

H I S T O R Y

of

The Society of Deacons & Free Preseses of Glasgow.

The Society was founded in the year 1780. Glasgow had then become a prosperous city of some 43,000 inhabitants. The very nature of the city's prosperity arising as it did from trades which had their ups and downs, had lent itself to the formation of many worthy schemes for relief of distress among the people. In the Eighteenth Century, the Trades House with the fourteen Incorporations, the Merchant House, Hutcheson's Trust, the Clan Societies and many other similar bodies all stood for benevolence as distinct from charity and a great deal of work was being done by them. It was out of the multiplicity of these that the Society of Deacons and Free Preseses arose, but the origin could not be better explained than in the language of the preamble of the original Articles and Regulations which reads:-

"Among the numerous Associations in the City for charitable purposes, none hitherto formed, answers the end of establishing such a connection between them as that schemes might thereby be derived for the benefit of the whole and advantage also accrue to the public; men also had devoted great part of their time and attention in raising and managing funds for the support of the poor seemed to be no better provided for when their own circumstances fail and when in sickness and old age than others who had not contributed so much to the public benefit.

These considerations induced a number of Deacons and Free Preseses within the City to erect themselves into a Society and begin the contributions and raising of a fund which in process of time through the blessing of God might prove to be means of relief and support to such of their brethren as now or hereafter may think proper to join them in this laudable scheme or of their widows when in poor circumstances so as they may decently be supported while in sickness and distress, wherefore they did and do hereby erect themselves into a Society for the foresaid purposes to be called in all time coming the Society of Deacons & Free Preseses held within the City and Burgh of Glasgow".

And these articles provided that membership be confined to "any person who has been a Deacon of one of the Incorporations of this City or a Preses of some Charitable Society and is a Burgess and Guild Brother of the City of Glasgow of a good moral character".

Some of the early records of the Society have been lost but while the Minute Books now available only go back to 1844 the cash books/

books still exist from the beginning and from these a fair history of the early days can be obtained. The entry money was originally 10/6d in addition to which 1/- was payable yearly but life membership could be obtained for £1.1.6.; there were 169 members admitted in the first year. The first payment of relief was made in 1789 and over the years the payments of relief increased and likewise the number of members.

In the Minute Books in these earlier days there was recorded against the name of each applicant for membership the name of the Incorporation or Society of which he had been a Deacon or Preses. We find included amongst the members of the Society, Lord Provosts, Magistrates, Deans of Guild, Deacon Conveners, many Deacons of Incorporations, Presidents of such Societies as the Grand Antiquity Society and the Anderston Weavers Society; but that the strict terms of the original constitution were being more and more departed is seen by the frequent appearance of the names of other Societies and bodies not essentially benevolent. For some years up to 1857 there were a number of Deacons of Incorporations admitted but the institution in that year of the Association of Deacons of the Fourteen Incorporated Trades operated against the same accession of new members from the Incorporations, it was accordingly not surprising to find that in 1876 the rules of the Society were altered to provide for applicants being admitted who "were not and had not been Deacons or Preseses but were desirous of joining the Society from motives of philanthropy" and from that date the rule has remained in this form; although membership is not in so many words restricted to the male sex it has been the practice so to interpret it.

After the Society had been in existence for 100 years the funds amounted to £1668 and 30 pensioners were receiving 10/6d a quarter; payments towards funeral expenses were made in these times and coal money was also provided. The year 1903 saw the funds reach a total of £5000 and this figure was doubled by 1927 and/

and in 1955 it stood at £19,508. The number of pensioners has varied throughout the years. In the past twenty years a sum of £5498 was distributed.

The formation of the Master Court has varied little in the history of the Society. In the Rules the two principal Office Bearers are referred to always as "Preses" and "Treasurer" but since 1876 all the records refer to them as "Deacon" and "Collector". The Rules provide "for the candidate standing second in votes for the office of Preses" being a Director and while in practice this "office of Second-in-Votes" has now no further significance nor does it carry any prerogative, it is interesting to find that in August 1879 when the Preses elected at the Annual General Meeting in May of that year resigned, the Second-in-Votes was elected a Preses.

The original Rules of the Society provided that there should be "a box or charter chest wherein to deposit their bonds, bills and valuable papers"; the box is still a cherished possession and there is now in it a collection of records and articles of no little historical interest which have been added from time to time to mark the passing of the years.

The centenary of the Society in 1880 was marked by the acquisition of what was described as a "handsome medal and chain of office" for the Deacon. This medal was however passed on to the Collector in 1897 when a medal of solid gold was purchased for the Deacon and these two medals are in use today.