

THE LODGE OF AITCHISON'S HAVEN

The book on view here is the oldest surviving Minute Book of any Masonic Lodge. It records the meetings of the Lodge of Aitchison's Haven, which became extinct in 1853. The Lodge was one of those Lodges which, meeting in Edinburgh in 1736, founded Grand Lodge. When the Lodge became dormant the Minute Book passed into private hands and was purchased at auction by Grand Lodge early in 1981.

The book contains the earliest known minute of meeting of any Scottish Masonic Lodge; indeed the minute (dated 1598) is probably the oldest Masonic minute in the world. The book is entitled "The Bulk of the Actis and Ordinans of the Nobile Maisteris and Fellows of Craft of the Iudg of Aitchison's heavine".

This old minute is dated 9th January 1598 and is thus eighteen months older than the earliest minute of the Lodge of Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel) No. 1, which is dated "Ultimo July 1599" (31st July 1599).

The minute reads as follows:-

1598

The 1X day of Janurie the Zier of God upon ye quikilk day Robert Widderspoon was maid Fellow of Craft in ye presens of Wilzam Aytone Elder Johne Fender being Varden, John Pedden Thomas Pittencrieff John Crafurd, George Aytone Wilzame Aytone younger Hendrie Petticrieff all fellowis of Craft upon ye quikilk day he chois George Aytone Johne Pedden to be his intenders and instructouris and also ye said Robert he payit his XX sh. and his giffis to every Maister as efferis.

(The above transcription is by the late Brother Wallace-James).

Modernising the language, the minute would read:-

The 9th day of January in the year of God 1598; upon the which day Robert Widderspoon was made a fellow of Craft in the presence of William Ayton Senr., John Fender (Warden), John Pedden, Thomas Pittencrieff, John Crafurd, George Ayton, William Ayton Junr. and Hendrie Petticrieff, all being fellows of Craft. On the which day he chose George Ayton and John Pedden as his proposer and seconder, and as his instructors; also, the said Robert paid his 20 shillings and made offerings of gloves to every master.

(The money would be 20 shillings Scots - a very small sum. It was also customary in those days that the newly admitted mason bought gloves for those present)

The book contains also a copy of the Schaw Statutes, to which John Fender was a signatory.

The village of Aitchison's Haven lay in Midlothian to the west of Levenhall, near Morrison's Haven, but it no longer exists. The village had a charter from King James V in 1526 and the Lodge may have dated from that time. By this Charter the monks of Newcastle were empowered to build a harbour from which to ship the coal taken from the coalfields at Prestongrange.

A full account of the Lodge, including transcriptions of most of the minutes before 1680, is to be found in Volume XXIV of the Proceedings of Lodge Quatuor Coronati, No. 2076, English Constitution in a paper given to the Lodge in 1911 by Brother R.E. Wallace-James, Past Master, Lodge St John Kilwinning, No. 57, Haddington.