

SIR WALTER SCOTT AND FREEMASONRY

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Although Sir Walter Scott did not take so intensive and extensive an interest in Freemasonry as did his senior countryman, Robert Burns, his connexion with the Craft was by no means negligible and may even be claimed as hereditary.

His father, Walter Scott, Writer to the Signet was initiated in Lodge St. David, 36, Edinburgh, on 4th January, 1754 and on 4th February 1767, joined Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, while his uncle-his father's brother-Captain Robert Scott, was initiated in Lodge Canongate Kilwinning on March 2nd, 1786. His father was initiated about the same time as Erasmus Darwin, physician and physiologist and poet, the grandfather of Charles Darwin. Within a year of his initiation, he (Walter Scott) was appointed senior warden of the Lodge but he never became its Master. He was one of three nominated for the office in December, 1755, but the honour never came to him.

Lodge St. David, constituted March 2nd, 1738, was named after David I of Scotland, "the sair sanct to the Crown " and the builder of Holyrood Abbey. At this time it met in Hyndford's Close, opposite John Knox's house. It was known originally as Lodge Canongate from Leith, and it was formed by the Edinburgh members who found it inconvenient to go to Leith for the meetings. Lodge Leith Canongate, which is now defunct, was an offshoot of the famous Canongate Kilwinning.

The Minute relating to the initiation of Walter Scott, senior, runs as follows

The Lodge being convened on an Emergency . . . there was presented to the Lodge a Petition for Anthony Ferguson, Mercht. in Edinburgh, Walter Scott and John Tait, Writers in Edinburgh, Craving to be made Masons and admitted Members of this Lodge and being recommended by the Right Worshipful Master, the desire of their Petition was unanimously granted and they were accordingly made Masons and each paid his full dues to the Treasurer.

From Sir Walter Scott's *Autobiography* we learn a great deal about his father, for whom he had unbounded affection and respect and whom he has portrayed in *Redgauntlet* under the disguise of Saunders Fairford. In the *Autobiography* he says of him:

His person and face were uncommonly handsome, with an expression of sweetness of temper, which was not fallacious; his manners were rather formal, but full of genuine kindness, especially when exercising the duties of hospitality. His religion, in which he was devotedly sincere, was Calvinism of the strictest kind and his

favourite study related to Church History. I suspect the good old man was often engaged with Knox and Spottiswoode folios, when, immured in his solitary room, he was supposed to be immersed in professional researches.

At the age of twenty-nine years the father married Anne Rutherford, eldest daughter of Dr. John Rutherford, Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh. This was in 1758. Their first six children all died in infancy and shortly after the birth of their famous son, Walter, in 1771, the family removed to George Square, where other five children were born, making twelve in all. It was in Lodge St. David that Sir Walter and his brother, Robert, the sailor, were initiated, the latter on December 7, 1785; the former on March 2, 1801. Another brother, Thomas, who became a Writer to the Signet, was initiated in Lodge Canongate Kilwinning on November 18, 1807. Thomas's son, Captain Walter Scott of the Engineers, was initiated in Canongate Kilwinning on April 6, 1836 and Sir Walter's son was initiated in Canongate Kilwinning on November 30, 1826, while his son-in-law, J. Gibson Lockhart, was initiated in that Lodge on 26th January, 1826, that Lodge also witnessing the initiation of Lockhart's son, a Lieutenant in the 16th Lancers, on February 9, 1848.

The Masonic interests of the Scott family seem, therefore, to be divided, though not in equal proportions, between the two Lodges, St. David and Canongate Kilwinning. St David was also the Mother Lodge of Sir Walter's close friend, the Earl of Dalkeith, afterward the Duke of Buccleuch (from which stock the Scotts of Harden, kinsmen of Sir Walter's family, descended) some time Grand Master Mason of Scotland, to whom he dedicated his first great work *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

The Minute of Robert Scott's initiation reads as follows:

The Brethren being convened, Br. Walter Scott, Esqr. took the Chair and the Lodge being regularly opened and constituted, a petition was presented for Messrs. Robert Scott, Chicherter Cheyne (both sailors) and John Johnston Craving to be made Masons and Members of this Lodge; and the two former viz., Messrs Scott and Cheyne being recommended by the R.W. Br. Scott and Mr. Johnston by Br. Wm. Allan the desire of the petition was unanimously granted and, by direction from the Chair the Ceremony was performed by Br. Paterson. In 1808, Sir Walter gave the following interesting sketch of his brother, Robert:

