

## **Upstairs Case 5**

### **The Incorporated Trades of Elgin - A Brief History**

Trade or craft organisations existed in Scotland from the time of David I (1124-1153), the king who created the first burghs in Scotland, including Elgin.

On 28th November 1234, Alexander II (1214-1249) granted a Royal Charter to the Burgh of Elgin making it the most important town north of Aberdeen\*.

*[\*Recent research suggests that the date 1234 on The Royal Charter may be incorrect and added later as the witness Reginald Le Chen was the King's chamberlain from 1267-1269, in the reign of Alexander III; the 20th year of his reign was 1268].*

The merchants of Elgin were allowed to form a guild, whose dean was allocated a place on the Town Council. At the same time the trades were allowed to form themselves into corporations, for the protection of their crafts and as a benefit society for members. This was a privilege accorded to only six burghs in Scotland at this time, the others being Perth, Aberdeen, Stirling, Berwick, and Dundee.

Until the Reformation they enjoyed the protection of the Church, which was their final court of appeal. Each craft had its assigned place in St Giles' church, with its own altar, patron saint and priest.

Elgin's importance continued throughout the Middle Ages as an episcopal see (a diocese or territory over which a bishop rules), occasional royal residence and a thriving centre of trade and manufactures, and the Incorporated Trades enjoyed considerable privileges.

The Trades had a monopoly of their crafts within the burgh, maintained standards and exercised discipline over their apprentices and journeymen. However, it was not until the seventeenth century that the Trades made a significant contribution to the political and economic life of the burgh.

### **Magna Charta**

In 1657, an agreement was reached between the magistrates of the town and the representatives of the Trades – known as the Magna Charta.

In this year there were seven incorporated Trades:

- Glovers - including skimmers and tanners.
- Hammermen - smiths and all workers in metal, including silversmiths, armourers, lorimers (makers of harness pieces) and cutlers.
- Tailors
- Shoemakers - including cordiners (or 'cordwainer' – a shoemaker or worker in Spanish Cordovan leather)
- Weavers
- Squarewrights - masons and joiners.
- Butchers - the butchers had ceased to be members of the convenery by 1705.

By the Articles of Condescendence, regulations were introduced for the governance of each Trade which was headed by a deacon. These deacons formed a convenery, which was in turn headed by the deacon convener.

In 1670 the Trades were given “*a piece of moorish ground*” to the south of Elgin. This became known as the Trades Muir and was the site of the future planned village of New Elgin. The Riding of the Marches (or boundaries) of the Trades Muir continued into the 21st century.

By 1705 the Trades were allowed to elect their own deacons and boxmasters (treasurers) and deacon convener. They were also allowed to return three of their members to the Town Council. This gave them significant political influence.

These new privileges caused considerable jealousy: “James Gordon, merchant, was cited before the Council and fined £100 Scots for saying that the Magistrates were *a parcel of beasts for giving so large privileges to the Trades*”.

Throughout the 18th and first half of the 19th century, the Incorporated Trades played an important part in the political and economic life of Elgin. From 1676 to 1691 the Trades met in Greyfriars, and from 1701 until 1731 they met in the Chapter House of the Cathedral. From 1731 until 1803, they seem to have held their meetings in a variety of inns in Elgin.

### **The Trades Hall**

In 1803 they purchased Drummuir House in Elgin High St for £560 from the Duffs of Drummuir. This three-storey house built on

arcades and dating from the late 17th century, became the Trades Hall until 1848 when it was sold to the North of Scotland Bank and demolished. It was replaced by a handsome classical style building, which in turn was also demolished, and replaced in 1969 by the building which now houses the Clydesdale Bank.

The minute books of the individual Trades and of the Convenery give some idea of their interests and activities from the 1780s to 1830s:

- From the late 18th century they had an association with Lossiemouth and in 1787 provided a fully equipped fishing boat and built houses for fishermen in Seatown.
- They provided an undertaking service with their own hearse and the provision of "*mort cloths*".
- In 1791, expenses of 4/- were recorded at a meeting to register opposition to the slave trade.
- In 1792, 5/6 was expended while presenting the Trades' respects to their patron and "*fellow Craftsman*" the Earl of Fife.
- In 1805 they contributed £20 for repairs to St Giles' church.
- In 1812, a subscription of £6/6s was raised for the relief of the poor.
- In 1816, there was "*paid Alexander Rhind for digging and building a well £10/3/4d.*" This was probably the last public well sunk in Elgin.
- In 1821 the convenery paid a subscription of £10 towards the cost of laying pavements in Elgin.
- In 1826 old St Giles' Church was demolished. The six trades contributed £112/1/2d, paid in equal instalments until 1829, towards the construction of the new church (the Trades were allocated their own seats in the new church as in the old).
- In 1835 the convenery paid the first instalment of a subscription for a new Town Gaol which was opened in 1843.
- In 1837 with their fellow burghers in Elgin the Trades were involved in the creation of a new harbour at Stotfield in Lossiemouth. The laying of the foundation stone was a grand affair. The Trades formed a procession headed by the blacksmiths (hammermen) led by an apprentice on horseback dressed as Vulcan with a "*thunderbolt in one hand and a bottle in the other*". This procession marched from Elgin to Lossiemouth where after the laying of the stone by Lt Col Brander of Pitgaveny, the prosperity of Stotfield was toasted in the inns of the village. "*Nothing could surpass the hilarity of the occasion*".

