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THE ABERDEEN MARK BOOK. AN INTRODUCTION

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1 The significance of the Aberdeen Mark Book

The Lodge of Aberdeen's Mark Book, even in its present mangled form contains material of great interest in the study of early freemasonry in Scotland -

1 It reveals a lodge with a remarkable social range of members – titled noblemen, landed gentlemen, academics, lawyers, merchants and craftsmen. And even a few 'real' masons – stonemasons. In the late seventeenth century there was a tendency from time to time for lodges to admit individuals who were not stonemasons, but the great majority of members were nonetheless stonemasons. The only exception was the newly founded (1695) Lodge of Dunblane, which was dominated by gentlemen from the start.

2 Aberdeen is the earliest lodge known to have drafted its own laws.

3 The Aberdeen Mark Book is unparalleled in the elaboration in which it recorded masonic lore, using intricate calligraphy and gilding in places to impress and to emphasise how important its contents are.

4 It is outstanding as an effort by one individual to gather together copies of what he regarded as the key documents required by his lodge – lists of members; lodge laws and statutes; the so-called 'Mason Charter' (a version of the 'Old Charges', a traditional history of masonry and its regulations derived from English medieval originals); and 'Lawes and statutes for Meassones gathered out of ther old wreatinges.'

Discussions of the early history of Lodge 1st and of the contents of the original Mark Book by A.L. Miller and David Stevenson have been published.¹ But one highly significant passage deserves to be singled out here, as it has not received the attention of masonic historians that it merits, as it deals with one of most distinctive features of masonic lodges. At the end of the list of members of the lodge written by James Anderson senior, he adds a passage which (in modern English spelling) reads

So ends the names of us all who are the Authors of this Book and the masons' box, in order according to our ages as we were made Fellow Craft, from which we reckon our age. So we entreat all our good successors in the Mason craft to follow our Rule as your patterns, and not to strive for place. For here you may sit [in the order] above written, and amongst the rest our names, persons of a mean degree [are] inserted before great persons of qualities.

Even with modernisation, and with a few words inserted, this may seem rather incoherent. But the main points are clear. The masters or fellowcrafts (alternative names for the same grade at this time) of the lodge have been listed in chronological order, according to when they joined the lodge, and that is the order in which they should sit, even though it means in some cases craftsmen (folk of 'low degree') sitting above noblemen etc. ('great persons of qualities'). That Anderson felt it necessary to stress that in the lodge the social hierarchy of the outside world was to be ignored, suggests that some members were unhappy with it – that there had been 'striving for place.'

It is, of course well known that modern freemasonry has this ideal of brotherhood in which all are equal and social status is irrelevant, and it has been *assumed* that this prevailed in Scotland's early lodges, but there has been no direct

evidence of this. This passage in the Mark Book provides definite proof. It is by far the earliest evidence in the records of any lodge that freemasons in their lodges, temporarily subverted the prevailing principles of social hierarchy.

2 The Aberdeen Mark Book and its contents

The Aberdeen Mark Book takes its name from the oldest materials in it, written in the 1680s. They include an list of names of the members of the lodge and their mason marks. However, the name is a later invention, not the one the author intended.

The Mark Book is a leather bound volume measuring roughly 15" x 10" (38 cm x 25 cm). Three brass clasps at the edges interlock when the volume is closed. A brass pin can be inserted through holes in them to hold it closed, and a hole in its end of the pin (like the eye of a needle) is designed to have a padlock added, making it a 'lockit book' which could only be opened by a keyholder – perhaps the lodge's master, or the secretary. A red leather plaque on the front cover reads

LODGE OF ABERDEEN
No. 1. ter
MERK BOOK
1670

The '1670' refers to the date of the earliest records copied into the book. The plaque has been added at some time since 1891, when Aberdeen Lodge received its present designation – and indeed it seems after 1919, if a photograph of it then published was up to date.²

In the lodge's laws in the Mark Book, the authors order their successors to take special care of the book and not to let it decay. Unfortunately not all generations of their successors have proved true to their trust. Most of the folios of the original Mark Book have been lost or destroyed, and the few that survive have been jumbled up among eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century material.

The process of preserving fragments of the original Mark Book while destroying most of it began in 1748. The minutes for 2 February include a 'Warrant for Repairing the Old Register' which records that the register 'was very much standing in need to be rebound' as the pages were damaged 'by Reason the same was Mounted with Iron.' This may be taken to mean that the book had originally been fitted with iron locks, and there were problems with rusting. The box master was therefore ordered to 'Cause Rebind the same adding more paper therto and to mount the same with brass, as also to cause bind a Letter Book of the best of the Old papers of the said register.'³

This is muddled telling the box master to do two things which are incompatible. He was to rebind the old register and mount it with brass – but also to take the best pages from it and bind them separately. The confusion is probably the fault of the secretary recording the decision, and what actually happened was what the lodge wanted. The best pages of the old register were taken out of it and pasted into a new book, which also had many blank pages for future records. All the pages not regarded as 'best' were evidently thrown away! A.L. Miller, the lodge's historian, expressed satisfaction that 'so much has been preserved,' but this conclusion is complacent. The foliation (numbering of the leaves) marked on the surviving original

folios shows that there were at least 147 folios in the original volume. Only about 20% of them have survived.

