



# English Freemasonry – ‘Ancients’ and ‘Moderns’

*Transcribed by Iain D. McIntosh*

## The Athole Family and Freemasonry

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As the more energetic of the Grand Lodges, which formed the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813 was denominated the "Ancients" and the majority of the Lodges under its supervision were known as "Atholl" Lodges, it appeals to us that an article consisting of references thereto by many of the Masonic writers may not prove uninteresting.

The Grand Lodge instituted in 1717 by Dr. Desaguliers, Dr. Anderson and others, was known during mid 18th Century as the "Moderns," the why and where for of these terms is not the purpose of this article, but the subject has been the cause of much able writing by living and deceased Brethren.

It is particularly with the "Ancients" that we have to deal, as this body received the whole hearted support of the Athole family.

The Grand Lodge of the "Ancients" was brought to a substantial position in British Freemasonry by the arrival in London in 1748 of Brother Laurence Dermott, a journeyman painter to trade, and whose enlightenment in the "Mystic Art" was primarily acquired in Lodge No. 26, Irish Constitution, in which he served as J.D., S.D., Secretary, J.W., S.W., his services culminating by being installed R.W.M., on the 24th May, 1746.

His career in London was a most successful one, and a rapid improvement in his social status was brought about by untiring energy and perseverance. Never at any time making apptence of being a scholar, he nevertheless cultivated his mind and acquired some knowledge of languages and of history and literature. It was during his long term as Grand Secretary of the "Ancients" that Dermott became acquainted with the Earl of Blessington, Earl Kelly and the Duke of Athole.

No record has come to light of John, 1st Duke of Athole, K.T. (1703-1724) being a Freemason, but documentary evidence shows that James, 2nd Duke of Athole, K.T. (1724-1764) was present at the Installation of Lord Weymouth as Grand Master of the "Moderns" on 17th April, 1735, and as this date is one year prior to the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland (1736), it is obvious that the family were interested in Speculative Freemasonry before their name appears on existing Scottish records.

No mention is made of the 2nd Duke of Athole being present at the consecration of the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

The name of John, 3rd Duke of Athole, K.T. (1764-1774) appears as Grand Master Elect of the Grand Lodge of Scotland at the Grand Election, Nov. 30th, 1772, and a Masonic historian



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states that "His Grace the Most Noble Duke of Athol, an , Antient ' Mason and Grand Master of a regular Lodge and now Grand Master Elect for Scotland was personally installed at the Half Moon Tavern, Cheapside, London, 2nd March, 1771, in the presence and with the concurrence and assistance of his Grace the Most Noble Duke of Leinster, Grand Master of Ireland, and the Honourable Sir James Adolphus Oughton, Grand Master of Scotland."

Special attention is directed to the fact that this is the first evidence of two ruling bodies, viz. Scotland and Ireland, giving personal recognition to the Installation of a Grand Master in England.

His Grace the 3rd Duke was elected Grand Master Mason of Scotland on Nov. 30th, 1773, and thus held the unique position of holding two Grand Masterships in the same year, and it was this influence upon the Order that brought about the title of "Athol" Masons. In 1774 the 3rd Duke died, and his death caused much concern in the ranks, as it was not easy to find a Duke every day to give his time and name to a voluntary order. Happily he left a son, but he was very young and not a Freemason, and the most sanguine only anticipated that he might in the course of future years step into the place vacated by his father. Those who thought so had not learned enough about the young Duke to find out his prompt and decisive character, for to the surprise of all he at once applied to the Grand Masters Lodge, No 1, and was initiated there on February 25th, 1775, when, from the urgency of the case, the whole three degrees were conferred upon him at the same time, and at the same meeting he was installed as Master of the Lodge. He was at the next meeting of Grand Lodge proposed as Grand Master of the "Ancients" to which office he was installed on March 25th, 1775.

This movement of the Duke was too disturbing for the quasi-older society to pass without comment, and on April 10th 1777 the Grand Lodge of the "Moderns" felt that they were bound to pass a resolution on the subject if they could take no more effective step. They moved it thus:-

"That the persons who assemble in London and elsewhere in I the character of Masons, calling themselves Antient Masons, and at present said to be under the patronage of the Duke of Athol are not to be countenanced, or acknowledged, by any regular Lodge, or Mason, under the constitution of England, nor shall any regular Mason be present at any of their conventions to give sanction to their proceedings, under the penalty of forfeiting the privileges of the 'Society,' nor shall any person initiated at any of their regular meetings be admitted into any Lodge, without being remade."

