



# THE MAGDALEN CHAPEL



An Illustrated Guide

## FOUNDATION IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Hugo Arnot records in *The History of Edinburgh* (1779) that in the early times there existed in the Cowgate a Maison Dieu which had fallen into decay. The Magdalen Chapel was founded on this site by Michael Macquhane (Macqueen) who died in 1538. As a burghess, merchant, and money lender he was from 1514 one of the most prominent citizens of Edinburgh. The Burgh records of the period contain many references to services rendered by him both to King James V and to the city. He had the desire to found and endow religious and charitable institutions to cope with destitution, sickness, and infirmity. For a number of years before his death he collected money for the project and after his death further funds were raised by his widow, Janet Rynd.

The building was intended to serve both as a Chapel and a Guildhall for the Incorporation of Hammermen (see later) and was to include accommodation for a chaplain. Work on the Chapel was under way by 1541 and the total cost was £2,700 Scots. By 1544 a little hospital or almshouse had been completed for the housing of seven Bedesmen (poor men) 'who should continually pour forth prayers to Almighty God'. In particular they were to pray for the soul of Mary Queen of Scots.

The Charter of Foundation and Deed of Mortification extends to nearly four thousand



*Pre-Reformation Stained Glass Shields*

words. It is dated 1547 and was signed by Janet Rynd and seventeen members of the Incorporation of Hammermen, including James Johnstoun, Deacon of the Craft. Of Michael Macquhane's purpose in this foundation the Charter says 'that when the said Michael was greatly troubled with an heavy Disease, and oppressed with Age, yet mindful of Eternal Life, he esteemed it ane good Way to obtain Eternal Life, to erect some Christian Work, for ever to remain and endure.'

## THE REFORMATION

The patronage of the Chapel and the Hospital having been granted to and accepted by the Hammermen, they took a keen interest in the place, as may be seen from the records of sums paid by them from 1547 to 1560 for dues and donations. In the year

1560 when the Protestant Reformation was established in Scotland the patrons, who were the Hammermen, ran into trouble. Their chaplain adhered to the Church of Rome and in his place they appointed a Protestant minister. The chaplain, however, brought a successful action against them for his salary, and he continued to draw this until his death in 1567. Meanwhile the Foundation Charter stated that, in the event of the Hammermen failing to observe its terms, the trust and the property were to revert to the relations of Janet Rynd. The Charter specified in great detail the form of Roman Catholic worship that was to take place in the Chapel and prohibited the Hammermen from doing anything against the interests of 'the Holy See' (i.e. the Church of Rome). These terms were now illegal to fulfil, and the relations of Janet Rynd were well aware of this and made as much trouble as they could. The tenants, likewise, saw no particular need to pay their rent, knowing that the Hammermen would be unable to enforce their right in law. It was only because of the considerable wealth of the Hammermen that they were able to weather this storm.

Immediately prior to the Reformation the Chapel was being used for academic lectures arranged by the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise. John Knox's colleague, John Craig, preached in the Chapel several times in the years 1560 and 1561 (in Latin, because he had been abroad so long that his English was rusty). Some hold the view that the Chapel was used for the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in December 1560. It was certainly used for the General Assembly of April 1578 at which Andrew Melville was Moderator and at which the Second Book of Discipline was discussed.

## THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Records show that from 1613 there was a great deal of internal and external work in connection with the Chapel and the Hospital to the west. An ornate porch and entrance was erected for the hospital. The hospital has long disappeared but a single relic was preserved in the large carved panel exhibiting the crest of the founders surmounted by the crown and hammer, the insignia of the Hammermen's Craft, now to be seen over the main door of the Chapel. In the 1620s the Hammermen arranged for the erection of the Tower with a steeple. This was enhanced by the mounting of a bell, still in working order, made by the Dutch bell-founder Michael Burgerhuys from Middleburg.

