

LADY BURGESSES AND GUILD SISTERS

The First Female Burgesses

The usual assertion in the Trades House is that there have only been female members since 2002 when the 14 Incorporations agreed to allow female members. Like most assertions this is not accurate as there have been female Burgess and female members at various times in the history of the Incorporations. The first female Burgess that we know of was Catherine Mylne, a widow in the Incorporation of Maltmen in 1605. She was allowed to carry on working her husband's trade after his demise¹. Other Incorporations had female Burgesses and the Bonnetmakers and Dyers history notes that in the early days it was noticeable that women were admitted to the privilege of burgess-ship, though not to that of Guild Brothers, and were permitted to carry on business as fully and freely as if they belonged to the sterner sex.

Female Bonnetmakers

Male Burgesses in the 1600 and 1700s, were entrusted to carry and use side arms, but sisters of the Bonnetmakers were not so trusted. *"That privilege did not seem to have been greatly coveted, for they found the peaceful Bonnetmakers hastening to beat their spears into pruning hooks, and betaking themselves to the more congenial study of how to secure the best kind of indigo so that Her Majesty's lieges, who were adorned with the blue bonnets of the period, might not be defrauded by inferior dyes when the head-gear was produced at the Mercat Cross."*²

Female Fleshers

The Incorporation of Fleshers also agree that to allow female members as one of their short histories claims that from the very first the Incorporation of Fleshers was *"liberal enough to admit widows of deceased members to trading privileges and to allow them to occupy their husband stalls in the market"*. This explains the appearance of the names of women on the early lists. Women at that time could not be burgesses and their admission to trade was of grace, not of right. To women the bounty of the Incorporation was always extended, and they are by far its greatest beneficiaries' to-day. [Written in 1935] Even strangers did not apply in vain. Grants were made to *"a poor man who had lost his all in a fire"*. To *"a poor sailor despoiled by the Turks"*, and to sundry *"puir cratur"*s not otherwise designated whose wretched plight had touched the warm heart of the Deacon of the day. The modern grant of a quarter's pension after the death of a pensioner toward funeral expenses is paralleled by the old-time grants for the *"hire of a mort cloth"* or shroud to cover the dead for decent burial where the cost of a coffin could not be afforded.³

Females in 1725

It is worth considering that in 1725 women were treated very badly, for example the Bonnetmakers and Dyers History notes: *In 1725 the session enacts that the elders and deacons go through their proportions, and take notice of all young women that keep chambers alone, especially them suspect of lightness, and warn them that they will be taken notice of, and advise them to get honest men, or take themselves to service.* Later on we find the following: *the session enacts that no women, married or unmarried, come within the kirk doors, to preaching or prayers, with their plaids about their heads, neither lie down in the kirk on their face in time of prayer, with*

¹ Chronicles of the Maltmen Craft, circa 1879. available on the Trades House Virtual Museum

² History of the Incorporation of Bonnetmakers and Dyers of Glasgow 1597 to 1950 ~ Page 57

³ A Note upon the History of the Incorporation of Fleshers by the Clerk 1935 ~ Page 14

certification their plaids shall be drawn up, or they raised by the beddal. The session, considering that great disorder hath been in the kirk by women sitting with their heads covered in time of sermon, sleeping their way, ordains intimation to be made that none sit with their heads covered with plaids in time of sermon. Interestingly the minister does not consider that his sermon might have been the cause of not just the female parishioners sleeping, but others as well. In the second decade of the seventeenth century the kirks were kept open on Sunday in summer from five in the morning till nine in the evening.⁴

Females in the Tailors

Only a few years later we have a record of the Tailors Craft considering the issue of women workers. At Glasgow Tron Kirk, April 14th 1735. The Deacon Masters & Members of the Incorporation of Tailors convened together with the Trade Baillie, and *taking under their consideration that several women who make women gowns and other clothing for women, which is a part of the Taylor Trade, and that they practice that Trade within this City of Glasgow, also that they are willing to pay such sums yearly to the Taylor Trade as the Deacon & Masters of the Craft and they shall agree upon, for their liberty to work women's work within the said City. Therefore it is Statute & allowed by the whole Trade that the Deacon & Masters receive such women under the protection of the Trade & grant them liberty to work any kind of women's work by themselves find their servants within this City, their servants being always men servants and Journeymen in the place, & to agree with such women as shall desire the said privilege for such a yearly sum to be paid to the Trade as the Deacon & Masters and they can agree upon. During their practise within the said City of Glasgow, the said yearly sum not to be under Twenty Shillings Sterling.*⁵

