

## Extract from Alexander Stewart's Reminiscences of Dunfermline

### THE MAYGATE LODGE - MASONIC AND OTHER PROCESSIONS.

The old Mason Lodge in the Maygate was the scene of many an interesting gathering long ago. In that hall were held of yore the mystic meetings of the brethren connected with St. John's Lodge (No., 24), one of the most venerable lodges in the kingdom. There, too, a school was kept by Mr Rankine, where he taught English, arithmetic, writing, and music. There Rennie, the teacher of dancing kept for years his classes. There too, the drawing academy was presided over by Mr. Campbell teacher of drawing, and afterwards by Mr. Joseph Paton; and young men were there taught drawing and design with a view to the improvement of patterns and designs for damask cloth. In that room were held many pleasant concerts, soirees, dancing assemblies and singing classes in the olden time, when Mossman kept his shoe shop, underneath. Above all, the "Penny Crush", or Saturday evening's entertainment. Little did the promoters of the Dunfermline "Penny Crush" conceive that their humble efforts in behalf of cheap, fascinating, and wholesome kind of amusement for their fellow-townsmen would result as it has done, and prove such a great boon throughout the land to many thousands of their fellow-countrymen. Dr. George Macdonald has forcibly and truthfully remarked, "If I can put one touch of rosy sunset into the life of any man or woman, I shall feel that I have, worked with God.

Some of the older citizens of Dunfermline will yet remember the grand Masonic processions that took place on the evening of St. John, in December. The St. John's and the Union Masonic Lodges used to fraternise together as that evening fell, and they paid a friendly visit to each other. When the brethren emerged from their lodge, everyone held in his hand a lighted flambeau. The torches were then consigned to the care of some of the numerous young lads who were waiting at the door to receive them. The Masons then formed themselves in procession, two abreast, walking in the centre, while, the torch-bearers walked on either side of them. The remains of the torches (which were manufactured in Edinburgh) afterwards belonged to those lads, who carried them, and they often again did duty on the morning of Han'sel Monday. The procession was a very imposing spectacle. What with the grand array of blazing flambeaux, sending up their bright glare into the dark December night (at a time when the street lamps of Dunfermline, fed with train oil, gave but a dim and sickly light), what with the merry music of the bands, the streaming of flags and banners, and the gilded insignia of the brotherhood, borne along by the more prominent members of that ancient guild, it was a sight to be remembered! The spectacle was especially imposing as the procession marched along the High Street. The streets were densely crowded, thousands came from far and near to see it. Hundreds of smiling faces and fair and graceful forms were seen

looking down upon it, bending over the open windows, and waving their handkerchiefs in all the streets through which the Masons passed.

*“Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again”  
And all went merry as marriage bell.”*

In addition to the various emblems, devices, and insignia of office carried along, there came along with them the reverend chaplain in his gown and bands, the Rev. George Bell Brand, the respected minister of St. Andrew’s Church, bearing with solemn mien a large bible, which lay open under on a velvet cushion. A pair of compasses and a square lay upon that portion of the sacred page referring to .the building of Solomon's temple, that building where originated the mysteries and methods adopted by the Mason craft in the centuries following. After perambulating several streets in this way, the bands playing various national and stirring tunes, amongst the latter the well-known air of –

*“Hey! the merry masons,  
And ho! the merry masons,  
And hey! the merry masons,  
Go prancing along!”*

They adjourned to their lodges, where, amidst much solemnity, and afterwards much joviality, they spent the night.

Before this great annual festival the brethren would sometimes vie with each other as to who would have the handsomest silk sashes and aprons for St. John’s night. Many of them purchased their sashes and aprons in Edinburgh, but others were content to have home manufactured ones, probably the production of fair and loving hands, and many of them were regarded as excellent specimens of taste and fine needlework.

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In those old days they had also St. Crispin processions, got up by the cordwainers of the town and neighbourhood. The colliers, too, had what were called *parades* now and again. They were attended by large numbers of colliers of both sexes, accompanied by bands of music, flags, &c., and thousands of onlookers. The first St. Crispin procession was held, I believe, about 1823, and was a most gorgeous affair. There were about 8000 spectators. Several towns in Scotland used to have their cordwainers' processions long ago. I remember seeing the last one that took place in Dunfermline, and which was carried out in a most imposing style. It was somewhere about 1839 or 1840. The showy dresses, uniforms, and brilliant equipages, also the insignia of office, &c., which were to be solemnly borne along, were obtained from the Edinburgh St. Crispin Lodge. Those who witnessed the demonstration will not be likely to forget it. The principal officials who took part in it were gaily attired. Some of them acted as aides-de-camp. They were mounted on horseback (perhaps for the first time in their lives), and while they rode their richly caparisoned steeds, they bore in their hands the flaming swords of State and Justice. The foremost to head the procession were heralds, who led the van on horseback,



then spearmen, then gentlemen ushers, the sword of State, the chaplain in his gown and bands, the archbishop, two macers, and then came the most important and distinguished personage of all, the king! He had on his head a jewelled crown, and carried in his hand the sceptre of office, while he wore a gorgeous dress of crimson velvet and ermine, and bore on his breast badges and showy stars of diamonds. He had white silk stockings on his ample kingly calves, and silver buckles on his shoes. His long rich train of crimson velvet, lined with white satin, was borne behind him by six small and nicely dressed pages. He was supported by stalwart dukes and body-guards, and by the knight-marshal Crispins. The king was a tall, erect, stately man, of over six feet in stature, and as he walked along in the midst of this pageantry he had quite a majestic appearance. They could not have fixed upon a more suitable man to represent majesty than he. In the evening there was held a court or levee (in the Guildhall, if I remember rightly), where the public had an opportunity of obtaining an audience of the king and his consort, and seeing them seated on their elevated and richly adorned thrones, surrounded by their knights, equerries, and lords in waiting, clad in all the habiliments of office.

This grand and harmless St. Crispin display, like many others of a more truly regal description, has passed away, and is now "like a tale that is told." It will yet be remembered by a number of persons in Dunfermline who were privileged to witness it, and no doubt the recollection of the affair will call forth a quiet smile. The *soubriquet* of "the King" clung ever afterwards to the one who represented majesty on that great occasion. If one were asked years after, "Wha made thae boots o' yours, Jamie?" the answer was, "the King," or "King Crispin." Or another would remark that he "saw 'the King' wi' his leather apron on, standin' at his ain door, crackin' wi' Deacon Tamson," &c. &c.