

# The Records of the Trades House

1605-1678

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## Review

By

An Ex-Deacon

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GLASGOW has not always been the second city in the British Home Empire. If one required to be convinced on this point a perusal of the newly-issued volume of the "Records of the Trades House, 1605-1678," will supply the proof. In the great cities of the present age every man is in a large measure a law unto himself as regards the conduct of his business and his private behaviour, but in earlier times, when communities were smaller there was not so much of either licence or liberty. Parliamentary enactments, doubtless, regulated affairs general in a somewhat loose way, but communal law held its subjects in a very much firmer grip. The merchant and the craftsman were compelled to belong, each to his own side of the guildry, and trade in the burghs was carefully regulated and controlled, first for the glory of God and next for the well-being of the burghers, while men themselves were looked after in such a way as necessitated a circumspect behaviour, failing which they fell under the censure of their respective chiefs.

Before the Glasgow Guildry came into existence the trades worked under either a charter or a "seal of cause" and were quite independent of each other. Some of these charters or seals bear date as early as 1516, but it cannot be determined when, doubtless urged by a desire for mutual protection, the trades banded themselves together into what has since become

the "Trades House," an institution, which, during three centuries, has been closely connected with everything of the best in the social and civic life of Glasgow, and which, passing from being the supreme court of the craftsmen, has developed into one of the most powerful of the many beneficent agencies of our time. That the banding together was before 1605 is certain, for on the first page of the earliest minute book of the "House" reference is made to the Crafts Hospital, which was maintained by the associated crafts for the benefit of their very necessitous members, and that the convenery was even then in a certain sense a judicial tribunal is evidenced by requests made to the magistrates in March and April of the same year to carry two of its decrees into effect.

The chairman of the convenery, itself composed then as now of representative delegates from the incorporated crafts, was the deacon convener. He was not chosen by these delegates, but selected by the magistrates from a list of three names sent them from the "House," a condition of affairs which obtained till 1833, after which time the convener was chosen by the "House" itself. The convener's council indicates the piety of the time, for its members were required to be wise and godly men, whose business it was to advise in all things pertaining to the glory of God and the weal of the town. All through the "Records" there are interesting details of the meetings and procedure of the council. It had no local habitation and was convened in various places—the Convener's House, the Council House, the Blackfriars' Kirk, the College Kirk, aye, even in the Tolbooth. The crafts held meetings in like places, but in August, 1647, they were interdicted from meeting again in any kirk and subjected to pains and penalties for

disobedience. In 1625 the office of collector was tacked to the convenership, not that the convener had necessarily to do the work, but, if he employed any one to do it for him it was at his own charge, and he was held responsible, and the "Records" show several instances of payments to account.

It is probable that, were the functions and powers of the "House" to-day as they were in olden times, the gentlemen of the law would find some of their occupation gone. The "Records" prove that human nature has ever been the same, and that self-protection and self-interest are dominant factors in our lives. Trade differences are often the cause of prolonged and costly litigation, as our city and river unfortunately know too well, but in the earlier days of which the book we write of is a record, these were settled in a more expeditious and less expensive manner. Masons quarrel with wrights about the slating of a house as an infringement of their privileges—skinners complain of hammermen pointing leather "ribbons"—saddlers object to tailors sewing saddle cloths—cordiners find fault with the quality of the leather supplied by the skinners and tanners. These and many such like causes were brought before the "House" and settled by it, and it is a tribute to its wisdom and its impartiality that in every case the parties agreed to the reference and to be bound by the decision. Not only did the "House" adjudicate on "differences," but it took measures to protect the trades from unauthorised competition—generally that of tradesmen from other burghs. In 1605 a maltman from Shettleston was found to be interfering with the freemen's occupation by making malt in the burgh. He was bound under a surety to refrain from this and to acknowledge the visitor

of the craft. A tailor who had set up a shop was complained of. He pleaded that he had but lately come to the town, and that he was ignorant of the conditions. In 1652 there were so many of the Gorbals weavers trading in the burgh that the freemen of the craft asserted they were like to be beggared by them. A working agreement was arranged, and on account of payments being made to the hospital, certain privileges were from time to time accorded to the outsiders.