Quite a number of other Incorporations have a history of female members and the Master Tailors had a rather ambivalent attitude to women working in their trade. Once can only imagine the arguments and debates in 1735 when patrimony was the rife and the men did not appear to know how to handle these wonderful ladies who were clearly as good at the men in making ladies clothing.

The Master Tailors were making sure they could control anyone, male or female, practising their trade, while trying to turn it into a male occupation. Women were slow to join. The first recorded entries in the accounts of dues paid by a woman were for the year 1736-37 when Mrs Rebecca Wallace, Mantuamaker and Mrs Stewart, hoopmaker paid annual dues of £6 Scots each. Mrs Stewart paid only for that one year, and is never mentioned again. Mrs Wallace stayed a member until 1762. There were never more than six women paying dues, and none at all after 1762.⁶

The Tailor's troubles with female workers was not over and in 1744, an Act was passed forbidding any freeman of the Tailor Trade to teach any woman or girl any part of the Tailor trade under the penalty of a fine. This Act was ratified in the revision of 1758, although they were to be allowed to employ women for certain tasks. These were for the stitching of stays which was allowed to be given to women to do in their own houses, and the making of buttonholes and the stitching or putting borders on Holland vests which they were to be allowed to do in freemen's own houses only.⁷

⁴ History of the Bonnetmakers and Dyers 1883, Page 68

⁵ Excerpts from the Record of the Incorporation of Tailors of Glasgow 1872 ~ Page 38

⁶ The Incorporation of Tailors in Glasgow in the 18th by Henry Lumsden 1928 Page 17

⁷ The Incorporation of Tailors in Glasgow in the 18th by Henry Lumsden 1928 Page 18

It is fascinating to note the hypocrisy of the day as the Tailors accepted that women were much better than men at certain aspects of their Trades, but resisted the admittance of females to the Incorporation. In February 1744 we find the following in the Tailors' Minute Book: *That no woman be employed by any Freeman of the Trade to work any Taylor work for them, except stitching of stays, which may be given to women in their own houses, and excepting also the making of button holes and Stitching or putting on boarders on Holland vests, which women likeways may be employed to do in Freemens own houses only, and that who contravenes this last act shall be liable in a new upsett and of having their work discharged till payment of their fine; And the Trade Considering that it will still tend to the benefit and advantage of the freemen of the Trade, and also of his Majesty's Lieges, That every Member of the Trade be still prohibited and discharged from giving out, any work or pieces of work to be made out of their houses, by any unless by freemen, upon whatever pretext. As by this method only the freemen of the Trade being employed are secured and Journeymen Prentises and others will be prevented from carrying on a Trade & business as if they were Freemen, and Embezzling & Dilapidating the goods and Materials entrusted with them and committed to their charge, And that nevertheless it may be necessary to allow women to be employed by any Freeman to stitch stays in their own houses, & to make Button holes & Stitch & putt on boarders on Holland vests, But to be done only in freemen's houses, in respect it has been found by experience, that **women are fittest for stitching stays, making button holes and stitching & putting boarders on Holland vests, and that few or none of the freemen of the Trade incline to work at the said branches of business, and are not so quick and dextrous at it.** And that the Members of the Trade are not in such danger, & run not such risk of having other branches of their business assumed and carried on By women, who stitch stays and, or their Materials being embezzled as they may and will do in case other articles of their business were allowed to be wrought and made out of the freemen's houses.*

Females and the Hammermen

The Hammermen always had an interest in the ladies and made numerous payments to them over the centuries and as far back as the 1600s. The females receiving payment were listed and the reasons for the payment and one such records include the following extracts:

- *A troublesome gentlewoman*
- *Woman in distress, husband shot by rabble*
- *1730 to Jean Ferrie to help her homeward*
- *Widow highly recommended, a good honest woman*
- *Widow in strait, having a child in great trouble*
- *Anderson sisters both dying*
- *1735 Jean Adie distemper and troublesome*
- *Jean Lochart a poor relict*
- *Barbara Leggat a lame woman, robbed on her way hither*
- *In 1738 to a Janet Robb a poor daft wife!*

Not complementary in the least and the ladies must have been in real financial difficulties to have applied for the pecuniary support.⁸

In 1808 a Miss Margaret Coats of Carlton Place was found running a successful Brass Foundry in Saracen Lane which she had inherited from her father and was considered for admission to the Hammermen, but eventually it was agreed that she

⁸ Hammermen's Facebook article, 2018, written by Deacon of the Hammermen, Colin Botfield.

would pay a reduced one off freedom fine, and did not have to produce an essay piece. [An essay in those days was the manufacturing of an item of a difficulty which would demonstrate that the applicant had the skill to be a good craftsperson]. She was not required to pay quarterly dues and she did not receive full membership but was allowed to trade in the Royal Burgh under Hammermen jurisdiction and so she may have been one of the early Lady Engineers, predating Ada Lovelace of Babbage fame.⁹

Female Bakers

The Incorporation of Bakers admitted Miss Margaret Browning as a Licentiate member on 4th December 1838, the story of this admittance can be found in the Incorporation of Bakers history and is as follows:

The following excerpt from the minutes explains the peculiar position held by Miss Browning-afterwards Mrs. James McFarlane on the roll of the Incorporation:- 4th December 1838. Mr. Thomas Wilson, junior, one of the requisitionists, stated that the purport of calling this meeting was to lay before the Trade an offer of Fifty Pounds Sterling on behalf of Miss Margaret Browning, in order that she may be admitted a Member of the Incorporation - to receive such rights and privileges as can be conferred upon a female, consistent with the Constitution of the Incorporation.

The Trade, by a very great majority, agreed to accept of that sum, and to admit Margaret Browning as a Licentiate, in which character she will be admitted to the privileges of Grinding at the Mills, Baking and Selling Bread within the Burgh, and to the benefit of the poor's roll should she require the benefit thereof at any future period; but she shall not be permitted to vote at any meeting of the Trade, or be voted upon."¹⁰

Female Burgesses in the 1900s

In the early 1900s the suffragettes must have found not being allowed to become a Burgess a real insult and in 1919 we find the first two recorded females as Burgesses. Whether or not they were entitled to become Burgesses or not is in question as one is registered as a Younger Son and the other a Far Hand. The ladies in question were:

1. Ivy MacKenzie of the Incorporation of Gardeners who became a Far Hand on 7th May 1919
2. The second lady was Alison Leitch of the Incorporation of Bonnetmakers and Dyers who became a member as a Younger Son on 3rd June 1919.

The next female Burgesses joined a year later when two ladies joined in 1920 and they were:

1. Sophia Ziegler Gemmell (Douglas) who was the Eldest Daughter and joined as a Merchant on 3rd July 1920. It is important to note that the Merchant's House had ceased to issue Burgess Tickets since the mid-1800s.
2. Mary A Snodgrass joined as a Far Hand and a Merchant on 7th December 1920.

1921 saw two more ladies gaining their Burgess tickets and they were:

1. Lillias Glen who became a Burgess on 22nd August 1921 as a Daughter-in-Law, Hammerman.

⁹ Hammermen's Facebook article, 2018, written by Deacon of the Hammermen, Colin Botfield.

¹⁰ History of the Incorporation of Bakers 1931, Page 146.

2. Julia P. Cooper Douglas (Reid) also became a Burgess, Hammerman on 27th December 1921.

1922 was an excellent year for lady Burgesses when 21 were enrolled and in 1923 83 ladies became Burgesses. By the end of 1923 all of the Incorporations had ladies associated with them as Burgesses, but not members of the Incorporations.¹¹

The names of all Burgesses in Glasgow can be found at www.tradeshouselibrary.org

Royal Female Burgesses Members

The exclusivity of the Incorporations to males appears rather strange in the 21st Century and in the early 1900s we find that the Her Majesty the Queen Mother, and H.R.H. Princes Mary and the Countess of Harewood became Burgesses of Glasgow but not members of an Incorporation.

