

EARLY ROYAL ARCH CHAPTERS IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

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Notes on Early Scottish Chapters

One of the earliest records of the Royal Arch Degree in the South of Scotland area is from the minutes of the Journeymen Lodge in Dumfries dated 8th October 1770;

It reads,

“It was represented by Bro Baird that James Tait was desirous to receive the benefit of Royal Arch Mason, the members after taking the same consideration, that propose to examine said candidate, and finding the same to be duly qualified a Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason proceeded to elect him Master of the chair and then he was elevated to the Sublime Degree of Excellent, Super Excellent and Royal Arch Mason.”

Not all of the early Chapters or Lodges working these degrees in Scotland at this time were consecrated by a Scottish Grand Body. Our own Supreme Grand Chapter did not officially come into being until 1817, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1800 “expressly prohibited and discharged all Lodges having charters from the Grand Lodge from holding any other meetings than those of The Three Orders,” (3 Craft degrees).

In London in 1766 a Grand Chapter of England was formed under the authority of Lord Blaney. It was from this English Grand body that several Royal Arch Chapters in Scotland were constituted.

Land of Cakes Chapter No 52 was constituted at Eyemouth, Berwickshire in 1787. This Chapter was lifted from the Grand Chapter records, England, in 1809 but subsequently moved under the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland in 1816 and became No15.

This Chapter having joined the SGRAC of Scot had by then held 2 charters one English and the other Scottish. It was however working under the English charter when Robert Burns was exalted in 1787.

Royal Caledonian Chapter No 100, Annan, Dumfriesshire was first granted its charter by England in 1796. Between 1796 and 1817, the number of joining members totalled 82, but later the Chapter later ceased to remain a member of the Grand Chapter of England. With no other reasonable entry in the minutes apart from being represented at the laying of the foundation stone of Lochmaben church in 1816 the final minute was taken on 11th January 1825.

The Chapter then has a period of nearly 30 years where no record of its workings can be found. This is somewhat strange, as when the last recorded minute was taken in 1825 the Chapter seemed in very good health. The next available minutes are then to be found in the back of the minute book, which belonged to the now extinct St Andrew's Lodge No 79, Annan. These Chapter minutes show that they continued to hold irregular meetings until 1852 when a total of 8 meetings are recorded for that year. From then until April 1857 no other meetings were held, with their final meeting being recorded as January 1859.

In 1872 a former member of the Chapter wrote to the then Grand Scribe of England stating the Chapter's history after 1817 and asking for it to be reinstated, no reply was ever recorded.

Loyal Scots Chapter No 106 was erected at Langholm, Dumfriesshire on 14th March 1797. According to The Grand Chapter of England records, the only names to be registered on their books were that of the following, Comp James Cott (Z), Comp John Elliott (H), and Comp David Muswell (J). In 1807 the Chapter was apparently contacted by the Grand Chapter of England to ask why they had never been in communication and as no reply was received it was finally erased on 11May 1809.

Mount Sinai Chapter No 123. Again this Chapter was chartered at Langholm in 1803. Between the years 1803 and 1811 a list of 33 members were added to it's membership, however as with the Loyal Scots No 106 no response was received after

it had been written to by the Grand Chapter of England and it was duly removed from its register in 1821.

Mount Lebanon Chapter No 153 was granted its charter by the Grand Chapter of England in 1808 and arranged to meet at Gatehouse-of-Fleet in Kirkcudbrightshire. A total of 37 names registered between the years 1808 and 1813, with nothing further heard from the Chapter after 1813.

Royal Gallovidian Chapter No 155 was granted its charter at Kirkcudbright in 1809 with 35 members' names on the Grand Chapter of England's records between 1809 and 1814. The Chapter was removed from the records in and around 1817 but it continued to exist as an independent body until 1861 when it finally closed its books by mutual consent of its members. It was by then the last of the English governed Chapters in Scotland.