The punishments inflicted by the "House" upon delinquents afford a curious insight into the paternal nature of its rule. In 1618 James Leishman for having abused his deacon was ordained to get on his knees at the Cross and there crave pardon from God and the deacon. In 1619 a tailor similarly offended, and had a like punishment under pain of "no freedom" till he was purged from his offence. Many such incidents are minuted, but the most singular punishment is that when the offenders are ordered to betake them to the Tolbooth, enter themselves as prisoners and remain there until either their fines be paid or the deacon convener thinks fit to release them. It is like a bad boy at school being "kept in" or made to stand in a corner. Such punishments nowadays would be more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

A considerable portion of the "Records" refers to the hospital which was founded by Mr. or Sir Ronald Blackadder, sub-dean of Glasgow. In 1607 the crafts were requested to make contributions towards furthering its completion, and the honour of the first response belongs to the maltmen. In the early days of its existence the hospital had six hospitallers. These did not always behave as they ought, and some of them were "putten oot" because they were found out of

bounds and debauching themselves in the town. They were privileged to meet all funerals at the "Wynd Heid" as a means to eking out their livelihood. They were veritable blue gowns, and there are many entries in the Accounts anent the purchase of their clothing. One of the most interesting figures among the "six poor men" is Simon Baird, the original officer to the "House." It looks as if Simon did not have any salary from the "House" itself, but undoubtedly he was clothed by it while in office, for there are frequent disbursements on his account for "pairs of schone" and "stands of cloathes." He fell on evil days, and entered the hospital in 1623. While there he looked after the arms, and at divers times was given money to "buy oyle to dress ye muskettes." The last entry regarding him reads: "For ane winding scheit to Simon Baird xxxij.s." The muskets and other arms were handed in by the deacons annually, and were renewed and added to from time to time. In 1652, although they were conveniently hidden and put away, they were stolen by the English, against whom there was such an intense feeling that sympathisers with them jeopardized their "freedom" privileges. The crafts were called upon by the convener to replace the stolen arms by new ones. It might be a question as to the "why and wherefore" of these weapons, but when it is known that the policing of the town was undertaken by the burgesses, and that every incorporated craftsman required to be a Freeman Burgess, the answer is found. There is no mention of any pensioners outside the hospital till 1638, when the collector is instructed to pay William Houstoun, tailor, 20 marks annually during his lifetime. In 1655 those who in any way received assistance forfeited their vote, a custom which continues till the present day.

That feudalism was a social condition is evidenced by the request of the Lord of Glasgow requiring the town to send burgesses to attend on him at the Parliament in Edinburgh in 1609. Six merchants and six craftsmen were delegated, and in 1612 and 1615 there were payments made to the men who rode to Ayr and to the Capital with the Archbishop.

The crafts were intensely jealous for the credit, the honour, and the liberties of their town, resented any encroachment on its rights and privileges, and never shirked their share of its defence. In March, 1651, they bore a share of the advance of £500 sterling to the King, and several instances are recorded of their voluntary payments towards burghal expenses. In 1609 the Laird of Blythswood and his associates, out of "mere malice of heart," conceived ill against the town, and the Trades in common with the burghers entered action against him. The money for the prosecution of the suit was not immediately forthcoming, and the bailie and convener gave their personal bond for a loan, which the crafts honourably redeemed, and in 1611, in defence of the same liberties, they charged themselves with a share of the costs in a plea against Dumbarton. The national motto, "*Nemo me impune lacessit*," had deep root in the hearts of the old burghers, and doubtless, we of to-day reap the benefit of their stoutness of heart. The democratic spirit has always been strong amongst our citizens, let their politics be what they may, and the power which would seek to trench on our liberties would find a compact phalanx of defence in front of it. That democratic spirit made itself felt in 1641 when a petition was presented to the Crown demanding that the burghers themselves should elect their provost and magistrates, and that these positions should not, as

hitherto, be filled by the nominees of the bishop or any other.

Scotland has ever been in the forefront in the matter of education, and the "Records" show that the Trades House upheld the national policy. The parish schools served their purpose in an excellent manner, and the proportion of illiterates in our country was very much less than in England. With a view to the education of very poor children, and still having the glory of God before them, the crafts, in September, 1649, founded the Trades School. Two months later John Paterson became its first master. The school was carefully looked after, and visitors were regularly appointed. For more than two centuries it served its purpose admirably, and the older generation of our citizens will readily remember when its classes met in the building in Glassford Street. Higher education, too, had the support of the "House," and a bursar was always maintained at the college. John Hamilton, 1618, seems to have been the first presentee. In 1646 there is a payment for a silver spoon to the then bursar. Nowadays to be presented with a spoon has a somewhat different significance. In our own time the "Buchanan Bequest" enables the "House" to do an inestimable amount of good in the way of higher education, and it speaks well for the discrimination of the Education Committee that the results of its liberality are in the highest degree satisfactory.