That bitter feeling existed at this period between the two Grand bodies in England is evidenced by a letter sent to the Grand Lodge of the "Moderns" by the Duke of Athole,



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dated 15th October, 1776, from the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, where the Duke had evidently been studying, as follows:-

1. His Grace the Duke of Athol would wish to know by what authority the G.L. of England pretends to a supremacy over the G.L. of Scotland, instituted by Royal Charter granted by King James the sixth to the family of Roslin in the year 1589 and acknowledged to be the new head and first Lodge in Europe.
2. Why the G.L. of England has thought proper to alter the mode of initiation; also the word, pass-word and grip of the different degrees in Masonry.
3. Whether Dermott constitutes Lodges in his own name or in the name and authority of the Duke of Athol, and whether anything can be laid to his charge, inconsistent with the Character of an honest man and a Mason. (Dermott had been accused of forging the G.M.'s signature-when he, the G.M., the Most Noble Prince John, Duke of Athol, avowed His Grace's handwriting, supported the ancient Craft and vindicated the author in public newspapers).
4. Whether any mode of union could be thought of and in such a manner that might appear probable to both parties.

(Apparently the Officers of the Grand Lodge of the "Moderns" had reversed the words of the 1st and 2nd Degrees, but at a later period viewed the error of their ways and replaced them in their proper position.).

It is evident from the foregoing that the influence of the Duke, and his collaboration with Laurence Dermott, was having a beneficial effect on the Craft in general, and their action not only protected some of the usages and customs of the Order, but exercised a strong influence towards the amalgamation of the two Grand bodies in England. That the internal affairs of the "Ancients" were not altogether pleasant, is evidenced by an affair that took place at one of their communications, and although foreign to the subject matter of this paper, is nevertheless worth adding. A motion was made for the thanks of the General Committee to be given to Grand Secretary Dermott for the pleasing instructions which he had so often administered to the Brethren. Upon which four Brethren protested against any thanks, or even approbation of the Secretary's conduct, who, instead of being useful had actually sung and lectured the Brethren out of their senses. Secretary Dermott replied that he did not desire to continue in office longer than he should be found really useful. That if a candidate better qualified offered himself, he, the Secretary, would, for the benefit of the Craft resign in favour of such Candidate, without the trouble of a General election. And if he was so fortunate as to sing any Brother out, of his senses, he hoped the Wor. Master in the Chair and the Grand Committee would allow him an hour's time and he would endeavour to sing them into their senses again.



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The request was granted with great good humour, the Secretary made proper use of his time, and the Grand Committee adjourned to the Five Bells Tavern in the Strand.

The first book of laws or constitutions of the "Ancients" was published by Laurence Dermott in 1756, under the new and fanciful title of "Ahiman Rezon" or a "Help to a Brother."

There are several editions of this book, and in the 3rd Edition, in an Address to the Reader, Dermott states:-

"Several eminent Craftsmen residing in Scotland, Ireland, America and other parts both abroad and at home, have greatly importuned me to give them some account of what is called modern Masonry in London. I cannot be displeased with such importunities, because I had the like curiosity myself, about 16/17 years ago, when I was first introduced into that Society. However, before I proceed any further concerning the difference between ancient and modern, I think it my duty, to declare solemnly before God and man, that I have not the least antipathy"" against the gentlemen members of the modern society."

Many of the careful writers on Masonic history made a mistake by applying the terms "Seceders" "Schismatics," &c., to this section of an Order who established themselves into a Grand Lodge in 1753 and the late Brother Henry Sadler after an arduous examination of all the documentary evidence possessed by the now United Grand Lodge of England, failed to find any evidence which justified him in believing that any considerable number of the "Ancients" ever owned allegiance to the regular Grand Lodge of England. At the formation of the Grand Lodge- "Moderns" in 1717, representatives of only four Lodges were present, and these bore the name of the alehouse or tavern in which they were convened, viz:- "Goose and Gridiron" "Crown" "Apple Tree" and "Rummer and Grapes." There is abundant evidence to prove that innumerable Lodges were in existence at the period mentioned. It is not unlikely that several of these may have been the precursors of the Ancient Athole Lodges.

