

# TRADITIONS OF THE TRADES HOUSE OF GLASGOW.

An Old Guild which the Surgeons of Glasgow  
helped to establish.

By HARRY LUMSDEN.

MANY medical men may well ask, what has the Trades House to do with us? The West of Scotland practitioners who have read Duncan's "Memorials of the Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow" might answer that the first connection of the profession with the House is an old story, and separation from it an incident 200 years old, both almost forgotten. But the Guild Brethren of the Trades House would prefer to answer that the Chirurgeons of Glasgow did a great deal for the Brethren 300 years ago, and while they bade good-bye to the Glasgow Crafts finally in 1722, they had been in the preceding 120 years willing parties with the Craftsmen in the fray which not only gave the House its birth, but provided it with a constitution which keeps it young, active, and vigorous to this day.

To understand what the Trades House is, one has to go back nearly seven centuries to the times when the Scottish Royal Burghs began to flourish. Nearly all such Burghs were from an early date after their constitution by the Crown managed by a Town

Council of select Burgesses belonging to the Merchant or land-owning class.

The Merchants had Guilds, which were in some cases constituted at the same time as the Burgh itself, in others shortly afterwards.

But there was a class of Freemen in each Burgh who did not belong to the Merchant Guild. They were not so wealthy. Their means of livelihood was "unworthy of the dignity of a Merchant." They were only Master Craftsmen. It soon became evident to these Craftsmen that unless they combined in a similar way to the Merchants, who had their Guild (a kind of business and civic Trade Union) from which all Craftsmen were excluded, they would never have fair play in the administration of the Burgh to which their superior numbers at least gave them the right.

The Scottish Craftsmen imitated the example of their brethren in England and the Continent by forming voluntary associations of their own which were primarily intended to look after the interests of the Craft and Craft Burgesses, and to succour Craftsmen and their families who might be in need, but were also intended as a form of combination through which to claim public rights and exclusive privileges in practising their vocations.

At a still later stage these Craft Guilds each obtained legal recognition from the Burgh by means of a Charter, or, to use a Scottish term, a Seal of Cause. Even this, however (which made them an Incorporated Body), was found insufficient to enable them to fight the Merchants, in their desire for a due share in the management of the Burgh. Each Trade was a separate Incorporation by itself, with "Home

Rule," but the Craftsmen as a whole were not combined.

This weakness was got over in Scottish Royal Burghs by the Crafts federating. The Deacons of the Crafts met together, along with one or two Masters of each Craft, and appointed a Chairman to preside over their deliberations on common affairs. They called him in Scottish phraseology their "Convener," and to distinguish him from other conveners he was known as the "Deacon Convener."

The body which thus met came to be known as the "Convenery of the Burgh."

While this was the custom in Royal Burghs, it does not hold good with early Glasgow, however, for Glasgow was not a Royal Burgh. It had no Corporate Merchant Guild. It had no Convenery, although it had, by the end of the sixteenth century, fourteen Incorporated Trades, one of them the Incorporation of Chirurgeons and Barbers, the only one of the fourteen created by Royal Charter.

Doubtless the Merchants of Glasgow must have had some form of Association prior to 1604, when their disputes with the Craftsmen culminated in arbitration, and doubtless also the Deacons had often met together and communed on matters of common interest. But the fact remains, there was in Glasgow a different state of circumstances from what would certainly have been found in a Royal Burgh.

In Glasgow, therefore, while the Crafts had all their Seals of Cause in 1605, the Merchant Burgesses as a class had obtained no legal recognition. The Burgess Freemen were all simple Burgesses and no more, whether Merchants or Craftsmen. There was no such class as the Burgess and Guild Brother.



The Trades House

The dispute between the Merchants and the Craftsmen of 1604 probably reached a crisis by reason of the repeated requests made by the Convention of Royal Burghs to the Glasgow Merchants to form a Guild. This was opposed strenuously by the non-federated Incorporated Trades on every occasion when it was mooted. The disputes became so serious that arbitration was resorted to, and in the arbitration the Chirurgeons of Glasgow bore a considerable part. Being a separate corporate body, they ranged themselves with the Craft Corporations, and out of twelve Craft Commissioners two were Chirurgeons (Mr. Peter Lowe, the Quarter Master or Treasurer, and Mr. Robert Hamilton, the Visitor or Deacon of the Chirurgeons at that time). Moreover, Mr. Lowe's father-in-law, the Rev. David Weems, Parson and Dean of Glasgow, was one of the four Oversmen who drew up the Decree Arbitral. In a little less than four months there was issued the famous document now known as the "Letter of Guildry." It created a Guildry for the first time in Glasgow, and gave Burghal sanction to a new combination among the Merchants, from which eventually arose the Merchants House, and to a federation of the Trades, from which arose a Convenery, with a Deacon Convenyer at its head, now known as the Trades House. But in Glasgow alone there was this important distinction which the Craftsmen had fought for and won, both Merchants and Craftsmen formed component parts of one Guildry, while their own Trade organisations were separate and distinct from it; in other Burghs the Guildry was composed entirely of Merchants.