Later on we find that the Princes Royal, Her Royal Highness Anne Elizabeth Alice Louise became a Burgess on 19th November 2003 as an Only Daughter and a full member of the Incorporation of Hammermen.¹²

First proposal to allow Lady Members ~ 1976

The Incorporation of Barbers raised the question of the Sex Discrimination Act 1976 at a House meeting on 12th February 1976 and how this would affect new membership of the Incorporations and they suggested that a uniform approach would be desirable. The Clerk of the House pointed out that there were two questions raised by the letter, firstly whether the act had any effect on the present sex discrimination applied by the Incorporations and, secondly, whether such discrimination was desirable or not. It was agreed that the House should seek guidance on the legal question and that this should be paid for by the House.¹³ The Clerk of the House circulated copies of the opinion of Council on the S0065 Discrimination Bill 1975 to the Clerks.¹⁴

Ex Deacon Convener J. H. Calder MacLeod could not have been too happy with the way the House and Incorporations were handling the idea of lady members as his letter to the Clerk was read to the House on 9th February 1977 concerning the matter. Deacon Convener Robert C. Smith pointed out that the question whether to admit female members to the Incorporations was not strictly a matter for the House, but rather a domestic matter for each individual craft.¹⁵

Female Members ~ 1980

In 1980, the Clerk reported to a meeting of the Platform that he had received eight replies to his letter asking the Incorporations views on the admission of lady members. The meeting agreed that he should circulate the letter again to the Clerks of the Incorporations who had not replied, to enable them to put the matter before the House in November.¹⁶

In January 1981, the question of lady members arose once again, this was caused by the Incorporation of Fleshers proposal to alter its rules to admit lady members. The reason for refusal were laid out by the Clerk and were as follows:

¹¹ Roll of Burgess and Guild Members 1902 to 1929, Trades House Archives.

¹² History of the Bonnetmakers and Dyers, Page 41.

¹³ Minutes of the Trades House of Glasgow, 12th February 1976.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Trades House of Glasgow, 14th October 1975.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Trades House of Glasgow, 9th February 1977.

¹⁶ Minutes of the Platform Committee of the Trades House of Glasgow 23rd September 1980.

Note for the Bye-Laws Committee by the Clerk

Counsel was asked about the applicability of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. In his opinion (16.9.76) he said, in effect, "*if a craft properly exercises its discretion in regard to acceptance of new members, the Act is not applicable.*" All Clerks responding to the Clerk's circular to the Crafts (18.6.80) have stated that their Master Courts do exercise such discretion and accordingly consideration of the issues can now proceed on the basis that the Act is inapplicable (except in the very limited area of female apprentice entrants.)

Accordingly the Committee should proceed to the answers given by the crafts to the question posed to them in these terms:-

"If the Master Court considers that there is at present a genuine exercise of discretion in regard to admission) then recognising that a decision to admit female members would require a unanimous agreement by all fourteen crafts to change the "associative principles" of the House, and recognising that failure to reach agreement is undesirable, would then Master Court agree to a change in the associative principles to admit the admission of female members?"

The answers to this question were:-

"Yes" - Tailors, Weavers, Wrights, Fleshers, Barbers

"No" - Hammermen, Bakers, Skinners, Masons, Gardeners

"No but would not go against the majority" - Bonnetmakers and Dyers

[It is interesting to note that the Cordiners, Coopers and Maltmen did not respond.]
The following ruling was read out at a House Meeting:

The refusal of the five incorporations doomed the admittance of female members and In my view the committee should recommend to the House to refuse the request of the Fleshers for approval of their proposed alteration to their Rules (to admit females) on the grounds that such a proposed change would involve a departure from an associative Principle (as the same as identified in the Clerks' Opinion of 1910) and would accordingly, following that opinion, would only be possible with Parliamentary authority or, at least, with the unanimous consent of the fourteen Crafts and the House which consent is lacking.

