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# THE ORIGINS OF FREEMASONRY

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*Scotland's century*  
1590–1710



## **The origins of freemasonry**



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**David Stevenson**

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521353267](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521353267)

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First published 1998

First paperback edition 1990

10th printing 2005

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Stevenson, David, Ph.D.

The origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century, 1590–1710 / David Stevenson.

p. cm.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 35326 2

1. Freemasonry – Scotland – History. I. Title.

HS597.A5S74 1988

366'.1'09411 – dc19 88–5040

ISBN-13 978-0-521-35326-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-35326-2 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-39654-7 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-39654-9 paperback

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**For my parents,  
Alan Carruth Stevenson and  
Annie Gordon Sheila Steven**



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# Preface

I had no idea, when I first began research into early freemasonry in Scotland, that I would end up arguing that the essentials of the complicated cocktail of diverse influences and trends that make up modern freemasonry were brought together in Scotland. Rather this was a conclusion that was gradually forced on me by the evidence. I first became aware of the fact that there were masonic lodges in seventeenth-century Scotland nearly 20 years ago. In the course of postgraduate research on the covenanter I came across a reference to two covenanter generals being admitted to membership of the Lodge of Edinburgh. My reaction was one of bewilderment, for I had no idea that masonic lodges had existed at that time. What did it mean to be a mason in the 1640s? Nothing I found to read threw significant light on the matter. The reference was therefore consigned to a file as an intriguing oddity for later investigation. When I at last blew the dust off the file and tried to make sense of the reference, thinking it might provide the basis of an interesting article, I soon found I had entered into a major research topic on which a vast amount had been published, though academic historians like myself had largely ignored or overlooked it. As a result, the projected article grew into two books. The present one seeks to trace the influences which formed early freemasonry and to analyse the evidence relating to its emergence primarily in Scotland and its subsequent spread to England. The second book, *The first freemasons. The early Scottish lodges and their members*, concentrates on the development of individual lodges.

Researching and writing them has been an exciting experience for me. When I began I was foolish enough to think that I already had a fair general knowledge of seventeenth-century Scottish history and its sources. I quickly discovered how wrong I was, as a whole new world of masonic lodges unfolded before me, social organisations previously unknown to Scottish historians of the period which now demand a place in the social and cultural history of the country.

Why has masonic history been so remarkably neglected by 'ordinary' historians? Several answers may be suggested. Firstly, one could waste a lifetime reading the sheer nonsense written in past generations by masonic authors, and this has often led academic historians who have ventured into the

fringes of the subject to recoil disillusioned, concluding too soon that the whole subject was disreputable.

Secondly, though there have been many excellent masonic historians, without whose work this book could not have been written, their work has tended to be not just by masons but for masons, published by specialist publishers and (though not kept secret) only publicised in masonic circles. This separation of masonic and general history has had unfortunate effects for all concerned. Most general historians remain unaware of a remarkable development which takes place in seventeenth-century Britain, while masonic historians, concentrating on the emergence of freemasonry, are usually not equipped with the wider knowledge of historical developments which is necessary if what is happening is to be fully understood. A major exception to this generalisation was provided by the remarkable partnership earlier this century of Douglas Knoop (professor of economics at the University of Sheffield and a mason) and G. P. Jones (professor of economic history at the University of Sheffield and not a mason). Their many works greatly enhanced the credibility of masonic history, and they argued with vigour that masonic history should not be studied in isolation from other aspects of historical development.

A final reason for the gulf that still generally separates masonic from general historians concerns attitudes on both sides. Some masons regard their history as virtually the property of members of the craft, and are unhappy at outsiders working in the field – a response obviously conditioned by the periodic publication of lurid attacks on the craft, for such ‘exposures’ lead to fear that any outsider taking an interest in freemasonry might really be seeking material for a scandalous instant best-seller. Some academic historians, disapproving of freemasonry or suspicious of it, regard it as a disreputable subject best avoided. This latter attitude is obviously absurd; if historians confined themselves exclusively to studying aspects of the past they positively approved of, our understanding would be limited to say the least.

The historian of freemasonry should, ideally, have expertise in a wider range of historical studies than I can lay claim to. In particular, it will be evident to specialists in Renaissance and Enlightenment studies that I am expert in neither. In these fields I have gratefully relied on some of the excellent modern essays and monographs that are available rather than on my own researches. In writing I have tried to bear three objectives in mind. Firstly I hope the book will help to integrate the history of freemasonry into general history by de-mystifying the topic, demonstrating that historians can and should investigate it like any other branch of history instead of ignoring it as disreputable and inexplicable. Secondly, I hope that the many freemasons who take an interest in the history of ‘the Craft’ will not only find new information about its early days in the chapters which follow, but will be persuaded that it can only be fully understood if placed in the wider context of

general history. Finally, I hope the book may serve to make some sense of freemasonry to the general reader. Some features of the movement that may be regarded as absurd or distasteful when viewed in the context of the late twentieth century, may be better understood (even if still, perhaps, not positively approved of!) when seen in the context of their true origins. At times it may seem that I am unduly concerned to explain and prove points in a detailed way which some readers would be happy to be spared: in extenuation I plead that in a minefield as dangerous as masonic history has often proved to be it is necessary to plot every step with the utmost care.

I am not myself a freemason, and have no intention of becoming one. It is perhaps worth stating this specifically in order to reassure the paranoid who would automatically reject anything written about the craft by a member of it! In view of the exaggerated notions as to the dedication to total secrecy of the craft which are common, I am happy to record my thanks to the many Scottish masonic lodges which have allowed me access to their records, to the Grand Lodge of Scotland for letting me use their library to consult both manuscripts and printed works, and to masonic office holders and historians who have responded to my queries and given me encouragement – even if they have not always agreed with my interpretations. Without such help this book could not have been written. I would like to single out for mention firstly the earl of Elgin (a past Grand Master of Scotland) for allowing me to consult the correspondence of one of my covenanting generals, Sir Robert Moray, and for arranging for me to have the fascinating experience of talking about Sir Robert to the lodge named after him, Lodge No. 1641, Sir Robert Moray; and secondly the late George Draffen of Newington, who as a leading Scottish masonic historian gave me much helpful advice about sources, publications and contacts in the early stages of my work. Discussions with Professor Roger Emerson (London, Ontario) have been very useful to me in the field of the late seventeenth-century background to the Enlightenment, and I have benefited much from correspondence with Professor Wallace McLeod (Toronto) about the Old Charges – though he would not wish to be associated with some of the arguments put forward in this book.

Some of the material in chapter 7 has previously appeared in *PSAS*, 114 (1984), and I am grateful for permission to incorporate this into the present work. Permission of the following to reproduce copyright photographs as illustrations is gratefully acknowledged:

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| 6a, 7b, 8a | The Royal Society, London  |
| 6b         | The earl of Elgin  |
| 6c, 8b     | The Trustees of the British Library                                |
| 7a         | The Trustees of the National Library of Scotland                   |

Acknowledgements are also due to the staff of the many libraries and archives I have visited during my research, the back-room workers who do so much to facilitate the work of the historian. I am most grateful for research grants from the University of Aberdeen and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland to cover the cost of travel; to the University of Aberdeen for a term's study leave; and to a grant from the Leverhulme Trust which bought me further freedom from teaching duties to complete research and writing. Both my gratitude and that of readers is due to Pauline Leng, whose editorial labours have been responsible for removing much in the way of obscurity and clumsiness of expression. Finally, my thanks are due to my colleagues in the Department of History, University of Aberdeen, for accepting the inconveniences caused by my absences on leave. At least they brought them a doubtless welcome respite from my attempts to convert them to the joys of masonic history.

## Abbreviations and conventions

<i>APS</i>	<i>The acts of the parliaments of Scotland</i> (12 vols., 1814–75)
<i>AQC</i>	<i>Ars Quatuor Coronatorum. Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London</i>
BL	British Library, London
Carr, 'Catechisms'	'An examination of the early masonic catechisms', <i>AQC</i> , 83 (1970), 337–57; 84 (1971), 293–307; 85 (1972), 331–48
Carr, <i>Edinburgh</i>	H. Carr (ed.), <i>The minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh, Mary's Chapel, No. 1, 1598–1738</i> (Quatuor Coronatorum Antigrapha, Masonic Reprints, xiii, London, 1962)
Carr, <i>Kilwinning</i>	H. Carr, <i>Lodge Mother Kilwinning, No. 0. A study of the earliest minute books, 1642 to 1842</i> (London, 1961)
Carr, <i>Mason and burgh</i>	H. Carr, <i>The mason and the burgh. An examination of the Edinburgh register of apprentices and the burghs rolls</i> (London, 1954)
Carr, 'Mason Word'	H. Carr, 'A collection of references to the Mason Word', <i>AQC</i> , 85 (1972), 217–41
Colvin, <i>Architects</i>	H. M. Colvin, <i>A biographical dictionary of British architects</i> (London, 1978)
<i>Complete baronetage</i>	G. E. C[okayne] (ed.), <i>Complete baronetage</i> (6 vols., Exeter, 1900–9)
<i>Complete peerage</i>	G. E. C[okayne] (ed.), <i>Complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom</i> , revised edn (14 vols., London, 1910–59)
<i>CSPS</i>	<i>Calendar of state papers relating to Scotland</i> (13 vols., London, 1898–1969)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of national biography</i> (63 vols., 1885–1900)
EUL	Edinburgh University Library



GLS	Grand Lodge of Scotland, Edinburgh
GLSYB	<i>Grand Lodge of Scotland year book</i> (Edinburgh, 1952- )
HMC Inventory	Historical Manuscripts Commission, London 'Inventory of early Scottish masonic records', appendix to D. Stevenson, <i>The first freemasons. Scotland's early lodges and their members</i> (Aberdeen, 1988)
Jones, <i>Guide</i>	B. E. Jones, <i>Freemasons' guide and compendium</i> , new edn (London, 1956)
Knoop, <i>Catechisms</i>	D. Knoop, G. P. Jones and D. Hamer (eds.), <i>Early masonic catechisms</i> , 2nd edn (London, 1963)
Knoop, <i>Genesis</i>	D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, <i>The genesis of freemasonry</i> (Manchester, 1947)
Knoop, <i>Handlist</i>	D. Knoop and G. P. Jones (eds.), <i>A handlist of masonic documents</i> (Manchester, 1942)
Knoop, <i>Pamphlets</i>	D. Knoop, G. P. Jones and D. Hamer (eds.), <i>Early masonic pamphlets</i> (Manchester, 1945)
Knoop, <i>Scottish mason</i>	D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, <i>The Scottish mason and the Mason Word</i> (Manchester, 1939)
Lyon, <i>Edinburgh</i>	D. M. Lyon, <i>History of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No. 1, embracing an account of the rise and progress of freemasonry in Scotland</i> , 2nd or tercentenary edn (London, 1900)
MacGibbon, <i>Architecture</i>	D. MacGibbon and R. Ross, <i>The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland</i> (5 vols., Edinburgh, 1887-92)
Miller, <i>Aberdeen</i>	A. L. Miller, <i>Notes on the early history and records of the Lodge, Aberdeen, No. 1<sup>st</sup> on the roll of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Scotland</i> (Aberdeen, 1919)
<i>Mr of works accs.</i>	<i>Accounts of the masters of works</i> , ed. H. M. Paton (vol. i) and J. Imrie and J. G. Dunbar (vol. ii) (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1957-82)
Mylne, <i>Master masons</i>	R. S. Mylne, <i>The master masons to the crown of Scotland</i> (Edinburgh, 1893)
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
Poole, <i>Gould's history</i>	H. Poole (ed.), <i>Gould's history of freemasonry</i> (4 vols., London, 1951)
PSAS	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i>
RCAHMS	Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Inventories, Edinburgh

RMS	<i>Register of the great seal of Scotland. Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum</i> (11 vols., Edinburgh, 1882–1914)
RPCS	<i>Register of the privy council of Scotland</i> (38 vols., Edinburgh, 1887–1970)
RSS	<i>Register of the privy seal of Scotland. Registrum secreti sigilli regum Scotorum</i> (8 vols., Edinburgh, 1908–83)
SBRSS <i>Scots peerage</i>	Scottish Burgh Record Society, Edinburgh Sir J. B. Paul (ed.), <i>The Scots peerage</i> (9 vols., Edinburgh, 1904–14)
SHS Smith, <i>Dumfries</i>	Scottish History Society, Edinburgh James Smith, <i>History of the Old Lodge of Dumfries</i> (Dumfries, 1892)
SRO	Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh
SRS	Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh
Stevenson, <i>Freemasons</i>	D. Stevenson, <i>The first freemasons. Scotland's early lodges and their members</i> (Aberdeen, 1988)
Vernon, <i>History</i>	W. F. Vernon, <i>History of freemasonry in the province of Roxburgh, Peebles and Selkirkshires, from 1674 to the present time</i> (London, 1893)

*Money*\* All references are to Scots money unless otherwise stated. From the seventeenth century £1 Scots = £0. 1s. 8d. sterling (about £0. 08 sterling decimal). Thus £1 sterling = £12 Scots. A merk = £0. 13. 4d. Scots = about £0. 1s. 1d. sterling (about £0. 05½p. sterling decimal).

*Dating* Days and months are cited Old Style, as this was retained in Britain until 1752. In accordance with the convention of the 'historical year', years are taken to begin on 1 January and not (as in Scotland until 1600 and in England until 1752) on 25 March, dates being silently adjusted where necessary.

*Quotations* Original spelling is retained for quotations unless otherwise stated, though abbreviations have been silently extended. In case of difficulty in understanding quotations it often helps to concentrate not on the spelling but on how words look as if they should sound, taking into account the frequent interchangeability of u, v and w, and the Scots tendency to replace w with qu.



# 1 Introduction

*The origin of Freemasonry is one of the most debated, and debatable, subjects in the whole realm of historical inquiry.*<sup>1</sup>

*[Masonic history is] a department of history which is not only obscure and highly controversial, but by ill luck the happiest of all hunting grounds for the light-headed, the fanciful, the altogether unscholarly and the lunatic fringe of the British Museum Reading Room.*<sup>2</sup>

*... the wealth of old Masonic records in Scotland, so strangely neglected by those who possess it.*<sup>3</sup>

The evidence relating to the emergence of modern freemasonry is complex, confusing, and often fragmentary. The purpose of this introduction is to help readers gain their bearings before plunging into the jungle of more detailed arguments and explanations.

## **Masonic history**

This book is a study of the emergence in seventeenth-century Scotland of freemasonry, a brotherhood of men bound together by secret initiations, by secret rituals, and by secret modes of identification, organised in groups known as lodges. The functions of these lodges, and the attraction they had for those seeking admission were various. At first, and in some cases well into the eighteenth century, one of the basic functions of many of the lodges was regulating the working lives of stonemasons. But from the start social and ritual functions lay at the heart of the lodges. Already by the mid seventeenth century ideals resembling in many respects those of modern freemasonry can be detected in the lodges, and significant numbers of men who were not stonemasons were being admitted to these lodges.

This study is based as far as possible on contemporary written sources, evaluated like other historical sources. This should go without saying, but in

<sup>1</sup> F. Yates, *The Rosicrucian enlightenment* (Paladin edn, Frogmore, 1975), 252.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Knoop, *Genesis*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> R. J. Meekren, comment in discussion in *AQC*, 58 (1955), 83.

## 2 Introduction

view of the strong tendency of many people either, at one extreme, to believe the most implausible fables about masonic history, and at the other extreme to dismiss all evidence relating to the history of freemasonry as totally untrustworthy, it is worth stressing the obvious: that masonic history should follow the rules accepted for other branches of history. As the outstanding twentieth-century historians of early freemasonry, Knoop and Jones, wrote in 1946,

whereas it has been customary to think of masonic history as something entirely apart from ordinary history, and as calling for, and justifying, special treatment, we think of it as a branch of social history, as the study of a particular social institution and of the ideas underlying that institution, to be investigated and written in exactly the same way as the history of other social institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately these sentiments have failed to free masonic history from the ghetto to which it has all too often been consigned by the narrow historical outlook of many masons combined with the unreasoning prejudice of professional historians. Knoop and Jones themselves failed to provide a properly balanced approach to masonic history, for it should not be seen as a branch of social history, but simply as a branch of history; and though they talked of social history this often in practice turned out to mean economic history. Thus other aspects of the historical context within which freemasonry developed – political, religious, intellectual, cultural and even social – have continued to be neglected, and what economic history in isolation could reveal about freemasonry turned out to be distinctly limited.

Moreover, in their enthusiasm for freeing masonic history from past absurdities and excesses, Knoop and Jones dictated very narrow and puritanical definitions of the role of the historian which appear to have influenced some later writers into hardly daring to say anything. The duty of the historian, masonic or otherwise,

is to hunt for facts and verify conclusions, and not to fill in gaps either by the dangerous argument of analogy ... or by an equally dangerous exercise of the imagination ... There are undoubtedly numerous gaps in the history of freemasonry, but to fill them, not by the successful search for new facts, but by the use of the imagination, is to revert to the mythical or imaginative treatment of the subject.<sup>5</sup>

This stark creed has been valuable in raising the standards of masonic history, but in trying to cure the excesses of one extreme it goes too far in the opposite direction by suggesting that the historian must limit activity to the collection of facts. These facts, it seems, may then be left virtually to speak for themselves, and where facts are lacking all the historian can do is seek new

<sup>4</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, v. For a brief sketch of the main schools of masonic history see *ibid.*, 2–5.

<sup>5</sup> D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *The scope and method of masonic history* (Manchester Association for Masonic Research, Oldham, 1944), 9.

facts. If they cannot be found no attempt should be made to fill the gap. Fortunately, in practice Knoop and Jones showed themselves to be much more sophisticated historians than this suggests. What they really meant to banish was not imagination but invention, for they were denouncing the tendency to invent convenient facts to fill gaps or add glory to freemasonry's past. Imagination is in fact an essential item in the historian's toolkit, both in trying to make sense of facts and in speculating when facts are lacking, though it must of course be intelligent and informed imagination, and it must be made clear where fact ends and interpretation and speculation begin. The same is true of the use of analogies: potentially dangerous in the wrong hands, but powerful and enlightening when sensitively employed.

Thus though much of this book is based on sound documentary evidence, I make no apology for the fact that it also contains much in the way of tentative interpretation and imaginative guesswork. It is hoped this is plausible, and wherever possible is based on whatever scraps of evidence survive, but this the reader must judge. The 'facts' are frequently stubborn, refusing to speak for themselves and demanding interpretation if they are to make any sense, and speculation abounds when facts fail altogether. The alternative would be to present a heap of disjointed facts, which would be an abdication of the historian's duty to do all that is possible to make the past comprehensible. As many aspects of early freemasonry are obscure, the book is littered with phrases such as 'it is possible that', 'it may well be that' and 'it would seem that' – clumsy but necessary to draw the reader's attention to the problems and uncertainties inevitably involved in attempting to fill those gaps which Knoop and Jones in their severer moments would have insisted should be left unfilled.

Though the work of Knoop and Jones may be criticised in some respects, their work provides a strong and essential foundation for masonic history, vastly superior to what had preceded it: criticising them is a backhanded compliment, for they must be taken seriously and their works should still be studied, whereas most attempts to write the early history of freemasonry are best ignored, relegated to merciful oblivion. Further, in criticising aspects of the approach of Knoop and Jones to masonic history I have the advantage of being able to call on the conclusions of a great deal of non-masonic historical research which were not available to them. Such research has widened the horizons of historians in a number of ways, opening up whole new fields of study relevant to freemasonry. Outstanding here has been the work of Frances Yates into previously obscure areas of Renaissance thought. Though she never specifically investigated freemasonry she speculated acutely on several occasions that the themes she was studying must link up with it somehow. Chapter 5 seeks to prove that she was right.

Beginning in Britain, freemasonry swept across Europe in the mid eighteenth century in the most astonishing fashion. The claim is often made

that the creation of modern freemasonry dates from the foundation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. In fact that date is almost an irrelevance in the long process of development of the movement, for though the English Grand Lodge came in time to play a major role in organising freemasonry, when founded it merely brought together four London lodges: 'At the time, the formation of Grand Lodge was an event of very minor importance in the development of freemasonry, and in no sense constituted a milestone in masonic history.'<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that England can claim the first move towards national organisation through grand lodges, and that this was copied subsequently by Ireland (c.1725) and Scotland (1736), has led to many English masonic historians simply taking it for granted that freemasonry originated in England, which then gave it to the rest of the world. Thus we get confident statements such as 'There can be little doubt that speculative freemasonry was originally wholly of English growth.'<sup>7</sup> But when the seventeenth-century evidence relating to the development of freemasonry is examined, it is immediately apparent that documentary evidence is astonishingly copious in Scotland, almost entirely absent in England. This has often been perceived as an embarrassment, and a number of arguments more ingenious than plausible have been put forward to explain away the overwhelmingly Scottish provenance of the evidence to pander to the patriotic prejudices of English masons.<sup>8</sup> This is startlingly illustrated by the various editions of the standard full-scale history of freemasonry, written by Robert Gould. In the first edition of 1884–7 Gould very sensibly dealt with early Scottish freemasonry before early English freemasonry, as so much Scottish evidence pre-dated equivalent English evidence. But the heretical implications of this arrangement were too much for English twentieth-century masonic editors. Consciously or unconsciously responding to their built-in assumptions of English primacy, chapters were swapped round so that early Scottish freemasonry was considered not only after English but after Irish freemasonry! No doubt this arrangement was justified by the order in which the national grand lodges were founded, but the result is an absurdity. Much of the evidence discussed in chapters on early English freemasonry is in fact Scottish evidence, as the English evidence on its own is too slight to make a coherent account possible.<sup>9</sup>

One of the major innovations of the great partnership of Knoop and Jones was to stress the importance of the Scottish contribution to the making of freemasonry, and this proved one of the most controversial aspects of their

<sup>6</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 321.

<sup>7</sup> B. E. Jones, *Freemasons' guide and compendium* (London, 1950), 96. See also J. Hamill, *The Craft. A history of English freemasonry* (1986), 19, 27.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., E. Ward, 'Operative entered apprenticeship', *AQC*, 70 (1957), 19; R. E. Wallace-James, 'The minute book of Aitchison's Haven Lodge', *AQC*, 24 (1911), 44.

<sup>9</sup> R. F. Gould, *The history of freemasonry* (6 vols., London, 1884–7), ed. Dudley Wright (5 vols., London, 1931), ed. H. Poole (4 vols., London, 1951).

work.<sup>10</sup> But their understanding of the Scottish contribution was inevitably limited by the fact that they studied it within an English framework, as they still regarded freemasonry as an essentially English movement, instead of placing it in the context of Scottish history. This book seeks to rectify this by looking at the Scottish seventeenth-century developments initially as part of the history of the country they take place in, and only then seeking to relate them to what was happening in England. This new perspective, it is hoped, will throw much new light on the origins of freemasonry. The end date for the study, about 1710, is inevitably arbitrary, but has been chosen as marking approximately the point at which the popularity of masonry in England led to developments there which ended the period of Scottish domination of early freemasonry. The book is thus about the 'Scottish phase' in the development of freemasonry. Considering the wealth of the Scottish early masonic records<sup>11</sup> surprisingly few attempts have been made to write histories of Scottish freemasonry. The first, that of David Murray Lyon in 1873,<sup>12</sup> produced a vast and chaotic heap of valuable information disguised as a history of the Lodge of Edinburgh. Georg Begemann produced a history which at least admitted in its title what it was, but did so in Germany and at a time, 1914, when German works were unlikely to receive widespread distribution or a welcome in Britain.<sup>13</sup> These are the only substantial previous attempts to provide a history of freemasonry in Scotland, for though Knoop and Jones produced a book on *The Scottish mason and the Mason Word* in 1939, the first of the two studies it contained was almost exclusively concerned with economic history, though the second was of great value in demonstrating conclusively that the Mason Word was a Scottish institution.<sup>14</sup>

### The origins of freemasonry

In tracing the direct line of descent of modern freemasonry, the starting point undoubtedly lies in England, in the documents known as the 'Old Charges' or 'Old Constitutions'. Like other Medieval trades the masons had their craft organisations or guilds, and their mythical histories stressing the antiquity and importance of their crafts, closely linking them with religious and moral concepts. The crafts also had their secrets, relating to techniques and working practices. Masons doubtless had some sort of ceremony or ritual to mark the initiation of new members of the craft, but in this they were no different from other crafts. But the English masons were peculiar in one

<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 133.      <sup>11</sup> These records are fully listed in Inventory.

<sup>12</sup> D. M. Lyon, *History of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No. 1, embracing an account of the rise and progress of freemasonry in Scotland* (London, 1873, 2nd edn, London, 1900)

<sup>13</sup> Georg E. W. Begemann, *Vorgeschichte und Anfänge der Freimaurerie in Schottland. Buch 1. Die alten schottischen Werkloggen* (Berlin, 1914). See D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *Begemann's History of freemasonry* (privately printed, 1941), 9–10.

<sup>14</sup> Knoop, *Scottish mason*.



respect by the fifteenth century: their mythical trade history, contained in the Old Charges, was unusually elaborate. This lore was to make a significant contribution to freemasonry through its emphasis on morality, its identification of the mason craft with geometry, and the importance it gave to Solomon's Temple and ancient Egypt in the development of the mason craft. Nonetheless, to speak of 'freemasonry' in the modern sense in the Middle Ages is anachronistic; there is no indication that the mason trade was to be singled out from the rest for a remarkable and unique future.

The Medieval contribution, of craft organisation and legend, provided some of the ingredients essential to the formation of freemasonry, but the process of combining these with other ingredients did not take place until the years around 1600, and it took place in Scotland. Aspects of Renaissance thought were then spliced onto the Medieval legends, along with an institutional structure based on lodges and the rituals and the secret procedures for recognition known as the Mason Word. It is in this late Renaissance Scottish phase, according to the main argument of this book, that modern freemasonry was created.

In the course of the seventeenth century men at all levels of society became intrigued by the secrets of the stonemasons and their claims that their craft had a unique intellectual status, and some of these outsiders were initiated into lodges. Initiation of gentlemen into lodges in England is also recorded from the 1640s, but the process there is much more obscure. The link with working stonemasons and their organisations was weak, and the secrets possessed by English masons and their organisation in lodges seem to have derived from Scotland suggesting that, whereas in Scotland freemasonry grew out of the genuine practices of working stonemasons, in England it was in part at least imported from Scotland, with lodges being from the first created by gentlemen and for gentlemen. But from the early eighteenth century the English began to innovate and adapt the movement, though Scottish influence remained strong, and at this point England took over the lead in the development of freemasonry from Scotland. Moreover, the movement was changing in other ways. The Scottish phase, that of the Renaissance contribution, was being succeeded by a new phase – in both Scotland and England – in which some of the values which were to be associated with the Enlightenment were incorporated into the movement: as the Age of Reason dawned freemasonry, Renaissance in origin, was adapted to fit a new climate.

Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment influences had blended together to create an institution that seemed to reflect the progressive spirit of the age, with ideals of brotherhood, equality, toleration and reason. Yet even as freemasonry emerged and spread as a world-wide movement, it diversified in the most bewildering way. It seems a protean institution that changes shape and content according to circumstances and membership. It could provide an

institutional framework for almost any religious or political belief. It could be committedly Catholic (until outlawed by the papacy) or protestant. It could nurture conspiracies of left or right. In Britain both Hanoverians and Jacobites were attracted to rival masonic allegiances. It is as if the lodge system, combined with secrecy, ideals of loyalty and secret modes of recognition, had created an ideal organisational framework, into which members could put their own values and which they could adapt for their own uses. Many of these variants arising from masonry which survive today are not recognised by British masonic organisations, being regarded as having abandoned the original ideals of the movement, but it is nonetheless true that masonry has provided the classic structure for secret organisations in the modern world.

Thus the development of masonry from the early eighteenth century is bewildering in its incoherent diversity. But the masonry of the grand lodges within Britain, and of other lodges they recognise elsewhere, retains to this day clear evidence of its late Renaissance and Scottish origins.

### The Scottish evidence

The claim that it is in Scotland in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the essentials of modern freemasonry emerge is a large one, but the following list of 'firsts' that Scotland can claim on the basis of surviving sources is a crude indication of the evidence on which the claim rests:

- Earliest use of the word 'lodge' in the modern masonic sense, and evidence that such permanent institutions exist
- Earliest official minute books and other records of such lodges
- Earliest attempts at organising lodges at a national level
- Earliest examples of 'non-operatives' (men who were not working stonemasons) joining lodges
- Earliest evidence connecting lodge masonry with specific ethical ideas expounded by use of symbols
- Earliest evidence indicating that some regarded masonry as sinister or conspiratorial
- Earliest references to the Mason Word
- Earliest 'masonic catechisms' expounding the Mason Word and describing initiation ceremonies
- Earliest evidence of the use of two degrees or grades within masonry
- Earliest use of the terms 'entered apprentice' and 'fellow craft' for these grades
- Earliest evidence (within the Lodge of Edinburgh) of the emergence of a third grade, created by a move towards regarding fellow craft and master not as alternative terms for the same grade but as referring to separate grades (or at least status).

To set alongside all these Scottish masonic 'firsts' England can claim:

Earliest copies of the Old Charges (no Scottish copies are known which pre-date the mid seventeenth century)

Widespread use of the word 'freemason', and use of the term 'accepted mason'

Earliest lodge composed entirely of 'non-operatives' (which can be interpreted as indicating how English masonry was, much more than Scottish, an artificial creation, not something that grew out of the beliefs and institutions of working stonemasons)

The earliest grand lodge

Of these, the Old Charges which developed in England were to become an essential part of freemasonry, but they were not in their origins part of it, while the other 'English' developments are late and, it might be argued, comparatively superficial, not affecting the basic nature of the movement.

Up to the end of the sixteenth century there is no evidence indicating that the masons of Scotland differed much from other types of craftsmen, except that the nature of their trade meant that masons often moved from one place to another in search of work. But from the 1590s evidence that the craft was unique emerges with bewildering rapidity. In 1590 an Aberdeenshire laird was confirmed as having hereditary jurisdiction over masons in Aberdeenshire and two other shires. In 1598 William Schaw, the king's master of works, issued a code of statutes regulating the organisation and conduct of masons. The following year surviving minutes of two lodges, Aitchison's Haven and Edinburgh, begin, and the Lodge of Haddington also had at one time records surviving from 1599. At the end of the year a second code of statutes by Schaw was issued, partly addressed to Kilwinning Lodge and mentioning also the lodges of Edinburgh and Stirling; and the Lodge of St Andrews is mentioned in an Edinburgh minute. In 1600 or 1601 William Schaw and representatives of five lodges confirmed the position of William Sinclair of Roslin as hereditary patron of the craft; the five lodges included one not referred to before, Dunfermline. Glasgow Lodge existed by 1613, and a new confirmation of the rights of the Sinclairs of Roslin in 1627 or 1628 was signed by representatives of the previously unknown Lodge of Dundee. In 1642 the remarkable minute books of Edinburgh and Aitchison's Haven, covering the whole seventeenth century, are joined by those of Kilwinning Lodge. In the 1650s the lodges of Linlithgow and Scone (Perth) are revealed; the 1670s brings Aberdeen (perhaps), Melrose, Canongate, Kilwinning, and Inverness, followed in the 1680s by Dumfries, and Canongate and Leith. The rate at which new lodges are founded, or emerge from previous obscurity, continues high in the final two decades covered by this study, with Kirkcudbright (probably), Dunblane and Hamilton in the 1690s and Kelso, Haughfoot, Banff, Kilmolymock (Elgin) and Edinburgh Journeymen in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Thus we know (either certainly or in a few instances on good though not conclusive evidence) of 25 lodges scattered throughout Lowland Scotland and into the fringes of the Highlands,

including lodges in all the largest burghs: and it would be remarkable (considering that some are only known through single fragments of surviving evidence) if other lodges did not exist in this period of which all trace has been lost.

The term 'lodge' had been used long before the 1590s, but the lodges which then emerge are very different from their predecessors, as will be explained in chapter 3. These new masonic lodges are, it will be argued, from their first appearance, as much or more concerned with rituals and secrets as with regulating the working practices of stonemasons. Generally only the latter aspects of the work of the lodges get recorded in their minute books, but this is hardly surprising; by definition the secret is unlikely to be recorded, and historians of any institution know to their cost that minutes are likely to be silent on many of the most interesting features of its activities. However, other evidence of the existence of masonic rituals and secrets soon appears to eke out the occasional tantalising references which occur in minutes. From the 1630s there is a steady trickle of references to the Mason Word, a secret means of identification. All the earliest references are in non-masonic sources, but soon they are joined by ones in lodge records. From the mid seventeenth century there also emerge Scottish copies of the Old Charges. Finally, in the 1690s the first surviving masonic catechisms appear, detailing secret rituals of initiation.

From this mass of Scottish evidence a fairly coherent picture of seventeenth-century Scottish freemasonry can be drawn. Much remains unknown, and always will, but compared with the situation in England, where only isolated scraps of evidence of masonic activity survive, the historian of early Scottish freemasonry has remarkable wealth at his disposal.

### **Problems of definition**

From the early seventeenth century onwards the Scottish 'operative' masons (working stonemasons) began to be joined in some lodges by 'non-operatives', men from other walks of life who wished to share in their rituals. If the first question facing the historian studying the origins of freemasonry is 'What were the secrets and rituals of the operative masons and how had they acquired them?', the second is 'Why did men who were not stonemasons wish to participate in the activities and secrets of the stonemasons, and what sort of men were these non-stonemasons who joined lodges?' Providing an answer to this latter question has been hindered by problems of terminology and attitudes. The terms usually used for the non-stonemasons who joined lodges are 'non-operative masons', 'gentlemen masons', and 'speculative masons'. The problem arises partly through the three terms often being assumed to be synonymous. Frequently this is not the case, for the term 'non-operative' contains a hidden ambiguity. Is a non-

operative a member of a lodge who is not a stonemason? Or is it a member who is not a working man (an 'operative') of any sort? Even the best masonic historians have tended to overlook this important ambiguity and conflate the two possible meanings. They tend to assume that the non-operatives whom they should identify and discuss are not 'all members who are not stonemasons', but 'all members who are not craftsmen', which is a much more limited group. Its members are by definition of higher social status, and can therefore be conveniently referred to as 'gentlemen masons'.<sup>15</sup> Thus an important group of members of some lodges, men who were operatives in that they were working men but who were not operative stonemasons, has fallen through a definitional gap and disappeared from view.

Problems of definition also arise when the terms operative and non-operative are applied not just to individuals but to lodges. An operative lodge is taken to be one which is made up mainly of stonemasons and is largely concerned with regulating the mason trade. So far so good. But there is a tendency to proceed to contrast 'operative' lodges of stonemasons with 'non-operative' lodges comprising mainly non-stonemasons. It is then assumed that the former type of lodge was largely concerned with functioning as a trade guild, regulating the craft, while the latter was concerned with esoteric rituals, freemasonry proper.

Thus the assumption imposed by the terminology, if one is not careful, is that operative lodges, made up of stonemasons, must do operative things; non-operative lodges of gentlemen or speculatives do speculative things. This may make some sense in an English context, where nearly all lodges were 'artificial' foundations by gentlemen, but it is totally inappropriate for Scotland where virtually all the pre-1710 lodges were originally, and often long remained, closely tied to the mason trade. The stonemasons in their 'operative' lodges were doing 'speculative' things long before gentlemen non-stonemasons came on the scene, so a terminology which insists that lodges of operatives must be largely concerned with operative functions forces distortion on the facts. The older masonic historians who invented these terms seem to have been influenced by the snobbish assumption that, though freemasonry recognised in its very name its connection with the mason trade, and based its ritual and symbolism on the trade's tools and practices, nonetheless mere working stonemasons could not have developed interesting rituals comparable with those of later freemasonry; that must have been the work of respectable, educated gentlemen. Thus speculative equals gentleman equals non-operative. Again the assumption may have some appropriateness in England, where at least the spread of lodges was largely in the hands of the gentry, but in Scotland the terminology can force misconceptions on the evidence in an interesting example of how use of an accepted terminology can, if it is not entirely appropriate, prescribe limits

<sup>15</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 129.

to the interpretations possible. In this book 'non-operative' means a man who is not a stonemason, whether he be a craftsman or a gentleman.

A final term requiring definition is freemasonry itself, which is derived from the word freemason. Originally the latter had no esoteric significance, and it seems to have been used in a variety of ways in Medieval England. It has been argued that it denoted a mason skilled enough to work with freestone, fine-grained stone that could be cut and carved in any direction, but it seems the word was more widely used to indicate a fully qualified mason, as opposed to roughmasons or roughlayers who could not undertake skilled work. A man admitted to the privileged position of a master in a trade guild, or of a burgess in a town, was made 'free' of the guild or town, becoming a 'freeman' in the sense of being free to enjoy certain rights, and from that to calling a fully qualified master mason a freeman mason or a freemason is only a small step.<sup>16</sup> The word freemason is unusual in Scotland, but does occasionally appear in seventeenth-century lodge minutes. In the Lodge of Edinburgh in the 1630s 'master freemasons' was used as an insignificant variation of the term 'master freemen masons',<sup>17</sup> and a Melrose Lodge minute of 1674 refers to the making of a 'frie mason', a usage which may imply initiation to 'freemasonry' in the modern sense.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, it was an English trade term from which the word freemasonry was derived. But how should freemasonry be defined for the purposes of studying its origins? Knoop and Jones proposed 'the organisation and practices which have from time to time prevailed among medieval working masons and their "operative" and "speculative" successors, from the earliest date from which such organisation is traceable down to the present time'.<sup>19</sup> This is surely far too generous a definition. In investigating the origins of freemasonry the practices and organisation of Medieval masons are relevant, but they are not part of freemasonry itself. A definition of freemasonry should only include the operative craft of masonry once its members developed beliefs and practices which rendered it qualitatively different from other crafts. There is no evidence of this in the Middle Ages, though the elaborate traditional history of the mason craft and the mobility of its members made it a relatively unusual one. But by 1600 in Scotland the craft had a very distinctive organisation based on the lodge, unique and elaborate symbolic rituals and secrets revolving round the Mason Word, and it soon developed claims to the interest of men who were not stonemasons through these rituals and through the ambitious assertions masons made as to their craft's significance. This, for the purposes of this book at least, is freemasonry. It surely deserves that name even before non-stonemasons begin to

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–15. See also E. Ward, 'The crisp English word freemason', *AQC*, 68 (1956), 58–66.

<sup>17</sup> Carr, *Edinburgh*, 109, 111, 113, 115.

<sup>18</sup> Vernon, *History*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 11.

## 12 *Introduction*

be initiated: it would be a very odd definition of freemasonry, with its claims to override differences of social status, which argued that freemasonry only came into existence when gentlemen started to join in rituals which had been long performed by working masons. That would make the rank of a person doing certain things, not the things themselves, define freemasonry.

## 2 The Medieval contribution

### The organisation of the craft

In one sense at least the mason craft can be said to have been unusual even in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the way of life of most craftsmen was a settled one, producing goods for sale locally or (through middlemen) in distant markets, the stonemason's trade was one that frequently entailed moving around from job to job. Compared with the static and regular life that was the lot of the majority of craftsmen, the mason often led a life of movement and unpredictability. Sometimes he would work on his own, or with just a few colleagues; but on major building projects he might be part of a labour force of dozens or even hundreds. Sometimes a particular job would involve only a few days' or a few weeks' work; others would take years or even the whole of a working life, requiring permanent settlement close by, or seasonal migration with the mason leaving his family for the spring and summer. All this meant that the needs of the mason in terms of organisation and relations with his fellows were rather different from those of most other craftsmen.

The typical form of craft organisation to emerge was the town craft guild. The guild had several overlapping functions. It controlled training for a trade (through apprenticeship) and entry to it, the organisation and conditions of work, and wages. It had 'social welfare' functions, helping members who fell on hard times, providing for the decent burial of members, and giving support to their widows and orphans. Regular banquets emphasised social solidarity, for the guild was a social as well as an economic organisation. It was a fraternity forming a sort of artificial family or kin group, bound together not

<sup>1</sup> The brief introductory survey of the organisation of the mason craft in the Middle Ages contained in this chapter is based on the following works: D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *The Medieval mason. An economic history of English stone building in the later Middle Ages and early modern times*, 3rd edn (Manchester, 1967); Knoop, *Genesis*, 17–61; J. H. Harvey, *The Gothic world 1100–1600: a survey of architecture and art* (London, 1950), 19–24; L. F. Salzmann, *Building in England* (Oxford, 1952), 30–43; A. Black, *Guilds and civil society in European political thought from the twelfth century to the present* (London, 1984); S. L. Thrupp, 'The gilds', *Cambridge economic history of Europe*, iii, ed. M. Postan, E. E. Rich and E. Miller (Cambridge, 1963), 230–80; G. P. Jones, 'Building in stone in Medieval Western Europe', *Cambridge economic history of Europe*, ii, ed. M. Postan and E. E. Rich (Cambridge, 1952), 493–518; R. A. Leeson, *Travelling brothers: the six centuries road from craft fellowship to trade unionism* (London, 1979), 36–68.



by blood but by common interests reinforced by oaths and rituals. In another of its aspects the guild was a religious confraternity or brotherhood, often employing a priest and supporting an altar in a town church dedicated to the patron saint of the craft, on whose day special masses and processions were held. The members of the guild also processed with other guilds at major religious festivals and civic occasions, for the guild usually had an officially recognised place in town affairs. It was, from one point of view, the institution through which a town's authorities sought to control and regulate the craft, but it simultaneously gave a craft a corporate identity, and through it the craft held its rights and privileges concerning the organisation of the trade. For town craftsmen the guild was an institution at the centre of their lives – and not just their working lives. Membership of the guild defined their position in society and did much to give their lives shape and meaning.

The guild was normally an intensely local institution. It was part of the structure of the town, and was concerned with the welfare of the craft in the town. Membership was a jealously guarded privilege, with outsiders excluded from membership and therefore from working within the town's jurisdiction. Guilds of this sort, which had evolved through the needs of static crafts in specific localities, formed an uneasy framework for the mason trade. Conventional guilds of masons nonetheless emerged in many places. In Scotland craft guilds were generally known as incorporations. Some were admitted formally to a place in burgh life and government through the grant of a 'seal of cause' from the burgh council, defining their rights and powers. These guilds, usually strictly limited in number, are often referred to as *the* incorporations of a burgh, but the word was also sometimes used more widely (by the seventeenth century at least) to include craft organisations given only very limited public recognition and authority. As corporate bodies they were incorporations, but not among the elite of *the* incorporations. Sometimes the former were distinguished by being referred to as societies or, grudgingly, as 'tolerated communities'.

The seal of cause of the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights of Edinburgh was granted in 1475,<sup>2</sup> while in Aberdeen and Glasgow masons, wrights (carpenters) and coopers were grouped together in incorporations which received their seals in 1527 and 1551 respectively.<sup>3</sup> These seals should not, however, be taken to mark the beginnings of organisation by the crafts concerned; rather it would usually be the case that craft organisation had existed and evolved for generations, with the granting of a seal representing the culmination of the process, even though it is often the first point at which the organisation becomes visible to the historian. But though the larger

<sup>2</sup> J. D. Marwick (ed.), *Extracts from the burgh records of Edinburgh, 1403–1528* (SBRs, 1869), 30–2; Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 247–9.

<sup>3</sup> E. Bain, *Merchant and craft guilds. A history of the Aberdeen incorporated trades* (Aberdeen, 1887), 115, 238–41; J. Cruikshank, *Sketch of the Incorporation of Masons and the Lodge of Glasgow St John* (Glasgow, 1879), 3–6.

burghs in Scotland developed incorporations including masons, they did not meet fully the needs of the mason craft, and in England at least officially approved and constituted mason guilds seem to have been less common than those of many other crafts, and tended to appear comparatively late.<sup>4</sup>

Because conventional guilds, especially when shared with other, much larger, related crafts such as the wrights, were not completely suited to the circumstances of the mason craft, the guilds came to be complemented by parallel, overlapping organisations which took account of the special needs which arose from the mobility of many masons and their concentration at the sites of particular buildings. These organisations became known as lodges. Originally a mason's lodge was, it seems, simply a sheltered working place, a temporary construction on the building site, perhaps a sort of lean-to against the wall of an existing building or of that under construction, or a separate shed, where the masons could shape and carve the stone out of the sun or rain. But it developed far beyond this; masons can be found eating and resting in lodges, and even sleeping there when they were not local men with homes they could return to each night. 'The Lodge was the building on which the life of the temporary community of masons centred.'<sup>5</sup> The lodge building might serve several purposes – working shelter and tool store on the one hand, barrack accommodation on the other. Moreover, the word lodge came to be extended from a particular building to those who used it and the rules by which they were bound. The group working together on a site constituted a lodge, and specific lodges attached to specific buildings could, if they remained in existence for long periods, evolve their own customs and traditions whereby the masons lived and worked together. Many lodges of this sort would be short-lived, but on major building projects work might continue, with greater or lesser intensity, for many years, even for generations. A great building like a cathedral would need permanent trifling attentions to its fabric even once completed, and the masons (now local men) associated with such routine repairs would still form a distinct group perhaps known as a lodge. References to lodges in these senses can be found in both England and Scotland in the later Middle Ages.

In Aberdeen in 1483 the burgh council was involved in the settlement of a dispute between the six 'masownys of the luge', and fines were laid down for offences, with provision for the exclusion of masons from the lodge (presumably thus incurring loss of employment) in case of repeated offences. This Aberdeen lodge was under the supervision of the master of kirkworks, being a permanent or semi-permanent institution attached to the burgh church of St Nicholas, and these late fifteenth-century references to the lodge coincide with a period of building activity: the choir of St Nicholas' was rebuilt. Indeed, the lodge building may only have been erected at about this time. It is said that in 1485 the burgh bought the lodge from a burghess of

<sup>4</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 42–4.

<sup>5</sup> Salzmann, *Building in England*, 39–40.

Montrose for 100 merks, and it may be that he had built it for masons he was employing to work on the church but that the council was now taking it over. In 1493 three masons bound themselves to remain and abide in the 'luge' and work there and elsewhere. Five years later a mason bound himself 'to mak gude seruice in the luge' and outside it, and two others swore 'to remane at Sanct Nicholes werk in the luge' and elsewhere, not leaving without permission. In 1544 the lodge building was again referred to, and finally in 1605 orders were given that it be repaired and divided up to provide accommodation for three schools, this last reference indicating both that the building must have been a fairly substantial one and that by the beginning of the seventeenth century the Aberdeen 'lodge' in the Medieval sense was no longer active.<sup>6</sup> The only other reference known in Scotland to a Medieval lodge which indicates that it was an institution as well as a building also occurs in connection with a burgh church. In Dundee in 1537 the council agreed to pay an annual fee for life to a mason to undertake work either on the church or on other buildings in the burgh, and his working hours were to be 'as the ald vss and consueted of our lady luge of Dundee had and usit befor'.<sup>7</sup> Thus in Dundee the lodge was that of the burgh church of St Mary's, and was well enough established to have its recognised and respected old usages and customs. Already the shades of meaning of the word lodge are complex. It could be a building, anything from a rough lean-to to a permanent structure, used for any or all of a variety of purposes from carving stone to sleeping, it was a social and working group, and it could develop into an institution with its own customs or rules.

Lodges attached to specific buildings gave the mason trade one type of organisation its particular circumstances required. But there was a need for more. Like all other craftsmen the masons were exclusive in their attitudes. They wanted to limit entry to the trade to men who had been properly trained in its 'mysteries', its skills and techniques. Such knowledge was secret and carefully guarded from outsiders in order to limit numbers and maintain the reputation of the craft. In a settled burgh trade control over admission through the guilds was comparatively simple; craftsmen knew each other personally and any interloper not duly trained and admitted could easily be detected. But when masons gathered from a wide area for a major building project, how was a mason to know if the strangers were qualified masons he could accept as colleagues? Organisation above the level of the town was

<sup>6</sup> J. Stuart (ed.), *Extracts from the council register of the burgh of Aberdeen, 1398–1570* (Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1844), 39, 52, 68, 199; J. Stuart (ed.), *Extracts from the council register of the burgh of Aberdeen, 1570–1625* (Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1848), 267; Miller, *Aberdeen*, 9–11, 16n; A. M. Munro, 'Notes on the history of masonry in Aberdeen', *The Masonic Bazaar, Aberdeen, 8th, 9th and 10th October 1896* (Aberdeen, 1896), [3–4].

<sup>7</sup> P. Chalmers and C. Innes (eds.), *Registrum episcopatus Brechinensis* (2 vols., Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1856), ii, 317–19; Mylne, *Master masons*, 63–4.

necessary. In Germany in the fifteenth century the *Steinmetzen* of the lodges (*Bauhütten*) attached to some of the great cathedrals evidently maintained contact through periodic meetings to regulate the craft over large areas of the country.<sup>8</sup> In Britain the word lodge was not used, so far as is known, to denote bodies claiming jurisdiction or authority for their rules and customs other than for particular buildings, but the Old Charges speak of annual assemblies. The organisation they describe, of regional or national meetings with legislative and judicial powers, doubtless represents an ideal rather than reality, but informal assemblies of masons probably did meet from time to time to try to regulate the trade, perhaps taking advantage of the opportunities offered by intensive phases of work on major buildings, making decisions which masons who had gathered from a wide area would report in their own localities on returning to their homes. Certainly in so far as masons in England attempted to fix wage rates they were sporadically successful, for this activity brought repeated denunciations on them in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

Some versions of the Old Charges mention sheriffs, mayors and knights as attending (ideally) the supposed annual assemblies, to help enforce regulations on the disobedient.<sup>10</sup> The involvement (in theory at least) of such important local figures doubtless in part indicates a wish for powerful patrons to protect the craft: but such patrons may also have been intended to supervise the activities of the masons to ensure that they did not act against the public interest – as by fixing wages. The involvement of local landowners and officials in the mason trade and the holding of assemblies cannot in practice be traced in Britain in the Middle Ages, but traces of such activities in England relating to another wandering craft suggest that the idea of such a practice is not totally absurd. A brotherhood of minstrels based at Beverley evidently claimed jurisdiction over all minstrels between the rivers Trent and Tweed, and boasted of having held assemblies since the time of King Athelstan (interestingly also claimed, in the Old Charges, as the founder of masonry in England). John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, is supposed to have had jurisdiction over minstrels at the end of the fourteenth century, and to have ordered that assemblies be held of minstrels from five Midland counties. Moving on to more certain ground, the Dutton family had hereditary jurisdiction over minstrels and perhaps other groups (including harlots!) in the palatinate of Chester, and this was recognised in an act of parliament in

<sup>8</sup> Harvey, *Gothic world*, 21–2; Knoop, *Genesis*, 54–6. F. Frankl, *The Gothic. Literary sources and interpretations through eight centuries* (Princeton, 1960), 110–58, assembles a mass of information about Medieval guilds and lodges of masons, but he is distinctly credulous as to some of the evidence about the origins of lodges which he accepts, and as to the assumption he makes about them.

<sup>9</sup> Knoop, *Medieval mason*, 198–9; Salzmann, *Building in England*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–2.

1598. The minstrels of the palatinate assembled annually to acknowledge the authority of the Duttons and pay them dues.<sup>11</sup>

In Scotland, moreover, an act of parliament in 1427 sought to impose councils in burghs and barons in rural areas on all crafts as wardens.<sup>12</sup> There is no indication that the act, the result of fears that crafts organising themselves in guilds were potentially subversive, had any practical results. But either through this act or other developments there are two instances in Scotland of lairds claiming hereditary rights to jurisdiction over masons by the end of the sixteenth century. Royal confirmation of authority as warden over masons in three shires was granted to an Aberdeenshire laird in 1590, and power over all Scottish masons was claimed by the Sinclairs of Roslin a decade later.

### The Old Charges

Guilds of masons, site organisations known as lodges, and largely mythical formal assemblies (traditions concerning which may have been based on the holding of irregular and informal regional gatherings): all these have been discussed in terms of needs arising from the nature of the trade and desire to control entry to it, working conditions and wages. But there would have been much more to such organisations than this. The point has already been made where guilds are concerned, but it must surely apply to the Medieval types of lodge as well. The men of the lodge in many cases at least ate, relaxed and slept as well as worked together. Just as lodges (other than those which were temporary) developed their rules or customs like the guilds, so they doubtless had ceremonies and rituals connected with celebrating and emphasising the craft's status, making merry at banquets to strengthen the bonds between the brother craftsmen, and welcoming or initiating new members – often with the unfortunate candidates victims of some humiliation and rough horseplay and expected to make gifts to the existing members. When a stranger appeared, before guild, lodge or simply other masons working on a building, claiming to be a qualified member of the craft, he would be examined, perhaps by a practical test of skill but also, it may well be, by questions which might relate to practical knowledge, to the legendary lore of the craft, or by standard questions with answers that constituted identification codes or passwords. Confidential methods of recognition, a form of greeting and a grip (handshake), certainly existed among the German *Steinmetzen* by the mid sixteenth

<sup>11</sup> J. M. Lambert, *2000 years of gild life* (Hull, 1891), 131–7; Knoop, *Medieval mason*, 160–1; Sir John Hawkins, *A general history of the science and practice of music*, new edn (2 vols., London, 1875), i, 191–4; T. Percy, *Reliques of ancient English poetry* (London, 1839), xvii–xviii, xxxiii–xxxiv; *Statutes of the realm*, iv, pt 2 (1799), 901; Leeson, *Travelling brothers*, 37. There seems to be no evidence to support the statement in Knoop, *Genesis*, 47, that the Duttons also had jurisdiction over artisans.

<sup>12</sup> *APS*, ii, 15.

century, and they are thought to have been used by the *compagnonnages*, the organisations of the French journeymen masons.<sup>13</sup> There is no direct evidence of them in Britain, but in view of the needs of masons to identify true colleagues to whom the skills and secrets of the craft had been properly and regularly imparted, it is far from fanciful to suppose that some accepted means of identification had emerged, and later formed the basis for the Mason Word and its attendant rituals. No doubt where there were guilds of masons, the apprentice mason who had served his time had such matters revealed to him when he was received into the guild as a freeman, a brother of the craft. But where there was no guild his master may have either imparted this knowledge himself, or a lodge attached to a building may have done this, as part of an initiation ceremony.

In England at least meetings of masons in town guilds, semi-permanent lodges or temporary site lodges were in all probability sometimes dignified by readings – or recitations from memory – of the Old Charges, the legendary history of the craft and of the obligations this great past placed upon masons. No Scottish manuscripts of the Old Charges (sometimes referred to as the Old Constitutions or Manuscript Constitutions) survive which date from before the mid seventeenth century, but it is highly probable that the legends were known in Scotland: the First Schaw Statutes of 1598 indicate that the ‘charges’ or regulations contained in the Old Charges were well known.

The Old Charges are of great importance in understanding what it was about the mason craft that made possible the remarkable developments which took place in it in Scotland around 1600. They exist in many versions, with considerable differences between them. Some versions are more elaborate and detailed than others; some contain episodes that others omit. But their basic form and message is unchanging, and as this book is a study primarily of Scottish masonry it is appropriate to use an early Scottish version to outline the contents of the Old Charges. The following is therefore taken from the Kilwinning Manuscript of the mid seventeenth century. But it should be stressed that there is nothing specifically ‘Scottish’ about its contents except for details of wording and spelling.

The manuscript opens, as is standard, with a brief invocation or prayer addressed to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and the narrator then launches into his subject:

Good Brethren and Fellows: Our purpose is to tell yow how and in what manner wise this worthy CRAFT OF MASSONRIE was begun, and how it was keepest by worthy Kings and Princes, and by many other Worshipful Men. And also to those that be here wee will charge by the Charges that belongeth to every free Masson to keepe, ffor in good faith, and they take heed to it, it is worthy to be weell keepest, for it is a worthy Craft and a curious Science. For there be sevin Liberal Sciences of which sevin it is one.

<sup>13</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 56–9.

The seven liberal sciences or arts, as defined by classical authors, were grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. A place for masonry was found by equating it with geometry, 'The which science is called Massonrie.' Moreover, it was maintained, all seven sciences were founded on one science, that of geometry. It taught the measurement of the earth, and all crafts are based on measurement and weighing, from agriculture to astronomy. Therefore it is the most worthy of sciences and underlies all the rest.

As to the origins of masonry/geometry, all the crafts in the world were founded by the sons of Lamech, who is mentioned in Genesis. Lamech's eldest son, Jabal, founded geometry, but he and his brothers feared the wrath of God for their sins, and therefore wrote down their great discoveries on pillars of stone that could survive fire or flood. In due course the Great Flood came, but subsequently one of the pillars was discovered by 'The great Hermarius', a great grandson of Noah. This was Hermes Trismegistus, and from this pillar he taught the sciences to man. Knowledge of masonry/geometry then spread to other areas. It was much employed in the building of the Tower of Babel, and the king of Babylon himself, Nimrod, was a mason. Indeed he was the first royal patron of and legislator for masons, for when he sent masons to his cousin the king of Nineveh he charged them to be true to one another and serve their lord truly for their pay – 'this was the first time that euer any Masson had any Charge of his Craft'. The next stage of development was in Egypt, for Abraham and his wife Sarah went there and taught the seven sciences to the Egyptians; and Abraham had a scholar called Euclid who 'learned right weel' and became a master of all the sciences.

Now the great men of Egypt, 'the Lords and the Estats of the realme', had a problem arising from the hot climate; by their wives and other women they had very large numbers of sons, 'for that land is a hote land and plenteous of generation'! There were far too many sons to be maintained on their fathers' lands. The king of Egypt therefore summoned parliament to consider the problem, but it found no solution. The king then issued a proclamation that any man who could think of a solution should come forward. The 'worthy Clerke Euclide' did so, and offered to teach the children one of the seven sciences whereby they could live honestly as gentlemen. The king of Egypt and his council then issued a commission to Euclid under a seal, and Euclid taught the sons of the Egyptian lords 'the Science of Geometrie in practicke, for to worke in stone of all manner of worthy works that belongeth to churches, temples, castles, towers, and mannors, and all the other manner building', and he used his authority over them to issue new charges, including those of Nimrod, but also extending them. Masons should call each other brother or fellow, and not knave or servant or any other derogatory name. Masons should work for their masters honestly, choosing the wisest mason working on a building to be their master of works, and they should assemble

together once a year to legislate for the craft and correct each other's faults. 'And thus was the Craft governed there; and that worthie Clarke Euclide gave it the name of Geometrie; and now it is called through all this land Maissonrie.'

Next the story moves back to the Holy Land. King David loved masons well, and gave them charges according to Euclid (having learnt of them in Egypt). David began building the temple in Jerusalem, and this was continued under his son Solomon, who sent for masons from many countries – 80,000 in all worked on the temple. Like his father he gave them charges, and the masons who had worked on Solomon's Temple spread the craft to other countries. One of them brought the craft to France, and won the patronage for it of Charles Martel, who became king. But 'England in all this season was voyd of any Charge of Massonrie.' The craft's lore and charges were first brought across the English Channel by St Alban, and he got the masons a charter from the king, but subsequently political confusion led to the destruction of 'the good rule of Massonrie'. It was later restored, however, by King Athelstan, who loved masons. His son Edwin loved them even more; he was himself a great practitioner of geometry 'and afterwards for love that he had to Massons and to the Craft he was made a Masson'. He obtained a charter from his father commissioning the craft to hold an annual assembly, and gathered information about masonry at home and abroad. This he brought together in a book, which was to be 'read and told' to all entrants to the craft. King Edwin's book was, evidently, the Old Charges themselves, and they therefore conclude the history of the craft at this point, and end with the charges issued by Edwin. These extend those issued by the earlier great patrons of the craft, going into much more detail as to how masons should treat each other, not taking work from others or underpaying fellow masons, choosing only suitable persons to be apprentices, respecting confidences and trade secrets by not repeating what was said in lodge or chamber, reverencing their elders, and so on. Every master and fellow within 50 miles of the place where an assembly of masons was being held was to be obliged to attend if he knew of it, and to abide by its decisions. 'These Charges that wee have now rehearsed unto yow, and all others that belongeth to Massons, yow shall keep; so help yow GOD and your Halydoome.'<sup>14</sup>

There is no direct evidence of the use to which the Old Charges were put by masons in the later Middle Ages, but internal evidence indicates that they were intended to be read out or recited at meetings, especially when entrants were admitted to the craft. Thus it may be that at almost any gathering of masons in connection with their craft, whether in guild, lodge or otherwise, the craft's lore would be solemnly rehearsed at greater or lesser length.<sup>15</sup> If

<sup>14</sup> Summarised from the transcript of the Kilwinning Old Charges in Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 117–23. See Inventory, 4.1–12 for the Scottish versions of the Old Charges.

<sup>15</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 84–5.



this is so, then masons must have heard the narrative repeated many times in the course of their careers. Through it they were taught pride in their craft; its importance in the general scheme of human knowledge; its antiquity; and of the great men who had revered and patronised it. The repeated message reinforced the mason's self-respect as the heir to a great tradition, and bound him to his fellows to form an organisation of brothers with common ideals and a common heritage to maintain.

Relatively few early copies of the Old Charges are known. The two earliest versions, which differ greatly (one being in verse) date from around 1400. Perhaps a century then elapses before the next supposed version (it has long been lost) is recorded, and it is followed by another six in the sixteenth century (mainly in the second half of the century). The first half of the seventeenth century then produces 11 copies.<sup>16</sup> Thus the impression is of relatively little interest in, or knowledge of, the Old Charges until the later sixteenth century. This may be misleading to some extent, through accidents of survival and perhaps a tendency until the later sixteenth century to regard the Old Charges as secret, to be memorised rather than committed to paper. Nonetheless, a surge of interest, which it can plausibly be suggested derives from a connection being made between parts of the charges and later Renaissance themes (the glorification of mathematics and the architect, and the obsession with the Hermetic quest for the lost wisdom of the ancients), does seem to have taken place after about 1550. But not until a century later, after nearly 20 English copies have been recorded, do Scottish texts begin to survive, and all the early Scottish texts clearly derive from English originals. Yet the Schaw Statutes give reason to believe that the essentials at least of the Old Charges were known in Scotland by 1600, and when the Scottish copies do appear they are distinctive not in their contents but in their context. All the seventeenth-century Scottish copies survive among the records of masonic lodges. By contrast in England, where far more copies of the Old Charges pre-dating 1700 survive, it is very rare for them to be associated with lodges or working stonemasons. The Lodge of Antiquity holds a copy dated 1686, and Alnwick Lodge's Old Charges were written into its records immediately after minutes dated 1701: but these are the only cases known. Thus from the mid seventeenth century onwards the evidence is far stronger for Scottish working masons being acquainted with the contents of the Old Charges than it is for their English counterparts.

The existence of the elaborate lore of the Old Charges differentiates the

<sup>16</sup> The English manuscripts, in the order in which they are noted in the text, are the Cooke and the Regius Mss; the Dermott Ms; the Meehan, the Wilson, the Levander-York Original, the Melrose No. 1, the Grand Lodge No. 1, and the *London Chronicle* Mss; and Lansdowne, the Wren Original, the York No. 1, the Chadwicke, the Wood, the Stone, the Hadfeild, the Thorp, the York No. 3, the Devonshire and the Sloane 3848 Mss. I am most grateful to Professor Wallace McLeod for information on the dates of these early versions of the Old Charges.

mason craft from others. But in spite of this the Charges do not mean that the masons can be regarded as qualitatively different from other crafts; there is little in the Old Charges that cannot be paralleled in the legendary histories proudly maintained by many trades<sup>17</sup> (though static crafts had no need of the sorts of assemblies the masons claimed to have held for ages past). All crafts sought to uphold their own supremacy on grounds of utility or antiquity, and recitation of lore supporting such claims combined with sworn obedience to rules was commonplace. Though there is talk in the Old Charges of secrecy there is no unique emphasis on it.

Thus in making grandiose claims the masons were doing no more than other trades. Yet it is nonetheless the case that the masons' claims to high status were unusually impressive. The identification of masonry and geometry was not something the masons had invented themselves in absurd enthusiasm for their craft, but could claim intellectual respectability. Classical authors had seen architecture as the practical application of geometry and therefore had equated the two. Masons had then identified masonry with the science of architecture – and with considerable justification, as it is clear that many Medieval masons were not simply hewers of stone but men skilled in measurement, mathematical calculation, design and geometrical drawing.<sup>18</sup> They played leading roles in designing great buildings and then converting the designs into reality. Thus a mason was an architect, and the architect was accepted as a geometer, and, as the Old Charges boasted, geometry was often held not just to be one of the seven liberal arts or sciences, but to be the discipline underlying all the others.

Other aspects of the craft and its products also helped to give it a special status. The permanence of the materials it used was impressive, and the greatest products of the mason craft, the vast cathedrals and abbeys, were arguably the most awe-inspiring creations of man in the Middle Ages, astonishing testaments not just to love and fear of God but to the ability of man and his power to change the world about him. The great stone ecclesiastical buildings – and stone castles – were dominant features in landscapes which contained no other constructions which could even begin to rival them in scale. That the men whose skill built them should develop an immense pride in their craft and make great claims for it was natural; and it is equally understandable that others should take such claims seriously. That they did so is suggested by the fact that though the Old Charges are basically similar to other craft histories, they are unusually elaborate, and the equation of masonry and architecture was not confined to the craft but was accepted by a number of late Medieval writers.<sup>19</sup> If studied in search of the historical truth about the origins of the mason craft, the Old Charges may be dismissed as

<sup>17</sup> Salzmann, *Building in England*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, 'Building in stone in Medieval Western Europe', 487–8.

<sup>19</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 63.

rubbish, impressive exercises in the dubious skills of name-dropping and creative chronology. But in so far as they reflect the craft's image of itself they should not be dismissed with ridicule. The astonishing achievements of Medieval masons make 'the fantasy highly appropriate and honourable'.<sup>20</sup>

As examples of late Medieval craft history the Old Charges were unusual. Their future was to be unique. When freemasonry developed at the end of the sixteenth century it was statements contained in the Old Charges that singled out masonry for special attention. The mention of Hermes Trismegistus, the stress on the development of the craft in Egypt, and the identification of masonry and geometry were taken over by the masons from the Medieval background of knowledge inherited from the ancient world, but they took on new significance and importance during the Renaissance.

If there are doubts as to how far the lore contained in the Old Charges had spread among masons in England by the end of the Middle Ages, the situation in Scotland is even more difficult to assess as no copies of the Old Charges are known. But one fragment of evidence has come to light recently that strongly suggests that Scottish masons were fully aware of one element of the Old Charges' legends, the emphasis on Solomon's Temple as the greatest of all building projects, central to the development and dissemination of masonry. A Latin inscription on the west front of the chapel of King's College, Aberdeen, reads (in translation) 'By grace of the most serene, illustrious and ever-victorious King James IV: On the fourth before the nones of April in the year one-thousand five-hundred the masons began to build this excellent college.' The significance of the date, 2 April, is almost certainly that it was the date on which it was calculated, by reference to the Bible, that the building of Solomon's Temple had begun. It was, therefore, evidently chosen as a highly appropriate date for a building project to be started. A written account of the building of the college makes clear references to the building of the temple, and it has been argued that the founder of the college, Bishop William Elphinstone, chose the starting date and commemorated it with the inscription.<sup>21</sup> This, however, does not explain the peculiar wording of the inscription. It mentions the king as patron of the project, but states that 2 April was the date on which the masons started work. It is surprising that an inscription of this sort should specifically mention the craftsmen responsible for the work at all, yet here they are standing alongside the king. Is it possible that the masons were mentioned because it was they who, drawing on their traditions, pointed out that 2 April was a particularly appropriate day on which to start building? It is intriguing to find that the first stone of the chapel of

<sup>20</sup> Leeson, *Travelling brothers*, 37. For the Old Charges and the sources from which the legendary history of the craft was compiled see Knoop, *Genesis*, 62–86, and D. Knoop, G. P. Jones and D. Hamer (eds.), *The two earliest masonic manuscripts* (Manchester, 1938), 62–86.

<sup>21</sup> G. P. Edwards, 'William Elphinstone, his college chapel and the second of April', *Aberdeen University Review*, li (1985), 1–17.

another King's College, that at Cambridge, was laid on 2 April (in 1441). There thus may be in these two instances traces of a Medieval masonic custom that has previously been overlooked, though 2 April starting dates for other buildings need to be sought to confirm this.<sup>22</sup>

A few guilds or incorporations containing masons existed in Scotland by the end of the Middle Ages. There are isolated references to two 'lodges' attached to major burgh churches. Scottish masons may have seen 2 April as a date of symbolic significance. These few scraps of information are hardly impressive. But by the late sixteenth century the craft was in fact on the verge of a remarkable development which would make it different in kind from all other crafts and give birth to freemasonry. The transformation came about, so far as can be discerned, because one man saw that some aspects of the traditional heritage of the craft of masonry linked up with a whole series of trends in the thought and culture of the age, and worked to introduce them into the craft. This man was William Schaw, and his appointment as master of works to the Scottish crown placed him in a position in which he had power over the craft and could attempt to remodel it in accordance with his own visions of its high status.

<sup>22</sup> R. Willis and J. W. Clark, *An architectural history of the University of Cambridge* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1886), i, 321-2. I am grateful to Dr G. P. Edwards for this reference. 2 April in 1441 was Passion Sunday (the fifth in Lent) and as this is mentioned in the verse that records the starting date it is possible that that, and not any connection with Solomon's Temple, was why the day was chosen.

### 3 William Schaw, master of works and general warden

#### The life of William Schaw

Major building projects, in Scotland as elsewhere, were usually under the control of a master of works, who was in charge of administrative and financial affairs, while the technical supervision and organisation was in the hands of the master mason. The separation of functions was not a rigid one, however, for masters of works were often men with particular expertise and interest in architecture and sometimes took an active part in designing buildings. In the early sixteenth century the kings of Scotland began to appoint principal masters of works, with responsibility for all royal castles and palaces for life, in place of (or in addition to) temporary masters for specific buildings.<sup>1</sup> On 21 December 1583 William Schaw was appointed to the office, as 'grit maister of all and sindrie his hines palaceis, biggingis and reparationis, and grit oversear, directour and commandar' of such operations for life.<sup>2</sup>

Details of Schaw's life are sparse, and much of what is known is derived from the Latin epitaph placed over his tomb in Dunfermline Abbey (see plate 1) after his death in 1602. In translation it reads as follows:

To God most Holy and most High. Beneath this lowly pile of stones lies a man illustrious for his rare experience, his admirable rectitude, his unmatched integrity of life, and his consummate qualities, William Schaw, the King's Master of Works, Master of the Ceremonies, and Chamberlain to the Queen. He died 18 April 1602, having sojourned among men for two and fifty years. In his eagerness to improve his mind he travelled through France and many other kingdoms. Accomplished in every liberal art, he excelled in architecture. Princes in particular esteemed him for his conspicuous gifts. Alike in his professional work and in affairs he was not merely tireless and indomitable but consistently earnest and upright. His innate capacity for service and for laying others under an obligation won for him the warm affection of every good man who knew him. Now he dwells in Heaven for ever.

Queen Anne ordered a monument to be set up to the memory of a most admirable and most upright man lest the recollection of his high character, which deserves to be honoured for all time, should fade as his body crumbles into dust.

<sup>1</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, i, xvii–xxii. See R. S. Mylne, 'The masters of work to the crown of Scotland, with the writs of appointment, from 1529 to 1768', *PSAS*, xxx (1895–6), 49–68 (Schaw's commission is accidentally omitted).

<sup>2</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, i, xvii; *RSS*, 1581–4, no. 1676.

A separate panel on the tomb reads

Live in Heaven and live for ever, thou best of men. To thee this life was toil, death was deep repose. In honour of his true-hearted friend, William Schaw. Alexander Seton, Earl of Dunfermline.<sup>3</sup>

William Schaw was born, as his epitaph indicates, in about 1550. He was a member of a cadet branch of a well-established family of lairds, the Schaws of Sauchie, whose lands lay near Stirling in the tiny shire of Clackmannan. His father was John Schaw of Broich, the younger son of Sir James Schaw of Sauchie (who died in 1528).<sup>1</sup> The Schaws of Sauchie had strong links with the court, being keepers of the king's wine cellar, and it is likely that it was this family link that first brought William Schaw employment at court. He may be the William Schaw who appears in the accounts of the treasurer as a page to Mary of Guise, Queen Dowager and Regent of Scotland, for whom black velvet was brought to make a cloak on 1 June 1560.<sup>5</sup> The queen was gravely ill and died 10 days later, and it may be that she was arranging mourning clothes for her pages in anticipation of her fate. She died just as her attempts to keep Scotland faithful to Catholicism and France were on the verge of complete failure, and shortly after her death the Lords of the Congregation, the protestant party in rebellion against her, seized power with English help. The year was a turbulent one for William Schaw in other ways as well. His father was accused along with four of his servants of murdering a servant of another laird. On his failure to appear in court to answer the charge he was 'put to the horn' (denounced as a rebel) and his moveable goods forfeited to the crown. Family disaster was averted, however; a gift of the escheated goods was made to his sons, John and William, and Broich himself and his servants were soon granted a remission or pardon.<sup>6</sup>

After 1560 nothing is known for certain of William Schaw's activities for more than 20 years; it is unlikely that he was the William Schaw who stole 4,500 crowns from a follower of Mary Queen of Scots, though the thief was probably a relative, as the head of the family, Sir James Schaw of Sauchie, got into trouble for failing to seize him.<sup>7</sup> In 1581, when the reformed church in Scotland feared that the young James VI was falling under Catholic influence, both the king and his courtiers were forced to sign what became known

<sup>3</sup> RCAHMS, *Fife*, 122 – original Latin and translation. For another translation and a photograph of the tomb see *GLSYB* (1982), 68. The tomb cannot have been erected before 1605 as it was not until then that Seton was created earl of Dunfermline.