The contents of the volume as it exists today are, as indicated above, chaotic in their arrangement. Most of the folios which survive from the original mark book bear a foliation dating back to the 1680s, but also two other, later, foliations, indicating at least two further disbindings, rearrangement of materials and rebindings after 1748. There is no attempt at over-all foliation or pagination.

A full description of the contents of the book, bringing out its anarchic nature has (out of mercy to more casual readers) been banished to an appendix, but it contains five categories of material –

- 1 Surviving folios of the original mark book. Twenty eight such folios have been cut down in size, presumably because they had been damaged, to about 12” x 8” (31 cm by 20 cm) and then pasted onto new folios. Luckily, only one side had been written on. In several other cases, complete pages from the original mark book may have been bound into the new book – in one case a folio can be seen to have been tipped in (a folio in the new book having been cut out, leaving only a stub remaining, onto which an older folio has been glued).
- 2 Folios listing members admitted, 1721-44, 1751-67. These copy the style of original mark book, and some of the earlier one’s may be originals.
- 3 A roughly alphabetical (names arranged according to first letter, but no further) list of entrants, 1750 -1845. Many later names have been added to the list at later dates where space allowed. Indeed, the Mark Book is still a ‘live’ record. Between the digital images on this disk being made (2007) and the writing of this introduction (2010) three names dated 2008 have been added!
- 4 A second roughly alphabetical list of entrants, marked ‘Continued.’ Though some names have been entered, many of the folios are blank. Clearly many new members preferred to have their names recorded in the older list.
- 5 Several miscellaneous papers (eighteenth century) relating mainly to the financial situation of the lodge.

Thus the bulk of the material in the Mark Book consists of lists of members names. These are valuable, but how full and accurate they are needs to be checked with other lodge records before any analysis of them is attempted.⁴ The first surviving lodge minute book, which starts in 1696, reveals the names of some members not listed in the Mark Book.⁵ In what follows attention will be concentrated on the original Mark Book.

3 James Anderson senior and the original Mark Book

The name James Anderson is well known to freemasons, as he was the author of the 1723 *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* commissioned by the Grand Lodge of England. But in the context of the Aberdeen Mark book it is his father, James Anderson senior, who is the centre of attention.

Anderson senior was born in 1649, and became a ‘glassinwright’ or glazier. Nothing is known about his working life. He was admitted to the Incorporation of Hammermen (Guild of Metal Workers) of Aberdeen in 1689 and subsequently held office in it.⁶ An oak chair that he presented to the Hammermen survives. In 1696 and

1708, when French invasions were feared, he was appointed a lieutenant in the forces raised in the town. When a poll tax was collected in 1694 it was recorded that Anderson 'is not pollable in Town, his greatest interest [assets] being in the Shire', and this is confirmed in Aberdeenshire poll tax records two years later, where he was recorded as having a stock of under 10,000 merks.⁷ For Anderson, his wife, four children and two servants, he was ordered to pay six pounds eighteen shillings Scots. Another entry records that he had inherited land in the shire from a relative valued at £140 Scots. As this indicates, though Anderson was a 'mere' craftsman, he owned some land. A look at his extended family trees shows he was related to a number of significant families in Aberdeen and beyond – landowners, successful merchant and craftsmen, and academics. He was in a position to help his sons to a good education at the local university – Marischal College, Aberdeen – and three of them took advantage of it to make quite distinguished careers for themselves – James as author of the *Constitutions* and genealogical works; Adam as author of a famed *History of Commerce*; and David as Professor of Divinity at King's College, Aberdeen. Anderson senior died in 1722.⁸

When Anderson joined the lodge of Aberdeen is unknown but by the time (probably in the late 1680s) he embarked on compiling the Mark Book he was clerk (secretary) of the lodge. He took 1670 as the starting point for the record he compiled as there had then been a major reorganisation of the lodge in that year. It had adopted new laws and statutes and 'had for the first time established a poor's box' - a charitable fund to support members and their families when in distress. Anderson was clearly proud of his lodge, and wished to produce a record which reflected its status, so he embellished it with headings in bold and elaborate script and some use of gold leaf, using two types of script – secretary hand and italic. By the standards of trained calligraphers, Anderson's ambitions were not always matched by his skills – much of his work is pretty crude – but in places he achieves a pleasing elegance.

Anderson was keen to make it clear that he was the actual writer of the Mark Book. It therefore may seem confusing to find him referring to forty nine members (including himself) as authors of the book. However, he was using the word 'author' in accordance with a broad definition. An author was 'The person who originates or gives existence to anything'.⁹ Those listed were those who, as members of the lodge, had through their activities been responsible for the events he is recording as scribe or writer. The dating of the original Mark Book to the later 1680s is based in the fact that that was the time he regarded the book by the 'authors' as in a sense 'finished.' The latest dated entry in the list of authors is 1679. The earliest on the list of their 'successors' is dated 1687. Is it coincidence that Anderson became master of the lodge for the first time in 1688? Was he elected as a reward for his service in producing the Mark Book? Or did his election inspire him to compile it?