Nevertheless, the old legal distinction between the two classes was peculiarly emphasised. Once entered as Burgesses and Guild Brethren, the Freemen became associated with one or other of the two great sections, and these sections never came together for any purpose, except through their representatives in the Dean of Guild's Council or Court. A Freeman who did not make his choice remained a simple Burgess, and was not accounted a Guild Brother at all. We therefore see three classes of inhabitants—(1) Non-Burgess (with no trade rights); (2) Simple Burgess (with only such Trade rights as did not infringe those of the Merchant and Craft Guild Brethren); (3) Burgess and Guild Brother (*a*) of Merchant Rank, or (*b*) of Trades Rank.

Fines, as they were then called, *i.e.*, Entry Monies, were charged at each stage of the citizen's qualification. A fine to the Town for Burgess-ship; a fine to the Guildry for entry as Guild Brother; which went either to the Merchants Rank or the Trades Rank, in accordance with the section of the Guildry in which the new Burgess wished to enrol.

The administration of these two funds was left to the discretion on the one hand of the Dean of Guild, with the advice of the *Merchant* Council, and on the other hand to the Deacon Convener, with the advice of the rest of the Deacons and their assistants. A further fine was exacted for entry money when a Craftsman became a fully qualified member of his Craft. The accumulations of these fines have in three centuries made the Merchants House, the Trades House, and its fourteen individual Craft Corporations very wealthy, benevolent Institutions.

One can now distinguish the unique triple organisation which was created in Glasgow by the Letter of Guildry out of the United Guild Brethren—

- (1) The Dean of Guild and his Council of eight—four from each rank—forming what is now known as the Dean of Guild Court.
- (2) The Dean of Guild, with his Merchant Council managing the Merchants Hospital and the funds accumulated from the Merchants' Guildry Fines and from other sources.
- (3) The Deacon Convener, with the Deacons of the fourteen Crafts and their assistants chosen by him from each Craft, managing the Trades Hospital, and the funds accumulated from the Craftsmen's Guildry Fines and from other sources. Each of the fourteen Crafts retained control of its own affairs and of its accumulating funds, and among them were the Chirurgeons.

The first body has come down to us without change, and is still the Dean of Guild Court of Glasgow.

We recognise the second body as the directors of the "Merchants House," and the third as the representatives of the "Trades House," the Merchants House being the whole of the Merchant Guild Brethren, and the Trades House the whole federated rank of Craft Guild Brethren belonging to the Incorporated Trades. Over and above all these three representative bodies was another representative body, the

“Town’s Great Council,” the administrators of the community of Glasgow (the Provost, Magistrates, Dean of Guild *ex officio*, Deacon Convener *ex officio*, and the Merchant and Trade Councillors). King James VI. had wisely ordained that the Town Council should, like the Dean of Guild Court, consist of Merchants and Craftsmen in equal numbers.

The Deacon Convener’s Council was first composed of the Deacons and certain “assistants” belonging to each Craft, selected by the Deacon Convener. It was intended to be a representative body, and in the course of a few years the Deacons chose their own “Assistants.” At first, and for fifty or sixty years, the number of assistants from each Craft varied, but in the year 1647 the total representatives became fixed at 54, and remained the same in number and proportions till 1920. How the proportion of representatives was arrived at is unknown, *e.g.*, the Hammermen had six representatives, the Weavers four, the Surgeons three, the Bonnetmakers only two, and this eventually caused discontent. It was only set at rest by the Trades House Provisional Order, 1920, which gave nine of the Crafts increased representation up to four members each.

The Letter of Guildry gave power to the Town Council to choose the Deacon Convener from leets presented to it. With the passing of the Burgh Reform Act in 1833 this power was taken away, and for the first time in 228 years the Deacon Convener thus became leader of the Burgess Craftsmen of Glasgow by popular election. Immediately the Trades House introduced the principle within its own ranks. The qualified Freemen of each Incor-

poration have since annually elected not only their Deacons, but also their representatives in the House, by direct vote.