My eldest brother (that is, the eldest whom I remember to have seen) was Robert Scott. . . . He was bred in the King's service, under Admiral, then Captain William Dickson and was in most of Rodney's battles. His temper was bold and haughty and, to me, was often checkered with what I felt to be capricious tyranny. In other respects I loved him much, for he had a strong turn for literature, read poetry with taste and judgment and composed verses himself which had gained him great applause among his messmates. Witness the following elegy upon the supposed loss of the vessel, composed the night before Rodney's celebrated battle of April the 12th, 1782. It alludes to the various amusements of his mess:

No more the geese shall cackle on the poop,
No more the bagpipe through the orlop sound,
No more the midshipmen, a jovial group,
Shall toast the girls and push the bottle round.
In death's dark road at anchor fast they stay,
Till heaven's loud signal shall in thunder roar,
Then, starting up, all hands shall quick obey,
Sheet home the topsail and with speed unmoor.

Robert sang agreeably (a virtue which was never seen in me), understood the mechanical arts and, when in good humour, could regale us with many a tale of bold adventure and narrow escapes. When in bad humour, however, he gave us a practical taste of what was then man-of-war's discipline and kicked and cuffed without mercy. I have often thought how he might have distinguished himself had he continued in the navy until the present times, so glorious for nautical exploit. But the peace of Paris cut off all hopes of promotion for those who had not great interest; and some disgust, which his proud spirit had taken at harsh usage from a superior officer, combined to throw poor Robert into the East India Company's service, for which his habits were ill adapted. He made two voyages to the East and died a victim to the climate.

Sir Walter Scott's father died on April 12, 1799 and he was buried in the Greyfriars' Church, Edinburgh, of which he had been a member and a regular worshipper. Every Sunday morning he was in his pew, accompanied by his wife, children and servants. Every Sunday evening he assembled his family and the servants in the drawing-room, examined them on the sermon they had heard in church and on the Shorter Catechism they had learned at home, after which he proceeded to read aloud a long gloomy sermon from beginning to end. Yet he was singularly broadminded for his day and generation and even permitted his children to perform theatricals in the drawing-room on weekdays.

Sir Walter was thirty years of age when he was initiated in Lodge St. David at an Emergency Meeting held on March 2, 1801. He received all three degrees on the same night. Among the frequent guests of the Lodge were James and John Ballantyne, with whom Sir Walter had been brought much in connexion with the publication of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, the first two volumes of which were published at Kelso in January, 1802. There was a Lodge Minute relating to the Ballantynes, dated March 18, 1800, which reads: -

It ought not to be passed over how much was contributed to the entertainment of the Lodge by Brethren Ballantyne of the Kelso Lodge, to whose social dispositions, elegant manners and musical powers the Lodge of St. David are no strangers. The R.W. Master called on the brethren to drink to the health of these two respectable visitors, particularly to that of Brother James Ballantyne, who had formerly been of this Lodge and who now held office in the Kelso Lodge. The toast was drunk with the greatest possible applause and was returned in a handsome and appropriate address from Mr. James Ballantyne.

The Minute of the Lodge for March 2, 1801, reads as follows:

There having been many applications for entries in this Lodge, the present evening was appointed for that purpose, when the following Gentlemen were admitted apprentices: Andrew Ross, George M'Kattie, Walter Scott, John Campbell. The Lodge was afterwards successively opened as a Fellow Craft's and Master's Lodge when the following Brethren were passed and raised to the degrees of Master Masons: the said Andrew Ross, George M'Kattie, Walter Scott. As also John Tod, James Luke, George Morse, Hugh McLean, William Dunlop, Lieut. George Pott, Lieut. John Dunlop, Patrick Erskine, James Hope, Bruce Robt. Nairn, John Ramsay, Alexr. Kedie, David Anderson, James Dewar, Robert Walker. The ceremony was gone through on this occasion with very great accuracy and solemnity by the Right Worshipful Master, who afterwards took the Chair. And the Lodge being joined by some of the other Brethren continued together for some time in the usual amusements of the Craft. It may here be added that from the institution of the Lodge of St. David to the present time, there has not been an instance of so great a number being on one occasion entered masons.

J. Campbel, Secy.

The Master of the Lodge at this period was Houston Rigg Brown of the firm of Brown and Company, Coachmakers of Abbey Hill, Edinburgh, initiated in 1795, Master from 1800 to 1804 and again from 1808 to 1818.

Every year, on the anniversary of Sir Walter Scott's initiation, the Brethren of Lodge St. David celebrate the occasion and a very large attendance at that meeting may always be depended upon.

