

Trades House of Glasgow
EX-DEACON CONVENER
SIT THOMAS MASON



By

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Ex-Deacon-Convener Sir Thomas Mason, D.L

The early years

Thomas Mason was born on 16th October 1844 at Hall Craig Street, Airdrie and was baptised on the 17th of November 1844 by the Rev. M. McGavin at Wellwynd Associated Congregation, Airdrie. At the time of his birth Thomas's father, John Mason (1812 to 1868), was a mason and his mother was called Marion Hamilton¹ (abt. 1812 to 1886). John and Marion were married in December 1839.

The 1851 census indicates that John Mason was about 38 years-of-age and he was employed as a mason and he was residing with his wife Marien Mason aged 38 years and the following children: Thomas Mason, 8-year-old son and James B Mason under one year (born 1851) and Jane Hamilton, 64-year-old widow, [possibly Marion Mason's mother]. All staying at Hall Craig Street, Airdrie².

Thomas was educated at Anderson's Academy in Glasgow.

By the 1861 census the family had moved apart with Thomas Mason now an apprentice and living as a lodger at 118 George Street, Paisley where he was serving an apprenticeship as a stone mason. He may have been working under Robert Lindsay aged 20 years who was residing at the same address and was a stone mason journeyman. Both were staying in the home of John and Janet Hislop and John was listed as an Engine keeper at a Coal Pit³. Thomas's parents were now living at 40 Eglinton Street, Tradeston, Glasgow and his 48-year-old father was still listed as a mason living with his 48-year-old wife, Marion⁴. Little would John and Marion know the connection that their son would have with the Feuer's of Tradeston when in a number of years' time he would become a Deacon of the Incorporation of Masons of Glasgow and then Deacon Convener of the Trades House of Glasgow.

The first marriage of Thomas Mason took place on 21st of June 1869 at the Blue Tower, Cumnock and was conducted under the form of the Congregational Church by Thomas Brisbane, Minister. Thomas was residing at Crofordston Cottage, Coylton and his spouse, Jane Paton (abt. 1846 to 1875) who was at that time a Pawnbrokers' Assistant, was residing at the Blue Tower, Cumnock.⁵

Thomas was educated at Anderson's Academy in Glasgow⁶, he became a sub-contractor while still a teenager and spent 13 years in railway construction, latterly as manager⁷. By the time of the census in 1871, Thomas was employing 20 masons and 12 labourers and was recorded as a Mason & Builder Foreman. He now had a wife, Jane aged abt. 25-years-of-age, and two children: 1 year-old Jane and 3 months-old Marion. Also staying with Thomas and their family was his 58-year-old widowed mother, Marion and his 13-year-old sister-in-law Margaret Paton. Their home address was Hill, Ochiltree, Ayrshire.⁸

¹ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1844 Thomas Mason (Other Church Registers Baptisms CH3/992/12 6 Airdrie – Wellwynd Associate) Page 6 of 22.

² www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1851 Thomas Mason (Census 651/49 1) Page 1 of 17.

³ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1861 Thomas Mason (Census 573/1 22/ 10).

⁴ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1861 John Mason (Census 644/9 61/ 21).

⁵ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1869 Thomas Mason (Statutory Register Marriages 610/24).

⁶ <https://www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/name/?nid=MasonT>.

⁷ <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/eyrwho/eyrwho1247.htm>.

⁸ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1871 John Mason (Census 609/5 8) Page 8 of 9.

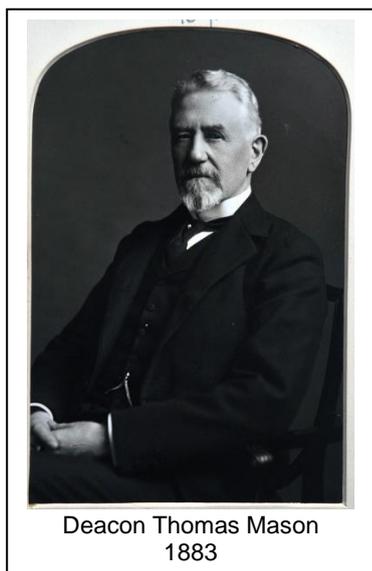
1875 was a tragic year for Thomas as his 30-year-old wife Jane died at 11pm on the 13th of November 1875 at their home in 16 Devon Street, Glasgow. The cause of death was chronic [cardites] bronchitis⁹.

