

THE BLAIRHOYLE CONNECTION

THORNHILL

STIRLING

IN THE PROVINCE OF WEST PERTHSHIRE

The village of Thornhill is situated about mid-way between Stirling and Aberfoyle, overlooking the fertile carse of Stirling² much of which was cleared of moss in the Eighteenth Century, and South-Westwards, the uncleared Flanders Moss, now a sanctuary for wild life, particularly birds, but in general the village is surrounded by good agricultural land.

At one time, most of the cattle from the North and West were walked to the main market towns of Stirling and Falkirk via Thornhill, where the drove roads converg^ec making an overnight stop here.

The Eastern end of the village, known as Norrieston and in general, the older part, spread Westwards, so forming the village c Thornhill, with all the necessary industries appearing. It became a thrivin⁸ community with a distillery nearby, a tannery, weavers, smiths, building trades and agricultural produce making a near self sufficient area.

The River Forth being the county boundary between Stirling and Perthshire, it followed that being on the North side, Thornhill is in Perthshire. That changed with the introduction of Regionalisation in the 1970's. So Thornhill was plucked from its native Perthshire into the Stirling District of Central Region. When in Perthshire, the postal address was localised to "by Stirling" to expedite deliveries and since Regionalisation we have been allocated a Falkirk postcode, FK.

The Eastern approach to the village has the church wall, once the United Free Kirk with the then manse alongside, then the Established or Parish Church, known as Norrieston Parish Church, the only recognised place of worship in Thornhill since the Free Kirk and the Established amalgamated in 1929. This Union is reputed to be the first of its kind in the country. There are also several claims to "firsts or near firsts" such as a piped water supply to the Main Street by gravitation before being advanced to a storage tank and pumping station. One of the first automatic telephone exchanges, the building now houses the Post Office. Another unique factor of the village goes back to the Ordination of the Rev. 3, Gordon Mitchell n the same day as the laying of the church's foundation stone in August 1879, inique also in church history.

Over a century ago the pace of life matched most other rural areas, with everyday merchandise being available locally. Stirling was within easy reach by horse and carriage, operating from the local hostelryes, where horses could be changed on route from Aberfoyle. Travelling in those far off days took considerably more time, if not effort and inconvenience, for example, after travelling by road to Kippen Station, a train service was available. This railway opened in 1856, was closed for passenger trains in 1934. Goods trains continued to use the line until its only function was the delivery of fresh water and it finally closed in 1959.

The Freemasons in the village had to find their way to neighboring villages or towns and return at the close of meetings, this was after a day's work, an arduous task, frequently undertaken in inclement weather.

The nearest Masonic Lodge being in Doune with Callander a close second, most of the local masons were members of Lodge St James, Doune No. 171, and George Williams served two terms as RWM there, before becoming the first RWM at

Blairhoyle. Both churches were active a century ago, the Parish Church, built in 1879 replaced an older building known as the Chapel of Ease which stood on part of the cemetery, now marked only by four corner stones.

The minister of the new kirk, Rev. 3. Gordon Mitchell was ordained on 25th August, 1879, the same date as the foundation stone was laid.

The Free Kirk Minister, the Rev. George Williams, a native of Aberdeenshire took over his duties about the same time as his counterpart. Highly thought of in Ecclesiastical circles, Mr Williams interests were wide and varied and included genealogy, having recorded notes and inscriptions of gravestones, some of which now form a stairway from the road, his information proved useful to the Genealogical Society. As well as being a botanist, author and poet, one of his main interests was Freemasonry. The nearest Masonic Lodges were a few miles distant, so the minister, a likeable and go-ahead person, along with the other local masons, had the idea of forming a Masonic Lodge in Thornhill. It befell their task to put the wheels in motion. The names of the others concerned are listed later and followed by all other members.

the local landowner, Col. Drummond of Blair Drummond, being a Past Provincial Grand Master, thoroughly approved of the idea and scheme and willingly made the plot of land at the crossroads available for the lodge. The owner of Blairhoyle Estate nearby, Mr George Crabbie, an Edinburgh merchant and businessman of Whisky and Green Ginger fame felt that freemasonry would benefit Thornhill and that Thornhill would benefit the Masonic Craft.

Although Mr Crabbie was not himself a Freemason he decided in his wisdom to have a hall built at his own expense, suitable for the requirements of the local Freemasons. Several plans, similar to buildings on Blairhoyle Estate were submitted and approved, subject to minor changes such as having the entrance door facing South instead of West.

The building consisted of a main hall with an open fireplace, a porch and cloakroom, all timber lined; the main hall without a ceiling, showing the rafters and roof space. The building, of stone, harled brickwork and exposed red sandstone plinths has a tower over the porch consisting of first floor storage and access to the upper floor with window seats on each of its four sides.