<sup>4</sup> The most detailed study of Schaw's life is J. W. Saunders, 'William Schaw, master of works to King James VI, and his connection with the Schaws of Sauchie', *AQC*, 50 (1937), 220–6, though it needs to be used with care as it contains elementary blunders relating to Scottish history. Other summaries of Schaw's career may be found in Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 59–60; Mylne, *Master masons*, 62; and *DNB*.

<sup>5</sup> Sir J. B. Paul (ed.), *Accounts of the lord high treasurer of Scotland, 1559–66* (Edinburgh, 1916), 23.

<sup>6</sup> *RSS*, 1556–67, pt 1, nos. 810, 811.

<sup>7</sup> *RPCS*, 1545–69, 168–9.

as the Negative Confession, a systematic denunciation of Catholicism. Among the signatures is that of William Schaw, and it is likely (though not certain) that this was the future master of works.<sup>8</sup> The timing of his appointment as master in December 1583 suggests that it was linked with political developments. James VI had just escaped from an extreme protestant faction, the Ruthven Raiders, which had kidnapped him the previous year, and the reaction against this episode brought more conservative men to power. Thus the appointment, which involved displacing his predecessor (Sir Robert Drummond of Carnock) from an office he had been granted for life, suggests that Schaw was associated with conservative interests. References in the years that follow confirm this. When in 1588 there were renewed fears of Catholic intrigues at court, and the presbytery of Edinburgh summoned before it 'papists and apostates quho sall happin to resort to Court' or to Edinburgh, William Schaw was among those ordered to appear.<sup>9</sup> Again, when in 1593 an English agent drew up a list of those at court who supported English interests and those who were hostile to them, Schaw was listed in the latter group and described as 'a suspected Jesuit';<sup>10</sup> and a few years later a Latin paper, designed to prove that James VI favoured Catholics, complained that Schaw was 'praeffectum architecturae' to the king even though he was a Catholic.<sup>11</sup> In 1598 English agents watching the movements of an English Catholic who had come to Scotland reported that he claimed to have been recommended to Schaw. The king had given protection to the former and arranged for him to meet Schaw, and soon Schaw and the Englishman were reported to be meeting frequently.<sup>12</sup>

Though Schaw was a Catholic and therefore a worry to English agents, the fact that he survived in office at court in a protestant country suggests that he was flexible in religion. Like a number of other Scots in court circles, though remaining a Catholic he avoided actions that might provoke persecution, probably even attending protestant services from time to time. One of his closest friends, Alexander Seton, performed just such a religious balancing act for many years while holding high office.<sup>13</sup>

Of William Schaw's extensive travels abroad, mentioned in his epitaph, tantalisingly little is known. On 17 January 1584 he set sail for France with Lord Seton, an experienced diplomat who was being sent to renew previous

<sup>8</sup> *Scotland, national manuscripts: facsimiles* (3 pts, 1867–72), pt 3, lxx; T. Thomson (ed.), *Acts and proceedings of the general assemblies of the kirk of Scotland* (3 vols., Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, Edinburgh, 1839–45), ii, 518. For a gift of non-entry to William, son of John Schaw of Broich, in 1581 see *RSS, 1581–4*, no. 210.

<sup>9</sup> Thomson, *Acts and proceedings*, ii, 738; D. Calderwood, *The history of the kirk of Scotland* (8 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842–9), iv, 691.

<sup>10</sup> *CSPS, 1589–93*, 620; *CSPS, 1593–5*, 18. <sup>11</sup> *CSPS, 1595–7*, 228.

<sup>12</sup> *CSPS, 1597–1603*, 291, 293, 294, 348.

<sup>13</sup> M. Lee, 'King James' popish chancellor', *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland*, ed. I. B. Cowan and D. Shaw (Edinburgh, 1983), 172–3.

treaties of friendship between Scotland and France.<sup>14</sup> Schaw's inclusion in the mission – and indeed his appointment as master of works – may be due to the fact that he had managed to obtain much more powerful patronage than that offered by his Schaw of Sauchie cousins, namely that of the Setons. Alexander Seton, who was a younger son of Lord Seton, took a great interest in architecture and was, as mentioned, closely linked with William Schaw. It was to be he who, by then first earl of Dunfermline, erected Schaw's tomb. Moreover, the Setons were Catholics, providing a further bond between Schaw and his Seton patrons. Indeed both Alexander and his father hoped to use the mission to France to further Catholic interests, by getting foreign help to restore the old religion in Scotland.<sup>15</sup> Alexander Seton, described by the family historian as 'a great humanist in prose and verse, Greek and Latin, and well versed in the mathematicks and [he] had great skill in architecture',<sup>16</sup> no doubt accompanied his father to gain experience of affairs of state and further his education, and it is tempting to see him booking a place on the trip for a friend who shared his architectural interests so they could use the opportunity of foreign travel to extend their knowledge of architecture and related subjects, a venture appropriate for Schaw as he had just been appointed master of works.

Lord Seton returned to Scotland late in 1584, and Schaw was certainly back in Scotland by 1585, for in that year he was one of three men chosen by the king to entertain Danish ambassadors who had arrived in the hope of getting the Orkney and Shetland Islands restored to Denmark.<sup>17</sup> Lord Seton died in January 1585,<sup>18</sup> and soon after this Schaw can be traced working for the Setons. Lord Somerville engaged John Mylne (a member of the family which was to produce three master masons to the king in the seventeenth century) to build him a house. But he left fixing the price and the 'contryveance' or design to Alexander, Lord Seton 'he being one of the greatest builders in that age; and at that tyme had the king's master of worke at Seatoune, building that large quarter of his palace towards the north-east'.<sup>19</sup> This account is confused; the new Lord Seton was not Alexander but his elder brother Robert, later first earl of Winton, but the confusion of names

<sup>14</sup> *CSPS, 1581–3*, 649; *CSPS, 1584–5*, 4; *Scots peerage*, viii, 585–8.

<sup>15</sup> Lee, 'Popish chancellor', 171; *Scots peerage*, viii, 587.

<sup>16</sup> Sir Richard Maitland and Alexander, Lord Kingston, *The history of the house of Seytoun* (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, Edinburgh, 1829), 63.

<sup>17</sup> Sir James Melville, *Memoirs of his own life* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1827), 336.

<sup>18</sup> *CSPS, 1584–5*, 562.

<sup>19</sup> Lord J. Somerville, *Memorie of the Somervills; being a history of the baronial house of Somerville*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1815), i, 459–60. The *Memorie* dates this episode 1584, but this is unlikely as both the old Lord Seton and his sons were in France until late in the year. Probably the rebuilding of Seton Palace began after the old lord's death in 1585. The same source, written in the late seventeenth century, erroneously refers to John Mylne as king's master mason at this time, reflecting the myth that emerged in the middle of that century that there had been Mylne master masons to the king even in the sixteenth century.



may indicate that it was Alexander, whose architectural interests are well attested, who advised Lord Somerville at Drum and was already busy with rebuilding part of his brother's residence at Seton. Whether Schaw, in addition to his work at Seton Palace, had any part in the rebuilding of Pinkie House and Fyvie Castle, the outstanding testimonies to the architectural interests and skills of his friend Alexander Seton, is unknown.<sup>20</sup>

Schaw's main love might have been architecture, but the fact that he was appointed, soon after returning from the French mission, to look after the Danish ambassadors indicates that he was also regarded as a diplomat. It was no doubt this earlier contact with the Danes that led James VI to include Schaw in his retinue when he set out late in 1589 to fetch home his wife, Anne of Denmark, who had been delayed by storms in Norway. Schaw stayed with James in Denmark over the winter, being entertained by the Danish court. As with Schaw's mission to France, it can be suggested that the Danish trip was intellectually rewarding and that he took full advantage of it to advance his knowledge of the architectural subjects close to his heart, but no specific details of his visit survive. Early in 1590 he arrived back in Scotland, sent ahead of the rest to complete preparations for the arrival of the king and his bride, in particular by finishing repair work at the Palace of Holyroodhouse and at the residence assigned to the queen in Dunfermline.<sup>21</sup>

In Anne of Denmark Schaw found a new friend at court, and he was soon appointed chamberlain of the lordship of Dunfermline, which had been assigned to her.<sup>22</sup> He held this position by 1593, and in that year his old companion Alexander Seton, a close friend of the queen, was appointed chairman of the committee which managed her Scottish property.<sup>23</sup> Another link between Schaw and Seton was forged by the latter acquiring many lands in the lordship of Dunfermline (hence the title he was to take on being created an earl in 1605).<sup>24</sup> Somewhat earlier Schaw had become master of ceremonies. All that is known is that the English ambassador reported in 1591 that the office, vacant through the death of the previous holder, was likely to be given to Schaw; and that his epitaph shows he held the office at the time of his death.<sup>25</sup>

Much of Schaw's time and energy in the 1590s was devoted to building

<sup>20</sup> See RCAHMS, *Midlothian and West Lothian*, 81-4; G. Seton, *A history of the family of Seton* (2 vols., 1896), i, 811-22; MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 348-55, 392-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Papers relative to the marriage of King James the Sixth of Scotland, with the Princess Anna of Denmark* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1828), 29-30, appendix, 10, 15-16; D. Moysie, *Memoirs of the affairs of Scotland* (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, Edinburgh, 1830), 82; J. Spottiswoode, *History of the Church of Scotland* (3 vols., Spottiswoode Society, Edinburgh, 1851), ii, 405; *CSPS, 1589-93*, 245, 252.

<sup>22</sup> G. P. McNeil (ed.), *Rotuli scaccarii regum Scotorum. The exchequer rolls of Scotland, 1589-94* (Edinburgh, 1903), 355, 359, 403-4, 405.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, 'Popish chancellor', 174.

<sup>24</sup> Maitland, *History of the house of Seytoun*, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *CSPS, 1593-5*, 567.

work at Dunfermline, both on the queen's house and on the abbey,<sup>26</sup> and on his work as chamberlain. But he was also involved in more dramatic activities. In 1594 he was ordered by king and council to 'caus entir workmen' to destroy the earl of Huntly's great castle at Strathbogie, a task which can hardly have been congenial to an architect and must have been especially distasteful to Schaw, as Huntly was a leading Catholic who was in trouble for intriguing with foreign powers.<sup>27</sup>

By this time court favour and office had led William Schaw to greater prosperity than the senior members of his family, and by 1588 the barony of Sauchie was in his possession. Sir James Schaw of Sauchie arranged to sell the barony, having obtained a renunciation of any interest in it from William's elder brother, John Schaw of Broich. But William appealed against this to the king, who intervened and assigned possession of the barony and lands to William. On William's death the lands went to his nephew, Sir John Schaw of Broich and Arnecrumbie (Arngomery), and from him they passed back to the original line of the Schaws of Sauchie.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that William Schaw left no children. Indeed, there is no evidence that he ever married, and the fact that he was once suspected of being a Jesuit tends to confirm that he was a bachelor.

Ten years after William Schaw's death his executor, James Schaw (whose relationship to him is uncertain) claimed that William's annual fee as master of works, 500 merks a year, had frequently remained unpaid. The king ordered an investigation, and in October 1612 his Scottish councillors reported. They had examined the relevant treasurers' accounts, and found record of payment of the fee only for 5 years, and partial payment of a sixth, out of 18 years. The other years were evidently unpaid, and this had been confirmed by William Schaw himself when making his testament shortly before his death. The councillors stressed that William 'in his lyfetyme, and during the tyme of his seruice . . . was a most painefull, trustye, and well affectit seruand to your maiestie'. Decision as to whether payment should be made to James Schaw was left to the king, but clearly the councillors were in favour of generosity.<sup>29</sup>

The total lack of letters or other personal or family papers inevitably leaves much of William Schaw's life and work obscure. But in one sphere he left lasting monuments more impressive than buildings, though he could not

<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately only a single master of works' account survives for Schaw's years in office (Holyroodhouse, 1599, *Mr of works accs.*, i, 315–23) so the extent of his work at Dunfermline and elsewhere is uncertain.

<sup>27</sup> *RPCS, 1592–9*, 185–6; W. D. Simpson, 'The architectural history of Huntly Castle', *PSAS*, lvi (1921–2), 158–9, and 'Further notes on Huntly Castle', *PSAS*, lxxvii (1932–3), 157–8. A William Schaw was wounded in unknown circumstances in 1596 (Moysie, *Memoirs*, 127) but there is no evidence that this was the master of works.

<sup>28</sup> Saunders, 'William Schaw', 224–5.

<sup>29</sup> J. Maidment (ed.), *State papers and miscellaneous correspondence of Thomas, earl of Melros* (2 vols., Abbotsford Club, Edinburgh, 1837), i, 95–6.

possibly have known what the effects of his actions would be. He set out to reorganise the mason craft in Scotland and endow it with a new stature and meaning: and in doing so he created freemasonry.

### The Coplands of Udoch, wardens of the masons

The earliest episode in the remarkable outburst of activity relating to the mason trade which marked the last decade of the sixteenth century cannot be linked directly to William Schaw, but it seems highly likely that this episode reflects Schaw's interest in the organisation of the craft. On 25 September 1590 a letter was issued under the privy seal stating that the king had been informed of the qualifications of Patrick Copland of Udoch

for using and exerceing of the office of wardenrie ovir the airt and craft of masonrie and that his predicessouris hes bene ancient possessouris of the said office of wardenrie ovir all the boundis of Abirdene Banff and Kincardine lyk as the said Patrik him self is electit and chosin to the said office be commoun consent of the maist part of the maister masons within the sheriffdomes . . .

Therefore the king confirmed Patrick in the office of wardenry over the craft of masons in the three shires, making him warden and justice over them for life. He was to exercise this office as freely 'as any uthir wardane of the said craft within this realme dois or may do', or as Patrick's own father used to do. Patrick was to have the right to all fees and privileges pertaining to the office, with power to hold warden and justice courts, and to appoint deputies, clerks and other court officials. Unfortunately the text of the last part of the document as recorded in the register of the privy seal is defective, degenerating into nonsense, but Patrick Copland was evidently also granted power to make and enforce rules for the craft.<sup>30</sup>

Thus according to this document Patrick Copland was warden of the mason craft with authority over a whole region of the country, and his father and other predecessors had held the same office. In addition there is the tantalising suggestion that there might be, or have been, similar regional wardens in other parts of the country. It is hard to know how much credence to give to these statements, but (as seen in chapter 2) English evidence indicates that for members of a wandering trade to accept (or have imposed) a local landlord as patron and protector was not unknown. Moreover, as already mentioned, a 1427 act of parliament had ordered councils in burghs and barons in country areas to be appointed wardens of crafts.<sup>31</sup> There is no evidence of wardens being actually appointed at that time, but it is just conceivable that, directly or indirectly, the authority of the Coplands of

<sup>30</sup> SRO, PS.1/61, Register of the privy seal, f. 47r; Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 4–5; Miller, *Aberdeen*, 11–12.

<sup>31</sup> *APS*, ii, 15.

Udoch over masons derived from the act, just as it could be that the claims of the Sinclairs of Roslin (which will be discussed in chapter 4) to national authority over the masons derived somehow from what had originally been a local claim to jurisdiction under the act.

Little is known about the Coplands of Udoch. They were a family of minor landlords, whose lands (now called Idoch) lay in the parish of Turriff in northern Aberdeenshire. A possible alternative explanation of how they came to have power over masons is that this derived somehow from their connections with the Gordon earls of Huntly, the most powerful men in the region. In 1510 Thomas Copland of Udoch had been excused by the king from having to attend the sheriff court of Aberdeenshire as he was occupied in continual service with the earl of Huntly.<sup>32</sup> In about 1556 another Thomas Copland of Udoch produced before the sheriff court a letter appointing Patrick Copland of Udoch, perhaps this Thomas' father, to the office of baillie, which was to descend to his heirs. A missing folio in the court book means that it is unknown who was commissioning the Coplands as his baillies, and what they were baillies of, but it is possible that the Coplands acted as hereditary baillies for the earls on part of their estates.<sup>33</sup> It could also be that the Coplands were delegated power over the masons by the earls of Huntly, the masons having asked the earls to be their patrons because of their powerful position in the region and as they were major employers of masons – the great castle of Strathbogie or Huntly (which William Schaw was to be ordered to destroy) was almost entirely rebuilt in the 1550s.<sup>34</sup> The suggestion that an insignificant family could acquire powers over craftsmen through delegation from a great landlord is again given some plausibility by the evidence relating to English minstrels, for the family of Dutton gained authority over the Chester minstrels through delegation by the earls of Chester to their constables, who in turn delegated it to their own stewards, the Duttons.<sup>35</sup> But, in the absence of any real evidence, all this must remain mere speculation.

Patrick Copland of Udoch, whose office as warden of the masons was confirmed by the king in 1590, had inherited his family estates from his father, Thomas, by 1574, when his eviction of his father's widow (evidently his stepmother rather than his mother) from the house of Udoch can be traced.<sup>36</sup> Apart from a few other references relating to his property, nothing is known of Patrick Copland except his authority over masons, and that he died in 1606 and was succeeded by his son Alexander.<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence that Copland, his predecessors, or his son actively exercised their authority over masons. In the light of what William Schaw was to do a few years later it may

<sup>32</sup> D. Littlejohn (ed.), *Records of the sheriff court of Aberdeen* (3 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1904–7), i, 105–6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 141; SRO, SC.1/2/3, Aberdeen sheriff court diet book, 1557–60.

<sup>34</sup> See note 27 above. <sup>35</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Littlejohn, *Records*, i, 198, 220, 225, 228, 421. <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 60.

be that already in 1590 he (Schaw) was considering reorganising the mason craft, and that he first thought of basing his work on a revival and extension of an existing concept of regional wardens exemplified by the Coplands of Udoch as a surviving example – or perhaps the only example that had ever existed – of such wardens. On this argument it was Schaw, a well-established court figure close to the king, who took the initiative in getting royal confirmation under the privy seal for the rights of the Coplands over masons. But, if this is what happened, Schaw soon changed his mind, and within a few years he was working on a new system of organisation in which there was no place for regional wardens.

### The First Schaw Statutes

On 28 December 1598 William Schaw issued ‘The statutis and ordinanceis to be obseruit be all the maister maissounis within this realme’, acting as master of works ‘and generall Wardene of the said craft’. Thus eight years after evidence is found of the office of regional warden, a general warden of all Scottish masons appears. This time there was no claim of antiquity for the post, and it seems that it was created by Schaw himself with the approval of at least some masons: the preamble to the statutes (which will be discussed more fully below) states that they were set down by Schaw with the consent of the master masons thereafter specified, but at the end of the document they are only described in vague terms as all the masters who convened on 28 December. As the king’s master of works Schaw was the agent who organised work, and therefore employment, on behalf of by far the most important single employer of masons in the country. That in itself gave him very considerable authority over masons, and he probably claimed that this made the master of works in effect general warden, so he was not creating a new office but making explicit one that really already existed. He did this, no doubt, to make his jurisdiction over masons more explicit than it had previously been, in order to strengthen his position in implementing the ambitious reforms he had in mind for the mason craft. The First Schaw Statutes can for convenience be divided into 22 paragraphs or clauses, the numbers of which will be indicated in the text in brackets.<sup>38</sup>

The statutes open by binding master masons to observe all the good ordinances previously made by their predecessors (1). It seems that Schaw was here thinking primarily of the charges or orders contained in the Old Charges, for the clauses which follow appear to be based on them, thus providing the best evidence there is that the Old Charges were known in

<sup>38</sup> The paragraphs are not numbered in the copies of the statutes which have been published in W. Fraser (ed.), *Memorials of the Montgomeries, earls of Eglinton* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1859), ii, 239–41, and Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 9–11, and though an unpublished version (Inventory, 1.3) has 21 numbered paragraphs, I have adopted the slightly different numbering added to the text in Carr, *Edinburgh*, 36–9.

Scotland long before the mid seventeenth-century date of the earliest surviving Scottish copies. But the material taken from the Old Charges was altered and expanded in the statutes so as to apply it specifically to Scottish conditions, with injunctions that obedience was to be given to wardens, masters and deacons and that masons undertaking work they were not competent to perform should be fined and made to compensate their employer, the amount of compensation being assessed by the general warden or, in his absence, by the wardens, deacons and masters of the shire (2–6).

Next, the statutes ordered that a warden was to be elected yearly by the master masons to have charge of 'everie ludge as they ar devidit particularlie'. This was to be done with the consent of the general warden if he was present, and he was to be informed of the results of all elections so that he could send directions to the lodge wardens (7). Rules concerning apprentices follow. No master was to take more than three apprentices in his lifetime without special consent of the wardens, deacons and masters of the shire. Apprentices were to be bound to their masters for at least seven years, and were not to be made 'brother and fallow in craft' until they had worked for at least another seven years after that. Masters were to notify their lodges when they took apprentices, so that they could be 'orderlie buikit'. Apprentices were subsequently to be 'entered' in the same order in which they had been booked (8–12).

No master or fellow of craft was to be admitted to a lodge unless at least six masters (including the warden) and two entered apprentices were present, and the skills and worthiness of the candidates were to be tried. The entry of each fellow craft was to be booked, along with his mark, the names of those present 'and the names of the intendaris that salbe chosin to euerie persone' (13). Various regulations were then laid down concerning working practices. No master should work with, or let his servants work with, 'cowans'. Entered apprentices were only to undertake work with permission of the warden and masters of the lodge, and were only to undertake small jobs. Disputes between masons were to be referred to their lodges, and masons refusing to accept the proposals of the lodges for settling such quarrels 'salbe deprivit of the privilege of thair ludge' and not be permitted to work there until they submitted (14–19). Finally, the statutes ordered that masons who did not attend meetings of which they had been informed were to be fined, and masters attending assemblies or meetings were to tell of any wrongs they knew of committed by other masons against their fellows or their employers. All fines imposed by lodges for breaches of these regulations were to be devoted to pious (charitable) causes (20–2).

To these statutes all the master masons present agreed, and they requested William Schaw to sign them and send a copy to every lodge within the realm.

The First Schaw Statutes provide a flood of new evidence about masonic organisation in Scotland, but it is not easy to distinguish innovations by Schaw

from confirmations by him of existing practices. Nor is it easy to understand the meaning of the statutes if they are considered in isolation. The interpretation of them which follows is therefore partly inspired by additional information from other sources, especially early lodge minute books and the early masonic catechisms.

The masonic organisation delineated in the First Schaw Statutes is based on lodges. The name is old, but the lodges now described are very different from those known from earlier sources. The Medieval lodges (as explained in chapter 2) had either been temporary buildings (working, eating and/or sleeping places at a building site), or semi-permanent institutions attached to major ecclesiastical buildings and limited to the masons working on these buildings. There is no evidence of such lodges having jurisdiction over all masons working in an area, or having general control over who could enter the trade, or of individual lodges having links with others to exercise jurisdiction on a wider basis, over whole shires – though the Second Schaw Statutes were soon to indicate that Kilwinning Lodge claimed to have had such rights in the past.

All these features appear for the first time in the First Schaw Statutes. There is to be established a coherent lodge system for all Scotland, with a general warden having jurisdiction over all lodges. There is mention (in vague terms) of meetings and assemblies above the level of the lodge, and though the relationship of lodge and shire is not defined it seems that the lodges within a shire were expected to work together. Obviously these new lodges have similarities with those traceable in earlier periods. The name itself was one long accepted for a group or organisation of masons, and the earlier lodges had doubtless sought to regulate entry to the trade and working practices like the Schaw lodges. But, whether temporary or semi-permanent, the late Medieval lodges (the fragments of evidence indicate) had only been concerned with masons working on a single building, or perhaps at most on all public buildings in a particular burgh. If there was organisation above this level, it was either informal – masons moving from one building to another carrying the craft legends and regulations and thus introducing an element of uniformity – or based on the fact that in some areas masons may have occasionally attended courts held by regional wardens like the Coplands of Udoch, creating a sort of assembly of masons. It is also, no doubt, the case that the earlier lodges had had rituals and ceremonies – it is difficult to conceive of a Medieval craft organisation not having rituals of some sort. But there is nothing to indicate that these rituals were identical to those of the new Schaw lodges; the rituals of the latter were based on the Mason Word, and there is no pre-seventeenth-century evidence for the existence of the Word. Yet even if it is accepted that it was around 1600 the rituals that later appear in the catechisms were created, it may be presumed that they grew out of whatever older rituals the masons possessed.

Just as there is no evidence of continuity of ritual, so there is none of organisation. Doubtless some of the new-type lodges which appeared around 1600 claimed from the first links with these shadowy earlier lodges (as many certainly did later), but there is not a single scrap of evidence to give plausibility to the idea of the direct and continuous descent of any of the 'Schaw' lodges from earlier organisations. Of the two types of Medieval lodge, the semi-permanent lodges sometimes attached to great churches probably disappeared long before the 1590s, a process which would have been hastened by the coming of Reformation to Scotland in 1560. As to temporary building-site lodges, they continued to exist alongside the new lodges. There are frequent references in building accounts to such lodges being built, and functioning as accommodation for masons as well as work sheds.<sup>39</sup>

The name of the chief official in the new lodges was also a legacy from the past. There is a reference to the warden of a lodge in fourteenth-century England,<sup>40</sup> and the 1427 act of the Scottish parliament had referred to craft wardens. But again similarity of name should not be taken as proof that the Medieval official was identical to the official described in the Schaw Statutes and presided over an identical institution. Even in the seventeenth century, with the Schaw lodges operating under their wardens, there were also wardens of the temporary site lodges. In 1616 John Service, 'warden of the maissouns ludge' at Edinburgh Castle, was paid for his pains in having charge over the other masons 'and in trying of their wark'.<sup>41</sup> He may have been chosen by his fellow masons, but essentially he was entrusted by their employer (who paid him for his work as warden) with disciplinary and quality-control functions. Service's office of warden over a site lodge was nothing to do with the lodges of the Schaw Statutes and their wardens, and the fact that the Medieval-style site lodges could exist alongside the new Schaw lodges but entirely separate from them emphasises that they were very different even if they had the same name. So too does the fact that a site lodge could be owned by a woman, the widow of a mason.<sup>42</sup> In both ritual and organisation William Schaw may have built on fragmentary traditions of the craft, but the central theme appears to be innovation rather than continuity.

The new Schaw or 'territorial' lodges (as some masonic historians term them) were presided over by wardens. The wardens were themselves master masons, and they and the other masters controlled the lodges. An alternative name for masters was fellow of craft or fellow craft, the two terms being used for the same grade, either separately or together in clumsy phrases such as

<sup>39</sup> See *Mr of works accs.*, indexes to both vols, under 'lodges'.

<sup>40</sup> Salzmann, *Building in England*, 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, ii, 12.

<sup>42</sup> D. Laing, 'Who was the architect of Heriot's Hospital?', *Transactions of the Architectural Institute of Scotland*, ii (1850-1), 40.



'master or fellow of craft' or 'master and fellow craft'. Also members of the lodge, but with no part in administering it, were the 'entered apprentices'. When a master mason first took an apprentice he was supposed to 'book' him – have his name inserted in the lodge's records. At some unspecified time after booking the apprentice would be admitted or entered to the lodge as an entered apprentice. After a minimum of seven years as apprentice, and another seven years after that working as a servant or wage-earning employee of master masons, he would be admitted to the higher grade in the lodge, that of fellow craft or master. Nothing was said in the First Schaw Statutes as to how entered apprentices were to be admitted to the lodge, but it is clear that the fellow crafts were admitted with some sort of ceremony; a minimum number of members had to be present, the skill and worthiness of the candidate in his vocation and craft were to be tried, and intenders were to be appointed for the candidates. Other sources make it evident that these intenders prepared the candidate for initiation by teaching him the secrets and rituals of the fellow craft. There were also in the seventeenth-century secrets and rituals taught to the entered apprentices, but the silence of the Schaw Statutes may indicate that these had not been created by 1598. What the rituals comprised will be discussed in chapter 6.

Wardens, according to the statutes, were to be elected by the masters of the lodge, but there was also another lodge official mentioned, the deacon, and nothing was said about how he was appointed: his presence is simply assumed. The reason for this was that, though he was accepted as a lodge official, he was not usually chosen by the lodge. In many urban lodges he was the head of whatever incorporation included masons, being elected by the incorporation, or by a system that gave both the incorporation and the burgh council a say in the appointment. The presence of such deacons in lodges is thus part of a much wider question, that of the relationship between the new Schaw lodges and the incorporations. In the burghs they are in many respects parallel institutions, similar in membership, carrying out many similar functions. The only burgh where both types of institution can be studied in any detail (through minutes of both surviving) as they work side by side is Edinburgh. The Incorporation of Mary's Chapel contained all the building trades but was dominated by the masons and wrights, each of whom had a deacon. The mason deacon was head of the masons in the incorporation, and also presided in the Lodge of Mary's Chapel, both bodies taking their names from the building in which they met. In Glasgow the wrights and masons also formed a single incorporation up to 1600, but then split into two separate bodies. It is tempting to link the timing of this with William Schaw's attempts to reorganise the mason craft, but whatever the reason for the split it meant that in Glasgow there was after 1600 an incorporation consisting entirely of masons and alongside it a lodge with virtually the same membership. Where

there was no incorporation parallel to a lodge the deacon was elected, like the warden, by the lodge.

Why was there often this seemingly clumsy and unnecessary duplication of institutions, incorporation and lodge, which often seem from their minute books to be very similar in nature and activities? Both types of institution regulated entry to the trade, made rules as to working practices, punished transgressors, sought to settle disputes between masons, and had social functions in bringing masons together to eat and drink. Both burgh lodge and incorporation seem to be essentially craft guilds. Why not, therefore, merge them? There are cases where the logic of this argument seems to have been partly followed. In Stirling and Dundee it is impossible to separate lodge and incorporation, a single body performing the functions of both. But it is probably significant that in both these cases the lodge/incorporation was not a full incorporation but only a trade society given limited recognition by the burgh council. In this may lie part of the reason why full incorporations and burgh lodges remained separate.

Incorporations are usually defined as bodies which, authorised by the burgh authorities, gave the craft concerned privileges and status in the burgh, and a share (though a limited one) in governing the burgh. But there was another side to incorporation by a seal of cause: it created an organisation through which the burgh magistrates and council could control and regulate the craft. In the fifteenth century there had been considerable suspicion of the crafts and their deacons as potentially subversive. They had been seen as a threat to the authority of burgh councils, and as designed to push up wages and introduce restrictive practices in the crafts. Interestingly, the masons and wrights were singled out on several occasions as notable offenders here.<sup>43</sup> But by the late sixteenth century the incorporations had been brought firmly under burgh control, and though having an incorporation brought a craft privileges it also involved recognition that ultimate control of the craft lay in the hands of a merchant-dominated burgh council. In any case (as indicated in chapter 2) incorporations were designed to meet the needs of static crafts, of tradesmen whose working lives would be spent in the burgh, and this made them not entirely suitable for masons who frequently moved in search of work. Again, masons were usually lumped together in the incorporations with other building trades. This meant that, as a relatively small craft, they were outnumbered. Even in late seventeenth-century Edinburgh, when building in stone rather than wood had become almost universal, the wrights outnumbered the masons in the Mary's Chapel Incorporation by about three to one – and a number of other trades were also members of the incorporation.

Thus even if, as in Edinburgh, the masons had their own deacon, they usually only formed a minority in an incorporation which consisted mainly of

<sup>43</sup> J. D. Marwick, *Edinburgh guilds and crafts* (SBRs, 1909), 41–2, 55, 115.

much more static trades and was supervised by the burgh council. In these circumstances masons may well have concluded that incorporations could not protect their interests and regulate their trade adequately. Moreover, they had their own lore and rituals, greatly revived and elaborated by William Schaw, which were exclusive to their craft. An organisation shared with other crafts and open to inspection by the burgh was not suitable for this side of the masons' activities.

The lodge system of the First Schaw Statutes offered a solution to such difficulties. Masons could retain membership of incorporations for the advantages this brought them within burghs, while through lodges they could have their own organisations outside the control of the burgh councils. Only masons would be members – or at least if others were allowed in this process would be controlled by the masons themselves. Thus through lodges the masons asserted their right to their own autonomous organisations, established by themselves without seal of cause or other authorisation from outside the craft. In such lodges they could seek to regulate their craft without intervention by others, and value and develop their own secret legends and rituals. But perhaps in Stirling and Dundee, where the existing craft societies or guilds which included masons were not formally constituted incorporations closely supervised by the burgh authorities, masons found they could adapt the societies to fit their own needs, and therefore felt no need for separate lodges.

This interpretation of why both lodges and incorporations were regarded as necessary by masons postulates that, though masons were happy to benefit from burgh privileges, they wished to avoid complete burgh control over their craft. Support is given to this suggestion by the strong tradition that lodges should not meet within burghs. The early masonic catechisms stress this, and it was put into practice in a number of cases. Melrose masons met outside the burgh at Newstead: Aberdeen masons crossed the River Dee to meet outside the burgh's jurisdiction. Elgin masons met as the Lodge of Kilmolymock, Perth masons as the Lodge of Scone: but though these lodges were named after places outside burghs, they appear to have met within them, their names being a sort of symbolic declaration that they did not regard themselves as burgh institutions. Other lodges were not exclusively associated with a single burgh; Kilwinning drew members from Irvine, Ayr and other towns, Aitchison's Haven from several burghs near Edinburgh. None of these lodges literally obeyed the injunction in the earliest catechism by meeting a full day's journey away from any burgh, but some at least met outside them; and doubtless even those which met in burghs felt that in spirit they were obeying the injunction: by meeting in their own lodges, whose existence owed nothing to the burgh authorities, they were 'outside' the burgh metaphorically if not literally.

The fact that Schaw accepted that incorporation deacons should preside in

burgh lodges may perhaps be seen as the price that he had to pay in persuading incorporations to accept the existence of what they might well have seen as threatening rival craft organisations. The lost early records of the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel are said to have contained many examples of Schaw's signature,<sup>44</sup> and this suggests that he had a leading role in its affairs which would have enabled him to persuade it to accept the creation of a lodge for some of its members. But though the incorporations accepted the lodges they only did so tacitly, turning a blind eye to their existence. If the minutes of the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel are any guide, incorporations avoided all reference to lodges in their records. Similarly, only in the most unusual of circumstances do lodge records contain any indication that there were such things as incorporations – as when the extraordinary circumstances of the foundation of the Lodge of Journeymen Masons forced the Lodge of Mary's Chapel to acknowledge the fact that there was an Incorporation of Mary's Chapel acting as a public front for it.<sup>45</sup> Lodges liked to pretend that they alone exercised authority over the mason craft, but the circumspection with which they acted in practice indicates their awareness of the existence of incorporations and burgh councils and of the necessity to avoid provoking them by presenting any threat to their interests.

Like lodge records, the Schaw Statutes ignored the existence of incorporations, except indirectly through their acceptance that deacons had authority over lodges. The statutes assumed (or pretended) that all the stages of a mason's career were recorded and controlled by the lodge. In practice, where lodges and incorporations existed side by side, lodges only controlled parts of the process. Booking of apprentices was left to the incorporation or to the burgh authorities. In Edinburgh at least, the start of the apprenticeship (which should have been accompanied by booking, though in practice this was often delayed for several years) was normally followed two or three years later by admission to the lodge as an entered apprentice. Several later seventeenth-century indentures specifically committed the master to having his apprentice thus 'entered' to a lodge within a time limit.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps seven or so years after being entered, the entered apprentice was promoted in the lodge to fellow craft master, after initiation but without any 'essay' or test of his practical skills as a craftsman such as had been intended by Schaw – and without the 14-year wait between the start of apprenticeship and promotion to fellow craft he had stipulated. By this promotion the mason became a master so far as the lodge was concerned: but to the incorporation he remained simply a time-served apprentice earning his living as a wage-earning journeyman. Many never rose beyond this status, but a privileged minority went on to become mason burgesses and (on approval of an essay) masters of the incorporation. Thus a

<sup>44</sup> Mylne, *Master masons*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Stevenson, *Freemasons*, chapter 2, section 4.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., H. Carr, 'Apprenticeship in England and Scotland up to 1700', *AQC*, 69 (1956), 67–9.

man would be a master or fellow craft in the lodge before being accepted as a master by burgh and incorporation.

In the course of their careers masons thus advanced up two interlocked but distinct hierarchies, those of lodge and of incorporation/burgh. In Edinburgh at least the incorporation supervised a mason's booking as an apprentice in the burgh register and his promotion to burghess and master, while quite separately the lodge admitted him as entered apprentice and then fellow craft. A 'typical' Edinburgh mason's career has been described, but there were many variations in the timing of the various stages, and even differences in order; some men became burghesses and masters of the incorporation before becoming masters or fellow crafts in the lodge. Moreover, the sons of master masons who were trained by their fathers were not, it seems, formally apprenticed, and therefore first appear in the records when admitted to lodges as entered apprentices.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps it was thought inappropriate, indeed subversive of the authority of the head of the family, that a son should be a party to a formal contract or indenture with his father, defining and therefore limiting how the father should treat the son.

Several minor points arising from the First Schaw Statutes require comment. Mason marks are mentioned, and (as the statutes required) they were recorded in some lodge minute books. But there is no evidence that in the seventeenth century any symbolic significance was attached to them. They had evolved in the Middle Ages as ways of identifying the work done by individual masons, and were thus not essentially different from the identifying marks used by men in other occupations, from bakers to merchants. Many of the marks recorded in the seventeenth century are simply monograms of the initials of masons, and thus clearly have no esoteric meaning. The only exception to this generalisation is the remarkable obsession of Sir Robert Moray with his mason mark (see chapter 7), but he is so extraordinary and untypical a mason that no conclusion about the attitudes of other masons to their marks can be based on his elaborate symbolism.

The statutes forbade masons to work with cowans. Who were these cowans? The evidence of scattered references in building accounts and in lodge minutes indicates that they were semi-skilled men who were qualified to undertake some work involving the use of stone. The terms *cowan* and *roughlayer* were used interchangeably in the accounts of Schaw's successors as masters of works,<sup>48</sup> and scattered references elsewhere indicate that they were allowed to work with stone provided they did not use lime mortar, and they may also have been forbidden to cut or carve stone. Incorporations

<sup>47</sup> This description of the careers of masons is based on Carr, *Mason and burgh* and Carr, *Edinburgh*, 5–7, though Carr discusses careers in terms of promotions in a single hierarchy whereas one of the central features of the system was the peculiar existence of two parallel hierarchies.

<sup>48</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, ii, 2n, 19, 21, 49, 50, 97–100, 190, 195, and see index under Bryce, Walter.

sometimes ignored cowans, but in some cases they licensed cowans to work or even (in Perth) admitted them to membership. Building accounts show cowans and masons working side by side. But the Schaw Statutes and the masonic lodges are positively hostile to cowans. It is not just that they are seen as semi-skilled men who have to be kept in their place, excluded from some types of work to enforce traditional ideas of trade demarcation. Masons are banned from working with cowans at all, and though in practice some lodges made exceptions this was always done reluctantly. It seems possible that lodge and incorporation had in fact different definitions of cowans, just as they had different definitions of masters. In 1705 the Lodge of Kilwinning agreed that its members might employ cowans if no mason could be found within 15 miles, and in doing this the lodge defined a cowan as a man 'without the word'.<sup>49</sup> Thus to some extent what made a man a cowan was not lack of skill, but lack of initiation into the esoteric lore of the Mason Word. In refusing to work or associate with cowans, lodge members were evidently, in part at least, bringing pressure on men qualified for membership to accept initiation into the lodge and thus make it easier to find employment. Other cowans, not having been properly trained in the mason craft, would not have the option of lodge membership and were excluded from the Mason Word as they were not qualified to receive it. The hostility to cowans, now defined in part at least as men whose deficiency lay in lack of initiation, probably arose from William Schaw's ambitions for the craft. He wanted masons to be an exclusive body of men qualified as masons both through training in trade skills and through initiation to the esoteric lore of the craft. For this to be achieved masons had to distance themselves both from the semi-skilled and from the uninitiated, and the word cowan was used to embrace both categories.

Finally, the date of the First Schaw Statutes, 28 December, requires comment. The most widely accepted patron saint of the mason craft was St John the Baptist, whose feast-day was 24 June, or St John the Evangelist, whose feast fell on 27 December. In Edinburgh the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights had, in pre-Reformation times, been responsible for the upkeep of the chapel of St John the Evangelist in the burgh church, St Giles,<sup>50</sup> and most seventeenth-century lodges held their main meeting of the year – sometimes their only one – on 27 December (unless that was a Sunday, when the meeting would be held on 28 December). It is highly likely that William Schaw had convened his meeting of master masons on 27 December, the most important day in the masonic calendar, and that it was as a result of the discussions then held that the First Schaw Statutes were drafted and agreed the following day. This is certainly what happened with the Second Schaw Statutes the following year.

As the description of the stages of a seventeenth-century Edinburgh

<sup>49</sup> Carr, *Kilwinning*, 133.

<sup>50</sup> Marwick, *Edinburgh guilds*, 54–5.

mason's career indicates, the Schaw Statutes were not implemented in every detail. Local practices varied greatly, and there is no evidence of cooperation between the lodges in a shire. Nonetheless, the statutes defined the basic character of the seventeenth-century lodge and its work. At least two lodges were prompt to obey the injunction that lodges should keep proper records of 'bookings'. Copies of the statutes were written into what became the first minute books of the lodges of Aitchison's Haven and Edinburgh. These were then signed by Schaw, and the minutes of the two lodges begin on 9 January 1599 and 31 July 1599 respectively.<sup>51</sup> A third copy of the statutes signed by Schaw was evidently provided for Kilwinning Lodge.<sup>52</sup> Though the statutes were not obeyed to the letter, they continued to be prized for many years by lodges which owned copies. As late as 1661 the members of Aitchison's Haven Lodge thought inserting an alteration into their copy worthwhile, indicating that they still took the statutes seriously – though not seriously enough to deter them from tampering with the text!

### The Second Schaw Statutes

The Second Schaw Statutes, dated Holyroodhouse, 28 December 1599, were again signed by William Schaw (as master of works and warden of the masons), and they record that they were the result of a meeting which had begun the previous day, St John's Day. At the end of the statutes Schaw appended a formal statement addressed to the warden, deacon and masters of the Lodge of Kilwinning declaring that Archibald Barclay, being a commissioner sent by the lodge, had appeared in Edinburgh on 27 and 28 December, had produced his commission in presence of the general warden and the masters of the Lodge of Edinburgh, and had behaved 'verie honestlie and cairfullie' in the matters entrusted to him. But 'be rессone of the absence of his Maiestie out of the toun, and that thair was na maisteris bot the ludge of Edinburgh convenit' it had proved impossible to 'get sik an satlat [settled] ordour (as the privileges of the craft requyris) tane at this time'. But on a suitable occasion 'we sall get his Maiesties warrand, baith for the authorizing of the ludgeis privileges' and setting penalties for the disobedient.

The new statutes contained 14 separate statutes or paragraphs (plus the closing declaration by Schaw).<sup>53</sup> Some were addressed specifically to the Lodge of Kilwinning, others to all lodges in Scotland: the two types will be summarised below separately, though (as the paragraph numbers indicate) in the original they are mixed up together. First, it was laid down that 'the

<sup>51</sup> Inventory, 1.2, 1.3. In the Aitchison's Haven copy of the statutes the part of the sheet which would have had Schaw's signature on it is missing, but it is likely that it originally carried his signature.

<sup>52</sup> Fraser (ed.), *Memorials of the Montgomeries*, ii, 239–41; Inventory, 1.1.

<sup>53</sup> Fraser (ed.), *Memorials of the Montgomeries*, ii, 241–4; Inventory, 1.5. The paragraph numbering is that adopted in Carr, *Kilwinning*, 4–6.

warden within the boundis of Kilwynning, and vtheris placeis subject to thair ludge' should be elected annually on 20 December. Elections were to be held in the church of Kilwinning, 'as the heid and secund ludge of Scotland', and the general warden was to be informed of who was elected (1). Next, it was declared expedient by 'my lord warden general' that every lodge in Scotland have 'the auld and antient liberteis thereof vsit and wont of befoir'. In particular, the warden of the Lodge of Kilwinning, the second lodge of Scotland, should be present at the election of all wardens within the Nether Ward of Lanarkshire (one of the two divisions of the shire), Glasgow, Ayr and Carrick (one of the three divisions of Ayrshire). The warden of Kilwinning was to have power to summon all wardens and deacons in this area – or, indeed, in any other part of the west of Scotland – and, along with the deacon of Kilwinning, power to judge them (2). The statutes then announced that it was needful and expedient that 'in all tyme cuming, as of befoir' Edinburgh should be the 'principall ludge in Scotland'. Kilwinning was to be the second, as of before, this being 'notourlie manifest in our awld antient writtis'. The third lodge was to be Stirling 'conforme to the auld privileges thairof' (3).

The next 'Kilwinning' statute ordered the warden of Kilwinning to elect and choose 'sex of the maist perfyte and worthiest of memorie within [their bounds], to tak tryall of the qualificatioun of the haill masonis within the boundis foirsaid, of thair art, craft, scyance and antient memorie', and the warden (and deacon, it is now added) would be held responsible for seeing that this was done (6). The two Kilwinning officials were enjoined to exclude from their society and company all who disobeyed the acts and ancient statutes of good memory, and all others who were disobedient to church or craft (7). All statutes and acts made by the predecessors of the masons of Kilwinning were to be observed faithfully, and no apprentice or craftsman (fellow craft?) was to be admitted except within the church of Kilwinning. All banquets which were paid for by the fees collected from new apprentices and fellow crafts were to be held within the lodge (9). The warden and deacon of Kilwinning were to take oaths from all masters and fellow crafts within their bounds that they would neither keep company nor work with cowans or their servants and apprentices (12). Finally, the officials of Kilwinning Lodge were to 'tak tryall of the art of memorie and science thairof, of euerie fallowe of craft and euerie prenteiss, according to ather of thair vocationis; and in cais that thai have lost ony point thairof' they were to be fined, the money being paid to the lodge, 'and that conforme to the commoun vse and pratik of the commoun luginis of this realm' (13).

Turning to the paragraphs which were evidently addressed to lodges in general, it was stated that wardens of lodges were to be answerable to the presbyteries (the district courts of the church) within their shires for offences committed by masons in their lodges, and one-third of any fines imposed for such offences should be put to pious use by the lodge. Offenders were to be



tried annually by the warden and the six most ancient masters of the lodge (4, 5). The officials of lodges (wardens, deacons and quartermasters) were to choose qualified notaries to be their clerks or scribes, and they were to write all documents and records of the lodge (8). Fees for entrants to lodges were specified. At his entry a fellow craft was to pay £10 to the lodge box (to pay for the banquet or dinner which would then take place) and present gloves worth 10 shillings to the masters, while entered apprentices were to pay £6 for a banquet. But no fellow craft was to be admitted 'without ane sufficient essay and prufe of memorie and art of craft' to warden, deacon and quartermasters (10, 11). Finally, the warden, deacons and quartermasters were empowered and commissioned by Schaw to set down and make acts conforming to all former acts and to 'equitie iustice and antient ordour' (14).

In providing a remarkable flood of new information about the mason craft the Second Schaw Statutes fully live up to the standard set by the First. In some respects the Second Statutes are simply a continuation of the First, but they differ notably from their predecessors in some ways. The first and most obvious difference is that they are tailored to the circumstances of a particular lodge. Reading the First and Second Statutes together, a strong impression is given that the Second Statutes are in part the direct result of reactions among some masons to the First Statutes. It looks as if there had been protests that in some respects the First Statutes contravened the traditions and customs of the craft, perhaps especially in failing to take account of local claims to precedence and jurisdiction. How far these protests reflected the reality of craft organisation which had once existed, and how far simply local patriotism of the 'we are the greatest' type is impossible to say, but the protests were clearly strong enough for Schaw to feel he had to take account of them. He therefore (it may be surmised) laid down an order of precedence for the three lodges which were making claims to primacy based on the traditional lore of local masons. Edinburgh was recognised as the first and principal lodge in Scotland, Kilwinning as the second, and Stirling as the third. But there is a complication: before this ranking has been explained, the statutes have described Kilwinning as the head and second lodge of Scotland. What does this mean? If it is head lodge, then should it not be first rather than second?

One explanation that has been suggested is that though Kilwinning was called *the* head lodge, what is meant is that it was *a* head lodge, all three lodges mentioned in the statutes being a special type of lodge, different to and superior to others in that they had jurisdiction over areas which included other lodges, and power to supervise such lodges within their territory.<sup>54</sup> There is, however, little evidence to support such an interpretation. Certainly Kilwinning can be seen, once its minutes start in 1642, to be attempting to exercise jurisdiction over a wide area (though not over other lodges), but this is unique. Edinburgh Lodge's minutes give no indication whatever that it

<sup>54</sup> Carr, *Kilwinning*, 7.

claimed jurisdiction outside the burgh, and the few traces that exist of Stirling Lodge in the seventeenth century hardly suggest that it was of any particular significance. Of course, it might still be claimed that Schaw had intended Edinburgh and Stirling to be 'head lodges', even if they did not in the event develop as he wished. In the case of Edinburgh there is some evidence that Schaw tried to push it into accepting a special role, but he seems to have been trying to get it to act as first lodge of Scotland, rather than as merely one of three head lodges. It seems therefore more likely that in the Second Statutes Schaw was attempting to arbitrate between conflicting claims for precedence. Kilwinning, it may be suggested, argued strongly that it should be recognised as first lodge of Scotland, its claims being put forward by the lodge's commissioner, Archibald Barclay, at the meetings in Edinburgh on 27 and 28 December 1599. But Schaw resolved that Edinburgh had a better case – with the masters of the Edinburgh Lodge, the only others present at the meeting, naturally supporting him. As some consolation to Kilwinning, however, Schaw declared that though it was the second lodge of Scotland, it could call itself *the* head lodge of Scotland, a special title recognising the fact that there was a strong tradition that masons based on Kilwinning had claimed at some time in the past precedence over other masons, and therefore over other lodges. Schaw was prepared to go so far as allowing Kilwinning Lodge the consolation of the title of head lodge of Scotland, but he was nonetheless determined to make it accept that it was subordinate to Edinburgh: it was to be the second lodge in the country, not the first as it demanded. Nearly every time the lodge is mentioned in the statutes it is repeated that it is second lodge – seven times in all – whereas that it is head lodge is only mentioned once. Archibald Barclay doubtless had need of Schaw's statement that he had acted honestly and carefully, for when he returned to Kilwinning he had to report that he had failed to get the lodge declared first in the land. The fact that the seventeenth-century minutes of the lodge never refer to the Second Schaw Statutes may well be an indication that the lodge, far from being proud of the statutes as they declared their lodge the second in the country, spurned them for not making it the first.

If the question of the precedence of lodges is one feature that distinguishes the Second Schaw Statutes from the First, another is the emphasis on antiquity and tradition. It is true that the First Statutes had opened with an order to masons to observe all good ordinances which had previously been set down, and that some of its clauses were derived from the Old Charges. But this cannot compare with the Second Statutes, which contain explicit appeals to the past in 7 of the 14 statutes. In part this appears to be a reaction to the same sort of protest against the First Statutes which had made it necessary to settle the question of precedence. Schaw had responded by recognising that Kilwinning was in some ways different from other lodges, and proceeded to reassure lodges in general that their old statutes or acts, their ancient order,

would be respected. The First Statutes had sought to impose uniform regulations on all lodges, leading to indignant reactions from masons proud of their local customs and retaining shadowy memories of past local organisation, so Schaw now sought to reassure them that these would be respected within the framework of new lodges and uniform regulations he was seeking to create.

This assumes that the statutes which refer to lodges in general, without specific mention of Kilwinning, were intended to be incorporated in codes of statutes issued to other lodges, but there is no evidence of this ever being done. This can be accounted for plausibly by reference to Schaw's declaration to Kilwinning Lodge at the end of the Second Statutes. Schaw was intending to get King James VI to give royal authority to the privileges of the masons, no doubt based on revision and amalgamation of the First and Second Statutes, and copies of such a royal grant would have been circulated to all lodges – had such a grant in fact ever been made. But Kilwinning Lodge had, perhaps, reacted to the First Statutes with such indignation that Schaw hastily compiled the Second Statutes, a provisional and temporary code intended to placate Kilwinning (though it failed to do so) until a royal grant could be obtained which would greatly strengthen Schaw's hand in dealing with recalcitrant lodges.

Does the emphasis on old statutes and acts, and on ancient order, contained in the Second Schaw Statutes cast doubt on the argument (put forward on the basis of the First Statutes) that the lodge and ritual systems for which evidence now begins to appear were largely the creations of William Schaw? Certainly putting the two sets of statutes side by side brings out the need for caution in trying to deduce conclusions from them on the point. In particular, it could be argued that why evidence about lodges suddenly begins to appear at this time is not that Schaw had created a new system, but simply that he had insisted that already-existing lodges maintain proper written records (First Statutes) kept by a well-qualified lodge clerk (Second Statutes). Conclusive refutation of such an interpretation is impossible, but it seems on balance most likely that all the talk of old writs and statutes merely refers to regulations for the craft made by incorporations, the Old Charges and local customs and traditions. It certainly seems peculiar that if 'writs' relating to earlier masonic practices and organisation existed in 1599, they all then suddenly disappeared without trace just as Schaw was putting emphasis on lodges caring for their records.

It is also true that the Second Statutes appear to indicate that masons in different areas had well-established local traditions associated with lodges, and that Schaw accepted that Kilwinning Lodge had traditional claims to a regional authority. But while it may be accepted that these local traditions were genuine as traditions, passed down from generation to generation, this is something quite different from accepting that these were 'true' in the sense of

accurately depicting the reality of the past organisation of the craft. The traditional lore of any institution tends to exaggerate its significance and achievements, and though traditions may have been handed down concerning Medieval site lodges, there is absolutely no written evidence for the existence of the sort of lodges which appear from 1598 onwards before that date. Therefore it seems reasonable, on the available evidence, to conclude that William Schaw reworked the traditions of the craft and its former institutions into something essentially new.

There is one aspect to the emphasis of the Second Schaw Statutes on the traditions of the craft and the importance of preserving them that has previously been totally overlooked, though it is one of the most exciting and remarkable features of Schaw's work. Statutes 6 and 10 refer to those masters most perfect and worthiest of memory testing others in their art, craft, science and ancient memory, and to those wishing to become fellow crafts having to give proof of memory (among other necessary qualifications). Considered in isolation these references may not seem to provide any major revelation of Schaw's intentions: they could be interpreted as simply laying down that masons should memorise the traditions of the craft, and (if, as is highly likely, they existed by this time) the secrets of the Mason Word. But the bombshell which reveals conclusively the full significance of such references explodes in statute 13. The warden of Kilwinning Lodge was ordered to test every entered apprentice and fellow craft in 'the art of memorie and science thairof'. Those who have 'lost ony point thairof' were to be punished according to the common use and practice of the common lodges of the realm. 'Art of memory' was not merely a rather strange and clumsy term for what has been memorised (as has been assumed in the past). It was a technique for memorising things which had its roots in ancient Greece. Originally purely a utilitarian – though remarkably elaborate – method of aiding the memory, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance the art of memory took on much more complicated overtones, becoming something that was highly symbolic and even occult. The reference to the art of memory in the Second Schaw Statutes provides the only direct evidence, as opposed to strong circumstantial evidence, that in remodelling the mason craft William Schaw was deliberately introducing Renaissance influences into the craft, and for that reason it is immensely important. The full significance of the art of memory, and the features which made it particularly appropriate for masons, will be discussed in chapter 5.

The question of whether Schaw was introducing the art of memory to the masons for the first time, or whether he was continuing an existing practice is one of the many that cannot be answered with certainty. The statutes speak of it as something long established: but the same is true of, for example, the order of precedence given to the first three lodges of Scotland, and it is almost certain that this ranking was in fact an innovation and a matter of bitter

controversy. In a society dominated by custom and appeals to the past, it was far more effective to claim to be reviving or continuing past practices than to admit to innovation.

It has sometimes been claimed that the two sets of Schaw Statutes, interesting as they are as to the organisation of the operative mason craft, contain nothing relating to esoteric matters and therefore nothing directly relevant to the development of freemasonry.<sup>55</sup> It is true that they do not describe secret practices, but this is hardly surprising in codes which were public enough for Schaw to seek royal confirmation of them. Moreover, there are hints in the First Statutes of ceremonies connected with the admission of fellow crafts. It is known that later in the century such initiations into lodges involved the elaborate secret rituals of the Mason Word, and it would strain credibility not to assume that something of the sort existed in 1598 when the statutes were produced. Further, as the First Statutes mark the arrival of the modern type of lodge, the grades of entered apprentice and fellow craft master, to argue they are not pertinent to the history of masonry suggests a perverse determination to reject evidence which is unwelcome because it shows that these elements emerge in Scotland and not England! As regards the Second Statutes, the three simple words 'art of memory' may be taken as proof that from the first the Schaw lodges were at least dabbling in occult and mystical strands of late Renaissance thought.<sup>56</sup>

A few other aspects of the Second Statutes remain to be discussed. The date 20 December on which Kilwinning Lodge was to hold elections differs from the 27 December, St John's Day, elections in other lodges. This presumably reflects some Kilwinning tradition, though the significance of the date is unknown. After 1642, when the lodge's surviving minutes begin, it met regularly on that day. The stipulations that the lodge must meet in the church of Kilwinning, and that its banquets must be held in the lodge, raise difficulties. The recorded meetings of the lodge, from 1642, never took place in the church, and banquets obviously would not be permitted there. Wider issues of the relations of church and craft are partially dealt with by making it clear that lodges would cooperate with presbyteries in dealing with offenders. This was presumably intended to still the fears of the church that the lodges were inconsistent with its discipline, but if this is so it is hard to believe the church could have been satisfied with such limited reassurance. Indeed, one of the most extraordinary features of the emergence of the masonic lodges and their rituals and secrets in seventeenth-century Scotland is that the church, not noted for its tolerance, did not denounce them as subversive and

<sup>55</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 130.

<sup>56</sup> The fact that the reference to the art of memory appears in a statute that seems at first to be specifically addressed to Kilwinning Lodge should not be taken as indicating that practice of this arcane skill was to be confined to members of that lodge, for the provision for fining those deficient in the art refers to lodges in general. This is one of many signs of confusion in detail in the Second Statutes which suggests haste in drafting them.

inconsistent with true religion – in spite of the fact that the founder of the movement, William Schaw, was a Catholic. Yet 50 years were to pass before any sign of worry about masonic activities is recorded in church records, and even then the matter was soon forgotten.

William Schaw intended to crown his legislation for the mason craft by gaining royal authority for it. The Second Statutes indicate that this is imminent. But royal approval was not forthcoming. If Schaw ever did raise the matter with James VI he may have found that he had been too optimistic. The king may have felt that giving special privileges to a craft throughout the country, ignoring the rights of burgh and other authorities, would raise problems, and that public ratification of Schaw's reorganisation of the craft would be likely to lead to religious and other controversies. But Schaw was not discouraged, though the third remarkable masonic document that he was to add to his two sets of statutes before his death in 1602, the First St Clair Charter, may represent a slight change of direction in his plans for the mason craft.

## 4 The Sinclairs of Roslin and the masters of works

### The First St Clair Charter

The document generally known as the First St Clair Charter would more accurately be described as a letter or commission.<sup>1</sup> It was issued in the name of the deacons, masters and freemen of the masons in Scotland, with the consent of William Schaw as master of works. From 'aige to aige it hes bene observit amangs ws', it is stated, that the lairds of Roslin 'hes ever bene patrones and p[ro]tectors of ws and our privileges', but within the past few years by negligence and slothfulness the office had passed out of use. This had deprived the lairds of their just rights, and the craft of their patrons, protectors and overseers, leading to many corruptions in the craft and to potential employers abandoning great 'interpryses' (building projects). Moreover, when controversies arose between masons it was very inconvenient that there was no patron or protector to judge such disputes, for masons could not use the ordinary courts of the country because of their poverty and because legal processes took so long before judgements were reached. Therefore the masons, with the consent of Schaw, had agreed that William Sinclair of Roslin and his heirs should obtain from the king jurisdiction over the masons as patrons and judges. Sinclair was to have power to appoint deputy judges under him, and his jurisdiction was to apply in burghs as well as in the countryside. The commission was signed by Schaw as master of works and representatives of four or five lodges either appended their signatures or (more frequently) had a notary sign on their behalf as they could not write. The uncertainty as to the number of lodges represented arises from the fact that one of the parties to the charter was described by a notary as warden of the Lodge of Dunfermline and St Andrews, which suggests that at this point there was a single united lodge in Fife, but later the notary named the two lodges separately. The other lodges represented were Edinburgh, Haddington and Aitchison's Haven.

<sup>1</sup> Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 65–6; Inventory, 2.1, 2.2. The surname of the lairds of Roslin was usually spelt Sinclair in this period, but the form St Clair has been retained in referring to the charters in accordance with the long-established practice of masonic historians. The spelling Roslin is used for the lairds, again as this is conventional, while the castle and church are spelt Rosslyn in accordance with modern usage.

The fact that the same notary signed for Dunfermline, St Andrews and Haddington masons indicates that a meeting of commissioners from Fife and Lothian lodges had taken place at which the charter was accepted, rather than it being sent round from lodge to lodge for signature. The document is not dated but was probably drawn up in 1600 or 1601; two of the three Edinburgh representatives named held office as deacon of the Incorporation and warden of the Lodge of Edinburgh that year.<sup>2</sup>

The First St Clair Charter is a much shorter and simpler document than the Schaw Statutes, but it too raises problems in striving to understand precisely what was going on in the mason craft. If the lairds of Roslin had a strong traditional claim to be patrons of the craft, why had this not been mentioned in the Schaw Statutes? Also, are not the statutes and the charter incompatible? The former give jurisdiction in settling disputes and punishing faults among masons to the lodges; the latter assigns this to the patron of the craft. Why were deacons and masters mentioned in the text of the charter, but not the lodges and their distinctive officials, the wardens? Both lodges and wardens were named when the signatures were added. Why is William Schaw called master of works, but not general warden of the masons? Only partial answers can be suggested. William Schaw's work in reorganising the craft might have led William Sinclair of Roslin to revive old family claims to patronage of the craft which had been allowed to lapse, and on agreeing to support such claims Schaw might have decided to drop his title of general warden as it seemed to conflict with the jurisdiction of the Sinclairs. Certainly Schaw's support for Sinclair does seem to represent a change of plan since the Second Statutes. In the latter he had confidently claimed to be on the verge of getting royal sanction for the privileges of the craft, presumably with his authority over the craft as general warden recognised and confirmed. This had not been forthcoming. Had Schaw therefore decided instead to try to get royal approval for the organisation of the mason craft by embracing the claims of the Sinclairs to be protectors of the trade, in the hope that it would be more difficult for the crown to ignore their supposedly traditional rights to leadership of the craft than it had been to ignore Schaw's own pretensions?

The First St Clair Charter can be seen as indicating either that Schaw was forced to change his plans to take account of claims over the craft by the Sinclairs which were too strong for him to resist, or that, thwarted in his attempts to get royal approval for the privileges of the craft directly, he used Sinclair of Roslin's claims to seek royal approval indirectly through him. Of course the two motives do not exclude each other: both may have been present. But the problem of why the charter avoided mentioning lodges and wardens remains.

Whatever the reason for Schaw now agreeing that the mason craft should accept a Sinclair patron, attempts to gain royal sanction were again un-

<sup>2</sup> Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 69.



successful. Schaw's death in 1602 and the move of the king to England on the Union of the Crowns the following year may have disrupted attempts to win the king's support. A further difficulty may have been that, though in William Sinclair the masons had found a gentleman of ancient lineage willing to be their patron, they had not found a respectable or influential one. The character of William Sinclair of Roslin, indeed, provides the strongest argument in favour of accepting that the First St Clair Charter's claim that the Sinclairs of Roslin had well-established rights as patrons of the craft represented a genuine tradition, not one invented to help gain approval for a newly chosen patron. If the masons had had a free choice in seeking a suitable patron to advance the craft's interests they would never have chosen the laird of Roslin!

### **The Sinclairs of Roslin**

It seems likely that the tradition of patronage of the mason craft by the Sinclairs of Roslin was connected somehow with the remarkable church of Rosslyn built by William Sinclair, earl of Caithness and Orkney, and his son in the mid fifteenth century. Only the choir was ever built, but this fragment contains an elaboration of carved decoration unique in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> The building of the choir and the amount and complication of the carving involved must have provided work for many masons for a prolonged period. These men must have been excited and had their skills challenged by working on such an outstanding project; and of course there was the hope of much similar work to come if the rest of the great church was built. In the circumstances it would have been understandable for the masons to have hailed their Sinclair employers as patrons and protectors of the craft – though it is more plausible to conceive of this as having been a local arrangement than as a national one. However, there is no direct evidence for the Sinclairs having a regional position comparable to that of the Coplands of Udoch in the north east, and it may be that the tradition of the Sinclair patrons of the craft was connected with Rosslyn church in a different way. Once the choir had been built, succeeding generations of masons must have been awed by it and struck by its uniqueness. In trying to account for this, the idea that the Sinclairs had some special relationship with the craft could have arisen, to emerge around 1600 – and be believed by the Sinclairs themselves – when interest in the craft was stirred up by the activities of William Schaw.

The Sinclairs of Roslin were a junior branch of the family that had built Rosslyn church. It has been argued that any claim to patronage of the masons derived from the church would have descended with the senior line, and that this proves that the Sinclair of Roslin claim is false. This is not convincing; a right vested in the senior line could have been delegated to a junior one, and

<sup>3</sup> RCAHMS, *Midlothian and West Lothian*, 98–106.

transferring it to the line which held Rosslyn church would have been appropriate.

Sir William Sinclair of Roslin had died in 1584,<sup>4</sup> having resigned his baronies of Roslin and Pentland to his eldest son Edward in 1574.<sup>5</sup> The barony of Pentland was transferred to Edward's younger brother William in 1583, and by 1591 William held Roslin as well, presumably through the death of his elder brother.<sup>6</sup>

William Sinclair was a Catholic, and this and pride in the work of his predecessors made him fight to preserve Rosslyn church. In 1589 he had one of his children baptised in the church, to the fury of the protestant established church as Rosslyn was not a parish church; the minister who had officiated was made to beg forgiveness in public for his action.<sup>7</sup> The following year Sinclair was being investigated by the presbytery of Dalkeith for keeping images in his church, and it was alleged he had entertained a man who had been excommunicated. In 1591 the presbytery was still incensed at Sinclair 'keiping images and uther monumentis of idolatrie' in Rosslyn church, but had to delay action against him as he had been arrested.<sup>8</sup> It was evidently involvement with the earl of Bothwell's extraordinary antics in making raids on the royal court and threatening the king's person that had led to Sinclair's arrest,<sup>9</sup> but he was soon free and continuing his struggle with the church. He agreed to make his tenants attend their parish church, but modestly declined the suggestion that he should himself become an elder, declaring his insufficiency for such a position. That shortly thereafter he was forced to confess to fornication seemed to prove his point; but though threatened with excommunication at first he stubbornly resisted demands that he remove the 'images' from Rosslyn church. But soon he had to submit; on 31 August 1592 it was reported that the altars in the church had been demolished 'till one stane or tua hight', though some sort of tacit compromise may have been reached since, though the altars were demolished, many carved figures were allowed to survive. William Sinclair's problems with the Church of Scotland were far from over, however. Perhaps infuriated by the desecration of his chapel, he proved evasive or defiant on other matters. When accused of not attending his parish church he confused the issue by claiming that he was not resident in Lasswade (which included his castle and church of Rosslyn) but in another parish which had no minister! He declared that he did not know whether one of his bairns (evidently illegitimate) had been baptised or not, and when ordered to do public penance for fornication he refused, adding

<sup>4</sup> SRO, CC.8/8/14, ff. 299r-304v.

<sup>5</sup> RMS, 1549-80, nos. 2249, 2257, 2258.

<sup>6</sup> RMS, 1580-93, nos. 615, 1819.

<sup>7</sup> W. McMillan, *The worship of the reformed church of Scotland, 1550-1638* (London, [1931]), 254-5.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kirk (ed.), *The records of the synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, 1589-96, 1640-9* (Stair Society, Edinburgh, 1977), 21-2, 31.

<sup>9</sup> RPCS, 1585-92, 662, 668n, 671.

contemptuously that he cared not to sit (on the stool of repentance) for every such offence, but would consider sitting if given a quart of wine, presumably to help him pass the time while doing penance. The presbytery, horrified at his lewd arguments, summoned him to appear before the synod; the unrepentant sinner retorted that he was as happy to face a hundred ministers as one, and that the ministers of the church could not have much to do if they bothered him about such trifles! However, in the end the combined efforts of presbytery and synod seem to have forced the laird of Roslin to make some sort of submission.<sup>10</sup> But his problems with the civil authorities continued, with a trickle of summonses to answer charges, and to sign bonds to keep the peace and not harm various individuals with whom he was evidently involved in feuds.<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair's attempts to protect Rosslyn church may have won him respect even from protestant masons reluctant to see the great works of their predecessors destroyed, and his Catholicism obviously provides a link between him and William Schaw. Further, in the 1590s William Sinclair became a significant employer of masons, by building a massive dwelling block at Rosslyn Castle.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that such professional contacts between masons (probably from Edinburgh, just 8 miles from Rosslyn) and the supposed traditional patron of their craft was in some way connected with the revival of the Sinclair claim to the position. But it is hardly surprising that the king failed to appoint as patron of the mason craft the fornicating, brawling Catholic laird of Roslin. Eventually, late in the second decade of the seventeenth century, William Sinclair of Roslin, 'a lewd man' who 'kept a miller's daughter', retired (with his mistress) to Ireland where presumably he hoped life would be easier for a Catholic.<sup>13</sup> The date of his death is unknown, but he was evidently still alive at the time of the Second Charter, 1627–8. The greatest mystery of the First St Clair Charter is how on earth William Schaw and the masons thought the craft could possibly benefit from reviving the claims over it of such a man.

The First St Clair Charter thus remained a dead letter so far as royal sanction was concerned. According to the Second Charter William Sinclair was active as patron of the craft, but there is no evidence of this activity. His son and heir, however, another William, was to take an interest in his position and attempt to maintain his rights as patron. The younger William Sinclair

<sup>10</sup> Kirk, *Records of the synod*, 37, 43, 44, 46, 48, 52–3; SRO, CH.2/424/1, Minutes of the presbytery of Dalkeith, 1582–1630, 27 January, 18 May, 13 July, 3, 10, 17, 31 August, 7, 14, 21 September, 2, 23 November 1592.

<sup>11</sup> *RPCS*, 1592–9, 151, 616, 638, 645, 702; *ibid.*, 1599–1604, 637; *ibid.*, 1610–13, 686; *ibid.*, 1613–16, 426.

<sup>12</sup> RCAHMS, *Midlothian and West Lothian*, 107, 109–12. The lintel of a fireplace bears the date 1597 and the initials SWS. This is puzzling, as they must stand for Sir William Sinclair, but the laird at that time was not a knight.

<sup>13</sup> R. A. Hay, *Genealogie of the Saintclaires of Rosslyn, including the chartulary of Rosslyn*, ed. J. Maidment (Edinburgh, 1835), 154.

was a very different man from his father, and emerged as a solid citizen even while his father was still around to embarrass him. He married a daughter of John Spottiswood, archbishop of Glasgow and soon to be archbishop of St Andrews, in 1609, and took possession of the family barony of Pentland. By 1617 he was a knight, and it was probably then that his father went to Ireland, for the lands of Roslin were transferred to him in that year. He was appointed a justice of the peace in 1615 and repeatedly in later years, and took office as sheriff of the shire of Edinburgh in 1622.<sup>14</sup> To this respectable laird of Roslin the masons turned in the late 1620s in another attempt to acquire a patron and protector – unless it was the laird himself who took the initiative. Again the fact that masons were being employed at Rosslyn may have helped to revive links between craft and putative patron, for in the early 1620s Sir William completed the dwelling block begun by his father at Rosslyn Castle.<sup>15</sup>

### The Second St Clair Charter

The Second St Clair Charter is about three times the length of its predecessor, the extra length being achieved mainly by repetition.<sup>16</sup> In the charter the deacons, masters and freemen of the masons and hammermen of Scotland related that the lairds of Roslin had in the past been their patrons and protectors, and had had rights to this effect granted by the king's predecessors. But these grants had been lost when Rosslyn Castle was burnt, and through neglect the rights of the Sinclairs had fallen out of use. A previous attempt had been made to obtain royal ratification of these rights, with the consent of William Schaw, and from that time until he had gone to Ireland William Sinclair had exercised the office of patron. Since he had left, however, many corruptions and imperfections had arisen in the craft. Therefore, considering the skill and judgement in their craft of his son, Sir William Sinclair of Roslin, the parties to this new document now ratified, in favour of him and his heirs, the First St Clair Charter. He and his wardens and deputies were to have full jurisdiction over the craft, with power to summon meetings of the craft, to legislate for it and to punish offenders.