Tradition has placed the City of York as the birthplace or seat of Masonic Government in England, and fairly substantial documentary evidence has been found that Prince Edward, son of King Athelstane, obtained from his father a Charter A.D. 926, by virtue of which all Masons were convened to a General Assembly in York, and again in the reign of Queen Elizabeth A.D. 1561, she having heard of the admission of many noblemen and gentlemen into Masonry, caused her to send an armed posse to raid a meeting of the Lodge, which having taken place on a St. John's Day, and as no use of arms was necessary, "the deputation returned to the Virgin Queen a most honourable account of the Antient Fraternity, whereby her political fears and doubts were dispelled and she let them alone as a people much respected by the Noble and Wise of all the polite-nations" It appears that the presiding Master, Sir Thomas Lockville, was the party to select the raiders, and initiated into



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the mysteries of Freemasonry the very men sent by Queen Elizabeth to raid the meeting. Our reason for introducing this historical reference to York is to remind you that in mid 18th century York was the centre of an influential Grand Lodge, one of four; and that Lodges under these four jurisdictions met in the City. That the Lodge under the Grand Mastership of the Duke of Athole was proud of their distinguished head is evidenced in the issue of the York Courant for 21st December. 1773. The Brethren of the Moriah Lodge seem to have determined to let the public; know under whose Grand Mastership they met, viz. :-

"MORIAH" LODGE.

"Of Antient Free and Accepted Masons No. 176. Constituted by the Antient Grand Lodge of England, of which the Most Noble Prince John, Duke and Marquis of Athol, Marquis and Earl of Tullibardine, Earl of Strathtay and Strathardle, Viscount of Ballquider, Glenalmond and Glenlyon, Lord Murray, Balveney and Gask, Heritable Captain and Constable of the Castle and Constabulary of Kincleaven, one of the sixteen Peers of Scotland, Knight of the Most Noble and Most Ancient Order of the Thistle, and at present Grand Master of the Most Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons. The Members hereof are desired to meet their New Master, Wardens, &c., &c."

In critically examining the data contained in the writings of Masonic Historians who were biased or imagined that they over-came their difficulties by the simple and expeditious process of copying their predecessors, we are led to think that the real cause for the formation of other Grand Lodges was the attempt of the older body to keep their organisation exclusive. In the Constitutions of the Modems dated 12th December, 1739, it is stated that the " passing " and " raising " is illegal unless at the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge, bearing out the point of exclusiveness, and naturally raising the ire of many of the members, the more particularly as a motion was made on the 27th Nov., 1725-fourteen years previously-that " a Master of each Lodge, with the consent of his Wardens, and the majority of the Brethren, being Masters, may make Masters at their discretion. Agreed Nem. Con."

During the many years of bitterness and jealousy which existed between the two Grand Lodges, viz.:-The "Ancients" or "Atholl" Lodges and the "Modems," many Brethren grieving over the quarrels and differences, devoutly desired some settlement and fraternal unity, and no names during all these years of strife are more prominent than the 3rd and 4th Dukes of Athole. Remember that the desire for a union was expressed by the Duke of Athole in his letter of 15th October, 1776.

The bitter feud which existed between the rival Grand Lodges in England was shared, but perhaps in a lesser degree, by the Brethren under those Constitutions over the seas, for we



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find that on a visit of Prince Edward, afterwards Duke of Kent, to Canada in 1794, a Masonic address was presented to him, in which a paragraph runs:-

"We have a confident hope that, under the conciliatory influence of your Royal Highness, the Fraternity in general of Freemasons in his Majesty's dominions will soon be united," to which the Prince replied :- "You may trust that my utmost efforts shall be exerted that the much-wished-for-union of the whole Fraternity of Masons may be effected." It is noteworthy that the signatures at the foot of this address were the D.G.M.'s of the Royal Grand Lodges in Canada.

At the Grand Lodge of England "Moderns" meeting held on 22nd Dec., 1809, the near prospect of a Union with the Atholl Lodges is referred to, and during one of the adjournments for refreshment to which the Masters of Lodges were invited, in order that profit and pleasure might be the result, the R. W.M. introduced the Toast of the Duke of Athole, with appropriate observations on the prevailing hopes and expectations attached to it.

On 7th March, 1810, the Atholl body sent the following report to the "Moderns" That a Masonic Union on principles equal and honourable to both Grand Lodges and preserving inviolate the landmarks of the Antient Craft would in the opinion of this Grand Lodge be expedient and advantageous to both." The answer came from the Earl of Moira, Grand Master of the "Modern" Grand Lodge on 10th April-" That this Grand Lodge meets with unfeigned cordiality the desire expressed by the Grand Lodge under His Grace the Duke of Athole for a Re-union." The bitter rivalry and misunderstandings between the two Grand Lodges for over a period of 60-70 years were now at an end, and in 1813, an amicable and satisfactory union was accomplished.