He spent five years in charge of Brand's tramway contracts which included the first let by Glasgow Corporation in 1870. In 1875 he left Brand to manage his first major contract for the No.1 dock at Stobcross Docks (Queen's docks) in Glasgow. In 1876 having gained experience and some financial security he joined the firm of John Morrison (1836-1919) & Co., as a junior partner. In 1879 the company name was changed to that of Morrison & Mason and ten years later it became a public limited company with both partners holding the majority shareholding. In the 1880's the company took on railway work and were responsible for building the Cathcart Circle (1884-86), the Paisley Canal branch line of the Glasgow and South Western Railway and the Citadel Station at Carlisle.

They also branched out into waterworks building the Craigmaddie Reservoir and tunnels for Glasgow Waterworks and the Thirlmere Reservoir for Manchester Corporation, working alongside fellow shareholder William Arrol (1839–1913) on Thirlmere's 26 mile stretch of aqueducts. They also successfully tendered for public buildings contracts such as Clyde Navigation Trust (1883-86) and Glasgow City Chambers (1883-88). In the 1890's they began to build bridges such as the Great Western Bridge (1890), the Glasgow Bridge (1895) and the Rutherglen Bridge (1896). Morrison & Mason Ltd grew to become one of the most successful contracting businesses in Scotland.¹⁰

Trades House Involvement

In 1876, Thomas entered a partnership with fellow mason John Morrison, forming Morrison & Mason, which became a major civil engineering and building firm. The rapid execution of two large contracts for the Clyde Trustees made the firm's reputation.¹¹



Thomas joined the Incorporation of Masons in Glasgow on the 20th of September 1877 as a Far Hand member. It is therefore clear that Thomas's father had not joined the Incorporation before him. Sir Thomas Mason's sons Thomas Mason junior, who was his eldest son and his younger son Robert Wyle Mason both became members of the Incorporation of Masons on the 5th of February 1902¹². Thomas Mason became the Collector of the Incorporation of Masons in 1881 and in September 1883 he was appointed to become Deacon, the highest position in his Incorporation. At the time he became Deacon, Thomas was residing at 21 Clyde Place, Glasgow.¹³

As the new Deacon of the Incorporation of Masons, Thomas was elected to serve on the Committee on Pensioners and to be a Dean of Guild Councillor of the Craft Rank.¹⁴ On 9th October 1884, Thomas was elected to be a member of the following committees: Committee on Public Business and Committee on Pensioners of the House and to serve as Dean of Guild Councillor of the Craft Rank.¹⁵ In December 1884, Thomas was elected to the Committee on the Action of

⁹ www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, 1875 Jane Mason (Statutory Registers Deaths 644/12 983).

¹⁰ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=33048&p=0>.

¹¹ <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/eyrwho/eyrwho1247.htm>.

¹² Trades House Archives.

¹³ <https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBOR%2FGLASGOWTRADESHOUSE%2FMASONS-22&parentid=SCOT%2FBURGESS%2F1035162>

¹⁴ Trades House Minutes, 11th October 1883.

¹⁵ Trades House Minutes, 9th October 1884.

Division and Sale of the Trades Hall.¹⁶ This was the Committee that was trying to manage the process of selling the Trades Hall or to have it pulled down so as to enable a new Trades Hall to be constructed. 1885 was to see Thomas re-elected onto the Committee on Public Business and to become a member of the Committee on Bye-Laws and the Committee on Education.¹⁷

The 13th of October 1886 must have been a great day for Thomas Mason as that is the date that he was proposed to become Collector of the House by Mr W. R. Copland and this motion was seconded by Deacon Merry. Thomas was not the sole contender for this high office as two other people were proposed and seconded for the position of Collector. In the end Thomas won the election and Mr. William R. Copland and Mr. Alexander Eadie became his Cautioners to the extent of £ 500 for the faithful discharge of his duties as Collector of the Trades' House.¹⁸ As Collector, Thomas was elected to sit on the following Committees of the Trades House: Committee on Hall Buildings, Delegates on Gorbals Lands, Committee on Kelvinbank Lands, Committee on Public Business, Committee on Finance, Committee on Pensioners, Committee on Bye-Laws and Committee on Education.¹⁹ Thomas would serve on these committees until he ceased to be the Late Deacon Convener.