Like the First Charter, the Second is undated,<sup>17</sup> but an examination of the offices held by some of the signatories strongly suggests 1627–8 as the date, and an unfinished minute in the records of Edinburgh Lodge is dated 'At rosling' 1 May 1628 and reads 'The quhilk day Sir Williame Sinkler ...' Perhaps this records (or rather fails to record, through being incomplete) the

<sup>14</sup> *RMS*, 1609–20, nos. 349, 1741; *RPCS*, 1613–16, 406; *ibid.*, 1619–22, 769; *ibid.*, 1622–5, 43, 431; *ibid.*, 1625–7, 659; *ibid.*, 1633–5, 378, 424.

<sup>15</sup> *RCAHMS, Midlothian and West Lothian*, 110, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 66–8; Inventory, 2.2, 2.5.

<sup>17</sup> A copy of the charter made at the end of the seventeenth century has the date Edinburgh 1630 added, but this appears neither on the original nor on a much earlier copy. See Inventory, 2.3, 2.5.

occasion at which the Second Charter was presented to Sir William, or a meeting at which it was decided to draft it.<sup>18</sup> Certainly it indicates active links between the craft and Sir William in that year, and thus lends weight to a 1628 date for the charter. As with the First Charter, the document itself contains evidence that a meeting of some sort took place, for a single notary signed for members of several lodges. Edinburgh, Dunfermline and St Andrews were parties to the Second Charter, but the other lodges which had approved the First Charter (Aitchison's Haven and Haddington) were not now represented. In their place, however, were representatives from lodges covering a much wider geographical area than the parties to the First Charter – Stirling, Dundee and Glasgow – as well as, anomalously, representatives of the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights (or of Squaremen) of Ayr.

The claim of the Second St Clair Charter that there had been previous royal grants to the Sinclairs as patrons of the masons is not plausible. As was pointed out long ago, if such royal grants had really existed, why had this information, of central importance to the attempt to obtain ratification from the king, not been included in the First Charter? Also though Rosslyn Castle had been burnt on more than one occasion, the fact that the Second Charter was uncertain as to the date (for which a blank is left) on which the supposed royal grants had been destroyed does not inspire confidence. Moreover, if the 'writs' (charters and other papers) of the Sinclairs of Roslin had been destroyed by fire, how is it that so many of their charters pre-dating the known fires at the castle have survived, only the writs concerning patronage of the masons being destroyed?<sup>19</sup> Having failed to obtain royal approval through the First Charter, it seems that the masons sought to strengthen their case in the second by inventing previous royal grants – which they may well have genuinely convinced themselves had once existed.

The main difference between the two St Clair Charters is, at first sight, a bewildering one. The Second Charter was issued not just in the name of the masons, but of the hammermen as well. As the name indicates, the hammermen comprised those trades in which the hammer was one of the most important tools, above all the smiths and other metal-working trades. In most burghs incorporations of hammermen did not include the building trades, these being separately organised in incorporations of wrights and/or masons. But masons and wrights did of course use the hammer and occasionally they joined the smiths in a single institution, as in the Incorporation of Hammermen of Selkirk. Nonetheless, hammermen and masons were usually seen as entirely separate, and all the activity in Scotland since 1590 involving the reorganisation of the mason craft can be seen as resulting from the interplay of a variety of contemporary influences (to be examined in the next chapter) with the traditions, and perhaps remnants of organisation, of the

<sup>18</sup> Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 69–70; Carr, *Edinburgh*, 89–90.

<sup>19</sup> Maidment's introduction to Hay, *Genealogie*, quoted in Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 70–1.

mason craft inherited from the Middle Ages. How can the hammermen be fitted into this picture? The answer probably lies in the fact that there was ambiguity as to the definition of 'mason', arising from the claims the masons made for their craft. Normally the word was applied simply to stonemasons. But masons argued that their craft was coterminous with geometry. If this was accepted, then other crafts which employed the skills of geometry were 'masonic'. Thus all the building trades and several others, including that of the hammermen, could be comprehended under the term mason. This concept of the unifying influence of geometry was well established in Scotland: in 1592 James VI had granted the right to elect a deacon and form a craft incorporation to the masons, wrights and slaters, and all other craftsmen 'that wirkis be square reule; lyne; or compass under the airt of geometrie' living in Dundee.<sup>20</sup> Thus the hammermen may be seen to be included in the Second St Clair Charter as 'honorary masons' through their use of geometry, an attempt at empire-building by the Sinclair patrons of the craft. However, the hammermen did not respond to the offer of Sinclair patronage: all those who signed the Second St Clair Charter were (in so far as they can be identified) masons and members of lodges, with two exceptions.

The non-mason signatories were a glazier and a wright. As such they could be regarded as hammermen according to some definitions of the term but, as they were not members of an incorporation of that name, the presence of their signatures is probably not connected with the mention of hammermen. A much more plausible explanation of these two signatures may be suggested. The lodges which had signed the First St Clair Charter had been confined to the Lothians and Fife. The signatures on the Second Charter cover a wider area, including men from the lodges of Stirling and Dundee to the north and Glasgow in the west. But a very noticeable absentee is Kilwinning. It was suggested earlier that Kilwinning was very sensitive about its claims to primacy among lodges, and that the Second Schaw Statutes had been unwelcome to it as they placed the lodge second among the Scottish lodges. Were the masons of the Kilwinning Lodge still proving uncooperative, as they felt their status was not being properly recognised? Did those who were organising the signing of the Second St Clair Charter therefore seek to bypass the lodge by trying to get signatures from the masons in the Incorporation of Squaremen (a name which of course in itself reflects the idea of the building trades united by geometry) of Ayr, but fail as these masons remained loyal to Kilwinning Lodge, to which they belonged? On this interpretation those supporting the charter had therefore had to make do with signatures of other members of the incorporation, one a former deacon, the other the present deacon – who could therefore describe himself as deacon of the masons and wrights. Of course, as a glazier and a wright, the two men

<sup>20</sup> A. M. Smith, *The three united trades of Dundee. Masons, wrights and slaters* (Abertay Historical Society, Dundee, 1987), 79.

were squaremen, practitioners of the science of geometry. Though this is conjectural, it seems the only plausible explanation of the Ayr signatures. But as other lodges are known which did not sign the Second Charter (Aitchison's Haven and Haddington), for unknown reasons, it may be unwise to read too much into the absence of Kilwinning signatures.

The masons and hammermen to whom the Second St Clair Charter was addressed were presumably intended to include all building and metal working trades. As will be seen in the next section, Sir William Sinclair was to be active in upholding his claims as a craft patron, and was soon to become involved in a dispute with the masters of works about their respective jurisdictions over the crafts. It is notable that the master of works was not a party to the Second Charter (as Schaw had been to the first). The implication is that whereas William Schaw as master of works had supported the pretensions of William Sinclair in the First Charter, his successor was hostile to the renewed claims of Sir William Sinclair when the Second Charter was drawn up. The king's masters of works asserted their power over all those in the building trades working on royal buildings: just a few weeks after the masons of Edinburgh Lodge had met Sinclair at Roslin in May 1628, James Murray, the master of works, got a royal confirmation of this right<sup>21</sup> in what looks like an effort to strengthen his own position in reaction to the pretensions of the Sinclairs, which he saw as threatening his rights. With the master of works claiming jurisdiction over a number of trades, it seems that his rival, Sir William Sinclair, and the latter's supporters attempted to do the same by including the hammermen in the charter.

One question remains, however. In so far as the Sinclair patrons were intending to act as supervisors of the working activities of craftsmen, adding hammermen to masons might make sense. But what about the esoteric activities which the mason craft had developed? Was there any intention of admitting hammermen to lodges (along with wrights and other building trades presumably), and thus to the esoteric and ritual side of the mason craft? This seems unlikely. One explanation could be that the Sinclairs were only concerned with the outward, operative side of the mason craft, so the question of admission of other crafts to the stonemasons' secrets did not arise. But evidence from the end of the century reveals that the Sinclairs were themselves admitted to the esoteric side of masonry: in 1697 it was reported that the Sinclairs of Roslin were obliged to receive the Mason Word.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the intention of the Second Charter was that Sir William Sinclair should be protector of all the building trades, but should have a special relationship with the masons through being himself initiated to the secrets of

<sup>21</sup> [C. Rogers (ed.)], *The earl of Stirling's register of royal letters* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1885, henceforth referred to as *Stirling's register*), i, 273.

<sup>22</sup> BL, Loan Mss 29/240, f. 160r. The passage is printed (with modernised punctuation and capitalisation) in HMC0 29: 13th Report, Appendix ii, *Portland Mss* (2 vols., 1893–4), ii, 56.

the Mason Word. It may be that under the hoped-for royal grant the masons planned that they and Sinclair together should, in effect, rule the other crafts by virtue of their unique status and secrets, the Second Charter being an exercise in masonic as well as Sinclair imperialist expansion. The hammermen, however, failed to respond to the invitation to join the masons under Sinclair patronage, perhaps because they interpreted it in this way – as an attempt to subject them to the vainglorious masons.

### **The struggle for jurisdiction**

On the death of William Schaw in 1602, David Cunningham of Robertland had succeeded him as master of works. Robertland, an Ayrshire laird, had been a member of the queen's household,<sup>23</sup> and through that position if nothing else he must have known his predecessor. But there is no sign that he tried to continue Schaw's work of reforming the mason trade. Cunningham was dead by 1607, when James Murray became master of works. A wright by trade, Murray had become king's master wright in 1601 and 'oversear and attendar' of the king's works (a sort of deputy to the master of works) in succession to his father in 1605. The new master soon acquired land, built himself a fine mansion house (which still stands) at Baberton near Edinburgh, and eventually (1633) gained a knighthood, thus becoming Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton. His appointment was ratified in 1625 when Charles I came to the throne, and in 1629 he and Anthony Alexander were appointed joint general surveyors and masters of works, though Murray was granted precedence. Anthony Alexander was the second son of Sir William Alexander, who was to be created earl of Stirling in 1633. Having been a close friend of James VI, Sir William now served James' son, Charles I, as king's secretary. Anthony Alexander was said to have 'acquired skill in architectorie', travelling abroad in the process, and the intention was that he should ultimately succeed his older partner in office. This he did when Murray died in November 1634.<sup>24</sup>

It was James Murray of Kilbaberton who first clashed with Sir William Sinclair of Roslin. It had long been accepted that the masters of works had the right to control admission of craftsmen to royal works; Drummond of

<sup>23</sup> *Papers relative to the marriage of King James VI of Scotland with the Princess Anna of Denmark* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1828), appendix, 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, i, xxviii–xxix; ii, lviii–lix; Colvin, *Architects*, 567; R. S. Mylne, 'The masters of work to the crown of Scotland, with the writs of appointment', *PSAS*, xxx (1895–6), 54–9; R. S. Mylne, 'Notices of the king's master wrights of Scotland, with writs of their appointment', *PSAS*, xxxiv (1899–1900), 295; *RMS*, 1609–20, no. 689; *ibid.*, 1620–33, no. 1402; *Stirling's register*, i, 319; SRO, PS.1/98, Register of the Privy Seal, ff. 4v–6r. According to his testament (SRO, CC.8/8/57, ff. 269v–272r) Murray died in December, but this is an error; a contemporary diary records his death the previous month: Sir Thomas Hope of Craighall, *A diary of the public correspondence* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1843), 16.



Carnock, William Schaw's predecessor in the office, had been described in 1581 as 'agrear with all the warkmen',<sup>25</sup> and James Murray had obtained a separate grant from the king of this right in 1614, as it had not been mentioned in his 1607 grant as master of works. The fact that Murray had this gift of rights over craftsmen confirmed by Charles I in May 1628<sup>26</sup> looks (as has already been suggested) very much like a reaction to the Second St Clair Charter. Moreover, it is probable that the masters of works regarded these grants as in effect giving them general rights over the building crafts, not only over craftsmen engaged on royal works: the fact that William Schaw was active in the Incorporation of Mary's Chapel certainly suggests as much.

Nonetheless, Sir William Sinclair at first won royal support for his pretensions. Charles I wrote from London to the Scottish privy council on 4 March 1631 about the matter. The wording of his letter makes it clear that the text of the Second Charter had been sent to London, though perhaps with minor alterations; whereas the surviving text of the charter states that it was drafted in the name of the deacons, masters and freemen of the masons and hammermen, the king's letter refers to the masters of works, deacons and freemen of these trades. If this is not just a mistake made in London, it may be that a reference to masters of works had been slipped into the text to give the impression that the joint king's masters of works supported the charter, while avoiding actual perjury (a master of works could be the man in charge of any building operation). The royal letter summarised the charter and then announced that Charles, 'out of our princelie care to obviat any disordour in tymes comeing', and considering that those who were requesting royal approval were those most concerned in the matter, stated that he had 'signed the said grant at ther request' and ordered the council to 'exped the same' – that is, see the charter formally sealed and issued. But there was a qualification: this was only to be done if it would not be prejudicial to 'the ordour or government ther established alreadie'.<sup>27</sup> The supporters of the charter had persuaded the king, but he or his advisers wisely decided that a check was necessary to make sure that there were no objections to ratification that were not known about in London.

Opposition to Sinclair appeared immediately. On 22 March the privy council ordered him to produce the 'patents' on which he based his claim to be judge and overseer of 'the trade of maissonis hammermen', and a week later it was agreed that the king's masters of works should be allowed to see the text of the ratification of his rights sought by Sinclair.<sup>28</sup> After this there is no direct reference to the Sinclair claim for nearly four years, and it is to be presumed that after reading the proposed ratification of the Second St Clair Charter James Murray and Anthony Alexander had objected strongly to it, thus preventing it passing the seals. The masters of works were, however,

<sup>25</sup> Mylne, *Master masons*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Stirling's register*, i, 273.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 501–2.

<sup>28</sup> *RPCS*, 1630–2, 177, 187.

worried enough about their position to use this breathing space to make moves designed to strengthen their hands if the Sinclairs renewed their efforts to get royal support. The first move Murray and Alexander made was to get a ratification of their powers. This, signed by the king in January 1634, was by far the longest and most comprehensive of any of the grants to Scottish masters of works, and it extended their powers significantly. They and their successors were to have power over all craftsmen and artificers whatsoever 'belonging to building within the kingdome quha salbe fund to wrong or deceave' any of the king's subjects in 'anie poynt of thair calling or tred concerning building or quha doethe not fulfill and keip thair covenant or contract be word or writ in thair said tred or quho doethe neglect or rin away' from the king's or anyone else's works. The masters of works were to try any complaints made to them by owners of works about the faults of craftsmen, and punish the guilty as they thought expedient. What the 'building crafts' were was defined when the powers of the masters to test the skills of craftsmen before admitting them to royal works were detailed. As well as masons, wrights, slaters, glaziers, plumbers and painters, the list includes less obvious groups such as shipwrights, pike and spear makers and coopers – who presumably qualified as they all worked in wood and were thus related to the wrights – and smiths or hammermen.<sup>29</sup> Thus Sir James Murray and Anthony Alexander replied to Sir William Sinclair's attempt to exercise jurisdiction over masons and hammermen by themselves gaining jurisdiction over all trades even remotely connected with building.

The next move, in July 1634, involved only one of the two masters of works. Anthony Alexander, his elder brother Lord Alexander, and another courtier became members of the Lodge of Mary's Chapel in Edinburgh. This looks like an attempt by Anthony Alexander to show an interest in things masonic and flatter the masons by joining in the affairs of their lodge, in order to improve his standing with them and thus bring himself an advantage in the dispute with Sinclair.

Sir James Murray died on Saturday 29 November 1634, and just two days later a draft grant confirming that Anthony Alexander was sole master of works was dispatched to London for signature by the king, carried by one of Alexander's own servants. He himself left for London two weeks later.<sup>30</sup> The haste suggests that Alexander feared that Sinclair might seek to take advantage of the situation before the new grant was ratified, by renewing his own claims to jurisdiction over the masons and hammermen. If this was the case Sinclair was too slow off the mark, for the king signed the new grant to Alexander on 15 December.<sup>31</sup> But Sinclair did manage to intervene when the

<sup>29</sup> The ratification of January 1634 is noted in *Mr of works accs.*, ii, lix; *Stirling's register*, ii, 711; and Lyon, *Edinburgh*, slip glued in opposite p. 525. But only the full text of the original reveals the extension of the powers of the masters of works, SRO, PS.1/105, ff. 65v–69v.

<sup>30</sup> Hope, *Diary*, 16, 17.

<sup>31</sup> *RMS, 1634–51*, no. 250.

grant was returned to Scotland: he persuaded the commissioners for the exchequer to halt the process of passing Alexander's grant through the seals, thus gaining revenge for the stopping of his own grant in 1631. The king, however, was indignant at this interference, writing (27 February 1635) of Alexander's grant having been stopped by Sinclair 'pretending ane heritable charge of the Maissones of our said kingdome, though we have nevir gevin warrant for strengthning of aney heritable right'. Like his father, Charles sought the ultimate abolition of all hereditary offices, and this now counted strongly against the pretensions of the Sinclairs of Roslin: the king had evidently forgotten that only four years before he had been ready to sanction the hereditary Sinclair claim. But Charles did agree to an investigation into the Sinclairs' case. The commissioners of the exchequer and the king's advocate were to get Sinclair to show them what rights he had which would justify the stopping of the master of works' grant. Charles was determined that his master of works should have the full rights of his predecessors unless there was some just reason for determining otherwise.

And we will lykways for the better clearing of the said bussines that yow examyne the maissones of that our kingdome, and that not by papers whervnto ather of the pairties may have procured ther hands in a privat way, bot that yow give order to the magistrats of everie toun and to the sherreffs of everie shyre or to any other officers whom yow shall think fitt, that so they, haveing called before them and heard the saids maissones, may report vnto yow what they shall find in the same.<sup>32</sup>

What riches there would be for historians if this ambitious systematic national survey of the organisation and rights of masons, both in burghs and the countryside, had taken place! Alas, there is no sign that any attempt was made to carry out the king's orders.

The king's letter suggests that he had received information from both sides involved in the dispute, with Sir Anthony Alexander (he had been knighted in 1635) no doubt alleging that Sinclair had somehow acted disreputably in getting masons to sign the Second St Clair Charter – and perhaps Sinclair retorting that Alexander was buttering up the Edinburgh masons by joining their lodge.<sup>33</sup> In May 1636 the king again wrote to both the chancellor and the exchequer, urging that a decision be made: the chancellor was to seal Alexander's grant unless investigation had proved that this would infringe anyone's just rights.<sup>34</sup>

Why was this question of jurisdiction over some craftsmen, surely a relatively minor matter seen from the perspective of the king in London,

<sup>32</sup> *Stirling's register*, ii, 837–8; Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 92–3.

<sup>33</sup> There is a puzzling reference in April 1635 to there being sent to London 'the signatour of Masons and Wrychtis renuncit be Sir Anthonie Alexander' (Hope, *Diary*, 23), but its bearing on the dispute is obscure.

<sup>34</sup> SRO, E.4/5, Exchequer acts book, 1634–9, f. 147r; Lyon, *Edinburgh*, opp. p. 525; BL, Add. Ms 23112, Register of the secretary of state for Scotland, ff. 33v, 34r.

receiving such sustained high-level attention? The answer surely lies in the fact that both parties had powerful patrons at court. The chancellorship was held by the archbishop of St Andrews, who thus combined the highest civil and ecclesiastical offices in Scotland; and he, Archbishop Spottiswood, was Sir William Sinclair's father-in-law. But for this, Sinclair's vague claims to traditional rights would probably have been rejected out of hand when they were found to conflict with the powers of a royal official. To balance against Sinclair's father-in-law, Sir Anthony Alexander could invoke his own father, the earl of Stirling, the king's secretary. The chancellor controlled the seals through which Alexander's grant had to pass, but the secretary controlled the king's correspondence which gave orders as to what should pass the seals!

A burst of activity in July 1636 led to at least a provisional decision being reached. On 18 July the exchequer ordered both parties to produce the evidence supporting their cases in eight days' time. Meanwhile they were to attempt 'to settle the business friendly' through the mediation of the bishop of Brechin and the clerk register. But on 25 July the case was delayed again, the exchequer instructing the bishop, the clerk register and the king's advocate to assess the evidence.<sup>35</sup> A few days later a further letter from the king confused matters by suggesting that he was now inclined to show Sinclair some favour: he was to be appointed 'judge and overseer of the hammermen'.<sup>36</sup> But when on 1 August the exchequer at last reached a decision it ruled against Sinclair. Alexander had submitted a supplication complaining that Sinclair, pretending to have some interest in privileges concerning the masons, had 'by some sinister information' stopped Alexander's grant as master of works passing the seals. As Sinclair was trying to encroach on his rights, Alexander requested that his grant now be passed. Sir William Sinclair had then presented his case: he himself had a grant and patent granted by the king giving him privileges (presumably that of 1631 was meant), though it had not passed the seals. The commissioners of exchequer resolved that Alexander's grant should now pass the seals – but then indicated that this should not necessarily be seen as a final settlement, as it should be without prejudice to Sinclair's lawful rights!<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, the decision was clearly a victory for Alexander, and he was quick to follow it up. By October 1636 he was using his jurisdiction over the building trades as master of works to attempt a major reorganisation of the trade through the Falkland Statutes. But the Sinclair faction did not give up, and it managed to get the king to open up the whole issue again. On 20 September 1637 Charles wrote explaining how he had previously decided, on receiving a petition from

<sup>35</sup> SRO, E.5/2, ff. 40v, 41v; Lyon, *Edinburgh*, opp. p. 525.

<sup>36</sup> *RPCS*, 1635–7, 306.

<sup>37</sup> SRO, E.4/5, f. 154r–v; *RMS*, 1634–51, no. 250. The grant bears its original date of 15 December 1634 but its position in the register shows that it was not inserted there until mid 1636.

the masters deacons and freemen of the maisons and hammermen and vppoun there information that the overseeing and judging of there traide did from many adges belong to the Lairds of Rosline to signe a grant to that purpose to the now laird Sir William Sinkler. But it being hitherto stoped by the opposall of our Mr of Worke as derogatory to his office. And we thereuppon [were] againe petitioned by the said Sir William affirmeing the contrary; Have therefor thought fitt to remitt the consideration and tryall thereof vnto you; willing and requyreing yow forthwith to certifie us of your oppinioun thereanent, That accordinglie we may give forth order therein.<sup>38</sup>

The date of the letter is significant: three days before Sir Anthony Alexander had died in London,<sup>39</sup> and obviously Sinclair's supporters had hastened to take advantage of the fact that for the moment there was no master of works to oppose their claims.

The Alexander cause was not lost, however, for without waiting for the results of the new investigation to be made in Edinburgh the king appointed Henry Alexander, Sir Anthony's younger brother, master of works and general surveyor with the same powers as his predecessors.<sup>40</sup> A few months later Henry Alexander was admitted to the Lodge of Edinburgh. But at this point references to the long dispute between the masters of works and the would-be patrons of the masons cease abruptly. The reason was not that both parties were satisfied, nor that one had scored a decisive victory over the other, but that all those concerned in the dispute had much more important things to worry about. In the later months of 1637 protests against the king's religious policies in Scotland snowballed fast, culminating in the national covenant early in 1638. 'The troubles' had begun, with Scotland – and indeed Britain as a whole – moving towards civil war.

Nothing whatever is heard of the Sinclairs as patrons of the masons for 60 years. Sir William died in 1650 without obtaining the official sanction for the Second St Clair Charter that he had sought. But the family claim was maintained, it seems, for in the 1690s an English traveller who visited Roslin recorded that 'The Laird[s] of Roslin have been great Architects and patrons of Building for these many Generations[,] they are Obliged to receive the Masons word.'<sup>41</sup> But then silence descends again until the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736, when it was presented with a formal resignation by the then William St Clair (as the family now spelt its name) of his and his heirs' claims over the craft. In return for this gesture he was elected the first grand master of Scotland.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> BL, Add. Ms 23112, f. 76r.

<sup>39</sup> C. Rogers, *Memorials of the earls of Stirling and the house of Alexander* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1887), i, 172.

<sup>40</sup> The king's order is undated, but is registered between orders dated 9 October and 4 November 1637, BL, Add. Ms 23112, f. 75r.

<sup>41</sup> See note 22 above. <sup>42</sup> Lyon, *Edinburgh*, 187–8.

From at least 1600 to 1736 there was a continuous tradition that the Sinclairs were hereditary patrons of the mason craft, and that tradition in all probability existed in some form before 1600. Yet the only contribution the Sinclairs are known to have made either to the welfare of the operative craft or to the development of freemasonry is the negative one of resigning their position so they could be succeeded by grand masters. This is not, by any standard, an impressive record. Nonetheless, the story of the Sinclair patrons, fragmentary though it is, throws flashes of light on the special position among the crafts claimed by the masons – even if the cavalier attitude of many of the documents to distinguishing one trade from another spreads confusion. The 1690s reference reveals that the Sinclairs of Roslin were initiated as masons: they had the Mason Word, and it seems likely that this had been the case as far back as 1600 though they are not known to have been members of lodges.

### **The Falkland Statutes**

William Schaw had sought in the last years of the sixteenth century to extend the authority of the king's master of works, in the new guise of general warden, over all masons. This new role presumably developed out of the position of influence over the craft already held by the masters as the representatives of the largest employers of masons. Schaw's successors had continued the work of extending the powers of the masters over the craftsmen they employed: in 1614 James Murray got the king to confirm that as master of works he had power to 'hire and fire' all craftsmen employed on royal building projects, and 20 years later he and Anthony Alexander had got confirmation that their power extended over all those employed in the building crafts in Scotland.

On 26 October 1636 at a meeting held at Falkland Sir Anthony Alexander exercised these powers for the first time – though he claimed to be acting as general warden as well as master of works, and the former title had no official standing.<sup>43</sup> He thus revived the title used by William Schaw but not heard of since his death. But there was a difference. Schaw had only claimed to be general warden of the masons, and though there may have been an implicit claim to authority over other crafts which could be regarded as subordinate to the masons this was not made explicit. Now in the Falkland Statutes Alexander asserted his power over the full range of crafts listed in his January 1634 grant from the king (though the two surviving versions of the statutes

<sup>43</sup> The location may have been determined by the fact that Alexander was supervising work being carried out at Falkland Palace, though the accounts that might have confirmed this are lost; but at least surveying and ditching the park was undertaken in 1635–6: *Mr of works accs.*, ii, cii.

vary somewhat as to the crafts listed, only one mentioning the hammermen). For good measure, power over any other 'Airtieficieris of Buildingies' was included.<sup>44</sup>

The Falkland Statutes related that Alexander, after conference with the artificers and craftsmen present, had resolved on a series of acts and statutes to reform abuses and reorganise the crafts. Companies or corporations of the building crafts were to be established in every convenient place in Scotland 'quhair thair is na establischeit companies' with liberties or seals of cause. The existing companies were clearly the incorporations, and the new ones were to be guilds like them in many respects. The companies were to examine prospective entrants to the crafts, who were to submit essays. If their qualifications were proved and they were 'of guid lyff' they were to be admitted masters of the craft. Such masters were to be free to work in all parts of the kingdom where there were no existing privileged companies. Admission of masters was to require the approval of a number of members of that craft; thus no mason was to be admitted without the consent of six master masons. If a company did not have sufficient members from a craft, then men were to be brought in from neighbouring companies to legitimise admissions. Each master on admission was to pay £30, of which half would go to the company's box and half to the general warden. Each company was to elect each year a warden, oversman or deacon, who was to have power to suppress all 'vilanes' (unqualified or unadmitted persons who tried to practise a trade), to punish those producing substandard work, and act against 'all sorts of deceitfull meittingis of Measouns belonging to any of the saids Airtis' (a puzzling phrase). The deacon or warden was also to have general responsibility for keeping order and enforcing obedience; and half the fines he collected from offenders were to go to the box, half to the general warden, a stipulation also applied to all the other fines and fees mentioned in the statutes.

A number of clauses were devoted to regulating training and employment in the crafts and the running of the companies themselves, with substantial penalties for infringements. There was to be 'ane generall correspondencie' among the companies, which were to cooperate in tracing and punishing offenders. All companies were to meet at least once a quarter. Masters working outside the territory of their own company were to book themselves with the local company and accept its jurisdiction. Companies already established in burghs – the incorporations – were to have jurisdiction over areas adjacent to their burghs, but were not to be subject to the statutes or to the general warden. Thus Sir Anthony Alexander recognised that he had no

<sup>44</sup> The Aitchison's Haven text, which is usually cited, does not mention the hammermen, but the Stirling text does, and there are other minor differences in the trades listed: W. A. Laurie, *History of freemasonry*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1859), 445–52; D. B. Morris, 'The Incorporation of Mechanics of Stirling', *Transactions of the Stirling Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1930–1), 37–44; Inventory, 3.1–3.

hope of exercising authority over the incorporations, but was willing to offer them extended jurisdictions and accept them as the equivalents of his companies, the main differences between old incorporations and new companies being that the latter were under his control and would not be exclusive, in the sense of seeking to bar craftsmen who were not members of a particular company from working in its territory.

William Schaw had sought to organise the mason craft on the basis of a lodge system; in many burghs the lodges would be separate from but parallel to the incorporations. Sir Anthony Alexander sought to reorganise in a system of companies all building craftsmen who were not members of incorporations. What were Alexander's motives in proposing this system, and how does his scheme fit in with the general development of the mason craft and the emergence of freemasonry? In part the origin of the Falkland Statutes doubtless lies in the dispute between Alexander and Sir William Sinclair; in the course of the dispute the former may have been forced into widening his own claims to authority and his ambitions for the crafts in order to counter his rival effectively. But it is unlikely that this was Alexander's main motive. Was he, then, inspired by the sort of mix of Renaissance and traditional ideas which had inspired William Schaw to exalt the status of the mason craft, creating or greatly extending the esoteric and ritual aspects of the craft? Was Alexander, a member of the Lodge of Edinburgh, trying to widen Schaw's lodge organisation to include other building crafts, as they were all 'architectural' crafts subordinate to the masons? There is possibly an element of such ambitions present. The extension from the mason craft to all building crafts would be theoretically justified by Renaissance ideas about architecture and geometry. As will be seen in chapter 5 the Vitruvian concept of the architect included the belief that architecture was supreme among the crafts, and that it was through its skills that other crafts should be judged, and in the eyes of the masons their craft was identical with architecture. Both Sir Anthony Alexander and Sir William Sinclair in their rivalry may have seen themselves as asserting the Vitruvian ideal of the architect in justifying their claims to power over all building crafts. On the other hand, there is no explicit statement in the Falkland Statutes of the superiority of the masons over the other crafts, though they are listed first among the crafts, and there is no reference to the esoteric concerns which lay at the heart of the lodges. As with the St Clair Charters, the Falkland Statutes contain no hint of secrets or rituals.

Thus, though Alexander was an initiated member of Edinburgh Lodge and may have harboured grandiose dreams of himself as the Vitruvian architect, his motives in issuing the Falkland Statutes were probably largely economic – in two different senses. Firstly, the statutes can be seen as fitting into a pattern of craft reorganisation fashionable both in Britain and on the continent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There was a widespread



tendency for craft guilds to amalgamate into companies which often thus came to include many crafts, sometimes (as in France and Spain) through government intervention, sometimes (as in England) through piecemeal local developments.<sup>45</sup> Many Scottish incorporations indeed showed the influence of this trend by embracing several trades. Thus incorporations combining masons and wrights, usually with minor related trades, were common. But in the 1630s a movement for further reform emerged in Scotland. In 1633 or 1634 the Convention of Royal Burghs passed a resolution 'to erect companies for the better maunadgement of trade and for advanceing of the native commodities', and ordered Edinburgh to draft proposals for this. In February 1634 burgh commissioners sent to the king were instructed to ask him to give royal authority to grants of privileges to manufacturing companies. 'As also for making and devyding of the traid in severall companyes for the bettir government thairof'. The agent for the burghs at court was Henry Alexander, the master of works' brother; and even if this family connection with such developments had been lacking, the master of works was more directly concerned with the affairs of craftsmen than any other major royal official, and thus would be likely to take an interest in proposals for reorganising them.<sup>46</sup>

The king responded in May 1634 by instructing Edinburgh to take action 'for distributing your Inhabitants in severall companeis'. Nothing was done, so he raised the matter again two years later.<sup>47</sup> The reorganisation then proposed was evidently directed mainly at merchants, not craftsmen, but this background of discussion of companies as a basis for reorganisation of economic activity probably influenced Sir Anthony Alexander's decision to seek major changes in the organisation of the crafts over which he claimed authority.

The second type of economic motivation behind the Falkland Statutes was probably even more important. Alexander clearly intended to provide himself with a substantial income through claiming, as general warden of the new companies, a full half of all fines and entry fees. William Schaw in his two sets of statutes had sought no financial advantage for himself as general warden of the masons. As general warden of the building trades Alexander had his hand held out and an anticipatory gleam in his eye. The earl of Stirling and his sons were very much a new family 'on the make'. The Alexanders had risen from relative obscurity in a single generation primarily through service to the crown and office holding, but they also involved themselves in a number of colonial

<sup>45</sup> H. Kellenbenz, 'The organisation of industrial production', *Cambridge economic history of Europe*, v, ed. E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson (Cambridge, 1977), 464–6.

<sup>46</sup> J. D. Marwick (ed.), *Extracts from the records of the convention of the royal burghs of Scotland, 1677–1711* (Edinburgh, 1880), 539; L. B. Taylor (ed.), *Aberdeen council letters* (6 vols., Oxford, 1942–61), ii, 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Stirling's register*, ii, 754; M. Wood (ed.), *Extracts from the records of the burgh of Edinburgh, 1626 to 1641* (Edinburgh, 1936), xv, 179, 180, 185.

schemes and business ventures. Sir Anthony Alexander's interest in architecture was no doubt genuine, but in seeking to extend his powers over the building trades his interest perhaps lay more in profit than anything else.

Within a year of issuing the Falkland Statutes Sir Anthony was dead. The statutes themselves were virtually stillborn, for before they could have any significant effects the outbreak of rebellion against the king made their implementation impossible. But, as with the Second St Clair Charter, while there is no evidence that other crafts showed any enthusiasm at all for the statutes, there is evidence of masonic lodges approving them. On 14 January 1637 the members of the Lodge of Aitchison's Haven convened in the presence of Sir Anthony and signed the statutes.<sup>48</sup> Later in the year Alexander can be detected undertaking a systematic attempt to form companies. On 15 May he issued orders for the artificers of the shire of Linlithgow to appear before him or his deputies in Linlithgow Palace on 29 May to be formed into companies, in order to cure the great abuses and delinquencies that existed through unfree men practising crafts, and some men practising several crafts at once (something which was common in rural areas). The fact that at one point 'Glasgow' has been written over 'Linlithgow' suggests that a number of such orders were being sent out summoning local meetings.<sup>49</sup> The only known success of the campaign was in Stirling. On 27 April 1637 Alexander held a court in Stirling Castle, presumably as general warden, and the 'luge of Stirling' is mentioned. In the months that follow there are several references to the lodge and company of Stirling, treated as a single institution, and on 5 November 1637 the lodge and company accepted the Falkland Statutes.<sup>50</sup> After the death of Sir Anthony Alexander in September his brother and successor, Henry, appeared in Aitchison's Haven Lodge (17 March 1638) and those present again approved the statutes.<sup>51</sup>

It appears from this fragmentary evidence that Sir Anthony and Henry Alexander were seeking to make lodges the basis for their new companies. As lodge membership was largely confined to men of a single craft this seems inconsistent with the Falkland Statutes, which sought the establishment of companies combining all the building trades. Was the idea to expand lodge membership to include other trades? Or was the idea that the lodges, confined to masons, should form elite cores of initiates within the companies, the masons forming a craft aristocracy by right of being Vitruvian masons/architects? Answers to such questions are impossible through lack of evidence. The lodge and company of Stirling included wrights as well as masons, but the former could have been members of the company though not

<sup>48</sup> W. A. Laurie, *History of freemasonry*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1859), 451.

<sup>49</sup> Central Regional Council Archives, Stirling, PD.7/12/5; Inventory, 30.5.

<sup>50</sup> Central Regional Council Archives, PD.7/12/6, ff. 1r-3r; *ibid.*, PD.7/12/4, ff. 1-3, 4r; Inventory, 30.4, 30.6.

<sup>51</sup> Laurie, *History of freemasonry*, 452.

initiates of the lodge. Aitchison's Haven Lodge remained the exclusive preserve of masons even after accepting the statutes, and it seems likely that both lodges gave their assent to them reluctantly. The two Alexander masters of works in turn had appeared in Aitchison's Haven Lodge and demanded approval for the statutes, and this was conceded. But no attempt was made to turn the lodge into a company, suggesting that members were unenthusiastic. Apart from anything else, implementing the statutes would have meant surrendering half the lodge's main sources of income, fees and fines, to the general wardens. In Stirling the references to the lodge and company suggest some attempt to adhere to the statutes, but the situation is very confused and there is no evidence that the statutes had any long-term effect on craft organisation there. It is possible that the company had a place in the obscure evolution of the Incorporation of Mechanics, but references to the lodge and company soon disappear.

With the coming of the troubles and the collapse of the ambitions of the Alexander masters of works the Falkland Statutes became an irrelevance. But the fact that they had been urged on at least some lodges by the Alexanders led to a continuing feeling that they were somehow of special significance for the mason craft. Much later in the century the Lodge of Aberdeen possessed an incomplete copy of the statutes, but had no real idea what the document was. Nonetheless they reverently copied it out as containing 'Laws and Statutes for masons gathered out of their old writings'<sup>52</sup> – and then ignored them as their predecessors had done.

### **The last general wardens**

When Henry Alexander visited Aitchison's Haven Lodge in March 1638 the National Covenant, the symbol of resistance to the religious and other policies of Charles I, had just been produced, and it was soon being signed with enthusiasm throughout much of Lowland Scotland. Within months effective control of the country passed into the hands of the covenanters. The fortunes of the Alexander family suffered both from this and coincidental misfortunes. Henry's two brothers, Sir Anthony Alexander and Lord Alexander died in 1637 and 1638 respectively. Their father, the first earl of Stirling, died in 1640, and his grandson and successor died a few months later. Henry Alexander then became third earl of Stirling, but the family's estates had been lost and the country was in the hands of its political enemies. Henry had probably retreated to England in 1638, and the rest of his life is so obscure that it is not known for certain when he died, though it was probably in or before 1649.<sup>53</sup> By 1641 he was no longer considered master of works, perhaps having resigned because either the office was considered beneath the

<sup>52</sup> Miller, *Aberdeen*, 41–3.

<sup>53</sup> *Complete peerage*, viii, 283; *RMS*, 1620–33, no. 206.

dignity of an earl, or he had no intention of ever returning to a hostile Scotland.

To replace him Sir John Veitch of Dawyck was appointed general surveyor, master of works and king's architect for life in May 1641 – a good example of the way titles of offices sometimes became increasingly elaborate and impressive over time. The name general surveyor had become attached to the master of works by 1629, and the term king's architect had originally been an alternative name for the master of works. Now all three are referred to as if they were distinct offices.<sup>54</sup> It seems, however, that the covenanters (whose successful rebellion against Charles I had given them control of this country) did not at first recognise the appointment of Veitch, for when the king came to Scotland later in the year to make his peace with them the matter of who should be master of works was discussed.

This is revealed by a remonstrance presented to parliament in the name of the artificers of the kingdom. The document described the qualifications which a new master should have. He should be 'eminent for his skill in all mechanick artes, discretion, honestie and painfulnes'. This would be conducive to the breeding of skilled 'artificers of all Arts Vsefull in Architecture' and to keeping them in order. He should be a man such that 'his Wisdome, Authoritie and qualities . . . may make him deserue to be Generall Warden of the whole Artificers of buildings, as worthy men haue euer formerly bene', for this post was best held by the master of works. No one should be appointed master

but such as salbe sufficiently qualified in Mechanicks, and all that belongs to Architecture, to Plott and contriue what is fittest for building and reparacion, what Bewtifull and Vsefull and least chargeable. To Judge of workmens abilities and workmanship, To invent and vse varieties of workes and Engines, To direct euery seuerall Artisan in his owne arte, and to manage his place to the honour of the king and kindome and flourishing of Artes and Artificers within the same.

Finally, the artificers sought to take advantage of the king's weakness by using a common excuse for proposing to limit his powers. As he was an absentee ruler he could not know the qualifications of candidates for office. Masters of works should therefore in future only be appointed after being recommended 'by the whole Wardens and Deacons of the Masons, Wrights, and others chosen by them assembled for that purpose'.<sup>55</sup>

This remonstrance merits quotation at some length as it contains several novel and significant features. All previous documents mentioning the office of general warden had been ones signed, and usually drafted, by the general wardens themselves. In the struggle with Sinclair of Roslin in the 1630s the masters of works had never once mentioned the office of general warden to strengthen their case. This serves to confirm that the office existed not

<sup>54</sup> *RMS*, 1620–33, no. 1402; *ibid.*, 1634–51, no. 965.

<sup>55</sup> *APS*, v, 706.

through official appointments to it but through some understanding between the general wardens and the craftsmen themselves. Now, in 1641, the building crafts indicated that they attached importance to the office and that it was separable from that of master of works, though it was best if both offices were held by one man. The title of general warden has at last emerged from the private world of the relationship between the masters of works and craftsmen into the public business of parliament. Further, the remonstrance is significant in that it identifies the building trades in general, and not just the masons, with architecture, and does so in Vitruvian terms which suggests that other crafts were seeking to join the masons in claiming prestige for themselves through the remarkably high status accorded to the architect in the late Renaissance.

Unfortunately for the craftsmen, the covenanters were no more willing than the king to give them a say in appointing masters of works, and they seem to have accepted the king's appointment of Sir John Veitch of Dawyck (though they did not specifically confirm it). But Veitch soon decided that the job was beyond him, and on 31 August 1642 he agreed to resign so a new grant could be issued in favour of himself and John Carmichael (the son of the treasurer depute). The two men were to hold the office jointly to ease its burdens caused by the troubles: Veitch complained that most of the king's houses were ruinous. Veitch's resignation involved the office of general warden as well as that of master of works as if the former as well as the latter was a royal office. But the new grant to the joint masters (19 April 1643) did not copy this innovation: as far as the king was concerned the general warden did not exist.<sup>56</sup>

The partnership with John Carmichael failed to lessen the burdens on Veitch for long, for in 1644 Carmichael was killed fighting for the king at the Battle of Marston Moor.<sup>57</sup> Veitch then (1645) agreed to hold his offices, described as master of works and general warden of all tradesmen and workmen, jointly with his late partner's elder brother, Daniel Carmichael. The king agreed to this the following year – but again the royal grant ignored the 'unofficial' office of general warden.<sup>58</sup>

After the Restoration of monarchy in 1660, however, the office at last received official recognition. In the reorganisation that followed the return of Charles II from exile, William Moray of Dreghorn was appointed sole master of works, overseer and director general of his majesty's buildings in Scotland (17 August 1660).<sup>59</sup> Later (10 May 1662) Sir William, as he then was, and Sir John Veitch, the former master of works, were officially appointed as

<sup>56</sup> J. R. N. Macphail (ed.), *Papers from the collection of Sir William Fraser* (SHS, 1924), 240–1; *RMS*, 1634–51, no. 1352.

<sup>57</sup> *Scots peerage*, iv, 587.

<sup>58</sup> *Mr of works accs.*, ii, lix; *APS*, vi, i, 426; *RMS*, 1634–51, no. 1693.

<sup>59</sup> NLS, Adv. Ms. 25.3.4, Miscellaneous law tracts, 42. This copy of the gift erroneously calls the new master of works Murray of *Abercainrey*.

general wardens in Scotland of all trades pertaining to building (including hammermen and makers of artillery as well as the more obvious crafts). The joint wardens were given power to hold warden courts, incorporate craftsmen into companies, appoint wardens, overseers, deacons and other officers, and summon conventions or assemblies. They were to have 'a proper seall for thair office', and all sheriffs, justices and magistrates were to assist them in their work.<sup>60</sup>

For the first time the office of general warden was partially separated from that of master of works (though one holder was master, his partner a former master); and for the first time the king had made an appointment to the office. The reason for this innovation is probably the same as the reason that Sir William Moray had been appointed master of works. Sir William was the brother of Sir Robert Moray, the remarkable freemason whose long fascination with the craft will be described in chapter 7. Sir Robert was a close friend and trusted adviser of Charles II, and he had procured for his brother the office of master of works, closely connected with his own masonic interests. While there is no direct evidence for it, it is highly likely that he was also instrumental in obtaining royal recognition of the office of general warden. Had Sir Robert plans for the mason craft in Scotland which he hoped to implement through his brother? This is quite possible, though in the event nothing was attempted. Sir William was not a success as master of works, and in 1669 was forced to resign from office after some obscure scandal (presumably financial) which was hushed up out of respect for his brother.<sup>61</sup>

The office of general warden reached its apogee with its conversion into a post to which appointments were made by the crown. William Schaw had claimed the title of general warden of the masons. In time this had become general warden of the building crafts, and this jurisdiction over these crafts had been recognised by the crown (though attached to the office of master of works) in 1634. Now, in the 1660s, the general warden had become a crown office. But its apogee was also its swansong: no further references whatever to the office are known. The older office of master of works was also in decline, an inevitable long-term result of the Union of the Crowns as the king's castles and houses were no longer occupied by a resident royal family. After Sir William Moray had resigned in disgrace the office, in name at least, disappeared for some years. His successor, Sir William Bruce (appointed in 1671), was titled general overseer and superintendent of the king's buildings, though he was in effect master of works. The old title was revived in 1689,

<sup>60</sup> EUL, Laing, Mss III, 349, summarised in HMC 72: *Laing Mss* (2 vols., London, 1914–25), i, 332–3. An endorsement states that the gift conforms to that which Sir Anthony Alexander and 'I my self' (presumably Veitch) had formerly had, but this note is unfinished and crossed out, suggesting that the writer had realised that former gifts had been of the office of master of works, not of general warden.

<sup>61</sup> See D. Stevenson, 'Masonry, symbolism and ethics in the life of Sir Robert Moray, FRS', *PSAS*, 114 (1984), 420.

and appointments continued to be made until the late eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> But it had declined into insignificance, and its holders made no further attempts to influence the development of the mason craft or the building craft in general.

Looking back on the confusing story of the connections of the masters of works and the general wardens with the mason craft from the 1590s to the 1660s, it is immediately apparent that one man stands far above the rest in importance. None of the masters and wardens can claim to have had any lasting effects on the organisation and activities of the masons with the sole exception of William Schaw. He gave the masons a lodge system through which they could organise the operative side of the craft as well as its esoteric rituals; and it is highly probable that these rituals themselves, and the values and beliefs they enshrined, also owed much to Schaw. What was it that inspired Schaw to reorganise the craft, and that inspired others in the course of the seventeenth century to take claims of masons to valuable secrets and superiority over other crafts seriously enough to want to join the masonic lodges? To answer these questions it is necessary to abandon a close-up focus on the mason craft in Scotland and turn to developments in thought and attitude in Europe as a whole. For, to adopt a culinary metaphor, if early freemasonry was concocted from a Scottish recipe, many of the ingredients involved were exotic imports from abroad.

<sup>62</sup> Mylne, 'Masters of works to the crown of Scotland', 52–3, 60–8.

## 5 The Renaissance contribution

### Neoplatonism and the occult striving of the late Renaissance

Until relatively recently the aspects of the Renaissance which tended to receive most attention from historians were those which could be seen as 'progressive' or 'modern', pointing the way ahead to the modern world. The Renaissance may have looked to the past, as the term itself indicates, being a striving for a rebirth based on ancient knowledge, but it looked to the past for the sake of a new future. It involved the partial rejection of one past, indeed, in favour of another one which was seen as providing vastly superior opportunities for the expansion of man's understanding and capacities. Classical philosophy, science and literature were to be revived while the intellectual shackles of the 'monkish' and 'superstitious' Middle Ages were to be thrown off, opening up a new future for man. What was wrong with this sort of picture of the Renaissance was not what it said but what it failed to say. So far as it went it was accurate, but on its own it gave a highly misleading impression of rationality and modernity of outlook, ignoring central features of the age which seemed irrational and discreditable. In recent decades, however, historians have increasingly realised that Renaissance interest in subjects like astrology, magic and alchemy, and the Neoplatonic philosophy which largely underlay them, should not be dismissed with embarrassment as unfortunate aberrations on the fringes of the Renaissance. Such concerns are now seen as central to the understanding of the whole Renaissance, and particularly late Renaissance, attitude to the world. From a modern viewpoint they may seem as superstitious as many of the beliefs of the despised Middle Ages; but not only were they of great significance at the time, they can be seen as making their own contributions to the future. Dead ends in themselves, they were based on the belief that man could understand the world around him and would then be able to alter it, bending the powers of nature to his own ends, a novel and optimistic attitude changing man's whole idea of his position in the universe.



## The potentialities

open to human ingenuity were greatly enhanced by the tide of Neoplatonism which swept through Renaissance Europe. The revival of this, the last school of ancient pagan philosophy, fostered a disposition to blur the difference between matter and spirit. Instead of being regarded as an inanimate mass, the Earth itself was deemed to be alive. The universe was peopled by a hierarchy of spirits, and thought to manifest all kinds of occult influences and sympathies. The cosmos was an organic unity in which every part bore a sympathetic relationship to the rest. Even colours, letters and numbers were endowed with magical properties.<sup>1</sup>

Thus all matter was regarded as being animate, all that existed was bound together by a network of spiritual forces, and everything shared in some way in the divine. In a universe in which the divine was present in all matter, God was the sum of all that existed and of the spiritual forces that connected them. In this great system of animate matter there was a complex web of correspondences or relationships which linked matter at different levels, the microcosm of man and the macrocosm of the universe. Thus, for example, occult forces linked the movements of the stars and the fortunes of men, and it was the task of astrologers to interpret such astral influences. By study of these correspondences and of the spiritual forces that animated the universe in general man could gain understanding and spiritual enlightenment, a oneness with the divine. Going further and trying to exploit the spiritual powers, in the interests of personal spiritual advancement or to benefit mankind in general, often led on to the practice of magic, a summoning of the forces of nature and harnessing of them for such purposes. Once magic is seen in this way, it is understandable that Sir Walter Raleigh could write that 'The art of magic is the art of worshipping God', for magic was essentially 'a humble supplication that God should extend' to the practitioner 'the privilege of a unique view of his mysteries': 'At this level the practice of magic became a holy quest; the search for knowledge, not by study and research, but by revelation. The notion that purity of life was an essential preliminary to scientific discovery ran through the long history of alchemy.'<sup>2</sup>

The pursuit of this quest through alchemy reached its peak in the decades before and after 1600; alchemy has been described as the greatest passion of the age in Central Europe. The search for the philosophers' stone was not, in the hands of the true alchemist, merely a materialistic search for ways of turning base metals into gold, but an attempt to achieve 'the moral and spiritual rebirth of mankind'.<sup>3</sup> 'The occult striving was in essence an attempt to penetrate beyond the world of experience to the reality which underlay it, and as such it paralleled or overlapped with the artistic use of symbols and

<sup>1</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (Harmondsworth, 1973), 265.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>3</sup> R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and his world. A study in intellectual history* (Oxford, 1973), 199, 201. The chapter in this book on 'Rudolf and the occult arts' provides an excellent introduction to the strange world of late Renaissance Neoplatonism.

emblems. At the same time it belonged in a central way to the whole apprehension of nature.<sup>4</sup> Hidden forces of nature, once understood, could be controlled, giving men previously unknown powers over the world about them. Defined in these terms, the aims of the Neoplatonist can be seen as similar to those of the 'modern' scientist; but of course the difference between them lies in totally divergent views as to how knowledge was to be sought, and as to the nature of the universe of which knowledge was being sought. The Neoplatonist universe was drenched in the spiritual, and was to be understood through purification and revelation. The ultimate goal was spiritual perfection, in which man merged with the divine spirit which pervaded the universe, himself becoming godlike in the process.<sup>5</sup> What was created was not the scientist but the magus.

The climax of the Neoplatonist occult striving in general, like that of alchemy, came around 1600. Almost by definition, occult striving entailed secrecy. The philosopher sought understanding of the hidden or secret spiritual forces of the universe, and though the understanding achieved was to be utilised to benefit mankind as a whole it was not to be communicated to all. It was sought in secret by individuals, or very commonly by small groups of would-be adepts, leading to a veritable 'cult of secret societies'.<sup>6</sup> The secrecy associated with the masonic lodges which emerged in seventeenth-century Scotland was partly a legacy of the Medieval past, of the craft keeping the 'mysteries' of its operative trade to itself, but this was greatly reinforced by the prevailing passion for secrecy of the age in which the lodge system was born. Partly it was secrecy for its own sake, based on the common tendency to feel that the more exclusive knowledge was, the more valuable it must be. Moreover, it was of the essence of really significant knowledge or revelation to be secret: the great secrets of the universe would be cheapened if revealed to all. Along with this was associated the belief that just as only the pure would achieve true revelation, so knowledge achieved through such revelation should belong exclusively to them – not least because great danger would lie in revealing how to summon up the powers of nature to the untrained and untrustworthy who might misuse such knowledge.

The Neoplatonist striving was linked inextricably with symbolism, especially in the form of hieroglyphs and emblems. In Neoplatonic thought symbolism pervaded the universe, a symbolism that potentially revealed divine truths but also hid them. Everything in nature had symbolic meaning, through the hierarchies of correspondences that penetrated all parts and aspects of the universe. If the symbols could be read correctly the structure and forces controlling the universe would be revealed. Thus nature was God's symbolically revealed – and simultaneously concealed – truth. These

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>5</sup> C. A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge, 1969), 19–20.

<sup>6</sup> Evans, *Rudolf II*, 271.

truths had been understood in the distant past, especially by the Egyptians whose sages had recorded them in their hieroglyphs. Man could either attempt to read the symbolically expressed truths directly from nature, or through interpretation of the hieroglyphs. The sacred truths had been deliberately hidden in the hieroglyphs to conceal them from the profane, but the hieroglyphs were not regarded merely as a form of writing that no one could read any longer. They were believed somehow to enshrine the truth in a more perfect form than mere words could do. Thus the hieroglyphs had to be 'read', but their meaning could never be fully expressed in words. From this concept grew the vast emblematic literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The emblem consisted of an illustration, usually much more than a single symbol or hieroglyph (though emblems were regarded as equivalent to hieroglyphs) and sometimes amounting to quite a complicated little scene or picture, accompanied by words expounding the meaning of this illustration. The inscription was vital in explaining how the illustration was to be interpreted – the problem with Egyptian hieroglyphs was that they were extremely difficult to understand as they were not accompanied by texts to help in their interpretation. But, paradoxically, though the words were thus vital, they could never capture the full meaning of the picture, for it was held 'that the emblems contain a kind of knowledge which cannot be found in discourse'. The pictures encapsulated underlying Platonic ideas, and if studied properly communicated deep wisdom which could not be expressed in words. But the symbols could never be fully comprehended for they held 'a plenitude of meanings which meditation and study can never reveal more than partially'.<sup>7</sup>

The superiority of the visual image over the word was not universally accepted, however, as was indicated by a fascinating and revealing controversy in early seventeenth-century England between the playwright Ben Jonson and the architect Inigo Jones. The two men quarrelled bitterly over their respective contributions to the great court masques of the day. Ben Jonson maintained that his poetry was what really mattered; the elements of spectacle provided by Jones were mere illustrations of his words, expressing in visual form the meaning of the words. On the contrary, argued the architect, it was the visual spectacle, speaking directly to the soul, that had the real meaning. The poet's words merely helped to explain that meaning, and they were therefore secondary. Even Jonson, while arguing his case, that the poet's pen was more noble than the artist's pencil, admitted the outstanding place conventionally given to the visual image: 'Picture is the invention of Heaven: the most ancient, and most a kinne to nature' and a picture created by 'an excellent Artificer' 'doeth so enter, and penetrate the inmost affection

<sup>7</sup> G. Boaz (ed.), *The hieroglyphics of Horapollon* (New York, 1950), 22; E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic images. Studies in the art of the Renaissance* (London, 1972), 14.

... as sometimes it overcomes the power of speech, and oratory'.<sup>8</sup> As the controversy indicates, the emblem with its mysterious qualities was not confined to a static picture: a masque with its mixture of music, acting, poetry and pageantry was an emblem, the visual elements conveying messages which the words alone could not do. In this aspect, the emblem could take the form of ritual, set actions and gestures conveying meanings. 'Manners become codified, and gesture becomes a ritual'<sup>9</sup> in this atmosphere, and it is not far-fetched to think of the rituals of the Scottish masons in this way, using a visible and verbal ritual to demonstrate truths and values (see chapter 6).

In the Neoplatonist world symbolism was more than a matter of conventional symbols and meanings, of interpreting and identifying, for example, figures by their allegorical attributes – Jupiter by his thunderbolt, Pax by her olive branch, St Andrew by his cross. In the emblem the symbol took an almost mystical character. Hieroglyphs and the like were equivalents to the hieroglyphs of the natural world through which God at once revealed and concealed divine truths. Interpretation and creation of symbols and emblems therefore became a central aspect of the late Renaissance occult quest for enlightenment. The process was an immensely complicated one, for emblems and symbols had – or should have if they were to be really significant – many different levels of meaning, simultaneously communicating different truths. A good example of this many-faceted aspect of symbols was Sir Robert Moray's star/pentacle mason mark (to be discussed in chapter 7), which unpeels like an onion to display a whole range of significances.

Moray was willing to try to explain his symbol in plain language, but there was a strong tendency to avoid this, not just because words could not fully express the meaning of emblems but also because the essence of a symbol's significance was obscure and complicated. If God had seen fit to conceal the secrets of the universe in the emblems of nature, then surely man should not strip them naked for all to see. Paradoxically, secrecy and obscurity become an essential part of the great struggle to unlock secrets. Simple and literal language is too shallow, poverty-stricken and vulgar to convey great truths.<sup>10</sup> Thus much of the alchemical, Rosicrucian and astrological literature of the age is largely incomprehensible not merely through the inability of authors to express their meanings clearly, but through the desire even when publishing

<sup>8</sup> S. Orgel and R. Strong, *Inigo Jones. The theatre of the Stuart court* (2 vols., London, 1973), i, 3–4; F. A. Yates, 'The emblematic conceit in Giordano Bruno's *De Gli Eroici Furori* and in the Elizabethan sonnet sequences', *Journal of the Warburg and Courthold Institutes* [*JWCI*], vi (1943), 105, 107–8; F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition* (London, 1964), 163; E. H. Gombrich, 'Icones symbolicae. The visual image in Neo-Platonic thought', *JWCI*, xi (1948), 163–173, 181, 183–4 (a revised and extended version of this paper appears in Gombrich, *Symbolic images*, 123–95); Evans, *Rudolf II*, 201, 269–70; D. G. Gordon, 'Poet and architect: The intellectual setting of the quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones', *JWCI*, xii (1949), 152–78.

<sup>9</sup> Boaz, *Hieroglyphics*, 17. <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

what were held to be important truths to make them hard to find, only discernible to the purified adept prepared to struggle to comprehend them.

When looking through the endless emblem books of the period it is hard to comprehend the full significance and value attached to the emblem, for the contents of the books often look trite at first sight. Even to many people at the time, perhaps, the emblem was little more than a pleasant conceit, and many of the emblem books were fairly simple works of popularisation or religious propaganda, but potentially emblems and symbols in general were keys to ultimate knowledge. In this climate it becomes intelligible that the mundane tools of the mason craft and architectural features of building should come to be seen as containing symbolic references to ethical truths. Of course this process was not entirely new. The square, the tool for checking right angles, had long been accepted as standing for rectitude and fair-dealing, for example.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the obsession of the period with symbolism may be assumed to have had a major influence on the development of the mason craft's rituals and on the emergence of the symbolism of freemasonry. The humble mason moralising over his tools might seem worlds apart from the alchemist, astrologer or philosopher in quest of the secrets of the universe, but they were bound together by sharing the same basic world-picture.

It was, however, two specific aspects of Renaissance Neoplatonic occultism, Hermeticism and the art of memory, which were to have most impact on the mason craft in Scotland, and through it on freemasonry in general.

### Hermeticism and the cult of Egypt

The late Renaissance respect for Egyptian hieroglyphics as the most profound of man-made symbols was just one side of a more general belief that the understanding of man, and the spirit-filled universe he inhabited, that had been achieved by the Egyptians had been greater than that of any other people. In a sense this was a logical, if crude, development of the Renaissance attitude of rejecting the recent past and turning to the distant past as a source of knowledge. If old was good, oldest must be best. Ancient Egypt was the oldest civilisation of which Renaissance man had any real knowledge, therefore it must represent the knowledge of the ancient world in its purest form, before it had been corrupted and distorted by the effete Greeks and parvenu Romans, and this was taken as being admitted by classical writers who referred to the lost esoteric knowledge of their Egyptian predecessors. That it was difficult, if not impossible, to understand many aspects of Egyptian civilisation did not undermine belief in Egyptian superiority: on the

<sup>11</sup> For examples of masons' tools such as squares, levels and plumbines used in emblems see A. Henkel and A. Schöne, *Emblemata; Handbuch zur Simblikunst des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1967), nos. 1418–24, and especially no. 1078.

contrary, it confirmed it. The very strangeness of the Egyptians in European eyes, the incomprehensibility of their hieroglyphs, gave an air of mystery and the occult which was deeply fascinating to men imbued with the Neoplatonic vision of an animistic, symbolistic universe which man must strive to understand. They did not expect to attain such understanding easily, for true knowledge and enlightenment was the privilege of a spiritual elite, and the idea that the great Egyptian scholars had deliberately locked up their profound knowledge in hieroglyphs served to stress how valuable that knowledge was.<sup>12</sup>

The outstanding Renaissance Neoplatonic expression of the myth of Egypt was Hermeticism. The Hermetic movement owed its existence to a miscellaneous body of works ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus and his circle. The Greeks had identified their god Hermes with the Egyptian god Thoth, scribe to the gods and himself god of wisdom, and under this name he was known to the Renaissance, with the epithet Trismegistus (Thrice Great). The works confidently assigned to Hermes were in fact written in the second and third centuries after Christ, but up to 1614 were universally believed to be Egyptian works dating from many centuries before. Even after their true dating was established several generations passed before this was universally accepted. The Hermetic works, mainly Greek in origin, may show signs of Egyptian influence, but essentially they reflected the prevailing Platonic and Stoic philosophy of the period in which they were written, being filled with an intense piety and sense of spiritual quest whereby man could seek to distance himself from the material world and become imbued with divine power and virtues. Though the tracts were very diverse the emphasis was on 'Egyptian' religion, ritual and astrology, and on the occult methods the Egyptians had used to summon and control the powers of the stars. The universe described was a Neoplatonic one filled with emanations of the divine, and indeed the Hermetic treatises themselves (most of which only became known in Western Europe, for the first time since late antiquity, in the late fifteenth century) were a powerful influence in shaping Renaissance Neoplatonism.

The supposed magical mystery religion of the Egyptians was linked to Christianity and made compatible with it by the fact that it was held to contain prophecies of the coming of Christ and parallels with Christianity. This made it acceptable as an imperfect forerunner of the true faith. As the writings in fact post-dated Christ and contained elements drawn from many faiths and philosophies, the presence of Christian elements in them is not surprising, but of course their true age was unknown to the Renaissance Hermetics. Giordano Bruno, the greatest Renaissance magus or magician seeking to harness the powers of the cosmos, took up an extreme position,

<sup>12</sup> For the Renaissance obsession with Egypt see E. Iversen, *The myth of Egypt and its hieroglyphics in European tradition* (Copenhagen, 1961).

holding that the Egyptian religion was the only true religion, Christianity being a corruption of it.<sup>13</sup>

Very few went this far, however, and most Hermeticists, protestant or Catholic, avoided overt appeals to magic and other aspects of Egyptian lore that could be seen as conflicting with true religion. But the coming of Reformation in the sixteenth century accentuated one feature within Hermeticism, the emphasis on the spiritual quest of the individual. Protestant reformers claimed to be bringing new purity of religion to Europe, and in seeking pure religion in the distant past (early Christian times) their outlook can be related to the Renaissance appeal to the past in general, and to the Hermetic search for ancient spiritual wisdom in particular. But the fact that protestantism neither triumphed completely nor failed completely left Europe torn apart by religious dispute. Faced with endless conflict between Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and with deep splits within protestantism, leading to widespread religious persecution and bloody religious wars, some turned their back on fanatical conflicting dogmas and retreated into intensely personal religion which required no outward form through public ritual or worship, sometimes combining this with a willingness to give nominal conformity to whichever rival harsh creed prevailed where they lived, with true religious life confined to the individual or to small secret groups. The Family of Love, whose shadowy existence can be traced in the later sixteenth century in The Netherlands (though it had some English supporters) was an example of this.<sup>14</sup> Some at least of those involved in Hermeticism adopted such attitudes, separating true faith from outward conformity, and others no doubt were attracted to Hermeticism because it provided a spiritual quest not identified with any of the warring branches of more orthodox Christianity. The insane world of religious conflict could be rejected in favour of personal piety based on works thought to be far older, and therefore arguably purer, than protestantism or Catholicism.<sup>15</sup> Others hoped through Hermeticism not just to achieve personal peace but to find some way of bringing religious conflict to an end, by reconciliation or toleration achieved through the spiritual truths of Hermeticism.<sup>16</sup>

Frances Yates interpreted Giordano Bruno as 'taking full magical Egyptian Hermeticism as his basis, preaching a kind of Egyptian Counter-Reformation, prophesying a return to Egyptianism in which the religious difficulties will disappear in some new solution, preaching, too, a moral reform with emphasis on social good works and an ethic of social utility', regretting the destruction of the best features of the Medieval past as well as seeking Egyptian enlightenment. Yates then posed a rhetorical question:

<sup>13</sup> See Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 1–19 for a general introduction to Hermeticism – which forms the basis of much of the preceding paragraphs.

<sup>14</sup> F. A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian enlightenment* (Paladin edn, Frogmore, 1975), 259–60.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, *Rudolf II*, 197.

<sup>16</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 273.

'Where is there such a combination as this of religious toleration, emotional linkage with the medieval past, emphasis on good works for others, and imaginative attachment to the religion and the symbolism of the Egyptians? The only answer to this question that I can think of is – in Freemasonry.'<sup>17</sup> Yates admitted that 'We are fumbling in the dark here, among strange mysteries', but nonetheless her question and tentative answer arose naturally from the study of Hermeticism. There are resemblances between Hermeticism and freemasonry which cannot be dismissed as mere coincidences.

If, as the evidence suggests, the essentials of freemasonry did emerge around 1600, then chronological considerations alone would make it truly extraordinary for Hermetic influences *not* to be present. These years saw the peak of the Hermetic striving for enlightenment and the spiritual rebirth of mankind, based on secret knowledge and secret societies or cults. When a system of lodges emerges in Scotland with secret rituals and identification signs, just as the great esoteric Hermetic movement was sweeping across Europe, there surely must be a link between them. This is all the more the case as the masons had long possessed a tradition, enshrined in the Old Charges, that Hermes had played a major part in preserving knowledge of the mason craft and transmitting it to mankind after the flood, and that a key development in craft history, the teaching of masonry by Euclid to the sons of the nobility, had taken place in Egypt. Any educated man of the day would have some knowledge of Hermetic lore, and would pick up the reference to Hermes in the Old Charges and thus be likely to see masonry as a Hermetic art bound up with one of the great intellectual movements of the day. As if to confirm this, Hermes, in his Greek guise as the divine messenger, was often identified with John the Baptist, the forerunner and announcer (of the coming of Christ).<sup>18</sup> John the Baptist was (along with John the Evangelist), as previously noted, the patron saint of masons. Thus the masons could be seen as having long recognised Hermes Trismegistus as their patron. Of course masons themselves must surely have been delighted and flattered by the links that could be made associating their craft with the Hermetic quest, for such connections could if exploited give their craft a unique status. This is, indeed, what happened. The processes by which the links were identified and exploited to transform the craft's own image of itself, and the image perceived by outsiders, are obscure. But a major role was played by William Schaw, master of works. He is known to have wanted in 1599 to make masons skilled in the art of memory; and that art in the sixteenth century had developed close links with Hermeticism. Moreover, as the next section of this chapter will indicate, Schaw may have discussed the art with a disciple of Giordano Bruno. Thus Frances Yates' speculation that not just Hermeticism but specifically Bruno's own version of Hermeticism may have influenced freemasonry may well have some truth in it, with Schaw providing the link between them.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 273–4.

<sup>18</sup> E. Wind, *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958), 48–9.



Tracing the influence of Hermeticism in Scotland, to provide a local context for the work of William Schaw, is not easy, for no systematic study of the subject has ever been attempted. But interest in the art of memory at the court of James VI can be convincingly established, and Scotland did have a strong tradition in alchemy, which in the sixteenth century became 'The Hermetic science *par excellence*', though it is true that by no means all alchemists of the period were Hermeticists.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of the sixteenth century King James IV subsidised the work of the Italian alchemist John Damian – a man usually ridiculed for his attempts to fly, but obviously the king took his work seriously. A century later the claims of Alexander Seton (died 1604: not to be confused with William Schaw's friend of the same name, later earl of Dunfermline) to have made gold excited Europe, and led to his being imprisoned and tortured by Christian II of Saxony in an attempt to extract his secrets. John Napier of Merchison (1550–1617), best known as the inventor of logarithms and a commentator on the Book of Revelation, had a deep interest in alchemy, and conferred in Edinburgh with an eminent visiting German practitioner in 1607–8. His son Robert was also a keen alchemist, regarding (as his father had probably also done) alchemical mysteries as divine revelations. Sir David Lindsay, first Lord Balcarres (1587–1641), collected alchemical and Rosicrucian manuscripts, while Sir George Erskine, Lord Innerteil (died 1646), who 'was a great student of naturall philosophy, even to a considerable advancement in the hermetick school, and had a correspondence in very remote parts with the sonnes of Hermes', concentrated on alchemy. William and Patrick (1584–1652) Ruthven, younger sons of the first earl of Gowrie, were both well known for their alchemical works.<sup>20</sup>

Any assessment of the extent of Hermetic influences in Scotland must await further research, but the evidence given above of interest in the Hermetic arts of memory and alchemy at least indicates that such influences were present in the general intellectual climate there as in the rest of Europe. Suggesting a connection between the Scottish mason craft and Hermeticism is not seeking to link masonry with some disreputable and obscure fringe phenomenon, but rather demonstrating the strong circumstantial evidence for relating it to one of the greatest intellectual movements of the Renaissance. The Hermetic movement was soon to be discredited on historical grounds, but its influence on the Scottish masonic lodges was permanent, for

<sup>19</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 150. For a good account of the varieties of alchemy, and indeed of the alchemical quest in general, see J. W. Montgomery, *Cross and crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654). Phoenix of the theologians* (2 vols., Archives Internationales d'histoire des Idées, The Hague, 1973), i, 242–52.

<sup>20</sup> J. Read, *Humour and humanism in chemistry* (London, 1947), 18–51; J. Read, 'Scottish alchemy in the seventeenth century', *Chymia*, i (1948), 139–48; J. Small, 'Sketches of early Scottish alchemists', *PSAS*, xi (1874–6), 410–36; J. B. Craven, 'A Scottish alchemist of the seventeenth century: David, Lord Balcarres', *Journal of the Alchemical Society*, i (1913), 68–75.

they combined Hermetic elements with their own traditional lore and other aspects of Renaissance and Reformation thought to create freemasonry.

### The art of memory

Of all the aspects of thought taken over from the ancient world and then extended and elaborated in the late Renaissance which are discussed in this chapter, perhaps the strangest to the modern mind and the most difficult to understand is the art of memory. Summarising its development and significance is not easy. Frances Yates' remarkable book *The art of memory*<sup>21</sup> provides a splendid introduction to the subject, but even she felt that full understanding of how the art worked had eluded her, and that her very substantial book was merely an introduction to a neglected subject on which a vast amount of research still needed to be done.

The art of memory was a technique for improving the capacity of one's memory which developed in ancient Greece but is mainly known through Roman writers. It was held to be of particular value to orators and lawyers in memorising long speeches, but was also seen as being of much wider application in the ages before printing, and indeed before widespread and cheap availability of a medium on which to write; a capacious and well-organised memory was regarded as central to education and culture. The Greek mnemonic technique was based on a building. The student of the art was instructed to study some large and complex building, memorising its rooms and layout, and particular features or places in it. In doing this he should establish a specific order in which he visited the individual rooms and places. When memorising a speech, he should then imagine himself to be walking through this building on his set route, and in each of the *loci* or places he had memorised he should establish *imagines* or images which were to be attached to each argument or point in his speech. The order in which the images were placed on the journey through the building should correspond to the order in which the points were to be made in the speech. These 'images' established in the 'places' should be connected in some way with points being memorised. The connection could be simple and direct (say a weapon to represent a murder or war) or indirect and convoluted, based on quirks of an individual's mind making connections between images and concepts which would not make sense to others. Very often the images were human figures, and it was thought that unusual and striking images – beautiful or grotesque, comic or obscene – were easier to remember than the commonplace.

When he came to give his speech, the orator would in his own mind walk through the building on his set route, and each image in its place would remind him of the point he should come to next in his speech. While usually

<sup>21</sup> F. A. Yates, *The art of memory* (London, 1966). The summary of the development of the art of memory in this section is based on Yates' work.

concerned simply with remembering the salient points to be made in the right order, there was also discussion in the Roman sources of far more intensive use of the art by the highly skilled whereby virtually every word of a speech could be memorised.