On June 4, 1816, in the absence of the Marquess of Lothian, Provincial Grand Master for the Border Counties (Peebles, Selkirk, Roxburgh and Berwickshires) Sir Walter Scott laid the foundation stone of a new Lodge-room at Selkirk for Lodge St. John, 32, when he was elected an honorary member of the Lodge. The Minute for that day reads as follows:

June 4, 18 16. This being the day appointed for Laying the Foundation Stone of the Free Masons Hall, a most numerous meeting of the Brethren along with a respectable deputation from Hawick and visiting Brethren from Peebles and Jedburgh went in procession according to the order of Procession inserted on the 143rd and 144th page hereof, when the stone was laid by Walter Scott Esquire of Abbotsford Sheriff Depute of the County of Selkirk, who, after making a most eloquent and appropriate speech, Deposited in the Stone the different Coins of his Majesty's Reign, with the Newspapers of the day and the inscription as inserted on the 145th page hereof. The Rev. Mr. James Nicol of Traquair gave an excellent prayer well adapted for the occasion. After the ceremony of laying the stone was over the Brethren returned to the Town Hall and, on the motion of Bro. Walter Hogg, the unanimous thanks of the Brethren was voted to Mr. Scott for the honour he had conferred upon the Lodge by his presence and laying the Foundation Stone.

On the motion of Bro. Andrew Lang the unanimous thanks of the Brethren was also voted to the Revd. Mr. Nicol for the obliging manner he had consented to come to this place to act as Chaplain and for his conduct throughout. On the motion of Brother James Robertson Mr. Scott was admitted an Honorary Member with three Cheers.

On the following day he wrote to his friend, the Duke of Buccleuch, when he said:

I was under the necessity of accepting the honour done me by the Souters, who requested me to lay the foundation stone of a sort of barn which is to be called a Freemasons Hall. There was a solemn procession on this occasion, which, that it might not want the decorum of costume, was attended by weavers from Hawick, shoemakers from Jedburgh and pedlars from Peebles, all very fine in the scarfs and trinkums of their respective lodges. If our musical band was not complete it was at least varied, for besides the town drum and fife, which thundered in the van we had a pair of bagpipes and two fiddles and we had a prayer from a parson whom they were obliged to initiate on the spur of the occasion, who was abominably frightened, although I assured him the sanctity of his cloth would preserve him from the fate of the youngest brother alluded to by Burns in his *Address to the De'il*.

Some years later a deputation from Lodge St. John, Hawick, endeavoured to procure Sir Walter for the laying of the foundation stone of a building there but he declined the invitation.

There are not the numerous references to known Masonic characters in Scott's works as are to be found in Robert Burns's, but the Rev. George Thomson, tutor to his children, who was Master of Melrose St. John Lodge in 1822 figures as "Dominie Sampson" in *Guy Mannering* and Adam Ormiston, Master of the same Lodge in 1793, 1820 and 1829, is "Captain Clutterbuck" in *The Monastery*. Whether he ever attended any of the meetings of the Melrose Lodge is not known but he certainly received invitations because there is a letter in existence regretting his inability to accept the invitation extended to him. In 1825 he was also asked to lay the foundation stone of the Chain Bridge across the Tweed between Melrose and Gattonside, which he declined in the following letter

I am duly favoured with your invitation and should have been most happy to have met with the Masonic Brethren of Melrose, on the very agreeable occasion mentioned in your letter. But for many years past I have declined attending public meetings of this nature for which my age seems a sufficient reason. I am very much pleased to understand that the measure of the bridge has been brought forward and supported in so spirited a manner by the inhabitants of Melrose. I wish every success to the undertaking.

The baronetcy was conferred upon Sir Walter Scott in 1820 and, in 1823, Sir Alexander Deuchar, desirous of resigning the office of Grand Master of the Order of Knights Templar, suggested that the office be offered to Sir Walter Scott, but he wrote saying :

It is an honour which I am under the necessity of declining, my health and age not permitting me to undertake the duties, which, whether convivial or charitable, a person undertaking such office, ought to be in readiness to perform when called upon, besides, I have always felt particularly uncomfortable when circumstances have forced me to anything resembling a public appearance, but, with these feelings, I should do the Conclave injustice, were I to accede to your proposal, which, in other respects, does me flattering honour.

It is not on record that Sir Walter ever became either a Royal Arch Mason or a Knight Templar.