The investment of the funds of the "House" has always been a matter of primary importance. In 1650 it made the bargain, which of all others contributed most to its usefulness as a great beneficent institution. A portion of the lands of the Gorbals was for sale, and our long-headed forbears evidently foresaw great possi-



bilities for the future. In February the "House" and the crafts agreed to purchase a fourth part of these lands. So important was this matter considered, that in order to meet its own share of 8,000 marks, the "House" called up its bonds. In August of the same year the payment was completed, and feus began to be taken up, and it is interesting to trace through the accounts, which so frequently appear in the "Records," the gradual rise in the return from the investment. In these days when taxation of unearned increment is a factor in our Imperial politics, it may be well not to pry too deeply into the books of the factor for the Gorbals land; suffice it to say that the "House" and the trades interested have an annual return which greatly exceeds thrice the amount of the original purchase money.

The accounts of the "House" shed more light on the manners and customs of their time than, probably, any other portions of the book. In 1615 the convener gifted £100 as a thankoffering to God for the preservation of his own and his wife's life. The money was used to purchase a velvet mort-cloth. The hire of this and other mort-cloths was a source of considerable revenue. These cloths were in demand by all sorts and conditions—the humble burgher, the merchant, knights and their ladies. In 1655 two cloths were sold by roup, the maltmen being the purchasers, but the "House" suffered by the sale, for in 1667 it is minuted that it is like to come to utter ruin mainly by the loss of the "benefit of the mortcloathes qlk it formerlie had."

Drink money is a frequent cause of expenditure. It figures in connection with quite a variety of circumstances and occasions. A curious entry appears in 1610, when 13/4d.—Scots, of course—was paid to James:

Mayn, a joiner, for "glew and his morning drink." One wonders how much, or rather how little James expended for the "glew." In 1614-15, Convener Patrick Maxwell must have been on the teetotal side, for there is no evidence of drink money in his discharge, but Convener Fisher, 1615-16, was more in sympathy with the thirstiness of humanity.

Mr. Lumsden's earliest predecessor was Alexander Grahame, notary, and the legal phraseology of the minute book serves to show that the clerks have all belonged to the profession of the law. In 1625, when Mr. Hutcheson became town clerk, he resigned from his post in the Trades House, and Mr. Braidwood was appointed to his place. The fees were not very great, but as the years went by they gradually became bigger, keeping pace with the increasing wealth of the convenery itself.

The aim of the "House" was always to get the best of everything. No wonder the old work stood the test of time. A seven years' apprenticeship and two more years for "meat" was exacted from every lad who wanted to become a craftsman. They and their masters were strictly supervised, and to be a journeyman was possible only after a demonstration of ability. Work was strenuous, and early hours the rule; even the "House" itself was often convened for 7 a.m. Attendance at the kirk was required from all, and, so that a due observance of this ordinance might be maintained, the barbers were forbidden to "poll heids" on the Lord's day, because this kept the folk from the kirk and tended to drinking and debauching to the offence and dishonour of God, and the provoking of His wrath. Other times other manners.

These and many other features form interesting

reading. One of the least desirable items of the "Records" is the frequency of the minuting of the indenturing of apprentices. This, but for the fact that the book is exactly what it professes to be—a transcript of the earliest minutes might—so far as the ordinary reader is concerned, have been omitted. All the same, it is interesting to know that an useful purpose has been served. Several families have found a strating point for their genealogical tree from one or other of the names recorded, and others have been able to trace theirs back to them. The object of the Grand Antiquity Society has therefore been unwittingly anticipated.

A perusal of the "Records" will amply repay for the time spent. Not only the "House" and the crafts, but the citizens generally, owe a debt of gratitude to the Editor for his labours. What these must have been, a glance at reproductions of the pages of the original minute book will serve to show. The preface is modest, and the directions to readers excellent.

Altogether the work is a notable production, and serves to fill a vacant niche in the literature pertaining to the social and the industrial life of the great city, which, in after years, was to owe so much of its importance to its waterway, to which there is but a single direct reference in the whole book.

DAVID LAMB.

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