A first reaction to the art of memory is likely to be that it would surely hinder rather than help the unfortunate orator. Even though his memory-building could be used again and again for different speeches (the memory-places being furnished with new images for each), the need to remember very large numbers of places, the order in which to visit them, the images in them, and the significance of these images, seems a crippling burden. Yet the system evidently worked, and it was evidently responsible for some of the remarkable feats of memory recorded of ancient poets and orators. Most people can think of things which they have come to memorise in an indirect and complex way because this works better – for them if for no one else – than simple and direct memorisation. This perhaps gives a glimmering of understanding of the art of memory. The peculiarities of the mind that can lead people to find it easier to memorise the seemingly complex than a simple fact were elaborated by the art of memory into a systematic and powerful mental tool, the artificial memory.

The often human images which revealed their significance through their actions, dress and possessions may also be seen as being related to the figures of gods and the personifications of abstract concepts (such as virtues identifiable by their attributes) which were popular in the ancient world. In the Roman empire, for example, these were developed on the coinage into an elaborate 'form of symbolical references to almost every possible activity of the State' which was closely linked with popular belief through the tendency to regard the personifications as minor gods.<sup>22</sup> Peace holding an olive branch, or Abundance holding ears of corn and a horn of plenty, could be called, in a very broad sense, memory images, and indeed many other kinds of symbolism can be seen in the same way, for symbols or images have always been widely used to remind the beholder of certain things. With the coming of Christianity the Roman system of personifications was taken over and developed as part of Christian iconography in which each saint had his own attributes (recalling his or her life, particular virtues, or martyrdom) to aid identification. The sequences of carvings in great Medieval churches, whether groupings of individual saints (which, taken in order, conveyed a particular message) or symbolic representations of biblical events, were also guides to memory. But of course such systems of iconography are in some respects very different from the artificial memory system taught by the protagonists of the art of memory. Above all, the art of memory was based on mental images which had no physical existence. It was usually based on real buildings and real places within them, but the images assigned to these places were mental ones, and when using the artificial memory the building was visited in the

<sup>22</sup> H. Mattingly, *Roman coins*, 2nd edn (London, 1960), 160.

mind. Moreover, many of the images employed in the art of memory were the inventions of the individual user of the technique, and would make no sense to anyone else, whereas the whole point of the iconography of personifications and saints was that the images should be understood by all.

Nonetheless, the idea of moving round a great Medieval cathedral which through its layout, sculptured images, paintings and stained glass windows evoked memories of particular doctrines and events in religious history, often designed to be 'read' in a specific order, provides some insight into what the practitioner of the art of memory was doing in his mind when using his skills. And some Medieval writers did make the connection between the Christian iconography of saints and their attributes and the ancient art of memory.

In the ancient world the art of memory was classified as an aspect of Rhetoric, but Cicero – himself an advocate of the art – classified memory as one of the three parts of the virtue of Prudence (the others being intelligence and foresight). In the long term this had great significance for the art of memory, for the virtues defined by Cicero (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance) became accepted in the Middle Ages as the four cardinal virtues. Thus in time the art of memory, identified with prudence, came to be regarded as an aspect of ethics. The work of St Augustine added further significance to memory, for he regarded it as one of the three parts of the soul (the others being understanding and will), and taught that through exploring the memory men could find a memory-image of God embedded in their own souls. What had begun as a utilitarian technique for improving the memory had come to be seen as being of importance in religion not just as a valuable method of imprinting religious truths on the mind, but also as something that in itself had moral value and would lead to knowledge of God.

The art, many varieties of which developed, was not always fully understood and was sometimes viewed with suspicion. Moreover, though in the Middle Ages it had a central place in schemes of knowledge, it was nonetheless a minor place, and information about its development is scarce. Then, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the art became highly fashionable. Manuscript works describing and developing the art of memory in new ways proliferated, and were joined by printed treatises from 1482 onwards. These often included lists of images to be learnt and pictures or diagrams of buildings with places in which images were to be put. The revival of the art of memory was in part an aspect of the general fascination with the legacy of the ancient world which typifies the Renaissance. But the art was usually interpreted through the work of Medieval writers, and this led many who despised the 'barbarous' immediate past of the Middle Ages to reject it in spite of its respectable classical origins. Moreover, the spread of printing was by the sixteenth century reducing the need for elaborate memory techniques. But one strand of Renaissance thought made the art of memory its own. 'Through Renaissance Neoplatonism, with its Hermetic core, the art of

memory was once more transformed, into a Hermetic or occult art, and in this form it continued to take a central place in a central European tradition.<sup>23</sup>

The first person to bring this new type of memory system to prominence was Giulio Camillo, who died in 1544. His activities aroused intense interest, especially in France and Italy, for he constructed an elaborate wooden model 'memory theatre', attributing remarkable powers to its workings, but refusing to reveal them to anyone but the king of France. Alas, the secrets never were revealed, but Frances Yates' reconstruction of the theatre reveals it as having been based on the classical theatre as described by the Roman architect Vitruvius, though with the addition of biblical influences, as demonstrated by the inclusion of the seven pillars of Solomon's House of Wisdom ('Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars' – Proverbs, 9.1). From the classical art of memory Camillo took memory-places, and constructed wooden images to put in them. But these images were regarded as talismans which could summon the magical powers of the sun and the planets in accordance with theories derived from Hermetic writings. The utilitarian art of memory has thus been transformed into an occult method whereby man could understand the universe and harness its powers, the leap from an earthly building to the heavens being facilitated by the fact that, though since ancient times the art of memory had usually been based on buildings, a variant of the tradition had sought its memory-places in the signs of the zodiac and the stars.<sup>24</sup>

The other famous sixteenth-century exponent of the Hermetic version of the art of memory was Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). He joined the Dominican Order of friars, which had a long tradition of interest in the art of memory, and he is said to have become highly qualified in the art at an early age. His art of memory evidently owed nothing to the example of Camillo, and differed from it considerably; the classical elements are less prominent, the occult and mystical are dominant. A number of his works were largely concerned with memory, and they show that he saw the art as a Hermetic secret of the distant past primarily significant through the magical powers it could be used to summon. 'As compared with Camillo, he was infinitely more daring in the use of notoriously magical images and signs in the occult memory',<sup>25</sup> for his ambitions as a Hermetic magus who sought to call on the powers of the universe were much greater than those of his predecessor.

Bruno's first work on memory was explicitly Hermetic; it opens with a dialogue in which a treatise on the art of memory is presented by Hermes himself. The art is seen as a revelation of Egyptian knowledge, and the

<sup>23</sup> Yates, *Art of memory*, 128. Yates concentrated on the occult developments of the art of memory, but more orthodox varieties also thrived, and their religious value was stressed by preachers and others, a point well made by Malcolm Guite. 'The art of memory and the art of salvation: the centrality of memory in the sermons of Donne and Andrewes' (lecture to seventeenth-century studies conference at Durham University, 6 July 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Yates, *Art of memory*, 129–72      <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

ultimate aim of the system described was to help the mind of man to ascend to understanding of the divine and to achieve oneness with it. The art has become 'a magico-religious technique, a way of becoming joined to the soul of the world as part of a Hermetic mystery cult'.<sup>26</sup>

Giordano Bruno visited Paris in 1581–3, and his first two works on memory were published there in 1582. He then moved to England, where his third work was printed in 1583,<sup>27</sup> and almost immediately a controversy erupted over his ideas. In the course of this his cause was championed in print by a Scot living in London. Alexander Dickson had been born in Perthshire in 1558 and studied at the University of St Andrews. Early in 1584 he published a treatise based on Bruno's first work, outlining the classical art of memory but setting it in a Hermetic Egyptian context much more openly than Bruno had done. This was quickly followed by two denunciations of the treatise (on religious grounds) by a Cambridge scholar, a defence of his work by Dickson, written under an assumed name, and a final attack from Cambridge. Dickson's efforts on Bruno's behalf were rewarded in dialogues published by the latter in 1584: Dickson appeared in the work as one of the main speakers, being introduced as a 'clever, honest, kind, gentlemanly and faithful friend' dearly loved by Bruno.<sup>28</sup>

It is likely that Bruno and his disciple Alexander Dickson met while the former was in England in 1583–5; but whether they did or not, the episode reveals that the foremost supporter of Bruno in Britain was a Scotsman, and though he was living in England at the time he retained close contacts with his native land. Through him knowledge of the Brunonian art may have spread to Scotland. However, Dickson was not only fascinated by the occult Hermetic variant of the art of memory. A work published in London in 1592 refers to 'the Art of memorie which master Dickson the Scot did teach of late yeres in England, and whereof he hath written a figuratiue and obscure treatise, set downe briefly and in plaine terms according to his owne demonstration, with the especiall vses thereof'. The art described was a version of the classical art without reference to the occult. Dickson made his pupils memorise places and images in a building in sets of 10. The images in each 'decade' were to be somehow linked to help memorise them in the correct order: if a lute was followed by a fire, then the image of the lute should be burning. As in the classical treatises, Dickson urged that images be unusual and striking. Hugh Platt, the pupil who described Dickson's teaching, felt that the art did not live up to the high claims his teacher had made for it. He had charged £1 sterling for a full month's teaching of the 'great and swelling art', but it was almost entirely theoretical: when it came to the practice, Platt complained, Dickson 'coulede scarcely tell which way to bestowe a full house in demonstration'. But

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–230, 259.      <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 201–3, 243.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 266–8; J. Durkan, 'Alexander Dickson and STC 6823', *The Bibliothek. A Scottish Journal of Bibliography and Allied Topics*, iii (1962), 183–5.

Platt nonetheless found the art useful: it never failed him in learning pleasant tales and histories with which to regale others at table, and card players found it valuable for memorising cards played!<sup>29</sup>

With his love of the various forms of the art of memory Dickson combined loyalty to Catholicism and (up to her execution in 1587) to the dethroned Mary Queen of Scots. In the years that followed his venture into scholarly controversy in 1584 he is repeatedly mentioned as being involved in much more hazardous pursuits. He gathered miscellaneous papers (in connection with his studies, he alleged) which included confidential naval and military information about England, and either took or sent this to France. The English believed he had handed it over to the French authorities, but Dickson was later to maintain that this was not the case and that he could recover the papers – if the price was right. Late in 1590 he was reported by English agents to have returned secretly from a mission to the Spanish Netherlands undertaken for the Catholic earls of the north-east of Scotland, perhaps having withdrawn from England as his religious and political sympathies made remaining there dangerous. But English agents continued to monitor his activities. Early in 1592 they were worried by the presence of Dickson (described as master of the art of memory) at the Scottish court, and believed he was about to set out on another mission to the Spanish Netherlands for the Catholic earls; by this time he had become secretary to one of them, the earl of Erroll. Later the same year he was called before the general assembly of the Church of Scotland for attending mass and declaring his approval of the Church of Rome. On his refusal to submit he was imprisoned, and his banishment ordered if he refused to conform. By another account, Dickson of the art of memory, the self-confessed ‘papistical papist’ had been at court for a long time, and certainly he seems to have won the sympathy of King James VI because he was soon free. But his problems were acute enough for him to consider changing his allegiance; in 1593 he is found offering to persuade the Catholic earls to serve the English, or to spy for England in Scotland, Spain or the Spanish Netherlands, in return for a pension. This came to nothing: in 1594 he was still secretary to the Catholic earl of Erroll. But in 1595 when he tried to get money out of James VI in order to bring him the papers concerning English military matters which he had in Paris, James refused on the grounds that Dickson, formerly an agent of the Catholic earls, was now their enemy and friendly with the ministers of the Church of Scotland – presumably the more extreme ministers with whom James was on bad terms. Dickson then turned to the English, offering to get his papers from Paris for them. This ploy also failed, but it seems he eventually landed on his feet, if he is to be identified with the Mr Alexander Dickson who was described as a servant of James VI in 1603. In 1599 he had been preparing a

<sup>29</sup> Yates, *Art of memory*, 284–5; H. Platt, *The jewell house of art and nature* (London, 1592), 81–5.

defence of James VI in reply to an attack on him, an action which may have helped smooth his way to employment at court. He was dead by 1604.<sup>30</sup>

The turbulent life of Alexander Dickson, master of the art of memory, trying desperately to survive in a world of political and religious intrigue in which his Catholic faith made him vulnerable, brought him into repeated contact with court circles in Scotland. Nothing is known of his activities in Scotland relating to the art of memory, but he was widely known to be a master of that art, and the reprinting of his 1584 works on the subject in 1597 must have drawn renewed attention to this aspect of his interests.

Dickson was, moreover, not alone at the Scottish court in taking an interest in the art. William Fowler, poet, man of letters and secretary to the queen, Anne of Denmark, includes in a list of 'My Works' a treatise on 'art of memorye'. Even more intriguingly, a note in Fowler's manuscripts refers to 'teaching your majestie the art of me[m]orye'. Fowler records that in return he was being instructed in poetry by James VI (who not only wrote poetry himself but produced a work on how to write verse in Scots).<sup>31</sup>

Dickson and Fowler, the two Scots protagonists of the art of memory, may well have been acquainted from their youth. Dickson had attended St Leonard's College, St Andrews, graduating in 1577, and it is all but certain that the William Fowler who graduated from the same college the following year was the future poet and secretary.<sup>32</sup>

Thus William Schaw, master of works, worked at a court where the art of memory was known and even the king took an interest in it. His connections with William Fowler, in professional terms, were close; he was the queen's chamberlain, Fowler was her secretary. Both men accompanied the king on his Danish jaunt of 1589–90. One glimpse of their relationship and work with and for the king is provided by an account written by Fowler of the baptism of James' eldest son, Prince Henry, in 1594. Noticing, rather late in the day, that the Chapel Royal in Stirling Castle 'was ruinous, and too little' James ordered

<sup>30</sup> Durkan, 'Alexander Dickson', 185–90; *CSPS, 1589–93*, 415, 493, 626, 686–7; *CSPS, 1593–5*, 98, 377, 598, 609, 639, 674–6; *HMC 9: Salisbury Mss*, iv (1892), 205–6; T. Thomson (ed.), *Acts and proceedings of the general assemblies of the kirk of Scotland* (3 vols., Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, Edinburgh, 1839–45), ii, 788, 789; D. Calderwood, *History of the Church of Scotland* (8 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842–9), vi, 212, 214; J. Colville, *Original letters* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1858), 106, 204. Dickson also worked on a treatise on prudence, appropriately for a master of memory, BL, Harl. Ms 6866, ff. 52–72.

<sup>31</sup> H. W. Meikle, J. Craigie and J. Purves (eds.), *The works of William Fowler* (3 vols., Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, vol. i 1914, vol. ii 1936, vol. iii 1940), ii, 3; iii, xixn. James VI's *The essayes of a prentice, in the divine Art of poesie* (Edinburgh, 1584) ends with a 'Table of some obscure words and their significations'. Among the words the young king considered obscure was Hermes, 'An Aegiptian philosopher soon after the tyme of Moyes, confessed in his Dialogues one only God to be Creator of all things': J. Craigie (ed.), *The poems of James VI of Scotland* (2 vols., Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1955–8), i, 92.

<sup>32</sup> *Works of William Fowler*, iii, xi; J. M. Anderson (ed.), *Early records of the University of St Andrews* (SHS, 1926), 283, 285.



'that the old chappell should be vtterlie rased, and a new one erected in the same place, that shuld be more large, long and glorious, to entertaine the great number of strangers expected'. This snap decision meant that the chapel was not ready for the baptism when the foreign ambassadors and others assembled for the event: indeed the king would not even fix a date for the baptism, though the ambassadors began to grumble that they would have to leave if they were to get home before winter set in. The building work was urged on by the king himself, who 'had the supply of the greatest number of Artificers in the whol Cuntries, conuened there, of all the crafts for that seruice, and his Maiesties owne person daily ouerseer, with large and liberall payment'.<sup>33</sup> There is no specific mention of the master of works being present, but it is inconceivable that he would have been absent; royal building works were his responsibility, and this was work of great urgency with the king himself 'on site'. Arrangements for the magnificent pageants which accompanied the baptism (when it did at last take place) were entrusted by the king to two men, one of them being William Fowler – though disappointingly some of the events planned had to be cancelled 'by reason, that the artisans were employed in other businesse', doubtless hijacked by William Schaw for last-minute work on the chapel. At the baptism itself Schaw had an important role in his capacity as master of ceremonies.<sup>34</sup>

On the occasion of the prince's baptism William Schaw can be demonstrated to have worked closely with the king and William Fowler, both of whom were interested in the art of memory. Doubtless such close contacts between the three men also existed at the royal court at other times, and it is more than possible that they discussed the art. Schaw may have first acquired his own interest through written treatises, or during his visit to Paris with Lord Seton in 1584 (immediately after Giordano Bruno had stayed in the city and published his first works on the art there). The Scottish court in the 1590s was clearly a place in which such interests could be fostered and developed. Though Schaw worked in the queen's household alongside Fowler the two men were separated by religion, for Fowler was a staunch protestant. Schaw may, therefore, have found a closer affinity intellectually with Alexander Dickson, his fellow Catholic. No direct contact between the two men can be traced, but it would strain credulity more to suppose that the two men did not know each other, since they moved in similar circles, than to assume that they did. And even if Schaw's interest in the art of memory pre-dated meeting Dickson, it would be remarkable if he did not discuss the subject with a man commonly identified as master of the art of memory, and well known for his publications on the subject, when he

<sup>33</sup> *Works of William Fowler*, ii, 169–70, 171. See RCAHMS, *Stirlingshire*, i, 211–13 for the rebuilding of the chapel.

<sup>34</sup> *Works of William Fowler*, iii, 172, 176, 181.

decided that knowledge of the art should be a necessary qualification for members of masonic lodges.

Of the many variants of the art of memory, ancient, Medieval and Renaissance, which was it that William Schaw wished Scottish masons to be skilled in? The likely connection with Dickson, and the fact that other elements of the Hermetic tradition are present in the emergence of freemasonry at this time must surely indicate that it was at least influenced by the occult, Hermetic art of Giordano Bruno – who, after eight years of imprisonment was to be burnt in Rome for heresy within two months of the issue of the Second Schaw Statutes on 28 December 1599. If it was in part Bruno's art that Schaw introduced to the masons, then he was attempting to implant elements of a secret Hermetic cult into the mason craft, with the art of memory intended to lead to spiritual advancement and knowledge of the divine. But though this aspect of the art of memory was almost certainly present in Schaw's mind, it must surely have been other, older aspects of the art of memory which led him to believe it had special relevance for the mason craft.

It is conceivable that the art of memory, in some form, was used by Scottish masons before 1599, for though it can usually only be studied today through the works of the scholars who wrote about it, it was used by men at all levels of society: indeed, especially once the printed word began to spread, it would have been potentially more valuable to the illiterate than to the literate. It is recorded as being used by an Italian singer in 1435, and may have been used widely in the oral transmission of traditional lore.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it was of course particularly suitable for helping in the transmission of material regarded as too secret to be committed to writing. It is even possible that the reason why, though some at least of the contents of the Old Charges were known in Scotland by this time (as the First Schaw Statutes show), there are no Scottish manuscript versions until about half a century later is that the Old Charges were regarded in Scotland as too secret to be committed to paper.

The features of the classical art of memory which made it seem particularly relevant to the mason craft are obvious. The art was based on moving through an elaborate building, and it was an art which was believed to give great powers to the adept by vastly increasing the capacity of the human memory. Thus this powerful art, which like other arts believed to enhance human capabilities could easily take on occult overtones, was in a sense based on the skills of the architect/mason. Frances Yates, though not aware of the reference in the Second Schaw Statutes to the art of memory, suggested a connection between the art, which used an architectural framework in the search for wisdom, and freemasonry. She suggested that in England 'the Hermetic form of the art of memory perhaps goes more [than in Italy] underground, becoming associated with secret Catholic sympathisers, or with

<sup>35</sup> P. Burke, *Popular culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), 144, 309 n. 67.

existing secret religious groups, or with incipient Rosicrucianism or Freemasonry'. Masonic historians

have to leave as an unsolved question the problem of the origin of 'speculative' masonry, with its symbolic use of columns, arches, and other architectural features, and of geometrical symbolism, as the framework within which it presents a moral teaching and a mystical outlook directed towards the divine architect of the universe. I would think that the answer to this problem may be suggested by the history of the art of memory, that the Renaissance occult memory . . . may be the real source of a Hermetic and mystical movement which used, not the real architecture of 'operative' masonry, but the imaginary or 'speculative' architecture of the art of memory as the vehicle of its teachings.<sup>36</sup>

This is perhaps too sweeping; in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, obsessed with symbolism and imagery, any craft was likely to develop symbolism based on its tools or products, so to see masonic symbolism as arising entirely from the Renaissance art of memory is unconvincing. But through the Second Schaw Statutes the art of memory can now be directly linked to the development of freemasonry, and the occult overtones the art had acquired contributed to the development of masonic secrecy and ritual.

What did Schaw and the masons use the art of memory for? The general striving for mystical enlightenment is doubtless present, but, as has already been suggested, it was probably also employed for more mundane purposes such as memorising the Old Charges. The two are not entirely separable, however: the search for knowledge of the divine was based on Hermetic theories of ancient Egyptian knowledge, and Hermes and Egypt have an important place in the Old Charges. Finally, and most excitingly of all for understanding the emergence of freemasonry, it will be argued in the next chapter that the seventeenth-century masonic lodge may have been in one sense a memory temple, an imaginary building with places and images fixed in it as aids to memorising the secrets of the Mason Word and the rituals of initiation. William Schaw's injunction that masons must be tested in the art of memory and the science thereof has been read by generations of masonic historians but the significance of it has never been noticed. Yet that single short phrase provides a key to understanding major aspects of the origins of freemasonry, linking the operative mason craft with the mighty strivings of the Hermetic magus.

## The Rosicrucians

Hermetic influence was present from the start in the 'Schaw' masonic lodges which emerge after 1598, both in the form of the general impetus the

<sup>36</sup> Yates, *Art of memory*, 286, 304. For some discussion of the influence of Hermeticism and the Hermetic art of memory on the design of actual buildings see R. Taylor, 'Hermeticism and mystical architecture in the Society of Jesus', *Baroque art. The Jesuit contribution*, ed. R. Wittkower and I. B. Jaffe (New York, 1972), 63–97.

interest in the movement must have given to organisations like the lodges to claim secret wisdom and to aspire to purification as a necessary precursor to the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, and more specifically through the Hermeticised art of memory. A further influence began to effect the lodges from the second decade of the seventeenth century, Rosicrucianism, a specifically protestant variant of Hermeticism with its own mythology.

The Rosicrucians took their name from the supposed founder of their order or brotherhood, Christian Rosencreutz, or 'Rosy Cross'. The rosy cross has clearly many levels of meaning – as with any Renaissance symbol, the more different meanings that could be found in it the better, so to look for a single meaning which excludes all others is a mistake. Obviously the cross stressed the Christianity of the movement. It would also immediately recall the coat of arms adopted by Martin Luther, a rose with a cross emerging from it,<sup>37</sup> thus specifying that the movement was a protestant one which strove for religious reform in the tradition of Luther – though it was not narrowly and exclusively bound to Lutheranism. The rosy cross also referred to – or quickly came to be regarded as referring to – England, with the red cross of St George as its flag and the red rose as a royal symbol inherited from the Tudor dynasty. This was the meaning that Frances Yates concentrated on in her book on *The Rosicrucian enlightenment* (though she indicated that the rose probably also had alchemical significance),<sup>38</sup> for she interpreted the movement as being primarily dedicated to advancing the protestant cause, with King James VI of Scotland and I of England as the champion of the protestantism who would use the power of the newly united Great Britain to intervene in Europe and turn back the advancing tide of Catholic Counter-Reformation. But in concentrating on this she largely ignored another aspect of the symbol which is intimately linked to the nature of the movement.

The rose, and especially the red rose, had been from ancient times the symbol of Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love. It was symbolic of love, and making love was something private and not to be discussed openly: Cupid therefore dedicated the rose to Harpocrates, the god of silence.<sup>39</sup> Hence the red rose of Aphrodite became a general symbol of silence and secrecy, and perhaps also of invisibility. Anything spoken *sub rosa*, under the rose, was confidential. Those who became involved in the search for the mysterious Rosicrucian Brotherhood were well aware of this meaning. A French pamphlet of 1623 related that in Germany (which was where Rosicrucianism began) inn-keepers hung roses in their taverns as a reminder to customers that by convention what was heard there was secret.<sup>40</sup> Sir Thomas Browne explained that the rose was an emblem of silence 'to conceal the pranks of

<sup>37</sup> A. E. Waite, *The brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London, 1924), 101.

<sup>38</sup> Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 267.

<sup>39</sup> Waite, *Rosy Cross*, 85–7.

<sup>40</sup> Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 141 cites the 1623 French reference, but dismisses it without discussion as 'rather an interesting suggestion'.

Venerly' and cited the German practice 'which over the Table describeth a Rose in the cieling'.<sup>41</sup> Invisibility and secrecy were to be identified as hallmarks of the supposed Rosicrucian controversy, and surely the rosy cross symbolises this Christian secrecy above all else.

The Rosicrucian movement emerged from previous obscurity in a work known as the *Fama* which was published in Germany in 1614. It had been circulating in Germany at least since 1610, and evidently originated in the work of Lutheran esoteric mystics at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Publication transferred the *Fama* from the underground realm of secretive mystics to the full glare of public scrutiny, and it was quickly followed by publication of the other key document for the study of Rosicrucianism, the *Confessio*, in 1615. The *Fama* aimed at, as its full title announced, the 'Universal and General Reformation of the whole wide world':

The *Fama* opens with a thrilling call to attention, that trumpet call which was to echo throughout Germany, reverberating thence through Europe. God has revealed to us in these latter days a more perfect knowledge, both of his Son, Jesus Christ, and of nature. He has raised men endued with great wisdom who might renew all the arts and reduce them all to perfection, so that man 'might understand his own nobleness, and why he is called Microcosmus, and how far his knowledge extendeth into nature'. If the learned were united they might now collect out of the Book of Nature a perfect method of all arts.<sup>43</sup>

The movement which was to culminate in this enlightenment had been begun (the *Fama* alleged) by Christian Rosencreutz, who had travelled widely in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in search of knowledge. He had founded the Rosicrucian Order, centred on a building known as the House of the Holy Spirit. This secret order had continued to exist since the founder's death, but (in the great tradition of lost secrets of the past being rediscovered) much of his esoteric knowledge which could have transformed the world had been forgotten. Then, in 1604, the vault in which he had been buried had been discovered in the House of the Holy Spirit. The vault, into which the sun never shone but which was illuminated by an inner sun (the inner sun of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment), contained through geometric figures and inscriptions a great store of knowledge. Its discovery was the signal for general reformation: the opening of the door of the vault, revealing the light of the inner sun, was the opening of a new door for Europe, leading to great spiritual and other discoveries and marking a turning-point in history.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Works*, ed. G. Keynes, new edn (4 vols., London, 1964), ii, 385–6; J. Aubrey, *Three prose works*, ed. J. Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell, 1972), 295. Aubrey copied this explanation from Browne. For a Scots use of the term 'under the rose' in this sense see [J. Corbet], *The epistle congratulatory of Lysimachus Nicanor of the Societie of Jesu, to the covenanters in Scotland* (1641), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Montgomery, *Cross and crucible*, i, 202–4, 209–10.

<sup>43</sup> Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 72–3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–5.

The fact that Rosicrucianism was largely based on Hermeticism is obvious. The great claims of massive achievements which were within man's grasp, the holy quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment based on the rediscovery of a lost past, the cult of secrecy: all these are present. But some aspects of the central Hermetic tradition have been abandoned. The appeal to ancient Egypt, worrying to many Christians even if Egyptian religion was seen as a precursor of Christianity, has gone, being replaced by vague references to Christian Rosencreutz having absorbed the ancient wisdom of the East. The emphasis of many Hermetic writers on the openly occult and on the existence of complex orders of spiritual beings, perhaps especially difficult for protestants to accept, has also disappeared. These changes reflect the other main influence which shaped the Rosicrucian literature, Lutheranism. In one sense the movement was 'an eccentric expression of the outlook which had been developed by the Lutheran mystics of the sixteenth century'.<sup>45</sup>

The publication of the *Fama* and the *Confessio* aroused intense excitement, for they appealed very directly to the mood of the age and met its needs. Hermeticists and the great claims of more orthodox religious reformers had produced an atmosphere in which men were filled with expectation of great events which would bring profound changes, either through spiritual enlightenment bringing oneness with the divine and control over nature, or through the end of the world and the second coming of Christ at the climax of the great battle between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist. There was much desperation in the mood of the age. Reformation had destroyed old religious certainties and created rival new ones, with immense cultural and political consequences as well as religious ones. Renaissance developments in thought and culture, the discovery of the New World, and technological progress might be seen as positive achievements, but they were also profoundly unsettling, calling into question accepted beliefs of all sorts. There was a feeling that the whole world was in a state of flux, on the point of disintegration, and men looked desperately for some new way ahead, which would save mankind from uncertainty and despair, putting an end to instability.<sup>46</sup> Part of the appeal of the vast claims of Hermeticism, offering men spiritual advancement and control over the forces of nature, was that the problems facing man were perceived as being so vast that only a solution on an epic scale could solve them. In this mood of heightened expectancy and frantic searchings for solutions, the Rosicrucian tracts of 1614–15 were seized upon with enormous enthusiasm. The Hermetic search for wisdom through study of nature and ancient Egyptian mysteries was an exciting one, but long established and not noticeably successful (except in the eyes of those

<sup>45</sup> C. Webster, 'Macaria: Samuel Hartlib and the great reformation', *Acta comeniana. Revue internationale des études comeniologiques*, 2, xxvi (Prague, 1970), 157.

<sup>46</sup> For this theme of the sixteenth century as a period of profound and increasing uncertainty and disquiet see T. K. Rabb, *The struggle for stability in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1975).

involved). Rosicrucianism added novelty by claiming that a brotherhood, hidden from the rest of mankind, had long existed, and already had the knowledge on which to base enlightenment, world reform, and religious reconciliation, rediscovered in the tomb of Christian Rosencreutz.

In reality there was, it is all but certain, no Rosicrucian Brotherhood, either newly founded or long established. The tracts were elaborate allegories based on Hermeticism, Lutheranism, the cult of the esoteric and of secret societies, and the general mood of expectancy arising from fear and uncertainty as to the future. Though the tracts claimed to reveal the existence of the brotherhood, it was stressed that its membership and the location of its headquarters would remain secret; the brotherhood was an 'invisible' one. But publication sparked off an extraordinary search, centred on Germany, for the fraternity, and many clamoured to join it. The tracts were studied intensely for clues as to the brotherhood and its secrets. Soon the aspirations of the supposed Rosicrucians became closely associated in many people's minds with hopes for a protestant crusade in Europe. Frederick V, the Elector Palatine, emerged as a protestant champion, and in 1613 (just before the Rosicrucian excitement burst on Europe) he had married Elizabeth, daughter of James VI and I whose greatest kingdom was England, the land of the red cross and the red rose. When Frederick was chosen king of Bohemia in 1619, to rescue the country from Catholic and Habsburg control, the crucial showdown between Catholic and protestant was regarded by many as having begun, and it was assumed that James, king of the red rose and cross, would mobilise the resources of Great Britain to intervene to support his son-in-law and protestantism. But the great clash between good and evil failed to take place. The cautious James resolved not to intervene in Frederick's foolhardy venture, and the latter was driven out both of Bohemia and the Palatinate. The protestant cause, in the eyes of some a cause intimately linked with that of the Rosicrucians, had failed.

The reaction was one of disillusionment, and publication of Rosicrucian literature and interest in the mysterious brotherhood collapsed in Germany in about 1621. In 1623 Paris was startled by a rumour that the invisible brethren had come to town, but this was short-lived, and the news had not aroused rejoicing but something approaching panic, for (perhaps not surprisingly in view of the strong anti-Catholic element in the Rosicrucian tracts) the fraternity was suspected of being a diabolical one.<sup>47</sup> But though Rosicrucianism (in the sense of the search for the supposed brotherhood and study of its tracts) declined, disappearing from the centre of the stage, it nonetheless survived, especially among alchemists who added its lore to that already gleaned from the mainstream of Hermeticism.

The great Rosicrucian controversy of the second decade of the seventeenth century had aroused relatively little interest in Britain, and the silence

<sup>47</sup> Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 136–7, 139–41.

of the surviving evidence casts doubts on Frances Yates' contention that the identification of the red cross and rose of England and the rosy cross was central to the whole Rosicrucian movement. It undoubtedly became an element of the movement in German eyes, but the English were unresponsive. The Rosicrucian legend had, however, been absorbed into the culture of the day. In 1626 Ben Jonson used Rosicrucian themes in one of his masques, displaying considerable knowledge of the movement, and in 1627 Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* presented a utopian dream of an ideal scientific and religious society based on an order of priest-scientists pursuing the search for knowledge, a dream which included adaptations of many Rosicrucian motifs.<sup>48</sup>

Knowledge of Rosicrucianism in Scotland is demonstrated by the fact that Lord Balcarres, the collector of alchemical manuscripts, also collected Rosicrucian works. Among them were translations into Scots of the *Fama* and the *Confessio* in his own hand dated 1633. Balcarres' daughter married Sir Robert Moray, the well-known soldier, politician and scientist, who had been initiated into the Lodge of Edinburgh and created an elaborate symbolism for his mason mark. Moray later became the patron of Thomas Vaughan, the English alchemist who first published an English edition of the two Rosicrucian tracts in 1652. Did Vaughan obtain his text from a manuscript of Scottish origin supplied by Moray? Vaughan indicated in his preface that he did not know who had made the translation that he published, but revealed that it had been given to him by 'a Gentleman more learned than my self, and I should name him here, but that he expects neither thy thanks or mine', and the self-effacing gentleman may well be Moray.<sup>49</sup> The text of the 1652 edition is very closely related to the 1633 Scottish manuscript, but is not descended directly from it. The 1633 version is clearly itself a copy rather than the original text of the translation, as is shown by blanks being left in it for words the copyist could not read, and some phrases being erroneously omitted, and some of these defects were remedied by the 1652 edition. One possible scenario is that Balcarres, having obtained the original manuscript of the translation, himself copied it into one of the volumes of tracts he was compiling, and that he subsequently gave the original to Moray who passed it on to Vaughan. Vaughan then anglicised this Scots translation and published it.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–7, 163–7, 182; B. Jonson, *Works* (11 vols., Oxford, 1923–52), vii, 708, 710–12, 722.

<sup>49</sup> A. Rudrum (ed.), *The works of Thomas Vaughan* (Oxford, 1984), 479, 714. Eugenius Philalethes [T. Vaughan], *The Fame and Confession of the fraternity of the R.C.* (London, 1652), sig. A3v. A facsimile of the 1652 edition was published with an introduction by F. N. Pryce by the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (Margate, 1923). Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 282–306 reprints the 1652 text but omits Vaughan's preface.

<sup>50</sup> Pryce, *Fama*, 3–8, argued that the original English translation was English, and that in copying it Balcarres 'Scotticised' the text. That he worked from an English original is held to be proved by the fact that there are inconsistencies in spelling, the 'original' English



The existence of Scots and English translations of the leading Rosicrucian tracts demonstrates interest in Britain in the movement, though an interest that developed rather late and, coming years after the great excitement generated by the original publication of the tracts in Germany had collapsed, was relatively limited and sober. What evidence is there to link Rosicrucianism and freemasonry? Direct evidence, as in so much of the argument of this book about a movement which sought to keep its most significant activities secret, is limited. But Sir Robert Moray, the most interesting Scottish freemason of the century, was also reputed to be much involved with Rosicrucian matters; and south of the Border Elias Ashmole, who provides the closest English parallel to Moray in the development of masonry, being initiated in 1646, shared Moray's Rosicrucian interests. Of course it could be argued that this merely demonstrates that, not surprisingly, the same type of person was attracted to the two entirely unconnected movements by their esoteric natures.

The same negative objection can be made to the evidential value of the fact that the first ever surviving reference to the Mason Word, which probably dates from the early 1630s, couples it with Rosicrucianism:

For we be brethren of the *Rosie Crosse*;  
We have the *Mason Word* and second sight.

Might this not simply be a linking of three things regarded as mysterious and occult with no implication of any real connection between them? It might (though alternative interpretations will be put forward in the next chapter), but even if the direct evidence is inconclusive, the circumstantial is very strong. Just 15 years before the Rosicrucian explosion of 1614 William Schaw had reworked the remnants of older masonic organisation in Scotland into a lodge system of secret societies, and had (to a greater or lesser extent) injected into these lodges Hermetic influences. Other aspects of Renaissance thought (to be discussed in the next section) led to the conclusion that the mason craft was far superior to all others, with a central place in the advancement of knowledge – and of course knowledge and spiritual enlightenment were inextricably linked. Surely masons and their lodges, accepting such a picture of their role, would immediately see the supposed Rosicrucian Brotherhood

spellings being retained in places. But this may result from the confused situation in the early seventeenth century when Scots was fast declining as a written language. Many documents contain a mixture of Scots and English forms. Thus the inconsistencies of the 1633 version may be a symptom of the cultural confusion of Balcarres or the author of the lost original. Another English translation of the *Fama* and *Confessio* exists among the papers of Elias Ashmole (Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 236–7, 282). Yates argued that this probably pre-dated the Scottish 1633 text, but this rests solely on the judgement that the handwriting is 'certainly not later than the reign of Charles I'. But two-thirds of Charles' reign came after 1633, and the conclusion that the English text pre-dates the Scottish seems largely to rest on an anglocentric assumption that nothing can appear in Scotland until it is already known in England.

as being in many ways similar to their own? Though not actually members of the invisible fraternity, they would surely have seen themselves as engaged in the same great quest. The idea that working stonemasons assigned themselves such an exalted role, as equivalents of the scholar-priests of the invisible fraternity, may seem so ludicrous that it should be rejected out of hand. But the promotion of the architect to a central position in the sphere of knowledge was a very real phenomenon, and the identification within the mason craft of the architect and the mason was centuries old. Placed in this context, the idea that masons could have seen themselves as part of the Rosicrucian quest becomes not just plausible but quite a likely development, and one that would add impetus to the development of the esoteric side of the craft and to the vast claims made for it.

There is, moreover, one specific reference in the *Fama* which could be seen as directly linking the craft to the Rosicrucians. The tomb of Christian Rosencreutz, the opening of the door of which symbolised the dawn of a new age for mankind, had been found by accident. But the accident happened because one of the brothers of the order had started to make alterations to its headquarters, the House of the Holy Spirit, 'he being a good *Architect*'.<sup>51</sup> Thus on one level the discovery of the tomb had been an accident; but, on another, it had taken place because an architect had been exercising his skills. Had there been no architect among the brothers, there would have been no new age dawning. It may be objected that this is to read too much into one casual phrase, but presumably the phrase was there to serve some purpose, and the architect is such a prominent figure in Renaissance thought that it is hard to believe his skills were ascribed at random in the Rosicrucian allegory to the brother who found the tomb. Anyone reading the *Fama* who was already in the mason trade, or who had heard that the mason craft in Scotland possessed secrets and a secret organisation, could hardly fail to seize on the reference.

Thus the Rosicrucian episode may have played a part in directing the attention of the educated upper ranks of society in Scotland to the masons and their lodges. It seems likely that one of the attractions of the Rosicrucian literature was that it could be seen as changing the nature of the Hermetic quest. The Hermetic adept in the past had sought access to the secrets of the universe through the unlocking of the secrets of nature both directly and through the mystical writings associated with Hermes Trismegistus. This was an awe-inspiring task which men had struggled with for generations. The Rosicrucian quest for ultimate secrets was infinitely more simple. All that had to be done was to find the invisible brethren, for they already possessed the knowledge that all sought so frantically. The immediate search became one for a secret society, and this was something that many more people could see

<sup>51</sup> Vaughan, *Fama*, 20; Yates, *Rosicrucian enlightenment*, 290.

themselves as contributing to than the struggle to build up knowledge piecemeal by studying nature and hieroglyphics.

Rosicrucianism burst on a Europe already sensitised through Hermeticism to the centrality in human endeavour of the great quest for lost knowledge and to the idea of secret societies being involved in the search. The Rosicrucian movement provided a simplified variant of the quest, sparking off an intense hunt for a secret society, with the Rosicrucian tracts minutely scrutinised for clues as to how to find it. In Scotland a glaringly obvious candidate was the masonic lodges already influenced by Hermeticism, claiming possession of arcane secrets. The lack of references in non-masonic sources to lodges indicates that an attempt was made to keep their existence secret: if this is so, it can only have added plausibility to the idea of identifying them in some way with the 'invisible' Rosicrucian Order. Any such suspicions that the lodges were connected to the invisible brotherhood would seem to be confirmed by the happy clue in the *Fama*; the accidental archaeologist who had uncovered the secrets of the tomb of Christian Rosencreutz had done so because he was an architect, and thus a mason.

When from the 1630s onwards a trickle of gentlemen began to join the masonic lodges, did they do so because they hoped to find Rosicrucian enlightenment in them? If so, they must have been sorely disappointed. But it is likely that the whole Hermetic and Rosicrucian atmosphere helped to draw them towards the lodges as secret societies possessing at least Hermetic and Rosicrucian overtones, where they could feel, through initiation and access to the lore of the Old Charges and the Mason Word, that they were at least gaining access to the fringes of the world of the occult search. If the invisible brethren remained stubbornly invisible, then the semi-visible masonic lodges were better than nothing. Even when few retained any real hope of discovering the real Rosicrucians, by joining a lodge a man could declare his faith in the ideals scholar-priests were supposed to have stood for.

As with Hermeticism in general and with the art of memory in particular, Frances Yates suggested the connection of freemasonry with Rosicrucianism. She speculated that in later sixteenth-century England 'an idea of something like what was later the masonic idea' had developed and later moved abroad and influenced Rosicrucianism. Therefore 'One should look for possibly masonic mystiques among the writings of the Rosicrucian group.'<sup>52</sup> This suggestion was partly inspired by the fact that the writings of the Elizabethan magus, John Dee, did have an influence on the Rosicrucians, and that he had an interesting part in the contemporary trend towards idealising the architect. But though the spiritual and alchemical ideas of Dee were well known on the continent – he travelled widely in Germany in the 1580s – the interest in architects relates to a much earlier part of Dee's career, and there is no evidence that he developed it in any 'masonic' way. There is, moreover, no

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

evidence whatever for any 'masonic' developments in Elizabethan England, and the concept of such ideas evolving there, being exported to the continent, and subsequently returning in a Rosicrucian guise seems unnecessarily elaborate.

There is of course evidence of very notable 'masonic' developments in Scotland in the 1590s, but it seems highly improbable that they were exported at that time or had anything to do with the origins of Rosicrucianism. It is far more likely that any influences connecting the two movements worked in the opposite direction. Emerging freemasonry did not help to form Rosicrucianism, but Rosicrucianism may have influenced the early development of freemasonry, adding a new strand of ideals and beliefs to those already present in the Scottish mason craft. To the already mixed bag of masonic lore – the myth of Egypt, Solomon's Temple, the Hermetic quest, the art of memory – was added the myth of the secret order of invisible brethren, dedicated to seeking ultimate truths and to understanding the mysterious universe.

### **The architect, the mathematician and the manual arts**

By the late Middle Ages, as seen in chapter 2, masons (in England at least) were boasting that the art of masonry was the same as that of the architect, and that it could be identified with geometry. This claim was known to a number of writers with no connection with the mason craft,<sup>53</sup> but it was not emphasised or held to be of particular significance except by the masons themselves. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the situation changed dramatically, for the architect came to occupy a remarkably exalted position in Renaissance thought. This came about largely through the acceptance of the claims made for the architect by the Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, who had served under Julius Caesar as a military engineer. Knowledge of Vitruvius had not disappeared entirely in the Middle Ages, and the claims of the English Old Charges concerning the importance of masonry doubtless reflected the influence of his ideas: the oldest surviving manuscript of Vitruvius' *De Architectura* (eighth century) is English, and there are several later Medieval English texts and summaries of them. But it was in fifteenth-century Italy that Vitruvius first became a dominating influence, first through manuscript texts of his work and then, after 1486, through printed versions. By the mid sixteenth century Vitruvius was available in Latin, Italian and German, and treatises based on his work were common.<sup>54</sup> Understanding of the Vitruvian concept of the architect and of the techniques and styles of architecture detailed by Vitruvius were held not only to be relevant to the education of architects, but to be essential elements in the education of a

<sup>53</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Vitruvius, *On architecture*, ed. F. Granger (2 vols., London, 1931–4), i, xxxii–xxxiv.

gentleman. Absorbing Vitruvian ideas was seen as of central importance in seeking to achieve the Renaissance ideal of re-creating the classical world.

As Vitruvius' concept of the architect was vital to the changing perceptions of the mason craft both by its own members and by outsiders which helped to lead to the emergence of freemasonry, it is worth quoting at length from the first chapter of the first book of his *De Architectura*:

The architect should be equipped with knowledge of many branches of study and varied kinds of learning, for it is by his judgement that all work done by the other arts is put to the test. This knowledge is the child of practice and theory. Practice is the continuous and regular exercise of employment where manual work is done with any necessary material according to the design of a drawing. Theory, on the other hand, is the ability to demonstrate and explain the productions of dexterity on the principles of proportion.

It follows, therefore, that architects who have aimed at acquiring manual skill without scholarship have never been able to reach a position of authority to correspond to their pains, while those who relied only upon theories and scholarship were obviously hunting the shadows, not the substance. But those who have a thorough knowledge of both, like men armed at all points, have the sooner attained their object and carried authority with them . . .

Let [the architect] be educated, skilful with the pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.

Vitruvius then explained why it was that the architect required all these diverse skills. He needed general education to write treatises, drawing to produce sketches of his works, geometry for preparing plans and learning the right use of rulers, compasses, squares, levels and plumb-lines. Optics was necessary for planning the placing of windows to light the building, and arithmetic was essential for measurements and for working out costings. History enabled the architect to explain the significance of various traditional and symbolic motifs employed in the design of buildings. Philosophy made him 'courteous, just and honest without avariciousness', and the study of physics (necessary to understand the flow of water and air currents) was part of philosophy. Knowledge of music was needed for constructing theatres, building water organs, and adjusting the tension of ropes on machines of war (such as catapults) correctly. The architect must understand medicine so as to be able to assess the healthiness of proposed building sites and water supplies, while law enabled him to draw up contracts correctly. Finally, astronomy assisted in the alignment of buildings, and without knowledge of the heavens 'he will not be able to have any comprehension of the theory of sundials'.

Consequently, since this study is so vast in extent, embellished and enriched as it is with many different kinds of learning, I think that men have no right to profess

themselves architects hastily, without having climbed from boyhood the steps of these studies and thus nursed by knowledge of many arts and sciences, having reached the heights of the holy ground of architecture.<sup>55</sup>

Another translation of this last phase renders it more literally; the culmination of study of the arts and sciences which comprised architecture was reaching 'the temple of architecture at the top'.<sup>56</sup>

The Vitruvian architect was thus not the specialist practitioner of a single art, but the master of all the arts central to human knowledge, including the mathematical arts. Architecture, moreover, was the culmination of all other studies, and therefore superior to them. The architect was the Renaissance ideal, the Universal Man.

By the late sixteenth century the Vitruvian concept of the architect was well known in Britain. In 1563 John Shute wrote a treatise influenced by Vitruvius which declared that 'Architectur . . . ys of all artes, the most noble and excellent, contayning in it sundry sciences and knowlaiges wherwyth it is furnished.'<sup>57</sup> John Dee was translating Vitruvius when he wrote in 1570 of architecture as 'a Science garnished with many doctrines, and diuers Instructions: by whose iudgement, all workes by other workmen finished, are iudged', and he cited the Vitruvian list of arts necessary to the architect.<sup>58</sup> The status of the architect was further heightened by his identification with the mathematician at a time when the mathematical sciences were increasingly regarded as providing certainty in knowledge as a key to understanding and controlling nature. John Dee sung the praises of the architect in his preface to Euclid, claiming that 'all the mathematical arts subserve Architecture as their queen'.<sup>59</sup> And, as any mason who had ever heard the Old Charges knew, Euclid was one of the founders of the mason craft in ancient Egypt.

The concept of the architect/mathematician became particularly important in the later sixteenth century through increasing confidence in the potential powers of man over nature. The dominant tradition in the ancient world had been that man could not imitate or dominate nature, and indeed should not attempt to do so. This attitude had lingered on in the Middle Ages, leading to fears that seeking to compete with nature was attempting to compete with God. Interfering with nature, trying to change it, was regarded as only possible through magic. Therefore not only alchemists but 'mechanics' in general were sometimes viewed with deep suspicion as being

<sup>55</sup> Vitruvius, *The ten books on architecture*, ed. M. H. Morgan (Harvard, 1914), 3–10.

<sup>56</sup> Vitruvius, *On architecture*, i, 17.

<sup>57</sup> J. Shute, *The first and chief groundes of architecture* (London, 1563), Bii, v.

<sup>58</sup> J. Dee, *The mathematical preface to the Elements of geometry of Megara (1570)*, ed. A. G. Debus (New York, 1975), table appended to the preface; P. French, *John Dee. The world of an Elizabethan magus* (London, 1972), 57–8.

<sup>59</sup> Dee, *Preface*; F. A. Yates, *Theatre of the world* (London, 1969), 20–41, 190–7.

in danger of challenging God. Moreover, to the ancient philosophers attempting to change nature was not only potentially blasphemous, it was not respectable. The philosopher's role was to seek to understand the universe through the mind, by rational thought, and conclusions reached were not to be tested in practice by experimentation, for that involved manual labour. By definition the manual trades were servile, to be despised by the free-born philosopher, and nothing useful for the advancement of knowledge could be gained from them. Plato rebuked friends who tried to use instruments to demonstrate theses in geometry for spoiling the beauty of the art by abandoning the intellect in favour of despicable manual work. Plato regarded architecture as the least reprehensible of the manual trades, as it involved the greatest use of mathematics and the architect constructed machines for war (war being entirely respectable): nonetheless, he indicated that you would not want your daughter to marry an architect.

When the great revival of interest in classical learning took place in the Renaissance this anti-technological bias was a potential burden. One of the reasons that Renaissance interest in doing or 'operating', rather than just thinking, centred on the architect was that his trade had, in Vitruvius, a classical authority to grant it full respectability, and that even Plato had given it a half-hearted blessing. Moreover, the Vitruvian definition of the architect was conveniently wide, so it could be used to justify involvement in a variety of trades.

The ancient world's attitude to manual work was also weakened by Christian emphasis on the value of labour, and as time passed a major new challenge to old prejudices separating the theorist from the practitioner arose from developments that proved the limitations of the ancients. The highest ambition of the early Renaissance had been that the classical world should live again. To equal that golden age of the past, regarded as immensely superior to the present, had been an awe-inspiring prospect. But by the sixteenth century there was an increasing realisation that man was in fact surpassing the ancients in a number of ways. Gunpowder had transformed warfare, printing was revolutionising the dissemination of knowledge, and above all else the magnetic compass and the work of Portuguese and Spanish navigators had demonstrated that whole new continents existed and were inhabited by strange peoples of whose existence the ancients had been totally ignorant. These new discoveries and technological developments, greatly enhancing human knowledge and capacities, owed little or nothing to the philosopher sitting in his study. They had come through craftsmen, men who were by conventional definitions uneducated with nothing to contribute to the sum of human knowledge, exercising their practical skills. Recognition of this fact led some at least to a revolutionary change in perception of the manual trades. 'The co-operation between head and hand became much closer during the period of the Renaissance ... Scientists with technological interests, and

sometimes even manual skill, mixed with artificers who wanted to give their work a technological foundation.<sup>60</sup>

That the universe was constructed by God according to mathematical principles was an ancient idea; in the new mood of optimism based on recognition that the ancients had been surpassed, that technological progress based on mathematical skills was changing the world, this idea was re-emphasised. Plato was said to have stated that 'God is continually exercised in Geometry.' This was frequently interpreted (in a way which would have horrified Plato) as meaning that the work of God was that of an artisan; in the fifteenth century, for example, Pico della Mirandola had hailed God as 'the best of artisans', and the identification of geometry and architecture meant that God was often seen specifically as an architect, the universe as the greatest of all architectural achievements.<sup>61</sup> When Johann Valentin Andreae created his remarkable utopia *Christianopolis* it assigned a central place to the endeavours in practical science or technology of the artisan, with God as the 'supreme architect' and the universe as a 'mighty mechanism'. This sort of metaphor was fairly commonplace, and was sometimes clearly presented as such: in the 1630s Sir Thomas Browne called God the 'High Architect of the world', but elsewhere made it clear that He was not a geometrician but was *like* a skilful geometrician.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, the idea of God the geometer/artisan/architect was never more meaningful than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The concepts of the Vitruvian architect as master of all the arts and crafts and of artisans in general as important participants in the search for knowledge were at their height.

If God was a mechanic or architect, many argued, then the trades pursued by the artisan could not be contemptible. Working with artisans became important in trying to understand the universe, the work of the divine artisan, and the role of the artisan in making geographical and other discoveries gave further proof of this. Pessimism as to man's capacities to understand and change the universe was sometimes replaced by wild over-optimism as to the likely achievements of the now respectable technologies; several authors around 1600 cheerfully talked of colonising the moon.<sup>63</sup> 'A vision of

<sup>60</sup> See R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the rise of modern science* (London, 1972), 36–40, 56–7, 60, 63, 66–72, 75–80, 83–5, 88–96 and Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 155–6 for this and the immediately preceding paragraphs.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Montgomerie, poet at the court of James VI (and another court Catholic) wrote in a sonnet on the works of God of 'High architectur, vondrous-vaultit [vaulted]-rounds; / Huge host of heavin in restless-rolling spehers': see J. Cranstoun (ed.), *The poems of Alexander Montgomerie* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1887), i, 89–90. I am grateful to Professor Roderick Lyall for this reference.

<sup>62</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio medici and other works*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1964), 16, 294; J. Rykwert, *The first moderns. The architects of the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 128; J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society. A study of English utopian writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge, 1981), 77–8.

<sup>63</sup> Hooykaas, *Religion*, 69.



unlimited possibilities began to appear within reach of all the mechanical arts',<sup>64</sup> for they were based on the certainties of mathematical principles. 'The world is a machine; it is the most purposeful and beautiful instrument', wrote a French author in 1599, for God the artisan or architect had created this mechanism according to mathematical principles. The growing respect with which the trades were now often viewed was given additional impetus by the Reformation. Renewed emphasis on the Bible led to protestants stressing the sanctity of labour in general. All callings, not just that of the priest, were seen as divine. The craftsman's vocation was as honourable, as pleasing in the eyes of God, as any other.<sup>65</sup>

The sixteenth century saw the apotheosis of the architect as the king of the artisans. Vitruvius had made him the master of all the arts and sciences. In the guise of the mathematician he was the leading exponent of the exact science which held the key to progress in knowledge and technology: and this mathematical variant of the great quest for knowledge was to lead to what has been called 'the mathematization of the world'<sup>66</sup> in the seventeenth century, the remarkable progress made in describing and understanding the world which culminated in the work of Isaac Newton.

Being a practitioner or artisan as well as a scholar, the architect could both put theory into practice, and (as was now seen as important) bring the practical discoveries of the craftsman to bear on philosophy. This dual nature of architecture was symbolised by Inigo Jones in one of his masques in 1632 by two female figures. *Theorica* looked up to heaven, and on her head was a pair of gold compasses, their points also pointing upwards. *Practica*, dressed more humbly, looked down to the earth, carrying in one hand a long ruler and in the other 'a great paire of iron compasses, one point whereof, stood on the ground, and the other touched part of the ruler'. Theory gathered sublime knowledge based on eternal principles from above with her compasses, while Practice transferred the heavenly measure from her ruler to the earth.<sup>67</sup> Jones practised what he preached, taking a close interest in the concerns of craftsmen.<sup>68</sup> It must have been such a concept of architecture embracing both practice and theory which led the burgh council of Stirling, in hiring one John Coutts in 1529, to describe his job as being 'to work and labour his craft of

<sup>64</sup> A. Keller, 'Mathematical technologies and the growth of the idea of technical progress in the sixteenth century', *Science, medicine and society in the Renaissance*, ed. A. G. Debus (2 vols., London, 1972), i, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Hooykaas, *Religion*, 61–2, 92–4; Webster, 'Macaria', 158.

<sup>66</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The modern world system* (2 vols., New York, 1980), ii, 7, quoting Pierre Chaunu.

<sup>67</sup> Jones evidently took these figures from *Theorica* and *Experientia* as engraved on the title-page of an Italian work on Vitruvian architecture published in 1615, where they flanked a great classical arch, and elaborated their symbolism from another Italian work, Gordon, 'Poet and architect', 163–8, plates 30–1.

<sup>68</sup> Rykwert, *The first moderns*, 129, 131.

masonry and gemetry'. This is by far the earliest known Scottish reference to join geometry and masonry.<sup>69</sup>

Not all, however, were willing to accept the inflated Vitruvian estimation of the architect; and least of all Ben Jonson, in his long dispute with Jones over the relative importance of the visual and the verbal contributions to masques. In 1624 Jonson satirised the pretensions of the architect by transferring to the master cook claims to skill in many arts, especially in fortification, astronomy and alchemy. All the knowledge of the universe is to be found in the kitchen where the cook, 'the man of men', designs, draws, paints, carves, builds, fortifies,

Makes *Citadels* of curious foule and fish  
Some he dry-ditches, some motes round with broths;  
Mounts marrow-bones; cuts fifty-angled custards;  
Reares bulwarke pies; and, for his outer workes,  
He raiseth ramparts of immortall crust;  
And teacheth all the *tactics* at one dinner:  
What rankes, what files, to put his dishes in;  
The whole *Art Militarie!* Then he knowes  
The influence of the starres, vpon his meates;  
And all their seasons, tempers, qualities,  
And so, to fit his relishes, and sauces!  
He has *Nature* in a pot! 'boue all the *Chemists*,  
Or bare-breeched brethren of the *Rosie-Crosse!*  
He is an *Architect*, an *Inginer*,  
A *Souldier*, a *Physitian*, a *Philosopher*,  
A *general Mathematician*.<sup>70</sup>

Ten years later Jonson was back on the attack, presenting Jones as 'Coronell [Colonel] Vitruvius' accompanied by a mob of craftsmen, 'my Musicall, Arithematicall, Geometrical, Gamesters! or rather my true Mathematicall Boyes' – who included 'Master Maul! our Freemason'.<sup>71</sup> Generally, however, the Vitruvian pretensions of the architect were respected, though some (like Henry Wotton in 1624) tried to separate the liberal or theoretical side of architecture from the mechanical, being unable to overcome a distaste for the latter.<sup>72</sup>

Though the Vitruvian concept of the architect can be traced in late sixteenth-century England through published works like those of Dee and Shute, this cannot be done in Scotland: the publishing industry was small,

<sup>69</sup> R. Renwick (ed.), *Extracts from the records of the royal burgh of Stirling, 1519–1666* (Glasgow, 1887), 35–7, quoted in W. Harvey, 'Masonry in Stirling: The Ancient Ludge', *Transactions of the Stirling Natural History and Archaeological Society* (1922–3), 25–6, 50 n. 31.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Gordon, 'Poet and architect', 162–3. In Jonson's own copy of Vitruvius he marked the relevant passages, which undermines the suggestion in Yates, *Theatre of the world*, 89–90 that he took them from the Rosicrucian writer Robert Fludd.

<sup>71</sup> Yates, *Theatre of the world*, 88–9.

<sup>72</sup> Rykwert, *The first moderns*, 128.

and in architecture as in most subjects Scotland was dependent on works published in England and on the continent. William Schaw, master of works, could not have failed, however, to be aware of Vitruvian ideas. When in the 1590s he worked to reorganise the mason craft in Scotland he must surely have been partly inspired by the Vitruvian vision of the architect/mathematician and the late Renaissance vision of the place of the artisan (the architect as mason in this instance) in the advancement of learning: and perhaps he saw himself as establishing this unique status as the heritage of the Scottish working masons – who obviously would be likely to respond favourably to this enhancement of their position. They had long claimed, through the Old Charges, that the mason was the architect who in turn was the mathematician; in the generations around 1600 others were much more willing than at any time before or since to take these pretensions seriously.

The fact that in the 1590s Schaw was sometimes referred to as king's architect instead of, as was traditional, king's master of works demonstrates the influence of the new concept of the architect, attaching to his office all the grandiose connotations of that word. Such references became increasingly common in the early seventeenth century,<sup>73</sup> and (as indicated in the previous chapter) when in 1634 Sir James Murray and Anthony Alexander got, as masters of works, jurisdiction over all the building crafts, they were asserting the prerogative of the Vitruvian architect to judge the work of all other craftsmen – as their rival Sinclair of Roslin may have already tried to do through the Second St Clair Charter.

Another aspect of the office of master of works may also indicate Vitruvian influence. The masters came to have responsibility for the king's artillery. This can doubtless be explained partly on practical grounds. The guns were kept in royal castles, wrights were employed to work on their carriages, and the skills of building craftsmen were needed to move such heavy objects: looking after them could thus conveniently be combined with looking after the buildings that housed them. When James Murray surrendered his office of overseer of the king's works in favour of his son (the future master of works) in 1605, he remained master gunner of Scotland until his death. His son in 1615 added the office of master gunner to that of master of works; later (1646) John Mylne, the king's master mason, became master gunner.<sup>74</sup>

That this association of the office of master gunner with those of master of works and master mason indicates Vitruvian influence as well as convenience is suggested by the fact that the 1634 and 1661 grants giving the masters of

<sup>73</sup> *CSPS*, 1595–7, 228; *RMS*, 1609–20, nos. 689, 986, 1395; *RMS*, 1634–51, nos. 965, 1352, 1693.

<sup>74</sup> *SRO*, PS.1/85, Register of the privy seal, f. 125r–v; *Mr of works accs.*, ii, lvii, lxi. The 1615 gift states that the younger James Murray succeeded his father as gunner, but the office was in fact held by Robert Lindsay between them: J. Maidment (ed.), *State papers and miscellaneous correspondence of Thomas, earl of Melros* (Abbotsford Club, Edinburgh, 1837), i, 259.

works control over building or architectural craftsmen included gunmakers among these. Moreover, when in the course of the civil wars two covenanting generals joined the Lodge of Edinburgh, one was the general of artillery, the other the quartermaster general, a post requiring technical qualifications as its holder was responsible for such 'architectural' activities as surveying and constructing camps and fortifications. The latter was Sir Robert Moray: and Elias Ashmole, already cited as in some respects his English counterpart, was initiated by an English lodge a few years later after serving as an artillery officer.<sup>75</sup> Can it be coincidence that two of the three senior army officers to join masonic lodges were artillery officers, and the third a man whose responsibilities were partly architectural? It seems unlikely, and the alternative explanation, that they and the lodges that welcomed them were under Vitruvian influence and regarded gunnery as an aspect of masonry or architecture, seems far more plausible. Moreover, these three army officers form part of a wider pattern of men with technological and mathematical interests joining Scottish lodges in the seventeenth century. The numbers of these mathematician masons are small, but they form too noticeable a trickle to be the result of mere chance.

It would seem, then, that some men joined lodges through identifying masonry with Vitruvian concepts of architecture; and those of whom this can be said with some confidence (as they are known to have had mathematical interests) may be only the tip of the iceberg. The Vitruvian concept was nothing esoteric but a part of the general cultural background of the age, and architecture was regarded as something any well-educated gentleman should study. Thus many gentlemen members of lodges may have joined through architectural interests even though these are not detectable as they did not make careers for themselves in architecture or related subjects.

The idea of the architect as mathematician may have led to the evolution of one of the most distinctive products of the seventeenth-century Scottish mason – sundials. There survives from this period a remarkable profusion of Scottish sundials, varying greatly in type and complexity. This rich legacy has never been explained. Prevailing climatic conditions mean that Scotland is not a place where sundials are of outstanding utility, and the complexity of the more elaborate sundials, which contain many separate dials, goes far beyond any practical purpose. Some of the dials are virtually stone exercises in solid geometry (see plates 2 and 3). 'Dialling' was one of the skills of the architect, as defined by Vitruvius, and he had stated that knowledge of astronomy was essential to the architect so he could construct sundials. Did these remarkable objects develop partly as a means whereby the working mason could demonstrate his mathematical skills and the connection between his craft and the heavens above? Did, indeed, the masons become obsessed with dials as

<sup>75</sup> D. Stevenson, 'Masonry, symbolism and ethics in the life of Sir Robert Moray, FRS', *PSAS*, 114 (1984), 408, 410.

through them they displayed the power of their craft to harness the heavens for the use of man? The use might be a humble one, getting the sun to tell the time, but even that could be seen as of great significance in principle. The idea is a highly speculative one, and clearly fashion played a part in bringing the more elaborate dials into being: these cumbersome and elaborate carvings had to be commissioned by nobles and gentry before construction. But there is one piece of evidence suggesting that sundials held a particular fascination for Scottish masons independently of the tastes of their employers. The two places in seventeenth-century Scotland where sundials (of fairly simple types) were most common were, it seems, Prestonpans and Newstead, and it is said that they occurred mainly on houses that had belonged to masons. Prestonpans was one of the meeting places of the Lodge of Aitchison's Haven, and it recruited many members there. Newstead contained an unusual concentration of masons for many generations, and the Lodge of Melrose not only met there but was dominated by Newstead men.<sup>76</sup> One of the main arguments of this book is that the Scottish mason craft developed in a unique way in the seventeenth century. The sundials produced by the Scottish masons are unique in their variety and complexity. The identification of the mason with the mathematician and the astronomer forms a plausible and logical link between the two phenomena.

The idea of the masons seeing themselves as combining astronomy and mathematics to force the heavens to serve man may seem absurdly pretentious, but again it needs to be stressed that in the context of the time the idea made sense. It was not the masons themselves who had laid the intellectual foundations for such pretensions by exalting the Vitruvian architect. Similarly the recognition of the artisan as someone who could make a useful contribution to human knowledge was flattering to craft pride, but it would not have become of practical significance unless it had been accepted by scholars. By the sixteenth century such acceptance was becoming common, and increasing numbers of investigators made contacts with craftsmen, both to learn from them and to offer the benefit of their own knowledge to them. John Dee's English translation of Euclid was addressed to the artisans of London, and earlier in the century a German ironfounder can be found asking that the same work be translated into the vernacular for the use of artisans.<sup>77</sup> To assist the flow of information in the opposite direction, the idea of a history of the trades emerged. Information about each craft should be collected and published, the word 'history' here having the meaning of a true and systematic

<sup>76</sup> M. Gatty, *The book of sundials*, 4th edn (London, 1900), 143. The Scottish dials are surveyed in *ibid.*, 140–65 and MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 357–514. It is likely that the shapes of some of the more elaborate dials were based on the 'torquetum' invented by Peter Apian (professor of Mathematics at Ingolstadt) in the early sixteenth century. This was an instrument for indicating the positions of the sun, moon and stars. A new study of Scottish dials is forthcoming: A. R. Somerville, 'The ancient sundials of Scotland', *PSAS*.

<sup>77</sup> Hooykaas, *Religion*, 88–9.

account. Francis Bacon planned such a cooperative venture in the early seventeenth century; the idea of the history of the trades was revived in the 1640s and 1650s; and the scheme was adopted by the Royal Society of London in the 1660s. Both Sir Robert Moray and Elias Ashmole took an active interest in the project, and both men decided that their own contributions would be 'histories' of masonry. Moray's correspondence contains a number of references to his labours on the project. He evidently started with an account of the builder's materials (perhaps based on Book Two of Vitruvius), but though he wrote 57 pages he then seems to have abandoned the work.<sup>78</sup> These two men presumably believed that their connections with the mason craft through initiation would help them contribute to the work of the Royal Society as it brought them into contact with craftsmen and their practical knowledge. How many other men joined lodges to seek from the masons not just their supposed ancient Egyptian or Rosicrucian secrets, but also more mundane but nonetheless useful information?

The developing concepts of the architect, and of the artisan as a man from whom even the philosopher could learn, also contributed to one of the main themes of freemasonry, the idea of differences of social rank being irrelevant in the lodge. Partly this arose out of the general ideal of the brotherhood or fraternity, but this was reinforced (once men from the upper ranks of society began to join the craftsmen in their lodges) by the fact that philosopher and artisan were seen as united in the quest for knowledge, each with an essential contribution to make. This levelling in pursuit of the quest applied with greater force to masonry/architecture than to any other craft. The word architect, with its connotations of unifying theory and practice, and of mastery of many arts and superiority to all other crafts, applied equally to the humble (or rather, no longer so humble) artisan and to the learned and high-born 'architect' in the more restricted sense of the word. Nowhere is this point brought out more clearly than in the epitaph of John Mylne, master mason to the king of Scots, who died in 1667. The epitaph opens with a startling juxtaposition in the very first line.

Great Artisan grave senator John Milne  
Renown'd for Learning Prudence parts and skill  
Who in his life Vitruvius Art had shown  
Adorning other Monuments; his own  
Can have no other beauty than his Name  
His Memory and everlasting fame  
*Rare man he who could unite in one  
Highest and lowest Occupation  
To sit with statesmen, Counsellor to King's  
To work with Tradesmen in mechanick things,  
Majestic man for person, wit, and grace,  
This generation cannot fill his place.*

<sup>78</sup> Stevenson, 'Sir Robert Moray', 409, 410, 420.

The lines italicised above were also inserted in an inscription placed over the door of Mary's Chapel, meeting place of both the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights and of the Lodge of Edinburgh, followed by the words

May all Brethren, Myln's steps strive to trace  
Till one, withall, this house may fill his place.<sup>79</sup>

'Great Artisan grave senator', uniting the highest and lowest occupations, working with statesmen, kings and tradesmen, at home and accepted among them all, John Mylne was the proud practitioner of a profession unique in its ability to unite such social extremes. All master masons in a lodge were (in theory) equal, because like Mylne all were equally architects. Is it coincidence that the epitaph singles out Mylne's prudence for praise? Given that the art of memory was identified with the cardinal virtue of prudence, it is possible that a reference to the connections of the masons and the art lies concealed here.

From the airy heights of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, the art of memory and the Rosicrucians this chapter has descended, in the present section, to the more practical matters of defining the architect and classifying knowledge, matters which seem much more intelligible to the modern reader. How does the comprehensible world of the Vitruvian architect and mathematician link up with the occult and mystical world of the followers of Hermes Trismegistus and Christian Rosencreutz? They form what now may appear as different and even contradictory trends within the late Renaissance, but in the minds of contemporaries they were entirely compatible. John Dee, translator of Euclid and advocate of the artisans, was also the Hermetic magus who spoke with spirits. Emphasis on mathematics may have led to mechanistic interpretations of the universe, but mathematics was also closely bound up with, and extensively employed in, the occult arts. Indeed it was common for mathematics itself to be regarded as a magical art, for it enabled men to do inexplicable things.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, mathematics and the Hermetic quest had effects on man's perception of his place in the universe which were far from being entirely dissimilar. Both held out the ultimate possibility of fully comprehending the universe and then using the power over nature that this gave to exploit nature to the advantage of man. The mathematical struggle to comprehend the world was a spiritual one, seeking knowledge of the divine, as in the Hermetic version of the quest. Thus that the Hermetic dead-end and the trends which were to lead to the development of modern science should stand side by side as facets of the Renaissance contribution to freemasonry is logical and natural.

<sup>79</sup> Mylne, *Master masons*, 159–60.

<sup>80</sup> See J. P. Zetterberg, 'The mistaking of "the mathematicks" for magic in Tudor and Stuart England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, xi (1980), 83–97.

## **Renaissance, Reformation and the Scottish masons**

Earlier sections of this chapter have considered Renaissance influences which either demonstrably contributed to the unique developments which took place in the mason trade at the end of the sixteenth and in the early seventeenth centuries in Scotland, or through circumstantial evidence and their similarity to aspects of freemasonry can be argued to have contributed to these developments. The channel through which these influences entered emergent freemasonry cannot always be traced. Some (like the art of memory) can be attributed to William Schaw, that frustratingly elusive figure so central to the sudden emergence of the lodges around 1600. Others probably came partly through his aspirations for the craft, partly seeped in gradually to the organisation he had created from the general cultural background of the day, and were partly brought to the craft in the course of the century by the new gentlemen members of lodges. These new members were attracted to the lodges through developments in Renaissance thought which made them believe that an organisation of masons with secrets might contain worthwhile knowledge, occult or practical. Such men may have sought membership through their interest in developments such as Hermeticism, the Vitruvian concept of the architect, and the idea of the importance of the artisan in technological advance; and by joining they may have helped to strengthen such influences in the lodges.

One objection to all this may be that it seems to postulate that some Renaissance ideas were influential in a unique way in Scotland, in that they led to developments in the mason craft that took place nowhere else. Why should this be the case? If Scotland in the sixteenth century is seen, as often in the past, as remarkable only for poverty, backwardness and disorder, as an interesting but almost barbarian country on the fringes of civilisation, then the idea that strong Renaissance influences were at work seems incongruous. But research in recent decades has destroyed this caricature. Scotland was indeed relatively remote from the centres of European civilisation, she was small and relatively poor, and in terms of some aspects of culture, economic activity and government she was relatively backward. But in none of these things was she unique among the nations of Europe and, what is of particular relevance here, in cultural terms she was very much a part of Europe. Through the printed word and the many Scots who travelled and studied on the continent she kept in close touch with the development of the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, her close links with France being particularly important here. It may be that Scotland herself made no contributions of European importance to the Renaissance – with the possible exception of the work of the great humanist scholar and Latin poet George Buchanan – and that Renaissance influences were often more studied than put into practice, for



she was a poor and rather conservative country. In a way, however, this can be seen as a sign of the strength of Scotland's existing culture; the Scots adopted those Italian, French and other Renaissance influences which seemed attractive and relevant, blending them with their own culture, and rejected those regarded as inappropriate.<sup>81</sup>

This blend of the old and the new in Scottish culture reached its climax in the last decades of the sixteenth century, when the country achieved peace and stability after the mid century decades of political and religious upheaval. The court of James VI was a notable cultural centre, though lack of resources (rather than lack of interest) confined its achievements largely to the realms of poetry and music.<sup>82</sup> It was a court at which (as already seen) the queen's secretary could teach the king the art of memory, and in return receive instruction in composing poetry. James VI may have been no great scholar, and have been perennially short of cash, but he encouraged the flourishing of the courtly arts and himself published poetry and works on the rules of poetry, theology, political thought, witchcraft, and tobacco.

