

Lodge Mother Kilwinning No.0

It is impossible within the compass of a few pages to do more than trace in outline the rise and progress of this venerable old Lodge. Lodge Mother Kilwinning still awaits a historian of the calibre of Murray Lyon or R. S. Lindsay who will deal as faithfully with her history as they have done for the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) and the Lodge of Holyrood House (St Luke). Three histories of Lodge Mother Kilwinning have been written. Lee Ker and Robert Wylie published theirs in book form. That by Murray Lyon appeared as a serial in the long defunct "Scottish Freemason's Magazine." All three were members of the Lodge and all three should be read if one is to obtain any sound knowledge of the Lodge which stands so proudly at the head of the Scottish Roll.

The origin of the Lodge is uncertain, although it most probably began with the building of the Monastery at Kilwinning. Whatever its beginnings, by 1598 it had become one of three Lodges mentioned in the Schaw Statutes of that year. These Statutes, and a further set issued in 1599, were promulgated by William Schaw, Master of the King's Masons and were compiled for the better administration of operative building in Scotland.

The order of seniority assigned in these Statutes to the three Lodges at Edinburgh, Kilwinning and Stirling has aroused considerable controversy. Had the existence of these Statutes been known in 1736 it is just possible that Mother Kilwinning would not have withdrawn, in 1743, from the Grand Lodge of Scotland at whose birth she was represented. It was not until some years after 1736 that the Grand Lodge of Scotland assigned any seniority to the lodges on the roll. Such seniority was based upon records which could be produced as evidence of antiquity. Here Mother Kilwinning was at a disadvantage, for her written minutes did not commence until 1642 and the existence of the Schaw Statutes with their evidence of her existence in 1598 were unknown. As a consequence, the Lodge was placed second on the roll of Grand Lodge—a position which the Lodge resented and declined to accept. The Lodge based its claim for precedence upon the fact that earlier records than 1641 had been consumed by a fire which had destroyed the family seat of the Earls of Eglinton wherein they were stored.

Finding Grand Lodge unpersuaded as to her claim to the prior position on the roll, Mother Kilwinning withdrew her allegiance and resumed her independence and powers of granting Charters. It is open to doubt whether in joining Grand Lodge, she had ever surrendered her chartering powers, though one might reasonably assume that, by the fact of adhering to Grand Lodge, she had done so.

That Mother Kilwinning had exercised the power of granting Charters before 1736 is not in doubt. Lodge Canongate Kilwinning was chartered by Mother Kilwinning in 1677 and St John's Lodge at Inverness within a few years thereafter at the least. The Lodge at Duns, in Berwickshire, also appears to have been issued with a Kilwinning Charter before 1736.

Between 1743 and 1807, when she rejoined Grand Lodge, Mother Kilwinning continued to function as a Sovereign Grand Lodge, completely ignoring and being ignored by, the Grand Lodge of Scotland. During this period in her history she issued approximately seventy Charters, both within Scotland and overseas.

Unfortunately Mother Kilwinning was not blessed with very competent secretaries, for the record of the issue of her Charters is very incomplete. One must remember, too, that the situation of the Lodge, in a small village in Ayrshire, can hardly have been conducive to the easy conduct of the business of a Grand Lodge. Travelling was difficult and the postal services, if they existed, cannot have been other than erratic.

The independence of Mother Kilwinning, at least during the early years of the period 1743-1807, does not seem to have brought with it any unfraternal feelings to Grand Lodge or her subordinate Lodges. At least one Grand Master Mason was a member of Mother Kilwinning and Grand Lodge placed no ban on her members visiting Daughter Lodges of Mother Kilwinning - that was to come later.

Mention has been made above that Mother Kilwinning issued Charters outwith as well as within Scotland. One of these charters was issued on 8th October 1779 to the "High Knight Templar of Ireland Kilwinning" Lodge, meeting in Dublin. The existence of this Charter has done much to support the completely erroneous idea that Lodge Mother Kilwinning worked Masonic degrees other than the three degrees of St John's Masonry. Early in the eighteenth century there arose the idea that in Scotland in general, and in Lodge Mother Kilwinning in particular, there existed a body of "High Degree Masons." The origin of this idea is not known, but it persisted until almost the close of the nineteenth century - and indeed the theory may still be cherished in some quarters. The degrees attributed to Mother Kilwinning were countless, but the most diligent search in her archives by Murray Lyon failed to reveal any reference to degrees other than those which are worked in Craft. Lodges the world over. Not even an early record of the Mark Degree has been found. That such records may have existed and been destroyed about 1807 is not impossible, but, if this is so, the destruction has been so complete that not a vestige remains.

From 1743 onwards Mother Kilwinning and the Grand Lodge of Scotland seem to have pursued parallel, but independent, paths in fraternal accord. Both issued Charters and the difficulties of travel would doubtless prevent much

inter-visitation between sub Lodges of the different allegiances. Such a state of affairs could be expected to continue indefinitely. The Grand Lodge of Scotland grew rapidly. Mother Kilwinning's jurisdiction grew but toward the end of the eighteenth century Grand Lodge prevented her members from visiting Kilwinning Lodges and forbade them from receiving Kilwinning Masons as visitors. Mother Kilwinning began to receive letters from her Daughter Lodges protesting at the state of affairs, but there was nothing she could do beyond advising a dignified silence and instructing her Lodges "keep themselves to themselves." Not a few of the Kilwinning Lodges came under Grand Lodge from time to time and became clear that Mother Kilwinning's days as an independent Sovereign Grand Lodge were numbered. By 1807 only six Lodges, all within Scotland, remained outwith Grand Lodge.