In the 1800s, the Deacon Convener and the Collector of the Trades House normally served for 2 years and so on the, 12th of October 1887, Thomas was once again elected to the position of Collector of the House on the motion of the Deacon Convener.²⁰

As if Thomas did not have enough to do with the numerous committees that he was sitting on, in November 1887, he was nominated to sit on the Glasgow City Educational Endowments Board by late Convener MacLean and seconded by Mr. James Wilson. He was unanimously elected in the place of Mr. Hugh Kennedy who had resigned his appointment as a Governor on the Board.²¹

As Collector, Thomas Mason duly served his two years, and his accounts were approved on both occasions that they came before the House. As Late Collector, Thomas still retained his position on the committees that he had been elected to, this would be a great benefit to him when he became Deacon Convener as he would have a sound understanding of their running and members. On the 9th of October 1889, Thomas was elected to the position of Deacon Convener on the motion of Deacon Convener Tullis and the motion was unanimously approved.²²

As Deacon Convener, Thomas took on a few more committees and he would now serve on the following Boards outwith the Trades House: Patron of Hutchesons' Hospital, Director of Buchanan Institution, Manager of the Royal Infirmary, Director for the Asylum for the Blind, Director of Home for the Relief of Incurables and Director under McAlpine's Trust. He would also continue to serve on the eight House Committees as he had been since becoming Collector.²³ Five months later, Thomas was elected to The Logan and Johnston School of Domestic Economy.²⁴ At the October meeting of the Trades House in 1890, on the motion of late Deacon Convener Tullis, Thomas was again elected to the

¹⁶ Committee on the Action of Division and Sale, 5th day of December 1884.

¹⁷ Trades House Minutes, 15th day of October 1885.

¹⁸ Trades House Minutes, 13th day of October 1886.

¹⁹ Trades House Minutes, 14th day of October 1886.

²⁰ Trades House Minutes, 12th day of October 1887.

²¹ Trades House Minutes, 8th day of November 1887.

²² Trades House Minutes, 9th day of October 1889.

²³ Trades House Minutes, 10th day of October 1889.

²⁴ Trades House Minutes, 12th March 1890.

position of Deacon Convener for his second year.²⁵ He would retain his external positions on boards as he had the previous year with the exception of the Directorship of the Buchanan Institute which had now been terminated and instead he became a Governor of Glasgow City Educational Endowments Board which had replaced many of the functions of the Buchanan Institute.²⁶

In October 1891, Thomas Mason became the Late Deacon Convener as his two years in post ended. He no longer sat on the external bodies as he had done as Deacon Convener, but he did continue on all the House Committees as before.²⁷ He retained his position on the committees until he left the House in October 1893 after his tenure as Late Deacon Convener ended.²⁸

Sir Thomas was called back to assist the House when they were looking into the condition of the Buchanan Monument in Edinburgh. The monument had fallen into disrepair and he assisted in determining the cost of its repair.

In September 1918, the Deacon-Convener nominated Sir Thomas Mason, D.L., ex Deacon Convener of the Trades, to be Manager of the Drapers' Fund from Martinmas, 1918, to Martinmas, 1919, and he intimated that a letter had been received from Sir Thomas stating that he would be much pleased to accept office.²⁹ Being elected to the position of Manager of the Draper's Fund is a singular honour which can only be given by the Deacon Convener of the day.

The 1881 census clearly shows how far Thomas and John Morrison had expanded as Thomas was listed as being a contractor with 356 men in his employment. Thomas and his wife Jane were residing at Dumbreck Priory, Dumbreck along with their 8 months old daughter Isabella.³⁰ Thomas's other children by his first marriage were staying with Thomas's 68-year-old mother, Marion Mason nee Hamilton at 55 Albert Road, Maybank, Gourock. The children with Thomas's mother were Jane Mason aged-11-years, Marion Mason aged 9 years, John Mason aged-8-years³¹ and Thomas Mason aged-5-years.³²

In 1891 was elected to serve on Glasgow Town Council. He was the first to represent both the Trades' House (1889 to 1900) and Merchants' House (1907 to 1908). He became chairman of the Clyde Navigation Trust in 1908 and chairman of the Glasgow Liberal Club in 1909.³³ He was also chairman of Scottish Union Insurance, the Scottish Tube Company and Sir William Arrol & Co. Sir Thomas Mason was knighted in 1909.