Nor was it only at court that Scotland experienced a modest cultural revival, strongly influenced by Renaissance ideas, at the end of the sixteenth century. In the country as a whole such influences can be seen at work most clearly, and highly appropriately in this context, in architecture. Conservative influences on the general design of buildings were still dominant: in an age in which political instability was still a recent memory nobles and gentry still required defensible residences, and the castle or tower house still reflected their image of themselves as military leaders and served to impress this perception on others. But within this traditional framework Renaissance decorative features multiplied and were adapted to local tastes. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century facades of the royal palaces at Stirling and Falkland had been 'among the earliest attempts at coherent Renaissance design in Britain', but these examples had no general influence on building later in the sixteenth century. Scottish architecture remained 'obstinately Scottish, classical motifs penetrating only as ingredients of an essentially vernacular style of decoration', though there are isolated examples of more thorough French, English and Italian influences.<sup>83</sup> Yet, as those elements of Renaissance design that do appear indicate, it was not that Scottish architects were unaware of Renaissance architecture styles, but that they nonetheless

<sup>81</sup> For some recent work on Renaissance influences see D. Hay, 'Scotland and the Italian Renaissance', *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland*, ed. I. B. Cowan and D. Shaw (Edinburgh, 1983), 114–24 (and several other essays in that volume).

<sup>82</sup> See H. M. Shire, *Song, dance and poetry of the court of Scotland under King James VI* (Cambridge, 1969).

<sup>83</sup> J. Dunbar, *The historic architecture of Scotland* (London, 1966), 51–2; G. Hay, 'Scottish Renaissance architecture', *Studies in Scottish antiquity, presented to Stewart Cruden*, ed. D. J. Breeze (Edinburgh, 1984), 196–231.

– perhaps constrained by the conservatism of their employers – stuck to basically traditional designs.

One of the most striking features of Scottish buildings in the last decades in the sixteenth century is the sudden emergence of the extensive use of vivid and lively decorative wall and ceiling paintings. The Renaissance inspiration of these is obvious in their style and themes, with large-scale use for the first time in Scotland of classical motifs and iconography: (perhaps encouraged by a post-Reformation tendency to avoid Christian themes for fear that this would be regarded as ‘idolatry’). Study of these works, some elaborately symbolic with occult overtones, supports the impression of Scotland as an outpost of the Renaissance, provincial perhaps but nonetheless lively for that.<sup>84</sup>

In considering actual building activity in Scotland in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the context of developments in the organisation and methods of the mason trade, the increasing emergence of Renaissance decorative features is, however, less important than the simple fact that far more stone buildings were being constructed in Scotland than ever before. Neither the church nor the crown were great builders in the period, but there was a boom in building by burgesses, lairds and nobles in these decades of peace and stability. No attempt has been made to quantify this, but the evidence ‘on the ground’ in the shape of surviving or recorded buildings seems overwhelming. Very few houses survive in the Scottish burghs which date from before the later Renaissance; from that time on their numbers increase rapidly, as the better-off merchants and craftsmen provided themselves with solidly built stone dwellings. In most cases these consisted of individual houses, varying from the fairly humble to the grandiose according to wealth, but in Edinburgh multi-storeyed tenement blocks divided into many houses became standard. In the countryside this was the great age of the tower house, some adapted from earlier towers, which display both the status and the taste of their owners, retaining defensive features but also indicating delight and interest in appearance. The towers proliferated not only in elaboration and decoration but in numbers, and some of the wealthiest landowners in building their residences were beginning to escape from the constraints of the tower form.<sup>85</sup>

This expansion in building activity must, obviously, have led to a surge in

<sup>84</sup> M. R. Apted, *The painted ceilings of Scotland, 1550–1650* (Edinburgh, 1966); G. Murray, M. R. Apted and I. Hodkinson, ‘Prestongrange and its painted ceiling’, *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarians and Field Naturalists Society*, x (1966), 96–132 (Hodkinson’s interpretative contribution to the paper should be approached with care as it accepts the discredited ‘Margaret Murray’ thesis of the existence of an organised and secret witch-religion); E. J. Cowan, ‘The darker vision of the Scottish Renaissance: the devil and Francis Stewart’, Cowan and Shaw, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 139–40 tentatively suggests interpreting the Prestongrange ceiling as a memory chart, derived from the art of memory.

<sup>85</sup> See Dunbar, *Historic architecture*, and MacGibbon, *Architecture*.

demand for the services of stonemasons, and therefore to a substantial increase in their numbers. Pride in the way their activities were transforming both the towns and the countryside surely increased the self-esteem and confidence of Scotland's masons, giving new meaning to traditional accounts of the glorious history of the craft and its unique status among the crafts as a whole. Did William Schaw draw on this new mood in the craft in planning an even more exalted future for it? Yet again, direct evidence is lacking but the chronological coincidence is striking. Schaw's reforms of the trade came not only just when the rich mix of Renaissance ideas already described was coming to a climax, but just when a building boom was in progress and may have led to a mood in the trade of optimism and expectancy.

Seventeenth-century Scottish freemasonry grew out of the Renaissance in many respects, but its evolution was also profoundly influenced by Reformation, and it can be seen as being in some respects a reaction against some of the changes that the coming of protestantism brought to Scotland. Reformation involved not just a change in religious beliefs but a change in the whole concept of what religion was. Before the Reformation religion had been, it has been argued, important for most people not because it offered a code of beliefs, but 'because its rites were an essential accompaniment to the important events of . . . life – birth, marriage and death. It solemnised these occasions by providing appropriate rites of passage to emphasise their social significance. Religion was a ritual method of living, not a set of dogmas.' With the coming of protestantism emphasis shifted from behaviour and actions to abstract beliefs and individual faith.<sup>86</sup> The new church had its own communal rites, but they were bare and simple compared with those of the old church – and this was much more the case in Scotland than in England, where the protestant church retained much in the way of ritual inherited from its Catholic predecessor. For many people the Reformation of 1560 must have created a deep sense of loss at so much in the way of ritual and pageantry being outlawed. Where craftsmen were concerned the coming of protestantism had little effect on the functions of their guilds in economic matters: they continued organising the trades in the burghs, regulating wages, working practices and admission, and disciplining offenders. But the guilds had always been much more than just utilitarian organisations. They had also been religious fraternities, and the destruction of this aspect of the craft guild which protestant Reformation entailed must have been a devastating blow.

The fraternity, confraternity or brotherhood was a prominent feature of late Medieval Catholicism, and their numbers grew remarkably in the fifteenth century. Virtually every craft guild functioned as a religious fraternity, and there were in addition many fraternities both in town and country which existed independently of the guilds. In the early sixteenth century Hamburg (with a population of about 13,000) had over a hundred fraternities, and there

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, 88.

were about a hundred in Nottinghamshire. In Castile there is estimated to have been one fraternity per hundred households.<sup>87</sup> The fraternity has been defined as 'an association of layfolk who, under the patronage of a particular saint . . . undertook to provide the individual member of the brotherhood with a good funeral . . . together with regular prayers and mass-saying thereafter for the repose of the dead person's soul'. On the patron saint's feast day the members of the fraternity would attend a special mass at their altar or chapel, and hold their 'annual general meeting' and annual dinner. Some fraternities would have special liveries or uniforms for members to wear on such special occasions, and especially in the burghs they would walk together in procession, under their own banners, at major religious festivals. The attractions of the fraternity to the layman were thus varied: guarantee of a decent funeral (and sometimes other benefits such as help for the old and sick developed as well), prayers and masses after death to help free the soul from purgatory, the bond of brotherhood and common purpose, reinforced by the annual banquet and by regulations as to how brothers should behave towards each other. Finally, the fraternity had the attraction of being under lay control; a priest was of course necessary to say mass, but such chaplains were appointed and paid by the fraternity, and laymen responded to the idea of having one aspect of religion which they organised and regulated according to their own needs and wishes.<sup>88</sup>

There is insufficient evidence to try to estimate how common fraternities not combined with craft guilds were in Scotland, but enough is known to indicate that there were considerable numbers of them – the best known being the confraternity of the Holy Blood in Edinburgh, which could count King James IV among its members, had scarlet liveries, and maintained an altar in St Giles.<sup>89</sup> Much easier to trace are the guild-fraternities. By 1522, for example, all 14 guilds or incorporations of Edinburgh had their own altars and chaplains in St Giles, and for members the religious side of the guilds was as important as the economic. 'The craft was a miniature of the Christian community of the burgh. The masters, journeymen and apprentices existed as a religious fellowship as well as a trade incorporation'.<sup>90</sup> For members of these bodies the climactic days of the year were the feast days of their patron saints, and the great festivals, such as Candlemas and Corpus Christi, when they took their places in processions and contributed to craft pageants and plays on religious themes. Thus in 1524 we find the masons and slaters of

<sup>87</sup> W. Monter, *Ritual, myth and magic in Early Modern Europe* (Brighton, 1983), 16; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English people* (Oxford, 1984), 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–34; Monter, *Ritual*, 15–16.

<sup>89</sup> D. McRoberts, 'The Fetternear Banner', *Innes Review*, vii (1956), 77, 81–3.

<sup>90</sup> M. Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1981), 28–9. See also R. Lamond, 'The Scottish craft guild as a religious fraternity', *Scottish Historical Review*, xvi (1918–19), 191–211; and J. S. Marshall, 'Scottish trade incorporations and the church', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, xix (1975–7), 93–109.

Aberdeen assigned their place in the Candlemas procession, and in the same burgh in 1554 the masons, wrights and coopers were involved in an argument as to their place in the Corpus Christi procession. There was a similar dispute involving the masons and wrights in Haddington at Corpus Christi in 1532, and in each of these cases the favoured solution was that masons, wrights and hammermen march together with four banners before them, two for the hammermen, one each for masons and wrights.<sup>91</sup> John Knox described, in disgust, the St Giles' Day procession in Edinburgh in 1558, with the clergy of the collegiate church, the guilds and the confraternities – 'priests, friars, canons, and rotten Papists, with tabors and trumpets, banners and bagpipes, and who was there to lead the ring, but the Queen Regent [Mary of Guise] herself, with all her shavelings [tonsured clerics]'.<sup>92</sup>

Reformation meant the complete abolition of the religious side of the guild-fraternity, while those organisations which were solely fraternities disappeared altogether. The basic justification of the fraternity had been the doctrine of purgatory, making necessary the saying of masses to free the souls of departed brethren from it. Protestantism had abolished that doctrine. Saints' days and many of the great festivals of the Christian year were no longer to be celebrated, and the fraternity altars dedicated to their saints disappeared. Processions, liveries, banners and worship by sections of the community (other than the family) such as guilds apart from the rest were suppressed. Plays as such were not banned, but the strict limitations placed on them meant the death of the old craft plays.<sup>93</sup> Guild members might sit together in church, their meetings might be opened with a brief prayer, but apart from such pathetic remnants the religious side of the guild had gone entirely. The 'rich life of symbol which they [the confraternities] had nourished was cut at the roots'.<sup>94</sup> The guilds could retain some elements of ritual and ceremony on such occasions as the admission of new members, but nonetheless the Reformation must have seemed a devastating blow to many of the craftsmen who had found in remembrance of previous great ceremonial occasions, and anticipation of and preparation for future ones, much to give life form and meaning. It was, therefore, understandable that in Edinburgh the majority of leading craftsmen remained stubbornly Catholic in the years immediately after the Reformation of 1560. In previous generations such men had been prepared to contribute considerable sums to sustain the religious life of the craft, and 'It was not simply the money of burgesses that was invested in the mass; it was also the collective identity of each of the craft guilds. One of the major problems for the new protestant regime was to find new outlets for the religious devotion of the craftsmen.'<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> A. J. Mill, *Medieval plays in Scotland* (St Andrews, 1927), 123, 129–30, 247–9.

<sup>92</sup> W. C. Dickinson (ed.), *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (2 vols., London, 1949), partly quoted in McRoberts, 'Fetternear Banner', 83.

<sup>93</sup> Mill, *Medieval plays*, 88–95, 105.

<sup>94</sup> McRoberts, 'Fetternear Banner', 84.

<sup>95</sup> Lynch, *Edinburgh*, 29.

In time the great majority of the craftsmen conformed to the new religion. But then, within two generations, one craft developed an elaborate secret life of ritual and ceremony of its own. Is it valid to see the emergence of masonic organisation and ritual in Scotland as a belated response to Reformation, an attempt to fill the vacuum which Reformation had created by meeting a yearning for ritual not met by the new church? The obvious objection to such an interpretation is to ask why only one craft (and a minor one at that) developed elaborate rituals, if all crafts had experienced the same loss. The answer is that the mason craft was already in some respects different from other crafts. It may already have had, by the time of the Reformation, some secret recognition system, and it had a particularly rich mythology. Renaissance influences from the Vitruvian architect to the cult of Egypt to the art of memory all further singled out the craft as something special, and William Schaw reformed its organisation, giving it a lodge system within which ritual could develop. Whether or not Schaw himself consciously encouraged ritual development to fill the vacuum left by the Reformation cannot be known, but one explanation of why so many outsiders sought to join the lodges during the seventeenth century may have been the desire to satisfy the human craving for ritual that the Scottish reformed church ignored.

This should not, however, be taken to suggest that the lodges and their secret rituals were in any way intended to subvert protestantism. William Schaw may have been a Catholic, but his lodges were protestant, loyal to the established church. In the relationship of the lodges in the years around 1600 with the Church of Scotland, however, may lie the origins of one of the most distinctive features of later freemasonry: the exclusion of overt religious elements from lodge activities while at the same time clearly accepting the existence of God and the truth of Christianity. This was to emerge in some cases as religious toleration, in others as support for deism, belief in the existence of God without commitment to any one brand of Christianity. In these forms this feature of freemasonry is bound up with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. But may it have originated in the fact that in the previous century Scots protestants could only justify ritual if it was made clear that it was *not* used in a religious context? To have given the lodges a religious function or had any form of worship within them would have contradicted the Scottish church's banishment of ritual from worship and insistence that the only valid forms of worship were private prayer, family worship, or the public worship of the whole community in the parish church. Was there, once the existence of lodges and their rituals became known, a tacit understanding between masons and the ministers of the Church of Scotland that the lodges' activities would be allowed provided there was nothing specifically religious about them?

Religion being 'off limits' to the masons as masons, if this argument is accepted, they were left with Christian morality and ideals of brotherhood.

Thus the emergence of freemasonry in seventeenth-century Scotland as a system of morality illustrated by symbols, allegories and rituals does not indicate any precocious deistic or tolerant attitudes to religion, but simply acceptance that the lodge was not a valid place for masons to indulge their (orthodox) religious inclinations in. But of course, in the long term, this exclusion from lodges of open commitment to any one brand of religion opened the way for the adoption of heterodox ideas and the admission of members with divergent religious beliefs. The idea that the Church of Scotland was ready to accept the existence of lodges, and of rituals within them, provided they were not religious rituals, would go a long way to explain the otherwise astonishing lack of concern (with a few exceptions) in the church about the lodges. The church had no need to persecute the lodges because it knew that they were no threat to its exclusive authority in religion.

The idea that the church did indeed take such an attitude to masonic ritual derives indirect support from the fact that it can be paralleled by its attitude in other cultural matters. In effect the church eventually suppressed all drama, both because of 'papist' or pagan influences in traditional plays and through moral objections to the whole idea of actors 'pretending' to be other people. But generally its attitude to the arts (in the modern sense) was that they were legitimate provided that they were entirely separated from religious worship. Instrumental music, sculpture, painting, striving for beauty in architecture rather than mere dignity, all were to be banished from the church, but they were not evils in themselves. This attitude was damning enough, for religion was of course held to be by far the most important aspect of man's activities, but at least it indicated acceptance (except by a few extremists) that the arts had a place in life. It would have been logical to apply this attitude to ritual as well, and indeed many forms of civic ritual survived the Reformation as they did not involve religion or religious elements, or had such elements removed from them. The elaborate 'riding of parliament', for example, when all the members processed to Parliament House in their robes for the opening ceremonies, might be sneered at by the more puritanically minded as a meaningless and vain show, but it was not suppressed. Similarly, it seems the masons could have their rituals provided they were essentially meaningless (in religious terms) and thus harmless. In the complex of forces and functions that created freemasonry, the lodge may be regarded as being, in one of its aspects, a religious fraternity without religion.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> An interesting example of how masonic lodges could be seen as equivalents to religious fraternities is provided by eighteenth-century Provence. When the clergy succeeded in taking over control of the fraternities from laymen and suppressed the non-religious social elements such as annual banquets, the social elites abandoned them and joined the masonic lodges instead, Monter, *Ritual*, 79.

## 6 Rituals of identification and initiation

### The Mason Word

Nearly all that is known of the secrets and rituals of the Scottish masons in the seventeenth century is derived from the catechisms which survive from the end of that century and the beginning of the next. At the centre of the esoteric activities described in the catechisms lay the Mason Word, and it was through talk of it that outsiders first learned that the masons had secrets. Scattered references to the Word occur from the 1630s onwards, and through them something can be discerned of how outsiders perceived the masons and their rumoured secrets.<sup>1</sup> Surveying these references thus takes on something of the character of a progressive revelation of what was known of the esoteric side of the craft. Surprisingly, this handful of references in non-masonic sources to the Mason Word is not accompanied by similar references to the masonic lodges, suggesting that convention among the masons dictated that lodges should not be mentioned to outsiders, but that it was permissible (or gradually became permissible) to intrigue the uninitiated by referring to the existence of the Word – though of course without revealing its secrets.

The earliest of all the references to the Word is also one of the hardest to interpret. Henry Adamson, reader (a sort of assistant to the parish minister) and master of the song school of Perth composed a long and stupendously tedious poem, which was published in Edinburgh in 1638 under the title *The muses threnodie, or, mirthfull mournings on the death of Master Gall*. Adamson had died the year before publication, and had evidently written the poem some years prior to his death. It was certainly composed after 1625, as it refers to King Charles I, and 'Mr Gall' was probably the Mr James Gall who became a burghess of Perth in 1628<sup>2</sup> but died a few years thereafter. Thus the poem can be dated to within a few years of 1630. It takes the form of an imaginary dialogue between Gall and another friend of Adamson's, George Ruthven, and at one point Gall assures Ruthven that the bridge over the River Tay (swept away by a flood in 1621) would be rebuilt,

<sup>1</sup> Nearly all these references are listed in Carr, 'Mason Word'.

<sup>2</sup> SRO, GD.1/552/2, Guildry court book of Perth, 1601–69, f. 60v.



Thus *Gall* assured me it would be so,  
 And my good *Genius* truly doth it know:  
 For what we do presage is not in grosse,  
 For we be brethren of the *Rosie Crosse*;  
 We have the *Mason Word* and second sight,  
 Things for to come we can foretell aright.<sup>3</sup>

What is the significance of the grouping together of the three terms brethren of the Rosy Cross, the Mason Word, and second sight? Adamson was addicted to obscure words and arcane references to bewilder and impress the unfortunate reader, but the conjunction of the three terms is not just random. They all involved the ability to see the invisible in some sense. The Rosicrucian brethren were held to be invisible, either meaning that though they existed they could not be identified, or that they were literally invisible. Second sight was the ability literally to 'see' the future, through visual images of future events. It was regarded as specifically Scottish, and Highland rather than Lowland, and only one reference to it is known before Adamson's: in 1616 a Caithness woman accused in Orkney of witchcraft confessed that she had been taught a spell to know and see anything she desired while on a visit to Lochaber as a girl. One example of her power was foretelling that some men were to be executed by 'seeing' them with halters round their necks. In this case second sight was equated with witchcraft, and later references to it reveal prolonged dispute as to whether it was a natural or supernatural phenomenon. At least some of those who took an interest in it linked it with Hermeticism.<sup>4</sup> Thus Adamson's references to the second sight and the Rosicrucian brethren conjure up the world of the occult quest for hidden knowledge and the concept of invisibility. That Adamson introduced the Mason Word in such company suggests that he knew at least some of the properties of the Word, for in a sense it enabled masons to 'see' the invisible by identifying men who were fellow masons by means that others could not understand.

Adamson's mention of the Mason Word does not necessarily imply that he expected his readers to know what it meant, given his love of trying to impress by being obscure. But the next reference indicates that it was assumed that all would know of the Mason Word. Late in 1637 open resistance in Scotland to the policies of Charles I was plunging the country into confusion. The treasurer, John Stewart, earl of Traquair, maintained contacts with the opposition, and claimed that he did this to try to bring about a settlement in

<sup>3</sup> The whole poem was reprinted in T. H. Marshall, *History of Perth* (Perth, 1849), 499–560, with this passage on p. 520.

<sup>4</sup> 'Acts and statutes of the lawting, sheriff, and justice courts, within Orkney and Zetland', *Miscellany of the Maitland Club*, ii, pt 1 (Edinburgh, 1840), 188–9; J. Aubrey, *Three prose works*, ed. J. Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell, 1972), 50, 54, 94–6, 113–15, 117–25, 284–5; S. Pepys, *Private correspondence*, ed. J. R. Tanner (2 vols., London, 1926), ii, 7–8, 25, 29–30, 37, 223–4.

the king's interest. But his enemies among the king's supporters believed that he was acting treacherously 'and s[ai]d he had the Masone word, among the nobilitie', as he complained to the earl of Rothes (one of the opposition leaders) on 13 October.<sup>5</sup> Quite what Traquair understood by the term is not clear, but it obviously had connotations of some secret bond – and one that bound men together for sinister purposes.

Some members of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland in July or August 1649 also feared the Word was something sinister. 'Ther was something (in the Assemb[ly]) spoken anent [concerning] the meason word, which was recommended to the severall presbtries for tryall ther of.'<sup>6</sup> At this time the extreme presbyterian 'kirk party' regime was in power, after the rebellion of the covenanters against the king had led to years of civil war and confusion. The kirk party believed that the disasters that had struck the country were a sign of God's wrath at the sins of the people, and it was carrying out a widespread assault on immorality and ungodliness of all sorts in a frantic attempt to win God's renewed favour for Scotland. It was in this atmosphere of searching for things which had been overlooked which might be displeasing to God that the question of the Mason Word was raised in the general assembly. But though some must have been questioning its compatibility with true religion, others supported it. Therefore instead of condemning it the assembly asked the presbyteries, the church's district assemblies, to give their opinions. Unfortunately none of them are known to have responded.

Discussion in the assembly about the Mason Word did, however, spread doubts about it, and in 1652 this led to concern when a candidate for the ministry was found to have the Word. On 12 January the elders of the kirk session of Minto in Roxburghshire had chosen James Ainslie as their minister. The next stage in his appointment was for the presbytery of Jedburgh to check on his qualifications. This was when the question of the Word arose, and on 2 February the presbytery decided to consult the neighbouring presbyteries of Kelso and Selkirk about 'Mr James Ainslie haveing the maissounes word'. Kelso replied in writing on 24 February 'anent a young mans having the maison word whither he myt [might] be admitted to the ministrie':

that to their judgment ther is neither sinne nor scandale in that word because in the purest tymes of this kirke maisons haveing that word have been ministers, that maisons and men haveing that word have been and daylie are elders in our sessions, and many professors haveing that word are daylie admitted to the ordinances.

<sup>5</sup> NLS, Adv. Ms 34.5.12, p. 49. The passage is printed in D. Laing (ed.), *A relation of proceedings concerning the affairs of the kirk of Scotland, from August 1637 to July 1638* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1830), 30, but with spelling and punctuation partially and in consistently modernised and the date given wrongly as 13 November.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lamont, *Chronicle of Fife* (Edinburgh, 1810), 9.

The presbytery of Jedburgh considered this opinion on 25 February, along with more cautious advice from the presbytery of Selkirk, which was that trials of Ainslie's qualifications for office should be delayed while the synod, the regional assembly, was consulted.

The matter was duly referred to the synod. Its response is unknown, but when the presbytery of Jedburgh met for the first time after the synod's meeting, on 3 November 1652, there was no mention of the Mason Word. Much time was spent discussing other aspects of Ainslie's case, but in the end the presbytery declared itself fully satisfied. On 9 December, James Ainslie was at last admitted to the parish ministry of Minto.<sup>7</sup> Thus a man having the Mason Word became a minister, but only after considerable debate. Where Ainslie had got the word, and whether he was a member of a lodge are unknown. The name of Ainslie was most common in Roxburghshire,<sup>8</sup> but there were three members of Edinburgh Lodge bearing that name in the 1620s and 1630s.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that James was related to them, and that they had family connections in Roxburghshire that led to James seeking to enter the ministry there. James Ainslie lived on till 1702, when he died at the age of 94, but nothing further is known about his connection with the mason craft.

Nonetheless, the references to the Word which occur in connection with the Ainslie case are of great interest, for they give some idea of how widespread knowledge of the secrets of the Word were – and had been. The Kelso presbytery's statement that 'maisons and men haveing that word' often sat as elders in kirk sessions and that many others having the word were treated as full members of the Church of Scotland and admitted to the sacraments may be regarded as accurate, being a comment on the existing situation. But it may be that less reliance can be placed on the claim that in the 'purest times' of the church men with the Word had been ministers. To the presbyterians the purest times of the church meant the times preceding the assertion of royal control over the Church of Scotland and the establishment of episcopacy by James VI: certainly pre-1610 and perhaps pre-1600. Can it be believed that two generations and more before 1652 numbers of parish ministers had had the Word? As so often in this book, the Scottish verdict of 'not proven' is the most appropriate. There is absolutely no direct evidence to support the statement, and yet it should not be dismissed out of hand as being untrue. It was suggested at the end of the last chapter that the remarkable failure of the Church of Scotland to try to suppress the masonic lodges which emerged around 1600 as subversive of true religion may be explicable at least in part by the hypothesis that the masons made it clear to the church that their rituals were not religious ones. Obviously before ministers could have been confident of this they would have had to know what the rituals and secrets of

<sup>7</sup> SRO, CH.2/198/3, Minutes of the presbytery of Jedburgh, 1644–58, under dates cited.

<sup>8</sup> G. F. Black, *The surnames of Scotland* (New York, 1946), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Carr, *Edinburgh*, 83, 94, 116, 126, 350.

the masons were. Had William Schaw or others, in the years around 1600 when the craft was being transformed, consulted some influential ministers to get their sanction for the Mason Word, admitting them to the Word in the process? Not proven maybe, but the lack of persecution and the assertion that ministers had had the Word mesh together very neatly. By the middle of the century some of the new generation of zealous young 'kirk party' ministers had some doubts about the Word, but they were over-ruled, and Ainslie entered the ministry.

The dispute over James Ainslie reveals nothing as to what the Mason Word actually was or what the objections to it were. But conveniently just a year later another reference throws light on both matters, and its context suggests that its author, Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, knew of the recent controversy in the church. Urquhart, an ardent royalist and a bitter hater of the presbyterian ministry of the church, was a noted eccentric and prolific author much given to a remarkably elaborate prose style that renders his works all but unreadable. One of his great projects was the invention of a new language to replace all others, and his *Logopandecteisio, or an introduction to the vniversal language* was published in London in 1653. At one point in this work he pours scorn on those who, when they see natural events such as eclipses of the sun, find supernatural explanations for them, and who denounce everything they do not understand as sorcery. Among such obscurantists he no doubt included the ministers of the Church of Scotland, who had persecuted him for his beliefs. To illustrate his point, Urquhart says that he once saw a man who

(for being able, by vertue of the Masson word, to make a Masson, whom he had never scene before, without speaking, or any other apparent signe, come, and salute him) reputed, by many of the same Litter, to have had a familiar, there grosse ignorance moving them, to call that supernaturall, or above the naturall reach of meere man, whereof they knew not the cause.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the power that the Mason Word gave was the ability to identify fellow masons secretly, and do this at a distance, without others present knowing how it was done – or even that it was being done. And the suspicion of the Word, implicit or explicit in all the earlier references, is explained as being due to the fact that men tended to assume that, as they could not understand how the Word made identification possible, magic must be involved through employment of a 'familiar', a spirit that could be summoned by a witch from a distance. Urquhart rejects such an occult interpretation, but shows no sign of knowing the secrets of the Word himself.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Logopandecteisio*, 9; C. Newman, 'A reference to the Mason Word in 1653', *AQC*, 80 (1967), 278–9. The whole work is reprinted in *The works of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty* (Maitland Club, Edinburgh, 1834).

<sup>11</sup> The fact that in this work Urquhart on several occasions likens literary composition to the designing and construction of buildings should not be regarded as significant; use of such architectural metaphors was very widespread.

Next in sequence comes a very different type of reference, concerned with the Word not as something mysterious but from a utilitarian point of view. It occurs in a newly discovered indenture of apprenticeship dated 28 November 1660. John Johnston, described as a mason freeman of the Canongate of Edinburgh and North Leith, took as his apprentice James Temple, formerly an inhabitant of Eccles in Berwickshire (about 18 miles from Ayton, where the indenture was signed). The apprenticeship was to last seven years, and the terms were standard ones except that Johnston as master bound himself

to purchase, procure and give to the saide James Temple his prentise the masone worde which he hath himselfe; and shall get the saide James in rolled and installed amongst the rest of his fellowe craftsmen in that lodge which the saide John belongs to himselfe, [so] that the saide James shall be as sufficient and as frie a work man in his craft of masone craft and be a fellow brother workman as any that shall be in the saide lodge or in any other lodge in Scotland.<sup>12</sup>

Temple was to be given the Word and admitted to the lodge by St John's Day 1662, just over two years after his apprenticeship had begun.

Two rather later indentures are known which bind masters to have their apprentices admitted to a lodge (1683 and 1712),<sup>13</sup> but neither of them mention the Word. John Johnston had been admitted a burghess of the Canongate in 1647, and was admitted to the Incorporation of Wrights and Masons of the Canongate the following year. But what lodge he belonged to is unknown: he does not appear in the records of either Edinburgh Lodge or the only other lodge known to have existed at the time in the vicinity, Aitchison's Haven.<sup>14</sup>

By including a stipulation that an apprentice be admitted to the Word and to a lodge, and further explaining that this was to be done so the apprentice would become as free a workman as any other, the indenture proves conclusively that the Mason Word was not some archaic leftover from a distant past, or some artificial invention of men with a taste for secrecy and mystery, but something of importance in the day-to-day life of the working mason. It was a genuinely 'operative' institution; possession of the Word indicated a properly qualified (both through skill in the craft and ritual initiation) mason who would be admitted to work alongside other masons.

In about 1663 or 1664 William Guthrie referred to the Mason Word in a sermon. He was a staunch presbyterian, deprived of his ministry in the parish of Fenwick in 1664 for his opposition to the restoration of episcopacy, but he did not share the doubts about the Word which had been expressed a decade

<sup>12</sup> Punctuation has been added in this transcript. The original indenture is at West Register House, Edinburgh, RD.13/427/1661, with a registered copy (with some differences of spelling) in SRO, RD.3/1, Register of deeds, p. 617.

<sup>13</sup> H. Carr, 'Apprenticeship in England and Scotland up to 1700', *AQC*, 69 (1956), 66–8.

<sup>14</sup> H. Armet (ed.), *Register of the burghesses of the Canongate* (SRS, 1951), 36; Inventory, 9.2, f. 83r.

earlier, for he mentions the Word in the context of explaining Christ's relations with his followers:

I cannot compare it better to you nor [than] to that they call the Masson-Word; there is a signe among the Massons that they call the Masson-Word; I wot not what it is but they say one of them cannot be in that dress but another will take him up to be a man of th[a]t same trade. I cannot tell what passeth betwixt Christ and his people, but there is some signe th[a]t he giveth them th[a]t will everymore know him, be in what dress he will.<sup>15</sup>

Guthrie cannot have been using the word 'dress' to refer to clothing – there would be nothing remarkable about people recognising each other by distinctive clothing – and must therefore be using the word in the sense of putting or placing in position. Thus he believed that masons identified each other by taking up some posture which was not eccentric enough to be noticed by anyone except a fellow mason, who would know what to look for.

Further evidence of the links between the operative mason craft and the Word comes from the records of Aberdeen Lodge, in laws and statutes dated 1670 but perhaps in reality of a decade or so later. These declare that

Wee Maister Meassones and entered prentises all of ws wnder subscriyvers doe heir protest and vowe as hitherto wee have done at our entrie, when we received the benefit of the Measson word, that wee shall owne this honourable Lodge at all occationes except those who can give ane Lawfull excuse or [of?] sicknes or [are] out of towne.

Another statute, 'Lawes for our box for the poor never practised heirtofoir in Aberdeine', declares that

Wee wndersubscriyvers doe heir Protest be all the oathes wee received at our entrie to the benefit off the measson word that wee shall own and mentaine the Measson box of Aberdeine and of this our lodge, according as wee have begun as the Authoires of it.

The following statute adds

Wee ordaine lykwayes that our eldest sones who are the authoires of this Book, and all our after comeres, shall have the benefit of the measson word

free of most of the dues usually exacted.<sup>16</sup> Here having Mason Word is equated with membership of the lodge and entitlement to charitable help from its funds.

At about the same time as the Aberdeen reference, in 1672, the Word was mentioned by an Englishman for the first time. In a pamphlet ridiculing a work which had urged the need to persecute those who would not conform to

<sup>15</sup> G. S. Draffen, 'The Mason Word – Another early reference', *AQC*, 65 (1952), 54; Carr, 'Mason Word', 222.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Aberdeen*, 57, 62.

the Church of England, Andrew Marvell, playwright and politician, poured scorn on those who were obsessed by minor differences between men. At one point he recalls the medieval Italian factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, who

took care to differ in the least circumstances of any humane action: and, as those that have the Masons Word, secretly discern one another; so in the peeling or cutting but of an Onion

these Italian factions could distinguish each other.<sup>17</sup> Marvell knew that the Mason Word was a secret means of identification, and his use of the term indicates that by this time it could be expected that English readers would have heard of it – just as the increasingly common references in England in the later seventeenth century to that other Scottish mystery, the second sight, indicate that it too was becoming well known.

These two esoteric phenomena are, indeed, linked in references to the Word which provide an example of a Scot explaining them to an Englishman. Robert Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle in Perthshire, dined with Dr Edward Stillingfleet, bishop elect of Worcester, and his wife in London on 6 October 1689. In the course of a discussion on the second sight, 'The Dr called the Mason-word a Rabbinical mystery, wher [when?] I discovered somewhat of it.'<sup>18</sup>

Robert Kirk had a great interest in Scottish folklore and supernatural phenomena, and while dining with him Stillingfleet 'came to enquire of the 2<sup>d</sup> Sight, only heard of in the highlands of Scotland'. The Englishman was highly suspicious of the second sight, arguing that possessing it was sinful if (as he apparently assumed) the ability was gained through evil men or spirits. Even desiring to understand the second sight was not without blame, for that implied belief that those with second sight had an unusual gift which was without divine sanction. Stillingfleet's argument, at least as reported by Kirk, was distinctly confused, suggesting that the second sight might exist, but that to believe in its existence was blameworthy! Kirk's reply was 'that in all Divine and Natural Sciences, the inquirer must come [to] learn the art wt [with] a previous beleaf in the artists ability to bestow it', and he added that second sight might only be an extended form of natural eyesight. Cats and lynxes saw better at night than men, and telescopes aided the sight. Perhaps in some such natural way some people had or attained the faculty of second sight. But Stillingfleet was not convinced, and still maintained that the devil was involved<sup>19</sup> – thus illustrating Urquhart of Cromarty's point that obscurantists

<sup>17</sup> A. Marvell, *The rehearsal transpos'd*, ed. D. I. B. Smith (Oxford, 1971), 35–6.

<sup>18</sup> EUL, Ms Laing, III, 545, R. Kirk, Sermons, conferences, men's opinions of the late transactions, with a description of London, anno 1689, f. 19v. The passage is reprinted (with changes in punctuation etc.) in R. Kirk, 'London, 1689–90', pt 4, *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, new series, vii (1933), 139.

<sup>19</sup> EUL, Ms Laing, III, 545, ff. 18v, 19v.

labelled everything they could not understand as supernatural and sinister. Kirk, on the other hand, though often regarded as credulous because of his interest in the supernatural, argued for a natural or 'scientific' explanation. Where the Mason Word fitted into the discussion is not clear: It has been assumed that Stillingfleet brought up the matter,<sup>20</sup> but the natural reading of the passage indicates that it was Kirk who introduced it to the discussion – he 'discovered' or revealed something about it to Stillingfleet. Perhaps Kirk argued that just as the Mason Word was held to be supernatural by non-masons, as it involved invisible communication, but in reality had a natural explanation in signs and postures, so the second sight was not necessarily supernatural just because it was not understood. What it was about the Word that Kirk revealed to Stillingfleet is indicated by a treatise on the supernatural that Kirk completed two years later, in 1691, 'The secret common wealth'. In an appendix entitled 'A Succinct Account of My Lord of Tarbott's relations in a letter to the Honourable Robert Boyle' concerning second sight, Kirk related that he had found five 'Curiosities' in Scotland 'not much observ'd to be elsewhere'. These were brownies, the Mason Word, second sight, charms and curing illness by them, and a 'being Proof of Lead' (bullet proof).

The Mason-Word, which tho some make a Misterie of it, I will not conceal a little of what I know; it's like a Rabbinical tradition in a way of comment on Iachin and Boaz the two pillars erected in Solomon's Temple; with an addition of som secret signe delivered from hand to hand, by which they know, and become familiar one with another.<sup>21</sup>

At last a mention of the Mason Word by someone who both knew its secrets, and was prepared to commit them (or at least part of them) to paper! The secret sign delivered from hand to hand is the first British reference to a masonic handshake. Surprisingly Kirk has nothing to say about secret recognition at a distance, which had been a leading feature of several previous references to the Word. He does, however, reveal (as he had evidently done to Stillingfleet a few years before) what the verbal part of the Mason Word was: it consisted of the words Jachin and Boaz, the significance of which will be considered in the next section. Kirk does not actually identify them as words that were part of the Word – he merely says the Word was a comment on these words – but the masonic catechisms reveal that Boaz was the word given to the entered apprentice, Jachin that given to the fellow craft. When Kirk had explained this to Stillingfleet the latter had called it a 'Rabbinical mystery': as the words of the Mason Word were connected with Solomon's Temple it was

<sup>20</sup> Carr, 'Mason Word', 223.

<sup>21</sup> EUL, Ms Laing, III, 551; R. Kirk, 'The secret common-wealth, or a treatise displaying the chief curiosities among the people of Scotland', pp. 69–70. Printed as *The secret common-wealth and A short treatise of charms and spels*, ed. S. Sanderson (London, 1976), 88–9. The manuscript is dated 1692 on the title page but 1691 at the end of the text.



natural to connect their use with Jewish traditions, and Stillingfleet probably had in mind the Cabbala, the esoteric lore of the Jews which fascinated many Christians. The search for understanding of the Cabbala, which sometimes merged with the Hermetic search for lost knowledge, was hampered by the fact that it was believed that its secrets were never written but (like the Mason Word) handed down by word of mouth.

Something of a pattern emerges from these varied references to the Mason Word. As time passed the Word became progressively less secret. In the first decades of the century it may be assumed to have existed but there is no proof. By one-third of the way through the century news of the Word had leaked out, though in such vague terms that it had connotations of the sinister and supernatural. By the 1650s details were emerging as to what its functions were. By the 1660s and 1670s masons themselves were becoming willing to use the term in writing (as the apprenticeship indenture and records of Aberdeen Lodge show). By 1690 Robert Kirk knew the secrets of the Word and was prepared to talk and write about them. Then, in the last years of the century, the first written catechism concerned with admission to the Word appeared – and in 1699 the Lodge of Aberdeen even seems to have had a masonic catechism concerning the Word printed.<sup>22</sup>

Belief that the Word was linked with the supernatural lingered on, however. In February to May 1695 Andrew Mackie of the parish of Rerrick in Kirkcudbrightshire was troubled by a spirit which appeared in visible form, threw objects about, made noises, started fires and generally made a nuisance of itself. Alexander Telfair, the parish minister, investigated, bringing in five ministers and nine other respectable witnesses, all of whom witnessed the activities of this lively poltergeist.

The said *Andrew Mackie* being a Meason to his Employment, 'tis given out, that when he took the *Meason-word*, he devoted his first Child to the Devil: but I am certainly informed, he never took the same, and knows not what the word is

related Telfair.<sup>23</sup> A mason's house was troubled by a spirit, and others then jumped to the conclusion that this must be connected with another supernatural phenomenon, the Mason Word, seen as a form of devil worship. Bishop Stillingfleet would doubtless have reached the same conclusion, but this reference is unique in linking the Word to witchcraft by suggesting that a compact with the devil was involved – no stonemason is known to have been involved in any of the hundreds of witchcraft cases in Scotland. Thus it was only when people were looking for an explanation for the haunting of

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Aberdeen*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> E. J. Barron, 'The Meason-Word', *AQC*, 14 (1901), 56; A. Telfair, *A true relation of an apparition, expressions, and actings, of a spirit, which infested the house of Andrew Mackie, in Ring-Croft of Stocking, in the paroch of Rerrick, in the stewartry of Kirkcudbright, in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1696), 6. The pamphlet was reprinted in an appendix to R. Law, *Memorials*, ed. C. K. Sharpe (Edinburgh, 1818), 267–77.

Mackie's house that the vague worries about the supernatural overtones of the Word developed in such an extreme form. And the mason involved was able to refute the charge by stating that he had not got the Word, either because of limitations in his skill and training or because he had not sought to be initiated. Masons with the Word would probably have said that Mackie was not a mason but a cowan.

By this time even a casual English traveller could pick up quite a lot of information about the word. One wrote in 1697, in a passage partially quoted in an earlier chapter,

The Laird[s] of Roslin have been great Architects and patrons of Building for these many Generations[;] they are Obliged to receive the Masons word which is a Secret signall masons have thro' out the world to know one another by; They Alledge 'tis as old as since Babel: when they could not understand one another they conversed by signs, others would have it no older than Solomon: however it is, he that hath it, will bring his brother mason to him, without calling to him, or your perceiveng of the signe.<sup>24</sup>

The theme of ability to summon from a distance reappears, and is extended, it being described as something that masons share world-wide. The connection of the Word with Solomon's Temple, first revealed by Robert Kirk a few years before, is also present, but some are not satisfied with this, and take the Word's origins further back to the Tower of Babel.

Even when considered in isolation the seventeenth-century references to the Mason Word provide enough evidence for it to be certain that the masons of Scotland had elaborate lore and rituals. But it is only when the masonic catechisms are examined alongside these references that it really becomes possible to understand the place of the Word in the life of the Scottish mason.

### **The catechisms: rituals of identification**

The documents known as the masonic catechisms begin to appear in the 1690s. It is perhaps conceivable that they emerge then because the rituals they reveal had just been invented, but a much more likely explanation lies in the fact that the last decade of the seventeenth and the first decade of the eighteenth centuries saw a very marked increase in the numbers of non-operatives joining lodges. The appearance of the catechisms is surely connected with this upsurge of interest in freemasonry, with the catechisms being written down mainly by and for the non-operatives, recording old rituals which had not previously been committed to paper. Moreover, the appearance of the catechisms comes as the natural culmination of the

<sup>24</sup> BL, Loan Mss 29/240, f. 160r. The letter is undated but it refers to a previous letter dated 20 July 1697. The passage is printed, with modernised punctuation and capitalisation, in HMC 29: 13th Report, Appendix ii, *Portland Mss* (2 vols., 1893-4), ii, 56.

long-term trend whereby the Mason Word had been becoming less secret, as knowledge of it leaked out.

As this implies, the catechisms are largely concerned with the rituals known collectively as the Mason Word, with how these were used in initiations and how they could be used to identify other masons. The Word is known for certain to have existed by about 1630, but as it dealt with the admission of entered apprentices and fellow crafts, the two grades of mason which were described in the First Schaw Statutes of 1598 and which thereafter became standard (as is shown by lodge minutes), it seems probable that the essentials of the rituals of the Word detailed in the catechisms already existed in the time of William Schaw, and may indeed have been largely created by him out of earlier practices of the craft.<sup>25</sup> There are considerable differences between the various catechisms which survive, which may reflect differing practices in individual lodges, changes and corruptions that had taken place in the rituals as they had been handed down by word of mouth over the generations, or the fact that those who first wrote down the rituals were enthusiastic outsiders who failed to remember or understand every detail of the rituals correctly.

Why were the rituals of identification and initiation of the masons called the Mason Word? As will be seen, the revealing of secret words forms the culmination of the rituals, but the adoption of the singular form 'Word' probably reflects post-Reformation protestant influence. The new Calvinist church in Scotland put great emphasis on the fact that the only sure guide to truth lay in the Bible, the Word of God. The scriptures were frequently referred to simply as the Word, and biblical references gave the word 'Word' an almost magical quality. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1). This was carried further in the Apocrypha, in the Wisdom of Solomon – a book whose very title would make it particularly significant to masons. The Word of God 'healeth all things', 'He made all things by his Word, and His Word killed unbelievers' (Wisdom 9.1, 16.12, 26, 18.15). Thus simply by calling their secrets the Mason Word the masons summoned up strong connotations of ultimate truth and mysterious power.

The catechisms which will be discussed here are those which pre-date the first printed versions, which were published in London in the 1720s.<sup>26</sup> Four or five catechisms survive for this early period (the dating of one is uncertain), along with a fragment and a reference to a lost text. The earliest of all is the Register House Manuscript. It is endorsed 'Some Questiones Anent the mason word 1696', and like most of its successors it has two distinct sections.

<sup>25</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 19, 22, 29 argues that the rituals had existed for decades before 1696. H. Carr (ed.), *The early French exposures* (London, 1971), viii–ix states that they 'almost certainly' existed 50 or a 100 years before 1696.

<sup>26</sup> Inventory, 5.1–7. Transcripts of all the early catechisms appear in Knoop, *Catechisms* and the best discussions of them are in the introduction to that work and in Carr, 'Catechisms'.

The first is the catechism proper, being a series of questions and answers through which one mason could assure himself of the identity of another, culminating in the acknowledgement of this by use of a secret word or words. The second section outlines the initiation ceremonies whereby the two grades of masons were admitted to the secrets of the Word.

Two other manuscripts are very closely related to the Register House Manuscript, the Chetwode Crawley and the Kevan, and all three may derive from a single lost original. That this is the case, rather than the three having much in common simply because they all describe the same rituals, is shown by descriptive phrases being virtually identical in all three texts. Thus at one point the Register House Manuscript describes the candidate being frightened with '1000 ridiculous postures and grimaces', Crawley does the same (with different spelling), while Kevan has the phrase with the word ridiculous omitted. The early history of these manuscripts is unknown. The Register House version was found among miscellaneous court of session papers in 1930; Crawley turned up in an Irish bookseller's shop in about 1900 but is clearly Scottish in origin; Kevan, found in 1954, probably came from the papers of a solicitor in Duns, Berwickshire, and has on the back a list of lands in that area and rents payable, confirming that it is of local provenance. Neither Crawley nor Kevan are dated, but both probably belong to the opening years of the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

That written catechisms were coming to be used in the lodges, and were not just illicit copies of oral rituals which were not supposed to be committed to paper, is evident from two sources. In 1699 Aberdeen Lodge paid a printer 'for printing of a Broad Side of an whole sheet concerning the Measone Word',<sup>28</sup> and this was almost certainly a catechism. A catechism was also written at the beginning of the minute book of Haughfoot Lodge in 1702. Later it was torn out in the interests of secrecy, but the last few lines were left as they occurred at the top of the page containing the first minute. This fragment contains enough to indicate that the lost text belonged to the Register House group of catechisms.<sup>29</sup>

The two remaining early manuscripts differ considerably from the Register House group and from each other. The Sloane Manuscript shows some signs of English influence in wording, but most if not all of its contents are Scottish in origin. It suggests in some instances the use of different symbolism in ritual from the Register House catechism, and it gives much more detailed information as to the recognition signs of masons. The Sloane version probably dates from the first, or perhaps the second, decade of the eighteenth century. The final manuscript, Dumfries No. 4, may well be rather later and thus post-date the first printed catechisms, and its text (which

<sup>27</sup> The fairly precise dates sometimes ascribed to these and other undated masonic manuscripts on the evidence of handwriting should be used with caution.

<sup>28</sup> Inventory, 5.2.      <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.4.

is combined with an unusually corrupt version of the Old Charges) may well represent in part the elaboration of ceremony and symbolism that took place in the early eighteenth century rather than traditional practices.

The summary that follows is based on the Register House Manuscript, with some alternative readings given from the other versions which are closely related to it, and additional material from the Sloane and Dumfries No. 4 versions. In transcribing the questions and answers in the catechisms' layout, punctuation and capitalisation have been modernised in the interests of clarity, and the numbering of the questions has been omitted. The Register House catechism begins:

Q. Are you a mason?

A. Yes.

Q. How shall I know it?

A. You shall know it in time and place convenient.

(Remark: The forsaied answer is only to be made when there is company present who are not masons. But if there be no such company by, you should answer by signes, tokens and other points of my entrie).

Thus if the two masons were alone or only other masons were present the question-and-answer session could be cut short, for the man being questioned could show that he had been initiated by demonstrating the secret gestures and postures of the Mason Word. Some of the later printed catechisms give indications of what these were.<sup>30</sup> The manuscript continues:

Q. What is the first point?

A. Tell me the first point, I'll tell you the second. The first is to heill and conceall. Second, under no less pain, which is then cutting of your throat. For you most make that sign when you say that.

Both points are given, but it is indicated that answering could be shared if the man being questioned wished to assure himself that the questioner himself was a mason. The first point is secrecy – 'heill' or hele means to cover, and rhymes nicely with conceal – and the second point is the punishment for failing to maintain secrecy. It is said that a sign should be made to indicate this (presumably passing a hand across the throat as if cutting), but this could not be done if there were non-masons present without being noticed, so the verbal reference to cutting the throat must have been substituted in such circumstances.

Q. Where wes you entered?

A. At the honourable lodge.

Q. What makes a true and perfect lodge?

A. Seven masters, five entered apprentices, a dayes journey from a burroughs town without bark of dog or crow of cock.

<sup>30</sup> Carr, 'Catechisms', pt 1, 343.

- Q. Does no less make a true and perfect lodge?  
A. Yes, five masons and three entered apprentices etc.  
Q. Does no less?  
A. The more the merrier, the fewer the better cheer.

The fanciful remoteness attributed to the meeting place of lodges relates to the tendency for lodges to meet outside burghs rather than in them, or more commonly to regard themselves as meeting metaphorically 'outside' burghs in that they were free from control by the burgh authorities; it may also be that the idea of the remote meeting place was connected with secrecy.

- Q. What is the name of your lodge?  
A. Kilwinning.  
Q. How stands your lodge?  
A. East and west as the Temple of Jerusalem.  
Q. Where was the first lodge?  
A. In the porch of Solomon's Temple.

The significance of the location of the first lodge will be discussed below, in connection with the pillars of the temple. The Sloane version omits the Temple, and indicates instead that the Word was first given at the Tower of Babylon (Babel), and the first lodge was in the holy chapel of St John. The substitution is apt: the ability to communicate through the Word had been needed at the building of the Tower, to overcome the confusion of languages, and as St John was the patron saint of masons in a sense all lodges were his chapels. The reference to the Tower also indicates that the English visitor who in 1697 stated that some said that Solomon's Temple was where the Word originated but others said the Tower of Babel was drawing on information based on both the Sloane and Register House variants of rituals.

- Q. Are there any lights in your lodge?  
A. Yes, three. The north-east, south-west, and eastern passage. The one denotes the master mason, the other the warden, the third the setter croft.  
Q. Are there any jewells in your lodge?  
A. Yes, three, perpend esler, a square pavement, and a broad oval.  
Q. Where shall I find the key of your lodge?  
A. Three foot and a half from the lodge door under a perpend esler and a green divot. But under the lap of my liver where all the secrets of my heart lie.  
Q. Which is the key of your lodge?  
A. A weel hung tongue.  
Q. Where lies the key?  
A. In the bone box.

The lodge described is obviously not a real, standardised type of building in which the members of lodges actually met. It was a symbolic building, an ideal lodge that all masons had in common. In their rituals the seventeenth-century Scottish masons may have marked out, with chalk or otherwise, the outline of

this lodge on the floor of the room the lodge met in (certainly this is what was done later), giving the lodge a temporary and diagrammatic physical reality, but it remained essentially a mental lodge. Was this lodge of the mind a temple of memory? The question was posed in chapter 3 when considering William Schaw's determination in the Second Schaw Statutes of 1599 that masons should be skilled in the art of memory, and it had previously been posed by Frances Yates – who knew nothing of Schaw's activities. Certainly we have a building visualised in the mind in which features and objects are associated with concepts to be remembered. First there are the three windows, which stand for the master of the lodge, the warden, and the 'setter croft' according to the Register House catechism. The last of these is obviously a corruption of 'fellow craft'; like a number of elementary errors, this indicates that whoever wrote the catechisms, or the originals from which they were copied, had little understanding of things masonic.

In the Register House catechism the three windows stand for the office holders and the masters or fellow crafts who govern the lodge.<sup>31</sup> The Sloane Manuscript awards the three windows to the sun, the master and the square. This may at first seem an odd mixture but the theme of authority may be present here as well, with the windows 'illuminating' the lodge through the divine sun, the wisdom of the master, and the eternal mathematical principles enshrined in the square. The three windows were doubtless also intended to call to mind the Trinity, and some of the printed catechisms do ascribe them to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.<sup>32</sup> But these three different interpretations should not be seen as mutually exclusive: it would be a poor symbol that had only one level of meaning.

The lodge also had three 'jewels'. A perpend ashlar was a dressed or squared stone which spanned the full thickness of a wall from one side to the other. A squared pavement might be a single flat block of stone, or a floor made up of such blocks, but the 'broad oval' or 'broked-mall' (Crawley) or 'covered Kinall' (Kevan) is more obscure. It was evidently a term that was not understood by the writers of the catechisms. The suggestion (based on the Crawley reading) that it refers to a mall or mallet used in cutting a stone with a pointed chisel known as a broach<sup>33</sup> seems weak. More plausible is the interpretation which takes 'ornel' to be a type or cut of stone (as in an Inverness building account of about 1680). A 'broached ornel' would then have been a block of stone the surface of which had been roughened or furrowed by use of a broach. A block of roughened stone would seem to complement the smooth perpend ashlar. This reading has, moreover, the support of some later catechisms.<sup>34</sup> Possibly, however, 'broached' referred

<sup>31</sup> The Crawley and Kevan manuscripts substitute 'the word' and 'the Words' for 'the warden' through mishearing or misreading by their authors.

<sup>32</sup> Carr, 'Catechisms', pt 1, 349. <sup>33</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 43n.

<sup>34</sup> *RPCS, 1685–6*, 530; Carr, 'Catechisms', pt 1, 350.

not to the broach chisel but to the basic meaning of the word 'broach' as denoting something with a point, and hence triangular. Later catechisms sometimes have drawings which indicate that the jewels and signs associated with them represent the square in the sense of the four-sided figure; the square in the sense of a right angle (shown by the two sides of a square joining at a right angle); and a third figure shown either as a cone, triangular in silhouette, or as a square divided into two triangles by a diagonal line. If the idea behind the three jewels and signs is to represent the square in its two senses and the triangle, both basic mathematical concepts, then the perpend ashlar may represent the square as a right angle (a squared stone but not a square one), the squared pavement represent the square as a four-sided figure, and the broached stone may be pointed (a broach could be a spire) to represent the triangle.

In Sloane, however, the three jewels become the square pavement, the blazing star and the bewildering 'Danty tassley'. In a printed version of 1730 these three are combined as part of the lodge furniture into a mosaic pavement (probably indicating the squares composing the pavement were different colours – perhaps black and white) with a star in the centre and an 'Indented Tarsel' or indented border round it,<sup>35</sup> but this may be merely a desperate attempt to make sense of the Sloane text which is in fact hopelessly corrupt at this point. The 1730 text also includes under the lodge furniture a Bible, compass and square, belonging to God, the master and the fellow craft respectively, but Dumfries No. 4 is unique in referring to these three items as three pillars in the lodge. In 1701 a member of the Lodge of Dumfermline presented it with a brass square, and in the same year a Bible was presented to Hamilton Lodge. Presumably these were intended for use in the rituals of the lodges.<sup>36</sup>

The three 'lights' of the lodge have been interpreted above as windows; but the word is also used in contexts which indicate that they could be lights or candles set up within the lodge. Dumfries No. 4 speaks of the three lights as east, west, and one in the middle, the east light being for the master, the west for the fellow crafts, the middle for the warden. The same manuscript also describes two lights, the one in the east where the sun rises and sets men to work, the other in the west where it sets and sends men to bed. The explanation for this seeming contradiction can be found in the Sloane Manuscript. This describes three lights, as indicated above, but then gives an alternative version of the catechism said to be used 'In some places'. In this there were two lights, 'one to see to go in and another to see to work'. Thus one illuminated the entrance in the west, the other the east end of the lodge which was associated with working. In the three-light version in Sloane the

<sup>35</sup> Carr, 'Catechisms', pt 1, 351.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pt 1, 351; E. Henderson, *Annals of Dunfermline* (Glasgow, 1879), 370. For Hamilton Lodge's Bible see Inventory, 19.3.



master's place is said to be in the east of the lodge, 'and the Jewell resteth on him first and he setteth men to worke', and the wardens 'reap' in the afternoon (gain profit from the work of the masons?). What this seems to be saying is that the east end of the lodge (the holiest part of a church, from which the lodge's east-west axis is borrowed) belongs to the master, and the east window is presumably the window of the sun (in the Sloane definition of the windows). Through it the rising sun strikes the master, for surely the jewel which first rests on the master is a ray of sunlight. The master-sun sets men to work. The work takes place in the east of the lodge, for the great vocation of masonry is a holy one: and it also takes place 'in the east' in the sense that Christianity had come from the east and the mason craft had, in legend, had its birth there – as did the illuminating sun of Egyptian Hermetic knowledge.

The Register House Manuscript moves on to the location of the key of the lodge. It is three-and-a-half feet from the lodge door: Crawley reads 'from the Lodge' which sounds as if the key lay outside the lodge, but presumably the meaning is inside the door. The key lay under a green 'divot' and a perpend ashlar – presumably one of the three jewels. According to Sloane the keys of the lodge lie in a bound case or under a triangular pavement, while Dumfries No. 4 only refers to the location of the keys in the second sense given in the other catechisms – the keys or secrets lie in the hearts and tongues of masons, the latter being in the 'bone box' of the skull. This second location, placing the keys within the body of the mason, was closely related to the first, for what lay under the green turf, marked by a squared stone, was (as will be explained below) a corpse containing 'keys' or secrets to be extracted by masons.

This concludes the section of the catechism which describes what can be seen as a temple of memory. If the lodge was indeed a memory temple, it was a crude one, and perhaps much of its significance had been lost in the century since William Schaw constructed it for the masons. The symbolism seems fragmentary and confused in places – though of course this may be partly the fault of the writers of the catechisms failing to understand what happened in the rituals. Nonetheless 'images', such as windows or blocks of stone, appear in defined 'places' within the framework of a building as in the classical art of memory, though there are few images and they are tame compared with the grotesque or striking images recommended in the art. The explanation of the latter point may be connected with Reformation and the fact that the lodges had to be careful to avoid anything which would arouse the suspicions of a protestant church – the general avoidance of overtly religious references in these early catechisms is striking.<sup>37</sup> To have peopled the lodge of the mind with human images might seem to smack of idolatry, both to the Calvinist

<sup>37</sup> The Sloane catechism does, however, include references to the masons deriving their principles from Christ.

masons themselves and to the censorious ministers of the Church of Scotland.

However crude and limited the lodge and its symbolism as described in the early catechisms may seem when compared to the classical art of memory, it may nonetheless have its origins in the concept of a temple of memory illustrating eternal truths and moral principles through images appropriate to the mason craft. For the inescapable facts are that William Schaw had seen the art as important to masons, and that the abstract lodge of the catechisms is consistent with the concept of the temple of memory.

After dealing with the location of the keys, the Register House catechism breaks off the questions and answers to comment

After the masons have examined you by all or some of these questions and that you have answered them exactly and mad the signes, they will acknowledge you, but not a master mason or fellow croft but only as an apprentice, soe thay will say

Q. I see you have been in the Kitchine but I know not if you have been in the hall.

A. I have been in the hall as weel as the in the kitchine.

Q. Are you a fellow craft?

A. Yes.

Establishing status as a fellow craft who has been in the hall or main room of the house, rather than in the kitchen with the servants as an apprentice, seems remarkably easy. The reference to making signs indicates that the author has lapsed into the assumption that the masons involved in catechising are alone, or in the company only of masons. The climax of the identification process confirms this:

Q. How many points of fellowship are ther?

A. Fyve, viz., foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, hand to hand, and ear to ear.

They make the sign of fellowship and shake hands and you will be acknowledge a true mason. The words are in the 1 of the Kings Ch. 7, v. 21, and in 2 Chr., Ch. 3, verse last.

Thus the catechism proper abruptly ends. Crawley and Kevan make it clear that the sign of fellowship and the five points are not separate items, as they appear in the Register House text; the five points *are* the sign of fellowship. And the Kevan Manuscript overcomes the coyness of the other two, which conceal the actual words of the Mason Word in biblical references, by giving them as Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars of Solomon's Temple, as Robert Kirk had earlier revealed. Quite where the words fit into this climax of the identification ritual is not made clear in this group of manuscripts, but Sloane describes the embrace that constitutes the sign of fellowship in more detail and indicates that it included the exchange of words. Moreover, Sloane introduces a complication by hinting at the words referred to in the other catechisms – 'J or B' – but then producing in addition an entirely new word.

Another [salutation, or sign] they haue called the masters word and is Mahabyn which is allways divided into two words. And standing close with their breasts to each other, [and] the inside of each others right ancle joynts [touching, and making] the masters grip by their right hands, and [with] the top of their left hand fingers thrust close on the small of each others backbone, and in that posture they stand till they whisper in each others eares, the one Maha-, [and] the other repleys Byn.

The five points of fellowship described here are slightly different from those of the Register House texts, for though the Sloane text describes foot to foot, heart to heart and hand to hand, ear to ear has become mouth to ear, and knee to knee is hand to back. Either way, it was not a ceremony to be attempted in public! But what was its significance?

By the 1720s two grisly legends had emerged among English freemasons as alternative explanations of the five points of fellowship. The first appears in a version of the Old Charges dated 1726. The sons of Noah raised his body from the grave in search of a valuable secret, evidently connected with rebuilding of the world after the flood. But they first agreed that if they did not find the secret itself they would nonetheless hold the first thing they found to be a secret. This was a bone with marrow in it, and thereafter they gave it 'a name as it is known to free masonry'. The corpse was then raised, holding it foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, cheek to cheek and hand to back; but the real secret was not discovered.<sup>38</sup>

The second version, the Hiramic legend, first appeared in its full form in Samuel Prichard's *Masonry dissected*, a catechism of 1730, but there are clear indications that the story had been known at least a few years before. Hiram (usually called Hiram Abif in masonic sources through linguistic misunderstandings) is mentioned in the Bible as helping Solomon build his Temple, and was therefore regarded by masons as Solomon's master of works. Hiram was, however, murdered by three masons who tried to extort the secrets of the masters' Word from him. A search was made for the missing man, and the masons involved in this resolved that if they did not find the 'Word' when they found him, they would take the first thing they found as being the 'Word'. This of course makes the assumption that the missing man was dead, and sure enough his grave, covered with green turf and moss was soon found. Hiram's body was raised hand to hand, foot to foot, cheek to cheek, knee to knee and hand to back, the skin coming off his fingers when the first attempt to raise him was made.<sup>39</sup>

These legends concern necromancy, the magical art of obtaining knowledge, especially of future events, from the dead – though in its original classical form the knowledge was obtained by summoning the spirits of the dead rather than by exhuming corpses. Presumably this necromantic element

<sup>38</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 89–90; Knoop, *Catechisms*, 92–3.

<sup>39</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 90–1; Knoop, *Catechisms*, 168–9.

in masonic ritual was derived from the general background of Medieval and Renaissance magic, as yet another alternative to the many other methods whereby men hoped to gain access to hidden knowledge. One likely source for this embracing of a corpse is the biblical accounts of the miraculous restoration of the dead to life by lying on the corpse. Thus Elisha lay upon a child's body, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes and hands to hands, a description that recalls the points of fellowship. By the later seventeenth century some credited the Rosicrucians with the ability to raise the dead to life, and extracting secrets from a corpse could be seen as entailing restoring life to it. Moreover, the fact that the Rosicrucians' possession of secret knowledge came through the opening of Christian Rosencreutz's tomb has echoes of necromancy.<sup>40</sup> The biblical references to lying on a body were known in Scotland, for they must have inspired the treatment in 1623 of Patrick Ruthven, who believed himself to be bewitched. Isobel Haldane, later executed for witchcraft, came to his bed to cure him and lay on him 'hir heid to his heid, hir handis ower him, and so furth'.<sup>41</sup>

The key or secret contained in the grave is not openly referred to in the very earliest catechisms, but the key that lay below a green divot surely indicates a grave. This becomes explicit in the Dumfries No. 4 catechism. It includes a question about the building of Solomon's Temple, and the answer emphasises Hiram's part in the work. This is followed immediately by:

Q. Where layes the master?

A. In a stone trough under the west window looking to the east waiting for the son rising to sett his men to work.<sup>42</sup>

'The master' here is surely Hiram, and thus it is Hiram who holds the key or secret.

Thus the murdered master mason's body lay in the lodge of the mind, its secret unrevealed. For in the legends both of Noah and Hiram those who raise the corpse fail to discover the real secret, and settle for a substitute instead, a word arbitrarily chosen from the first thing found in the grave: this word then itself becomes a secret. Presumably this is to be interpreted as a statement that though in becoming a mason a man was admitted to secrets, much greater secrets remained to be discovered. The quest for knowledge and illumination must continue.

The secrets to be discovered from corpses are referred to as words, and the ritual also involves actual words as part of the identification codes. The Register House group of catechisms reveals two words, exchanged during the five points of fellowship embrace, that complete the identification ritual: Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars of Solomon's Temple, as mentioned above.

<sup>40</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 9; John Heydon, *The wise-mans crown: or, the glory of the rosy cross* (London, 1664), sig. J4.

<sup>41</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 277n; *RPCS*, 1644-60, 353.

<sup>42</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 66.

Two pillars had long had a place in masonic tradition, and are described in the Old Charges. But the two pillars of the Old Charges are not the same as the pillars of the Temple. Rather they are pillars on which knowledge vital for the future of mankind was carved which prevented it being lost in the Flood – or alternatively by fire. Legends of such pillars had originated in the Middle East, dating at least from the third or fourth centuries before Christ, and were known in a number of forms (often confused and amalgamated with each other) in the Middle Ages.<sup>43</sup> Entering the Old Charges, they represented a variant of the idea of valuable knowledge from the distant past which became central to Hermeticism and its search for the secrets locked in Egyptian hieroglyphics: Hermes Trismegistus himself transmitted the knowledge inscribed on (or concealed in) the pillars to man. When the pillars of the Temple joined the pillars of knowledge in masonic legend is unknown, but the fact that though the Temple is given prominence in the Old Charges its pillars are not mentioned suggests that they became important comparatively late in the day. On the other hand, the Mason Word already existed by the early seventeenth century, so the Temple pillar theme must have been present by that time – unless it is assumed that the verbal components of the Word were not at first Jachin and Boaz, and that seems unlikely.

The two pillars as described in the Bible were free-standing pillars placed on either side of the entrance to the Temple, this being a characteristic feature of temples of the period. For such pillars to have names was also common, and in Babylon pillars were sometimes given names consisting of whole sentences upholding the rights of the local dynasty. From this and other evidence it has been suggested that the full Hebrew interpretation of Jachin was 'He (Yahweh) will establish the throne of David, and his kingdom to his seed for ever', and the coronations of later kings of the Davidic dynasty took place at this pillar. Boaz perhaps signified 'In the strength of Yahweh shall the king rejoice'.<sup>44</sup> How seventeenth-century masons interpreted the pillar names is unknown, though the Dumfries No. 4 catechism shows that themes of God's power and plans for the world are present. The same source appears to equate the Temple pillars with those which had preserved lost knowledge. After describing the grave of Hiram, the master of works at the Temple, the catechism continues

Q. Where [was] the noble art or science found when it was lost?

A. It was found in two pillars of stone; the one would not sink and the other would not burn.

It then reverts to the Temple and its pillars Jachin and Boaz.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 67–70; Knoop, *The two earliest masonic mss*, 39–44.

<sup>44</sup> R. B. Y. Scott, 'The pillars of Jachin and Boaz', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, lviii (1939), 143–9.

<sup>45</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 66–7.

It seems likely that this conflating of the Temple pillars and the pillars of knowledge was widespread. The pillars of the Old Charges were probably held not just to bear knowledge that had been in danger of being lost, but also esoteric knowledge, and they are now moved to Solomon's Temple to strengthen their identification with the craft's legends. Jachin and Boaz then become appropriate as secret words, for they refer to pillars bearing esoteric knowledge, standing at the Temple where (on one version of tradition) the Mason Word was first given. Exchanging the names in the fellowship embrace might also be seen as relating to the concept of fellowship itself, as the pillars were twins. This is, however, groping in the dark, as not a single explicit reference to the pillars of the Temple occurs in seventeenth-century lodge records.

There may, however, be cryptic references to the pillars in two paintings dating from the opening years of the eighteenth century. Alexander Paterson was an armourer by trade, and as such he belonged to the Incorporation of Hammermen in Aberdeen. He became deacon convener of the trades in 1684, and he was master of the Lodge of Aberdeen three times in the 1690s. His portrait includes the common device of a view out of a window behind the speaker. Through the window can be seen a river, and on its bank stands a building, only the semi-circular end of it being visible. In front of this stand two squat pillars, square in section and evidently made of stone (see plates 4 and 5). These serve no conceivable functional purpose. Has this Aberdeen hammerman slipped an allusion to his masonic affiliation into his portrait, a symbolic representation of the pillars which had stood before Solomon's Temple? The second portrait, evidently by the same artist, depicts Patrick Whyte, hookmaker, and is dated 1704. Whyte was deacon convener seven times in 1690–1705, and master of the Lodge of Aberdeen (which he joined in 1690) seven times between 1696 and 1708. Again (though not so clearly as in Paterson's case) a view through a window reveals two square pillars standing before a building by a river. 'Not proven' perhaps, but given the fact that the two men were freemasons it is hard to think of any explanation of these peculiar structures except that they are the pillars of the temple.<sup>46</sup>

In masonic legend two pairs of pillars, those of knowledge and those of the Temple, became fused into a single pair. But neither of these was the pair that most men in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries would have first thought of if two pillars had been mentioned. A third pair was far more important

<sup>46</sup> The portraits are in Trinity Hall, Aberdeen, E. Bain, *Merchant and craft guilds. A history of the Aberdeen incorporated trades* (Aberdeen, 1887), 45, 175, 179–80, 185; Poole, *Gould's History*, iii, 211, 213; Miller, *Aberdeen*, 22. Bain records Paterson and Whyte presenting their portraits to the Incorporated Trades in 1685 and 1690 respectively, but these are not the portraits which survive today: Whyte's is dated 1704, and the styles of the wigs depicted are consistent with the 1700s but not with the earlier dates mentioned by Bain. I owe this latter point to Dr Rosalind Marshall of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Whyte's portrait is illustrated in Stevenson, *Freemasons*.

symbolically, and therefore may well have contributed in some way to the growing interest of the masons in pillars. The mountains on either side of what are now known as the Straits of Gibraltar were called by the ancients the Pillars of Hercules, and were regarded as marking the end of the world, bearing the appropriate inscription *non plus ultra*, meaning 'there is no more beyond this'. But the most powerful ruler of the sixteenth century, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, king of Spain and all its American possessions, adopted the two pillars as his device or symbol with the motto *plus ultra* (or *plus oultre*) – 'there is more beyond', with of course the implicit boast of 'and what's more, it's mine!' This was not merely a brag about the extent of his territorial possessions. It symbolised far more, the growing achievements and confidence of European civilisation. Though the search of the distant past for lost knowledge would long continue, the Pillars of Hercules with their new motto reversing the ancient message proclaimed that men were outstripping the achievements of the ancients. Far from the world ending at the Pillars, there were new worlds beyond. The fame of Charles V's device spread throughout Europe, and encouraged a whole rash of symbols based on two columns, sometimes with clear references to the pillars of Solomon's Temple, though connotations of an imperial destiny were often retained, as in their use by Elizabeth I of England and by the French royal family.<sup>47</sup>

Nor was it only rulers who adopted the Pillars of Hercules as symbolising new aspirations and achievements. Francis Bacon displayed on the title page of his *Great instauration* (1620) the Pillars inscribed *plus ultra* with a ship venturing boldly out beyond them, to symbolise the limitations of the ancients and the potentials of contemporary man.<sup>48</sup>

The new symbolism of the Pillars of Hercules was so popular it could hardly fail to attract the attention of the mason craft, and it may have merged with the other pillars to make masonic pillar symbolism an amalgam of not two but three pairs of pillars. Assuming the pillars were (as in later masonic practice) regarded as flanking the entrance to the lodge, then the mason could be seen when he passed between them as simultaneously entering a holy place (the Temple); acquiring lost knowledge or secrets (as they were also the pillars of knowledge); and venturing from the known to the unknown in search of new worlds (as they were also the Pillars of Hercules). Threefold interrelated symbolism may seem confusing, but it would have been immensely satisfying in an age that believed that the more complex a symbol was the more powerful and valuable it became. There may indeed have been additional connotations derived from biblical references which talked of the earth and heaven being supported by pillars. However, the evidence for such elaborate pillar symbolism in this early period is almost entirely circumstan-

<sup>47</sup> F. A. Yates, *Astraea, The imperial theme in the sixteenth century* (London, 1975), 23, 57–8, 123–4, 127, 138, 145–6, and plates 3a, 6a–b, 20a, 21.