Any further action on the part of the Fleshers to implement their proposed alteration is a matter for that craft alone but of course could involve the House who might have a duty to seek to be heard on behalf of those crafts who do not favour such a change and to take action as may then be advised.

T. Norman Biggart
30th December 1980"

Female Members ~ 1985

In 1985, the question of female members was again raised. The opinion of J. P. H. Mackay, Q.C. (Later Lord Mackay of Clashfern) was taken. All crafts had received a copy of the Memorial and Opinion and the Clerk would put together excerpts from the relative minutes for the Platform and the Craft where the problem arose.¹⁷

¹⁷ Minutes of the Platform Committee of the Trades House of Glasgow 22 November 1985.

Female Members ~ 1986

A motion was laid before the House on 7th May 1986 concerning the Incorporations being allowed to have female members, this was a permissive proposal and would not force any Incorporation to allow female members if they did not wish to do so. The motion was proposed by Deacon Andrew Primrose of the Hammermen. It was agreed that the motion should be referred to the Master Courts for their consideration.¹⁸ In September the House met again and voted on the motion of Deacon Primrose and the show of hands indicated that 25 were for the motion; 13 against and 3 abstentions. The Deacons and Visitor then reported on the position of their Incorporations as regards to the motion:

Incorporation of Hammermen	- In favour of permitting lady members
Incorporation of Tailors	- In favour of permitting lady members
Incorporation of Cordiners	- Against, but would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change.
Incorporation of Maltmen	- Would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change
Incorporation of Weavers	- No firm decision made but would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change
Incorporation of Bakers	- In favour of permitting lady members (By a majority)
Incorporation of Skinners	- No decision had yet been made
Incorporation of Wrights	- Against, but would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change
Incorporation of Coopers	- The Deacon indicated that he would prefer to await the 9 th October meeting before reporting on behalf of his Craft
Incorporation of Fleshers	- Would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change
Incorporation of Masons	- Against the proposal
Incorporation of Gardeners	- Against, but would not oppose any other Craft wishing to adopt the change
Incorporation of Barbers	- Against the proposal. The Barbers felt that this should be a matter for the Trades House and not for the individual Crafts
Incorporation of Bonnetmakers and Dyers. ¹⁹	- Against the proposal

Female Members ~ 1988

In January 1988 the question of female members once more became a topic of discussion and at a meeting of the Deacon Convener, Collector with the Deacons and Visitors of the fourteen Incorporations, the Clerk passed round a note on the admission of female entrants and the Deacon Convener asked the Deacons and Visitor present to “test the water” at their Master Courts on the possibility of the Master Courts passing a permissive resolution enabling other crafts to admit women if there should be unanimity on this point by all of the Incorporations. The Deacon of the Coopers pointed out that *the present constitutional position is meanwhile is a full answer to any women seeking entry and the Deacon Convener confirmed that without unanimity amongst the Crafts the House would be under a duty to object to any proposals which allowed female entry except through apprenticeship.*²⁰

¹⁸ Meeting of the Trades House of Glasgow, 7th May 1986.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Trades House of Glasgow, 24th September 1986.

²⁰ Minutes of a meeting with the Deacon Convener, Collector and the Deacons and Visitors 13th January 1988.

Female Members ~ 1995

Seven years later, in November 1995, the Hammermen and Ex Deacon Convener J. Percival Agnew wrote to the Deacon Convener concerning the admission of women into the Crafts. The Clerk advised that he had sought informal legal advice from senior counsel. When this had been received, the Hammermen were going to be asked to make a proposal for the other Crafts to consider.²¹ At a meeting of the Platform on 7th February 1996, it was reported that Senior Counsel's first impressions were that nothing had changed since Lord Mackay gave his Opinion, which was that unless all Incorporations agreed that other Crafts can admit women, none could do so.²² When this was reported to the House the same day, Deacon Hunter of the Incorporation of Hammermen asked that the matter remained on the agenda for the next meeting and that he would like the House to consider the matter further.²³