The Convener's Council became known as the "Deacon Convener's House" in 1668. "Councillors of the Crafts House" was first used in 1676, and "Crafts House" gradually changed into Trades House." The correct official title of the gentlemen who form the Deacon Convener's Council is "The Representatives of the Trades House." The fourteen Crafts represented were the Hammermen, Tailors, Cordiners, Maltmen, Weavers, Bakers, Skinners, Wrights, Coopers, Fleshers, Masons, Gardeners, Chirurgeons, and Bonnetmakers. Some of the Crafts were composite Crafts, in which were combined a number of different callings. Chief among these were the Hammermen, which embraced at least a dozen trades, and the Chirurgeons, which included Surgeons, Barber Surgeons, Apothecaries, and Barbers. Among the three Representatives who sat in the House from this Craft the Surgeons can be distinguished by the prefix "Master." While things went smoothly in that Incorporation, a Surgeon and a Barber was elected Deacon in alternate years, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century it became evident that the Surgeons were out of their proper element in such an organisation, and in the year 1720, as befitted what had then become a learned profession, the Surgeons separated from the Barbers, disassociated themselves from the Trades House, and continued their corporate existence alone, relying on the Royal Charter of Incorporation granted to them by King James VI. in 1599. The Barbers obtained

a new Charter from the Burgh, and maintained their association with the other Crafts in the Trades House.

The functions of the Deacon Convener's Council were such as one might expect in a federal assembly. Each Craft managed its own affairs. Only in matters which concerned the Craft Guild Brethren *in common* did the jurisdiction of the Convener's Council properly come into play. The similarity between the House and the Town Council as representative bodies here ends. The proper comparison in this aspect is that of a Federal Union like the United States. The Crafts are the self-governing States in the Union, the Trades House Representatives are like a Federal Assembly. It has often been remarked that the Federal Constitution of the United States was drafted by Alexander Hamilton, whose father came from Glasgow.

The relations of the Convener's Council with the Crafts were of a very varied character. The Acts and Statutes of the Council covered many interesting subjects, sometimes affecting the whole Guild Brethren of Craft Rank as such, *e.g.*, "that each Craftsman, before admission to a Craft, should first be a Burgess of the town and a Guild Brother of Craft rank." Till about 1720 the Surgeons of Glasgow were obliged to enrol as Burgesses and Guild Brethren of Craft Rank before commencing practice, and their apprentices had their indentures noted in the Deacon Convener's Books, the usual term being "Fyve yeirs as prenteis and twa yeirs for meit and fee."

Sometimes these Acts affected particular Crafts only, *e.g.*, "No Hammermen shall make the wood-

work of clocks, and no Wrights shall make the iron-work."

Then the judgments of the House in disputes tried before it form very interesting reading. Disputes arose concerning the admission of members to the Crafts, or the election of office-bearers, or trading rights. In these last cases the dispute is sometimes between two Crafts, and sometimes between two Craftsmen of the same Craft. Demarcation of work was a duty the Deacon Convener must have dreaded. Surgeons often arraigned Barbers before him in judgment, and *vice versa*. Factions in the Crafts, discipline amongst the Members or among Journeymen or Apprentices, and strife between one Craft and another gave the House plenty to do. On one occasion it had to judge of the legality of journeymen forming a Trade Union. In that case the journeymen had slavishly followed the methods of the Craft itself. Their head man was known as "Deacon of the Journeymen."

In 1612 the Chirurgeons were fined £6 Scots by the Deacon Convener and his Court for not bearing their share along with the other Crafts in the weeding of Dumbuk Ford. The Chirurgeons were to have sent two of their number to assist other Craft Citizens in this disagreeable duty, but had "sendit nain."

But by far the most important relation to modern eyes between the House and the Crafts was that concerning the granting of *supplementary* assistance to decayed members and their families, first, in the early days of its existence by means of the Crafts or Trades Hospital, and later by means of pensions.

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the House

exists merely for the purpose of granting pensions, or even for that and broader charity. Charity is only one of the objects its revenue is intended to cover.

For a century and a half the Council did a great deal of political work, petitioning for and against and criticising Bills before Parliament, but not in a party spirit. It is impossible to gather from the numerous petitions in the House Records whether these old Craftsmen were Whigs or Tories. They looked at Bills in a broad-minded way in the interests of trade, or the City, or the Country generally.