Royal St John's Chapter No 175 was constituted in May 1812 at Clarencefield, Dumfriesshire. The Grand Chapter of England's only record of this early Chapter is a minute from the 21st May 1812, indicating a new Chapter to be constituted at Clarencefield titled "The Chapter of the Royal St John's of Ruthwell". The petition which was originally presented to the "Brethren of the Craft in Ruthwell Parish" was as follows:

" Brothers Affleck, Garven, and Duncan presented a petition craving us to apply to the Grand and Royal Chapter for a warrant of constitution to hold a Chapter at Clarencefield under the title of "Royal St John," Ruthwell, which was agreed to, and accordingly we wrote the Grand and Royal Chapter on that business."

The Brother Duncan mentioned was the Rev'd Dr Henry Duncan, a prominent Freemason in the area, and who had held the position of Provincial Grand Chaplain. He was also the founder of the very first "Savings Bank" which is also situated at Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, and is now a local tourist attraction. A statute of the Rev'd Duncan can also be seen in Dumfries town centre. While the Grand Chapter of England have this Chapter's number as No 175, Bro James Smith in his "Early Royal

Arch Masonry in Annan”, 1894, records it as No 165. No other records can be found regarding this Chapter.

St Andrew’s Chapter No 185. James William Hughan in his *Origin of the English Rite of Freemasonry* claims that this Chapter was constituted in Annan, Dumfriesshire around 1817. No record of it can be found in the Grand Chapter of England’s archives, however James Smith in his “Early Royal Arch Masonry in Annan” has this Chapter being constituted in 1812.

Royal Bruce Castle Chapter has been somewhat of a mystery in and around the local area. In 1816 again according to James Smith three brethren from Lochmaben were exalted and immediately requested other local companions to recommend the erection of a Chapter within the Royal Burgh of Lochmaben. The answer to the proposal is minuted that on the 11th March 1817 “ *the M.E. laid a letter before the Chapter from the Grand Chapter, London, empowering us to hold meetings at Lochmaben, and a deputation was appointed to go there on Tuesday the 18th instant, for that purpose.*”

The minute of the event is then given in full.

“At Lochmaben, March 18th. A.L. 5821, A.D. 1817. At a meeting of the R.A. Chapter of Annan No 100 present (nine names follow); from the R.A. Chapter Mount Sinai, Langholm, No 123 (three names); and from the R.A. Chapter, St John’s Ruthwell (four names). The Chapter being opened in due form, there was produced and read a dispensation and authority from the Grand Supreme R.A. Chapter at London, of date 8th day of Feby., A.L. 5821, A.D. 1817, empowering this Chapter to hold their meeting at this town of Lochmaben, as well as at Annan, and there to exalt Master Masons, properly qualified, in due form to the sublime degree of R.A. Masons, as the same more fully bears, which being considered by the Chapter, they made choice of companion Wm. Rae as Principal Z.; John Broatch, H; and William Mitchell, J., to hold meetings and exalt companions and do all other business in their name, until a Warrant of constitution be granted to them as formerly applied for, to act in their own name and authority, under the title and designation of the “Royal

Bruce's Castle Chapter of Lochmaben; and the said Wm. Rae, Z. John Broatch,H; and Wm. Mitchell,J. , were in due form installed in their offices, and took the chairs accordingly. Thereafter the Chapter proceeded to the exaltation of the following brethren, viz., M.Mitchell, J.Johnston, and Thos. Henderson, M.M.'s who being examined were found to have passed the chair and were in due form exalted, etc."

The Duke of Sussex at Kensington Palace apparently granted the dispensation, which was, signed "Augustus Frederick. " James Hughan also sights this dispensation as the 8th Feb 1817, while George Draffen in his book claims the dispensation to given by the Duke of Kent. Draffen was probably misinformed as the Duke of Kent according to John Hamill (formerly Librarian and Curator of UGLE) had no active role in the administration of the Craft and also never had such role in the Royal Arch.

According to Grand Scribe E. Scotland, M.E., Companion R.S. Brown, in 1894, a deputation from the Royal Caledonian Chapter No 100 constituted the Lochmaben Chapter irregularly, and that there never was any warrant issued by either Scotland or England.

While there are no records of any warrant being issued there is evidence of the Chapter itself, as held within the property of Lodge St Magdalene No 100, at Lochmaben are two old Royal Arch sashes as well as a small wooden box with Royal Arch emblems on the lid and Bruce's castle on the base.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of John Hamill and Graham Smith is acknowledged.