Windows of Mason's car were smashed by suffragette Annie Greig during the 1912 Glasgow visit of Winston Churchill. ³⁴ In July 1914, Mason hosted the King's review of 'the Fleet of the Future ... the mighty super-Dreadnought'.³⁵

That same year he was knighted for his commitment to public service. He was the owner of a small stable of racehorses but also found time for charitable work. He was president of the Incorporated Glasgow Old Men's Friend Society and Old Women's Home to which he

²⁵ Trades House Minutes, 8th day of October 1890.

²⁶ Trades House Minutes, 9th day of October 1890.

²⁷ Trades House Minutes, 15th day of October 1891.

²⁸ Trades House Minutes, 13th day of October 1892.

²⁹ Trades House Minutes, 26th Day of September 1918.

³⁰ www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk. 1881 Thomas Mason (Census 614/1 44/33) Page 33 of 46).

³¹ www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk. 1881 Jane Mason (Census 567/2 3/20) Page 20 of 35).

³² www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk. 1881 Jane Mason (Census 567/2 3/20) Page 21 of 35).

³³ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=33048&p=0>.

³⁴ The Times, 10 February 1912, and 24 February 1912.

³⁵ The Times, 9 July 1914.

left a bequest of £500.³⁶ Sir Thomas Mason took up the position of Chairman of the General Board of Commissioners in Lunacy for Scotland on the 18th of November 1909, on the retirement of the Honourable George Hepburne Scott, Master of Polwarth.³⁷

In 1924, the King granted Thomas Mason His Royal Majesty's licence and authority to wear the insignia of the sixth class of the Order of the Striped Tiger, which Decoration has been conferred upon him by the President of the Republic of China, in recognition of valuable services rendered by him as Engineer of the Kiangnan Dock and Engineering Works.

Sir Thomas Mason died aged 79 at Craigie Hall, 6 Rowan Road, Dumbreck on 26th April 1924.

Trades House Minutes, 29th Day of May 1924



“Before proceeding to the business of the meeting, the Deacon-Convener referred to the recent death of Ex-Deacon-Convener Sir Thomas Mason, D.L. He said: - Since we last met we have to mourn the death of one who for the past forty years took a foremost place in the public life of Glasgow, Ex-Deacon-Convener Sir Thomas Mason.

Born at Airdrie eighty years ago, he came at an early age to Glasgow, and there his youthful courage and initiative, as well as his technical and commercial ability, soon placed him in the front rank in his trade.

In 1876, along with Mr. John Morrison, he founded the firm of Morrison & Mason, which almost from the beginning was entrusted with contracts for undertakings of the greatest magnitude.

The work of Ex-Deacon-Convener Mason and his firm is too well known to require enumeration of their many undertakings. The varied character of their

achievements in Glasgow alone, showed the magnitude and broad scope of their enterprise.

His own and his partner's connection with the Trades House and Incorporations began more than half a century ago. Both joined the Incorporation of Masons and became Deacon of that Craft within two years of each other. Entering the House in 1883, Mr. Mason was elected Collector in 1886, and Deacon-Convener in 1889. During his seven years' service on the Platform, he was instrumental in attaining the reconstruction of the Hall Buildings and in introducing several much-needed reforms in House affairs.

It was evident to his friends that a man of his energies and resource was not likely to confine his public work to a short experience in the House and Incorporations.

³⁶ The London Gazette, Published: Friday 30th JULY, 1909.

³⁷ Edinburgh Gazette, Tuesday, 23 November 1909.

His later record of service to the community is probably unique. He was the first Deacon-Convener of the Trades who ever became, in after years, Lord Dean of Guild and Head of the Merchant Rank.

But it is perhaps in connection with Clyde Trust affairs that Sir Thomas will be best remembered. Elected to the Board in 1891, he became Chairman in 1908 and remained so until his retiral in 1919.

In the work of philanthropic institutions, other than the Guilds, his inclinations chiefly lay towards the Glasgow Old Man's Friend Society and Old Women's Home, where for the past twenty-five years he was a constant worker for the happiness and comfort of deserving old people of both sexes.

