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July 3, 1996, Wednesday

SECTION: Pg. 8

LENGTH: 567 words

HEADLINE: 'I became a target . . . I was told it would be better if I left town'
Freemasons in Scotland

BYLINE: Stephen Breen Nic Outterside

BODY:

I MOVED to a Scottish town in the 1980s to start a business and quickly became aware that the local Freemasons had an all-pervading influence over the town, but local people said this was the way that things had always been done. I was told on numerous occasions that I would get nowhere in business "unless I went along to the lodge".

Freemasonry came to my attention again when a man I knew joined the cartel of local Freemason builders who tendered for council contracts.

I built premises on land close to his premises and I began to notice building materials were being delivered before the council tenders were opened and decided. In a later incident, a complete renovation was being carried out on the Masonic lodge and I watched as Masons removed materials from the sheds for the council renovations and took them to the lodge.

The police asked if I knew anything about it and when I told them what I knew they said they would be back, but that was the last I heard of it.

Until now, although the lodge had a bar and was very busy with its weekly evening "harmonies" (policemen, businessmen, council officials, councillors and so on), it did not have a drinks licence because of the over-provision of licences in the area. One non-Masonic club had an application for a drinks license refused for this reason. When I phoned the police to report the illegal drinking at the Masonic lodge, a drinks licence was granted almost immediately.

I soon became a target of the Masons. I began to have almost weekly problems. I had a dispute with the Mason over the boundary of my premises when my drains were deliberately blocked, my water pipe cut and trenches dug to prevent access.

There was an altercation during which he attacked me.

The policeman who came round was a Mason and suggested it would be better all round if I left town.

I was charged with breach of the peace and found guilty and the other man pled guilty to the same charge. I later discovered a passerby had seen the incident but the police did not take a statement and told him to go away. I discovered his version of events was the same as mine, but he was not prepared to make a statement because he had to live in the town.

The procurator-fiscal re-investigated the case and told me he intended to write to the Crown Office with a view to prosecuting the policeman who gave evidence at my trial for fabrication of evidence and perjury. Later, I received a letter from the Crown Office saying no further action would be taken.

I was subject to constant police harassment. In one week I was stopped 17 times for a vehicle check. Once my van was checked over thoroughly only to be stopped again 50 yards on, and the whole incident repeated.

The police sat outside my house with their blue light flashing and eventually targeted my young son. He was stopped by the police and told that they knew who his father was and that it would be easier for them to prove he did something than for him to prove he didn't.

Before reaching his teenage years he was charged with theft, vandalism, assault and breach of the peace. On each occasion we insisted that the incident be re-investigated by an outside force and on each occasion the charges were dropped.

In his first week of owning a car he was breathalysed three times. He is now in his twenties with no criminal convictions.

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The Scotsman

July 4, 1996, Thursday

SECTION: Pg. 8

LENGTH: 1025 words

HEADLINE: Freemasons in Scotland His master's voice

BYLINE: Stephen Breen Nic Outterside

BODY:

SITTING in the imposing Grand Master's office of the Grand Lodge of Antient and Accepted Masons of Scotland, in Edinburgh, the country's top Freemason asserts that the craft is not a secret society, just a society with secrets.

Lord Burton of Dochfour, an Eton-educated Inverness-shire landowner, is the 106th Grand Master Mason of Scotland. He follows in the illustrious footsteps of monarchs and some of the nation's most powerful aristocrats. King George VI served as grand master for a year until his accession to the throne in 1937 - as did George IV while he was Prince of Wales from 1806-20. The last incumbent, who left office in 1993, was Brigadier Sir Gregor MacGregor of MacGregor. Portraits of previous office-bearers look down on the large wooden table where the inner sanctum of this mysterious organisation, the grand lodge committee, holds its meetings.

A prominent member of the Scottish Landowners' Federation, Lord Burton was initiated into Lodge Old Inverness Kilwinning St John's in 1952 after being asked by a friend. He was attracted by its charitable works and was impressed by the treatment his father-in-law received in a Masonic hospital in England. He is one of 70,000 Masons in Scotland under the jurisdiction of the grand lodge, although he admits that membership is in marginal decline.

