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The Magdalen Chapel

COWGATE, EDINBURGH



Proceeds of sales will go to the Restoration Fund

20p.

A Short History of the Magdalen Chapel

Cowgate, Edinburgh

FOREWORD

This outline history of the Magdalen Chapel is a revised and slightly abbreviated version of a pamphlet prepared for the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society in 1927 by Mr John Smith, F.S.A. Scotland.

The E.M.M.S. for many years carried on valuable medical, social and evangelistic work in the Livingston Dispensary which adjoined the Chapel, and had the use of the Chapel for their services.

Grateful acknowledgement is made of their kindness in making the contents of their pamphlet available to the Scottish Reformation Society for this reprint as part of their Appeal literature for the Restoration Appeal.

We appreciate also the use of the excellent print on the cover of this pamphlet.

The Founders

A praiseworthy and prominent feature of pre-Reformation times in Scotland was the noble and pious desire among the wealthier members of the Church to found and endow religious and charitable institutions to cope with destitution, sickness, and infirmity. Edinburgh during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was especially indebted to such organisations, having at least seven hospitals or almshouses under ecclesiastical supervision, amongst them being the Magdalen Chapel and Hospital founded by Michael Maquhen and Janet Rynd, his wife, in 1541.

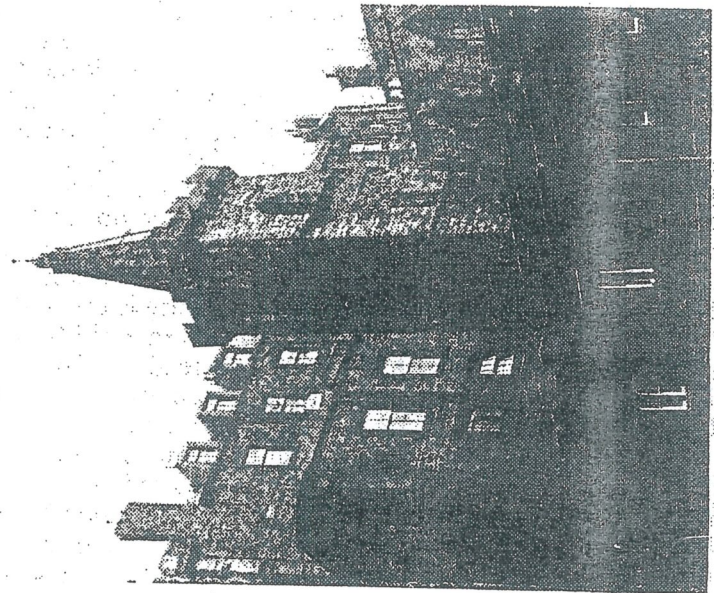
Michael Maquhen was apparently a native of Whithorn in Wigtonshire. As a burghess, merchant and moneylender he was from 1514 to 1537 one of the most prominent citizens of Edinburgh. The Burgh Records of the period contain many references to services rendered by him both to King James V. and to the city. The resolution to devote some of his wealth to charity was no doubt fostered by his appointment in 1521-22 as one of a number of prominent burghers who at intervals met to discuss matters concerning the "weil of thair Kirk". His experience at these conferences made him aware of the difficulty of adding to the altars and chapels which already crowded St. Giles' Kirk, and the knowledge of benefits conferred on the poor and suffering by the Trinity and other Hospitals in the city probably suggested to him the best way of using his resources. He began to put his scheme into shape by buying a number of properties to form an endowment fund, the last deed of this kind in his own name being dated 1536, the year before his death. To Janet Rynd, his widow, is due the completion of the enterprise. Shrewd and clear-headed, she, on the death of her husband, took charge of his lucrative business and served her Royal patrons and others in person. She seems immediately to have set about the furtherance of her husband's wishes, and in seven years completed the erection of the Chapel and Hospital. It appears that in all £2700 Scots (about £225 sterling) was expended in the work. Difficulties and delays would be many and varied, and anxious days followed its completion, for in 1544 our "auld enemies," the English, were hammering at the Nether Bow Port. She died in 1553, and was buried in the Chapel she had erected. Her gravestone exhibits the following inscription round its margin: "Heir lyes ane honorabil woman Janet Rynd spous of umquhile Micel Maquhen burghess of Edin and founder of this place and decessit ye III day of Decr. An Dom M.VcLIII."