Windows on every side gave commanding views of a 360 degree panorama from Ben Lomond and the Vale of Menteith in the West, to the Outer Grampians in the North; Ochil Hills round by Stirling and the Forth Valley with the Gargunnoch and Kippen Hills beyond the Carse.

and his deputation of assistants, -Bros Col. Drummond P.P.G.M.; Bro Watt, P.G.S.; Graham Stirling of Strowan, acting past P.G. Dep. M.; Bros Robertson P.G.S.W.; Guthrie P.G., J.W.; P. McNiven Callander P. G. S.D.; 5. A. McLean P. G. S. B. and Archibald McLaren who conducted the Masonic Ceremonial in connection with the laying of the foundation stone and opening of the Lodge Room.

The Ceremonial was observed with a large number of the Public being present.

The Service was to commence, with the hymn "O God of Bethel" sung to the tune "St. Paul" but they deviated from the ceremonial sheet and a new hymn believed to have been composed especially for the opening by the Rev. Geo Williams was used instead. This hymn is printed on the back page. The hymn was followed by a short prayer by the R.W.M. of Blairhoyle, the Rev. George Williams -"Almighty God, who in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the

earth, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee to stablish and protect this house; except The Lord build the House, they labour in vain that build it. Be Thou worshipped here in faith and purity, in charity and true devotion. May all that here seek the light, find the joy of Thy love and the light of Thy countenance. May the fear of God and Brotherly love flourish and abound within these walls. Let not envy or contentious thoughts divide those that good men. May you be blessed in all your undertakings; may health and happiness by yours and theirs that are dear to you; and may you be greeted with His approval who said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Signed on behalf of office bearers and brethren of Lodge Blairhoyle No. 792 by:- George Williams Master

James Graham, Senior Warden
James Gibson, Junior Warden

Thornhill 21st October, 1893

Rev. Bro Williams said Mr Crabbie, I have a word to say to you.

It would be base ingratitude on our part to let this opportunity slip of publicly offering you the thanks of "Lodge Blairhoyle" for your splendid gift. This Hall, so snug and quaint does credit to your head as well as to your heart. With gratitude we accept your gift. I am hopeful it may yet be my duty to put into your hand our symbol of command and welcome you on this floor, not only as a brother but as our Master. In the meantime, I have in my hand the address which I have just read to you and I ask you to accept it as a very humble but grateful and genuine expression of our feelings to you, our benefactor. In connection with the establishment of the Lodge, many good friends have done virtuously; but we can surely say of you what is said of the good woman of scripture, "Thou excellest all".

Mr Crabbie replied in these terms:- "I really do not know what to say and I can

only thank you for the kind and flattering way in which you have responded to remarks made by Mr. Williams in presenting me with this address. I assure you, words completely fail me. The address is beautiful and perfect as a work of art, but one thing is wanting, and that is that I feel I do not deserve it. "(YOU DO)" Be that as it may, I accept it as a bond of union between Thornhill and Blairhoyle which I hope no future generation will seek to ~~maffarn~~ (APPLAUSE).

The P.G.M. walked to the East of the stone, the R.W.M. on his right, preceded by the Wardens, who go to the West with the Level and Plumb respectively.

The P.G.M. says "W.J. P.G.W., what is the proper Jewel of your office? The Plumb". P.G.M. -Have you applied the plumb to the several edges of the stone? "I have Most Worshipful P.G.M."

P.G.M. -"W,S.P.G.M. What is the proper Jewel of your Office"?

The level". P.G.M. -"Have you applied the level to the top of the stone"?

-I have, Most W. P. G. M.

P.G.M.R. W. P. G. Depute M, what is the proper jewel of your office"?

-The Square". P.G.M. -"Have you applied the square to those parts of the stone that are square"?

- "I have M.W.P.G.M. P.G.M -"Having, My R.W. Brn, full confidence in your skill in Our Royal Art, it remains with me to finish this, our work".

He gave the stone three knocks and said "May the Almighty Architect of the Universe look down with benignity upon our present undertaking and crown it with every success.

The Cornucopia was delivered to the P.G.M.
The Vase with Wine to the P.G.S.W. and the
Vase of Oil to the P.G.J.W.

This delivery took place during and after the singing of "Behold how good a

thing i is".

With the completion of the three verses, the Cornucopia was delivered by the P.G.M. to the Acting G.M. who threw its contents upon the stone. The Vase of Wine was then handed to the P.G.M., then to A.G.M. who poured it upon the stone. The same procedures followed with the Vase of Oil.

The P.G.M. delivered the following prayer.

"Praise be to the Lord Immortal and Eternal who formed the Heavens, laid the foundation of the Earth and extended the waters beyond it, -Who supports the Pillars of Nations, and maintains in order and harmony, surrounding worlds. We implore Thy aid and may the continued blessings of an All- Bounteous Providence be the lot of these, our native shores, and may the Almighty Ruler of Events deign to direct the hand of our gracious Sovereign so that she may pour down blessings upon her people; and may that people, living under sage laws, in a free government ever feel grateful for the blessings they enjoy".

The ceremony and meeting was then closed in due and ancient form. The celebrations continued in the Public Hall. The tickets for this part were 2/- each (10p).

I assure you the pleasure I had in giving this Lodge-room to the Free Masons, of Blairhoyle cannot be equalled by their satisfaction in receiving it. In handing over this lodge to the Free Masons I ask them not only to accept my best wishes for the success of the Lodge but also for 'the well being of the whole village.

(APPLAUSE).

The R.W.M. the Rev. Williams next addressed a few words to Col. C. **HOME GRAHAM STIRLING** the P.G.M. of West Perthshire and asked him to accept as a gift from the Brethern of Lodge Blairhoyle, the silver trowel with which he had performed the ceremony. He was confident that whatever the intrinsic worth of the article, he would place a high value on it as a memento of this occasion. It was not often that a Provincial Grand Master had the good fortune of establishing a Lodge during the tenure of his office, but whatever honours came to Perthshire West he hoped it would fall to their esteemed Grand Master Col. Stirling

(APPLAUSE).

Col, Stirling said he should look upon the trowel with very much appreciation as a gift from the Masons of Thornhill. He had experienced great pleasure in laying the foundation stone that day.

He was well aware of the difficulties that attended the Thornhill Masons in their labours, but now that they could labour at home he hoped they would always labour with success (APPLAUSE).

Rev. Williams proposed three hearty cheers in honour of Mr. Capper for his work in connection with the erection of the lodge (APPLAUSE) and a vote of thanks to Mr Slater for the workmanlike manner in which he had finished the building (APPLAUSE).

Mr. Capper acknowledged this himself and on behalf of Mr. Slater.

After the impressive open ceremonial, the public were requested to retire, when the Lodge was raised to the third degree. Thereafter, an adJournment was made to the Public Hall where Col. Drummond presided over a banquet. The usual Loyal and Masonic and other toasts were given and a pleasant evening was spent in harmony.

With the Public retired and the Lodge in the third degree the P.G.M. called for his secretary, Treasurer and Architect to bring forward the necessary

workmen. During the singing of the 100th Psalm to the tune of ~ "Old Hundred", "All people that on earth do dwell". The Rev. Williams wish that Mr. (,raoDle become member of the craft did not materialise. However, his son John Edward Crabbie became a Free Mason in Edinburgh and later affiliated to Lodge Blairhoyle. He was installed as R.W.M. of 792 in the year 1913 a post which he held until 1922. He also held the position of Provincial Grand Master of Perthshire West for Twenty years.

J.E. Crabbie's two sons John Patrick Crabbie and George Monteath Crabbie became members of Lodge Blairhoyle, in 1933. Their application forms are dated 11th January. Mr Williams passed on to the Grand Lodge above in August 1929 at the age of 84 and was interred in the local cemetery, the Pall Bearers all being lodge members.

One of the record holders of the lodge must surely be that of Bro. James Taylor, initiated in 1894 and held the office of Tyler for forty three years until his passing in December 1937,

The early meetings were not of set pattern, frequently Fridays, Saturdays, and on four occasions Sundays.

Among some of the original documents are notes by the Rev. G. Williams, Ceremonial Sheets, five of the first Annual Certificates from Grand Lodge, seven Grand Lodge Receipts for dues, certificates, initiates etc., the receipt for the Charter £10-10/- (ten guineas, or in modern currency £10.50), fire insurance bill and receipt from West of Scotland Fire Office Ltd dated 29.9. 1894 for 5/6 amount £350.00. Rates receipts 15.5.94—95 for 5/7 $\frac{1}{2}$; 95—96 for 5/- $\frac{1}{2}$ d receipts, Parish of Kincardine 22. 10. 1894 for Relief of Poor Ill, Relief of Poor $\frac{1}{2}$, School 1/7 Reg. 1d Total 2/10 and a Property Duty Receipt for 2/8.

There are also receipted bills from McEwan Bros, Barnton Place, Stirling and other local traders. McEwans shows provisions of liquid refreshment for the opening ceremony banquet in Public Hall for soft drinks at 1/- per dozen bottles beer 1/9 dozen, Port Wine 1/- bottle and a gallon of whisky at 18/-, total £1. 16.6.