This important event in Masonic history is recorded as follows :-

Resignation of the Duke of Atholl, M.W.G.M. ESPECIAL GRAND LODGE of FREE and ACCEPTED MASONS of ENGLAND, According to the Old Institutions, held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand, Monday, November, 8th, 1813.

The R.W. Brother THOMAS HARPER, D.G.M., in the Chair, With the Right Worshipful Past Deputy Grand Masters, Grand Wardens and the other Grand Officers in their places.

And the Masters and Past Masters of the Warranted Lodges in and adjacent to London.

The Grand Lodge being opened in due form, the proceedings of the Grand Lodge in September, and of the Stewarts' Lodge of September and October, were read and confirmed.



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A letter from His Grace the Duke of Atholl was then read, intimating his desire of resigning the Office of Grand Master, in favour of His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent.

The R.W. Past Deputy Grand Master Perry moved the following Resolutions, which all passed in the affirmative, nemine contradicente, viz. :-

1. Resolved Unanimously:- That the resignation of the high office of Grand Master, tendered by the Most Worshipful His Grace the Duke of Atholl be respectfully accepted.

2. Resolved Unanimously: - That the thanks of this Grand Lodge be given to our Most Noble Brother His Grace the Duke of Atholl, for his zealous, enlightened and successful exertions as Grand Master of Masons in England, to promote, extend and secure the welfare of the Craft. That they feel, with the most lively sensibility, the recollection of the cheerfulness with which, in a moment of difficulty, his Grace took upon him the important office; and that also, on another trying emergency, when the existence of the Fraternity, as a recognised establishment, was at stake, he supported, by his high name, power and influence, the just claims of the Body to be secured by a special provision from the enactments of a statute, which the safety of the State rendered necessary for the restraint and regulation of popular societies. And it is with the most heartfelt gratitude that they make their acknowledgements to his Grace for his long and unshaken patronage, under the encouragement and sanction of which they have advanced to their present high, respectable and flourishing condition: And they fervently pray to the Almighty Architect of the Universe to bless and protect their Noble Brother and his Race.

3. Resolved Unanimously:- That a respectful application be made to his Grace the Duke of Atholl that he will be pleased to permit his portrait to be taken by an artist of celebrity, that it may be placed conspicuously in the Grand Lodge, as a perpetual memorial of their love and reverence of his virtues, and of their gratitude for his services to the Craft.

His Grace was Grand Master Mason of Scotland in 1778 and 1779. For personal reasons, he surrendered the reins of office of the "Ancient" Grand Lodge to the Earl of Antrim in 1781, and on the death of the latter in 1791, he was re-elected and duly installed on the 20th January, 1792, at the "Crown and Anchor " Tavern, and continued in office until the Union in 1813. Under his auspices, in 1798, the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys was established.

The sixth Duke of Athole, K. T., succeeded his father as second Baron Glenlyon, in 1837, and his uncle, John fifth Duke, in 1846. Initiated in Lodge St. John, Dunkeld, in November 1841, His Grace was, on St. Andrew's Day of the same year, called to a seat on the dais of the Grand Lodge, and for two years held the post of Grand Master Depute. He was elected Grand Master Mason (the 66th in succession) in November 1843, and this high office he held with much acceptability until his death in January, 1864. No other Craftsman has ever presided over the destinies of the Scottish Craft for such an extended period, and none was more





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beloved and respected. On several occasions he travelled long distances to attend Grand Lodge Quarterly Communications. As an instance of his punctuality in this respect, it may be mentioned that, being on a visit in November, 1861, to the Emperor of the French, he was not expected to preside at the Grand Lodge Festival of that year. Arrangements were made for his Depute filling the throne, but he surprised the Brethren by appearing at his post on the night of the Festival. His Grace performed many public Masonic Acts; but the chief of these were the laying of the foundation-stones of the Victoria Bridge at Glasgow, April 9, 1851; the Freemasons' Hall, Edinburgh, June 24, 1858; and the Wallace Monument, near Stirling, June 24, 1861. Twice did his jealousy of the honour of the Craft bring him into collision with Royalty itself, although the claims which he then put forth, being based entirely upon tradition, were quite untenable? When in 1851 Prince Albert was invited to lay the foundation-stone of the Fine Arts Gallery in Edinburgh, his Grace failing to persuade His Royal Highness to join the Order, declined under protest to countenance the proceedings. Again in 1861, when made aware of the Prince Consort's intention to plant the corner-stones of the new Post Office and Industrial Museum at Edinburgh, his Grace addressed a letter to His Royal Highness, in which he said, "I consider it my duty, as Grand Master Mason of Scotland, again respectfully to protest against the infringement of the ancient privilege of the Masonic Bodies to lay the foundation-stones of public buildings in Scotland." The Prince replied that he had made inquiry, and found that Freemasons possessed no such exclusive right as had been claimed by his Grace.