The Charter of Foundation and Deed of Mortification extends to nearly five thousand words. It is dated 1547, and it is clear that its preparation was delayed till every essential was in working order. To William Stewart, Bishop of Aberdeen, was entrusted the drawing up of the draft, and in reading it through one is struck with the simplicity of the language, the minute guidance given in every little point, and, above all, the human note that runs through the document. It was signed before Sir Adam Otterburn and Adam Crichton, Abbot of Dunclas, by Janet Rynd and seventeen members of the Incorporation of Hammermen, including James Johnstoun, Deacon of the Craft.

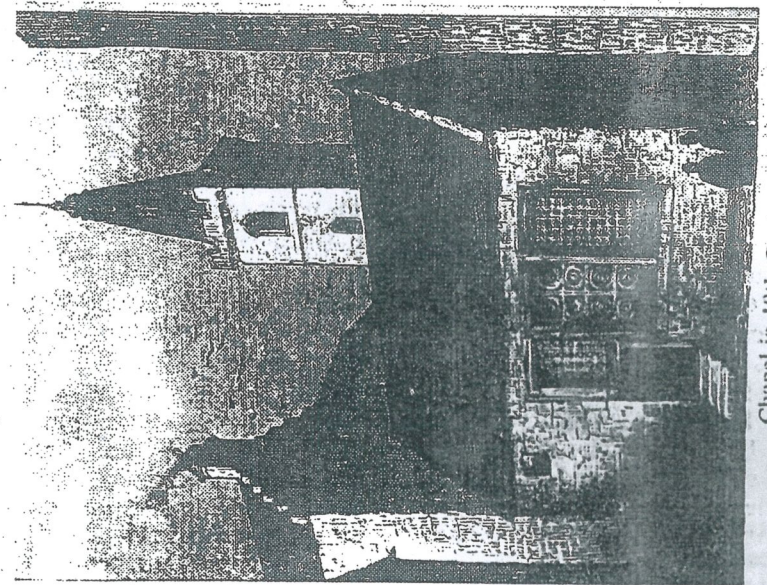
Early History of the Chapel

The patronage of the Chapel and Hospital having been granted to and accepted by the Hammermen, they took a keen interest in the place, as may be seen from the record of sums paid by them from 1547 to 1560 for dues and donations. When the storm of the Reformation burst in the latter year, violent divisions arose amongst the Craftsmen, and disorders took place which resulted in damage to the building, till it was secured by strong efforts made in its behalf. The whole interior seems to have been gutted, the roof injured, and the west window destroyed: gone for ever was everything that had any connection with the old faith, including the statue of the Patron Saint and the great altar with its candlesticks and furnishings. After peace had been established, the patrons began a series of alteration and improvements to adapt the building as a meeting place for the Craft. In 1614 an ornate porch and entrance was erected for the Hospital to the west of the Chapel: this had long since disappeared, leaving only a single relic in the large carved panel exhibiting the crests of the founders surmounted by the crown and hammer, the insignia of the Hammermen's Craft, now to be seen over the principal door of the Chapel. This was removed to its present position in 1649, the date inscribed below the pediment.

The steeple was the next important addition to the Chapel: it was commenced in 1618 and completed ten years later. The present bell was added in 1632 and replaced a much smaller one which was deemed insufficient, as the following Minute records:—
“Taking into yair consideration yat thay have ane fair steeple, bot ane small bell, ye sound yairof is not far heard, and for ye credit of yair craft and honour of ye guid toun, and yat yair bell may be heard through ye haill toun, they all in ane voice haif thocht guid yat every Airt (Trade) convene for yameselves, yat it sall pleis God to move every ane of yair hertes to gif to buy ane bell of greitter wecht and ane knock (clock) gif it can be ateinit.”
This remarkable appeal met with a generous response, an order was placed with a famous bell-founder in Flanders, and within