Female Members ~ 1996

At the next meeting of the House in May 1996, it was noted that a letter had been received from Deacon Richard J A Hunter of the Hammermen and this letter had been previously circulated to the members of the House, concerning women members of Crafts. Gordon Wylie, the Clerk to the House, advised the meeting that he had had a meeting with the Clerks of the fourteen Incorporations and a number still felt that their Crafts and Master Courts were still far from willing to accept lady members. The question of lady members was remitted to their Master Courts.²⁴

At the next meeting of the House in September 1996, the Clerk, Gordon Wylie reported that he had received a reply from the Incorporation of Weavers who considered that the status quo should exist with regards to female members. The Convener read the pertinent section of the Counsel's Opinion and urged the Deacons and Visitor to pursue the question through their Master Courts to enable the matter to be carried forward.²⁵

At the House meeting in November 1996, there is a lovely wee section concerning the partner of the Deacon Convener in which the House agreed unanimously that for the avoidance of doubt, the Deacon Convener's Lady may appropriately be referred to as the Lady Convener.²⁶ Now that we have had a Lady Deacon Convener the old title which had been agreed became inappropriate and the female partner of a Deacon Convener is now called the Deacon Convener's Lady and the male partner of a Deacon Convener is called the Deacon Convener's Consort.²⁷

The Evening times ran an article concerning the admission of women as Crafts members and at a House meeting in November 1996, the Deacon Convener reminded the Crafts representatives that as early a reply as possible would be welcome regarding the views on Lady membership. Only two responses had been received at the time of the meeting.²⁸

²¹ Minutes of the Trades House of Glasgow, 1st November 1995.

²² Minutes of the Platform of the Trades House of Glasgow, 7th February 1996.

²³ Minutes of the Trades House, 7th February 1996.

²⁴ Minutes of the Trades House, 1st May 1996.

²⁵ Minutes of the Trades House, 25th September 1996.

²⁶ Minutes of the Trades House, 6th November 1996.

²⁷ Hamish Brody, Ex-Deacon Convener, 8th November 2018.

²⁸ Minutes of the Trades House, 6th November 1996.

Female Members ~ 1997

Late Deacon Convener Fyfe reported that the “Chain Gang” ladies were organising a Fashion Show which would be held on 22nd March 1997. Music would be supplied by Bill Johnston and John Mason and supper would be included.²⁹

It was noted at the February 1997 House Meeting that a number of Crafts still objected to admitting lady members.³⁰

The progress on admitting ladies was going very slowly but ladies were still to the front whenever possible and in May 1997, Mrs Agnes Samuel, the Executive Director of Glasgow Opportunities was invited by Deacon Convener David Watson to address the House.³¹

Mrs Agnes Gillespie was invited to give a talk to the House on the Contact Group, and asked for support from the Deacons and Visitor in the work to support grantees.³² Clearly ladies were playing a vital role in supporting the activities of the House, but some Crafts still did not wish to admit female members.

Ladies Association

There appears to have been no further discussion on female membership until February 2000 when the House discussed sanctioning the formation of a Ladies Section. A few ladies had shown concern that the cost of involvement in time and money could be high. The Deacon Convener stressed that there would be no financial or other pressure for ladies to join, or to become a member of the steering group or eventual committee. It was envisaged that the Ladies Section would be independent of the Crafts but work closely with the Trades House Office. It was reported that at that particular time there was no intention to set up a Ladies Section but merely to find out the what demand might be expected and to produce a report.³³

The main reason for the formation of the Association was to enable widows to retain a connection with the Trades House after their husbands had passed away. At this time ladies could not become members of the Trades House.

One of the first things that the Association did was to make a bid to the Lottery Fund which was successful. The successful funding enabled the top floor of the Trades House to be refurbished and this included the creation of a museum in the area that was once used as a School Room. Lottery Funding would not be available to the Trades House as at that time there were no female members.

In February 2001, the Association of the Trades House Ladies sought permission to use the Trades House Arms and Badge on their stationary and this was agreed as appropriate.³⁴

The Ladies Association formed the initial membership of the “*Friends of the Trades House*” in 2017 as there was no longer a need or desire to maintain a separate section as there was approximately 50% of females in the Chain Gangs and it was felt that to have a group which barred male members went against the principle of

²⁹ Minutes of the Trades House, 5th February 1997.