<sup>48</sup> R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the rise of modern science* (London, 1972), 63.

tial: it may well have been there and indeed it surely ought to have been there since the most secret words of the Scottish masons were the names of pillars.

The lodge of the early Scottish masons was clearly intended to be Solomon's Temple. It does not seem to have been mentally furnished with the pillars of the temple, but they were present through the use of their names as secret words, and the references to the lodge being orientated like the temple and to the first lodge having been held in the temple porch help stress this identification – as does the grave of Hiram, the temple's architect. This being the case, the 'work' to which the master puts the masons in the lodge was presumably regarded as symbolising the building of the temple. In the religious literature of the day 'building the Temple' was frequently used as a synonym for building the new Jerusalem, the creation of a true godly community. Thus the secret ritual work of the lodge was no doubt seen as being both parallel to the public role of the church in its mission on earth and entirely compatible with it, though quite how the lodges thought they were contributing to the work of God remains obscure. At the very least, presumably, they would have claimed to be displaying Christian ideals of brotherhood and charity in action, and to be dedicating themselves to the cause of true religion through their rituals.

The Register House catechism makes it clear that the initiations of the entered apprentice and the fellow craft involved separate words and secrets. The Trinity College, Dublin, Manuscript, a very short catechism dated 1711, states that Boaz was the word of the apprentice, Jachin that of the fellow craft. Thus the fellow craft had both words, for use in the five points of fellowship embrace. Where, then, does the third secret word, revealed in the Sloane catechism, fit into the rituals?

The Sloane catechism gives the third word as 'mahabyn'. The Irish 1711 catechism converts this to 'matchpin'. Other rather later catechisms give 'maughbin', 'Magboe and Boe', 'marrow in this bone' and 'machbenah'.<sup>49</sup> All that is clear from this is that none of the authors of these catechisms had any idea of what the word meant. Some of these forms appear simply gibberish. Others probably are distortions arising from attempts to make an unknown word meaningful. Thus 'machbenah' looks distinctly like an attempt to pass off the word as Hebrew. This seems to have been influential, but attempts to give it a plausible Hebrew meaning are not convincing.<sup>50</sup> The form 'marrow bone' was also influential in the eighteenth century, and was incorporated with the Hiram legend: the secret taken from the corpse was a bone, with the marrow or secret within it. In modern times it has been pointed out that the word 'marrow' can mean colleague, partner or workmate. It can be found in Scottish building accounts in the last of these senses, used to refer to those

<sup>49</sup> Carr, 'Catechisms', pt 3, 341.

<sup>50</sup> M. Rosenbaum, 'Masonic words and proper names', *GLSYB* (1985), 104–8.



working with a man or men.<sup>51</sup> Thus it has been suggested the words marrow and bone were exchanged by masons with a message something like 'there is marrow (fellowship) in our bones' and simultaneously a reference to the Hiram legend.<sup>52</sup> These 'marrow bone' explanations of mahabyn are not plausible. If the word was simply marrow bone, why does it appear in so many other forms before that form appears? And how had it become distorted to mahabyn in the first place? As the word first appears as mahabyn an explanation should begin with it rather than the later forms.

With so many implausible explanations already available, it is only with hesitation that another interpretation that may be regarded as equally implausible is offered. There is a possible and fairly simple meaning that has been overlooked and has at least the virtue of being based on the earliest form of the word. The Sloane Manuscript prints mahabyn as a single word, but immediately says that it is always divided in two: and in the ritual fellowship embrace the two halves of the word are said separately. May it therefore be two words should be sought, referred to as one because the term the Mason Word is always singular, and perhaps also because the fact that the two are one is part of the meaning? Simply consulting a dictionary reveals possible meanings of the two halves of mahabyn which seem to fit beautifully, containing both references to buildings and to one of the central ideas associated with architecture/masonry. Mahal was an Indian word, known in England at least as early as 1623. Derived from an Arab word meaning to lodge, it could refer to private apartments or lodgings, but was used in particular to refer to palaces (as, of course, in the Taj Mahal). Bin of course usually means a receptacle or container, but in its Scottish variant, ben, the word moves up-market somewhat, and refers to the inner or best room of a humble house, particularly one with only two rooms. Mahabyn then could be interpreted as 'palace-humble dwelling' or by extension 'from the palace to the most humble dwelling' or 'from the highest to the lowest'. Is one of the masons in the fellowship embrace saying, in a suitably masonic or architectural metaphor, 'from the highest' to which his fellow master replies 'to the lowest'? As seen in the previous chapter, it was regarded as a unique feature of architecture/masonry that it combined theory, the province of the upper ranks of society, with practice, the realm of the common man. John Mylne's tomb of 1667 boasted that he was both senator and artisan, that as architect he combined highest and lowest occupations.

This explanation of the word or words exchanged in the embrace of fellowship that completed the rituals provides superbly relevant symbolism (something which no other explanation of mahabyn has ever done), stressing in architectural terms that the fellowship of the architect/masons transcended social distinctions. There is one other possible element present. The ben was,

<sup>51</sup> E.g., *Mr of works accs.*, i, 136-52 (1535-6), ii, 156 (1624).

<sup>52</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 92-3; Knoop, *Scottish mason*, 95.

as already explained, the inner room of a two-roomed house. The room through which it was approached, called the but (hence the term 'but and ben', meaning a house with just an outer and an inner room), was normally the kitchen. The catechisms talk of the entered apprentice being in the kitchen, the fellow craft having access to the hall. Does mahabyn therefore also refer to the fact that the master mason (whose word it was) had access to the ben, the inner and best room, equivalent to the hall? Interpreting symbolic meanings is dangerous ground, sensible constraints on possible meanings being hard to discern, especially in dealing with an age which delighted in elaborate and many-layered symbolism. But in the absence of any other plausible explanation of mahabyn, 'mahal/ben' is at least worth considering.

There is, however, another problem relating to mahabyn. Why was a third word needed, when Jachin and Boaz already provided secret words for apprentices and fellow crafts/masters? The answer lies in the obscure process by which the two grades of the seventeenth-century Scottish lodges were converted into a three-grade system. This is first visible in the Sloane Manuscript itself. In describing the quorum for lodge meetings it specifies two entered apprentices, two fellow crafts, and two masters: and it describes separate grips for handshakes for fellow crafts and masters. Thus instead of these being alternative names for the same grades, they have become different grades. The change is sometimes regarded as arising from misunderstanding of Scottish terminology by English masons who were adopting Scottish rituals: not realising that fellow crafts and masters were the same thing they assumed them to be separate grades, thus creating the trigradal system. If this is the case, then the Sloane catechism by mentioning three grades of member who must be present at a meeting demonstrates its English origin. However, this conclusion obviously rests on the assumption that the emergence of three grades takes place first in England, and there is insufficient evidence to be confident of this. Indeed, the first evidence for fellow craft and master ceasing to be synonymous terms occurs in the Lodge of Edinburgh in the late seventeenth century.

Traditionally the lodge was run by the fellow crafts/masters. But only a minority of these men were masters of the public organisation of the craft, the incorporation: most were journeymen wage-earners in the real world, masters only in the lodge. The incorporation masters, used to monopolising power in the incorporation, came to resent having to share power in the lodge with their employees the journeymen, and succeeded in gaining complete control over lodge finances. The journeymen fellow crafts fought back, and the lodge was torn by disputes for years, the culmination of the feud being the secession of many of the fellow crafts who were not masters of the incorporation to form the Lodge of Journeymen Masons.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The dispute is analysed in Stevenson, *Freemasons*, chapter 2, and its course can be traced in Carr, *Edinburgh*.

Now this split of the fellow crafts/masters of the Lodge of Edinburgh into journeymen fellow crafts on the one hand, and the 'real' or incorporation masters on the other, was concerned merely with power so far as the lodge minutes are concerned: there is no hint that it extended to ritual. However, the minutes never reveal anything of ritual matters, and in a lodge with a hierarchical structure based on graded secrets obtained through initiations, the exclusively minded incorporation masters would be very likely to have accompanied their bid for power, and indeed justified it, by a claim to exclusive secrets which would set them apart from the rest of the fellow crafts. It would be a remarkable coincidence if a split in Edinburgh Lodge between fellow crafts and 'real' masters relating to power took place at more or less the same time as the emergence of the ritual separation of fellow crafts and masters, with no connection whatever between the two developments. It is therefore possible that the Sloane catechism reflects the extension of developments in Edinburgh Lodge to ritual matters. The masters now have a separate grip from the fellow crafts; and after briefly referring to the secret words 'J and B' the catechism announces 'Another they haue called the masters word and is Mahabyn.' It would thus appear that this is a special word for the new type of master, concealed from the fellow crafts/masters. The wording is such that it is impossible to be certain, but the Trinity College catechism of 1711 is unambiguous: the three secret words are those of the three grades.<sup>54</sup> This is not the place to embark on a full discussion of the complex problems of the evolution of the trigradal system. What is relevant here is that a third Word, possessed by a third grade of mason, was emerging by 1700, and that the evidence suggests that denying Scotland any role in the development is misleading. Scottish lodges were to be slow to adopt a full trigradal system, but Edinburgh Lodge is the first anywhere in which three ranks of member can be distinguished, and in several other lodges signs of a small group of fellow crafts tending to monopolise power can be detected and may indicate the beginning of similar developments.

The rituals of identification in the earliest of the masonic catechisms, with their sets of questions and answers, their grips and signs, their secrets and imaginary lodges, obviously imply a process of initiation and learning in order to communicate this knowledge. How this was done is explained in the other half of the catechisms, which are concerned not with whether men had the Mason Word but with how they acquired it.

<sup>54</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 261 states that the Sloane catechism 'does not appear to contemplate more than two sets of secrets', but in fact it describes separate grips for fellow crafts and masters, which would have been pointless unless three secrets existed as well as the three words.

## **The catechisms: rituals of initiation**

The second half of the Register House catechism is headed 'The forme of givinge the Mason Word', and opens with an account of the initiation of an entered apprentice:<sup>55</sup>

Imprimis, You are to take the person to take the word upon his knees, and after a great many ceremonies to frighten him you make him take up the Bible, and laying his right hand on it you are to conjure him to sec[r]ecie, by threatening that if [he] shall break his oath the sun in the firmament will be a witness against him, and all the company then present, which will be an occasion of his damnation, and that likewise the masons will be sure to murder him. Then, after he hes promised secrecie, they give him the oath as follows:

By God himself and [as] you shall answer to God when you shall stand nak[e]d before Him, at the great day, you shall not reveal any pairt of what you shall hear or see at this time, whither by word nor write, nor put it in wryte at any time, nor draw it with the point of a sword, or any other instrument, upon the snow or sand, nor shall you speak of it but with an entered mason, so help you God.

After taking the oath the apprentice 'is removed out of the company, with the youngest mason' – that is the most recently initiated entered apprentice. After thus withdrawing, presumably to another room, and being 'sufficiently frighted with 1000 ridiculous postures and grimaces' the would-be mason was taught by the youngest mason 'the manner of makeing his due guard', which is 'the signe and the postures and words of his entrie, which are as follows':

First when he enters again into the company he must make a ridiculous bow, then the signe and say God bless the honourable company. Then putting off his hat after a very foolish manner only to be demonstrated then (as the rest of the signes are likewise) he says the words of his entrie which are as follows

Here come I the youngest and last entered apprentice. As I am sworn by God and St Jhon, by the square and compass and common judge to attend my master's service at the honourable lodge, from Munday in the morning till Saturday at night and to keep the keyes therof, under no less pain then haveing my tongue cut out under my chin and of being buried within the flood mark where no man shall know. Then he makes the sign again with drawing his hand under his chin alongst his throat, which denotes that it be cut out in caise he break his word.

Then all the masons present whisper amongst themselves the word beginning at the youngest till it come to the master mason, who gives the word to the entered apprentice.

With the giving of the Word, the culmination of the ceremony, the candidate at last became a member of the lodge, an entered apprentice.

When the time came to promote the entered apprentice to fellow craft or

<sup>55</sup> As in the previous section, punctuation and capitalisation have been modernised in quotations from the catechisms.

master a ritual similar in many respects was enacted, though on this occasion all entered apprentices apart from the candidate were excluded from the lodge, and the elements of fear and humiliation were evidently absent.

Then he who is to be admitted a member of fellowship is putt again to his knees, and gets the oat[h] administrated to him of new. Afterwards he must go out of the company with the youngest [master] mason to learn the postures and signes of fellowship. Then coming in again, he makes the masters sign, and says the same words of entrie as the app[rent]ice did, only leaving out the com[m]on Judge. Then the masons whisper the word among themselves, beginning at the youngest as formerly.

After this the candidate advanced and put himself in the posture for receiving the Word, and whispered to the eldest mason

The worthy masters and honourable company [that I come from]<sup>56</sup> greet you weel, greet you weel, greet you weel.

Then the master gives him the word and gripes his hand after the masons way, which is all that is to be done to make him a perfect mason.

These descriptions of the seventeenth-century masonic rituals in the Register House and related catechisms provide a fairly clear picture of the sorts of thing that took place. Frustratingly they leave out much detail, but it may be assumed that the ‘ridiculous’ grimaces and postures sneeringly dismissed in these catechisms were not random antics but carefully regulated parts of the ritual, and that the candidate had been instructed in them during his withdrawal with the youngest mason. It may indeed be that the postures described in the Sloane catechism (and discussed below) were the ‘ridiculous’ ones mentioned in the Register House Manuscript.

Another limitation of the catechisms is that they are concerned with what ceremonies took place, not with why they existed. At first sight it might therefore seem that the rituals comprise merely a pointless heap of silly antics. But almost by definition people see rituals in which they do not believe or share as meaningless and absurd, while accepting their own rituals as belonging to a completely different category of meaningful actions serving real functions. Thus the strangeness at first sight of the rituals of the early catechisms does not mean they can be dismissed as empty and not worthy of examination, for what matters is that they made sense to those that performed them. What seemed to the author of the Register House catechism (or whatever original it was copied from) to be ridiculous was doubtless deeply meaningful to the lodge members enacting the rituals.

<sup>56</sup> The additional four words are inserted from the Kevan and Crawley catechisms. But even with them, the passage does not make sense: which masters and company could the would-be master bring greetings from? It seems likely that the texts are corrupt and should read ‘Worthy masters and honourable company, I greet you weel.’ The Lodge of Dumfries called itself the honourable company of masonry, the Lodge of Kelso the company of the honourable lodge, Smith, *Dumfries*, 8; Vernon, *History*, 85.

The rituals for making a candidate an entered apprentice have many similarities to initiation rites found in a wide range of cultures and ages: and some of the features of these early masonic rituals which seem most strange or absurd in modern eyes are in fact the most typical of such rites. Initiation may be described as 'The ceremonial transition from one state of being into another',<sup>57</sup> and it commonly accompanied changes in status and position in societies. Such 'rites of passage' included baptism marking initiation into the church, and the ceremonies accompanying the radical change in position in society brought about by marriage. In many societies some of the most important rites were those which marked the transition of males from childhood to adulthood, taking place either at puberty or the entry into an occupation. These rites associated with entry into adult life or into a particular group within adult society – craft, religious order or fraternity – almost invariably included some element of ordeal (suffering, fear, ridicule, or humiliation), and themes of death and rebirth were common.<sup>58</sup>

The functions of the ordeal were mixed. By making the transition from one status to another difficult it stressed how important the change was, and increased the value of the status sought: the harder it is to gain entry to a group, the more desirable it becomes. Moreover, those who had to suffer to gain entry were more likely to be strongly committed to the group they had joined than they would otherwise have been.<sup>59</sup> The ordeal at once indicated to the candidate how exclusive the new status was and that he had to be proved worthy of it. At the same time it re-emphasised to existing initiates how privileged they were to enjoy a status that it had been so hard to gain. The fact that all in a group had to undergo the same type of initiation served to create a strong bond between them. But there was also another psychological effect associated with the elements of ordeal.

Stress may be deliberately induced to heighten receptivity to new ideas and facilitate the learning of the lore or secrets associated with a new status. Fear and pain (either physical, or psychological pain induced by having to accept ritual humiliation) can be aids to memory. The idea of beating a subject into a child who failed to learn it otherwise was an old one, and it can be illustrated outside the schoolroom by a custom that has been traced in Shetland and Perthshire and was probably once widespread in Scotland – and indeed in England and elsewhere. It was of vital importance that all concerned should know the precise boundaries or marches of farms or estates, but in moorlands and hills these were often not clearly marked, being defined by reference to natural features. Periodic perambulations of the marches or boundaries were thus made to refresh the memory; and at important boundary marks boys

<sup>57</sup> *Dictionary of folklore, mythology and legend* (2 vols., New York, 1949), i, 525.

<sup>58</sup> See A. Van Gennep, *Rites of passage* (first publ. 1908; Chicago, 1960), and M. Gluckman, *Les rites de passage. Essays on the ritual of social relations* (Manchester, 1962), 1–52.

<sup>59</sup> J. Mills and E. Aronson, 'The effects of severity of initiation on liking for a group', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59 (1959), 177–81.

were beaten by their fathers to impress on them the importance of the occasion and make it more likely they would remember the marks. Thus even if the father died the child would be able to uphold his rights by knowing the marches.<sup>60</sup> Sparing the rod might spoil the child by leaving it ignorant of the vital information imparted at 'beating the bounds'. The ordeals of entry to mystery cults in the ancient world had exploited pain, fear, humiliation and exhaustion as aids to changing attitudes, just as modern brain-washing techniques do.<sup>61</sup>

In Medieval Europe the ordeals of initiation for entry to religious orders or to orders of knights were sometimes harsh and prolonged, while those for entry into crafts or fraternities were usually very limited in length and severity. But initiation rites of some sort were universal, and usually contained the basic elements which can be found in the early masonic catechisms and lodge minutes. The instilling of fear and enforcement of humiliation produced the stress and heightened emotional state in which the rituals, secret lore and attitudes which were then learnt would sink deep into the mind of the candidate. This would be followed by the ritual presentation of gifts (usually gloves in the masonic lodges) by the new initiate to existing members of the group, and by a banquet paid for by him.

The element of rough horseplay and humiliation commonly found in these types of ceremony, and the hearty drinking at the banquet which followed, may be undignified, but formed important elements in the ritual with serious functions, and their psychological appeal is indicated by their survival today in initiatory practices in many trades, schools, universities and other groups, in the face of the hostility of modern concepts of dignified behaviour.

In the Middle Ages it may be assumed that entry to virtually any social group involved initiation. University students underwent initiations gratifying 'the bullying instinct, the social instinct, and the desire to find at once the excuse and the occasion for a carouse'. The new student 'must be hoaxed and bullied; then he must be welcomed as a comrade; finally his "jocund advent" must be celebrated by a feast to be provided at his own expense'. Physical assault, humiliation and mock trials were common, and though university authorities sometimes disapproved all attempts at suppression failed.<sup>62</sup> The providing of gifts and banquets can be traced in the records of Scotland's craft incorporations, but the rituals of initiation that preceded these events can usually only be traced through scattered references, often relating to the efforts which were made to suppress them in the seventeenth and early

<sup>60</sup> B. Smith, 'What is scattald? Rural communities in Shetland, 1400-1900', *Essays in Shetland history*, ed. B. Crawford (Lerwick, 1984), 104, and review of that book by Albert Bil in *Northern Scotland*, vii, (1986), 75.

<sup>61</sup> R. Graves, 'Brain-washing in ancient times', *Battle for the mind. A physiology of conversion and brain-washing*, ed. W. Sargant (London, 1957), 166-76.

<sup>62</sup> H. Rashdall, *The universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden (3 vols., London, 1936), iii, 377-84.

eighteenth centuries – especially if they were undertaken by occupational groups whose organisations lacked official status. The attack on ‘brothering’, as such ceremonies were usually called, arose from Reformation and the suppression which followed of many traditional practices in an attempt to impose a godly, dignified life: craft rituals were not denounced as positively ungodly, but boisterous ceremonies likely to end in drinking sessions were likely occasions for ungodly behaviour. Burgh authorities were increasingly infected with this sort of attitude, and the emerging ideal of genteel and respectable behaviour of the late seventeenth century saw the suppression of such ‘barbarous’ rituals as an aspect of the advance of civilisation. Or, if not suppressed, they should at least be controlled and limited, and this was often justified as being done out of concern for the unfortunate candidate for admission.

To take a few Scottish examples to illustrate how common ritual initiation was, in 1639 the privy council denounced some very great abuses which had been suppressed but had now been revived. The problem was that of

a number of young boyes and pages, footmen, lakeyes, and coachmen, servants to noblemen, barons and gentlemen who when they find anie boy newly entered in service or paigerie (as they terme it) they lay hands upon thame and impose upon thame some certane dewtie to be spent in drinking, ryot and excesse for receaving him in their societie and brotherhood.

Those who refused were mistreated shamefully, and the disputes which followed tended to lead to the masters of the servants becoming involved, so these practices were to be suppressed.<sup>63</sup> In 1684 the burgh council of Peebles objected to the ‘great and extravagant charges and expenssis’ the burgh’s wrights and masons put apprentices and journeymen to ‘in their brothering’. Limitations were therefore placed on the timing of brothering and on the fees to be exacted. Thus though Peebles had no incorporation of masons and wrights until 1713, and no masonic lodge till 1716, the trades were nonetheless organised and their right to control the admission of members was accepted (though subject to the scrutiny of the council). By contrast in 1663 the same burgh had denounced servants in general for ‘ane lawless and unwarrantable evill practicq’ of brothering servants. For a trade organisation led by the masters to be involved in brothering was acceptable (within limits), but for servants to organise themselves in this way was potentially subverse. Nonetheless, brothering among servants continued and was eventually accepted.<sup>64</sup>

A general attack on brothering was mounted by the Society for the Reformation of Manners in Edinburgh in 1701. The burgh magistrates were

<sup>63</sup> *RPCS, 1638–43*, 135.

<sup>64</sup> R. Renwick (ed.), *Extracts from the records of the burgh of Peebles* (SBRS, Glasgow, 1910), 56, 115–16, 172, 185–7.



asked to stop brothering in the town guard, and craftsmen members of the society were instructed to 'speak to their own Incorporations, and endeavour to get the same suppressed there, both with relation to admitting freemen, and among prentises'. Two weeks later 'Brothering and excessive drinking and spending therat' were again denounced. The incorporations were to be urged to put an end to such practices, and writers to the signet (the solicitors who prepared documents to be sealed with the king's signet seal) were to be spoken to about stopping brothering among their apprentices. The captains of the town guard evidently agreed to end brothering, but otherwise the reformers of manners evidently had no immediate effect.<sup>65</sup>

The young John Erskine of Carnock provides an example of brothering in the offices of writers to the signet. He spent a few months working for an Edinburgh writer in 1683 in a sort of informal apprenticeship, and he records that a few days after starting work

This night I gave the lads in our chamber a glass of wine and a supper, that I might make my acquaintance with them, and they have a custom in brothering to cause the person on his knees hear what they have to say, but I might and ought to have refused that needless ceremony.<sup>66</sup>

'The lads' were probably socially somewhat inferior to Erskine, but doubtless the wine had weakened his inhibitions and led him to submit to being brothered, an undignified business that he regretted once he had sobered up!

When the son of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston became an advocate in 1700 he was brothered, and the way in which any group, however loose or informal, tended to demand some sort of initiation had been indicated when Sir John had married for the second time in 1690. He had then made a payment 'for brothering my wifes page'.<sup>67</sup> Evidently his own servants insisted on ritual admission of the new servant to the household. In Aberdeen in 1695 the convener court of the trades ruled that half the money paid to the incorporations by new members should be paid to the convener, while the other half was 'to be applyed for washing of the heids'.<sup>68</sup> 'Head washing' appears as a synonym for brothering on a number of occasions, indicating an element in the ritual borrowed from the sprinkling or pouring water on a child's head at baptism.<sup>69</sup> In 1715 weavers admitted as masters to the Incorporation of Weavers of Dumfries had to pay not just an entry fee but also for 'drinking, dyner, head-washing and other dues at such solemnities of admis-

<sup>65</sup> EUL, Laing Mss III, 339, Society for the reformation of manners: register of resolutions and proceedings, 1700-7, under 29 April, 13, 20 May, 25 November, 2 December 1701.

<sup>66</sup> W. Macleod (ed.), *Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock* (SHS, 1893), xix, 19.

<sup>67</sup> A. W. C. Hallen (ed.), *The account book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston* (SHS, 1894), xxix, 127.

<sup>68</sup> Bain, *Merchant and craft guilds*, 130.

<sup>69</sup> W. McMillan, *The worship of the Scottish reformed church* (London, [1931]), 253-4.

sion'.<sup>70</sup> No such 'baptismal' element is known for the seventeenth-century lodges, but in 1741 in Scone Lodge an apprentice's head was washed by the master pouring a little water and whisky on it.<sup>71</sup>

The widespread brothering rituals and masonic rituals had some basic elements in common, but the latter were much more prolonged and elaborate, and had additional elements drawn from the Renaissance background: in addition to those influences already discussed Renaissance fascination with the mystery religions of the ancient world, with their ordeals often including symbolic enactments of death and rebirth,<sup>72</sup> may well be relevant here. By contrast brothering may often have amounted to little more than heavy drinking and a bit of rough horseplay accompanying the ritual submission and humiliation of the candidate. The early catechisms give no indication of how long the masonic initiation process lasted, but mention in the entered apprentice's ritual of 'a great many ceremonies' and a thousand postures, even if not to be taken literally, suggests a fairly prolonged process. Learning the signs, postures and words would also take time. On the other hand, the whole ritual was conducted at a single meeting, and indeed gentlemen masons were frequently made both entered apprentices and fellow crafts at the same meeting. Nor is it possible to be sure how far the ritual went in genuinely terrifying and humiliating the candidate. To some degree these elements probably became in time symbolic rather than real, especially when adult gentlemen and not adolescent craftsmen were being admitted. That rituals could be watered down was indicated by the Lodge of Dumfries in 1712. When a gentleman was initiated the lodge was 'easie to him' because of his rank.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, if the ritual was to retain its psychological force in binding members of the lodge closely together, then participation in rituals whereby the candidate was at least made to feel ridiculous was important, though inflicting real pain and fear might be avoided.

As to the hints of symbolism in the rituals of initiation described in the catechisms, it is notable that it was the sun that would bear witness against the mason who broke his oath. On examination of the parts of the catechism concerned with identification it was indicated that the sun symbolised knowledge, divinity, and the master of the lodge. Symbolism based on the tools of the trade also seems to have been present, though its extent is not clear. The new entered apprentice swore by the square, compass and common judge, and presumably the significance of these had been explained to him by his instructor, the youngest mason. The term 'common judge' is

<sup>70</sup> W. Dickie, 'Incorporated trades of Dumfries', *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, xviii, pt 5 (1905-6), 411-12.

<sup>71</sup> D. C. Smith, *History of the ancient masonic Lodge of Scoon and Perth* (Perth, 1898), 101; Knoop, *Scottish Mason*, 85n.

<sup>72</sup> See E. Wind, *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958).

<sup>73</sup> Smith, *Dumfries*, 61.

ambiguous. It is possible that it simply referred to God, the common judge of all mankind. But the mason had already sworn by God, and to couple his name with those of two tools would be strange. What was meant was, therefore, probably another tool. This was the judge, jadge or gauge, a piece of wood or other material on which the reverse of the profile of the shape a stone was to be carved in had been cut. As carving the stone proceeded, the jadge would be held against it as a template to ensure the accuracy of the profile being cut. A jadge of this sort is illustrated in the late seventeenth-century mark book of the Lodge of Aberdeen<sup>74</sup> and like the square and compasses it could easily be given symbolic significance. The tool may have been unknown to the writers of the early catechisms, who thus erroneously took the word to be 'judge' in a legal sense and added the word 'common' in an attempt to make sense of it.<sup>75</sup> But it may well be that both meanings are present: the 'jadge' judges the accuracy of a carving as God judges the merits of men, and the catechism plays with the two senses of the term.

One indication of the symbolism present in the initiation rituals is of course the symbolism of the identification rituals already described, for teaching the latter to the initiate must have been central to initiation. A doggerel poem on the subject of mortality which appears at the end of the Dumfries No. 4 Manuscript suggests further symbolic elements; the drawings of symbols it contains are indicated in italics in the following transcript:

A caput mortuu[m] [*skull*] here you see  
 To mind you of mortality  
 Behold great [*two pillars*] strength by [ ] fell  
 but establish [ ] in heaven doeth dwe[ll]  
 Let all your actions [*square*] be just and trwe  
 which after death gives life to you  
 Keep within [*compass*] of your appointed sp[here]  
 be ready for your latter end draws near.

The 'caput mortuum' or death's head appears as a reminder of death, a commonplace symbol and theme, but it is likely that death played a much more prominent part in the initiation ritual of the entered apprentice than this suggests. Hiram's grave lay in the lodge and contained secrets, as has already been seen, and the five points of fellowship embrace recalled the raising of his body from the grave. A central theme in many initiation ceremonies was ritual

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *Aberdeen*, opposite p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> F. J. Underwood, 'The common judge', *AQC*, 54 (1941), 11–14, argued the opposite: that judge in the legal sense was meant, an interpretation partly based on the anglocentric belief that the Register House catechism must be a copy of a lost English original so judge could not have a Scottish meaning. The late seventeenth-century laws of Aberdeen Lodge refer to 'the Common judge' and 'the common Judges of the land' meaning simply the judges in public courts (Miller, *Aberdeen*, 58, 64). This meaning cannot be attached to the phrase as used in the catechisms, however, as the candidate was being sworn to secrecy in the lodge and could not be answerable for breach of his oath in a public court.

death and rebirth, the transition celebrated being regarded as of such fundamental importance that it involved the candidate's death in one state and his birth into another. Putting these points together, it is likely that the seventeenth-century masonic ritual involved the candidate in some sort of ritual death, and subsequent raising from the dead or being born again into the world of masonry through being lifted from the grave in the five points of fellowship embrace. Ritual burial, the death's head displayed to emphasise mortality, being raised from the dead, and perhaps having the candidate himself ritually exhume and raise Hiram's body in a necromantic search for the secret keys to masonry, would fit in well with the Register House catechism's talk of many ceremonies designed to frighten the candidate.

The Register House and related catechisms have very little to say about what the postures and grips which are mentioned were. Luckily the Sloane Manuscript substitutes for the description of rituals contained in the other catechisms 'A narrative of the freemasons word and signes'. This gives a bewildering variety of postures, signs and grips whereby one mason could identify another which were evidently taught in the initiation ritual. Moving the right hand from left to right a few inches under the chin, or moving a drinking glass in the same way, were signs recalling the throat-cutting gesture. The hat could be taken off with a complicated movement, the feet could be positioned at right angles to each other, or tools could be arranged or the arm bent to form a square, thus revealing the mason. Turning the eyes towards the east and the mouth towards the west had the same effect. Ways of clearing the throat, knocking on a door (two little knocks followed by one big one), or bending a pin or cutting a paper to form a square were all signs. So too was knocking on a wall at a building site and

saying this is bosc or hollow. If there be any free brother at the work he will answer that it is solid, which words are signes to discover each other.

Surely bosc or boss is a concealed reference to Boaz: the pillar was, according to some of the legends concerning it, hollow, with ancient knowledge preserved inside it, and the 'solid' building could be seen as 'hollow' in that by enshrining the principles of architecture it contained secrets. Use of the word boss in the sense of hollow seems to have been distinctively Scottish, so this means of identification must have originated there. Finally, the Sloane Manuscript claimed that masons in France, Spain and Turkey kneel on the left knee and hold up their right hands to the sun to identify themselves. This suggestion of an international side to masonic recognition codes is also mentioned in the English traveller's 1697 reference to the Mason's Word, and confirms the suspicion arising from the fact that the same two sources are also unique in mentioning the Tower of Babel that the Englishman had got hold of information derived from the Sloane variant of masonic ritual.

It is hard to know what authority to give the disorderly heap of signs and

postures (not all of which have been mentioned here) given in the Sloane catechism. However, in essentials it probably describes the main secret methods of recognition comprehended in the term the Mason Word, which fellow masons had a duty to respond to, though far more signs are detailed than would be strictly needed for identification purposes: invention for the sake of elaborating rituals has gone far beyond the utilitarian needs of working stonemasons.

The knowledge that the catechisms provide about Scottish masonic rituals at the end of the seventeenth century is fragmentary and, in places, confused, since those who wrote the catechisms did not themselves fully understand the rituals. The authors of the earliest catechisms are unknown: they may have been men who had themselves been initiated, but equally they may have compiled the catechisms from information supplied by initiates to the writers. The identification rituals supply information about the 'lodge of the mind' and its symbolism, but they only do this in so far as this information was incorporated in the ritual: they do not attempt to describe the lodge systematically. Similarly the descriptions of the initiation rituals only give bare outlines of the procedure. Nothing is said as to what the candidate apprentice or master was instructed in by the 'youngest mason', but a sentence added at the end of Dumfries No. 3 Manuscript, a late seventeenth-century version of the Old Charges, describes the candidate being taken aside by a tutor chosen by himself (instead of the youngest mason) who instructed him in the secrets which should never be written, and showed him the whole mystery, so that 'at his return he may exercise with the rest of his fellow masons'.<sup>76</sup> This information never to be written down probably included the contents of the catechisms themselves, and doubtless much additional information relating to the symbolism of the lodge and the craft. At some stage the candidate presumably had the Old Charges read or recited to him. However, the details of the rituals probably differed considerably from lodge to lodge, judging by the differences between the Register House and Sloane catechisms, and by the fact that there is very little evidence in this early period of contact between individual lodges.

There is general acceptance that the rituals described in the catechisms date from long before the 1696 date of the Register House Manuscript, and it should be stressed that they are the only masonic rituals known in Britain before 1700. It has, it is true, been urged that it is 'a matter of pure coincidence' that all the earliest catechisms are of Scottish origin,<sup>77</sup> and it has been denied that the Scottish lodges had a 'symbolic working' before 1700. While it is certainly true that masonic symbolism was to develop greatly in the eighteenth century, the rituals of the first catechisms are full of symbolism – and some of the symbolism relates to the working tools of the trade, a feature which is sometimes held to be a distinguishing mark of freemasonry. Unless

<sup>76</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Carr, *Early French exposures*, ix.

'symbolic working' is very narrowly defined the catechisms clearly indicate that it was present in the early Scottish lodges.

A closely related line of attack on the evidence has been to say that, though Scots masons may have had rituals around 1700, these were 'bare and slight', the implications being first that they were not worthy of the name freemasonry, and secondly that English masons had more respectable and elaborate rituals. From these latter, it is implied, later masonic ritual developed, though there are admitted to be some signs of Scottish influence.<sup>78</sup> This is a travesty of the evidence. The reader is asked to dismiss the Scottish rituals (which undoubtedly did exist) as unimportant, in favour of supposed English rituals for which there is no evidence whatever. Masonic ritual was to develop greatly in England in the early eighteenth century, far beyond the traditional Scottish practices described in the early catechisms. But the starting point for these developments was the Scottish rituals, and features which have Scottish origins remain central. The very names of the grades to which English and Irish masons were initiated, entered apprentice and fellow craft, were taken from Scottish rituals. The Mason Word, with all the term implies of initiation rituals, secret methods of identification including catechising, grips and words, comes from Scotland,<sup>79</sup> and many of the practices associated with the Word were retained in England though the term Mason Word itself was dropped. The secret words themselves, Jachin and Boaz, and Mahabyn, are found first in Scottish rituals. Men in England and Ireland in the opening years of the eighteenth century who were interested in such matters obtained copies of masonic identification and initiation rituals derived from Scottish practice. None, it would seem, could find any English equivalents to study as a starting-point for developing masonic rituals.

It would be going too far to assert that English stonemasons did not have rituals in the seventeenth century. It is undeniable, however, that not only is nothing known about them but, when in the early eighteenth century evidence begins to emerge about the rituals of English freemasons, they are clearly of Scottish origin. So popular did the basically Scottish rituals become that they swept away into total oblivion any distinctively English practices except those relating to study of the Old Charges.

How strong is the case for linking the evidence about rituals which survives from the 1690s with the reform of the craft by William Schaw a century before? One connection has already been suggested: there is a strong case for regarding the mental lodge described in the catechisms as a memory temple, crude and confused perhaps by the process of being handed down over the generations. This lodge, containing the grave of Hiram, the greatest of all architects, could also be seen as the temple of architecture, finally attained by the architect as a result of his studies (according to Vitruvius). The Renaissance theme of hidden quest through a secret organisation for lost

<sup>78</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 126, 134, 140–1.

<sup>79</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 9.

knowledge is also present, in necromantic and (through the Old Charges) Egyptian forms. More specifically, the grades of entered apprentice and fellow craft, initiation to which through the Mason Word lies at the heart of the catechisms, are first found in the First Schaw Statute of 1598. It seems reasonable to assume that Schaw provided for some form of initiation, and the statutes mention the candidate's 'intenders' who prepared the entered apprentice for admission as fellow craft. This obviously recalls the 'youngest mason' of the catechisms and the tutor of the Dumfries No. 3 Manuscript. The fact that the statutes note separately that no one is to be admitted a fellow craft until his practical skills as a mason have been tested indicates that the duties of the intenders had nothing to do with that side of the candidate's qualifications, and the presumption that they taught him secrets and rituals is therefore strong. One objection to the idea that the intenders coached the candidates in secrets is that the statutes state that at least six fellow crafts and two entered apprentices must be present in the lodge at the promotion of a man to fellow craft. Thus, it has been argued, there could be no communication of secrets, for the entered apprentices would hear and see the secrets of the fellow crafts.<sup>80</sup> The explanation probably lies in the fact that entered apprentices had to be present to make up the quorum of the lodge, and perhaps to play some preliminary part in a ritual whereby the candidate for promotion bade farewell to his present state as their equal before embarking on the ordeal which would raise him to a higher state. But the fact that entered apprentices were at the meeting of the lodge does not mean that they were automatically privy to all that went on, and the suggestion that they were excluded from those parts of the ritual that involved the secrets of the fellow craft is strengthened by the fact that the statutes refer at one point to the six fellow crafts as the six admitters, implying that only they actually took part in the admission of the new fellow craft.

There is no hint in the First Schaw Statutes of preparing the entered apprentices for admission in the same way as the fellow crafts. This raises the possibility that in Schaw's time the main or only ceremony of initiation came on promotion to fellow craft. Two intenders can be found chosen by candidates seeking admission as fellow craft masters in Edinburgh Lodge in 1606 and 1609, and new masters are described as having done their duty in all points, or some similar phrase, suggesting a process of learning and ritual. But in Aitchison's Haven Lodge from 1599 intenders were chosen by both candidate entered apprentices and would-be fellow crafts, indicating that here there were two separate initiation ceremonies, as in the catechisms, for which the candidates have to receive instruction. Further, the intenders at Aitchison's Haven were usually the youngest masons, the most recently promoted of their grades, as in the catechisms.<sup>81</sup>

From 1598–9 the grades within masonic lodges of entered apprentice and

<sup>80</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 136–7.

<sup>81</sup> Knoop, *Catechisms*, 5; Carr, *Edinburgh*, 61.

fellow craft were established, and they had instruction and ceremony associated with their admissions. Through lodge minutes the entry of men to these grades can be traced throughout the century. In 1696 the rituals of their admissions are revealed, and the evidence of continuity suggests that, though the rituals of 1600 doubtless differed considerably from those of 1700, there was in all probability much underlying similarity between them, and that William Schaw thus had had a major part in the shaping of not only the lodge organisation but the rituals of freemasonry. Both were then exported to England in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.



## 7 Sir Robert Moray: masonry, symbolism and ethics

### The life of Sir Robert Moray

Robert Moray was born in 1607 or 1608, the son of Sir Mungo Moray of Craigie, a small Perthshire laird.<sup>1</sup> Nothing is known of his early life and education except for a few anecdotes that emerge from letters he wrote in later life. But these do reveal the early development of two major fields of interest which were to be lifelong: science and technology on the one hand, ethics on the other. The latter he regarded as the more important of the two, but in his mind the two were inseparable.

In philosophy Moray was a Christian stoic, and in 1658 he told a friend 'it hath been my study, now 31 years to understand and regulate my passions'.<sup>2</sup> The precision with which, so many years later, he dated the start of his lifelong attempt to achieve stoic control of the emotions to 1627 suggests that some turning-point in his life and outlook had then taken place, but we have no hint as to what it might have been. As to technological interests, Moray records that about 1623 he visited 'the moat at Culros, when the coal was going there'.<sup>3</sup> The 'moat' was an artificial island that had been constructed on the tidal mud flats of the Firth of Forth from which a mine shaft had been sunk. Much later, in about 1637, he was in Islington 'in the company of some engineers who pretended great skill in aqueducts' who were taking up old wooden water pipes and laying new ones.<sup>4</sup> By the time of this latter reference it would probably not be inaccurate to call Moray himself an engineer. He had embarked on a career in French military service, and it seems that he had specialised in technical matters, for when he came back to Scotland after rebellion had broken out against Charles I (commissioned, it was later to be

<sup>1</sup> Much of the evidence that underlies this chapter is examined in greater detail in D. Stevenson, 'Masonry, symbolism and ethics in the life of Sir Robert Moray, FRS', *PSAS*, 114 (1984), 405–31. For a full biography of Moray (which coyly avoids mentioning his masonic interests) see A. Robertson, *The life of Sir Robert Moray. Soldier, statesman and man of science* (London, 1922).

<sup>2</sup> Kincardine papers (letter of Moray to Alexander Bruce, later second earl of Kincardine), f. 99v. The Kincardine papers are in the possession of the earl of Elgin, for whose permission to consult them I am most grateful. A microfilm copy can be found in EUL, Mic. M.714.

<sup>3</sup> Kincardine papers, f. 48r.      <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 31v.

alleged, by Cardinal Richelieu to see if the revolt could be exploited in French interests) the covenanters appointed him quartermaster-general of their army (1640). As well as being responsible for assigning quarters and supplying weapons to an army, the quartermaster-general was in charge of laying out camps and fortifications, duties which required knowledge of surveying and other mathematical and technical subjects. In Vitruvian terms, the quartermaster-general was a specialist in some branches of architecture.

In 1640–1 the covenanters' army occupied the north of England, and on 20 May 1641 members of the Lodge of Edinburgh serving with the army admitted Moray and Alexander Hamilton, general of the artillery, to membership of the lodge.<sup>5</sup> The choice of the generals to admit was not simply a matter of honouring military leaders to demonstrate fervent covenanting zeal, for in that case surely it would have been the commander-in-chief, Sir Alexander Leslie, whose name was a household word, who would have been admitted to the lodge, not comparatively unknown men like Moray and Hamilton. They were chosen because they were the two generals with technological skills. Ballistics required mathematical knowledge, and Hamilton had experimented extensively in the manufacture of artillery while in the Swedish service. He built up the covenanters' artillery train by manufacturing many light cannon, and was a friend of Moray – or perhaps became a friend through serving with him in this campaign. A few years later Moray lent Hamilton a copy of 'a noble book teaching the science of motion after the manner of Euclid' by a German mathematician.<sup>6</sup>

The two 'technical generals' would have been the senior officers who had most to do with masons and other craftsmen whose technical skills would have led to their being assigned to the pioneers, who prepared camps and fortifications and serviced the artillery. Through their mathematical skills the generals could already be regarded as architects or masons, so it was natural that they should be chosen for admission to the lodge – and equally natural that they should be intrigued at being initiated into the secret lore of the mason craft.

The next few years of Moray's life were adventurous ones. In 1643 he was knighted by the king, indicating that the covenanting episode of 1640–1 had been forgiven. But later in the same year he was captured by imperial forces while fighting for the French, and was imprisoned in Bavaria. By 1645 he had been ransomed, having made use of his captivity to develop his scientific interests through conversation and correspondence with Jesuit scholars, including the remarkable Hermetic polymath Athanasius Kircher who was a leading authority on the mysteries of ancient Egypt. From 1646 to 1653 Moray alternated between involvement in French military affairs and efforts

<sup>5</sup> Carr, *Edinburgh*, 118–19.

<sup>6</sup> D. Stevenson and D. H. Caldwell, 'Leather guns and other light artillery in mid-17th-century Scotland', *PSAS*, 108 (1976–7), 300–17.

to help the defeated Charles I and (after his execution in 1649) his son Charles II. In 1646 he was involved in a plot to free Charles I from the Scottish army which was holding him prisoner. The following year he was in Scotland, attending the Edinburgh Lodge on the occasion of the admission of one of the king's physicians.<sup>7</sup> Four years later he was supporting the young Charles II and the Scots in their attempts to resist English invasion, and was rewarded by being appointed lord justice clerk and a lord of session – though there is no indication that he had any legal training. Resistance to the English was unsuccessful, but in 1653 Moray was deeply involved in secret royalist plots for a rebellion against the English army of occupation. The revolt when it came, the primarily Highland 'Glencairn rising' of 1653–4, was a fiasco, and after a period on the run in the Hebrides (where he found time to make observations on tides which he subsequently reported to Kircher) Moray escaped to the continent. These were years for him of personal sorrow as well as military failure. Moray had married Sophia Lindsay, daughter of Lord Balcarres, whose alchemical and Rosicrucian manuscripts testified to his interests. In 1653 Sophia died in childbed after prolonged suffering, comforted to the end by her husband, whose rigid stoic control even in these circumstances was commented on.

From 1657 to 1660 the exiled Moray lived in Maastricht, mainly conducting chemical experiments, but on the Restoration of monarchy in 1660 he returned to Britain and spent most of his remaining years at court in London, devoting himself to scientific studies and turning his back on politics apart from one mission to Scotland undertaken in 1667. Sir Robert Moray died suddenly in 1673, almost penniless as befitted a philosopher, widely regarded as one of the few men at court who were not corrupt and self-seeking.

### **A mason and his mark**

A bare outline of Moray's career indicates an adventurous and varied life, but he is only recorded as attending a masonic lodge twice in his life, in 1641 and 1647. Why then is he of central importance to understanding the ethos of emerging freemasonry? The answer lies in the fact that Moray frequently mentioned his masonic affiliation in his correspondence, and while he gave away none of the secrets imparted to him at his initiation these references reveal a good deal of what masonry meant to him. In this he is unique. No other freemasons in the seventeenth century give any direct indication whatever of the meaning of masonry to them. Elias Ashmole mentioned his initiation in his diary, and James Ainslie had his possession of the Mason Word debated in church courts, but neither of these cases reveals anything about what masonry meant to the initiate.

Caution is necessary, however, in generalising about seventeenth-century

<sup>7</sup> Carr, *Edinburgh*, 131–2.

freemasonry from the information Moray provides. He was selective as to what aspects of the craft he discussed on paper, never mentioning the Mason Word or lodges. What he did write about was his mason mark, and it may be that he felt free to do this because the heavy weight of symbolism he attached to it was personal to him, and thus did not involve masonic secrets, about which he had been sworn to silence. A number of sets of lodge minutes demonstrate that taking a mason mark often accompanied initiation as an entered apprentice, but they also show that the actual marks chosen were, like the marks of other craftsmen, only very rarely of symbolic significance: they were, indeed, often based on the initials of the mason concerned. Moray's friend Alexander Hamilton took a right-angled triangle as his mark, probably influenced by Moray's unique enthusiasm for the symbolism of the mark into choosing one of mathematical significance.

It would be possible therefore to maintain that, as the masonic passages in Moray's letters are solely concerned with the mason mark, to which he gives an importance unknown to other masons, the attitudes and values that are revealed by the symbolism of the mark reflect his personal interests and are no guide to the nature of masonry. On the other hand, the fact that much of what Moray has to say links up with values which are present in later freemasonry, and which can be traced emerging in the seventeenth century, gives good reason for accepting that Moray associated these values with masonry because he had found the basis of them present in the craft.

Moray's mason mark was a pentacle or pentagram. Though he always referred to it as his mason mark he had in fact adopted it as a personal symbol before he joined the Edinburgh Lodge in May 1641, as is shown by the only known letter by him which pre-dates that event. In this letter of 28 March 1641 he worked the pentacle into the final letter of his signature.<sup>8</sup> The symbolism of the pentacle was old and complex, and Moray was particularly attracted to it because it was reflected in his family's coat of arms. The shield of the Morays of Abercairney bore three five-pointed stars, their crest a similar star, and Moray frequently used heraldic seals bearing these arms.

Before trying to assess the symbolism of the pentacle it is worth looking at the different contexts in which Moray used the sign, as this brings out the extent of his obsession with it. It is appended to all the hundreds of examples of Moray's signature which survive (plate 6a). Even when he sought in one letter to disguise his identity by signing himself 'Robin Gray' he included the pentacle.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes Moray used the pentacle on its own in place of a

<sup>8</sup> Southesk muniments, Kinnaird Castle, letter of 28 March 1641 from Robert Moray to Lord Carnegie, in bundle 'Southesk Correspondence, 1632-1689' in Deed Box 'Earl of Southesk, no. 4'. The letter is printed in W. Fraser (ed.), *The history of the Carnegies, earls of Southesk* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1867), i, 136-7.

<sup>9</sup> Kincardine papers, f. 1v; O. Airy (ed.), 'The correspondence of Sir Robert Moray with Alexander Bruce, second earl of Kincardine', *Scottish Review*, v (1885), 26.

signature,<sup>10</sup> or to refer to himself in the text of letters.<sup>11</sup> He frequently scrawled a pentacle on the outside of letters, below the address.<sup>12</sup>

Most interesting of all, because it links up with one of the meanings of the pentacle as his mason mark, was a specialised use for the sign Moray arranged with the earl of Lauderdale. Though in his later years Moray sought to avoid involvement in politics, in 1667 he agreed to visit Scotland and report to Charles II and Lauderdale, his secretary for Scotland, on conditions there. The persecution of religious dissidents had provoked a rebellion the previous year. This had discredited the extreme royalists who favoured repression and thus persuaded Charles to listen to Lauderdale, who was urging more moderate policies on the king. It was decided that Moray, greatly respected by both as an honest man with no party axe to grind, should be sent to Scotland and report confidentially on the state of affairs. Moray agreed, for the cause was close to his heart; he hated corruption and religious persecution, and both were very evident in the regime in Scotland. Parts of the reports he sent to Lauderdale would be highly sensitive, and he decided that to ensure confidentiality he would write these sections in invisible ink after the visible text.

However, Moray feared that Lauderdale would forget this. He therefore reminded him of it in a letter of 1 July 1667: 'Wher you see my Mason mark you will remember what it meanes . . . I think I will play the Mason in my next.'<sup>13</sup> Sure enough, the visible section of his next letter ended with a pentacle and this was followed by an invisible section denouncing official corruption and military oppression in Scotland – and explaining that this secret report had been delayed by difficulties in obtaining the ingredients for the invisible ink.<sup>14</sup> But Moray now feared that Lauderdale would forget how to disclose the ink, and on 8 August wrote cryptically 'Of all Vitriols, the white is best for the eyes when you go a starr-shooting. It makes hid things visible, and leaves the ground still undisclosed.' Two weeks later he again warned Lauderdale to expect a secret message: 'the next time you converse with the stars, you will get the Gleanings of our discoveries'.<sup>15</sup>

Moray thus played the secret agent with evident enjoyment, and in doing so equated the pentacle or star, his mason mark, with invisibility and hidden mysteries. Playing the mason was being invisible. The theme of invisibility has already been discussed as present in the Mason Word, second sight and Rosicrucianism, and it is surely no coincidence that Moray associates it with his mason mark.

The final way in which Moray displayed his mason mark is the most

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Kincardine papers, ff. 5r, 7v.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., *ibid.*, f. 225r.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *ibid.*, ff. 4v, 8v, 24v, 40v, 90v.

<sup>13</sup> BL, Add. Ms 23117, Lauderdale Mss, f. 90r; O. Airy (ed.), *Lauderdale papers* (3 vols., Camden Society, London, 1884–5), ii, 15–16, 76n.

<sup>14</sup> BL, Add. Ms 23127, ff. 113r–v; Airy, *Lauderdale papers*, ii, 19–20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 31; BL, Add. Ms 23127, f. 187r.

interesting of all: it appeared on some of his personal seals, surrounded by Greek letters. The earliest surviving impressions of such seals date from 1667, but he had described the design, which he intended to have engraved as a seal matrix, to his friend Alexander Bruce in 1658. At that time both men were exiles from the Cromwellian regime in Britain. Bruce was in Bremen, ill and depressed, and Moray, settled in Maastricht, undertook to cheer him up with long and frequent letters. In the course of this correspondence Bruce asked for Moray's advice about what would be the most suitable thing to have engraved on a seal intended for a friend. For this casual question the historian is deeply grateful, for answering it led Moray on through heraldry to wider aspects of symbolism. Turning to his own use of symbols, Moray told Bruce that he had 'been so bold as to assume a crest, which is, and must be called a starre', the boldness lying in appropriating so potent a symbol for personal use. He then mentioned that he had had a seal engraved with this star (though it is not clear whether it was an ordinary star or a pentacle) and the motto *esse quam videri*. He urged Bruce to adopt this as his own crest, calling it 'my Masons mark' and then drawing it in the form of a pentacle. 'I can tell you many fine things about it which I will forbear till you bid me tell them.' He thus deferred helping Bruce to 'play the Mason' (the same phrase he was to use to Lauderdale nearly a decade later) by revealing symbolic significances: but he cheerfully resolved to 'play the quarrier' instead by advising on what works to quarry in to find symbols for heraldic use. If Bruce wished to 'look into the theater of Hieroglyphicks' he was to consult the massive works on Egyptian hieroglyphics of Athanasius Kircher.<sup>16</sup>

In his reply Bruce misinterpreted Moray's motto, thus helpfully spurring the latter on to further explanations. Bruce took *esse quam videri* to mean 'to be rather than to be seen', but this would not, Moray explained 'quadrat well enough with the starre': the motto accompanied the star/pentacle, and stars were visible. The correct interpretation was 'to be rather than to seem', or 'to be rather than to appear'. The importance of the mysterious stars in the heavens was not what they appeared superficially to be, but what they really were. Or, applying the motto personally, what you really are is much more important than external appearances: 'I had rather be somewhat of true worth though unknown, than appear to be what I am not, whatsoever the advantage of it.' Outward appearances do not necessarily indicate the true worth of either a man or a star. Astronomers might classify a star as being of the least magnitude worth giving a name to.

Yet seing, according to one of their maximes, the Magnitudes of them are not to be estimated by their appearance, but their situation and distance, those starres that are highest being sure to seem to be the least, though it is lyke enough they are the biggest: and the severall distances is the ordinary reason given for the different appearances of magnitude.

<sup>16</sup> Kincardine papers, f. 58r.

Moreover, stars are not what they seem in another sense. All that can be detected by men on earth is light and beauty, but what are important are the invisible emanations of the stars which influence human life – though Moray made it plain that he did not believe that astrologers had got very far in interpreting these astral influences.

Moray was still worried that Bruce might take his use of a star symbol as an indication of pride. In a passage which suggests that he was thinking of the pentacle as a symbol which linked the microcosmos of man and the macrocosmos of God and the universe in the Neoplatonic scheme of correspondences,<sup>17</sup> he denied that he was so vain as to apply the pentacle to his own qualities:

I shall have business enough perhaps to get myself assoyled [absolved] from the guilt of vanity, if you charge me with it hard, for assuming so proud symboles, as if I had any thing in me that had any kind of Analogy to them; or as if no lesse then supremest lights seated nearest the invisible glory, and indowed most nobly of subcelestiall creatures (for Naturalists say the sun workes not so much by his owne beames as by carrying along hitherwards in them the Vertues the higher starres send first; wherein the Hebrewes, bolder of old and more conversant in those speculations then now, say many fine things) could to signify either what I have or would be at. Yet if I were very close put to it, I would perhaps get somewhat to say for my justification, of a higher sphear then any thing I have said yet, though I have been talking of the highest starres, from which at last all of a suddain let me plash upon your letter again, as if I were no more but a shott starre [shooting star]. And so let me observe that the word is not *esse et non videri* but *quam*. Which let me tell you takes in this too: that one may desire to be somewhat and not be known, and yet be contented to be known when it is requisite. I think I have by this time given you your belly full of my Crest.<sup>18</sup>

A belly-full of symbolism indeed, and the promise of more to come of an even higher sphere, or greater significance. But already the suitability of the star/pentacle as a mason mark is revealed. Masons, as many of the seventeenth-century references to the Mason Word indicate, were not what they seemed, in that outsiders could not see anything distinctive about them which identified them as masons, but fellow initiates could detect ‘invisible’ emanations which identified them. As with the stars, there was more to masons than appeared at first sight.

No impression of the seal Moray has described bearing the star/pentacle and the motto *esse quam videri* has been found. He had not publicised its existence, as he indicated in another letter after Bruce had expressed doubts about the motto: ‘My motto is not so notorious that I may not change it, if you insist stantly on it; for I do not think there be 3 besides you that ever saw it,

<sup>17</sup> J. E. Cirlot, *A dictionary of symbols* 2nd edn (London, 1971), 197. See Boaz, *Horapollo*, 66, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Kincardine papers, ff. 62v–63v.

though I had it a good while ago on a seale.<sup>19</sup> Having had the seal made, he was not using it, perhaps through fear of accusations of pride keeping it as a private statement of his outlook rather than a public declaration. This may also be the explanation of why it was that Moray described his other proposal for a seal with a pentacle and Greek letters in 1658 but did not use such a seal until nine years later (plate 6c).

Moray finally got round to his promised 'higher sphere' of symbolism when recommending an engraver to Bruce. If Bruce decided to get some stones engraved 'I may possibly set you on work about a fancy or two, whereof I will now give you one. It is my Mason Mark I spoke of to you in my last which I will first rudely draw and then describe.' The drawing that follows is of the pentacle surrounded by the Greek letters for the word *Agapa* (plate 6b).

This character or Hieroglyphick, which I call a starre, is famous amongst the Egyptians and Grecians. For the Egyptian part of it I remitt you to Kircherus bookes that I named in my last. The Greekes accounted it the symbol of health and tranquility of body and mind, as being composed of capitall letters that make up the word *Hygieia*, and I have applied five other letters to it that are the initials of 5 words that make up the summe of Christian Religion, as well as stoick philosophy, all which are to be found in it without much distortion or constraint, and make up the sweet word *Agapa*, which you know signifies love thou, or hee loves, which is the reciprocall love of God and man, and that same word is one of the 5 signified by the 5 letters. The rest are *Gnothi*, *Pisteuei*, *Anecho*, *Apecho*. There's enough at once. On the reverse if it were a double seal I would have my Crest in a wreath, being a solid starr rising with ridges from the points to the centre.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Moray's personal interpretation of the pentacle begins with the discovery in its lines of the Greek letters making up the word *Agapa*. This technique of finding letters concealed in pentacles and other symbols was a very old one. Pentacles thus treated can be found in the reign of the Emperor Constantine I (died 337).<sup>21</sup> Henry Cornelius Agrippa illustrated the pentacle with five Greek letters round it in his famous *De occulta philosophia* of 1533, interpreting it in one of the ways Moray refers to, as a symbol of health.<sup>22</sup> Another work published in the same year surrounded it with unidentified characters but also saw it as *symbolum sanitatis*.<sup>23</sup> In the seventeenth century John Aubrey detected Hebrew letters in the pentacle and therefore took it to be of Jewish origin.<sup>24</sup>

Having found *Agapa* in the pentacle, Moray then used that word as the basis for an acrostic:

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 88r.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 67r. The Greek words italicised in this transcript are in Greek characters in the original.

<sup>21</sup> E. Lehner, *Symbols, signs and signets* (Cleveland and New York, 1950), 107.

<sup>22</sup> P. cclxxvii.

<sup>23</sup> H. Bayley, *Lost language of symbolism* (London, 1912), 256–7.

<sup>24</sup> J. Aubrey, *Three prose works*, 244–5.



*AGAPA* ('he loves' or 'love thou')  
*GNOTHI* (an imperative 'know' or 'gain knowledge')  
*ANECHO* ('remain constant' or 'endure')  
*PISTEUEI* ('he puts his trust in' or 'he has faith in')  
*APECHO* ('abstain' or 'exercise restraint').

*Anecho* and *Apecho* are separated in the acrostic but placed together in Moray's letter, and it has been plausibly suggested that he was thinking of the famous motto summarising stoicism, *Anecho kai Apecho*, 'bear and forbear'. Further, *Gnothi* recalls the famous injunction 'know thyself': and it has been suggested that *Pisteuei* and *Agapa* were intended to bring to mind the phrase 'faith, hope and charity', the New Testament Greek for the first and third of these being *pistis* and *agape*. On this interpretation the five words are thus intended to suggest three famous phrases. There are, however, problems in trying to translate the Greek precisely, not least because of the odd forms of the five verbs Moray uses – a deficiency which probably arose from his very limited knowledge of Greek. But even if he did not mean to refer to the phrases indicated above, the general trend of meaning of the five words is plain.<sup>25</sup>

In Sir Robert Moray's mason mark there was thus, by his reckoning, a summary of his Stoic/Platonic/Christian ethic, with great emphasis (as will be further discussed in the next section) on love both of those known personally to an individual (friendship) and of mankind in general (charity). It would perhaps not seriously distort the intended message to read it as 'love God and your fellow men; know thyself; be constant; have faith; be temperate'. It would be wrong to suggest that Moray must have found this philosophy in the Lodge of Edinburgh. As already seen, his interest in stoic control of the emotions dated from long before he joined the lodge, and the stoic and other elements of his philosophy were all present in the general intellectual background of the age: there is nothing distinctively masonic about them. But it can be suggested that Moray found his philosophy so compatible with the atmosphere of masonry that he thought it appropriate to convert his personal symbol, the star/pentacle, into his mason mark, and always thereafter refer to it as such.

Throughout his life Moray placed a very high value on the platonic ideal of friendship, and of course the ideal of brotherhood lay at the heart of the lodge as a craft fraternity. He opposed persecution and doctrinaire religion, and found in the lodge a stress on morality divorced from such things. He was interested in mathematics, and indeed in technology and science in general, and found the masons dedicated to the idea of themselves as architects with a leading role in human knowledge. The growing belief that artisans had knowledge of value to philosophers influenced him sufficiently for him to take

<sup>25</sup> The present writer, being lamentably ignorant of Greek, has relied on the interpretations of the acrostic in A. J. Haddow, 'Sir Robert Moray's mark', *GLSYB* (1970), 76–80, and W. McLeod, 'Sir Robert Moray's acrostic', *AQC*, 97 (1984), 203–5.

an active part in the Royal Society of London's scheme for a history of the trades in the 1660s, working on a history of the mason craft. The more esoteric elements which, it has been argued, freemasonry had imbibed from the late Renaissance would also have attracted Moray. His interest in hieroglyphics would lead to his being fascinated by a craft claiming expertise derived from Egypt. Moray was, as has already been noted, the son-in-law of Lord Balcarres, a collector of alchemical and Rosicrucian manuscripts, and Moray was the patron of Thomas Vaughan, who first published English translations of the original Rosicrucian tracts. The statement by Anthony Wood, the antiquarian, that Moray was a great patron of the Rosicrucians was doubtless exaggerated, but he was interested in the Rosicrucian quest and could not have failed to note the parallels between that movement and masonry. Finally, if, as has been argued, the masonic rituals revealed by the catechisms at the end of the century had been in existence for generations, Moray would also have been fascinated by the coincidence of his five-pointed symbol encapsulating ideals of love, morality and knowledge, and the five points of fellowship of masonic lore, also concerned with fellowship and the obtaining of knowledge. A further intriguing link was provided by the fact that the pentacle was often (through confusion with the six-pointed star) known as the seal of Solomon, whose temple was so prominent in masonic lore.

Moray expounded the pentacle as a personal symbol standing for *Agapa*, but he also accepted other levels of symbolic meaning, as when it was equated with the stars. He also cited with evident approval the Greek use of it to denote health and general well being. His use of it below the address on letters suggests he thought of it as a greeting or good luck symbol, a usage which can be found elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> More basically, the figure five, often expressed as a pentacle, was widely regarded symbolically as referring to man by depicting his five extremities (head and limbs), and could also stand for the five wounds of Christ<sup>27</sup> – connotations that may well account for the fact that the points of fellowship in freemasonry numbered five. Moray must have known of these meanings, and doubtless would have happily embraced them all as adding to the potency of his symbol.

Moray's unimpressive record of only two attendances at the Lodge of Edinburgh makes the suggestion that he had an important influence on the development of freemasonry implausible.<sup>28</sup> But it may be that in his correspondence with Alexander Bruce he was discussing his mason mark with a fellow mason – which would explain why Bruce, though interested in Moray's explanation of the mark, never asked Moray about other aspects of masonry. By the end of the century Bruce's son, the third earl of Kincardine,

<sup>26</sup> See Aubrey, *Three prose works*, 244–5.

<sup>27</sup> Cirlot, *Dictionary of symbols*, 197, 270–1.

<sup>28</sup> Haddow, 'Sir Robert Moray's mark', unconvincingly suggests that Moray was responsible for the five points of fellowship.

was a member of the Lodge of Dunfermline,<sup>29</sup> and it is possible that his father had been before him.

It has been suggested that the reason that Moray, having in mind the design for his *Agapa* seal by 1658, failed to use such a seal in the years that followed reflected his feeling that the symbol was too rich in symbolic associations to be used publicly without seeming to reflect presumption on his part. Why then did he begin to use it in 1667? It is tempting to see it as being significant that he first used it while engaged on his mission to Scotland which he hoped would bring an end to oppression, misgovernment and corruption. Did Moray feel that by undertaking this mission he somehow earned the right to use the symbol of brotherly love as that was what, in essence, the mission aimed at achieving? Did he even feel that it might act as a talisman, helping in some magical way to bring success to his enterprise? From what is known of the man, and the awe with which he regarded the symbol, this is not altogether implausible.

It is Moray's use of his pentacle mason mark, his references to it, and his interpretations of it which provide the best evidence of the importance of masonry in his life and of the values he attached to the craft. But there are a number of other references which cast gleams of light on the matter. The most intriguing of such references occurs in a letter which Moray wrote to Charles II late in 1653. Moray was in Scotland, deeply involved in royalist plots for rebellion against the Cromwellian regime. But the royalists spent much of their energy quarrelling with each other, and in the course of these bitter disputes an attempt was made to discredit Moray by forging a letter in which he was made to indicate that he was involved in a plan to assassinate the king. This was then given to the exiled Charles II. Two letters from Moray to Charles survive in which he protests his innocence. In the first he stressed his loyalty by saying 'I am so absolutely disposed to obey Your Majesties commands that I take them for the compas animated from above, wherby my poor actings in Your Majesties service ought to be directed.'<sup>30</sup> In the second he substituted a masonic for a scientific simile. He assured the king that he was willing to endure anything 'that destroys not sense', even 'the utmost afflictions'. Having thus asserted his stoicism, he asked either to be punished or to be cleared of the charges against him. Confident of the outcome, he ends 'And then having found me guiltless, your Majesty may, as a Master Builder doth with his Materialls', do what he wished with him.<sup>31</sup> Is it merely that Moray, searching for a novel and forceful way of emphasising the extent of his willingness to submit, comes up with a heartfelt masonic metaphor arising from his connection with the craft? Or did he intend Charles to recognise the

<sup>29</sup> See Inventory, 14.3.

<sup>30</sup> C. H. Firth (ed.), *Scotland and the protectorate* (SHS, 1889), 49–51.

<sup>31</sup> NLS, Adv. Ms 29.2.9, Balcarres papers, vol. ix, ff. 243–4; Robertson, *Sir Robert Moray*, 215–16.

masonic reference and, as a result of the values he knew were associated with the craft, take this as an indication of Moray's honesty and loyalty? The latter interpretation may seem unlikely, but is nonetheless possible. Moray is known to have revealed something of his masonic interests, and the values he associated with them, to others, and the king may have been among them.

Some years later, while himself in exile, Moray not only discussed his mason mark with Alexander Bruce, but also made contact with local masons. In March 1659 'Sir Robert Moray, Knight, born in Scotland, Privy Councillor of the King of Great Britain in Scotland, and Colonel of the Scottish Guards in the service of His Majesty, the King of France, aged fifty years' appeared before the town authorities in Maastricht, 'presented by Everard, master of the Craft of masons. He took under this craft the necessary oath, and the right of citizenship was granted him, according to custom.'<sup>32</sup> The significance of this contact with Dutch operative masons is obscure: Moray may either have been taking an interest in the practical side of their craft, or in their traditional lore. After he settled in London in 1660 he took an interest in building operations. He helped to obtain contracts for his friend Alexander Bruce (who became second earl of Kincardine in 1663) to supply stone from his quarry in Fife for royal works in Greenwich, and he can be found discussing the qualities of the stone with the king's master mason and the chief under-surveyor.<sup>33</sup> This interest may have partly arisen from his involvement in the Royal Society's history of trades project. Several letters of 1665 reveal that he was actively at work, and that he had made an abortive attempt to produce a history of masonry at some time in the past. By 16 September he had written '24 pages in quarto', but had only got through 4 of the 24 'heads' he intended to cover. In suitably masonic terms he cheerfully declared that what he had written was 'rough hewn' in style and matter, much in need of adjusting and polishing. He had begun to realise that his research had been inadequate, but modestly hoped that his scribblings might serve 'to beget in some abler persone an Itch to say more'. On the last occasion on which he mentioned the work he had completed 57 pages: having dealt with different types of stone he was discussing quarries, and intended to go on to bricks.<sup>34</sup> By the sounds of it, Moray's trade history was a strictly practical account which, had it survived, would have revealed nothing about the unique developments taking place in the craft in Scotland which were creating freemasonry; yet that he choose to write on masonry is of course a sign of his continuing obsession with the craft.

Moray also kept in touch, indirectly, with the mason craft in Scotland by being responsible (it may be assumed) for his brother being appointed master of works in Scotland in 1661 and joint general warden of the building trades

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1n.      <sup>33</sup> Kincardine papers, ff. 160v, 190r, 194r.

<sup>34</sup> A. R. and M. B. Hall (eds.), *The correspondence of Henry Oldenburg* (11 vols., Madison and London, 1965–77), ii, 507, 525, 530.

in 1662. Sir William Moray of Dreghorn was a failure in these positions and (as previously explained) was forced to resign after a few years, in the wake of some scandal. But his appointment to these posts may well indicate that Sir Robert had some plan in mind for reorganising the crafts which broadly speaking could be called masonic through their connections with architecture.<sup>35</sup> In the event, nothing happened, and Sir William Moray did not even join the Edinburgh Lodge. But there is a final puzzle associated with the pentacle. Sir William copied his brother in placing it below the address on letters, and in 1670 when Mr William Moray or Murray, the justice depute, joined Edinburgh Lodge he took the pentacle as his mark.<sup>36</sup> Surely it cannot be mere coincidence that the only two men to take this mason mark in the seventeenth century shared the same surname, and it may be surmised that he had learnt of its symbolism through some contact with his namesakes (and perhaps kinsmen) Sir William and Sir Robert.

Further evidence of Sir Robert Moray's interest in symbolism is provided by a number of other symbolic seals he used. One shows a dice or cube bearing a star on each face and the legend *CONSTANTIA* (plate 7a). Whichever way the dice fell, the symbol remained unchanged or constant. Moreover, the personification of Severity carried a cube (according to a sixteenth-century Italian writer) to show that she is 'constant, stable and always of firm mind, persevering with one and the same purpose without swaying to one or the other side'.<sup>37</sup> Severity, in this aspect of unflinching resolve, uninfluenced by frivolity or vanity, fits in well with Moray's ambition to lead the life of a stoic philosopher, and when combined with the star/pentacle declares the constancy and stability of true friendship or love.

Similar themes are present in a seal which shows a cubical altar with a heart on one side. On top of this altar of love the needle of a magnetic compass points to a star in the sky (plate 7b). Love is as constant as the attraction of the compass needle to the pole star, and the concept of fidelity is confirmed by the inscription 'ONELY'. The star is Moray's dead wife, now in the heavens, the seal a declaration of his continuing love. Even more explicit is another seal with a cubical altar, this time with a star on each side. On it stands a crowned heart. A hand descends from the heavens holding what may be a wreath, while Eros shoots an arrow at the heart and the legend reads 'UNE SEULLE' (plate 8a). By her death in childbed his wife had earned the crown of martyrdom in the cause of love, and again to Moray she is 'the only one'.

Though they all display the star, which Moray equated with his pentacle mason mark as a symbol of love and friendship, he probably intended no specific masonic references to be read into these seals. But the final one in the series may have a more direct relation to the craft. Only fragments of a single

<sup>35</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic images. Studies in the art of the Renaissance* (London, 1972), 141–2.