Chapel Today



Chapel in 19th Century

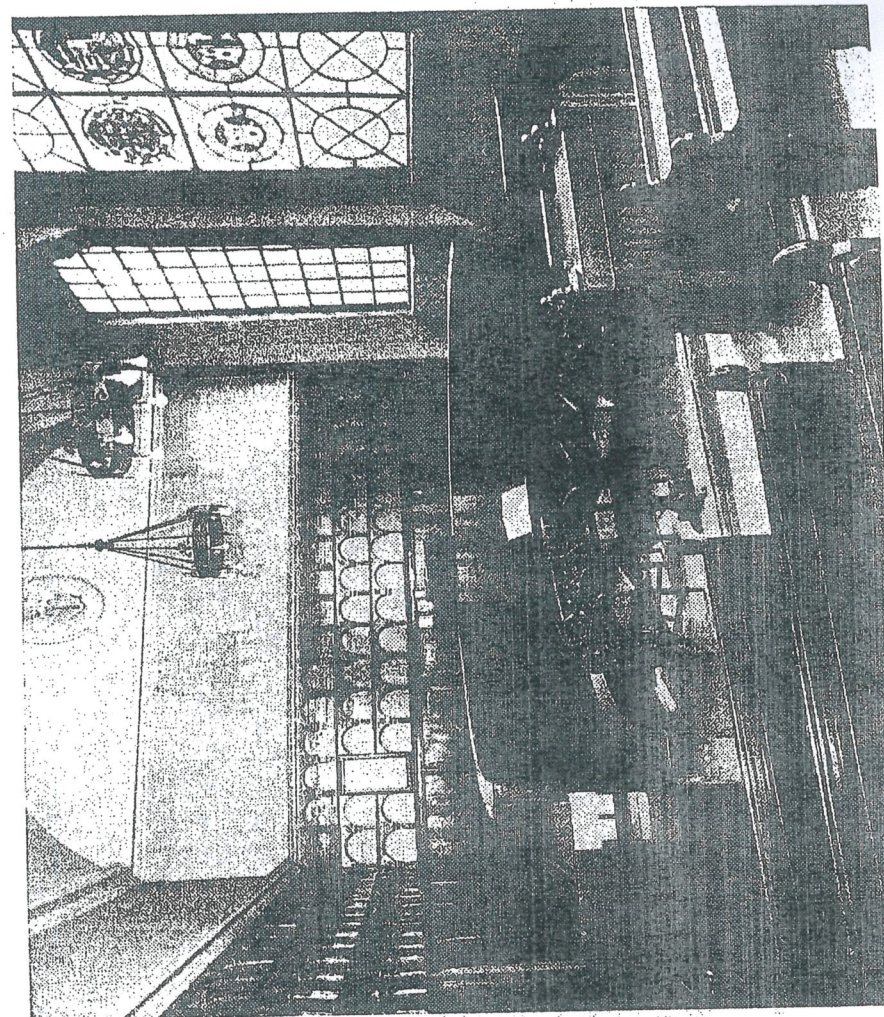
three months the bell was in position. The patrons were greatly pleased with the power and tone of their new bell, and soon found means to derive an income from its use, any one paying the fixed charges being privileged to have it rung on week-days: the Church of Greyfriars retained its services on Sundays at a fee of £40 Scots annually. It is still in splendid condition, and shows in raised letters two inscriptions: "Soli Deo Gloria Michael Burchuys me Fecit 1632," and "God blis the Hammermen of Edinburgh," as well as the crown and hammer on both sides. In many a stirring pageant that has crossed the stage of our romantic city's history has the old bell sent out its clear, ringing notes. Among other interesting records of its use is this:—"Paid to William Campbell for ringing of ye bell ye tyme of Montrose's burial £1, 4s. Scots." Again, in 1689, we read: "For ringing ye bell yat day the Prince of Orange was proclaimed King £2, 16s."