³⁰ Minutes of the Trades House, 5th February 1997.

³¹ Minutes of the Trades House, 7th May 1997.

³² Minutes of the Trades House, 6th May 1998.

³³ Minutes of the Trades House, 2nd February 2000.

³⁴ Minutes of the Trades House, 7th February 2001.

equality, which ladies had fought so hard to achieve their membership of the Incorporations.

Female Members ~ 2000

The discussion concerning a Ladies Association may have created pressure once again to consider the admission of lady members as in May 2000, when Deacon Convener Ian MacConnacher, referred to expressions of renewed interest in the possibility of women becoming Craft Members. He had written to the Deacons, Visitor and Clerks about this reaffirming that the Trades House could take no action as it is a matter for Crafts themselves to resolve.³⁵

Arising from the previous meeting the Deacon Convener Ian MacConnacher reported on the expression of interest in forming a Ladies Section and that he had received dozens of letters from ladies asking that it be set up and that Trades House be in its name. Deacon Alistair Macrae of the Incorporation of Masons felt that the matter was of such importance that it should be an Agenda Item at a House meeting. The Deacon Convener agreed to carry the matter forward to the next meeting.³⁶

Female Members ~ 2001

The discussion concerning lady members was not carried on to the next meeting, in fact they seemed to have been dropped until February 2001 when it was reported in the House Minutes that clarification had been sought from Senior Counsel regarding the admission of women to the fourteen Incorporated Trades in the light of Human Rights legislation. Copies of the advice was made available for the members where it was indicated that the position had not changed, i.e., that no Craft could admit women unless the other thirteen agreed that this was unobjectionable.³⁷

Deacon Convener George Horspool had asked the Clerk to put Admission of Women on the Agenda in order that the issue could be further debated and perhaps resolved. He indicated that a number of Incorporations wished to admit ladies and others did not, although they did not object to others doing so, and sadly some even objected to others admitting female members. It was agreed that the Deacon Convener should chair a working party which would include the Deacons of the Hammermen, Bakers, Maltmen and Masons and that they would report back in February 2002.³⁸

This must have been good news for the Incorporations that wished to enrol female members and clearly Deacon Convener Horspool was in favour of female members.

Female Members ~ 2002

At the next meeting of the House in February 2002, the Deacon Convener reported to the House that the issue of lady members was a prickly one and that they had not reached the stage where they were able to make a report.³⁹

³⁵ Minutes of the Trades House, 3rd May 2000.

³⁶ Minutes of the Trades House, 3rd May 2000.

³⁷ Minutes of the Trades House, 7th February 2001.

³⁸ Minutes of the Trades House, 7th November 2001.

³⁹ Minutes of the Trades House, 6th February 2002.

A Big Stramash

The question of women membership of the Incorporations reached a head in May 2002 when a rather fiery debate took place at the House meeting.

The meeting started off gently with a comment about the inability to recruit women having a detrimental effect on recruitment. In the previous autumn, three Deacons had raised this point with the Deacon Convener and he had accordingly canvassed the Master Courts as to whether:

- a. The Master Court could bind the Craft in such a matter
- b. Whether the Craft had any objection to the other Incorporated Trades admitting women.

Fourteen responses had been received and all of them were positive except the Incorporation of Masons.

It was after the report on the Incorporation of Masons' position that things really heated up.

The Deacon of the Incorporation of Hammermen stated that he felt that the position of the Incorporation of Masons was "*outrageous and totally unacceptable to Craftsmen in the modern world*". He then stated that "*he and his fellow Hammermen representatives would consider it impossible to sit as Representatives in the Trades House unless steps were taken to resolve the situation*".

The Deacon of the Weavers indicated that he felt that "*In this day and age it was unacceptable for one Craft to veto the legitimate aspirations of others to recruit members from the entire population*". [This is a strange argument considering the lone Bonnetmakers saved the wonderful Trades Hall building from being pulled down in the 1880s.] He also believed that refusal to admit female members might be an infringement of the Convention of Human Rights.