In the Covenanting period the Chapel was used for conventicles on a number of occasions (1674, 1676, 1679), and the bodies of several of the Covenanter martyrs were taken there after execution in the Grassmarket to be dressed in their grave-clothes. The table on which the bodies were placed is still to be seen in the Chapel, as is a sword which it is claimed belonged to the Covenanter, Captain John Paton. The headless body of the Earl of Argyle – whose skull was placed on the north gable of the Tolbooth – was deposited there, prior to its conveyance to the tomb of the Campbells in Kilmun, Argyll. The Treasurer's statement for the year 1685 contains the following minute: 'Received from the late Earl of Argyle's corpse staying in the Chapel, £29 Scots.' At the Glorious Revolution of 1689 the heads and hands of martyred Covenanters, which had been exhibited on the ports of Edinburgh by their executioners, were gathered together at the Chapel prior to interment in Greyfriars.

## THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

In 1725 the present platform on the east side was erected. The wrought iron rail in front of the platform is a notable piece of work and includes the insignia of the Hammermen. In the 1760s the Chapel was used by the early Scottish Baptists under Archibald MacLean. Part of the Chapel, or a building adjoining it, was used as a printing press at the time.

## THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

At the beginning of the century the Bereans had their meetings in the Chapel but in 1835 they were displaced by the Old Greyfriars Kirk Session who used the building as a mission station up to the Disruption of 1843. As the century progressed the Hammermen were feeling the effect of the building of the New Town of Edinburgh. Fewer and fewer members joined the Craft, and the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832 gave the death-blow to all such incorporated associations, putting an end to every form of exclusive trading. Interest in the funds for the support of the Chapel gradually faded away and in 1858 it was sold to the Scottish Reformation Society. The plan was to use it as a base for outreach among Roman Catholics in the Cowgate. The building was transferred to the Protestant Institute of Scotland on its formation in 1862.

Meanwhile in 1858, the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society (EMMS), founded in 1841, moved into 39 Cowgate, adjacent to the Chapel and also owned by the Scottish Reformation Society. In 1876 this property was sold to the EMMS and the premises were rebuilt in 1878 with a further extension in



*Magdalen Chapel in 19th Century*

1892. As well as training evangelical Protestant Christians for medical work the EMMS operated a Dispensary for the benefit of the local people. Concern was shown not only for their health but also for their spiritual needs. The EMMS used the Chapel for regular services and for the provision of Sunday Schools. Before each daily clinic at 2.00 pm and 6.00 pm a short service of worship was conducted. The Cowgate Dispensary was closed in 1952. The work is commemorated in several plaques within the Chapel.

## THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

In 1966 a request received from the new Heriot Watt University for the use of the Chapel as its Chaplaincy Centre was granted. In 1992/93 a major restoration programme was undertaken and the Chapel became the headquarters of the Scottish Reformation Society.

## SPECIAL FEATURES



## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The chief glory of the Chapel is found in the four beautiful stained-glass shields in the centre window. This is the only pre-Reformation stained glass in Scotland which is still intact. The roundels represent (1) the Lion Rampant, the Royal Arms of Scotland; (2) the Arms of Mary of Guise, the Queen Regent and consort of King James V and mother of Mary Queen of Scots; (3) the Arms of Michael Macquhane, founder of the Chapel; (4) the Arms of Michael Macquhane impaled with those of his wife Janet Rynd.

## THE HAMMERMEN

The Incorporation of Hammermen is fifth in the hierarchy of the Trades. It was formed in about 1477, in which year one of

its members endowed its altar of St Eligius (commonly known in Scotland as St Eloi) in St Giles' Church, placing it on the north side of the north-west pillar of the crossing. The Hammermen include a number of different crafts, all of which involved working with a hammer on metal. The Seal of Cause names blacksmiths, goldsmiths, lorimers, saddlers, cutlers, buckle-makers, armourers, 'and all vtharis within the said burgh of Edinburgh'. Pewterers and locksmiths were also included from an early date and gradually crafts of more recent origin, such as those of the clock and watchmaker, were added as they arose, until some eighteen principal disciplines were included. From its beginning in about 1477 until about 1492, the Hammermen included the goldsmiths, but that group was then able to break away to form its own Incorporation.