In 1641 the need of having a "knok" or clock was mooted, and by the end of that year one made by James Alison, Cupar, Fife, was installed at a cost of over £33 sterling. This was replaced in 1696 by one made by a well-known Edinburgh maker, Andrew Brown. It is now, alas, but a mass of rusty iron.

After the storms of 1560 the interior of the Chapel was in a very bare and unsatisfactory condition. The floor towards the eastern part was of stone and formed the sanctuary on which, doubtless, stood the altar, with the foundress's tomb near by. The rest of the floor was of earth, and would usually be covered with bent or rushes. This was replaced by a stone flooring to make it fit for the meetings of the Hammermen, forms being provided for sitting accommodation. There was no door to the west, as at present, and the small door in the south-west corner which originally existed was eventually closed, the entrance being through the door in the north wall under the steeple.

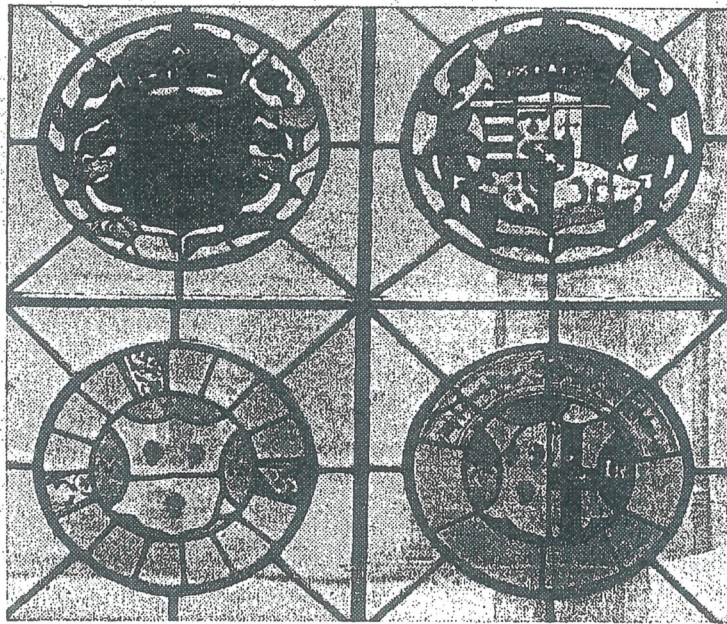
The "brods" or tablets which adorn the east and north walls assumed their present form in 1686. They record the legacies or donations given for the support of poor members of the Craft, and cover a period of over 250 years. At first they were simply inscriptions on paper. In the year noted, John Hislop, wright, was paid £60 Scots for making new wooden brods and £40 for altering 50 old ones.

In 1708 a splendid chair was made for the Deacon: it is now to be seen in the Chapel. In 1725 the varnished high-backed seat and the raised platform were erected and the whole Chapel redecorated, the roof being painted blue with a golden sun in the centre. The wrought iron rail in front of the platform is a notable piece of work and includes the insignia of the Hammerman. The bottom tablet to the right of the north door marks the position of the box in which contributions for the poor were received at each meeting of the Craft.



Interior showing Brods and Shields

The chief glory of the Chapel is found in the four beautiful stained-glass shields which now adorn the centre window. They represent (1) the arms of Mary of Lorraine, Consort of King James V.; (2) the Royal arms of Scotland; (3) the arms of Michael Maquhen; and (4) the impaled arms of Maquhen and Rynd. They date from the middle of the sixteenth century, and enable us to realise what Scotland lost through the ruthless destruction associated with the Reformation troubles. The presence of the first two shields or roundels mentioned raises many questions, for there is no documentary evidence of any connection of Royalty with the Chapel. But the original Charter affords some clue to the mystery. The Chapel was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, its Patron Saint was St. Mary Magdalen, and the Chaplain and Bedesmen were enjoined to pray for the soul of Mary Queen of Scots.