## Trades School 1826-1874

The foundation of a Trades School was one of the most significant contributions the Trades made to the community of Elgin. Founded in 1826 the first school was established in the Trades Hall. By 1836 the Convenery decided that a new school was required. Each of the six Trades contributed to this project and the New Trades School was opened in Moss Street in 1838.

During the lifetime of the school there were just four schoolmasters. The last of these teachers, Mr Mackenzie, was appointed in 1846 and continued in post until his death in 1874. Mr Mackenzie was paid a salary of £15 plus a government grant of £15, together with school fees, fixed by the Convenery:

Reading	2/-
Reading and writing	2/6
Geography, grammar and arithmetic	3/6
Book keeping	5/-
Latin	5/-

The Trades school finally closed in 1874, following the Education Act of 1872. The Elgin School Board set up the West End School as a substitute.

## Local Politics

With three members on the Town Council, the Trades had considerable political influence during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as at this time the Town Council was responsible for returning the Member of Parliament.

There was considerable opportunity for bribery and corruption, most notably in the notorious election of 1820 which was hotly contested between the factions of the Earl of Fife (the Duffs) and the Earl of Seafield (the Grants).

The Trades were supporters of the Earl of Fife, their "*Fellow Craftsman*". James Cattnach, Deacon of the Wrights is said to have received a book of psalms from Lord Fife in which each of its three hundred pages consisted of a pound note. However, Deacon Alexander Mclver of the Shoemakers refused £2,000 and the life rent of a farm.

As the election approached, the Grant party attempted to kidnap two of Lord Fife's supporters on the Council. In retaliation the Duff party seized two of the Grant supporters and took them away to Brora on the other side of the Moray Firth. Fearing for her own

safety, Lady Anne Grant, who was then resident in Grant Lodge, summoned her loyal clansmen from Cromdale for her protection.

Three hundred Highlanders reached Elgin on the morning of 13th March 1820 to be met by the tenantry of Lord Fife armed with "*staves, bludgeons, rusty swords and other weapons*". The sheriff appealed to Lady Anne to send her Highlanders home with the assurance of the appointment of special constables to keep the peace. Bloodshed was thus averted. The Grant faction won the election.

The Reform Act of 1832 put an end to this sort of activity and from that date the Trades ceased to have direct involvement in local politics.

### **Later History**

Fourteen years later in 1846 another Act of Parliament abolished Exclusive Trading Facilities and thereby the Trades lost their monopoly over their individual Crafts in Elgin.

In 1848 the Trades Hall and other properties were sold, and the proceeds divided amongst the Trades. However, they were not allowed to sell the Trades Muir, the area of the town which eventually developed as New Elgin, and which was the focus of their attention during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

However, the Trades were mainly concerned with their own affairs and their minutes record annual meetings, appointment of office bearers, and the distribution of funds to widows and dependents.

In 1883, the Trades were represented at the ceremony inaugurating the Coast Line Railway – their first participation in a public event for twenty-five years.

The Trades continued to meet throughout the twentieth century and act as a benefit society for their members. A new deacon Convener was appointed every two years accompanied from 1908 by a ceremonial riding of the marches along the boundaries of the old Trades Muir. The first female Deacon Convener, Ann Forteach of the Glovers, was appointed from 2007 - 2009, but by this time the membership of all the Trades had declined and some of the traditional crafts were no longer in existence in Elgin.

The Incorporated Trades were finally disbanded in April 2014. The last Deacon Convener, James Welsh, was instrumental to the donation of the Conventary archive along with those of the

Weavers and Tailors to Elgin Museum together with banners, seals, aprons, photographs and the Deacon Convener's chair.

John Grigor made a similar donation of the effects of the Squarewrights, and both passed their organisations' residual funds to the Museum for "*Acquisitions and Conservation*" and "*Building maintenance*", respectively. Bill Lyon also handed over the Hammermen's effects and Norris Patterson the Shoemakers effects.

**Photograph of the Incorporated Trades of Elgin Donating the archives and associated articles to Elgin Museum following the disbanding of the remaining Incorporated Trades in April 2014**

**Top row, left to right:** former Deacon Convener **Ann Forteath** (Glover; first female Deacon Convener 2007-2009), former Deacon Convener **Colin McInnes** (Squarewright), Box Master **Robert Grant** (Weaver), Mrs Grant and daughter, **Anne Pendery** (Weaver), Lt Col Grenville S Johnston OBE TD CA (President of the Moray Society, accepting the donation on behalf of Elgin Museum).



**Bottom row, left to right:** former Deacon Convener **George Nicol** (Weaver), Mrs Lyon, former Deacon Convener **William Lyon** (Hammermen; his family were plumbers), former Deacon Convener **John Grigor** (Squarewright, died 10/11/2015, aged 90; his family were carpenters), last Deacon Convener **James A. Welsh** (Weaver).

Also in the photo is the Weaver's apron, two Conveners of the Trades wooden chests, Deacon Convener's staff, 2002 Trades banner and various books of the Incorporated Trades.

## Incorporated Trades of Elgin Donation to Elgin Museum in April 2014

**Below:** Photo of **William (Bill) Lyon** holding his grandfather's police baton and wearing his Hammermen's Apron and Chain of Office and holding his Deacon Convener's Staff. Mr Lyon's funeral was held on 7th March 2016; his family were plumbers by trade.



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*Upstairs Temporary Exhibition from 26<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2016, by Sara Marsh and Roger Pendergast, Elgin Museum Volunteers.*