-stone of a new Bridge over the Nith at Cumnock.
- 1864 Laying of the foundation-stone of a new Parish Church at Cumnock.
- 1865 Inauguration of the Eglinton Statue at Ayr.
- 1867 Laying of the foundation-stone of the Reformed Presbyterian Church at New Cumnock.
- 1867 Laying of the foundation-stone at of Kilmarnock Infirmary.
- 1868