The first move in re-uniting Mother Kilwinning to Grand Lodge came from the latter body who wrote that "the cause of the separation seemed to be forgotten," and suggested that Mother Kilwinning and her Daughter Lodges might come in to Grand Lodge on terms to be agreed. To this suggestion Mother Kilwinning concurred after some negotiations, the following terms were signed on behalf of both parties:-

"At Glasgow, the 14th day of October 1807.

"At a meeting of the Committees appointed by the Grand Lodge of Scotland and the Mother Lodge of Kilwinning, vested respective constituents with full powers for the adjustment Masonic differences:

"Present on the part of the Grand Lodge-William Inglis, Esq., Substitute Grand Master; Sir John Stewart, Bart., of Allanbank; Alexander Laurie, Esq.; Wm. Guthrie, Esq., Grand Secretary: James Bartram, Esq., Grand Clerk.

"And on the part of the Mother Lodge Kilwinning - William Blair Esq., of Blair, Master; Robert Davidson, Esq., of Drumley, Depute Master; Alex. McGowan, Esq., of Smithston, Senior Warden; Alexander Hamilton, Esq., of Grange; Robt. Montgomerie, Esq., of Craighouse; and James Crichton, Esq., Collector of his Majesty's Customs, Irvine.

"The Committee having exhibited and exchanged their respective powers, and carefully considered the matters in dispute, reciprocally agree as follows:-

"1st. That the Mother Lodge, Kilwinning, shall renounce all right of granting Charters, and come in, along with all the holding under. her, to the bosom of the Grand Lodge.

"2dly. That all the Lodges holding of Mother Kilwinning shall be obliged to obtain from the Grand Lodge confirmations of their respective Charters, for which a fee of three guineas only shall be exigible.

"3dly. That the Mother Kilwinning shall be placed at the head of the Roll of the Grand Lodge, under the denomination of Mother Kilwinning; and her Daughter Lodges shall, in the meantime, be placed at the end of the said Roll, and as they shall apply for confirmations; but under this express declaration, that as soon as the Roll shall be arranged and corrected, which is in present contemplation, the Lodges holding of Mother Kilwinning shall be entitled to be ranked according to the dates of their original Charters, and of those granted by the Grand Lodge.

"4thly. That Mother Kilwinning and her Daughter Lodges shall have the same interest in and management of the funds of the Grand Lodge, as the other Lodges now holding of her, - Mother Lodge, Kilwinning, contributing annually to the said funds a sum not less than two shillings and sixpence for each intransit, and her Daughter Lodges contributing in the same manner as the present Lodges holding of the Grand Lodge.

"5thly. That the Master of the Mother Lodge, Kilwinning, for the time, shall be ipso facto Provincial Grand Master for the Ayrshire District. And,

"Lastly. While both Committees are satisfied that the preceding arrangement will be highly conducive to the honour and interest of Scottish Masonry, and though vested with the fullest powers to make a final adjustment, the Committee do only respectfully recommend its adoption to their respective constituents.

WILLIAM INGLIS, S.G.M.

WILL BLAIR.

Jo. STEWART.

ROBT. DAVIDSON.

ALEX. LAURIE.

ROBT. MONTGOMERIE.

WM. GUTHRIE, Gd. Secy.

ALEX. MCGOWN.

JA. BARTRAM, Gd. Clk.

ALEX. HAMILTON.

JAMES CRICHTON.

With the return of Mother Kilwinning to Grand Lodge it was necessary to re-arrange the Roll of Lodges and Mother Kilwinning was placed at the head, her subordinate Lodges occupying positions in accordance with the dates of their Kilwinning Charters. To this arrangement the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) raised objection, but the matter was allowed to rest in the interests of fraternal peace. The terms of the agreement between Mother Kilwinning and Grand Lodge were, in the early years after the re-union, the subject of minor contentions between the two parties. The particular clause which seemed to engender most dispute was that which provided for the Master of Mother Kilwinning being ex officio Provincial Grand Master of Ayrshire. A desire by Grand Lodge to divide Ayrshire into two Provinces (North and South) was frustrated by the Lodge declining to recognise such a partition. (Ayr North was to have the Master of Mother Kilwinning as its Provincial Grand Master.) None of these disputes came to anything and Mother Kilwinning has remained an honoured member of Grand Lodge these last hundred and forty odd year.

It may be added that although the name "Kilwinning" appears in the title of a large number of Scottish Lodges, it most generally indicates an affection for an old Lodge rather than any actual connection with it. Many famous names are connected with Lodge Mother Kilwinning and her Daughter Lodges. The present Master, the 17th Earle Eglinton, perpetuates the close connection between the Lodge the family of Montgomerie. Many other distinguished Brethren have been admitted to membership of Lodge Mother Kilwinning include the Earl of Crawford, the Earl of Cassillis, Lord Lyle, Mother Kilwinning's daughters have also initiated some famous men. Robert Burns was a member of Tarbolton Kilwinning, several whose minutes bear the holograph of "Robert Burnesse, Depute-Master." General Sir John Moore, who is buried at Corunna, , initiated in Lodge Renfrew County Kilwinning - a Lodge still on Roll of Grand Lodge.

G.S.D.