Anderson produced a splendid title page for the Mark Book, and describes it as 'This Account Book'. Though the word 'account' can have wider meanings, the title strongly suggests that Anderson saw the book as primarily one in which the lodge's financial accounts should be kept, and this is confirmed further down the title page – 'all the Debtes we shall be Resting To others is contained in this book.' Proper keeping of accounts would be especially important now the lodge had a poor's box to administer. Possibly the missing folios (over a hundred of them) contained such financial records, and were discarded in 1748 as no longer of any use or relevance.

The list of forty nine members that Anderson named as 'authors of the book' presents problems. It is headed 1670, and it has often been assumed to list members of

the lodge at that date. But examination of the careers of these authors demonstrates that all of these men could not have been members in 1670, and indeed that there is no single date at which all of them could have been members simultaneously.¹⁰ In reality it is (or was intended to be) a list of those who had been members in 1670 and those who had joined since, presumably written up in the Mark Book from older records. But in some cases comparing the careers of members listed reveals that they cannot have joined in the order shown in the list. From the very start, muddle was a feature of the Mark Book

4 James Anderson senior and James Anderson junior

James Anderson senior (1649 - 1722) was a prominent member of the Lodge of Aberdeen for many years. His son James Anderson junior (1679 – 1739) was to be commissioned by the Grand Lodge in London to compile what became the *Constitutions of Free-Masonry*, published in 1723, a seminal document in the development of freemasonry. Was there a masonic relationship between father and son? Anderson junior seems from the surviving evidence to be a surprising choice as author of the *Constitutions*. He was a Scot, and though Scotland and England had agreed a parliamentary union in 1707, Scots were not popular in England, being commonly regarded as uncouth (if not barbarian) and incomprehensible because of their accents. Anderson junior was a Presbyterian preacher, tolerated in England, but unpopular in the eyes of the majority and open to unofficial persecution. His social status was low, and Grand Lodge was socially aspirational, seeking noble patronage. So why choose Anderson junior to produce the *Constitutions*? Before this commission he had had no known connections with freemasonry - except that he was the son of Anderson senior. It is tempting to assume that he had been recommended to Grand Lodge as having expertise in the lore of freemasonry, having learnt from his father.¹¹

However, there is no direct evidence of this. Anderson junior's name does not appear in the records of the Lodge of Aberdeen. However, one suggestive piece of information has recently emerged. Very few letters by Anderson junior survive, but one of them carries a wax impression of his seal.¹² The coat of arms he used was one commonly used by Andersons. But the crest which surmounts it is a mason mark. It is the mark used by his father, which appears several times in the Aberdeen Mark Book. Clearly Anderson junior, even if not a member of his father's lodge, knew enough of his father's masonic activities to adopt his mason mark.

5 The Authors of the Book¹³

The Lodge of Aberdeen before 1670

What of the Lodge of Aberdeen before 1670? In the absence of any records, it is impossible to say much. Later tradition said that previous records had been destroyed when, in 1646 in the course of the civil wars, the royalist Marquis of Huntley had raided the town with 2,000 men. Some houses were burnt and all were plundered.¹⁴ This may well be true – though it does not explain the lack of records between 1646 and 1670.

'Lodges' had been associated with major building projects for centuries. At first, a lodge was simply a shelter where stonemasons could work under cover, but

over time the word came to mean more than that. A major building might take generations to complete, and lodges acquired an institutional side. The masons saw themselves as 'belonging' to the building site lodge, and saw it as the home for their developing traditions and rituals. Even when a building was complete, it often required a few masons for routine and repair, and when they worked on that building they were regarded as comprising a lodge. But these lodges were not autonomous organisations. Thus in the 1480s and 1490s there was a lodge of St Nicholas church in Aberdeen, and through it the town authorities imposed traditional working practices on masons.

The sixteenth century saw huge upheavals for masons. The Protestant Reformation destroyed by far their most important employer, the old Catholic Church. Some of its buildings were destroyed, many more abandoned and allowed to fall into ruin. Emerging from this crisis at the end of the century the mason craft somehow – the process is obscure – managed to reorganise itself. Building site lodges are sometimes still referred to, but in addition a network of 'territorial lodges' has emerged – named not after individual buildings but towns. And though attempts were made to exercise central control over them by the king's masters of work, in practice each lodge became an independent body, free from any control by town councils or other employers.

When this new type of lodge emerged Aberdeen is unknown, but it is clear that the date 1670 marks reorganisation, perhaps revival, but not foundation.