## THE BRODS (INSCRIBED PANELS)



*The Brods*

The Brods which adorn the north and east walls of the Chapel assumed their present form in 1686. They contain in letters of gold records of benefactions in the form of gifts and legacies, as a rule to the 'Chapell or Hammermen as Patrons of the Chappell'. In each case a date of the gift or the death of the testator is added in the lowest line. The dates on the panels run from 1555 to 1813, a space of over 250 years. In 1686 John Hislop, wright, was paid £60 Scots for making new wooden brods and £40 for altering 50 old ones. The oldest of these brods is supposed to be a relation of the founders: 'Isobell Macquhane, spouse of Gilbert Lauder, merchant burges of Edinburgh, bigged ye Crose House and mortified £50 yearly on the Cousland linie, Anno 1555'.

## THE DEACON'S CHAIR



*The Deacon's Chair*

The presiding official of the Hammermen's Incorporation was the Deacon who was elected annually at a meeting in the autumn. Alone of all the Incorporations, the Hammermen can trace the virtually unbroken line of their Deacons back to 1492. In the first quarter of the 17th century two names occur with special frequency in the list of deacons, those of James Sibbald and Thomas Weir.

## COAT OF ARMS



*The Arms of the Hammermen*

The coat of arms of the Hammermen is a very simple one, derived from the usual shop-sign of the fifteenth century, a hammer beneath a crown. These arms are the same as were borne in processions and on the battlefield in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For a period in the eighteenth century the shield was depicted as azure (blue) rather than gules (red), but the reason for this is unknown.

## SEMI-CIRCULAR SCREEN



*Wrought Iron Screen, Showing the Hammer and Crown*

There is a semi-circular screen of wainscot round the platform. Painted on the face of it towards the Chapel are eight shields, twelve inches broad, charged with armorial devices representing the eight chief trades that were united in the Hammermen's Incorporation, and a central device showing the badge of the Hammermen themselves.

## TOMBSTONE OF JANET RYND

Janet Rynd, joint foundress with her husband of the Chapel, died in 1553 and was buried in the Chapel. The flat slab which covers her grave is situated in the south east corner of the Chapel on the level of the platform. It is covered with a screen. The inscription reads:

Heir lysis ane honorabil woman Janet Rynd, ye spous of umquhil Micel Makquhen, burges of Ed., founder of yis place and decessit ye iiiii day of december anno domini MDLIII

## PLAQUES

On the West wall there are several plaques commemorating those who were associated with the work of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society.

## THE PORTRAITS

Dr James Begg (1808-83), minister of the Free Church of Scotland in Newington, and founder of the Scottish Reformation Society and the Protestant Institute.

Rev J A Wylie (1808-90), Free Church of Scotland minister, Professor of the Protestant Institute, and author of the three-volume work *The History of Protestantism*.



## SCOTTISH REFORMATION SOCIETY

The Scottish Reformation Society was formed at a meeting in the Edinburgh Music Hall on 5th December 1850 'to resist the aggressions of Roman Catholicism and to diffuse sound and Scriptural information on the distinctive tenets of Protestantism'. The leaders in its formation were Dr James Begg, Dr J A Wylie, and Professor William Cunningham. The Society was instrumental in the formation in 1862 of the Protestant Institute of Scotland, which provided instruction in Protestant theology and history for students and other young people. The Rev J A Wylie was appointed Professor to the Institute. A property at 17 George IV Bridge housed the Institute and the offices of the Scottish Reformation Society, and the Magdalen Chapel was purchased for outreach among Roman Catholics in the Cowgate.

In 1964 it was agreed to unite the two bodies under the title of the Scottish Reformation Society. All the assets and property of the Protestant Institute were transferred to the united Society. The Constitution of the Society was amended in 1965 to emphasize the positive propagation of Evangelical Protestantism and the diffusion of Scriptural teaching. The witness continued at 17 George IV Bridge until 1993 when the Society moved its headquarters to the Chapel.

The Society publishes a quarterly magazine, *The Bulwark*, and an annual *Historical Journal*. Membership is open to all who support the aims of the Society.

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