<sup>36</sup> Carr, *Edinburgh*, 152, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Stevenson, 'Sir Robert Moray', 420–4.

impression of it survive, showing a radiant sun with an eye at the centre and an inscription that includes the word *SEMPER*, 'always' (plate 8b). This was an ancient symbol of divinity, and in later freemasonry its use was to become common. Did Moray see it as the divine sun of ancient Egyptian wisdom, which on rising shone through the east window of the mental lodge about which he had been taught, and set the masons to work?

### **Voluntary social institutions and the cult of friendship**

So far Sir Robert Moray has been discussed in terms of those of his interests and attitudes which can be described as late Renaissance. He was fascinated by elaborate symbolism and Egyptian hieroglyphics, and by the occult quest for knowledge through the Rosicrucianist version of Hermeticism. Neoplatonic doctrines of correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm can be detected through his pentacle, and though little is known of his labours in his laboratories at Maastricht in 1657–9 and in the king's palace at Whitehall after 1660 they might be best described as alchemical. Yet Moray's career spans the central decades of the seventeenth century, and in a number of ways he also illustrates the changes in the climate of intellectual debate and social attitudes which were becoming evident in Britain in the later decades of the century. The changes were evolutionary ones: alchemy does not become chemistry overnight, nor is astrology suddenly abandoned in favour of astronomy. Nonetheless a fundamental change was underway. Moray's own observations and experiments, it is true, made no contribution to the advance of scientific knowledge. He was an enthusiastic dabbler, the extent of whose comprehension of the matters discussed by the scientists he associated with is debatable – it has been remarked that his proposals for experiments to test a theory of Isaac Newton on optics 'betrayed no understanding of the question'.<sup>38</sup> In this of course Moray was far from unique, and in the circles of gentlemen virtuosi among whom he moved he was highly regarded, praised for the breadth of his learning and for his knowledge of mathematics and chemistry in particular. A satirical verse evidently referring to Moray runs

The Prime Virtuoso hath undertaken  
Through all the Experiments to run  
Of that learned man, Sir Francis Bacon  
Shewing which can, which can't be done.<sup>39</sup>

Doubtless the allegation that he was working systematically through Bacon's experiments was not intended to be taken literally, the idea being simply to mock his indiscriminate enthusiasm for trying out anything and everything.

<sup>38</sup> R. Westfall, *Never at rest. A biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, 1980), 241.

<sup>39</sup> D. Stimson, *Scientists and amateurs. A history of the Royal Society* (London, 1949), 60.

Yet indirectly Moray has a place in the history of science, for he took a leading part in founding the Royal Society of London in 1660, was instrumental in obtaining a charter for it from the king, served as its first president, and was highly active in its early years in sustaining and encouraging its activities.<sup>40</sup> The appearance of the Royal Society was an indication of increasing interest in scientific investigation and experimentation, and of the increasing prestige of such activities. A French visitor to London in 1664 was startled to find so prominent a man as Sir Robert Moray himself adjusting telescopes and setting up experiments,<sup>41</sup> but his involvement in such activities indicates the way in which the old contempt for experimentation as manual work was in decline.

As well as demonstrating changing attitudes to the search for knowledge, the foundation of the Royal Society reflected a wider change of attitudes to social life which was reflected in the emergence of new types of institution, voluntary and (to a greater or lesser extent) informal organisations set up by men with common interests, shared enjoyment of certain social activities, or simply personal friendship and enjoyment of each other's company. This development, though detectable earlier, accelerated rapidly in Britain in the later seventeenth century, but though it has been widely recognised relatively little has been written in explanation of it. The new institutions sometimes reflected particular religious or political interests, or were confined to certain social groups, but often they were not, and consciously included men of differing opinions and different ranks. Sometimes they were secret, for the thrill of the esoteric and the exclusive if nothing more, sometimes they were open as to membership and activities. Sometimes (as with the Royal Society) they sought official patronage, more often they were consciously independent of any connection with church or state. One interpretation sees these new types of institution growing out of the great religious and political upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: turning their backs on conflict and strife, on great plans for religious unity or world reform, many found fulfilment in the sociability of small groups. The great Renaissance and Reformation quests for universal solutions were collapsing in disillusionment and a search for new goals.

Men began to turn away from the hope of building community on inherited subordination or confessional unity; they began instead to envisage a secular and voluntary society which would be a true community . . .

One expression of these very important changes was a new respect for private and informal activity. Outside the family – itself still a highly formalised and

<sup>40</sup> D. C. Martin, 'Sir Robert Moray', *The Royal Society*, ed. Sir H. Hartley (London, 1960), 239–50. The statement in M. C. Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment. Pantheists, freemasons and republicans* (London, 1981), 68 that Moray attended the Gresham College meetings in the 1650s that helped pave the way for the founding of the Royal Society is erroneous: he was in exile on the continent.

<sup>41</sup> Stimson, *Scientists and amateurs*, 74.

demanding institution – there was little scope for wholly private activity or, indeed, tolerance of it, in the corporate structure of the ancien régime. In some countries, notably England, the English colonies and the United Provinces, this had begun to change even before 1700. Elsewhere, the institutions which appeared to meet new demands and new tastes took root more slowly . . . But the appearance of such informal meeting-places as coffee-houses, clubs and salons gives a rough guide to the timing of the advance of this new cultural wave. They were the inventions of men and women making new demands on society and discovering new capacities in themselves which could not be given expression within the historic unities of blood, locality, religion, occupation and legal subordination.

The need for new institutions was perhaps most acutely felt, it might be added, in protestant countries where the fraternities, voluntary (except when linked with a trade) religious organisations with strong elements of sociability, had been destroyed by Reformation. Some of these ‘social inventions’ were secret bodies:

Sometimes they were light-hearted and convivial, sometimes they were not. They jealously guarded their secrets and took elaborate precautions against the approach of the profane and uninitiated. Such caution showed the confidence of their members that they had hit upon an important device for the satisfaction of needs of whose full extent and nature they may have been unaware. Of these societies, immeasurably the most important were the freemasons.<sup>42</sup>

In the context of the Scottish masonic lodges of the seventeenth century, there seem at first sight to be two problems with this interpretation. First, so far as the operative masons (who formed the majority of lodge members) were concerned, membership of lodges was not always voluntary. The intention was that all masons would have to be lodge members in order to practise their trade, though in reality (except perhaps in a few burghs) this was never achieved. This is true, but the new types of member whose entry to the craft was gradually transforming the movement, broadening it eventually into one open to all, were voluntary members. These ‘non-operatives’ sought when they joined lodges not to create entirely new social institutions but to satisfy their desires for sociability and fraternity by joining – and soon adapting to their own uses – institutions which already existed. The second objection is more basic. Earlier it has been argued that the fact that non-operatives became interested in joining masonic lodges was an aspect of the great Renaissance quest for universal solutions and the perfection of man. Now, it seems, the same interest in membership of lodges is being taken as a reflection of the abandonment of precisely these dreams, a scaling-down of vast ambitions in favour of a prosaic desire for personal satisfaction and tranquillity through the sense of belonging to a voluntary group. In fact the two interpretations are not incompatible. The late stages of the Renaissance

<sup>42</sup> J. M. Roberts, *The mythology of the secret societies* (London, 1972), 17–18.



quest and the beginning of the development of the new social institutions overlap and interact. The Hermetic cells and other secret societies and academies<sup>43</sup> which proliferated in the decades around 1600 were 'voluntary institutions' on the one hand, and may have arisen in part to satisfy the desire for sociability, but on the other hand they had also often been dedicated to the quest for universal solutions. Those non-operatives who began to join Scottish lodges in the seventeenth century, it may be argued, sought both the reassurance of the social bond and to advance the search for hidden and lost knowledge. Both motives can be plausibly attributed to Sir Robert Moray, for his Rosicrucian and alchemical interests not only shaded imperceptibly into interest in experimental science but were combined with a great interest in, and talent for, a central element of sociability – friendship.

The term friendship is now a vague one, but the seventeenth-century Platonic cult of friendship made it a well-defined and very intense relationship. Friendship was an intimate but entirely non-sexual one-to-one relationship between members of either the same or opposite sexes. Modern opinion would argue that claims to exclude totally the sexual, or to distinguish it completely from friendship, in a relationship in which both sexes were involved were delusions. But at the time the distinction was accepted: admiration of beauty might be a part of friendship, but the relationship was not a physical one in any other sense. A man's wife might, it was allowed, sometimes be his best friend, but that was something entirely distinct from the relationship created by marriage!

'Friendship' was regarded by Jeremy Taylor, author of a discourse on the subject published in 1657, as the most accurate translation of *agape*, so far as a relationship between individuals known to each other was concerned, 'charity' being its universal equivalent. For Taylor 'friendship is the nearest love and the nearest society of which the persons are capable'. Another author echoes this: 'Friendship is the nearest Union which distinct Soules are capable of.'<sup>44</sup> Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, the well-known Scottish advocate and author, hailed

*Friendship!* that wiser Rival of vain love,  
Which does more firm, tho' not so fiery prove.<sup>45</sup>

Friendship was superior to the conventional love of the sexes, and Mackenzie's words can be seen as providing a parallel between the cult of friendship and the new social institutions. Love was distrusted and even rejected as fiery and unstable, friendship preferred because though less fiery it was reliable and lasting. There is a connection here with the scaling-down of ambitions

<sup>43</sup> J. McClellan, *Science reorganised. Scientific societies in the eighteenth century* (Columbia, 1985), 42–5.

<sup>44</sup> J. Evelyn, *The life of Mrs Godolphin*, ed. H. Samson (London, 1939), xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>45</sup> Sir G. Mackenzie, *Works* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1716–22), i, 3.

after the great Renaissance and Reformation quests for wisdom and revelation went sour, providing no solutions and often leading instead to new conflicts. Heroic strivings, for enlightenment or in pursuit of love, were apt to lead to disappointment and frustration, and were therefore to be partially replaced by the more limited but realistic search for psychological satisfaction in the comradeship provided by friendship and the social institutions it gave rise to.

Sir Robert Moray's correspondence makes clear the high value he placed on friendship. It lay at the centre of his interpretation of the pentacle, and he claimed indeed to have made a science of friendship:

There is a kind of Metaphysical Alchimy that I use in such cases that searches the very hirnes [corners or crevices] of the fountains without looking after the streames . . . the pulse is not a surer indice of the heart's motions, then the rules of this Science are of friendship.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1660s his conduct led some to call him a misogynist as he wanted no part in the general sexual immorality prevailing at Charles II's court, remaining loyal to the memory of his wife. But he was happy to cultivate Platonic friendships with women. The tributes of contemporaries to Moray indicate that it was a science he practised successfully, and a number of his friends in London after 1660 were also devotees of the cult. Most obsessive of all, perhaps, was John Evelyn, diarist. He could write to Robert Boyle, the chemist, 'Dearest Sir, permit me to tell you, that I extremely loved you before; but my heart is infinitely knit to you now . . . pardon this great excess.'<sup>47</sup>

The one surviving letter from Moray to Evelyn dates from 1666 and indicates that Evelyn had written to Moray in terms that indicated that he knew a good deal about his beliefs. Moray expressed surprise at this, 'By what Telescope you read me at this distance, I do not know', wrote Moray, for Evelyn had shown himself acquainted with his 'most illegible parts': 'It seems you conclude me to be a greater Master in another sort of philosophy than that which is the businese of the Royall Society.'<sup>48</sup> The other philosophy doubtless refers to Moray's interest in ethical symbolism and the Rosicrucians, and it may be no coincidence that he says that Evelyn must be reading him with a telescope. Moray delights in playing with words in ways which are at once light-hearted and relevant, and may be playing on the fact that it is his star/pentacle symbolism that Evelyn has read, for stars are 'read' through telescopes.

Evelyn himself made use of the pentacle symbol, as in placing it below his signature in books. This probably pre-dates his acquaintance with Moray, but his use of it was probably intensified through discussion with Moray. In 1672,

<sup>46</sup> Kincardine papers, f. 107v.

<sup>47</sup> Evelyn, *Mrs Godolphin*, xxvii.

<sup>48</sup> BL, Add. Ms 15858, Original letters of Sir Richard Browne, f. 81r. The letter is printed in the various nineteenth-century editions of Evelyn's diary by W. Bray, though it is there wrongly dated 14 June instead of 14 January 1666.

the year before Moray's death, Evelyn embarked on an intense Platonic friendship with a 20-year-old orphan girl, Margaret Blagg, who through family connections had become a maid of honour to the queen and had virtually adopted Evelyn as a father: 'from that time forwards, I reckoned her as my Child . . . This Miracle of a young lady in a licentious Court and so deprav'd an age.' The symbol of the friendship was a pentacle, and Evelyn used it instead of her name in his diary. So far there is no need to assume that Moray had influenced Evelyn's use of the symbol. But when Margaret Blagg died in 1678 the copper plate which Evelyn placed on her grave bore, below the inscription, a pentacle surrounded by the Greek letters *agapa*.<sup>49</sup> Moray had made it clear in his letters that the application of the word *agapa* to the pentacle was his own invention, and thus Evelyn's use of the symbol provides convincing evidence that he had expounded the mysteries of his mason mark to Evelyn.

The cult of friendship was not an isolated phenomenon. It grew out of changing attitudes to religion which emerge strongly from the mid seventeenth century, accelerated by the civil wars of the period. Seeing the wars as the culmination of hatreds and bloodshed based on fanatical and doctrinaire concepts of religion which had intensified since Reformation and torn Europe apart, some sought new approaches to religion. In England the Cambridge Platonists reacted by seeing the true centre of religious belief and observance as lying in a diffuse universal charity (the wider counterpart of personal friendship) and personal devotion, rather than fanatical devotion to upholding specific details of doctrine or public worship. Within the Church of England the latitudinarian tendency continued this trend towards emphasis on personal religion, dislike of doctrinal squabbling, and willingness to tolerate different religious practices in others.<sup>50</sup> Out of such attitudes deistic beliefs developed, accepting the existence of God but rejecting much or all of revealed religion. Sometimes deism became very hard to distinguish from atheism, becoming a vague sort of nature religion owing much to Neoplatonism: in other cases, though the existence of God was fully accepted, all distinctly Christian elements in religion were abandoned. Such radical deistic views were later to be influential within freemasonry, but in Sir Robert Moray, the earliest freemason in whom deistic tendencies can be detected, religion remained specifically Christian.

In the course of his career Moray served the Catholic king of France, the presbyterian covenanters, and the episcopalian Charles I and Charles II, and by the 1650s it is clear that this reflected (or had come to reflect) not just the expediency of a professional soldier making a career for himself but a

<sup>49</sup> J. Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. E. S. de Beer (6 vols., Oxford, 1955), iii, 628; Evelyn, *Mrs Godolphin*, xxv–xxxiii, 22–5, 123–4, 208, 210, 214–15, 221.

<sup>50</sup> C. A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge, 1969), 36, 39–40; H. Kamen, *The rise of toleration* (London, 1967), 180, 202–4.

distinctive religious outlook closely linked to his ethical symbolism and strongly reminiscent of the stance of the Cambridge Platonists. Under the impact of years of civil and religious strife Moray had retreated entirely from religious conflict (and political activity) into a non-sectarian personal Christianity, strongly influenced by stoicism, in which public worship had little part but private prayer was of central importance. This, his past political activities, and his scientific interests, he recalled, had aroused suspicions and charges against him: not only had he once been accused of plotting to assassinate the king, 'I have also been reported to be writing against Scriptur, an Atheist, a Magician or Necromancer, and a malignant, for ought I know by half a kingdom.'<sup>51</sup> But he refused to be provoked into abandoning his stoic tranquillity by defending himself from such abuse, and was lucky enough to find in the cynical Charles II a king indifferent to religion who let him go his own way, remarking teasingly that he believed Moray was head of his own church.<sup>52</sup> Organised religion had disappeared, organised voluntary social institutions, Royal Society and masonic lodge, in which the ideal of friendship could be practised, had taken its place.

Moray revealed much about his Stoic/Christian ethic and Platonic cult of friendship in his correspondence, but very little of his religion. This was a logical result of his beliefs: religion and his relationship with God was a private matter, and the public practice of religion consisted of ethical behaviour – friendship and charity. He still believed in personal prayer, however, and each evening reviewed the day, 'celebrating in prayer such of the divine attributes as appeared to him in the new occurrences of providence'.<sup>53</sup>

Many left testimonies as to Moray's talent for friendship. Bishop Gilbert Burnet revered him as 'a wonderful composition of a man; there was nothing of art or form in him, all was simple and natural'. He was 'the most universally beloved and esteemed by men of all sides and sorts, of any man I have ever known in my whole life'. 'He had a most diffused love to all mankind, and he delighted in every occasion of doing good, which he managed with great discretion and zeal.'<sup>54</sup> According to the chemist Robert Hooke, Charles II 'testified of him [Moray] to be a good man that never did anyone any injury butt endeavour'd to doe good to every one, that he had never spoken against one to him'.<sup>55</sup> That such conduct was unusual at a court notorious for immorality and corruption is confirmed by John Aubrey: Moray was the only man at court 'that would doe a kindnesse *gratis* upon an account of

<sup>51</sup> SRO, GD.406/1/C.6132, Hamilton Correspondence.

<sup>52</sup> Robertson, *Sir Robert Moray*, 174; BL, Add. Ms 23123, f. 157v.

<sup>53</sup> G. Burnet, *History of his own time*, ed. O. Airy (2 vols., Oxford, 1897–1900), i, 105–6; H. C. Foxcroft (ed.), *A supplement to Burnet's history of my own time* (Oxford, 1902), 43–4.

<sup>54</sup> Burnet, *History*, i, 105–6; Foxcroft, *Supplement*, 43–4.

<sup>55</sup> R. Hooke, *Diary*, ed. H. W. Robinson and W. Adams (London, 1935), 49–50.

Friendship', being 'as free of Covetousness as a Carthusian'.<sup>56</sup> When he died suddenly in 1673 the fact that it was found that after years of residence at court enjoying royal favour he possessed no more than a few shillings confirmed his reputation as a true philosopher.<sup>57</sup>

The cult of friendship provided some of the impetus behind the craze for the new voluntary social institutions which becomes evident in the later seventeenth century in Britain, and helped give the craze justification by linking it with emerging philosophical beliefs: sociability in formal societies or informal groups could be seen as an important part of religious practice, *agape* in action, to a greater or lesser extent forming a substitute for public worship in congregations. For some, and Moray was evidently among them, the social bond provided by membership of a masonic lodge, provided a substitute bond to that of organised religion, with strong ethical overtones and ritual to replace, or more than replace, that present in protestant public religion.

It is tempting to speculate that one element of later masonic ritual originated as an expression of the cult of friendship, though the ritual concerned cannot be documented until well into the eighteenth century. The candidate for initiation has to bare the left side of his chest. This has often been interpreted as a check that the candidate is male, not a disguised female trying to gain access to secrets. It has been suggested that the revealing of the heart was also intended to denote sincerity and fervency,<sup>58</sup> but a much more specific symbolism may be present. The traditional personification of friendship, which might be either male or female, was often depicted with the left breast bare, thus exposing the seat of the emotions, including friendship, namely the heart. Thus the candidate is opening his heart to members of the lodge, expressing his fellowship with its members, not merely taking part in a utilitarian test to show that he does not sport a female breast.<sup>59</sup> Was this one of the 'ridiculous postures' which are mentioned in the early catechisms?

Early examples of the new interest in forming clubs and societies can be found in late sixteenth-century England.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the earliest such group to include a significant number of Scots can be traced at the court of Charles I. Sir David Cunningham held office at court, but kept in close touch with his Ayrshire kinsmen. In 1628 he wrote to his namesake David Cunningham of Robertland that on 22 October

the noble fraternitie had our solemne meeting in London, being now (with your self and Adam the Advocate) just forty in number. Wee have taken in sundrie of the beddchamber and others of qualitie and worth, and haue forever hereafter excluded and discharged to admitt of any but his majesties servants; and they also to be of the degrie of esquire. Also wee have established laudable and good orders

<sup>56</sup> J. Aubrey, *Brief lives*, ed. O. L. Dick (Harmondsworth, 1962), 281.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 282; HMC 78: *Hastings Mss* (4 vols., 1928–47), ii, 381–2.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 267. <sup>59</sup> Gombrich, *Symbolic images*, 139–40.

<sup>60</sup> P. Clark, *The English alehouse. A social history 1200–1830* (London, 1983), 234.

to be observed, under the forfeiture of certain penalties, whereby wee shall avoyde all manner of excesse, royat and disorder, the particulars whereof my brother Fullerton will informe you. Your self and the Advocate was very respect[ful]ly and solemnly remembered by the whole companie. These enclosed badges of the noble brothered is to be worne by you and the Advocate about your hatband, untill our next meeting which is to be every six monthes, whereof yu shall alwaies haue notice gheaven yow to keep that day solemnly, at which tyme yee shall haue our new badges of favour. This much I was comanded to signifie unto you.<sup>61</sup>

Whether this boisterous aristocratic fraternity of court officials was predominantly Scottish in membership is not known, but there were a considerable number of Scots in it, and the fact that David Cunningham of Robertland was one gives rise to speculation. His father had been master of works in Scotland in 1602–7, and David was succeeded by his brother Sir Alexander Cunningham of Robertland. In 1675 Sir Alexander's son David, younger of Robertland, became a member of the Lodge of Kilwinning. Is there a connection between this double link of the Cunninghams of Robertland with Scottish masonry in the seventeenth century and the membership of one of the lairds of a court fraternity? If the masonic knowledge of the Cunninghams contributed anything to the fraternity, then the latter could be claimed as the first of the vast multitudes of non-masonic fraternal and secret organisations to be inspired by the masons in the centuries that have followed.

It was the spread of coffee-houses in England from the 1650s, and the simultaneous tendency for at least some alehouses to be upgraded to provide better facilities and appeal to more respectable clients than in the past, which provided the most widespread opportunities for the emergence of publicly visible (as opposed to secret) new social institutions.<sup>62</sup> These groupings varied from the entirely informal – the more regular customers of particular houses – to more formal ones reflecting particular interests in, say, literature or politics, perhaps with a fairly fixed membership. The clientele of some of the coffee- and alehouses, or of clubs and societies which were formed based on them, was often drawn from particular social groups. An alehouse might become, for example, associated with a particular craft, members coming to it when looking for work. Many box clubs emerged based on taverns, collecting contributions from members and making payments to members suffering hardship. Other clubs and societies were confined in membership to the gentry. But there was also present very early on the idea that men could mix

<sup>61</sup> SRO, GD.237/221/4/1/5, Mss deposited by Messrs Tods, Murray and Jamieson, WS: Cunningham of Robertland papers. Punctuation has been added in the transcript. I am grateful to Mr Peter Donald for drawing this reference to my attention. 'Adam the Advocate' may have been Sir Adam Cunningham of Woodhall, commissary of Dumfries and later Lord Woodhall: Sir F. J. Grant (ed.), *The faculty of advocates in Scotland* (SRS, 1944), 47.

<sup>62</sup> See Clark, *Alehouses*, 195–8, 222, 225–35; A. Ellis, *The penny universities. A history of the coffee houses* (London, 1956), xv–xvi, 37–44, 86, 93–4; R. J. Allen, *The clubs of Augustan London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 7–24.

socially in such places with people of different ranks, in a way which would be impossible in traditional social settings. An English broadside of 1674 expresses this idea in the very first of a list of proposed rules for coffee houses:

First, Gentry, Tradesmen, all are welcome hither,  
 And may without Affront sit down Together:  
 Pre-eminence of Place, none here should Mind,  
 But take the next fit Seat that he can find:  
 Nor need any, if Finer Persons come,  
 Rise up to assigne to them his Room.<sup>63</sup>

The same could be true in the case of a formal institution such as the Royal Society: it was a place where people of very different social positions but common interests mixed, all being accorded the rank of fellow. The fact that the Scottish masonic lodges claimed that their craft joined men of all ranks under the term of architect or mason meant that the lodges were in a good position to benefit from the great upsurge in popularity of the voluntary social institution. There non-operatives could find the ideal of fellowship, informal social mixing (though in this case within a formal institution) and the annual banquet, and in addition indulge in a taste for the ancient, secret, mysterious and ritualistic.

The spread of the new social institutions comes later in Scotland than in England, but 1673 saw the establishment of a coffee-house in Edinburgh, and permission given to open one in Glasgow. As in England, government tended to be suspicious of them as centres for organisation of religious and political dissidence, in some cases with good reason. Action was taken in 1677 and 1692 to close individual coffee-houses, and in 1680–1 to restrict the reading of newspapers in them.<sup>64</sup>

Another type of institution created to meet the new craving for sociable groupings based fraternities on sporting activities. Archery competitions in some of Scotland's universities and burghs were traditional, and in 1676 a group of nobles and gentry met in Edinburgh and formed themselves into a company for encouraging the noble and useful recreation of archery, on the pretext that it had been much neglected for many years. President, councillors, treasurer and clerk were elected, and the privy council gave its blessing to the new body and agreed to provide money for an archery prize.<sup>65</sup> The first clerk of the Royal Company of Archers (as the company became) was Hugh Stevenson of Muntgreenan, a writer to the signet who hailed from Kilwinning in Ayrshire. In 1688 he and his brother (an advocate) were among a small group of men (who also included lairds, the son of a minister, a Kilwinning merchant and two men simply described as 'in Kilwinning') who met in Kilwinning and agreed to restore 'the ancient game of the papingo formerly

<sup>63</sup> Ellis, *Penny universities*, frontispiece and p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 215–19; M. M. W. Stuart, *Old Edinburgh taverns* (London, 1952), 167–8.

<sup>65</sup> J. B. Paul, *The history of the Royal Company of Archers* (Edinburgh, 1875), 24–6, 34.

used to be practised in this place' – the traditional target in archery competitions was a model bird, the papingo or parrot. The competition prize was to be a silver plate, the winner of the annual event becoming known as the captain, and the members of the Company of Archers of the Town of Kilwinning were to dine together annually.<sup>66</sup> It is interesting that the small settlement of Kilwinning should have both a masonic lodge and a company of archers: though the lodge had in the previous decade admitted a number of prominent landowners it was not doing so in the 1680s, and the Company of Archers perhaps provided an alternative pretext for socialising and dining together.

Archery, coffee-houses and taverns have nothing to do directly with the spread of freemasonry in Scotland: the fact that in England a great many of the lodges which emerged in the opening years of the eighteenth century were based on taverns is probably an indication that such lodges were recent creations, and artificial ones in the sense that they had been created by and for non-operatives, whereas virtually all the early Scottish lodges originated as genuine craft organisations. Nonetheless, the fact that non-operative membership of masonic lodges in Scotland, and the total number of lodges, began to grow fast in the last decades of the seventeenth century, and that a fascination with masonry emerged in England in the same period, undoubtedly owed much to the remarkable developments in social behaviour which were leading to such a variety of new institutions.

Sir Robert Moray cannot be taken to be a typical mid seventeenth-century freemason: the fact that he reveals so much about what masonry meant to him in itself makes him unique. But he does encapsulate in his career and interests many of the forces that were shaping freemasonry. He also illustrates another change taking place in the movement. In his interests in Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, alchemy and symbols he typifies the sort of late Renaissance influences which had given birth to Scottish freemasonry in the era of William Schaw. In his scientific interests, his deistic tendencies, his cult of friendship and sociability he reflects influences which look ahead to the age of Enlightenment rather than back to the age of Renaissance. So far as is known he was unique in his lifetime (with the partial exception of Elias Ashmole) in combining these elements with the older heritage of freemasonry. But he points the way to the future, for in time these influences on freemasonry were to adapt the craft to give it new relevance to a changing society, making it possible for it to sweep across Europe in the mid eighteenth century.

<sup>66</sup> F. J. Grant (ed.), *Register of apprentices of the city of Edinburgh, 1583–1666* (SRS, 1906), 174; W. L. Ker, *History of Kilwinning* (Kilwinning, 1900), 286–92, 294.



## 8 The early Scottish lodges

### Lodges and incorporations

Freemasonry as it emerged in seventeenth-century Scotland was based on lodges, secret or semi-secret organisations of initiates combining sociability and fraternity with elaborate secrets and (usually) with efforts to regulate entry to the craft of stonemason and the working practices of stonemasons.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the century increasing numbers of non-stonemasons were accepted as members, and a few lodges came to be dominated by such men. Summarising the origins and development of these early lodges is not easy, however. The dates of the earliest known references to the existence of individual lodges can be listed, but it is rarely possible to establish the dates on which they were founded. Sometimes lodge records survive from what was probably the time of their foundation, but they seldom admit that the lodge is a new creation. In an age which looked to tradition and antiquity to give status and legitimacy, few institutions were brashly prepared to announce that they were novelties, and the masons with their claims to be heirs of a great past were particularly unlikely to do so: in the various localities there had been masons for generations, who felt bound to each other by their practice of the same craft, and lodges tended to see themselves growing out of this past rather than being created at a certain time.

It has been argued (see chapter 3), nonetheless, that the 'Schaw lodges' were essentially new creations, and that the group of seven lodges which can be first identified in 1599–1601 (Aitchison's Haven, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Kilwinning, Stirling, Haddington, Dunfermline) had come into being as a result of the reorganisation of the craft undertaken by William Schaw and enshrined in his codes of statutes of 1598 and 1599. A number of other lodges may well date from the same era, but are only known through rather later references. There may have been some new creations in the early and middle decades of the century, but it is not until the 1670s and the decades that follow that lodges appear which are certainly or almost certainly new.

In trying to survey the development of lodges a further problem is

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible within the confines of this book to discuss the individual lodges and their members in any detail. This is therefore left to another book, Stevenson, *Freemasons*, which also provides the references to sources which underly this chapter.

frequently lack of evidence and the nature of the evidence. No manuscript records survive at all for some lodges, their existence being known only through stray references in other sources: this is the case with Linlithgow, Canongate Kilwinning, Kirkcudbright, and Canongate and Leith. In other cases only isolated fragments of lodge records exist (or existed long enough to be transcribed by historians). Haddington, Stirling, Scone, and Banff tantalise the investigator in this way. By contrast, Aitchison's Haven and Edinburgh have unbroken series of minutes running from 1599, and these are joined by Kilwinning in 1642. Many other series of minutes emerge between the 1670s and the end of the century – Inverness (though only a summary survives), Dumfries, Dunblane, Aberdeen, and Hamilton, to be joined in the opening years of the eighteenth century by Kelso, Haughfoot, Kilmolymock and Banff. But even where substantial amounts of record material survive in the form of minutes, the range of information given is often limited. Initiation of entered apprentices and fellow crafts is usually recorded, though seldom if ever are all such initiations recorded over extended periods, and it is not always easy to determine the status and occupation of those entering the lodge. Decisions relating to trade regulation appear frequently, and fees exacted from members and arrangements for the St John's Day annual dinner can sometimes be found. But of course there is seldom more than an occasional hint at the esoteric activities that formed the core of the lodges' activities, or about the values and beliefs that bound members to the lodges. Such complaints, however, do not alter the fact that an astonishing amount of record material has survived, though remarkably few attempts have been made to study it systematically.

When William Schaw created the modern lodge system he clearly expected to exercise control over it, and presumably expected his successors as masters of works to do the same through their positions as general wardens of the masons. But he died only a few years after issuing his statutes, and his successors showed little interest (except for Sir Anthony Alexander) in this task. The Sinclairs of Roslin failed to have any real influence on the craft of which they claimed to be patrons. The lodge system was well enough established to survive the collapse of centralised supervision, but that collapse no doubt accounts for one feature that quickly emerges from any survey of the lodges: they differed from each other to a surprising extent, so much so that it would be misleading to describe any one lodge as typical. With a few exceptions lodge records never mention the existence of other lodges, and there is very little evidence of members of one lodge visiting and taking part in the rituals of another. On the other hand, if masons of different lodges meeting on building sites put their initiations to utilitarian use by performing the ritual catechism of identification this would serve to ensure that the rituals and lore of the various lodges did not diverge too greatly. Further, it is known that initiations sometimes took place outside lodges, and this may have

involved members of different lodges performing the rituals of initiation together.

The differences between lodges was particularly clear where relations with external authorities, especially with the incorporations, were concerned. Information is lacking in many cases, and the relations of incorporation and lodge in Edinburgh have already been discussed (in chapter 3): the two bodies were, on the one hand, closely related, both meeting in the same building, with the mason deacon of the incorporation presiding in the lodge. Yet the lodge recognised no subordination to the incorporation and, while a tacit understanding must have existed, the official stance of each was that it alone controlled the mason trade in the burgh. The incorporation's right to do so rested on delegation of power by the burgh council, while the lodge represented the claim of the trade to regulate its own affairs independently of any external authority (with, at first, the exception of that of the general warden). The career pattern of a successful mason involved a zig-zag ascent *through the parallel hierarchies of public incorporation and secret lodge*. Booking of an apprentice with burgh and incorporation was followed by initiation as an entered apprentice. Expiry of apprenticeship converted a mason into a wage-earning journeyman or servant, while secretly in the lodge he would soon become a fellow craft or master. But only if he was very lucky or well connected would he go on to become a master of the incorporation (with power in its affairs) and a burgess of the burgh.

However, in practice status in the incorporation influenced perceptions of status in the lodge, leading by the late seventeenth century to the incorporation masters in Edinburgh seeking to monopolise power in the lodge, excluding fellow crafts/masters who were merely journeymen. The resentment of the journeymen at this led ultimately to their secession in 1707, forming what was at first simply a benefit society but soon became a lodge performing initiations. The dispute between the two factions led in 1714 to a case before the court of session which was settled by arbitration the following year. The episode was remarkably revealing in that the Lodge of Edinburgh was not a party to the case. Instead, so far as public debate was concerned, it was the incorporation that sought to suppress the journeymen's organisation, thus acting as a front for the secret lodge in which the dispute had originated. Further, though the settlement allowed the journeymen their own organisation and confirmed that it could not only act as a benefit society but could give the Mason Word, the term 'lodge' was not mentioned. This confirms the impression given by other evidence that the existence of the Mason Word was something that could be admitted publicly, but strenuous efforts were made to conceal the existence of lodges, the institution which administered the rituals of the Word. Thus the Edinburgh Lodge of Journeymen has the unique distinction of having the authority of the court of session for its existence.

In a number of other burghs the relationship of lodge and incorporation

may have approximated to that prevailing in Edinburgh, though the lack of parallel series of minutes from both bodies in any other burgh leads to much obscurity. Dumfries was like Edinburgh in that the deacon of the incorporation sat in the lodge: yet, on the one hand, he was not regarded as a lodge official, on the other, the lodge frequently met in the deacon's house, indicating that his position was not just that of an ordinary member. In Edinburgh's neighbouring and subordinate burgh of the Canongate the Incorporation of Wrights and Coopers included masons, but there is no sign of a lodge until in 1677 some Canongate masons successfully petitioned the Lodge of Kilwinning to authorise them to create their own lodge. This is quite unique in the seventeenth century: in no other instance did those creating a lodge feel the need for permission from another. The episode partly reflects the unique status Kilwinning claimed, and acceptance by others of the claim. But the circumstances of the foundation of Canongate Kilwinning remain obscure. The men who petitioned Kilwinning were not the leading masons of the Canongate, and they were not (as has often been assumed) infringing the jurisdiction of the Lodge of Edinburgh because the latter did not (with a few exceptions) recruit members from the Canongate. It is even possible there was an earlier lodge in the Canongate and that Canongate Kilwinning represents a secession from it (like the Edinburgh Lodge of Journeymen).

The Lodge of Edinburgh's minutes record no reaction to the founding of Canongate Kilwinning, but 11 years later it denounced the desertion of some of its own members who had founded another new lodge, the Lodge of Canongate and Leith, Leith and Canongate, whose peculiar name presumably represents an attempt to declare that members from neither settlement had priority in status over those of the other. Edinburgh Lodge's protest reflects the fact that though it could not claim authority over the Canongate, South Leith masons were within its jurisdiction. As for the incorporation in the Canongate, there is no sign that it tried to suppress either of the two new lodges that had appeared in the burgh.

Like Edinburgh, Perth combined masons and wrights in a single incorporation, while the masons had their Lodge of Scone – so-called, though they probably met in Perth itself. There is no evidence as to the relationship of craft and incorporation, though the fact that the despised cowans were officially recognised as a craft by the latter indicates that the masons were not dominant within it.

In Glasgow the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights divided in 1600 into two separate incorporations. Thus here the relationship of lodge and incorporation may have been very close, for the masons did not have to share their incorporation with other building craftsmen. Membership of the two institutions may have been almost identical, and indeed on occasion it may have been the case that their identities became confused. However, they did

not (as sometimes assumed) simply form a single institution, as the interesting case of Alexander Thom suggests. Thom was a mason specialising in sculpture who settled in Glasgow. The Incorporation of Masons was very reluctant to admit him as a member, but Thom obtained the patronage of the archbishop of Glasgow and the incorporation was forced to give way. Perhaps to ingratiate himself with his reluctant new colleagues, instead of paying the usual entrance fees Thom presented the incorporation with a splendidly carved wooden charter chest with the inscription 'God save the King and the Mason Craft 1684.' But another similar carved chest also exists, inscribed 'God save the King and St John's Lodge, 1686.' Unfortunately this second chest is not available for examination, but it very probably marks Thom's initiation into the Lodge of Glasgow, two years after becoming a master of the incorporation. Thus the fragmentary evidence indicates that the two institutions were distinct enough for entry to them to be entirely separate, and for separate charter chests to be appropriate.

There are, however, a few cases in which the distinction between incorporation and lodge (or lesser craft society) was blurred. The history of the Lodge of Stirling, though awarded the status of third lodge of Scotland in the Second Schaw Statutes in 1599, is obscure. It was a party to the Second St Clair Charter in 1627–8, but then in the 1630s it appears as the Lodge and Company of Stirling in Sir Anthony Alexander's attempts to create craft companies. From this grew the Society of Mechanics, and in 1674 a leading mason got into trouble with the burgh authorities for trying to get a royal charter of incorporation for it. Whether the lodge had separated from this body (though the latter still had masons among its members) is unknown. In 1687 the burgh's masons were granted some privileges separately from the mechanics, but again it is not clear if it was a lodge of masons who were acting like an incorporation by accepting the authority of the burgh council. From 1708 the names of some members of the Lodge of Stirling are known, and it was evidently an autonomous institution without any links with the burgh council. The fact that this lodge possesses a copy of the Old Charges dating from the mid or late seventeenth century suggests that it existed in some form in that period.

In the case of Dundee more evidence is available, but the situation is still confused. The Lodge of Dundee was a party to the Second St Clair Charter of 1627–8. In 1629 the masons and wrights of the burgh petitioned the king for the right to elect a deacon and thus form an incorporation – their agent being John Mylne, a burgher of the burgh and soon to be appointed king's master mason. The attempt failed, but surviving records show that the wrights had some sort of society or guild in the burgh from at least 1628, the slaters from 1654. Then in 1659 the masons got the burgh's permission to form a society or company, though with more limited powers than full incorporations had. But from the start this body, sanctioned and supervised by the burgh,

operated as a lodge. It possessed a copy of the Old Charges, the two minute books it began in 1659 start with an invocation or opening prayer taken from the Old Charges, and the first minute calls the organisation the Lodge of Dundee. Moreover, the regulations of the 'lodge' show it supervising all the stages of a mason's career which had been split between the separate hierarchies of lodge and incorporation in Edinburgh. The wording obscures this, as it begins by laying down the fees that an apprentice must pay before he was allowed to 'enter' to work for a master. But this must be what is called booking money elsewhere, the registering of a trade apprentice, because subsequently further payments were due 'at his entred prenticeship', which must refer to when he was initiated as an entered apprentice. Next came promotion to fellow craft, the second esoteric initiation, and finally payment to become a free master – that is, to move from being a journeyman to being able to act as an employer of labour.

The fact that two minute books were begun in Dundee at the same time suggests there was a concept of two separate institutions, but that the distinction between them collapsed in confusion almost immediately. One book mentions the officials of the organisation as being the deacon, clerk and officer; while the other book calls them the master and the warden of the lodge. Yet if the intention was that the former referred to an incorporation, the latter to a lodge, the fact that both minute books call the organisation the lodge, and the conflating of the two hierarchies in regulations concerning admissions, destroy the distinction. Adding further to the confusion, from this point until the early eighteenth century the term 'lodge' disappears from the records, sometimes being replaced by 'incorporation': the warden also vanishes: but the man who had been referred to as the warden is now referred to as the deacon. In the decades that followed, the public Society of Masons of Dundee and the secret Lodge of Dundee were different aspects of the same organisation.

In Dunblane the situation is more straightforward. The lodge was founded in or around 1695, essentially by non-operative gentlemen. But it had some operative stonemasons in it, and early in the eighteenth century they became for a time very influential in the lodge. As the burgh lacked any public guild of masons – and the existence of lodges was now becoming widely known – it came to represent the masons in a similar way to an incorporation, and therefore on a few occasions (between 1722 and 1732) was referred to as an incorporation. Thus what began as a lodge acted like an incorporation on a few occasions.

Something similar probably happened at Inverness, with a lodge coming in time to fill to some extent a vacuum created by lack of an incorporation including masons. The burgh had six incorporations, but in the eighteenth century property owned by them was held equally by seven institutions, the seventh being the lodge.

Aberdeen represents the opposite extreme to lodge and incorporation blending together. In the early sixteenth century Aberdeen masons ceased to become burgesses of the burgh, and though an Incorporation of Coopers, Wrights and Masons was established they did not become members. Why this was so is mysterious, but it may be that they refused to join an organisation containing other crafts and were refused an incorporation of their own, thus being deprived of the right to become craft burgesses. The Aberdeen masons may have developed some sort of trade society, with no official recognition, but the first surviving evidence of organisation among them relates to the Lodge of Aberdeen in the last decades of the seventeenth century.

In most of the more minor burghs the lodges that can be traced (and doubtless others that have vanished without trace) probably stood alongside incorporations which included masons. Other lodges probably had no such parallel organisation, such as Haughfoot and Hamilton, while Kilwinning, drawing members from an area which included several incorporations (such as the Squaremen of Ayr and Irvine, both of which included masons), probably ignored them completely.

### **The coming of the non-operatives**

The difficulty of generalising about lodges also applies to their membership. They differ very considerably in size and composition, and it is usually impossible to be precise about either. Where minutes exist they usually record admissions, but many men appear attending meetings whose initiations have not been minuted; there are difficulties in separating men with the same names; and complete attendance lists are unusual. Even once names have been established it is often difficult to determine status and occupation. Sometimes occupations are mentioned, and obviously there is no trouble identifying nobles and lairds. But the frequently made assumption that virtually all whose occupation or status are not indicated were working stonemasons is erroneous. In some lodges investigation quickly reveals that considerable numbers of these relatively humble members were not stonemasons: they were 'non-operatives' in not being stonemasons, even though they were not gentlemen. Thus there has in the past been very considerable under-counting in discussing the influx of non-operatives into the lodges, and because it is impossible to trace many of the humbler members outside the lodges this will remain the case.

The coming of the non-operatives into lodges, which was ultimately to transform freemasonry by opening membership to men of all ranks, is often assumed to have been a steady, cumulative process, with non-operative numbers increasing continuously until they dominated the lodges. This may have been the case in some instances, but frequently their recruitment was intermittent, the trend being reversed in some periods in a way which

suggests either changes in policy within a lodge or changes in attitudes of non-operatives to the lodges. The stonemason majority of lodge members might fluctuate between pride that others (especially men of high status) wanted to join their organisation and were willing to pay fees for the privilege, disillusionment at finding that admitting new types of members was changing the character of the lodge and that there was a danger that the newcomers might take over control of it. There were a number of cases in the eighteenth century in which gentlemen non-operatives gained dominant positions in old lodges, and the stonemason members reacted by leaving to form new 'operative' lodges excluding the gentry. Intensity of interest by non-operatives in joining lodges doubtless varied over time and from area to area in the era before freemasonry became a fashionable craze. Often connections can be established between a number of individual non-operatives joining a particular lodge, suggesting the importance of personal links: a man who became fascinated by freemasonry (perhaps through personal contacts with masons working with him, or for him) and gained admission to a lodge might encourage friends to join. The gentlemen among them might only attend the lodge they had been initiated into a few times, or even only once, their curiosity being satisfied, or perhaps experiencing disappointment about what they found in the lodge after the great claims of secret wisdom and lore. The frequently sporadic nature of the interest of gentlemen in the lodges is most dramatically illustrated by those lodges which appear essentially to have been founded through the enthusiasm of the gentry, but subsequently were taken over by operatives as the gentry withdrew.

In the summary of the patterns of recruitment of non-operatives that follows, the 16 Scottish lodges that are known to have included such members before 1710 will be dealt with in order of the dates at which they are known to have first recruited them. But (as with the list of earliest known dates of lodges appended to this book) the order is largely dictated by the chance survival of evidence, and to that extent it is unavoidably arbitrary.

William Schaw himself is not known to have been a member of any particular lodge: nonetheless he could be claimed as the first 'gentleman freemason', for in organising the lodges and their rituals he must have been regarded as an initiate of the latter. Similarly the Sinclair lairds of Roslin, patrons of the mason craft, were presumably initiates at least from the time of the First St Clair Charter (1600-1). But apart from these special cases the best claim to have been the first known gentleman mason is that of a laird, John Boswell of Auchinleck. In 1600 the Lodge of Edinburgh convened in the royal Palace of Holyroodhouse, summoned to meet there in the presence of William Schaw so that he as general warden could try and punish the warden of the lodge for some unspecified offence. Auchinleck was also present and, though his presence is not explained, he was probably there to back up or witness Schaw's action. As an Ayrshire man he may possibly have



represented Kilwinning Lodge if it had some grievance against the Edinburgh warden which was now being judged. It is not certain that Auchinleck was an initiate, for the meeting he was at of the lodge as a court may have had nothing esoteric about it. Nonetheless the likelihood is that as the existence of lodges was largely secret he would not have been admitted if he had not been an initiate – and he appended a mark to his signature that presumably is his mason mark. Other non-operative initiates were probably the four notaries recorded as acting as clerks to the lodge in the first decade of the century. As in other lodges, even if the clerks were only committing non-esoteric matters to writing they surely must have been initiated, if only to prevent them prying into what was being concealed from them, and to bind them to secrecy.

Far more interesting, however, is the group that joined the lodge in 1634: Anthony Alexander (the master of works), his elder brother Lord Alexander, and Sir Alexander Strachan of Thornton. These men, and four others who joined in 1635–8, were a group of relatives and friends in court and official circles, probably initially interested in the lodge through the king's master mason, John Mylne, who had joined the lodge in 1633. His epitaph was to depict the mason craft as uniting the humble and the high born, and certainly the Lodge of Edinburgh now seemed living proof of this. Anthony Alexander and his colleagues attended the lodge on a number of occasions, but the coming of revolt against Charles I dispersed the group and cut short this interesting development.

However, the lodge retained its willingness to admit non-operative members: Robert Moray and Alexander Hamilton, the two covenanting generals, in 1641; Dr William Maxwell, a physician to the king (probably introduced by Moray) in 1647; Hercules Jonkin, an Edinburgh merchant, in 1649, and James Thomson the same year. The fact that Thomson was initiated as an entered apprentice and fellow craft on the same day indicates that he was a non-operative, but he cannot be identified. Hans Ewald Tessin, the first known foreign initiate, followed in about 1652. He was an architect and military engineer working for Scotland's English conquerors, but his profession eminently qualified him to be a mason. James Neilson joined the lodge in 1654, a leading practitioner of a trade closely related to that of the masons: he was the king's master slater – and already a member of the Lodge of Linlithgow.

These new members who appear in the lodge in the 1640s and 1650s are a pretty mixed lot, and seem to have no connections with each other, but in the 1660s and 1670s another coherent group like that of the 1630s gained admission. The first was a politician, Sir Patrick Hume of Polworth, and it may well have been his influence which brought three lawyers to the lodge in 1670. The fact that three of these four 1667–70 non-operative members were actively involved in opposition to the regime of the earl of Lauderdale looks

significant, but there is no evidence of the lodge being a forum for political activity. James Corss, a well-known mathematical (and therefore by definition architectural) teacher and writer was recruited to the lodge in 1674.

Thereafter the admission of non-operatives to Edinburgh Lodge ceased for fully a quarter of a century: perhaps after flirting with opposition politicians the lodge had decided that broadening membership of the lodge by allowing in even a trickle of such new members might be dangerous. Admission of non-operatives restarted in 1700, but the type of men admitted in the decade which followed was distinctly different from those of the seventeenth century, for most were either members of the Incorporation of Masons and Wrights, or held positions of power in the burgh. The wright deacon and the boxmaster (treasurer) of the incorporation were recruited in 1700, its clerk and the then wright deacon and boxmaster in 1706, along with the provost and dean of guild of Edinburgh. The deacon convener of the crafts, the dean of guild, an architect, and John Clerk younger of Penicuik (a lawyer) followed in 1710. Recruiting an architect requires little explanation, and Clerk may have come into contact with the lodge in the course of his negotiation with the incorporation to buy a house from it. But the positions held by the others surely indicates that the lodge was deliberately cultivating influential figures in the incorporation and burgh, a development perhaps connected with the lodge's internal disputes. But again a trend in recruitment is no sooner established than it peters out: two wrights were admitted in 1711, then no more non-operatives for a decade. By this time, however, freemasonry was growing fast in England, and this contributed to a new influx of notables to the lodge in 1721: John Theophilus Desaguliers, one of the leading figures in English freemasonry visited Edinburgh, and was admitted to the lodge along with the provost of the burgh and other leading officials.

In the period under consideration non-operatives never formed more than a small minority of members of the Lodge of Edinburgh. But its record was impressive compared with that of the only other lodge whose surviving minutes cover the entire seventeenth century. The Lodge of Aitchison's Haven served the masons of the area to the east of Edinburgh, especially in and around Musselburgh, Prestonpans, Inveresk and Dalkeith, taking its name from (and often meeting in) the tiny port of Aitchison's Haven, perhaps to emphasise that it was independent of any of the local burghs. Representatives of the lodge signed the Second St Clair Charter in 1627-8, and in 1637 and 1638 it met in the presence of Sir Anthony and Henry Alexander, masters of works and initiates of the Lodge of Edinburgh, to accept the Falkland Statutes. A notary public, George Aytoun, was admitted as lodge clerk at this time, probably being related to the local dynasty of Aytoun stonemasons whose members were prominent in the lodge. It is probable that he was initiated into the lodge, though the earliest specific reference to the

clerk being thus admitted dates from 1677, when the clerk of the burgh of Musselburgh undertook to serve the lodge. Though non-operatives, such lodge officials were obviously special cases, and apart from them only four non-operative members can be traced in the lodge in the period up to 1710, and only two of the four can be identified: Alexander Seton, brother of the earl of Winton was admitted in 1672, Mr Robert Cubie, described as a student and preacher of the Gospel, in 1693. Apart from this the lodge remained wholly operative in membership – but not solely ‘operative’ (in the sense of being confined to trade regulation) in activities for, as argued elsewhere, ritual initiations on the lines of the early masonic catechisms do not cease to be freemasonry because the initiates are masons by trade.

The surviving minutes of Kilwinning Lodge unfortunately only date from 1642, but once they begin they immediately reveal that the lodge is unique, above all else through the wide area from which it drew its members and over which it sought to exercise jurisdiction: if Aitchison’s Haven recruited its operative members from a district, Kilwinning drew on a whole region, and sought to supervise masons throughout it. The area was not, however, as extensive as the jurisdiction awarded to the lodge in the Second Schaw Statutes, though it included northern and central Ayrshire and Renfrewshire and the burghs within the area, including the royal burghs of Ayr and Irvine.

Non-operatives appear suddenly in Kilwinning Lodge in the 1670s in considerable numbers, and then disappear again just as quickly. In 1672 the earl of Cassillis became deacon of the lodge – presumably having been initiated, though this is not specifically mentioned. Four or five other non-operatives were initiated in 1673, including Sir Alexander Cunningham of Corsehill and Joseph Cunningham of Carlurg. The following year they were joined by the earl of Eglinton and Lord Cochrane, and Robert Fergushill (the clerk of Corsehill’s baron court) became clerk of the lodge. The admission of David Cunningham of Robertland in 1675 confirmed the trend favouring the entry of nobles and lairds from northern Ayrshire, and in these years the non-operatives of high rank were repeatedly elected to the highest offices in the lodge. Then, in December 1677, not only did all the offices revert to operatives, but no non-operatives were even present. There may have been a specific reason for the change, for this was the meeting that accepted the petition of Canongate masons to be allowed to found their own lodge, Canongate Kilwinning. It may have been felt that commissioning a new lodge should be left in the hands of the traditional operative members. The return of two noble non-operatives, Eglinton and Cochrane, to the offices of deacon and warden in 1678 seems to suggest the trend seen since 1672 was being resumed. But thereafter the gentlemen non-operatives disappear from the lodge for several generations.

What had happened in Kilwinning Lodge? Perhaps the operatives had

been pleased at first by great men wanting to enter their lodge and hold office in it, but had then found that the new members were trying to transform the institution and therefore fought to regain control for themselves. But it would be equally plausible to suggest that there had been a craze among a group of local landowners connected by friendship and marriage, but having gone 'slumming' they grew bored with the company of artisans once the novelty wore off. Personal and political circumstances may also have conspired to change the course of events. Lord Cochrane died in 1679 and Eglinton went to live in England. In the same year the religious dissidents of the west staged a rebellion against the regime, and after their defeat it may be that the non-operatives felt that holding secret meetings with men far beneath them in rank might be misinterpreted as seditious. In the decades that followed a few non-operatives of relatively humble station, such as a local wright and a merchant, were initiated, but the major change in the character of the lodge that had been emerging in the 1670s had been decisively reversed.

*The Lodge of Scone or Perth seems, from the fragmentary seventeenth-century evidence that survives, never to have been nearly as ambitious as Kilwinning when it came to non-operatives. Indeed the only lodge record to survive from the period has usually been interpreted as indicating a large lodge purely operative in membership. The document concerned is a contract or agreement dated 1658 signed by 40 members of the lodge. But cursory examination of the contract and some bonds dating from the 1690s which relate to the lodge reveals first that signatures were being added by new members for decades after 1658, and secondly that not all of them were operative masons: among those who joined the lodge between 1658 and 1698 can be identified two merchants, two wrights, two town officers or sergeants, a glover, a slater, a lister or dyer, a tailor, a maltman, a weaver, a notary and a university graduate whose occupation is unknown. Not a gentleman mason in sight, but a lodge deeply penetrated by non-operatives nonetheless.*

Turning to Dundee, the minutes of the odd lodge/incorporation reveal only one non-operative in the seventeenth century, Patrick Kid of Craigie (admitted 1669, deacon 1677). The years 1705–7 saw the admission of six merchants, a watch- and clockmaker, and a writer, but this burst of activity was not sustained: the non-operatives disappear in the years that followed, perhaps in part because the fact that the organisation had a public role in representing the mason trade in the burgh made major changes in its composition difficult.

In the Lodge of Dunfermline the earliest evidence of a non-operative presence comes not from minutes but from agreements or obligations to attend meetings signed by members, dated 1673 and 1688. Unfortunately, as with the Perth contract, though the documents are dated, the signatures are not. But it seems probable that signing of the 1673 obligation ceased when it was replaced by the 1688 one. The work of deciphering and identifying the

signatures remains to be done, but three Fife lairds signed the 1673 document: the fact that no other landowners are immediately identifiable indicates that if there was a substantial non-operative presence it consisted mainly of men below the status of gentlemen with territorial titles. But when the surviving minutes commence in 1698 the lists of absentees include the name of the third earl of Dunfermline (the son of Sir Robert Moray's friend to whom he had explained the symbolism of his mason mark) and a number of lairds.

Melrose Lodge's minutes begin in 1674, and an agreement, of the type now becoming familiar, signed by members, dates from the following year. The lodge met in the village of Newstead, just outside the burgh, and was dominated by two dynasties of stonemasons, the Meins and the Bunzies. Newstead contained an extraordinary concentration of stonemasons for generations, and many of them were remarkable in that they owned land. Landholding had been fragmented when the lands of the Abbey of Melrose were sold off in the sixteenth century and many of the Newstead tenants had emerged as 'bonnet lairds', proprietors of small areas of land which they farmed themselves. Thus many of the Newstead masons and their families worked their own land, but in the spring and summer set out to seek work as masons wherever they could find it. Already in the 1670s the lodge of this closely knit little community was admitting non-operative residents and relatives: a maltman, a weaver and an osler (innkeeper) can be identified – two of them being Meins, the other a Bunzie. A few university graduates were admitted in the first decade of the eighteenth century, but again these were evidently relatives of existing members (two were Meins) and thus do not suggest a change in the lodge's recruitment policy for non-operatives.

The earliest information about the Lodge of Inverness is derived from an eighteenth-century list of lodge officials since 1678, but there seems no reason to doubt its validity. In 1678 William Mackintosh of Elrig, the brother of the chief of the Clan Mackintosh, was elected master of the lodge, the other officials being operatives. His successor (1692) was evidently also a laird, but from 1699 to the 1730s all the masters appear to have been operatives. Thus Inverness is one of those lodges whose history includes an episode in which non-operative gentlemen were attracted by the lodge, but then withdrew as interest declined.

Aberdeen Lodge presents a problem unlike that of any of the other early Scottish lodges. For the others, evidence may be fragmentary (in some cases almost non-existent) and difficult to interpret. But at least the documentary evidence is itself above suspicion: the minutes and other documents are undoubtedly what they claim to be. But Aberdeen Lodge's greatest treasure is certainly not what it pretends. The mark book gets its name from the list it contains of all the members of the lodge in 1670 and their marks. Were it genuine, this would be the earliest full membership list of any lodge, and thus

invaluable as a source. The original is unfortunately not available for study by non-freemasons, but enough has been published to make it evident (from the names and titles given to members) that it was not written in 1670, that it does not represent membership of the lodge in 1670, and indeed that all those listed cannot have been members simultaneously. Certainty is impossible, but probably the list was compiled in the late 1680s, and its author (the lodge clerk, James Anderson, a glazier) gathered together the names of those who then belonged to the lodge and the names of former members, and backdated the resulting list to 1670, perhaps the year in which the lodge had been reorganised (or even founded). But obviously once this relatively modest bit of deception has been detected further doubts arise: did Anderson go a step further and perhaps invent a few names of members to add to the glory of his lodge?

The Aberdeen membership list is startling. The 49 fellow crafts listed comprise:

4 nobles

3 lairds

5 or 6 members of professions (2 or 3 ministers, a preacher, a professor of mathematics and a lawyer)

10 merchants

10 or 11 stonemasons

16 other craftsmen.

While the possibility of a touch of creative recruitment on Anderson's part cannot be ruled out, analysis of the list makes it unlikely: had he simply been seeking names of the most prominent individuals in the burgh or the shire to honour the lodge with, he would not have come up with those that appear on the list. Moreover, the fact that several small groups of connected individuals appear on the list looks more like natural evolution of membership, as gentlemen non-operatives attracted friends into the lodge, than forgery. Thus two of the nobles listed, the earls of Erroll and Dunfermline (the son, or more likely grandson, of William Schaw's friend and patron) each have connections with several others of those listed. Nor need the fact that when other lodge records appear from the 1690s there is no sign of the rich social mix in the lodge depicted by the '1670' list discredit it. If non-operatives from the highest ranks of society appeared briefly in Kilwinning Lodge in the 1670s and then vanished, the same may be true of Aberdeen. Certainly the non-operatives who join the lodge at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth are generally below the rank of gentry – several merchants (including one from London), a junior army officer, a hookmaker, and a writer.

The '1670' Aberdeen Lodge membership list contains one further mystery: several of those listed were Quakers. How could members of a religious sect notorious for the refusal of its adherents to take oaths and for its

rejection of ceremonies be initiated into a masonic lodge? Two of them, John Forbes and John Skene, emigrated to New Jersey in the 1680s, thus becoming the first known freemasons in America. How they reconciled freemasonry and their Quaker faith is among the masonic secrets they took to the grave with them.

Turning (with some relief) from a lodge in the north-east to one in the south-west, the records of Dumfries Lodge begin in 1687. There are signs that the lodge was reorganised at that date. William M'George of Inglistoun, a local notary, was appointed lodge clerk, and entry fees for recruits distinguished between 'mechanicks' and others, thus indicating a willingness to recruit non-operatives. Several army officers, stationed in the area to suppress religious dissidents at a time of harsh persecution, were admitted to the lodge – something it probably came to regret as within a few months the 'Glorious Revolution' swept the regime from power and led to the establishment of a presbyterian church in 1690. Perhaps this unfortunate episode led the lodge to decide against any further experiments: not until the 1710s do non-operatives (mainly craftsmen and minor local officials) again appear in the lodge.

In some rural areas and small burghs the trades of mason and wright were not distinct: many of the members of Dumfries Lodge are described as wrights, but it would be misleading to label them as non-operatives for they would often undertake mason work as well. The same is true in another western lodge, that at Hamilton. But whereas Dumfries was probably an old lodge reorganised in 1687, Hamilton's first records, 1695, show the lodge shortly after its foundation. Moreover, not only is this the first lodge outside Edinburgh since the time of the Schaw Statutes which is definitely a new foundation, it is the only lodge that can be connected with a specific building project. Since the early 1680s Anne, duchess of Hamilton in her own right, had been systematically rebuilding and extending Hamilton Palace, a project that involved moving the little burgh of Hamilton from next to the palace to a new site. Masons working on the palace probably met at first to perform rituals and admit members without forming a lodge, a not uncommon practice, then in 1695 formalised their position, declaring the 'Lodge of Hamilton' to be an 'incorporation' (in the general sense of being a corporate body, rather than a guild authorised by a burgh).

Thirteen masters of the new lodge were listed in 1695: at least three were non-operatives (a surgeon and two clerks). In 1698 the duchess of Hamilton's secretary, David Crawford, entered the lodge. In the years that followed a number of local lairds, officials and lawyers joined them, along with more humble non-operatives such as a maltman and a miller. In the first years of the new century the members comprised a more thorough representation of local power elites, in the duchess' household, the burgh and the landed gentry holding office in the sheriff court and as justices of the peace, than was the

case in any other lodge in Scotland. Hamilton Lodge seems to have been well organised and realistic in its rules, giving it an air of modernity lacking in older lodges which continued doing things in traditional ways and nominally adhering to regulations that were unenforceable. Moreover, quite a few of the gentlemen non-operatives at Hamilton attended lodge meetings over a number of years, not just appearing for initiation. Yet the lodge also remained 'operative' in the sense that it was active in controlling admission to the mason craft and supervising it. But even in such very traditional functions the lodge showed a realism not present elsewhere. Cowans, spurned by other lodges, were actually booked or registered by Hamilton Lodge (though they did not become members), being accepted as semi-skilled workers with a recognised position in the trade.

Hamilton Lodge when created was largely operative in membership, though it was soon joined by many non-operatives. Dunblane was evidently created in 1696 largely by gentlemen non-operatives. Of 13 masters, 7 were nobles and lairds, 2 (a writer who was lodge clerk, and a lorimer or maker of harnesses for horses) were non-operatives of lower status, and only 4 were operative masons. The master of the lodge was William Drummond, Lord Strathallan, the warden Alexander Drummond of Balhaldie. The latter's brothers-in-law, John Cameron younger of Lochiel and Cameron's brother Alexander (the sons of the chief of the Clan Cameron) were also members of the lodge. Both the Drummonds and the Camerons were supporters of the Jacobite cause, and it may be that other members of the lodge had similar sympathies – the lodge may have been the creation of Lord Strathallan, who as hereditary baillie of the regality of Dunblane was a dominant local figure. That the lodge was in essence an artificial creation (in the sense that it did not originate as a lodge of operative masons) probably accounts for the fact that all but three of the masters were given offices (though in some cases as alternates to other members in their absence): offices were multiplied to give virtually everyone an active role to play. The Cameron brothers were left without offices: they were probably initiated through their relationship to the Drummonds, and were not expected to attend again as they did not live in the area. They disappeared from the lodge in the years that followed, whereas most of the other non-operatives attended repeatedly. The new lodge was highly selective in recruiting members, and most of those admitted in the early years were probably friends or acquaintances of existing members. But in time the lodge's character changed. In its first few years the lodge seems to have ignored the traditional function of regulating the mason trade. But after 1700 it gradually begins to involve itself with such matters, and by the 1720s it was occasionally regarded as virtually an incorporation, as in this period non-operative dominance of the lodge weakened temporarily.

Like Dunblane, Kelso Lodge seems to have been still in the process of formation when its first minute book begins in 1701. The following year the



death was recorded of the master of the lodge, George Faa or Fall. Faa can be traced as a member of Melrose Lodge, and Kelso Lodge's treasurer at this time, Alexander Mein, was also a Melrose initiate. Apart from these two officials Kelso Lodge was dominated by local gentry, and a plausible scenario is that initiative in founding a lodge had come from the gentry and that Faa and Mein had been recruited to supply the esoteric knowledge necessary for the new lodge. No lists of existing lodge members survive for the early years of the lodge, but Kerrs and Pringles from leading local landed families in the area are to be found entering the lodge along with army officers, a merchant and a doctor. In 1705 the lodge had about 41 members. About one-third can be classified as gentlemen non-operatives, but it is impossible to determine how many of the rest were more humble non-operatives. The lodge appeared to be thriving, but then something went wrong: after 1706 it virtually collapsed, not being revived until 1716. Moreover, the post-1716 lodge was very different from its predecessor of 1696–1706. The gentry had disappeared entirely, and though there still may have been humbler non-operatives present it had become essentially a lodge for operative masons. Either the gentry had become bored, or (more likely, from hints of tensions in the minutes) gentry and craftsmen with their different interests and social backgrounds had quarrelled over the running of the lodge.

The Lodge of Haughfoot had many similarities to Kelso. Both were founded by the gentry and took little or no interest in trade regulation, and in both the gentry ultimately withdrew, leaving the lodge to their social inferiors. The siting of the lodge at Haughfoot, a tiny settlement in the hills 23 miles south of Edinburgh, was probably determined by its proximity to Torsonce, the residence of one of the two lairds mentioned in the lodge's first minute. The fact that its minute book opens with the last few words of a catechism, the rest having been torn out, presumably indicates that the gentry broke with tradition by writing down their secrets, perhaps not being confident that they knew them by heart: and perhaps it was the indignant operatives who tore them out later, after they had taken over the lodge.

The first minute of the Lodge of Haughfoot dates from 1702 and records the initiation of Sir James Scott of Gala, his brother, three local tenants, and a wright. The initiations were carried out, it seems, by John Pringle of that Ilk (or of Torsonce) as master of the lodge, his brother and the lodge's clerk and boxmaster. The fact that the head of another branch of the Pringle family, Sir Robert Pringle of Stichel, had played a leading part in founding the Lodge of Kelso about 20 miles away the year before is doubtless more than coincidence. It looks very much as though interest in freemasonry was spreading among the gentry through personal contacts. A possible further link in the chain is that Stichel's uncle, Walter Pringle, had been one of the lawyers initiated in the Lodge of Edinburgh in 1670.

The nearest thing this new lodge had in 1702 to an operative mason

among its members (for no other members apart from those mentioned above can be detected) was a wright, and he may have, as happened in rural areas, combined the trades of wright and mason and thus provided a token 'real' mason. In 1704 an undoubted operative mason was admitted to the lodge after he proved he had already been initiated as an entered apprentice and fellow craft elsewhere. Recruitment of gentry and others increased membership to 26 by 1709. But after 1714 admission of gentry ceased, and after 1716 the office of master was almost invariably held by an operative, whereas previously it had been the exclusive preserve of the gentry. Some of the latter continued to attend lodge meetings into the 1720s, so the triumph of the operatives was not so abrupt as in Kelso, but the end result was the same. The gentry had created a lodge but then abandoned it.

Dunblane, Kelso and Haughfoot form a distinctive group as the first lodges created by non-operatives essentially for their own purposes. But subsequently operative influence in them grew fast. Previously the only lodges whose creation can be dated with some certainty (rather than dating back, or perhaps dating back, to William Schaw's time) had been the operative lodges of Canongate Kilwinning (1677), Canongate Leith (1688) and Hamilton (1695) – though perhaps the latter should be classified as transitional in its origins, as gentry non-operative influence was present from the start and quickly became dominant.

The final two lodges which can be traced admitting non-operatives before 1710 are, however, of earlier foundation. The Elgin masons met in the Lodge of Kilmolymock, and the lodge was probably established long before 1704, the date of its first surviving minutes. Within the next few years the minutes record the admission of a merchant, a schoolmaster and a tenant, indicating that non-operatives were accepted, but only of a fairly humble sort. The same is true of the Lodge of Stirling. Nothing whatever is known of it from the late 1630s until 1708, but in the latter year a cordiner (shoemaker) was admitted, followed by a soldier from the garrison of Stirling Castle in 1714.

Even if the complete minutes of every early lodge had survived, and they all made clear the status of every member, a complete list of non-operative freemasons could not be compiled. Some, it may be many, were initiated outside lodges. Lodges varied greatly in their attitude to such practices. In 1679 the Lodge of Edinburgh punished a fellow craft and two entered apprentices who, acting with others, had initiated several Ayrshire gentlemen as members of the lodge: the names of the gentlemen were not recorded, so presumably the lodge refused to accept them as members. Kilwinning ordered in 1686 that members only be initiated at lodge meetings – and indeed only on 20 December meetings. Dumfries Lodge, on the other hand, in 1687 simply ruled that members should not carry out initiations within 12 miles of the burgh. Thus the lodge acted to preserve its local monopoly, but otherwise seemed to accept that its members were free to carry out initiations

outside any specific lodge, and the assumption evidently was that such initiates would not belong to any lodge. Dunfermline Lodge was more positive: any member could initiate a man and make him a member of the lodge anywhere in the country, provided fees were collected and the new members' names were reported back to the lodge.

Such practices were probably a legacy of earlier times. Before William Schaw established the modern lodge system it is likely that Scottish masons had performed whatever rituals they had, including initiations, in informal groups, doubtless sometimes in the old, temporary, building-site lodges, and this practice, it seems, lingered on. Nearly all the 'lodges' known in seventeenth-century England were 'occasional' lodges, *ad hoc* meetings taking place to initiate men as freemasons, but not to membership of a permanent lodge as such things did not exist, and this sort of thing may have been widespread in Scotland as well (though there is no evidence of such one-off meetings being called 'lodges' north of the border).

### **Life in the lodges**

The main functions of the early Scottish lodges have already been discussed. They performed the rituals of initiation and identification described in the catechisms. Most of them attempted to regulate the operative mason trade to a greater or lesser extent, though their success here was much more limited than their ambitions. By eating and drinking together members satisfied a craving for sociability and strengthened the bonds which held them together. Members fallen on hard times were helped from lodge funds.

The minute books and other lodge records which survive usually concentrate on matters of trade regulation and on recording the admission of new members. They also show how often lodges met. It may be that sometimes meetings were not noted in the minutes if nothing took place which it was thought necessary to record, but there seems no doubt that the great majority of meetings were minuted, and sometimes this is confirmed by regulations specifying when meetings should be held. Several lodges stated that there should be quarterly meetings, including the one on St John's Day at which elections of officials and the annual banquet took place, but this usually proved over-ambitious, and in a number of cases lodges only met once a year, on St John's Day. In the years 1601–1710 the Lodge of Edinburgh met on average two-and-a-third times a year, hardly an impressive record for a big urban lodge. A few other lodges met more often than this over limited periods, but in general lodges met surprisingly seldom – a fact which obviously seriously limited their ability to regulate the trade and deal with disputes on a day-to-day basis. Attempts to make meetings more frequent than one or two a year usually ended in failure, and even at St John's Day meetings attendance was poor in spite of regulations making it compulsory.

Lodge minutes often say where meetings took place in terms of which town or settlement, but seldom specify a building. The Second Schaw Statutes specified that meetings of Kilwinning Lodge should always take place in the parish church, but there is no evidence of this actually happening. However, the Lodge of Haddington is said to have met in Gullane church in 1599, and in 1601–2 the Lodge of Aitchison's Haven met twice in the parish church of Inveresk, twice in that of Musselburgh. It is difficult to imagine that the lodges were permitted to conduct their initiations, let alone hold banquets, in the churches themselves, and the fact that all these references appear very early on in the evolution of the lodges indicates that associating meeting with churches was soon abandoned. Where places of meeting are specified they usually turn out to be either members' houses, or inns or alehouses. Dunblane Lodge records meeting in what was evidently an inn twice in 1696, and Kilwinning Lodge frequently met in 1643–61 in the upper chamber of Hew Smith's house at the Cross of Kilwinning, which appears to have been an inn or alehouse. Hamilton Lodge met sometimes in alehouses, sometimes in members' houses. Dumfries Lodge usually met in the house of the deacon of the Incorporation of Squaremen, who was a member of the lodge though not an official of it.

The Lodge of Aberdeen traditionally claimed to meet at the sconces at Girdleness, earthwork fortifications at the mouth of the River Dee. Whether they actually met at so inconvenient a place is uncertain, and in 1700 the lodge bought a house that was within the burgh boundaries but stood isolated on open ground. Perhaps for that reason it was regarded as in effect 'outside' the burgh and thus a suitable place for meetings. In 1712–13 the Lodge of Hamilton considered building a masons' house, but nothing was done.