Social Composition

The forty-nine men that Anderson listed as authors of the Mark Book range from titled noblemen to fairly humble craftsmen.¹⁵

LANDOWNERS

3 earls

1 lord

3 lairds (lesser landowners)

PROFESSIONALS

2 parish ministers

1 preacher

1 professor

1 lawyer

MERCHANTS

9 merchants

CRAFTSMEN

11 masons

6 hammermen (metal workers):

1 armourer

1 hookmaker

1 cardmaker

1 smith

2 glaziers

4 barber-surgeons:

2 wigmakers

2 surgeons

4 wrights (carpenters)

3 slaters

How had it come about that earls were associating socially and ritually with metal workers, lairds with carpenters? Scotland had a very hierarchical social structure – not as rigid in its social distinctions as some in Europe, but nonetheless one in which lords and earls had little contact with ordinary folk – except as tenants or servants.

It is clear that during the seventeenth century in Scotland it was a becoming increasingly well known that stonemasons had secret rituals, known as the ‘mason word.’ It was an age in which many believed that much of the knowledge and wisdom of the ancient civilisations had been lost, but that that some of it might be rediscovered by studying remnants of old traditions and seeking hidden knowledge, deliberately coded in order to keep it secret. Such quests became known as ‘hermetic,’ as at their centre lay the search for the lost knowledge of the mythical great ancient Egyptian philosopher Hermes Trismegistus.

Medieval stonemasons had traditions that traced their organisation and its secrets back to Ancient Egypt and beyond. Therefore it is not surprising that the masons, with their secret meetings and rituals, intrigued some outsiders – and no doubt some masons themselves liked hinting that they held valuable secret knowledge. Thus men of high social status could be tempted by the idea of joining an organisation of craftsmen. However, it seems unlikely that many expected serious intellectual enlightenment by joining a lodge. Most probably did so just to get a glimpse into an intriguing organisation that they had heard claimed to have centuries-old lore. Perhaps too there was in some an element of ‘going slumming’ – mixing socially for a few hours with folk very much their social inferiors. It is probable that many of the individuals from the élite who were initiated into the Lodge of Aberdeen at this time only attended it once – to experience initiation. The core of regular attenders would have consisted of merchants and craftsmen.

Given that there was a demand from outsiders to join the lodge, why did the masons agree to admit them, and thus dilute their secrecy and exclusiveness? Partly expediency. There were not many stonemasons around to maintain a thriving institution and perform its charitable functions. In the case of members of the élite seeking membership, the core of craftsmen members must have been flattered at the idea of being able to sit down with a lord. Moreover, that such men sought membership indicated acceptance of the importance of masonic lore and ritual. The presence of the great added legitimacy to the craft. And not least, high fees could be collected from men of wealth. Boosting lodge funds had to be balanced against traditions of secrecy.

Anderson seems to indicate that he intended to list the authors of the Mark Book in chronological order, starting with those already members in 1670. However, the very first named recorded makes it clear that this is not the case. Harrie Elphinston (1), listed under the date 1670, can be traced as an Edinburgh merchant in the 1670s, and evidently only moved to Aberdeen in 1680 (when he became local collector of customs and excise duties). And Anderson refers to him as tutor of Airth (that being the name of the estate of his young nephew for whom he acted as guardian), a position Elphinston did not hold until 1683. Other entries confirm that the list of authors was compiled long after 1670. Mr George Alexander (18) did not become an advocate until 1676. George Liddel (22) was not appointed professor of mathematics until 1678.

The highest ranking of the 'authors' of the Mark Book were noblemen who had homes in castles north of Aberdeen, and from time to time would stay in the town when travelling south to spend time in other residences and visit the capital, Edinburgh. All four were men of regional significance through their land-holdings, but none really of national significance. Probably they joined the Lodge of Aberdeen on such journeys, and links between them and other members suggest they brought members of their entourages to the lodge with them. The Earl of Dunfermline (31) was a major landowner in the parish of Fyvie, and two of the lesser-landlords in that parish, John Gray younger of Crichtie (33) and George Rait of Mideple (35) were perhaps accompanying him as part of his entourage when they joined the lodge. The same may be true of George Seton (34), who was minister of the parish of Fyvie. The Earl of Erroll (32), who owned most of the parish of Slains, was evidently initiated at the same time as this Dunfermline group. If the list of authors has any chronological validity, the fact that William Fraser, minister of Slains (17) appears much earlier in the list makes it possible that he had joined the lodge earlier than the rest of the Dunfermline- Erroll group – and that he had interested the others in masonry. It is to be hoped Fraser was a better mason than minister – he was frequently in trouble for neglecting his duties, and eventually resigned under suspicion of murdering his wife.

Similar groupings can be seen further down the social scale, as those who have been initiated recruited friends. Of Aberdeen's craft incorporations, only four are represented. The wrights, slaters and hammermen often worked together with stonemasons on building projects, so that some of them were invited to join the lodge seems easily explicable. The four barber-surgeons seem less obvious recruits – though successful craftsman who adopted the full wig of those aspiring to be regarded as gentlemen might well form friendships with those who constructed and maintained for them such important symbols of status.