Her Majesty Queen Victoria manifested her personal regard for the Duke by paying him a special visit during his last illness, the details of which were of an interesting character. A Funeral Grand Lodge was held in honour of his Grace. A similar mark of respect was paid by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Glasgow under the Presidency of Sir Archibald Alison, Baronet. And in 1865 his Grace's friends and admirers, at a cost of about £1500, erected a Celtic Cross to his memory, on a picturesque site on Logierait Hill, overlooking the Vale of Athole. The foundation-stone of the monument was laid by Brother John Whyte-Melville, of Bennoch and Strathkinness, Most Worshipful Grand Master Mason, supported by very large deputations of the Craft from all the districts of Scotland.

The following Dirge was composed by the Grand Bard, Brother James Ballantine, for the Funeral Grand Lodge held in honour of the Duke of Athole's memory:-

"O wild wails the wind o'er the green hills of Athole,  
While deep in the valleys the dark waters flow;  
The caverns are moaning, the forests are groaning,  
The grey cliffs are shrouded in dense wreaths of woe.  
Through glen and through corrie the coronach's stealing,  
Round sheiling and cottage sad sounds thrill the air;





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In castle and palace, lorn hearts are revealing.  
Their soul-stricken anguish, in tones of despair.

O'er the dark night of grief there arose a bright morrow,  
And love's morning star shone with warm genial ray,  
When our dear widowed Queen and her sister in sorrow,  
With pure angel tears washed death's sorrow away.  
O heavenly the feeling, that links hearts forever,  
When Royal Humanity points out the way  
To life and to love! where no future can sever  
Souls blent in harmony, ever and aye.

Well may the Clansmen lament their brave Chieftain!  
Well may we Brothers our loved Master wail!  
He who maintained in their pure pristine glory  
The Light of the Craft, and the fame of the Gael!  
And now, though he sleeps 'mid his own native mountains,  
While Lowlands and Highlands one sad sorrow share;  
Watered and nourished by love's swelling fountains,  
His name in our bosoms shall bloom ever fair."

Lord James Charles Plantagenet Murray (brother of the sixth Duke) was also an initiate of Lodge St. John, Dunkeld, of which he became R. W. Master. His Lordship was also for many years Representative of the Grand Lodge of Scotland at the Grand Lodge of England, with the rank of Past Senior Grand Warden. In other grades of Masonry he held the office of First Grand Principal of the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland, and was Deputy Governor of the Royal Order of Scotland.

John James Hugh Henry Stewart, seventh Duke of Athole, K. T., as Marquis of Tullibardine, was initiated in Lodge St. John, Dunkeld, on St. Andrew's Day, 30th November, 1858. Referring to the Festival of St. Andrew, held by the Grand Lodge in Edinburgh on the same date, the Grand Lodge of Scotland "Reporter" states: "The occasion was one of more than usual interest to the Brethren, as the young Marquis of Tullibardine was for the first time introduced by his noble father to the Grand Lodge, he having been initiated that morning. General Swinburne proposed the health of the Most Noble the Marquis of Tullibardine, which was received with Masonic honours. The noble Marquis made an appropriate reply, and expressed the utmost gratification at being admitted into the Fraternity."



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His Grace was "Passed" in the Mother Lodge on 12th January, 1859, and "Raised" in "St. Paul's" Lodge, Montreal, Canada, No. 374 E.C. on 24th March, 1863. He occupied both Wardens' Chairs in the Grand Lodge of Scotland and held the office of Provincial Grand Master of Perthshire West.

John George Stewart Murray, eighth and present Duke of Athole, K.T., C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O., received the "light" of Masonry, in the Lodge of Dunkeld" St. John's " No. 14, on the 24th of October, 1892, and on account of his having to go on foreign service, a special dispensation was granted by Grand Lodge and his "Passing" and "Raising" was completed on the 23rd December, 1892.

The highest honour his Mother Lodge could confer on him that of R.W. Master, was granted on the 29th of December, 1896. He held the office of Grand Master Depute of Scotland from 1906 to 1909 and was Most Worshipful Grand Master Mason of Scotland from 1909 to 1914.

On the 30th November, 1921, a full-length portrait of the Noble Duke was unveiled in Grand Lodge and a replica presented to Her Grace the Duchess of Athole.

His Grace is at present representative from the United Grand Lodge of England to the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

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