Charles S. Moir post office supplies and stationary for 3/11 $\frac{1}{2}$, Mr Moir was also the local watch and clockmaker and Lodge Secretary, John Duncanson, fuel bills for coal at 6d per half hunderweight, oil for paraffin lamps at 6d and 7d per gallon and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d per bottle in 1894. The bill for 6/9 $\frac{1}{2}$ included 3/- paid to Carting Firms, John Doig, Joiners materials supplied on 26th December 1894, 2 panes glass 1/- and 9d; 3 shelve for press at 1/- each, total 4/9, there appears to be a handsome discount of 2/6 leaving a balance of 2/3 settled on 5/3/1895 by John Doig. Another bill from John Duncanson shows that in November and December 1893, par oil 5d; $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. coal 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d; fire shovel 6d; a candles 2d and one hair brush at 3/6, 1 gall oil 7d, $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. coal 7d: $\frac{1}{4}$ cwt coal 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Moving onwards to more modern history the lodge had busy spells in the 1920's with several candidates being balloted for and initiated at the same time. In 1925 the RWPGM Bro. J.E. Crabbie installed Bro. G. Dickson into the Chair of King Solomon, George Dickson being estate overseer on Blairhoyle Estate. 1929, records the passing o.f Rev. Williams and Bro. Jas Taylor, Tyler, in 1934.

A carved chair was presented by Bro. C.E. Featherstone Lodge Blythswood 817 who at that time stayed locally.

In 1935 there were provincial bicentenary celebrations and on 11th December of that year, proceedings were broadcast on radio from Halls in Stirling and Perth.

A provincial bicentenary Jewel was presented by Bro. Jas. Rennie, Secretary, for services rendered as a bicentenary steward. Presentation was carried out by P.M. Dickson on behalf of Grand Lodge.

A new paraffin lamp was presented in 1939 but the outbreak of war in September was to bring many changes.

The Wardens Chairs, presented to the lodge are believed to be the original chairs from the Free Kirk.

Many of the members had gone to serve in the forces and in March 1940 as there was no important business, the lodge was closed in due and ancient form.

The building was taken over by the Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed The Home Guard. This was their meeting place at least twice a week, and was their headquarters; training and instruction took place and the tower was used on a rota basis as an overnight look-out post for enemy invaders and parachutists.

In the spring of 1944 the lodge was reopened by kind permission of I.P.M. Bro. Lieut, James Forrester. The Secretary, still being in the forces, records were not available. Another attempt to gather interest was made in December but attendance was poor so there was no election of office bearers.

Later that month a special meeting was held and a nomination was approved. By January 1945, interest was re-kindled and once again the lodge was in full swing. The improvements continued with a ceiling erected in the Main Hall at a total cost of £20. The paraffin lamps later gave way to electric lighting. Wall heaters were fitted in due course and the coal fire ~~cl4c,,~nd~~. A small toilet was installed.

Furnishings improved, the forms were replaced by metal tubular chairs. These were eventually replaced by PVC ones and padded upholstery benches. The columns on either side of the masters chair were formed from parts of a disused pipe organ from Blairhoyle House and appropriately also the keystone and archway from parts of the pulpit dismantled from the U.F. Kirk, where George Williams had preached for many years.

An organ donated pre war and in poor condition was removed and replaced at least twice. The interior' and exterior of the lodge has been decorated by members of the lodge for many years. A very fine Summer Ice table was also donated to the lodge. Although the property of the Masons it was for the use of the villagers and is now used and stored in the Church Hall for convenience. In 1953 an' electric clock was presented to the village (not the masons) with cash raised during the Coronation Celebrations. This handsome clock adorns the Southern Edifice of the Tower. The trustees of the clock had a protective clear sheet fitted several years ago.

The lodge has always enjoyed the reputation of being the smallest purpose built lodge in the country with passing tourists being advised of this by their drivers and couriers. It is also recorded on films of Lodges of Interest and has been shown in many lodges. It is now a "listed building" of Historic and Architectural interest, British Telecom featured the lodge in a television commercial advert.

The Rating System proved to be a millstone some years ago, so by emptying the lodge and storing the furnishings elsewhere during the close season, a rate rebate was obtained.

After a very few years, however, the system changed and full rates had again to be paid.

Over the past forty years, possibly another record, although not an actual office, is that of Key holder and Hallkeeper, the title holder being Bro. Cliff Ashton P.M. who is a son-in-law of McLay, a founder member.

The lodge meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month from October to April at 8 p.m.

For many years the lodge has given Christmas Presents to the widows of the lodge members as well as to a variety of charities, including the local WRI for the senior citizens outing.

Whilst the lodge is not licensed we cordially invite our own members to attend and visiting brethren will always be made more than welcome.

On receiving the Mark Degree, brethren are presented with a "Mark Penny" each of which is cast with an engraving of the picture of Lodge Blairhoyle.

Thanks to all for information, taken to be correct but not guaranteed.