The Stonemason Authors

Aberdeen's burgh records for the seventeenth century are copious, and in these it is not difficult to trace in them something of the careers of most of the four-fifths of the authors who were craftsmen or merchants there. But when it comes to the stonemasons, the eleven 'real' masons in the lodge, something very strange emerges. They are almost invisible. In the whole century, not a single mason became a burghess of Aberdeen.¹⁶ In the period from the 1620s for which a register of apprentices survives, no mason apprentices are named.¹⁷ Moreover, there was no craft incorporation (guild) which included masons. Thus they had no organised place in the civic hierarchy, no role in burgh government.

This is remarkable. In most other burghs of any size, masons belonged to an incorporation, usually shared with other building trade, and became burghesses. Why not in Aberdeen? A few masons had become burghesses in earlier times – six are listed between 1478 and 1541.¹⁸ And they had some official representation in the town. In 1527 an incorporation of coopers (barrel-makers), wrights and masons had obtained a 'seal of cause' from the town council, a document giving them official recognition.¹⁹ Later evidence shows this was no stillbirth – the three crafts did act together as an incorporation.²⁰ But by the seventeenth century it was an incorporation just of wrights and coopers.²¹ The masons, it seems, had opted out.

There might have been practical reasons for this. Membership of an incorporation meant payment of fees. Burgh-ship brought responsibilities, liability to taxation, and an obligation to live within the burgh. Perhaps masons just did not

think these privileges were worth the bother. But it seems likely that there were reasons connected with the stonemasons' possession of secrets. To carry out initiation ceremonies they needed an institution that was exclusively their own. An incorporation shared with other crafts was not an acceptable setting for their rituals. So, the masons opted out of a shared incorporation, and evolved their lodge for their secrets. In other burghs masons can be seen adopting other solutions to the problem of being a craft unique in its determination to preserve secrets. In Dundee the masons did not have an incorporation, but had a 'society' recognised as part of the town's structure. But since this society was exclusive to the masons, it could also act as a lodge. In Edinburgh on the other hand, masons did belong to an incorporation which was shared with other building trades. But they also had a lodge for their esoteric rituals. The two institutions were closely linked (the mason deacon of the incorporation was also deacon of the lodge). Incorporation and lodge met in the same building, and clearly each institution knew that the other existed, but there was evidently a tacit agreement that each would pretend to ignore the existence of the other.

In Edinburgh, with the largest concentration of stonemasons in the country, it was probably impossible for masons to avoid being in an incorporation. The burgh council took much interest in the crafts being properly organised. In Aberdeen things were more lax, the boundary between townsmen and people from the surrounding country not so well policed. For its size Aberdeen had 'relatively few craftsmen' with 'many trades, including textiles and plaiding' being 'based in the surrounding countryside' and not in the town itself.²²

Aberdeen masons opted out of an incorporation, and the town council seems to have made no objection. It frequently had to employ masons – to help maintain the church, bridges, harbour and tolbooth (town hall), and took no interest in whether the men it employed lived in or out of Aberdeen. But an incident in 1622 showed that the council was determined to make no exceptions to the rule that as masons did not belong to an incorporation they could not become burgesses. John Mylne, the king's master mason, was invited to Aberdeen to advise on rebuilding the tolbooth. It was common to honour such distinguished visitors by making them honorary burgesses. The council clearly wanted to honour Mylne, but would not make him a burgess because he was a mason. So instead made him a 'frieman of his craft, allarenlie' [only].²³

The stonemasons among the 'authors' of the Mark Book are fairly obscure figures. Some, were granted limited rights within Aberdeen. William Mackleud (3) was in 1676 granted permission to brew and sell ale, beer and aquavita (whisky), suggesting that he needed to supplement his income from building work. Most of the lodge's masons seem to have lived outside the town. John Montgomery, for example, lived in the rural Aberdeen parish of Old Rayne. His skills were highly regarded. In 1686 he was made an honorary burgess of the separate settlement of Old Aberdeen for his work on the tomb of a deceased bishop, and the following year he was paid the considerable sum of £100 sterling (£1,200 Scots) for designing and building a new mercat [market] cross in Aberdeen itself

Religious Composition

The great majority of the authors of the book were members of the Church of Scotland, but there was a significant minority that were not. That there was such diversity is in itself significant – by law, all forms of worship outside the national

church were illegal, and subject to forcible suppression. Moreover, the identity of the non-Church of Scotland group within the lodge makes its tolerance especially remarkable. It was composed of Quakers.

Emerging only a few decades previously in England, the Quakers had little support in Scotland except in Aberdeen and the surrounding area. Central to their beliefs were the rejection of ritual, refusal to swear oaths, and unconventional behaviour and ways of dressing that were generally regarded as subversive of social convention and hierarchy.

In their disrespect for hierarchy and belief in the equal brotherhood of all, it is possible to see how Quakerism and freemasonry could seem to have had elements in common. Nonetheless, how Quakers, rejecting oaths and ritual, could be initiated into masonry is deeply mysterious. Equally mysterious is why the lodge was ready to admit Quakers. The lodge sought to meet in secret, to keep low-key, and certainly should have wanted to avoid any suspicion it had any connection with sedition or heresy. To admit Quakers seemed to invite such suspicion. The town council of Aberdeen was active in persecuting Quakers. When their meetings were detected, they were broken up and those present arrested. When they attempted to establish a graveyard, their dead were exhumed. Their flaunting of how they differed from others – by dressing in sackcloth or attending church wearing hats – enraged the authorities.

Exactly how many of the authors of the Mark Book were Quakers is uncertain as all those who may have been were merchants or craftsmen, who are often difficult to distinguish from other local men with the same names. But John Cowie (42) was almost certainly the merchant of that name imprisoned as a Quaker in 1676 and 1677. And he is probably the same John Cowie who had graduated from Marischal College in 1669, and was in trouble in 1674 for cheekily handing the Bishop of Aberdeen a tract he had written denouncing the use of excommunication against Quakers. He owned a copy of one of the works of the leader of the Scottish Quakers, Robert Barclay of Urie (*Les Principes de la Verite*, Rotterdam, 1675). Cowie also and took part in a debate between the divinity students of Marischal College and Quakers in 1675.

Also on the Quaker side in the debate was one Alexander Paterson, who had been attending Marischal College in 1672. Certainty is again impossible, but he is very probably the Alexander Pettersone (19), armourer, who was later to be master of the Aberdeen lodge three times. The fact that he later became deacon convener of the incorporated trades indicates that he must have lived down his youthful religious aberrations.

Persecution of the Quakers was abandoned in 1679, but some still sought to escape from local hostility by emigration – to New Jersey. In the 1670s New Jersey was divided into East Jersey and West Jersey, and East Jersey was bought up by twelve Englishmen, most of them Quakers. But it proved difficult to attract English Quaker emigrants (who tended to favour Pennsylvania as a destination), so the twelve proprietors agreed to turn the scheme into a largely Scots venture. They bought in an additional twelve proprietors, half of whom were Scots, and the Scots soon proved the most active and successful of the twenty-four proprietors. By 1684 twelve of the proprietors were Scots. Many sold parts of their East Jersey lands to others: there were more than fifty Scots ‘fractioners.’ Most of these Scots proprietors and fractioners came from the North East, and most of the ordinary Scots emigrants (700 or more) were from the same region. A significant number were Quakers. The driving force

behind Scots involvement in the venture was Barclay of Urie, whose estates lay some miles south of Aberdeen. In 1682 he was recognised as governor of East Jersey.

In 1685 it was announced that an English ship, the *Henry and Francis*, was to call at a number of Scottish ports to pick up emigrants bound for New Jersey. Local agents were named to recruit emigrants, and one of the Aberdeen agents was Harrie Elphinston of Melgum, later to be Tutor of Airth – a long standing member and former master of the Lodge of Aberdeen

One of the Quaker authors of the Mark Book, Robert Gordon (39) bought land in East Jersey. Luckily, as he had so common a name, he had an unusual trade, that of cardmaker (maker of iron combs) to help identify him. Back in 1674 Gordon had been a poor lad without a trade. His fellow Quakers discussed how a job could be found for him, and they concluded that he should work for Alexander Moore (43) hookmaker, for as year, to be trained in wire drawing (manufacturing the wire used for making fish hooks and cards). If he proved diligent Moore was to 'give him some Insight in his trade of Cardmaking.' As a member of the Incorporation of Hammermen, Moore should not have taught anyone except apprentices his skills, but here Quaker charity outweighed such regulations. Gordon evidently put the training he received to good use, for by 1683 he was able to purchase (from one of the Quaker East Jersey proprietors, Robert Burnet of Lethenty) 1/32 of the latter's 1/24 share of the province! He sold half his little estate in 1686 and apparently never himself went to the province; but his son Daniel can be traced there in the 1690s, with power of attorney from his father.

Another member of the Lodge of Aberdeen who bought land in East Jersey never actually went there. This was the Edinburgh advocate Mr George Alexander (18) of Peffermiln. His father, an Edinburgh man, had married an Aberdeen girl and practised as an advocate in both Edinburgh and Aberdeen. He was appointed clerk of the latter burgh in 1660 but died the following year. Through this family connection George Alexander attended Marischal College in Aberdeen (in the late 1660s). Like Gordon he bought a 1/32 share of Burnet of Lethenty's land in 1683, but he is the odd man out among the Aberdeen Lodge men with New Jersey interests, as does not seem to have been a Quaker.