The benevolent work of the House was imposed upon it by the Letter of Guildry, and covered "good and pious uses" for the welfare of the community.

Immediately after issue of the Letter of Guildry a Deed of Agreement was entered into between thirteen out of the present fourteen Crafts providing for the erection and maintenance of an Almshouse or Trades Hospital for the use of the poor of the Crafts. The Chirurgeons were parties to this Agreement. Master Peter Lowe and Master Robert Hamilton signed the document, the latter adding the words "Deacon of the Chirurgeons" after his name. Moreover, Lowe was appointed the first Master of the Hospital. He had already acted as Quarter-Master or Treasurer of his own Corporation, and being a scholar and a well-known man of the world, he could be relied upon to act with care and efficiency in these days when several of the Deacons, and, indeed, the Treasurer of the City, could not even sign their own names!

With the sale of the Almshouse in 1790, the Agree-

ment between the Crafts for its foundation and its administration became void. By this time, however, there had arisen the practice of granting supplementary pensions to decayed Guild Brethren who could not be accommodated in the old building. The free revenue of which the Convener's Council now became possessed was not for many years made use of to increase either the number or the amount of these pensions. But the Council began to enlarge and extend its grants to "other good and godly work, tending to the advancement of the commonweal" by contributing to the numerous public schemes promoted in Glasgow as the Town grew and prospered. Large sums were voted to assist in raising military battalions to prosecute the American War and the War with France. At that period the House raised a Battalion known as "The Trades Battalion of Volunteers," the Colours of which are still preserved in the Trades Hall. The House helped to promote the Sabbath School movement, to establish and maintain the first general Poorhouse, to institute the Infirmaries, Asylums, and Hospitals. It assisted the University, Anderson's College of Medicine, and other educational bodies, took a share in making the Clyde navigable, in the promotion of railways and canals, and on many occasions in the relief of the unemployed, and in alleviating national distress.

In the meantime, the Council obtained the right to elect Governors to a small number of public Institutions of the City; doubtless in recognition of its share in their establishment and progress. After the Act of 1846 had abolished the exclusive privileges of trading, its fitness for acting as an electoral col-

lege by selecting directors for public Institutions became more and more recognised. A new form of public life was thus given to the Convener's Council, and as the years went on privileges of this kind were often conferred upon it as new Institutions arose. Now it nominates or supplies representative governors to nearly forty of the public Institutions of Glasgow.

And besides administering its own corporate funds in public and private benevolence, the House administers Trust Funds given or bequeathed to it for specific objects, the revenue being devoted solely to the purpose (educational, charitable, or otherwise) stipulated by the donor or testator.

The functions and work of the Trades House have changed but little in three centuries. Every entrant to a Craft must still produce his Burgess Ticket certifying that he has purchased his freedom, and is a citizen of Glasgow. When he pays his Burgess Fine he also pays to the Town-Clerk his Guildry Fine and becomes a Guild Brother of the Craft Rank. The Deacon Convener and his Councillors have no longer any knotty trade problems to decide, but, excepting this, the sphere of labour remains very much the same, with the modern privilege added of sending out enthusiastic workers to assist in the administration of the great charitable and educational Institutions of the City. The Deacon Convener, while presiding over his own Court of Deacons, still has his honoured place amongst the Magistracy of the "Town's Great Council." The four Craft Lyners still sit by the Dean of Guild each "ordinary Court Day" to advise him as practical men on ques-

tions of "neighbourhood and lining." The accumulated funds of three centuries are still distributed amongst the needy of the Craft Rank, and put to other "good and godly work" tending towards the commonweal.

The Craftsmen cannot forget the Surgeons of Glasgow who stood by their side in the fight for a share in municipal power. Most of all must they remember Master Peter Lowe, who set their Hospital on a sure foundation. During his two years of office his intromissions may have been small, some £200 Scots, but no doubt he gave them an inkling of the distinction between Capital and Revenue from which they have long profited. Their accumulated funds now amount to almost a million sterling. Their membership is over 8000. They spend £30,000 a year in benevolent Grants, and do not ignore in their annual distribution the calls of outside charities. The democratic spirit which prompted them to fight for civic freedom in 1605 has developed with the times, and their doors are now open to every citizen who wishes to join in the good work. All the learned professions are well represented in their ranks, and no Deacon is received with a more cordial welcome on taking his seat in the Trades House than one who is already a Fellow of the ancient Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons.