

ROYAL ORDER OF SCOTLAND



A History of The Royal Order of Scotland

Taken From: "High-Ways and Bi-Ways of Freemasonry"
1924

MOST of the authentic information regarding the establishment and history of this ancient and distinguished Order has been collected by those indefatigable Masonic historians, Brothers Hughan, Gould and Murray Lyon, and, during the year 1910, the various facts available were collated and put together in a very readable form by Brother E. Fox Thomas, the Provincial Grand Master of the Order for Yorkshire, in the pages of the Freemason.

The fact that, as regards authentic documentary records, the Royal Order of Scotland can claim seniority over every other Masonic system - the Craft only excepted - is alone sufficient to invest it with the highest degree of interest, but, as a matter of fact, its antiquity is only one of its many claims to our respect and veneration.

At one time it was considered right to ascribe a French origin to the Royal Order, but now the accepted opinion is that it is essentially British. On any other assumption it would be difficult to account for the Ritual which is in a rough but attractive doggerel verse, undoubtedly early even if here and there it betrays signs of more recent modification. The Legends and all their associations are purely Scottish, but curiously the earliest authentic records have to do with England not Scotland, and the Ritual contains but little indication of any Scottish dialect.

There are two degrees:

I. Brother of Herridom (H.:R.:D.:M.:)

II. Knight of the Rosey Cross (R.:S.:Y.:C.:S.:)

The former is conferred in a chapter of H.:R.:D.:M.: upon those who have been Master Masons of good standing for not less than five years. Brothers of H.:R.:D.:M.: are "promoted" to the Knighthood of the R.:S.:Y.:C.:S.: in a Grand Lodge or Council. Bro. Murray Lyon remarks that "the ritual of this rite embraces what may be termed a spiritualization of the supposed symbols and ceremonies of the Christian architects and builders of primitive times, and so closely associates the sword with the trowel as to lead to the Second Degree being denominated an order of Masonic Knighthood" (History, ed. 1900, P. 342).

The Traditional History of the Order, which must not be mistaken for actual history, represents the First Degree as dating from the time of King David I. of Scotland, and the Second Degree as instituted by King Robert the Bruce on the battlefield of Bannockburn, 24th June 1314, to commemorate the valor of a band of Knights Templars who had rendered him signal aid in that great victory.

These Templars were refugee survivors who had sought safety in Scotland after the downfall of the Order of the Temple and the murder in Paris of the Grand Master Jacques de Molay in the month of March of that year. King Robert the Bruce revived the older degree and incorporated the two degrees under the title of the Royal Order of Scotland.

Thus the year 1314 is the “Year of the Restoration,” and the “Anno Ordinis” is obtained by subtracting 1314 from the date A.D. King Robert established the Chief Seat of the Order at Kilwinning, reserving the office of Grand Master to himself and his successors on the Throne of Scotland. Membership of the Order was not to be confined to ex Templars, but none were to be eligible except Scots and possibly Irish. And finally the Order and the Masonic Body at Kilwinning were governed by the same head.

Referring to this tradition, Bro. Lyon remarks: “As regards the claims to antiquity and a Royal origin that are set up in favour of this rite, it is proper to say that modern inquiries have shown them to be purely fabulous. The Fraternity of Kilwinning never at any period practised or acknowledged other than the Craft Degrees; neither does there exist any tradition worthy the name, local or national, that can in the remotest degree be held to identify Robert Bruce with the holding of Masonic Courts, or the institution of a secret society at Kilwinning.”

Various explanations and derivations of the word H.:R.:D.:M.: (Heredom) have been suggested, but it may be said at once that any which connect it with the idea of “heirship” can be disregarded.

Bro. Hughan favoured the view that H.:R.:D.:M. is the same as “Harodim,” and that “Harodim” or “Menatzchim” are Rulers or Overseers or Princes in Masonry. Dr. Anderson, in the Book of Constitutions of 1723, and again in 1738, uses “Herridom” and “Menatzchim” in just that sense. Compare 2 Samuel ii. 18. Bro. Hughan’s contention is supported by the fact that one of the claims set up in the Ritual is that it is the mission of the Royal Order to correct errors and abuses which have crept into the three degrees of St. John’s Masonry.

Another, and probably the true, derivation is that from Holy House. To prepare the Building Anew of that True Holy House which is not the work of human hands being the intention of the Chivalry of the Royal Order.

There is no written evidence of the existence of the Order in Scotland prior to 1754. From that year to 1766 no minutes are preserved, if they ever existed, but a list of “Members of the Royal Chapter at Edinburgh,” written by Brother Mitchell, records that he was admitted to the Order in France, in 1749, and in England, in 1750. At Edinburgh one member was introduced in 1754, and two in 1755. There were about six members in 1757. Another was admitted in 1760, and in 1763 there were fifteen.

The regularly kept minutes at Edinburgh date from 13th October 1766. They refer to a Provincial Grand Lodge of Herridom erected at Paris by a Charter, dated Edinburgh, 4th October 1786. In 1811 there were twenty six Chapters of Herridom holding allegiance to the Provincial Grand Lodge of the Order in France, including some in Belgium and Italy, fourteen of which were not ratified by the Grand Lodge at Edinburgh.

The minutes for 1805 to 1813 are lost, and the Order fell into abeyance from 1819 to 1839. In the latter year Houston Rigg Brown, coach builder in Edinburgh, and John Osborne Brown, writer of the Signet there, members of the Lodge of St. David, held a meeting at which they represented themselves as being the only two members of the Order whose attendance could be procured, and they then admitted a number of Brethren, among whom were George Murray, afterwards Treasurer, and John Brown Douglas, writer of the Signet, afterwards Secretary. From then until the present the history of the Royal Order of Scotland witnesses to an ever increasing measure of vitality worthy of its proud tradition, and is universally held in the highest estimation.

The following is a list of the earlier Grand Masters and Deputy Grand Masters and Governors.

GRAND MASTERS

1754 (about), William Mitchell.

1767, James Kerr.

1776 William Baillie (Lord Polkemmet).

1778 William Charles Little.

DEPUTY GRAND MASTERS AND GOVERNORS

1767, William Mason.

1770 Lt. Gen. J. A. Oughton.

1777 William Charles Little.

1778, Earl of Leven.

1780 David Dalrymple (Lord Westhall).

1789 Dr. Thomas Hay.

Three of the above - viz. the Earl of Leven, Lt.-Gen. Oughton, and Lord Westhall - held the office of Grand Master Mason of Scotland (Craft), in 1759, 1769, and 1774 respectively. The Earl of Rosslyn was D.G.M. and G. 1881 to 1896, the Earl of Haddington 1897 to 1917, and the Earl of Kintore 1918 to the present time.

An account of the Royal Order of Scotland would be incomplete without some reference to its Laws and Constitutions, which, says Brother Lyon, "remained as originally given by the Provincial [or Provisional ?] Grand Lodge at London until 5th January 1767, when a fresh code was adopted and approved.

In this code for the first time appear on the surface some of the so called historical statements of this interesting branch of what are known as the High Degrees - a Deputy

Grand Master and Governor being recognised, and reference made to the institution of the Order by King Robert Bruce.

Other editions of the laws have been issued - in 1843 and in 1897 - in which the King of Scotland is declared to be the hereditary and permanent Grand Master, and in the first named year the statement was made in the minutes that the Grand Lodge of the Order had always existed in Scotland.”

The office of Grand Master is vested in the person of the King of Scotland (now of Great Britain and Ireland), and one seat is invariably kept vacant for him in whatever country a Chapter is opened, and cannot be occupied by any other member.

The Executive Committee consists of the Deputy Grand Master and Governor, Deputy Governor, Senior Grand Warden, Junior Grand Warden Grand Secretary, Grand Treasurer, and five other knights residing in Scotland, elected annually.

The headquarters of Grand Lodge and Chapter are at Edinburgh. No meetings can be held out of Scotland. The date of the annual assembly is the 4th July, or first following lawful day if the 4th July should be a Saturday or Sunday. The other regular meetings are on the first Wednesdays of November, February, and May.

There are at the time of writing twenty one Provincial Grand Lodges, viz. :

1. Glasgow and west of Scotland 1857
2. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island 1863
3. The Open Ports of China and the Colony of Hong Kong 1865
4. Western India (dormant) 1870
5. London and the Metropolitan Counties 1872
6. Lancashire and Cheshire 1874
7. Ontario 1875
8. United States of America 1877
9. Aberdeenshire (dormant) 1883
10. Natal 1885
11. Yorkshire 1886
12. Northumberland, Durham, and Cumberland 1893
13. Cape Colony 1893
14. Canton of Geneva (dormant) 1893
15. Transvaal 1906
16. Hong Kong and Straits Settlements 1907
17. Quebec 1909
18. Southern Counties of England 1915
19. The Philippines 1918
20. New Zealand 1919
21. South Western Counties of England 1920

A Provincial Grand Lodge of H.:R.:D.:M.: has power to superintend and regulate all Chapters of H.:R.:D.:M.: within its Province, but only by power specially conferred, usually upon the Provincial Grand Master.