Flanked by the grand secretary, Martin McGibbon, Lord Burton refers The Scotsman to an article in a South African newspaper this year which outlined the principles of Freemasonry. The grand master notes that in the picture used he looks like the Pope.

"It is a very old fraternal society," he told the newspaper.

"A society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values.

Members learn its precepts by means of scenes of ritual drama, much of which is developed from the ancient guild of stonemasons. The first condition of admission into membership of this order is belief in the supreme being.

Membership is open to men of any race or religion who are of good repute."

Few could argue with those sentiments, but over the years Freemasonry has been dogged by suspicions that some craft members abuse the lodge to secure promotion, help or favours in business.

So was Lord Burton aware of any cases where membership had been abused? "No. If you are a member of a lodge, the same way as if you are a member of a club, and someone in that club is a tradesman, you say: 'George, would you like to do a job?' Then you would know someone there who could be relied on. Would that be fair?"

The question is addressed to Mr McGibbon, who interjects throughout the interview to clarify the grand master's views.

Lord Burton cannot think of any occasions when Masons have abused the craft to help themselves or their brethren.

"We frown upon it being used in this way. There's not a great deal we could do about it if it was done, but I don't know of any particular cases where it is likely to have been done."

The grand lodge is tough with errant members, he says.

"Unfortunately there seems to be an increase in the number of Masons we have up before us in our quarterly communications who are debarred from operating. Some of them are disowned altogether."

Mr McGibbon explains that anyone convicted of a criminal offence would be suspended or expelled, though he can not provide any figures.

If he were faced with three job applicants with equal qualifications, one of whom was a Mason, would Lord Burton employ the Mason?

"It wouldn't influence me at all," he replies. "I would expect the Mason to be a man of good character, whereas I might not know about the other two."

Lord Burton accepts that, in Scotland, Freemasonry is perceived to be an overwhelmingly Protestant craft, but he points out there are no religious bars to anyone joining.

He notes that there are Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu Masons throughout the world. Though Freemasonry has fallen foul of the church in recent years, with the Free Church of Scotland saying it was incompatible with Christianity and the Church of Scotland asking its members to "reconsider" their membership of the craft, Lord Burton firmly believes that it and Christianity are "in no way incompatible".

In light of The Scotsman survey showing that the majority of Scottish male MPs believe that Freemasonry is either incompatible with open government or that MPs should declare their membership, did the grand master believe MPs should do so?

"I would have thought it wasn't necessary. We don't discuss religion or politics."

If a member of the public asked a lodge for a membership list would it provide it? "The lodge would not," he begins before Mr McGibbon interrupts to say: "The lodge would not because, on the same basis, if you were to call Glasgow Golf Club and ask if I was a member they would be unlikely to tell you."

Lord Burton does not hide his Freemasonry and would expect his friends to be open if he asked them if they were members of societies. "I would have thought most Masons, if asked, would say 'yes, I am' or 'no, I'm not'. You might be told it's no business of yours."

He did not believe the lodge policy of not revealing membership lists generated

suspicion among the public. Mr McGibbon says: "I don't see how someone not telling you I was a member of a golf club would engender any suspicion."

To illustrate his claim that Freemasonry is not a secret society, Mr McGibbon points out that a museum of Masonic artefacts at grand lodge headquarters in George Street, Edinburgh, is open to members of the public.

Lord Burton rejects the call from presidents past and current of the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities for councillors to declare their Masonic membership, saying: "I see absolutely no need for it.

Having been a Mason for nearly 50 years now and having been in local government for well over 30 years, in that time I've never seen any influence of Masonry within local government.

"It's a society with some secrets. We have secrets by which we can recognise each other, but that doesn't mean to say we have any subversion."

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July 26, 1996, Friday

SECTION: Pg. 11

LENGTH: 601 words

HEADLINE: Scots police reject Masonic guide

BYLINE: Stephen Breen

BODY:

SCOTTISH chief constables have no plans to follow the example of colleagues in England and Wales who are drawing up guidelines on Freemasonry within the police.

