

BONNETMAKER'S NOTES

The Bonnethill or Hilltown

Bonnetmakers plied their trade seated outside their houses (Instituted in 1529), In 1832 only one serving bonnetmaker was left who plied his needles as in older times. He died in 1848 on the verge of his hundredth birthday.

30th July 1904. Sir James Ritchie, a Dundonian and the then Lord Mayor of London, became a Bonnetmaker. There is a photograph of the event in possession of the clerk. The photograph was presented to the trade by Deacon convener James Coull at the supper held in Queens Hotel on Wednesday 1st March 2000.

The Form of the Oath to be Administered to Every New Entrant Member of the Bonnetmaker Trade before his admission.

I promise to obey the Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and also to obey The Kings Majesty, The Provost, Baillies, Convener & Deacon In so far as they obey the foresaid Gospell And Shall attend all Meetings of the Trade When properly called a far as in my power and Shall not Contradict nor Contravene my Deacon nor Craft in anything tending to the Good and Advantage of the trade directly nor Indirectly. I Shall According to my power relieve the poor And Shall in noways take, make nor Sell any unfreemans Goods under Colour of my own, And shall by every Means in my Power prevent Discord and promote Harmony in the Trade. So help me God.

However in September Alex Robertson, refused to take this oath. The reason for this is not known, but the entry records "The oath commonly administered being dispensed with, he, having positively refused to take the same, and in place thereof, only promising and declaring as an honest man to be a peaceable member of society, and of his Craft, to promote the interests of this Craft, and of the widows and orphans belonging thereto, and to do nothing prejudicial thereto, and to endeavour to make concord where discord is" The seven members present accepted him of those terms.

Never again was the original oath used and the present promise given by new members today is virtually that given by Alex. Robertson.

17th November 1896 the last Bonnetmaker entered was Adam Hill Stirton whose address was given as Wellgate, Dundee.

The Gavel used at Meetings of the Craft was presented to the Craft in 1938 by Thomas Winton. It is of walnut, made from a tree planted in grounds of Balmerino Abbey in 1566 by Mary Queen of Scots. A Chair made from the same tree is in the McManus Galleries and a quaich was presented to Dundee City Police Cricket club (currently I have been unable to trace the quaich.)

Patron Saint of the Craft was an Irish Saint, St Bride. The Seal of Cause stipulates that the Deacon is to be elected on St Bride's Day

In 1640 the Craft rented the Waulk Mill of Balmossie, the tenant being obliged to supply a man and horse to convey the bonnets to and from the burgh. Naturally a charge was made for this service. The highest income recorded was in 1708, when a total of 1914 dozen bonnets were waulked bring in revenue of £111. Representing a penny-farthing per bonnet.

In 1761 £1008 was received from Andrew Tender for the land lying on the south side of Dudhope Wynd.

1746 John Renny was paid £27 for twelve yards of silk, and 3 yards of ribbon for a flag and for painting it

1777 £4. 5s for a new silk flag

1863 A new flag was got at the opening of the Baxter park

It was customary to put out the Flag at all meetings of the Trade, and payments are entered in the accounts yearly for putting out the Colours.

1765 £2. 13s. Was the cost of 8 1/2 yards of Osnaburg for the church seat.

1767 £11.12.4 1/2 for a velvet for making the seat cover and 12s 6d. for a bag to put it in.

1767 £1.19s. for velvet and for making a little mortcloth.

1778 £6.11s.9d for plastering, fitting up and furnishing the Trades Room in the new hall.

Open Craft

In 1819, when the campaign for burgh Reform was at its height, it is recorded that there was only one Bonnetmaker left in the Trade. In addition the Trades were engaged in a bitter war against Provost Riddoch

He was obviously suspected that he was one of the 'Junta', who were part of Provost Riddoch's cronies. The Nine Trades claimed that it was unfair that "the Bonnetmakers, now in the hands of one individual should have the same voting rights in the Nine Trades as those with numerous members"

As further proof of cronyism, The Guildry complained that by voting with Riddoch, the Bonnetmakers put it on record that they are friendly to government by selfish and insulated Juntas and hostile to the rights of their fellow townsmen.

The Bonnetmakers answer was to enact that they could enlist of due paying but non-operative members so that it could have a membership large enough to claim proper representation of any Nine Trades deliberations.

That squabble made the Bonnetmakers the first "open "craft and undoubtedly saved them as a Craft today as a social and charitable organisation with no Craft Members.