The Visitor of the Maltmen indicated that he believed that certain Incorporations such as his own might be able to change their constitutions without the interposition of the Trades House and wondered if that might be a way forward for those prepared to risk the intervention of the House. He also made it clear that the Maltmen were in favour of an all-male membership for themselves they had no objections to other Crafts who wished to admit women.

It was at this point in the meeting that the Hammermen Representatives and the Deacon of the Weavers felt unable to remain longer in the chamber, and took their leave.

The Deacon of the Masons was asked to explain his Crafts' position. The Deacon of the Masons reported that the Master Court had debated the question three times and that their view was that "*their Craft formed part of a traditional body whose components should not be changed on a few Master Court votes. They would be content to await developments.*" The late Collector of the Incorporation of Gardeners "*felt that this was tantamount of being prepared to sit on the side-lines and see an ancient body die.*"

The Late Convener suggested that Parliament could be asked to intervene, and that perhaps a logical way forward would be to petition to admission of House representation of an Incorporation of Ladies.

At the end of the debate and at the suggestion of the Deacon Convener, the House resolved that the Clerk should write to the Incorporation of Masons requesting that the following question should be voted on at their general meeting on or before Deacon's Choosing Day 2002:

*“That this Incorporation does not object to any other Incorporated Trade eligible to send representatives to the Trades House admitting women as members”.*⁴⁰

Clearly there was now a great deal of pressure on the Incorporation of Masons to reconsider their position and allow other Incorporations to recruit women members if they wished.

The Final Resolution

The House meeting on 26th September 2002 has a four line entry which finally resolved the long running issue of female members and the following is an exact extract from the minutes:

*“On the proposition of the Late Deacons and Visitor, and seconded by the Visitor and the whole of the Deacons present, the House unanimously acknowledged the unanimity of the Fourteen Incorporated Trades in each not objecting to any of their number of admitting Women and resolved to approve any changes of Craft Rules necessary to allow such admission.”*⁴¹

It is worth noting that prior to the House officially approved the admission of female members, three Incorporations had female Burgesses, presumably in preparation to their being accepted as members of the Incorporations very quickly after the House resolution was passed.

Conclusion

The following list shows the dates Incorporations admitted their first female members and the year that they elected a female Deacon:

Date of Entry	Incorporation	Entry	Lady Deacon
4 September 2002	Weavers	F.H.	2006
11 September 2002	Wrights	E.D.	2015
11 September 2002	Fleshers	F.H.	2011
23 October 2002	Hammermen	F.H.	
16 December 2003	Coopers	F.H.	2014
13 March 2003	Tailors	Daughter	2015
10 April 2003	Bonnetmakers and Dyers	Daughter	2010
10 October 2003	Gardeners	D. in L.	2017
15 July 2004	Skinners	E.D.	2012
21 February 2005	Bakers	Daughter	2007
18 May 2005	Cordiners	E.D.	2013
17 January 2006	Barbers	Daughter	2006
9 June 2009	Masons	Daughter	
	Maltmen		

The Incorporation of Maltmen in 2018 had agreed to enrol female members but at the time of writing they had not completed the process of acceptance.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Trades House, 1st May 2002.

⁴¹ Minutes of the Trades House, 26th September 2002.

The very slow progress over the centuries of being able to enrol female members into the Incorporations and the struggle to have them accepted as members has now been forgotten by many in the Trades House. Nowadays many of the Chain Gangs [i.e. the Deacons and Visitor of the current year], are female Deacons who do a wonderful job in leading and enthusing their Incorporations. It is not uncommon for Chain Gangs to consist of men and women in equal proportions. The female members have brought great benefits to the Trades House, not just in making it an equal opportunities organisation, but also in bringing a female perception to the discussions and decisions that the House makes.

In 2018, the Trades House had only elected one female Deacon Convener and that was ex Deacon Convener Ruth Maltman. Ex Deacon Convener Ruth Maltman has been the only female to offer to take on the role of Deacon Convener and the House is actively encouraging more ladies to become the third citizen of Glasgow and represent the Trades House.