The requirements for a lodge meeting were clearly minimal. All that was needed was a room and privacy. The elaborate lodge described by the catechisms was not a real building but an imaginary one, though no doubt rooms in which meetings were held were to some extent laid out or marked to indicate the main features and orientation of the 'lodge'. Dwelling houses and alehouses were not only readily available, they were convenient from the point of view of serving food and drink to members partaking of the convivial side of lodge activities. The St John's Day banquet was of course the greatest occasion of a lodge's year, but it is clear that at other meetings ale was commonly available and members sometimes dined together. Arrangements for payment varied. Sometimes lodge funds were used, but more commonly dinner for all existing members was paid for by entrants to the lodge. At Dumfries in 1697 the penalty agreed for an absentee was that he should pay for 'the present treat', and Melrose Lodge in 1711 ruled that absentees should pay their share of 'the Reckoning', indicating that the bill was divided between members. Melrose's minutes are unusual in sometimes giving detailed information on the annual banquet. In 1685 John Mein, osler and

member of the lodge, was paid for providing meat and drink and making it ready. In 1698 the banquet involved the purchase of mutton, barley, white bread, salt, ale, pipes and tobacco.

St John's Day was for Aberdeen Lodge a 'day of rejoysing and feasting with one another'. The same is true of all lodges for which sufficient information survives to establish the date of their annual banquet, with the single exception of the Lodge of Kilwinning. Its annual meeting was on 20 December, but was changed to St Thomas' Day, 21 December, late in the eighteenth century. It was then claimed that it had always been supposed to meet on the saint's day but had been meeting a day early by mistake, an explanation which hardly seems plausible. The lodge banquets, and indeed other meetings at which ale and perhaps other refreshments were served, were doubtless often fairly rowdy affairs, though it is rare to get glimpses of this. Aberdeen Lodge felt it necessary to specify that members should not taunt or mock each other at meetings. In Dumfries in 1711 a drunken member knocked over the ink bottle, disfiguring the minute book to the mortification of the clerk who promptly recorded what had happened so posterity would know the blots were not his fault. Surely members of Melrose Lodge had drink taken when in 1690 they ruled that any member who took his place in the parish church before his seniors 'is a great ase'.

Details of lodge finances are seldom given in the records, but it is clear from minutes that there were frequent problems. Income came mainly from entrance fees and, in some lodges at least, from small regular payments exacted from members. Recruiting new members was one way to raise money, and gentlemen non-operatives may have been particularly attractive as prospective members because they could be expected to be generous – and, indeed, sometimes higher entrance fees were set for them. However, this had to be offset against the fact that gentlemen would expect to be honoured by the lodge: Aberdeen made provision for payment for 'treats' for nobles and gentlemen who were masons.

The difficulties several lodges (Edinburgh, Aitchison's Haven and Dunfermline) can be detected as experiencing in the later seventeenth century in getting entered apprentices to accept promotion to fellow crafts were partly financial. Entered apprentices were reluctant to pay the necessary fees, feeling (in Edinburgh's case at least) that promotion would not bring them a real say in running the lodge as an entrenched elite was monopolising power. Moreover, it was felt that this elite was managing the lodge's funds in its own interests, neglecting those of the rest of the members. In the absence of accounts it is impossible to say how justified such claims were, but it is significant that the first act of the rebellious journeymen who withdrew from Edinburgh Lodge in 1708 was to establish their own benefit society to which they made regular payments 'for our distressed poor who stand in need thereof'. The prime purpose of the funds accumulated by most lodges was to

provide payments to injured, sick or elderly members, and to their widows and orphans. Such payments are seldom recorded, but they can be assumed to be a basic part of lodge activities (as they were in incorporations). Often, as at Aberdeen, the lodge's funds were known as the poor's box, though as with the poor's boxes of the kirk sessions it was accepted that other types of payment could legitimately be made from the funds. Nonetheless, their basic purpose was help for the poor. Inherited from Medieval fraternities and guilds was the belief that guaranteeing a respectable funeral was an important part of such welfare benefits. Many if not most lodges purchased mortcloths, velvet cloths to cover the coffins of members to lend dignity to funerals. Thus the Aitchison's Haven minutes reveal a keeper of the mortcloth in 1624, and the lodge had two cloths of different sizes by 1667. In addition there was no doubt an obligation for members to attend each other's funerals, to lend the dignity of a body of mourners to the occasion.

Other lodge activities relate to the rituals and lore of the masons. These were clearly not confined to the rituals of initiation and identification, though references are sparse. By the late seventeenth century many lodges are known to have owned copies of the Old Charges (Aberdeen, Aitchison's Haven, Dumfries, Dundee, Kilwinning, Melrose and Stirling) and it is all but certain that the lore contained in these Old Charges was known long before the written copies appear. The Old Charges are not mentioned in the catechisms, but occasional references to what are probably copies of them occur in minutes. Aitchison's Haven ordered fines for those who 'kept' them, presumably meaning by this taking them away from lodge meetings, and Dumfries Lodge (which had, remarkably, three copies by 1700) carefully noted who had custody of them. The documents were thus regarded, it seems, not only as valuable but as secret. The rituals of initiation were too short for new members to study the lore of the Old Charges before their admission, but they were probably expected to become familiar with them subsequently, and it is very likely that they were regularly read out to the lodge, or recited from memory.

Individual lodges also probably rehearsed their own lore. Perth masons doubtless repeated the legend of their origins in the building of the abbey of Scone and related that to Solomon's Temple, as detailed in their lodge's contract or agreement of 1658. In three lodges testing of members' knowledge of lore and ritual can be traced. In Aitchison's Haven the warden tested entered apprentices before the St John's Day meetings. Dumfries lodge ruled in 1688 that members should be examined at quarterly meetings and then receive further instruction if necessary. At Melrose in 1694 the warden and clerk were to examine all members with the same questions, and two years later a few members were fined for not being perfect. A 1701 list of those who had been examined and were to pay suggests a similar fining of those whose knowledge was defective. Quite what was examined is not defined, but it is

likely to have been the lore of the Old Charges and the rituals of the catechisms. In Glasgow a minute of the incorporation in 1667 ordered all entered apprentices to meet with the deacon and master on the first Tuesday in January each year until they 'be friemen', an indication of how closely the affairs of the incorporation and the lodge were entwined: the master was, presumably, that of the lodge, and it sounds as though the meetings were designed to coach entered apprentices in the lore of the craft. Were the techniques through which members of these lodges were instructed in memorising all this those of the art of memory, urged on the lodges by William Schaw a century before?

It is appropriate to have ended discussion of the lodges by reverting to considerations of lore and ritual, for they lay at the hearts of all the lodges and were what gave them meaning, distinguishing them from all other institutions.

## 9 Early Scottish and English freemasonry

### Freemasonry in seventeenth-century Scotland

There is evidence that 25 masonic lodges had come into existence in Scotland by 1710 – though it is possible that a few of those which can only be traced through isolated seventeenth-century references were no longer active in 1710. The fact that some lodges (Linlithgow; Canongate Kilwinning; Canongate and Leith) are only known through single surviving references makes it likely that there were other lodges that have left no trace of their existence. How many of these there were is impossible to say, but probably their numbers were limited and they were mainly located in the smaller royal burghs. A 1705 tax roll shows 14 burghs paying over 1 per cent of the total tax imposed on the burghs,<sup>1</sup> and these may be taken to be the largest population centres in the country. Pre-1710 lodges are known in 11 of these 14 burghs, and in 1 of the 3 exceptions, Ayr, it is known that the local masons attended Kilwinning Lodge. This leaves the masons of Kirkcaldy and Montrose without known lodges, but the former at least may well have had a lodge: in 1758 the Grand Lodge of Scotland, usually cautious about accepting extravagant claims to antiquity, accepted that the Lodge of Kirkcaldy had existed for over a century.<sup>2</sup> But not all royal burghs can be assumed to have had lodges before 1710. The Lodge of Peebles was not founded until 1716, and the Lodge of Brechin's possession of laws dated 1714 may suggest that it was then being organised for the first time.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a guess that there were 30 or so lodges active in Scotland in about 1710 would not be far wrong.

As the survey of lodges in chapter 8 demonstrates, there was much variation between individual lodges in their functions, membership, and position in relation to incorporations. Yet their basic similarity is evident: they are all recognisably part of the same movement, though they had in some respects developed in different ways over time, partly through adapting to local circumstances. The lodges shared what were basically the same secrets of the Mason Word and the same rituals (though the differences between the rituals described in the Register House group of catechisms and the Sloane

<sup>1</sup> T. C. Smout, *Scottish trade on the eve of the union, 1660–1707* (Edinburgh, 1963), 282–3.

<sup>2</sup> J. L. Michie, *A short history of the Lodge of Kirkcaldy, No. 72* ([1958]), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Vernon, *History*, 305–6; Poole, *Gould's history*, iii, 230–1, 236–7.



catechism suggest some diversity). They had the same names for the leading officers of the lodge and for the grades of initiate. This underlying similarity survived even though individual lodges appear very much to have kept to themselves, ignoring other lodges. The idea of lodges serving the special needs of a mobile craft by welcoming and admitting men from other parts of the country who were working in their localities may have been present in theory but (with the exception of Hamilton Lodge) it was contradicted in practice. Lodges were, where trade regulation was concerned, just as exclusive as incorporations, jealously guarding the rights of local men. No doubt contacts between men from different lodges on building sites, exchanging the recognition signs of the Mason Word and perhaps performing rituals (including the initiation of new members of the craft) together, helped to preserve underlying similarity between lodges. But this similarity probably owed most to the common origin of the older lodges (on which later lodges modelled themselves) in the work of William Schaw in the seminal years around 1600. Through his two sets of statutes he had sought to establish uniformity among his lodges, and he presumably envisaged this uniformity being maintained by his successors as general warden of the mason craft. In practice subsequent general wardens (with the exception of the Alexander brothers in the later 1630s) seem to have taken no interest in the lodges, and in the later seventeenth century the office vanished. Thus central supervision of the lodges disappeared, and Schaw's early death in 1602 may have meant that his ambitious plans for the masonic lodges were left incomplete. Schaw, for example, had placed emphasis on the importance of skill in the art of memory for masons, but though it has been suggested above that the art of memory influenced masonic ritual, the lodge being in one sense a temple of memory, there is no evidence that later lodge members were aware of this derivation. Thus it is probable that the rituals which survive from the end of the century do not reflect fully Schaw's attempt at reworking the older mythology and rituals of the craft by adding late Renaissance influences to them.

Do the members of the early Scottish lodges merit the name freemasons? Surely they do, unless perverse elements are introduced into the definition of the word 'freemason' specifically designed to exclude them. The early Scottish masons, operative and non-operative, were organised in lodges whose leading officials were a master or deacon and a warden. They had elaborate secret rituals of initiation into two grades or degrees, entered apprentice and fellow craft master, and there are hints of the development in some lodges of a distinction in status between 'ordinary' fellow crafts and masters, which may have pointed the way to the three degrees of modern craft masonry. Though the secret rituals of initiation can only be traced in outline through the masonic catechisms it is clear that they had much in common with the rituals of later freemasons. Certainly the latter have been much

elaborated and refined over the centuries, but their seventeenth-century Scottish origins are undeniable. Important elements of the ethos of later freemasonry can also be detected in the early Scottish lodges: the emphasis on brotherhood, and the emergence of a distinctive morality illustrated and symbolised by the tools and materials of masons and the buildings they created. The framework of mythical history, based on the Old Charges, which supported the ritual and morality was also present.

It could be argued, however, that two major aspects of modern freemasonry were lacking in seventeenth-century Scotland. In the first place, while there existed a network of lodges there was no grand lodge supervising the movement, and after the decline and fall of the general wardens there was no other central authority presiding over the masonic movement. But, without denying the importance of grand lodges in the spread and development of freemasonry, it is difficult to see the existence of a grand lodge as an essential of freemasonry, necessary before the latter term can be used. The other aspect of later freemasonry lacking in seventeenth-century Scotland is lodges composed entirely of non-operatives. Most Scottish lodges were largely operative in membership, and even those which were predominantly non-operative (like Dunblane, Kelso and Haughfoot) had a few operative members. England can claim the first entirely non-operative lodges, and therefore (it has been argued) the first entirely 'speculative' lodges. But this distinction is, as argued in chapter 1, confused. There is present the equation of non-operatives with gentlemen when classifying lodge members, combined with the assumption that only such gentlemen can be regarded as doing respectably 'speculative' things, thus deserving the title of freemasons: it's not what you do but who you are that does it that counts, it would seem. The entry of gentry into lodges is obviously of central importance in the spread of freemasonry, a sign of its widening appeal to men of all ranks. But the implications that the rituals and beliefs of working masons cannot be freemasonry, that even when gentlemen enter lodges and share them with operatives this is not freemasonry, and that freemasonry is only an appropriate term for the activities of gentlemen entirely excluding operatives, seem truly extraordinary. They are a legacy of an age even more class ridden than our own. Moreover, they negate what is supposedly one of the central tenets of freemasonry, that within the brotherhood of the craft social distinctions are irrelevant. Further, as has been shown time and again in examining individual lodges, the traditional distinction between operatives (stonemasons) and non-operatives (gentlemen) simply ignores the existence in many lodges of members who belonged to neither group, as they were of fairly humble social status but were not stonemasons, following other trades and occupations.

The fact that in the great majority of Scottish lodges until the early eighteenth century (and in many cases long beyond that) most members were stonemasons is not a sign of the weakness or backwardness of Scottish

freemasonry. On the contrary, it is evidence of its strength. Freemasonry has always claimed to have grown out of the practices and beliefs of stonemasons. In Scotland this can be seen to be happening in the seventeenth century. That most of the early lodges which can be identified in England have no such links with genuine craft organisations suggests that there freemasonry was largely an 'artificial' creation in the sense that the lodges were created by gentry who had no direct contact with working masons, often (as the evidence of the rituals and the names for degrees that they adopted indicates) influenced by knowledge of what was happening in Scotland. In Scotland even when lodges were founded by the gentry the whole movement was so intimately linked with working masons that some were recruited into the new lodges to give them legitimacy. Early English gentry-freemasons, on the other hand, extolled the moral values enshrined in masonic symbolism but usually had little or no interest in going slumming by actually associating with working men.

The operative element in Scottish freemasonry, moreover, did not collapse in the face of the invasion of the gentry. In a number of cases operative-dominated lodges seem to have experimented with allowing gentlemen into their lodges, not liked the long-term results, and therefore excluded them. Even lodges founded by the gentry, like Dunblane, Haughfoot and Kelso, could be taken over in time by operative masons and others of humble status, the upper classes disappearing from their ranks. In some cases in the eighteenth century when old lodges were successfully colonised by the gentry, the operatives withdrew to form new 'operative' lodges for themselves – nine eighteenth-century Scottish lodges proudly bear the word 'Operative' in their names to this day.<sup>4</sup> In other cases it was the gentry, excluded by old operative lodges, who formed new lodges.

Of the 25 early Scottish lodges dealt with in this book, 2 (Aitchison's Haven and Haughfoot) have long been extinct, and in three cases (Dundee, Linlithgow and St Andrews) it is not certain that any modern lodge can claim continuity with its seventeenth-century predecessor. But all the remaining 20 lodges, 80 per cent of the total, still exist today. This is a truly remarkable record. By contrast no English lodge exists today to which any reference whatever is known before 1716–17, when the Grand Lodge of England was being founded.

### **Freemasonry in seventeenth-century England**

The basic argument of this book is that in its essentials modern freemasonry is Scottish rather than English in origin. Up to this point discussion has concentrated almost exclusively on the surviving Scottish evidence. But obviously if the argument is to have any credibility the relevant English evidence must also be examined. When this is done, it immediately becomes

<sup>4</sup> *GLSYB*, Roll of lodges, nos. 37, 47, 97, 105, 140, 150, 167, 193, 203.

apparent that the English evidence is very different from the Scottish. The first difference is quantitative. The scarcity of evidence at crucial points concerning the emergence of Scottish freemasonry has been lamented repeatedly in this book, but the sources are in fact astonishingly lavish compared with those available in England. The latter had five times the population of Scotland, but the surviving evidence bearing on the origins of freemasonry amounts to only a tiny fraction of that existing north of the border. Secondly, the nature of the evidence in the two countries is very different. Seventeenth-century Scottish masonic history can be firmly based on the surviving official records of many lodges. By contrast only one or two scraps of paper survive in England that may have once belonged to lodges. Instead the historian has to rely on a variety of references to the existence of masonic secrets and meetings, the accuracy and significance of a good many of which is doubtful.

It may be accepted that in England as in Scotland masons had in the late sixteenth century a craft mythology and initiation ceremonies of some sort, inherited from the Middle Ages. It is likely that these were unusually elaborate (compared with those of other crafts) in spite of the effects of protestant Reformation, and were combined with at least the ideal of craft organisation or brotherhood which went beyond guilds in individual towns. But, as in Scotland, this is guesswork, though in one respect the guess is more plausible where England is concerned as versions of the Old Charges exist from the period. As seen in chapter 2, there are far more copies of the Old Charges surviving from the mid sixteenth to the mid seventeenth centuries than could be accounted for by antiquarian interest. None of them can be linked conclusively with organisations of operative stonemasons, but the Old Charges probably formed the core of their lore, and there is an indication of this in one version. The lost 1581 English manuscript known as Melrose No. 1 (since the text survives through a copy made for the Lodge of Melrose in 1674) has a note subjoined to it certifying that one Robert Wincester 'hath lafully done his dutie to the science of Masonrie' and this is signed by John Wincester, described as Robert's master freemason.<sup>5</sup> A plausible interpretation of this would be that Robert was John's apprentice or servant and had undergone some sort of initiation during which the Old Charges had been used. The word freemason should not be seen as being of any particular significance here, being merely a trade description.

The best early evidence of institutionalised masonic initiation of some sort in England comes from the records (beginning in 1619) of the Masons' Company of London. These contain references to the 'making' of masons (e.g., 1620–1), to masons being 'accepted' (e.g., 1630), and to meetings about the 'acception' and the holding of acception dinners (e.g., 1645–7, 1649–50). These entries are sporadic, and the terminology sometimes ambiguous in that

<sup>5</sup> Vernon, *History*, 63.

being 'accepted' could mean merely becoming a member of the company. But on some occasions men who were already members were 'accepted' or 'made' masons, and it appears that this meant that they were initiated into some group within the company.<sup>6</sup> The differences between what was happening in London and in contemporary Edinburgh are striking. In Edinburgh the lodge concerned with initiation into secrets existed parallel to the guild (incorporation), but was separate from it. In London the guild itself was the organisation which conducted such initiations. Further, in Scotland all the masons who were masters of a guild had membership of a lodge open to them, and indeed apprentices and journeymen were also lodge members. In London by contrast it seems that only a minority of masters were 'accepted' or 'made', even prominent members of the guild sometimes having to wait for years before being accepted. Finally, it appears that those being accepted underwent only a single initiation: there is no sign of the two grades or degrees found in Scotland.

Thus the accepted masons formed an exclusive cell within the London Company. It has been claimed that 'The word "Acception" may be rendered as "The Lodge"',<sup>7</sup> but this is probably misleading. Perhaps the acception should be seen as an occasion or a ceremony rather than as an institution, with there being not a 'London Acception' but a number of accepted masons within the London Company.

By 1663 the records of the London Company of Masons included, in addition to copies of the Old Charges, 'The names of the Accepted Masons in a faire enclosed frame with a lock and key', and in 1676 a version of the Old Charges was described as the constitution of the accepted masons.<sup>8</sup> In 1677 there is a reference to the money received from 'the last accepted Masons' being spent on a banner for the company, but after that there are no further references in the company records to the acception. Then, in 1682, Elias Ashmole recorded attending a masonic 'lodge' at Masons' Hall in London. What seems to have happened is that the acception had become separated, to a greater extent than in the past, from the company (perhaps as a result of reorganisation following the granting of a royal charter to the Company in 1677), this meeting now becoming known as a 'lodge'.<sup>9</sup> The term 'accepted' continued to be applied in England to initiated masons, and the Grand Lodge of England founded 40 years later came to be called that of the free and accepted masons. The influence of English masonry on Scottish by the mid eighteenth century is indicated by the emergence of both the words free and accepted in the title of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. But though the word

<sup>6</sup> E. Conder, 'The Masons Company of the City of London and the Lodge of Accepted Masons connected with it', *AQC*, 9 (1896), 29–37; Knoop, *Genesis*, 146–7.

<sup>7</sup> Conder, 'Masons Company', 33, and see, e.g., Knoop, *Genesis*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Conder, 'Masons Company', 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

'accepted' was ultimately adopted by Scottish masons the term has no historical validity north of the border.

What being 'made' masons in the London Company's 'acception' involved is obscure. It looks as if it included initiation and the communication of some secrets, but there is no evidence of whether or not they were similar to those of the Scottish masons of the day, and certainly there is no evidence of two degrees such as had emerged in Scotland. Other scattered pieces of evidence indicate that there were 'lodges' in England before the London acception took that name. The earliest reference to a such lodge occurs in the diary of Elias Ashmole, antiquarian, mathematician, astrologer and would-be Rosicrucian. On 16 October 1646 at 4.30 in the afternoon he 'was made a Free Mason at Warrington in Lancashire', along with Colonel Henry Mainwaring of Kermincham in Cheshire, to whom Ashmole was related (assuming that this was the same man as the Mainwaring he refers to as his cousin). Ashmole named the warden and six others 'that were then of the Lodge', and it is evident that none of them were operative stonemasons. This, then, is the first known 'lodge' in England (apart from Medieval-type building-site lodges), and the first 'lodge' known anywhere with no operative members.

Ashmole was initiated just after the end of the great civil war between king and parliament in which he had served the defeated royalist cause as an artillery officer: his fellow initiate, Henry Mainwaring, has usually been described as serving parliament in the war, and this has led to the Warrington Lodge frequently being cited as a precocious example of masonic tolerance, comprehending men who had just fought on opposite sides in a bitter civil war. Further, the fact that one or two of the lodge's members may have been Catholics has been taken as evidence of a tolerant attitude to religion as well as politics.<sup>10</sup> In fact, though Henry Mainwaring had begun the war fighting for parliament, he had soon changed sides.<sup>11</sup> Thus it was two royalist officers who entered the lodge in 1646. Lancashire's many Catholics had also supported the king, so if there were Catholics in the lodge this merely confirms that, far from being above political and religious squabbles, it was an organisation in which royalists may have sought consolation in defeat through brotherhood.

What were the origins of this Warrington 'lodge', and what was its nature? The argument that it had gradually evolved from an operative organisation, and thus had a long previous history<sup>12</sup> is not convincing: it could equally well have been created the day before Ashmole joined it. Is it a coincidence that

<sup>10</sup> C. H. Josten (ed.), *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692). His autobiographical writings and historical notes, his correspondence, and other contemporary sources relating to his life and work* (5 vols., Oxford, 1966), i, 33-4, ii, 395-6; N. Rogers, 'The lodge of Elias Ashmole, 1646', *AQC*, 65 (1952), 50.

<sup>11</sup> J. S. Morrill, *Cheshire, 1630-1660. County government and society during the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), 53, 67n, 71, 80, 185n, 215.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Josten, *Ashmole*, ii, 396n.

this first known English lodge appeared in the north of the country, just five years after the first known meeting of a masonic lodge on English soil, at which the masons of Edinburgh Lodge had initiated two covenanting generals in Newcastle? There is an additional connection between the two events in that Ashmole's mathematical skills as an artillery officer<sup>13</sup> meant he could be defined in Vitruvian terms as an architect/mason, just like the two Scots generals. As so often certainty is impossible, but it may be that the activities of masons (operative or non-operative) in the Scottish armies which occupied the north of England in 1640–1 and 1644–7 had spread knowledge of, and aroused interest in, masonry in the area, with some locals becoming initiated and calling their meetings lodges in the Scottish fashion.

After Ashmole's 1646 mention of Warrington 'lodge' it is never heard of again, and in this it is typical of the seventeenth-century English lodges: an isolated reference is followed by total silence. One explanation could be that they were much more secretive than Scottish lodges, seeking to keep their very existence totally secret and generally avoiding keeping written records. But this is not plausible, for while outside the records of the lodges themselves and a few formal legal documents (indentures and bonds) there are no known references to lodges in Scottish sources in this period, there are a number in English sources – Ashmole's being one of them. Thus it seems that English masons actually felt less constraint about discussing the fact that lodges existed than their Scottish counterparts. It is, however, likely that the English lodges were less good at record-keeping than Scottish ones. As most were purely voluntary meetings joined for social reasons, keeping formal records was far less important than for Scottish lodges which had an operative role in admitting people to the mason trade and regulating it. Moreover, most early English 'lodges' were different from the Scottish institutions of the same name in a much more fundamental way. They were occasions rather than institutions, meetings of initiates held to carry out initiations. In Scotland they would not have been called lodges at all: rather they were the equivalent of those irregular meetings held outside lodges to initiate masons, approved by some lodges, frowned on by others.

Thus until the end of the seventeenth century England appears to have largely lacked permanent lodges of the Scottish type, the word 'lodge' generally being applied instead to *ad hoc* gatherings (like the old acceptions of the London Company) held to conduct initiations rather than to formally constituted institutions. The fact that apart from Ashmole's reference nothing is known of the Warrington Lodge ceases to be surprising once the word 'lodge' is seen to have this meaning: there never was any formal 'lodge' (in the modern sense) but merely men in the locality who had been initiated and sometimes met to initiate others.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 28, 31, ii, 359, 360, 382, 384, 385.

Ashmole was made a freemason in 1646. But as with the records relating to the acceptance in London there is no indication that Warrington 'lodge' practised a two-degree system or that the secrets involved in the Scottish Mason Word were imparted to him. Knowledge of the mysterious Mason Word was, however, already spreading to England. Sir Thomas Urquhart's reference to it in 1653 was contained in a work published in London, and in 1672 Andrew Marvell presumably expected his passing mention of the word to be comprehensible to his readers. Yet use of the term Mason Word did not become widespread in England. It was not mentioned in a skit published in London in 1676, though this 'divertisement' did play with the theme of invisibility associated with the Word in Scotland: 'These are to give notice that the Modern Green-ribbon'd Caball, together with the Hermetic Adepti, and the Company of accepted Masons' intended to dine together in a tavern. 'All idle people that can spare so much time from the Coffee-house' were urged to go along to watch, but were 'advised to provide themselves Spectacles of Malleable Glass; for otherwise 'tis thought the said Societies will (as hitherto) make their Appearance Invisible.'<sup>14</sup> Since a non-existent date (31 November) was given as that of the dinner the author was evidently not seeking to disrupt a dinner that was really being held by some group. Probably the intention was simply to ridicule the radical Whig groups who opposed the increasing absolutism of the regime and feared a Catholic threat to protestantism. Their badge was a green ribbon, and their secrecy was lampooned by comparing it with that of other dubious groups (real or imaginary) like the Hermetic adepts, the Rosicrucians and the masons. Here for the first time the term accepted masons escapes from the confines of the records of the London Masons' Company. The following year, it seems, came the partial separation of the London accepted masonry from the company, and in 1682 Elias Ashmole referred to what was evidently the successor to the acceptance as a lodge.

On 10 March 1682 Ashmole recorded receiving 'a Summons to appeare at a Lodge to be held the next day, at Masons Hall London', and on 11 March 'Accordingly I went, and about Noone [there] were admitted into the Fellowship of Free Masons' six men. Three of the initiates were members of the Masons' Company, but the most prominent and first named of them, Sir William Wilson, was not. Formerly a stonemason, he had made a rich marriage and his skills as a sculptor had earned him a knighthood just a few days before he became an accepted mason. This may indeed have been the occasion of the meeting, the honouring of a stonemason who had become an eminent figure. It may also be significant that Ashmole states that he was summoned to attend 'a Lodge', rather than a meeting of 'the lodge' at Masons' Hall. Is there another hint here that the word 'lodge' denotes a meeting, rather than an institution which meets? If the 'lodge' was an

<sup>14</sup> Knoop, *Pamphlets*, 30-1.



institution in anything like the modern sense then it is surely surprising that Ashmole, evidently not a 'member', was summoned to attend it and was admitted to the meeting without any formality of joining. But if the 'lodge' was simply an occasion, an *ad hoc* gathering to perform initiations, then presumably those organising the affair were free to invite whomever they wanted among initiated masons to attend. Ashmole, who proudly relates that he was the senior fellow present (having been admitted as a mason 35 years earlier), may have been invited so his eminence and his seniority as an initiate would add to the status of the occasion. On this interpretation, William Wilson was initiated at a 'lodge' and became an accepted mason. But he did not through this initiation become a member of a permanent lodge, for the 'lodge' was simply the meeting. The nine other fellows besides Ashmole at the meeting were all members of the Masons' Company, and Ashmole's list of their names is headed by that of the master of the company, suggesting that he presided at the meeting as an incorporation's deacon would have done in a Scottish lodge. Such meetings or lodges on the London Company's premises were doubtless fairly regular, with the same core of members drawn from the company attending repeatedly, giving continuity. Nonetheless, it is likely that they regarded themselves not as members of a lodge but as attending a series of lodges, just as before 1677 they had doubtless attended a series of acceptations.<sup>15</sup> Again in this reference there is a notable absence of any sign of a two-grade or degree system being practised in England: new members were made fellows immediately – though the term fellow craft was evidently unknown.

Probably some time, perhaps a considerable number of years, before Ashmole attended the London lodge in 1682 a fellow antiquarian had given a brief account of freemasonry. This was Sir William Dugdale, who related it to John Aubrey. Aubrey then recorded it in the manuscript of his account of Wiltshire: this was completed in 1691, and Aubrey stated that he had heard it from Dugdale (who had died in 1686) 'many years since'. Dugdale told Aubrey that a Medieval pope had given a grant to a company of Italian architect freemasons to travel round Europe building churches. From these architects derived 'The Fraternity of adopted-masons' or freemasons, who recognised each other by secret signs and words. Lodges existed in several countries (by which may be meant counties) and the 'manner of their Adoption is very formall, and with an Oath of Secrecy'. A memoir of Elias Ashmole, published in 1719, repeats the story in very similar words (adding accepted mason as an alternative to adopted mason or freemason),<sup>16</sup> and a rather later source does the same, claiming to derive the passage from sources for a history of masonry which Ashmole (like Sir Robert Moray) had

<sup>15</sup> Josten, *Ashmole*, i, 34, 245–6, iv, 1699–1701.

<sup>16</sup> Knoop, *Pamphlets*, 41–2; Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 2–3.

collected.<sup>17</sup> Ashmole's masonic papers have now been lost, but it may be that Dugdale got the information he passed on to Aubrey from Ashmole himself. These are the first references to the Italian myth of the origins of freemasonry, which was to have a long history. So too was the now discredited myth created by a note in Aubrey's manuscript stating that on the day he wrote, 18 May 1691, a great meeting of accepted masons (he first wrote freemasons but crossed this out) was to take place in St Paul's Cathedral to adopt Sir Christopher Wren as a brother.<sup>18</sup>

It looks as if some malicious informant had successfully imposed on Aubrey's credulity, and Dr Robert Plot, antiquarian and secretary of the Royal Society, may also have been in part the victim of those willing to gratify interest in supposed masonic secrets by invention – which is unfortunate as Plot provides the most detailed account of seventeenth-century English freemasonry, in his *Natural History of Stafford-shire* published in 1686. Under customs of the county he lists that

of admitting Men into the *Society of Free-masons*, that in the moorelands of this County seems to be of greater request, than any where else, though I find the *Custom* spread more or less all over the *Nation*; for here I found persons of the most eminent quality, that did not disdain to be of this *Fellowship*.

Moreover, continued Plot, if the history and rules of the craft were as old as 'is pretended' there was no reason to disdain membership. After summarising this lore of the masons from the Old Charges Plot described admission to the organisation:

Into which Society when any are admitted, they call a *meeting* (or *Lodge* as they term it in some places) which must consist at least of 5 or 6 of the *Antients* of the *Order*, whom the *candidats* present with *gloves*, and so likewise to their *wives*, and entertain with a *collation* according to the Custom of the place: This ended, they proceed to the *admission*, which chiefly consists of the communication of certain *secret signes* whereby they are known to one another all over the *Nation*.

If a man otherwise unknown showed these signs to a fellow of the society, 'whom they otherwise call an *accepted mason*', then the fellow was obliged to come to him at once, 'nay tho' from the top of a *Steeple*, (what hazard or inconvenience soever he run) to know his pleasure, and assist him'. Plot cites some of the other obligations of masons, then adds

but some others they have (to which they are *sworn* after their fashion) that none know but themselves, which I have reason to suspect are much worse than these, perhaps as bad as this *History* of the *craft* it self; than which there is nothing I ever met with, more false or incoherent.

Plot then related some of the absurdities of the historical narrative contained in the Old Charges, and after citing some Medieval laws against craft organisations he ends

<sup>17</sup> Josten, *Ashmole*, i, 34–5, iv, 1839–41.

<sup>18</sup> Poole, *Gould's History*, ii, 2–13, 41–2, 44.

'tis still to be feared these *Chapters of Freemasons* do as much mischief as before, which if one may estimate by the penalty, was anciently so great, that perhaps it might be usefull to examin them now.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Plot's suspicions have been echoed ever since: if freemasons insist on keeping so much secret, this must be because they are up to no good! But the importance of the passage rests not so much in Dr Plot's denunciations as in the detail given: one masonic historian remarked that if Plot had not written his book 'we should now know next to nothing of the living Masonry of the 17th century as practised in South Britain'.<sup>20</sup> The main points of interest in Plot's testimony are that use of the term lodge was not yet universal in England for meetings of freemasons; that he explains 'lodge' as the name given to a meeting, rather than as an institution; that as in Scotland masonic secrets centred on identification signs (which could be recognised even at long distances); that initiation was apparently to one grade only; and that masons were associated especially with moorland areas, perhaps hinting at the Scottish tradition that they should meet in isolated places. There is a ring of truth about these details, and in denouncing the mythical history of masonry Plot showed good critical sense. But unfortunately Dr Plot's book displays in places considerable credulity, and it was said that for years after publication the gentry of Staffordshire entertained themselves with stories of how they had misled the poor doctor when he had applied to them for information about the shire.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps tales of how widespread membership of freemasonry was, and dark hints as to terrible masonic secrets, fall into the category of tall stories told to mislead him.

Turning from Dugdale, Aubrey and Plot to the writings of Randle Holme brings this catalogue of references to English masonry back on to rather firmer ground, for he was himself a freemason, and proud of it. A Chester genealogist and herald, Holme published his *Academie of Armory* in 1688. In considering objects that might appear on coats of arms he includes the tools of the mason trade, commenting

I cannot but Honor the Fellowship of the Masons, because of its Antiquity; and the more, as being a Member of that Society, called Free-Masons.<sup>22</sup>

There exist, moreover, three items in Holme's handwriting in a collection of manuscripts which seem to bear on the activities of a lodge to which Holme belonged. The most interesting is a note listing 26 names, with marks and sums of money opposite them. The first entry concerns what a man gave 'for to be a free Mason', and evidently 4 other entries also concern payments by

<sup>19</sup> Knoop, *Pamphlets*, 31–4; Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 21–2.

<sup>20</sup> R. F. Gould, quoted in F. Pick and G. N. Knight, *The freemason's pocket reference book*, 3rd edn (London, 1983), 259.

<sup>21</sup> *DNB*, under Plot. <sup>22</sup> Knoop, *Pamphlets*, 34.

candidates for initiation. The rest of the names are apparently those of existing freemasons. Analysis of the names makes it almost certain that this scrap relates to a masonic lodge in Chester (though the word lodge does not appear). The 25 names that can be identified comprise 6 masons, 6 bricklayers, 3 carpenters, 3 slaters and plasterers, 2 glaziers, 1 painter, 3 men from non-building trades, and 1 gentleman – Randle Holme himself. This looks not dissimilar to some Scottish lodges, with the first members who were not operative masons being drawn from the other building crafts. The other two manuscripts in Randle Holme's hand are a copy of the Old Charges, which he may either have copied for the lodge or for his own use from a copy already in the lodge's possession, and a scrap which simply states that there were several words and signs for a freemason which were to be revealed to none but the masters and fellows of the society of freemasons 'so help me God' – these last words indicating that the passage is a paraphrase of an oath.<sup>23</sup> Here, at last, in these Chester references there is evidence that appears to describe an institution rather than a meeting of freemasons, something similar to an early Scottish – or a modern lodge – of freemasons, though the word lodge is not used.

In the last years of the seventeenth century and the first years of the eighteenth there are a number of other scattered references to lodges and initiations in England. Many years later a man claimed to have been initiated in Chichester in about 1696 by the duke of Richmond (an illegitimate son of Charles II). A copy of the Old Charges dated 1693 bears the names of five men headed 'the names of the Lodge', possibly a lodge held in York; and minutes of a lodge in York commencing in 1706 used to exist. Another copy of the Old Charges refers to a 'private' lodge held in Scarborough in 1705.<sup>24</sup> The Lodge of Antiquity possesses a copy of the Old Charges dated 1686 and written by a man who described himself as clerk of the society of freemasons of the city of London, but while this points to the existence of a London lodge sufficiently institutional in character to have a clerk (perhaps a development of the London Company's acception 'lodge'), it is not conclusive evidence of the existence of the Lodge of Antiquity at that date.<sup>25</sup> Some of these references, however, probably relate to occasional meetings at which a few masons initiated friends,<sup>26</sup> rather than formal 'modern' lodges.

James Anderson, in the second edition of his *Constitutions* of freemasonry (1738) indicated that several different types of lodges existed at the end of the seventeenth century in England, but his explanation is far from clear.

<sup>23</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 150–2; Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 112–20.

<sup>24</sup> Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 75, 120, 129, 130; Knoop, *Genesis*, 153–5.

<sup>25</sup> C. C. Adams, 'The oldest lodge', *The collected Prestonian lectures, 1925–1960*, ed. H. Carr (London, 1967), 317–18.

<sup>26</sup> Knoop, *Genesis*, 155.

'Particular *Lodges* were not so frequent and mostly occasional in the *South* [of England], except in or near the Places where great Works were carried on.' Then Anderson contrasted 'occasional' lodges with 'stated' ones. The most plausible explanation of all this seems to be that by particular lodges Anderson meant ones which were distinct in the sense of being sufficiently institutionalised to have a fairly fixed or stable membership and some concept of a continuing identity. But even these were usually 'occasional', being still basically meetings held irregularly to carry out initiations. Most lodges in London and the south were occasional, except those at building works. Presumably here Anderson refers to something on the lines of the old operative site lodges, though these are not otherwise known to have had any direct part in the development of English freemasonry.

It seems English freemasons, operative and non-operative, very seldom had lodges of the type that had appeared in Scotland around 1600. Site lodges only existed as long as a building project. At these site lodges initiation rituals may well have taken place, but the fact that they were tied to building projects made them unsuitable for gentlemen non-operatives, who therefore tended to meet by themselves without formally organising themselves into lodges, though when they did meet they used the word lodge to describe the meeting. By the term 'stated lodge' Anderson appears to mean much the same as particular lodge, though perhaps with stronger overtones of a fixed and regular institution. Anderson gives only one example to help elucidate his meaning. Sir Robert Clayton 'got an *Occasional* Lodge of his Brother Masters' to meet at St Thomas' Hospital, Southwark, in 1693 to advise the governors on designing new buildings, 'near which a *stated* Lodge continued long afterwards'.<sup>27</sup> Thus Anderson describes two separate lodges. Clayton held an occasional lodge, a lodge in the sense of a meeting convened by Clayton and consisting of other initiates he knew meeting for a specific purpose – the appropriate one of advising about architecture. Such occasional lodges were the most common type, as he had just explained, in the south of England. But then, near St Thomas' Hospital, a different type of lodge, more unusual in the south, came into existence, a 'stated' lodge on the building site, the institutionalised works lodge of the operatives working on the rebuilding of the hospital.

There is no implication here that Sir Robert Clayton had any connection with this latter lodge. It is important to stress this, as Clayton was a prominent Whig politician closely linked to a number of radical thinkers, and Anderson's reference (in any case questionable as coming more than 40 years after the events described) has recently been taken to prove that Clayton founded a lodge – indeed the first fully 'speculative' lodge in London. Then, while it is admitted that very little is known of this supposedly permanent speculative lodge, the names of Clayton's radical friends have been proposed as likely

<sup>27</sup> J. Anderson, *Constitutions* (facsimile reprint, London, 1976), 106–7.

members.<sup>28</sup> This is part of a wider thesis seeking to link English freemasonry in the late seventeenth century with radical ideas. The argument has, however, been rendered self-proving by sleight of hand in definitions. All secret organisations promoting radical causes have, astonishingly, been defined as masonic; such societies existed; therefore a central aspect of emergent English freemasonry was its close association with some of the most radical thinkers of the day. Thus one of the leading figures in such circles, John Toland, is known to have belonged to a secret society in the 1690s, and this 'can best be described, for lack of a better term, as an early Masonic lodge'. As the qualification, and the admission that Toland's group was not masonic by normal definitions tacitly concedes, there is not the slightest evidence that Toland's society was 'masonic' in any meaningful sense of the term.<sup>29</sup> From this sloppy use of the word masonic to describe anything combining radical ideas and secrecy then derive statements that a network of publishers and journalists, English radicals and French refugees which can be detected was 'masonic' in character, even though those involved were not masons.<sup>30</sup> Other secret societies of the age which had rituals and secrets as well as a convivial side to their activities obviously had something in common with masonic lodges, but to call them masonic lodges is illogical and confusing,<sup>31</sup> and the fragmentary evidence relating to English freemasonry before 1700 gives little support to the idea that it was closely related to radical causes of the day.

The only pieces of real evidence that can be interpreted as pointing to such a connection consist of the 1676 reference to freemasons alongside the green ribboned cabal; the fact that Sir Robert Clayton, who had radical friends, was an initiated mason; and (perhaps) a leaflet published in 1698 and addressed to all godly people in the city of London. This warned of the 'Mischiefs and Evils practised in the Sight of God by those called Freed Masons'. This devilish sect of men met in secret, and was

the Anti Christ which was to come leading Men from Fear of God. For how should Men meet in secret Places and with secret Signs taking Care that none observe them to do the Work of God; are not these the Ways of Evil-doers?

<sup>28</sup> M. C. Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment. Pantheists, freemasons and republicans* (London, 1981), 118; M. C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Ithaca, New York, 1976), 220.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob, *Newtonians*, 207, 223–4.      <sup>30</sup> Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> As was pointed out in J. M. Roberts, *The mythology of the secret societies* (London, 1972), 18n, in a comment on an article by Jacob which preceded her books. The passages relating to Scottish masonry in Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment* are sprinkled with misunderstandings, not the least being that masonry there was closely connected with the Stuart cause. The idea that the Whig government appointed a king's mason after the 1715 Jacobite rising to try to win the support of freemasons is extraordinary. The appointment had nothing to do with freemasonry, any more than did the simultaneous appointments of a king's glazier and a king's plasterer: P. W. J. Riley, *The English ministers and Scotland* (London, 1964), 259.

But God was observing those that sat in darkness and would smite them.<sup>32</sup> Is this just the gut reaction that Robert Plot had expressed, that if people insisted on doing things in secret this must be because their deeds were evil? Or did it reflect the more specific charge that became common in England in the early eighteenth century that freemasonry was permeated by 'atheism', by which deism was usually meant?

The rise of freemasonry in Scotland around 1600 is only comprehensible in the context of the general intellectual climate of the late Renaissance, and similarly the development and spread of freemasonry in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries can only be understood against the changing intellectual background of the age. It may well be, in view of later developments, that these hints at radical tendencies among masons are significant. Stress on morality, while avoiding explicitly religious observances (apart perhaps from brief prayers), appears to have arisen in Scottish masonry to still the fears of a church jealous to preserve its monopoly, but at a later date this unintentionally made the lodges a sympathetic environment for men with deistic tendencies like Sir Robert Moray, as has already been discussed.<sup>33</sup> As increasing numbers of men, reacting strongly against the bitter religious conflicts of the mid seventeenth century, moved towards deism, or remained committed to established churches but showed a readiness to accept other religious practices by their fellow men, masonic lodges in which by tradition doctrinal religion had no part could not fail to seem attractive. This feature of the lodges can first be detected in Scotland, and was first personified among masons by Sir Robert Moray: but whether or not it was imported into English masonry from Scotland must remain an open question.

Yet there is no doubt that when information as to the structure and content of English freemasonry at last becomes copious, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, what emerges is a system displaying at many central points very strong Scottish features which had not, so far as can be seen from the meagre surviving evidence, been present in seventeenth-century English masonry. In the years of fast development in English masonry after 1700 rituals appear in England based on the *Mason Word* and the practices described in the earliest masonic catechisms, and there is no doubt that both *Word* and catechisms are Scottish in origin. The English masons of the seventeenth century clearly had had rituals and secrets, but there is no way of knowing whether these were quite similar to those of the Scots or very different, for they disappear without trace before the onslaught of Scottish practices. A two-grade system appears with the Scottish degrees of entered

<sup>32</sup> Knoop, *Pamphlets*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> I am most grateful to Professor Roger Emerson for letting me see his forthcoming essay on 'Latitudinarianism and the English deists' in which he analyses the many different senses in which contemporaries and historians have used the word deist. Strictly speaking Moray was not a deist as his religion was specifically Christian, but his evident lack of interest in doctrine and refusal to identify with any denomination is clearly deistic in tendency.

apprentice and fellow craft master, replacing the what was evidently a one-grade system. The Scottish system of permanent or (in James Anderson's words) stated lodges, formally constituted and keeping records, comes to be universal, superseding the commonest type of English lodge, the occasional meeting. Moreover, it is worth paying attention to the geographical distinction that Anderson made when discussing types of lodges: occasional lodges predominated in the south of England. The implication is obviously that in the north permanent lodges were more common. The earliest 'lodge' known in England met at Warrington in Lancashire. The first reference to an English lodge that looks like a permanent body and not an occasional meeting, Randle Holme's lodge in Chester, also lies in the north. The first lodge in England whose minutes survive, the Lodge of Alnwick, lies only 20 miles from the Scottish border. The logic of all this is surely that the lodge in its modern form was a Scottish institution which spread into England in the course of the seventeenth century, probably first among operative stonemasons and other craftsmen. The freemasonry into which England's early gentlemen non-operatives were initiated was probably from the start much influenced by Scottish practices, but at first the English gentry preferred to meet informally and irregularly, sometimes calling their occasional meetings lodges. But eventually the strengths of the Scots-type lodge established by William Schaw, its utility in giving an institutional structure and uniformity to freemasonry, were recognised, and occasional lodges gave way to permanent institutions.

The records of the Lodge of Alnwick begin with a copy of the Old Charges dated 1701, followed by rules adopted by 'the Company and Fellowship of Free Masons at A Lodge held at Alnwick' on St Michael's Day, 29 September 1701. This date was ordered to be that of their head meeting, but St John's Day, 27 December, was to be celebrated by the masons wearing aprons with squares fixed in the belt. Two wardens of the lodge were to be elected annually, and masters taking apprentices were to 'enter' them in the lodge within a year. After serving seven years apprentices were to be 'Admitted or Accepted' on St Michael's Day. For the first time south of the border the entered apprentice makes his appearance, and accepted mason is now a higher degree: the term fellow craft is not used, but the accepted masons are described as the fellows of the lodge. Scattered minutes commence in 1703, the signatures of men admitted to the lodge in 1706. All the members were evidently stonemasons, and in essentials Alnwick looks much like many Scottish lodges. Moreover, it soon conformed to a Scottish practice by abandoning St Michael's Day for St John's for its most important meetings – though the lodge met on 24 June as well as 27 December, thus honouring the Baptist as well as the Evangelist.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> [F. F. Schmitger and W. Davidson (eds.)], *The Alnwick manuscript, No. E 10. Reproduction and transcript* (Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, Newcastle, 1895), 17–31; W. H. Rylands,



'No one can read of the masonic systems of Scotland and England in the seventeenth century without sensing the great difference between them. They were simply not the same thing.'<sup>35</sup> This firm statement was made by a writer in the context of contradicting those who saw significant Scottish influences on English freemasonry: crude and backward Scottish 'operative' masonry, with its 'bare and slight' rituals had nothing to teach the advanced English masons, whose superiority was indicated by the fact that most of them had nothing to do with mere working masons, and by their possession of more complex rituals (conveniently assumed to have existed though not the slightest evidence about them survives). Yet the statement that Scottish and English masonry were very different before 1700 can be accepted while putting forward an opposite and much more plausible interpretation of the evidence. English freemasonry developed in the seventeenth century, perhaps from the first combining Scottish influences with native developments. But the freemasonry in the two countries differed notably. English gentlemen non-operatives were not organised into lodges with set memberships of a Scottish or modern kind, but met in fluid occasional lodges. Moreover, English masons evidently only had one degree rather than the Scottish two, and this alone implies considerable differences in ritual. The acceptance within the London Company of Masons had, through its association with that institution and its members, more of an institutional air to it, and by 1682 its meetings were being called lodges. The fact that it then disappeared suggests that it was so loosely organised that it failed to retain an identity once it was separated from the company. It made a permanent contribution to the terminology of freemasonry, however, initiates becoming known as accepted masons (though the term 'adopted' masons was also sometimes used at first). The word freemason, originally simply a term for a fully qualified operative mason, came in the course of the century to have something of its modern overtones. But if seventeenth-century England can boast of originating the terms freemason and accepted mason, much of the

'The Alnwick Lodge minutes', *AQC*, 14 (1901), 4–13; Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 121–6. The only reference to freemasonry in Ireland in the seventeenth century occurs in a satirical speech delivered by a student at a graduation ceremony at Trinity College, Dublin in 1688. This claimed that a new college was to be set up, and that it would have 'a Society of Freemasons', the members ranging from gentlemen and parsons to sowgelders and pimps. This would be modelled on 'the Fraternity of Freemasons in and about Trinity College'. Crude fun was then made of supposed members of this 'lodge' and their activities: W. J. C. Crawley, 'Introductory chapter', in H. Sadler, *Masonic reprints* (London, 1898), xviii–xxvi; R. E. Parkinson, 'The lodge in Trinity College, Dublin, 1688', *AQC*, 54 (1941), 96–107. The skit indicates that an audience could be assumed to know something about freemasonry and its claim (which is ridiculed) to bring together men from different levels of society. But it does not prove that a lodge actually existed in Dublin in 1688: it may well have been simply an invention for satirical purposes. The next indication of freemasonry in Ireland is provided by a catechism dated 1711, the origin of which is uncertain (*Inventory*, 5.8).

<sup>35</sup> Jones, *Guide*, 140. See also Poole, *Gould's history*, ii, 160.

masonic organisation and practice which had given rise to these words seems to have undergone a transformation in the decades before and after 1700, leading to the adoption of lodges based on the Scottish system, the use of rituals of Scottish origin, and the Scottish two-degree system. Quite why Scottish influence suddenly became so overwhelming south of the border is impossible to say, but the freemasonry which spread throughout England in the early eighteenth century looks in many respects more like the Scottish masonry of the previous century than its shadowy English counterpart.

Naturally English freemasons did not admit abandoning native traditions in favour of Scottish ones: the Scots were not popular in eighteenth-century England, and signs of Scottish influence in the new British state created by the parliamentary union of 1707 were often resented. The English masons were quick to equip themselves with a continuation of the mythological history contained in the Old Charges to give their movement a respectable and continuous English past – though the author of this was, ironically, James Anderson, son of the former secretary of the Lodge of Aberdeen. That the compilation of the two works which were to prove so influential in forming eighteenth-century freemasonry, the *Constitutions* of 1723 and 1738, was entrusted primarily to a Scot is surely itself significant. So too are the facts that 12 of the grand masters of England in the eighteenth century were Scots,<sup>36</sup> and that when French freemasons invented many higher degrees and rituals they felt the best way to give them legitimacy was to call them the *Rite écossais*.<sup>37</sup> These look like tacit admissions that Scottish masonry had a special place in the history of craft.

The English did not, of course, passively adopt Scottish masonry wholesale. Though they adopted so many Scottish practices they began immediately to adapt them to suit their own needs. Here the fact that most English freemasons had no connection with the operative craft became highly important: they were not hampered in developing the craft by the conservative insistence of operative masons on sticking to traditional practices, so they were free to remodel masonry as they wished. Rituals were based on Scottish practices, but they were soon elaborated and altered. The Scottish two degrees were extended to three, perhaps hastening and completing an evolutionary process already begun in Scotland. The Scottish system of permanent lodges was crowned with a grand lodge. Just as English masons had adopted so much from Scotland in earlier years, so by the 1720s the results of this burst of creativity in England were influencing the practices of Scottish lodges. England had become dominant in the development of freemasonry within Britain.

When and where was freemasonry created? This book has argued that the

<sup>36</sup> A. R. Hewitt, 'Biographical lists of grand masters', *Grand Lodge, 1717–1967* [ed. A. S. Frere] (Oxford, 1967), 265–75.

<sup>37</sup> Roberts, *Secret societies*, 95–7.

answer was in Scotland around 1600, and that if anyone can be claimed as its founder that man was William Schaw, master of works and general warden of the masons. But of course in the emergence of so complex a movement it is dangerous to press simple conclusions of this sort too far: there is a danger of the argument degenerating into a matter of definitions of terms instead of explanations of events, ultimately leading to something as absurd as debating whether the engine or the wheels are most important to the motor car, offal or oatmeal most central to the haggis. Scotland dominates one of the phases of the development of freemasonry, and this book asserts that this was the decisive phase. This took place between two English phases. In the late Middle Ages English masons had developed the lore of the Old Charges, making unusually elaborate claims to the superiority of their craft. But there is no evidence that this was reflected in any way in a unique organisation of the craft (though it had peculiarities arising from the mobile nature of the craft) or in initiation rituals which differed in kind from those of other crafts. The development of the Old Charges in England may be regarded as comprising the pre-history of freemasonry, essential to its later creation but not at the time part of anything that can meaningfully be called freemasonry. Then in Scotland around 1600 came the astonishing achievement of William Schaw, grafting onto the traditional lore of the masons enshrined in the Old Charges an organisation based on a new type of masonic lodge, enriching the old lore with late Renaissance themes, establishing (probably on the basis of earlier practices) the two-degree system and (though direct evidence does not come until rather later) laying the foundation for modern masonic ritual through the initiation ceremonies for the two degrees, full of symbolism based on buildings and the mason's materials and tools. These form the essential framework of modern freemasonry, and the moral values that give it meaning can also be first traced in Scotland, through the values of brotherhood and charity that Sir Robert Moray associated with the craft.

This rich brew of seventeenth-century Scottish Renaissance freemasonry expanded in the course of the century as more lodges appeared and more non-operatives joined them (though this latter was far from a steady or continuous process). With changing times the values of its members doubtless changed: though these changes cannot be traced convincingly until they emerge clearly in the movement in the early eighteenth century, they doubtless began much earlier (as the case of Sir Robert Moray suggests). The transformation from late Renaissance to early Enlightenment was an evolutionary one, the new values being linked to the old. Seeking escape from *religious conflict through Hermetic mysticism and Rosicrucian excitement* turned into acceptance by some of pantheist and deist ideas. Alchemical and Hermetic quests gave way to 'modern' science and Newtonianism, but for many the change was gradual (eighteenth-century German freemasonry was

still closely associated with Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism and alchemy).<sup>38</sup> The theme of masonry/geometry, the architect/mathematician, provided a constant thread linking mathematically based modern science with its Renaissance predecessors. But in spite of such developments Scottish freemasonry seems to have remained basically unchanged throughout the century. Then came the English phase in the shaping of modern freemasonry, when around 1700 English masons adopted many aspects of the Scottish movement and began to adapt them to their own tastes. This tinkering with their traditional freemasonry was no doubt at first distasteful to Scots masons, but in time they accepted the English innovations, even labelling themselves free and accepted masons. It was possible for them to do this because the changes made by the English, highly significant for the future of freemasonry as they were, did not alter the essential character of the movement as it had emerged in seventeenth-century Scotland. It was true that some now associated masonry in England with radical and subversive ideas, but the craft could also comprehend men of conservative dispositions. The English innovations of a grand lodge, the recognition of a third degree, and elaborated ritual, were the icing on the cake baked in Scotland. Or, to change the metaphor, in the sandwich of early freemasonic history England provided the late Medieval and eighteenth-century bread, but in between lies the meat of freemasonry, the seventeenth-century Scottish ingredient. If the strange (to outsiders) rituals of freemasonry seem out of place in the Age of Enlightenment, consisting of superstitious mumbo-jumbo with dark overtones of necromancy, this was because at heart the movement was not an Enlightenment but a Renaissance phenomenon. That the Age of Enlightenment was nonetheless the great age of freemasonry is a seeming paradox indicating that for all the eighteenth-century's appeal to reason, many still hankered after elements of mystery, ritual, secrecy, and the quest for hidden truth. They found a framework for indulging such tastes, as well as sociability, in organisations and rituals of Scottish Renaissance origin, combined with Medieval mythical craft history.

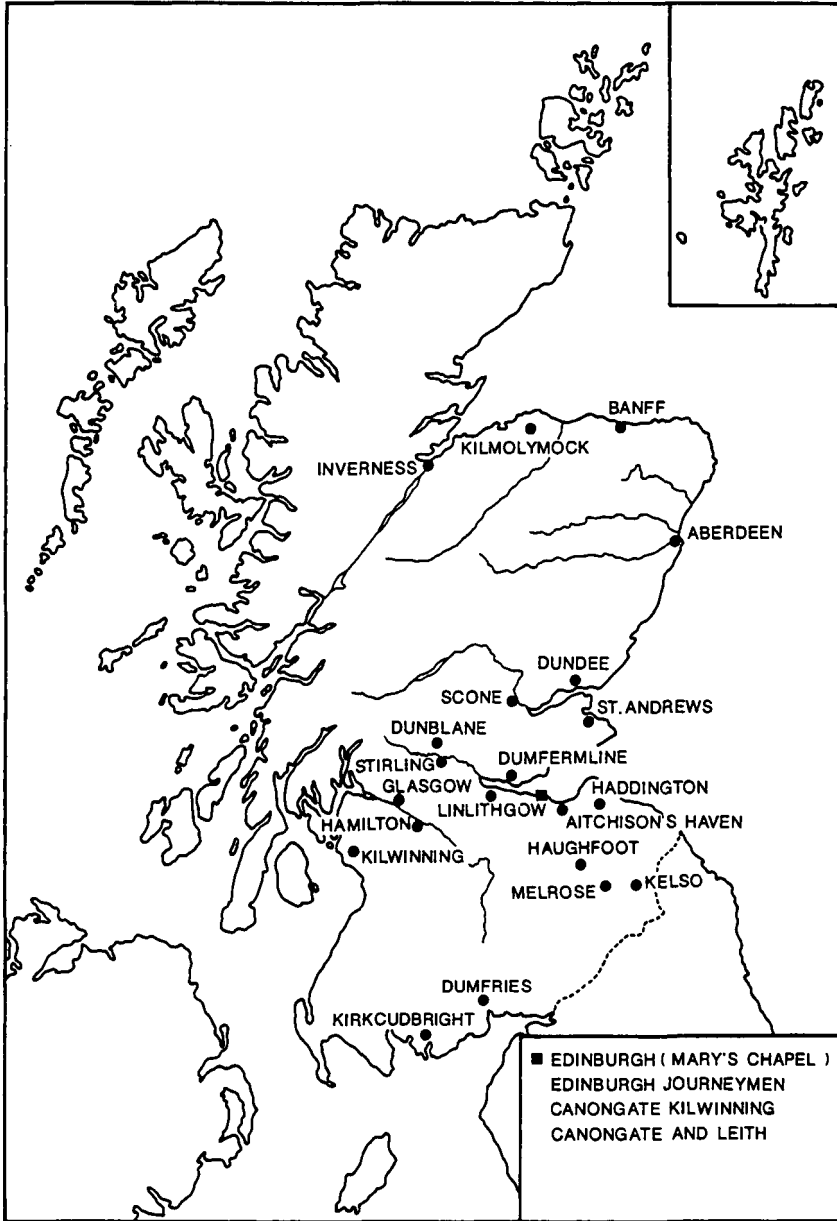
<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 102.

# Appendix: Early (pre-1710) masonic lodges in Scotland

Arranged by dates of earliest known references

- 1 Aitchison's Haven, 9 January 1599<sup>1</sup>
- 2 Edinburgh, 31 July 1599<sup>1,2</sup>
- 3 St Andrews, 27 November 1599<sup>1,2</sup>
- 4= Kilwinning, 28 December 1599
- 4= Stirling, 28 December 1599<sup>2</sup>
- 6 Haddington, 1599<sup>1</sup>
- 7 Dunfermline, 1600–1<sup>1,2</sup>
- 8 Glasgow, 31 December 1613<sup>2</sup>
- 9 Dundee, 1627–8<sup>2</sup>
- 10 Linlithgow, 2 March 1654
- 11 Scone (Perth), 24 December 1658
- 12 Aberdeen, 1670?
- 13 Melrose, 28 December 1674
- 14 Canongate Kilwinning, 20 December 1677
- 15 Inverness, 27 December 1678
- 16 Dumfries, 20 May 1687
- 17 Canongate and Leith, Leith and Canongate, 29 May 1688
- 18 Kirkcudbright, c.1691?
- 19 Hamilton, 25 March 1695
- 20 Dunblane, April 1695
- 21 Kelso, 2 June 1701
- 22 Haughfoot, 22 December 1702
- 23 Banff, 1703
- 24 Kilmolymock (Elgin), 27 December 1704
- 25 Edinburgh Journeymen, 1707–12

<sup>1,2</sup> Parties to the First (1600–1) and Second (1627–8) St Clair Charters



Map of early (pre-1710) masonic lodges in Scotland

## Bibliographical note

No attempt will be made here to provide a comprehensive list of works consulted in researching this book. The most important works on individual topics can be found referred to in the notes to the various sections of the book. Works relating to individual lodges may be traced through my *The first freemasons. Scotland's early lodges and their members* (Aberdeen, 1988), and an 'Inventory of early Scottish masonic records' is appended to that book.

The purpose of this note is to give some general guidance to the study of early freemasonry by pointing to some of the most reliable stepping stones in the vast quagmire of masonic literature. As the text of this book makes clear, there are few works that can be recommended without reservations in matters of interpretation and analysis. Nonetheless, the books and articles listed here are works of genuine scholarship.

Pride of place should go to D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *The genesis of freemasonry* (Manchester, 1947), by far the best general account of freemasonry up to c.1730. The many other publications of this prolific partnership are consistently scholarly and useful: particular mention should be made of their *Handlist of masonic documents* (Manchester, 1942) and two collections of source material, edited jointly with D. Hamer, *Early masonic pamphlets* (Manchester, 1945) and *Early masonic catechisms* (Manchester, 1943; revised 2nd edn by H. Carr, London, 1963). Knoop and Jones, *The Scottish mason and the Mason Word* (Manchester, 1939) provides much valuable background information on operative masonry in Scotland as well as surveying the Scottish evidence (so far as it had been printed) relating to the emergence of freemasonry.

Harry Carr was a masonic historian very much in the Knoop and Jones tradition, but he concentrated much more than they did on the Scottish evidence. His editions of *The minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh, Mary's Chapel, No. 1, 1598–1738* (London, 1962) and *Lodge Mother Kilwinning, No. 0. A study of the earliest minute books, 1642 to 1842* (London, 1961) are essential for the study of these lodges – though the fact that their indexes are selective, not including the names of most lodge members, is a major drawback. Carr's articles 'An examination of the early masonic catechisms', *AQC*, 83 (1970), 337–57; 84 (1971), 293–307; and 85 (1972), 331–48, and 'A collection of references to the Mason Word', *AQC*, 85 (1972), 217–41 are especially valuable. His *The mason and the burgh. An examination of the Edinburgh register of apprentices and the burgh rolls* (London, 1954) is a pioneering attempt to use lodge and burgh records in conjunction to elucidate the history of the mason trade, though limited by only using the apprentice and burgh registers, and hampered by the fact that the records of the

Incorporation of Masons and Wrights were not then accessible (also a problem for Carr when he edited the minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh).

The older bible of Scottish masonic history, David Murray Lyon's *History of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No. 1, embracing an account of the rise and progress of Freemasonry in Scotland* (2nd or tercentenary edn, London, 1900) is still an invaluable, if chaotic, source of information, though many of its interpretations are now recognised as invalid. Robert Freke Gould's *History of freemasonry* (6 vols., London, 1884–7) is another old work which can still be useful if approached with caution. Vol. iii of the 3rd edn by H. Poole (4 vols., London, 1951) contains much on the early Scottish lodges.

For non-masons trying to find their way around masonic terminology and practices Bernard Jones' *Freemasons' guide and compendium* (2nd edn, London, 1956) is a mine of information, and F. L. Pick and G. N. Knight, *The freemason's pocket reference book* (revised by F. Smyth, London, 1983) is a handy brief guide, arranged alphabetically. John Hamill's *The Craft. A history of English freemasonry* (1986) attempts to provide a history and explanation of the craft for both masons and others. Partly a response to recent attacks on freemasonry (the author is librarian of the United Grand Lodge of England), the book is moderate and scholarly, though the usual anglocentric assumptions are present to some degree.

The leading periodical devoted to masonic history is *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum. Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London*, the first volume of which was dated 1886–8. A century's accumulation of masonic research now lies within its volumes, with many contributions reaching a high standard of scholarship. Access to this material is greatly facilitated by *A concise index* to the periodical, ed. A. R. Hewitt and H. G. Massey (London, 1971).



# Index

The names of freemasons initiated in Scotland are followed by an abbreviation of the name of their lodges in brackets. This should be self-explanatory – see the list of lodges in the Appendix, p. 234. Other abbreviations used are: FS = Falkland Statutes; OC = Old Charges; non-ops. = non-operatives; SC = St Clair Charters; SS = Schaw Statutes.

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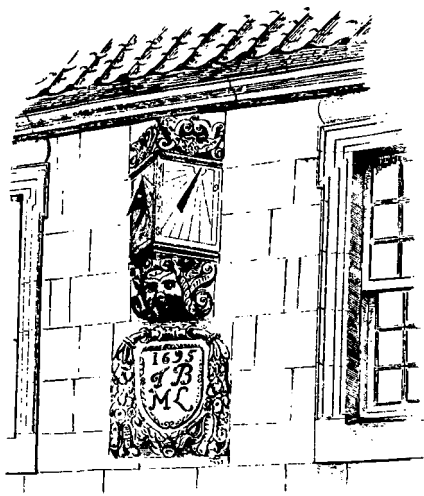


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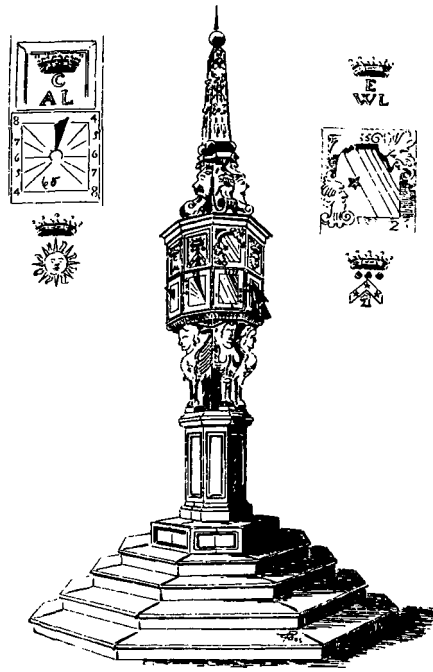
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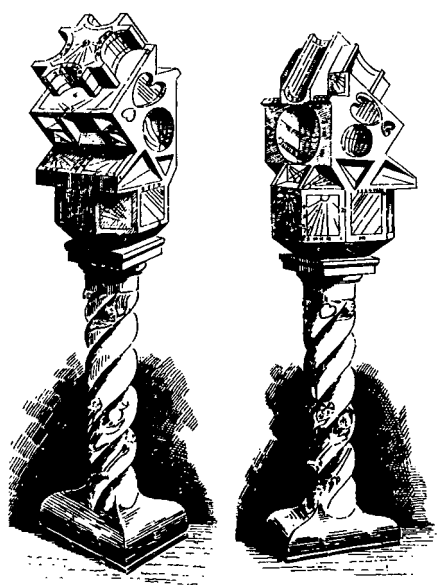
1 The tomb of William Schaw (died 1602), master of works to King James VI, in Dunfermline Abbey. Erected by the earl of Dunfermline on the orders of James' wife, Anne of Denmark. The only indication that this was the tomb of someone of particular importance to the mason craft is that the same mason mark (presumably that of the mason who constructed the tomb) appears prominently on many of its stones.



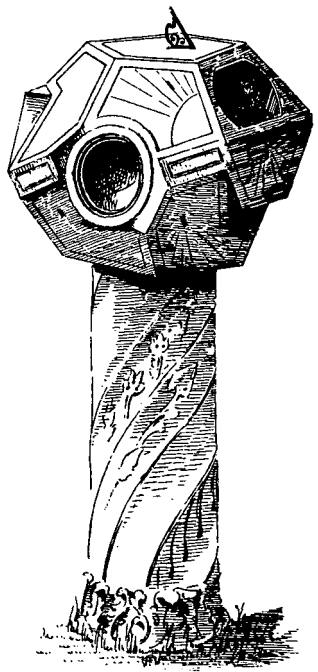
2a Sundial dated 1695 on the house Tobias Bauchop built for himself in Alloa. Bauchop, a well-known architect and mason, was a member of the Lodge of Dunfermline. (MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 377)



2b Mid seventeenth-century sundial constructed at Newbattle Abbey for the third earl of Lothian. (MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 473)



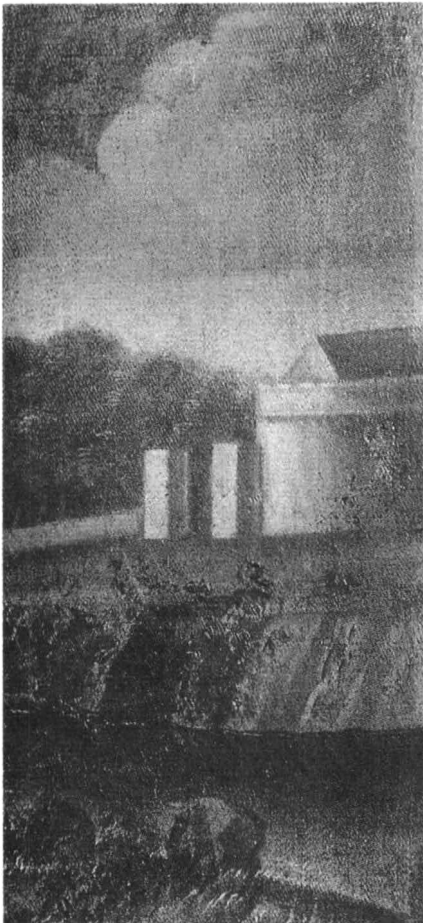
3a Sundial dated 1663 at Ruchlaw, East Lothian. The 'lectern-shaped' dials of this type derive their shape from an astronomical instrument, the *torquetum*, invented in the early sixteenth century by Apian for calculating the position of the sun, moon and stars. (MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 423)



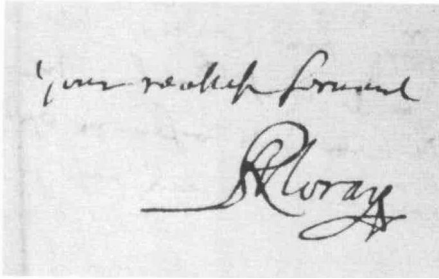
3b Sundial at Haddington, East Lothian. (MacGibbon, *Architecture*, v, 466)



4 Alexander Paterson, member of the Lodge of Aberdeen, 1690, and master of the lodge three times in the following decade. (Trinity Hall, Aberdeen)



5 The pillars of Solomon's Temple? Detail from the portrait of Alexander Paterson (plate 4). (Trinity Hall, Aberdeen)



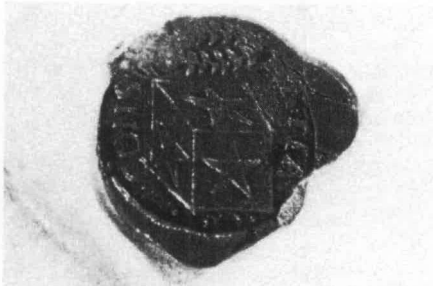
6a Signature of Sir Robert Moray, showing his pentacle mason mark in the tail of the y. (Royal Society of London, Letter book M.1, no. 5)



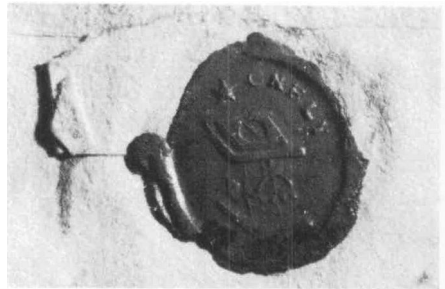
6b Sir Robert Moray's drawing of his mason mark. (Kincardine papers, f. 67r, property of the earl of Elgin)



6c Impression of Sir Robert Moray's mason mark seal. (BL, Ms Add. 23123, f. 128v)



7a Impression of Sir Robert Moray's 'cube' seal. (NLS, Yester Ms 7005, f. 208v)



7b Impression of Sir Robert Moray's 'compass' seal. (Royal Society of London, Letter book M.1, no. 13)



8a Impression of Sir Robert Moray's 'Eros' seal. (Royal Society of London, Letter Book M.1, no. 11)



8b Impression of Sir Robert Moray's 'sun' seal. (BL, Stowe Ms 200, f. 300)