John Forbes (36), merchant, was one of two lodge members who not only bought land in New Jersey but settled there. He was the son of Alexander Forbes of Boyndlie (in northern Aberdeenshire), who had been tutor of Pitsligo during the minority of the second Lord Pitsligo (14), and John's mother was Harrie Elphinston's (1) sister. Thus he had close family connections with at least two other members of the Lodge of Aberdeen. There is no direct evidence that he was a Quaker, but the fact that his father was heavily fined after the Restoration of monarchy in 1660 suggests that the family was regarded as suspect in its religious or political loyalties. John Forbes emigrated in 1684, making a last-minute decision to go after being infected by the enthusiasm of friends who were about to sail. He landed at Perth-Amboy with three servants and bought land - again from Burnet of Lethenty. But in 1686 he can be traced appointing an attorney as he was returning to Scotland. He subsequently succeeded his brother as laird of Boyndlie, being called Captain Forbes: when he had acquired this military rank is unknown."

The final Quaker mason emigrant from Aberdeen Lodge was John Skene or Skeen (27), merchant. Unlike the others his activities lay in West rather than East Jersey. John's father was a prominent Aberdeen merchant, Alexander Skene, who served as a baillie in the burgh and bought the estate of Newtyle in the parish of

Foveran. John was admitted as a burgess in 1659, and was studying at Marischal College in 1662-3 (though it is not known whether he graduated). Both father and son became Quakers, thorns in the flesh of the authorities. In 1674 John was in trouble for sitting through a church service in Foveran with his hat on and then addressing the congregation. The following year he was one of the Quakers who debated with divinity students. In 1676 he wrote to the provost of Aberdeen denouncing religious persecution, and he and thirty-three other Aberdeen Quakers were fined. He was also ordered to find caution not to pray or preach at meetings.

John Skene was in prison again in 1677. Sometime after this he decided to emigrate. The date is uncertain. It is asserted that he sailed from Aberdeen with his wife and family on the Golden Lion, arriving at Delaware in October 1682, but he may in fact have been the John Skene who landed at Burlington in 1678 and was in Pennsylvania by about 1681. Possibly he returned to Aberdeen after an initial visit to the colony, to collect his family. In June 1682 he bought the estate of Peachfield in Burlington County, the Quaker form of dating used in the deed indicating that he was still true to that faith. In 1683 he was elected to the West New Jersey Council, and though 'divested of office' through his opposition to the governor, he was by 1685 himself deputy governor of the colony, a post he held at least until 1687 and possibly until his death. John Skene of Peachfield made his will in 1690 and died soon afterwards.

Skene has been hailed as the 'First Freemason to Become a Citizen of the Western Hemisphere,' and certainly there are no known earlier examples of an initiated mason emigrating. He was closely followed in 1684 by John Forbes (though he did not settle permanently) and John Cockburn of Melrose Lodge.

Entered Apprentices

Analysis of the list of 49 authors of the Mark Book has revealed remarkable social and religious diversity. The eleven entered apprentices listed in the original Mark in the late 1680s form a remarkable contrast. Seven of them can be identified. One of them lived in Aberdeen, the other six in Old Aberdeen, four of them being burgesses there. And all seven of them were stonemasons. The significance of this can only be guessed at. It may well be that non-stonemasons joining the lodge were initiated as entered apprentices and masters at the same meeting: this often happened at a later date in other lodges. Or perhaps the lodge had, when the Mark Book was compiled, recently decided to strengthen the numbers of stonemasons in the lodge.

Old Aberdeen was at the time a separate burgh from Aberdeen, lying a few miles to the north, and contained King's College and Aberdeen Cathedral. Though it had only about one tenth of the population of Aberdeen, tax records indicate that the two towns in the 1690s had about the same numbers of resident stonemasons. Somehow, it is clear, Old Aberdeen was a more attractive place for stonemasons to live than Aberdeen.

6 The Successors to the Authors

In the decades that followed the first writing of the Mark Book, the lodge recruited mainly from local merchants and craftsmen, though a few were also small landowners, like William Forbes of Tulloch, merchant (1701). Other exceptions include a London merchant (Thomas Lushington, (1688) and a junior army officer (Ensign George Seton, 1706). But no longer are nobles, big landowners or parish

ministers to be found. A few men of some status begin re-appearing in the second decade of the eighteenth century, however, the most notable being Alexander Jaffray of Kingswells (1718). His initiation is a clear indication that though the lodge's recruitment policies had changed over the decades, some of its sympathies had not. Jaffray died in 1726 after spending nearly half a century as a leading Quaker activist and missionary.

In the 1730s recruitment from the social elite speeded up. The Earl of Kintore joined in 1736, along with two physicians, a lawyer, a landlord, and a professor of Greek. 1736 brought a collector of excise duties, 1739 another professor. The 1750s saw a big recruiting boom, with many merchants as well as ships' captains and landlords initiated. The lodge was moving up-market, and had sufficient prosperous members to finance an ambitious new Mason's Hall (see below). And so, down the centuries, as the lodge continued to reinvent itself, membership changing in character according to the wishes of members as a whole, the zeal of individual members in recruiting. – and, of course the interest of candidates in joining.