The Stained-Glass Shields

All this strongly suggests that the roundels were presented by Mary of Lorraine herself to Janet Rynd, for the records make it sufficiently clear that the founders of the Chapel were brought by their commercial relations into close contact with the King and Queen. The latter was left a widow in 1542, and her friend Janet Rynd, now also a widow, was busy at that date with the building of the Chapel. May we not surmise that the experience of bereavement which both had shared, coupled with the Queen's strong religious interest, culminated in her presentation of these two roundels in loving memorial of her friendship and in approbation of the pious purposes of the Foundation? One can hardly believe that Janet Rynd and Bishop Stewart would have presumed on their own responsibility to embellish the Chapel with the Royal Arms. The shields are incomplete and originally occupied positions in different windows, being probably only portions of the complete scheme of lighting. In 1585 record is made of repairs to the roundels, and in 1601 the centre window was enlarged to its present size, at a cost of £20 for the glass alone. Four years later the side windows were extensively damaged, and at that time these windows were enlarged to bring them into line with the centre window, all four roundels being transferred to their present position and protected by wire caging. In 1895 additional protection was afforded by facings of plate glass and a renewed wire screen. These are the only specimens of pre-Reformation stained glass of any importance left in Scotland and are consequently of great value.

The Chaplain and Bedesmen

The Charter provided for a Hospital or residence for a Chaplain and seven Bedesmen, pensioners, and a Chapel to be devoted entirely to religious services. The first and only pre-Reformation Chaplain was Thomas Williamson, who served for nineteen years. Apart from the general management of the institution he had two daily services to conduct in the Chapel: on Feast and Holy Days he had to celebrate Mass with full observance of ritual. At no time was he allowed to curtail or evade either, unless prevented by sickness or infirmity from carrying them out. His emoluments can hardly be termed princely. The official stipend was £18 Scots, about thirty shillings sterling, along with board and residence. The offertories given at the services, if any, also fell to his share, but out of these he had to supply six candle lights for the Chapel, the days and locations for the use of which are duly noted in the Charter: he had also to pay for the washing of the altar cloths and to supply the bread and wine required for the services. In 1559, as an adherent of the old Church, he was arrested and placed in Roslin Castle, but through the intervention of some of the Patrons of the Hospital

he was released and brought back to Edinburgh; and was paid his full stipend till 1567, the year of his death.

Over one-fifth part of the Charter is occupied with the rules and regulations regarding the Bedesmen. They were required to be of sixty years of age or over, and to be punctual in their attendance in the Chapel. The first service was held at a quarter to seven o'clock in the morning, and all had to repeat the Lord's Prayer five times, the Salutation of the Virgin and the Apostles' Creed fifty times, and each in turn a part of two special Psalms. The second service, held after breakfast, was of a simpler kind and was rehearsed on bended knees before the great altar. At a quarter to eight in the evening there were repeated prayers for the souls of deceased persons, especially the Founders and their relatives, after which supper was served and, to quote the language of the Charter, "the gates being closed they shall go to bed with mutual love, charity, meekness, and quietness."

The secular duties required of the Bedesmen included the opening and shutting of the outer doors, keeping the Chapel clean, and ringing the bell at prescribed hours. Each Bedesman received £9 Scots per annum, a sum gradually increased as larger funds became available; in addition he received a cloak or gown of thick blue cloth with a cross in white sewn on the right arm. For at least 115 years this livery was a familiar sight in the streets and closes of the old town. About 1665 the fraudulent behaviour of the official collector led to the abolition of the Bedesmen altogether, a step which was further recommended by the increasing claims of the poor connected with the Hammermen's Craft: the benefits were expended on the widows and orphans of members of the Craft. This body wielded great power in the burgher life of the city, a power which it used in the cause of charity and justice.

Later History of the Chapel

After the Reformation the Chapel became the regular meeting-place of the Patrons, who did their best to make it worthy of so powerful a Craft. The designation Hammermen included all metal-workers except the Goldsmiths, and as it covered twelve different branches of industry, endless disputes concerning their respective rights and privileges continually occurred. Turbulent to a degree that made them a force to be reckoned with in the burgher life of the city, the Hammermen would brook not the least interference in their affairs by outsiders. Master journeymen and apprentices had the right to state their grievances before the Craft, and some of these quarrels ended in bloodshed. The culprits were punished by being ordered to pay the barber-surgeons who were called in to attend to the sufferers, and if such payment were refused, the Craft had the right of putting the wrongdoers in gaol without the intervention of the magistrates.