In 1827 Sir Walter Scott became the guest of Lord and Lady Ravensworth at Ravensworth Castle, to meet the Duke of Wellington. On the 4th of that month the Duke, accompanied by Sir Walter Scott and Lord Ravensworth, was entertained to dinner in the Sunderland Exchange, the Marquess of Londonderry presiding. During the same year he addressed the following lines to Sir Cuthbert Sharp, of Sunderland, who was Deputy Provincial Grand Master for Durham from 1832 to 1848 and Grand Warden of England in 1839:

Forget thee? No! my worthy fere!
Forget blithe mirth and gallant cheer?
Death sooner stretch me on my bier!
Forget thee? No.

Forget the universal shout
When "canny Sunderland " spoke out
A truth which knaves affect to doubt
Forget thee? No.

Forget you? No - though nowadays
I've heard your knowing people say,
Disown the debt you cannot pay,
You'll find it far the thriftiest way
But I? Oh no.

Forget your kindness found for all room,
In what though large, seem'd still a small room,
Forget my Surtees in a ball-room
Forget you? No.

Forget your sprightly dumpty-diddles
And beauty tripping to the fiddles,
Forget my lovely friends the Liddells
Forget you? No.

The story of the failure of the Ballantyne printing business and the noble manner in which Sir Walter Scott met the liabilities has been told over and over again. His strenuous labours brought on an apoplectic seizure from which he never recovered fully and he passed away on September 21, 1832.

On the 5th November following a public meeting was held in the Assembly Room, Edinburgh, for the purpose of organizing a permanent memorial to his name. The Right Hon. John Learmonth, then Lord Provost, presided and a committee of fourteen was formed of which Sir John Forbes, Bart., was appointed Chairman. It was resolved to "erect a memorial in Edinburgh which would be worthy of the name of Sir Walter Scott."

The designer of the monument was George Kemp, a member of the Lodge Edinburgh St. Andrew, 48, who designed and presented the Master's chair in that Lodge, of which piece of furniture the Lodge is very proud. His design for the monument was submitted under the name of "John Marvo." He was in poor and humble circumstances. In his youth he used to help his father tend the flocks on the Pentland Hills and his career afterwards revealed one of the most striking examples of indomitable perseverance and courage. There is an interesting story told concerning him that one day while walking to Galashiels, a carriage drew up and he was offered a lift. When he alighted some one remarked that he had been riding with the Shirra (Sir Walter Scott). Sir Walter had no idea that the lad to whom he had given a lift would one day fashion the monument which was to be his country's tribute to him.

On August 15, 1840, the 69th anniversary of Sir Walter's birth, the foundation stone of the monument was laid by Sir James Forrest of Comiston, Bart., Lord Provost, who was, at that time, Grand Master Mason of Scotland. The magnificent silver trowel which he used for the ceremony was presented by the Master and Wardens of Edinburgh Lodge Mary Chapel. There were two inscription plates on the stone, one of which reads as follows :-

GRAND LODGE OF SCOTLAND
The
Foundation Stone
of the
Monument to be erected by the Citizens
of Edinburgh
In Memory of
Sir Walter Scott of Abbotsford, Bart.,
Was laid with due Solemnity by
The Right Honourable Sir James Forrest of
Comiston, Bart.,

Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant of the
City of Edinburgh, &c.,
Most Worshipful Grand Master Mason of Scotland
Upon the 15th day of August, 1840 and of
Masonry 5840:
Assisted by the under-mentioned Officers of the
Grand Lodges and the brethren of the Lodges
present:
The Right Honourable the Earl of Dalhousie,
R.W. Past Grand Master.
The Right Honourable The Earl of Rothes,
R.W. Deputy Grand Master.
Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, R.W. Substitute G.M.
Board of Grand Stewards
William Stewart Esq. of Glenormiston, President
Robert Blackwood Esq., Vice-President.
In the fourth year of the reign of Victoria First.

In 1841 an endeavour was made to change the name of Lodge St. David into Sir Walter Scott Lodge, but the motion was defeated by a majority.

Sir Walter was succeeded in the Baronetcy by his eldest son, Walter, who became a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army. As stated already he was an initiate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning.

There can be no more fitting conclusion to this short sketch of Sir Walter Scott's connexion with the Craft than to quote from his latest biographer, John Buchan:

Scott has what Stevenson found in Dostoevskya "lovely goodness." He lacks the flaming intensity of the Russian; his even balance of soul saves him from the spiritual melodrama to which the latter often descends. But, like him, he loves mankind without reservation, is incapable of hate and finds nothing created altogether common or unclean. This Border laird, so happy in his worldly avocations that some would discard him as superficial, stands at the end securely among the prophets, for he gathers all things, however lowly and crooked and broken, within the love of God.

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