7 Meeting places of the Lodge of Aberdeen

According to the Laws and Statutes of the Lodge contained in the Mark Book, meetings were not to be held in any house with people living in it, but in the open fields – unless the weather was bad, in which case they could meet in a house carefully chosen so no one could see or hear them. Given the climate of Aberdeen, it is likely that all meetings were in fact indoors. And, in any case, for masons to meet in an open field to perform their rituals would have been crazy, as it would obviously draw attention to their 'secret' doings. Later, the laws indicate the lodges had a regular meeting place, for they rule that all entered apprentices must be entered in 'our antient outfield Lodge.' This was situated at the sconces at the point of Girdleness. These were earthwork artillery defences overlooking the mouth of the River Dee, presumably deserted except in time of war, remote enough for secrecy to be preserved. Girdleness was near Aberdeen, but beyond its jurisdiction, as it lay in the neighbouring county of Kincardineshire (the Mearns). Thus the Lodge of Aberdeen literally went out of its way not to meet in Aberdeen.

This stress on the desirability of meeting in the open air, and the reality of meeting on a remote and desolate headland, seems at first extremely odd. But it makes sense in the context, mentioned above, of masonic lodges being determined to assert their independence. They were not part of the structure of town government and institutions. In this sense, the 'Lodge of Aberdeen' was not part of Aberdeen, and the masons demonstrated this by not meeting there. The earliest surviving masonic 'catechism (1696) goes even further in asserting in unrealistically extreme terms the alienation of lodges from towns. A true and perfect lodge should meet 'a dayes Journey' from any town 'without barking of dog or crow of cock.'²⁴ Impossible in practice, but a rhetorical gesture of rejection of town jurisdiction.

Whether the Aberdeen masons even kept to their avowed practice of meeting at Girdleness is uncertain. Minutes surviving from the 1690s record 'Aberdeen' as the meeting place up to 1719, and thereafter record its location as 'Footismyre.'²⁵ In fact, the lodge may have been meeting there since about 1700, for accounts of the treasurer of the lodge then recorded a payment of £400 as part of the price of Futtiesmyre.²⁶

This was a piece of land and a house on the 'links' of Aberdeen – an area of open sandy ground and dunes separating the populated part of the town from the sea. A 1732 print shows 'The Lodge of the Free Masons' as an isolated little house, hidden by a hillock from the rest of Aberdeen, which appears distant in the background.²⁷ The lodge might have agreed to meet within the boundaries of the burgh of Aberdeen, but were still determined to keep their distance.

From 1736 onwards lodge minutes are dated from the Masons' Hall, but this may still mean Futtiesmyre. However, to a changing lodge membership the attractions of relative remoteness eventually faded. In 1755 the lodge bought a plot of land in the town centre and built 'The New Inn,' with a separate entrance to the upper floor, which contained rooms for the lodge. This was a major investment. The New Inn soon became the best known in northern Scotland. Much of the money for the venture came from the more wealthy lodge members, these non-craftsmen showing a willingness to ignore lodge traditions of separation from others when meeting in return for creature comforts. Meeting snugly in a town centre inn, well able to cater for the convivial side of freemasonry, was more attractive than venturing out to the links in winter gales.²⁸

A visitor in 1782 described the lodge's premises. A drawing room led into the masons' hall, which had four windows along its 'front' wall, and a venetian style one at the east end. The entrance was from the west, and over the door there was a musician's gallery. The room measured 43 feet' by 30, which is the diagonal of its square.²⁹ Which no doubt is somehow esoterically significant.

The Lodge of Aberdeen had originated as a society of stonemasons. Over time, it had started admitted other craftsmen, and merchants, and indeed men from all the higher ranks of society. When the Mark Book was first compiled in the 1680s masonry had been an oddity, a very marginal phenomenon socially and culturally. But the foundation of the Grand Lodge of England had led to a remarkable craze for freemasonry, its transformation into something fashionable. In 1737 some Scottish lodges decided to copy the English structure, and founded the Grand lodge of Scotland. Many lodges did not become affiliated to this new-fangled body until years or decades later, but the Lodge of Aberdeen was a fairly early joiner, in 1743. The new high-profile freemasonry, symbolised by the connection with the Grand Lodge and the New Inn lodge room brought tensions to the lodge. Many of the craft members felt that they had increasingly little in common with the richer middle-class masons who now dominated the lodge, and resented the expenditure of lodge funds intended for charitable purposes on the extravagant New Inn. A similar pattern can be found in other lodges, and in a number of instances craftsmen left their old one to found a new 'operative' one, in which membership was restricted to genuine craftsmen – either men of any building craft, or only stonemasons. This happened in Aberdeen in 1781, when the Operative Lodge of Aberdeen was formed.

This may seem a failure of brotherhood, of the ideal of men of all social ranks being able to meet together in friendship, but in a society where wealth and rank mattered, there were bound to be strains. The financial priorities of rich and poor are seldom identical. Tastes in – and ability to pay for - food, drink and entertainment at lodge occasions varied. But though there was the division of masonry into the Lodge of Aberdeen and the Operative Lodge of Aberdeen, the existence of the Grand Lodge meant that both remained part of the same movement, committed to the same ideals.