There are two notable historical traditions connected with the Chapel, namely, that John Craig, John Knox's colleague, preached in it, and that here was held the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1560. In 1688, permission was given to some of the townspeople of Presbyterian principles to hold meetings there and to put in furnishings suitable for their requirements; a small loft or gallery was erected, but the tenancy so granted was soon terminated and the fittings removed. After that time the Chapel was not again used for divine services until comparatively modern times.

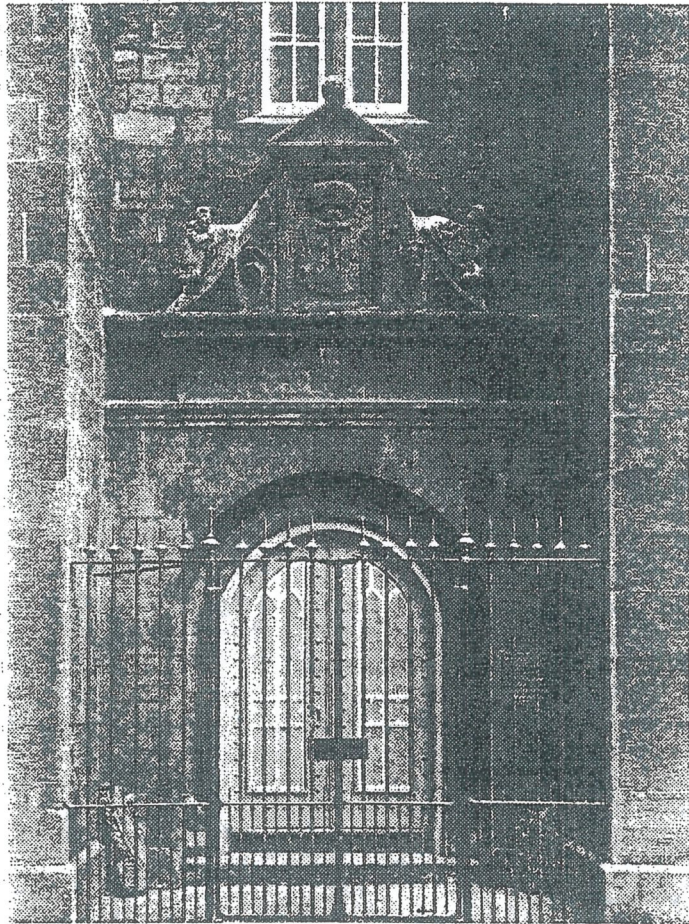
Another use which the Hammermen made of the Chapel was dictated by financial considerations. During part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it served as a mortuary. Its nearness to the public execution places, the Grassmarket, the Town Cross, and the Tolbooth, undoubtedly suggested this revolting arrangement. It is most likely that many of the mangled bodies of the Covenanters who were done to death near by were conveyed to the Magdalen Chapel and there handed over to their relatives or friends. The Treasurer's statement for the year 1685 contains the following Minute:—"Received for the late Earl of Argyll's corpse staying in the Chapel, £29 Scots": this is followed by the suggestive item—"Spent when I received the £29 for the Earl of Argyll's corpse ten shillings." Almost the last record of this kind is as follows:—"Paid John Moffat (the officer) an account for coals and ale furnished by him by the Deacon's orders to the late Alexander Ramsay when his corpse was brought into the Magdalene Chapel and laid before a great fire to see if he would come alive with the heat, in regard he dies suddenly, £2, 2s."

Towards the close of the eighteenth century the Chapel was often used for the drawing of lotteries and the exhibition of mechanical and other curiosities. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Hammermen were feeling the effect of the building of the new town. Their powers were of no avail there, as it was entirely outside their jurisdiction. Fewer and fewer members joined the Craft, and the passing of the Reform Bill of 1842 gave the death-blow to all such incorporated associations, putting an end to every form of exclusive trading. Interest in and funds for the support of the Chapel gradually faded away, and in 1857 the few surviving members decided to transfer it to the Protestant Institute. The Institute was amalgamated with the Scottish Reformation Society in 1965, and the Chapel is now in the care of this body. Considerable restoration work has been carried out and this is being extended as funds become available.