Chief constables south of the Border are set to accept guidelines stating that Masonic officers should declare their lodge membership if they are investigating cases where a conflict of interest could arise.

Some English chief constables want to ban officers from being Freemasons, but the final guidelines will fall short of this. In the guidelines being drawn up by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), individual officers considering joining the Masons will be warned to think very carefully before reaching a decision because it could be seen to compromise their impartiality.

The minimum position agreed during a consultation period among all 43 chief constables south of the Border is that Masonic officers should reveal their membership if they are investigating fellow Masons or if someone under investigation alleges an investigating officer is a Mason.

The final guidelines will go further, but the exact details will not be known until the draft is presented to ACPO's conference in October.

ACPO decided to draft the guidelines after the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) warned that there was lingering public suspicion that Freemasonry might influence police disciplinary investigations.

The House of Commons home affairs select committee began taking written evidence this month on the influence of Freemasonry within the police in England and Wales.

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) has no plans to draft guidelines on lodge membership for Scottish officers on the grounds that the PCA does not conduct police complaints in Scotland.

Scotland's eight chief constables were criticised by MPs when they refused to answer a Scotsman survey asking if they were Freemasons, saying it was a matter for individuals. A four-day Scotsman investigation into Freemasonry published earlier this month found evidence that the craft still has some influence in the police today.

Yesterday, Graham Bennet, the deputy chief constable of Fife Constabulary and secretary of the general purposes committee of ACPOS, said: "In general terms, we have no objection to membership of the Freemasons, provided it does not interfere with an officer's police duties or bring embarrassment to the police service."

ACPOS had no plans to draw up guidelines, he added.

Paul Whitehouse, the chief constable of Sussex, who is drafting the ACPO guidelines, said: "The position of the paper sent to chief constables is that people should be given advice that they should consider very carefully about joining the Freemasons.

"At the very least, if they decide to join and are involved in an inquiry or situation that might throw their (Masonic) activity into question, they should declare it.

"Everyone thought that was the minimum position, but several people wanted to go further than that and ban Freemasonry altogether."

He added: "The question of membership would only arise if an officer involved in an investigation realised a principal player was a Freemason.*At that point the officer should declare it. Obviously if someone alleged an investigating officer was a Mason, they should declare it."

In Scotland, complaints against the police are investigated internally by an officer from outwith the division involved in the allegations. The chief constable then sends a report to the regional procurator fiscal who decides whether to lay charges.

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March 26, 1997, Wednesday

SECTION: Pg. 2

LENGTH: 561 words

HEADLINE: MPs act to reveal masons in the judiciary

BYLINE: Graeme Wilson, Nic Outterside And Stephen Breen

BODY:

A POWERFUL committee of MPs has said that every police officer, judge, magistrate and Crown prosecutor in England and Wales should have to declare publicly if they are a Freemason in a move which may finally lift the veil of secrecy surrounding the

organisation.

Greater openness was essential to ensure public confidence in the criminal justice system, the Commons home affairs committee said in its report published yesterday.

Though it did not investigate individual allegations of corruption, the committee's report said there were clear concerns that "some public servants are members of a secret society one of whose aims is mutual self-advancement - or a column of mutual support, to use the masonic phrase". The shadow home secretary, Jack Straw, said a Labour government would implement the committee's recommendations following consultation.

While the committee of MPs said the police and judiciary should be forced to register if they were members of "any secret society", it argued the problem could be better tackled if masons themselves were more open and said if they were members.

The call for disclosure of masonic membership left the committee deeply divided. Three of the Conservative members had supported a watered-down conclusion which merely called on masons to throw more light on their activities but the Tory MP for Leicestershire North West, David Ashby, sided with the four Labour MPs on the committee and ensured a tougher stance was passed.

In spite of its call for openness, the report acknowledged Freemasonry had been the subject of much "unjustified paranoia" and its chairman, Sir Ivan Lawrence, said: "There is nothing sinister about Freemasonry when it is properly observed."