Extracts from Town Council Minutes

On 13th October, 1725, the Council, on a report of a Committee for revising the Acts as to the Trades, reported that they saw no reason to alter any, except an addition to, as regards building.....

The Convener of the Trades also reported that the Trades had no alteration to ask at present, except the foresaid addition, which they approved. Except that the Bonnet makers were demanding ane act to be added discharging ye Taylors from making cloath Bonnets for prejudizing ye Bonnet Makers, if the Council thought fit to grant the same; - which Act and Report being considered by the Council, They disapprove of the foresaid addition demanded by ye Bonnet Makers

The Deacon's Chair was made from a beam of the old Adam Town House, demolished in 1912 to make way for the monstrosity now called the Caird Hall. It was presented to the Trade by R. J. Loggie an ex-Deacon and founder of the firm of Accountants 'Henderson & Loggie"

The Deacon's Badge is over 150 years old (In 1990).

In 1905 the Deacon's staff was presented to the Craft by Peter Reid of Leslie. It was described as "the staff used by Deacons 100 years ago".

In 1902 Andrew Carnegie was made an Honorary Master of the Craft,. The present Seal of the Craft was designed and made for that occasion. The first use of the seal was on the Certificate given to him and as a gesture of appreciation he donated a 1,000 dollar gold bond of the United Steel Corporation.

The Duke of Kent became an Hon Member in 1933 when 171 Bonnetmaker's attended the ceremony. On his marriage to Princess Marina the Craft presented them with a gate-leg table.

11 July 1521 Special care was taken to preserve the purity of this water. A Dyer, "Will Wilson, with his awn grant, is [bound] that an he or any of his servants cast wad paist¹ in the burn or dam to pay forty shillings to our Lady werk."

Again "whair tha John Bennatt's servants has washen bonnets in the burn, the Bailies [resolve] to seek their acts [regarding this offence], and put them to execution."

At a later time "the Bailies decern Robert Bartie to pay to the common werks the soum of eight shillings, and that because his servant wes convict for washing of pensches² in the Castle burn."

From Maxwell's Dundee Prior to the Reformation

Drink

1550's. Although the national beverage of Scotland had not yet begun to do its evil work, other sorts of liquor were already making some degraded victims. Here is a bargain made in Court with a woman of drunken habits. "Compearit Maryoun Maidlen and John Spence, [bonnetmaker] her spouse, and actit themselves to sustene Anges Maidlen, her sister, in all things necessar for her sustentation, claithing, bedding, and weshing of her claiths as effeirs, during all the space of her lifetime; and charge her with nae other service as herself pleases to mak; providing that sho pass nocht furth of the house to ony hostler house, nor keep company with nane in drinking and eating but only in John Spence's house."

Apparently Agnes soon failed in carrying out her part of the bargain, and was tempted to a tavern, for, within a few days, e find her brother-in-law going to one, presumably in search of her, and violently assaulting the landlord. Thereafter he is convicted by the Bailies "for the drawing of ane whinger and committing of troubleance agains Andro Watson, stabler, and is adjudgit to have incurrit the pains conteinit in the acts."

1521. Bonnets were knitted of worsted, and then shaped and made compact by the action of fulling – a process so simple and easily carried on in the household, that many of them were surreptitiously made by unfreemen. Sandy Key, having been convicted for this offence, offerit himself content, and he be fundin wirking or labouring ony bonnets in time to come, that the bonnets he wirks be escheat to Our Lady werk – but gif it be under ane maister of the craft."

As far back as 1524 drink was a problem. Maxwell in his Dundee Prior to the reformation tells us of a bargain made in Court with a woman of drunken habits. "Compearit Maryoun Maidlen and John Spence, Bonnetmaker, her spouse, and actit themselves to sustain Agnes Maidlen, her sister, in all things necessary for her sustentation, claithing, bedding and weshing of her claiths as effeirs, during all the space of her lifetime; and charge her with nae other service as herself pleases to mak; providing that sho pass nocht furth of the house to ony holster house, nor keep company with nane in drinking and eating bot only in John Spence's house."

Apparently Agnes soon failed in carrying out her part of the bargain, and was tempted to a tavern, for, within a few days, we find her brother-in-law going to one, presumably in search of her, and violently assaulting the landlord. Thereafter he is convicted by the Bailies "for the drawing of ane whinger and comitting of troubleance agains Andro Watson, stabler, and is adjudgit to have incurrit the pains conteinit in the acts."

©Innes A. Duffus
Archivist to the Nine Incorporated Trades of Dundee

¹ Noxious refuse from dye-stuff.

² Animal intestines.