I move that we record our high appreciation of the services of this distinguished Guild Brother to the Community, the House, and the Crafts, and our deep sense of the loss sustained through his death, and that an excerpt of our minute be sent to Lady Mason, respectfully conveying the deep sympathy of the members of the House with her and her family in their sad bereavement.

The motion was unanimously agreed to.”³⁸

The House purchased a wreath for the funeral of Sir Thomas Mason.

Two days after the death of Sir Thomas Mason, his obituary appeared in the Scotsman newspaper. The full text of the obituary can be seen below:

**“THE LATE SIR THOMAS MASON
FORMER CHAIRMAN OF CLYDE TRUST**

A prominent figure in the public life of Glasgow has passed away in the person of Sir Thomas Mason, whose death took place on Saturday at his residence, Craigie Hall, Bellahouston.

Sir Thomas Mason, who was in his 80th year, had been in feeble health for a considerable time, but he took a keen interest in his business concerns till the end, and only three weeks ago, against medical advice, presided at a company meeting.

Sir Thomas Mason, although born in Airdrie, lived nearly all his life in Glasgow. He was educated at Anderson's Academy, Carlton Place, and when in his seventeenth year was apprenticed to the trade of a mason, which had been that of his father. His first sub-contract dated from twelve months later. Before he was out of his teens he had drifted into railway construction, and in this employment, latterly as a manager, he remained for thirteen years. In 1876 he entered into partnership with Mr John Morrison, a prominent builder, and the firm of Messrs Morrison & Mason was thus established. In the first year of their existence, they were entrusted with two large contracts by the Clyde Trust, and before these were completed they had received other important orders from both sides of the Borders.

Among the earlier works completed by the firm were Carlisle Station, the Paisley Canal Line of the Glasgow and South Western Railway, the Glasgow Municipal Buildings, the Clyde Trust Buildings in Robertson Street, the new Station at Paisley, the Cathcart District Railway, and the new mills for Messrs J & P Coats at the west end of Paisley. They also constructed the tunnels and reservoir at Craigmaddie for the Glasgow Corporation Water

³⁸ Trades House Minutes, 29th of May 1924.

Department, were responsible for a large amount of work in connection with the water scheme for Manchester, constructed branch railway lines in Ayrshire, and among other important buildings erected the Coats' Memorial Church in Paisley.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Business activities, however, did not occupy nearly all Sir Thomas Mason's attention, and he will be remembered best in Glasgow for his long and honourable record of public service. With the exception of the occupancy of the civic chair, an honour which might easily have been his had he cared, he occupied most of the coveted public offices in the city. In 1889, his work in connection with the Trades House was recognised by his election as Deacon Convener, a position which carries with it a seat in the Town Council. Seven years later he again entered the Council on his election as Dean of Guild, and he was the first to serve both as the representative of the Trade's House and the Merchant's House. In 1891 he became a member of the Clyde Navigation Trust, and here found his widest scope for public service. On the committees of that body his practical knowledge was of the utmost usefulness, and it came as no surprise when, in 1908, he was unanimously elected to the chairmanship in succession to the late Sir Nathaniel Dunlop. The extension and better equipment of the harbour were matters in which he took the deepest concern, and it was with regret that he had to relinquish the chairmanship, owing to advancing years, before the great scheme for tidal basins and dry dock accommodation at Shieldhall and Renfrew could be entered upon. Sir Thomas Mason took a keen interest in many charitable institutions, and counted it as one of his chief privileges to be president of the Old Men and Women's Home.

In politics he also played his part, and he was chairman of the Glasgow Liberal Club when the new premises were opened in 1909, shortly before he received his knighthood. More than once he was approached with a view to standing of Parliament, but all these invitations he resolutely declined. In the commercial life of the city, he was for a long period an outstanding figure, and was chairman of several important companies. For many years he was actively associated with Ibrox United Free Church, and for a considerable time sang in the choir. Of a genial and kindly disposition, he was conspicuous in his many spheres of activity by his judgement, energy and untiring perseverance, and withal a splendid type of the public-spirited citizen."³⁹

³⁹ The Scotsman 28 April 1924 ~ Sir Thomas Mason ~ Obituary