The MPs' report drew immediate criticism from leading Freemasons. Commander Michael Higham, the grand secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England, said its central recommendation was "flawed" because it described Freemasonry as a secret society. "This is legislation based on perception, not reality, and if it comes into effect will be a sad day for individual freedom."

The Bar Council said the report was "thoughtful, welcome and useful" and argued people should say if they are masons when they applied for a judicial post.

While the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Chief Police Superintendents' Association both said they would accept the proposals, the Police Federation - which represents rank-and-file officers - said people should not be forced to register their membership unless there was clear evidence of serious misconduct.

Although the verdict delivered by the committee applies to England and Wales, if it became law, it would almost certainly have Scottish provisions.

Graham Bennet, deputy chief constable of Fife Constabulary, and secretary to the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) general purposes committee, said: "There is no objection to membership of the freemasons providing such membership does not interfere with police duties or bring embarrassment to the service."

Last night the Law Society of Scotland and the Faculty of Advocates refused to comment.

Last year a survey by The Scotsman found that six out of ten Scottish MPs believed Freemasonry was incompatible with open government or supported a register of MPs' masonic memberships.

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April 25, 1997, Friday

SECTION: Pg. 1

LENGTH: 628 words

HEADLINE: Scots police say no to registering Mason links

BYLINE: Stephen Breen

BODY:

SCOTTISH police officers yesterday voted unanimously to reject a plan for Freemasons in the force to register their lodge membership, though chief constables said they would have no objections to such a move.

Delegates at the Scottish Police Federation conference said it would be an unjustified intrusion into their private lives if they were forced to declare that they were Masons.

But William Spence, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, said he would have no objection to officers having to register their Masonic membership, although he did not believe it was necessary.

The House of Commons home affairs select committee recently recommended that all police, judges, lawyers and magistrates south of the Border should register their lodge membership.

Yesterday was the first time that the federation, which represents 98 per cent of Scottish police, had debated Freemasonry and there was unanimous support for officers being allowed to join the society.

The select committee recommendations were designed to alleviate suspicion that Masonic officers abused their membership of the lodge, though it recognised that there was no actual proof.

PC John Finnie, of the Northern Constabulary, said that Masonic membership was compatible with an officer's duty to uphold the law impartially.

PC Finnie, a non-Mason, who tabled the motion, said: "Since drafting this motion I have found out that two colleagues of mine are Masons and what they have in common is integrity beyond question.

"I have over 20 years' police service and I have no knowledge of Masonic impropriety. A register would be a complete and utter bureaucratic nonsense and an unacceptable attack on the liberties of our members."

PC Norman MacLeod, of Lothian and Borders police, said: "I have always been a believer that certain restrictions should be placed on the private lives of police officers. That goes with the job.

"That having been said, I firmly advocate that the imposition of such restrictions should be confined to those areas where it could be shown that involvement compromises the officer's integrity and impartiality.

"The home affairs committee report concludes that there is nothing sinister about Freemasonry and there is no evidence of conflict between being a Freemason and a police officer.

"Once we go down the road of questioning police integrity on such tenuous grounds, where do we stop? I can see no good reason for sanctioning a further restriction on our private lives at the whim of individuals who are unable to offer any evidence of impropriety."

Inspector Michael Dowds, of Strathclyde police, said: "The British police force won a reputation around the world for being incorruptible and that was at a time when there were more Masons in the police than there are today."

Mr Dowds, who is not a Mason, continued: "I have friends and I have colleagues who are Masons. I found that were people of unimpeachable integrity and good moral standing

and I would be failing as a colleague, a friend and a supervisor if I did not stand up and defend them."

Bob Main, of Tayside police, said: "The Scottish police service continues to recruit people from all walks of life and the strength of the relationship with the public lies with that. If some members have to be Freemasons, so be it. There is an old saying, 'If it ain't broken, don't fix it.' A register isn't necessary." The select committee called for Freemasonry to be more open, which was the best way forward, he added.

But Mr Spence said: "Should there be a register I would have no hang-ups providing anything I have been associated with and I don't think any of my colleagues would have any problems with it."

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