A request was received from the new Heriot Watt University in 1966 that the Society should make the Magdalen Chapel available to the University as its Chaplaincy Centre.

This request was cordially granted, and the old Chapel has thus acquired a new interest as a religious centre for the benefits of students attending Edinburgh's new University.

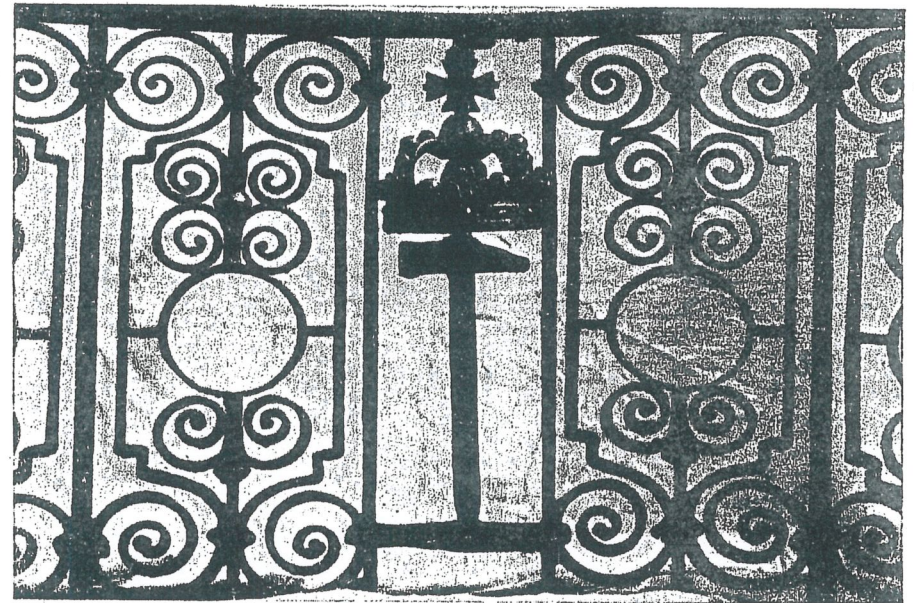
At the installation of the first Chaplain of the Heriot Watt University, Lord Provost Herbert Brechin presented to the Chapel a beautiful lectern Bible which had been gifted to him a few months previously by His Majesty, King Hussein of Jordan.



A PRAYER

(In regular use at the meetings of the Hammermen in the Magdalen Chapel.)

“ Most holy & blessed Lord, Make us thy servants mett together befor the at this tyme, Mindfull that all things are naked & open before thy Majestie, with whom we have to doe, Give us wee beseech thee to eye the in every-thing we interpryze, & help & lead us through every difficultie & strait we meet with, Keep our hearts near thyself, Remove from us all partialitie, corrupt affections & Divisione, And grant us thy Grace to goe about everything we (by thy providence) shall happen to meet with, with uprightnesse of heart & singlenesse of eye as in thy alseing sight & presence, So that the haill fruits of our travell by thy special grace & assistance may tend to the praise of thy dreadfull & blessed name, to the weel of every one & the comfort & good of us who are before the, And that for Christ thy sones sake, Blessed for ever, Amen.”



Wrought Iron Screen, showing the Hammer and Crown

THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION SOCIETY

The Scottish Reformation Society was founded in 1850 and since then has sought to promote a witness to the principles of the Reformation which brought so many blessings to many parts of the world.

The Society is inter-denominational in character and seeks to carry on its work in several ways. Public lectures are given on the various facets of Reformation history and principles; good evangelical literature is extensively used to inform and influence the public mind on the great questions at issue between the Reformed doctrine and all departures from this faith. These two are bound up together with the issue of the Society's official magazine *The Bulwark* which appears in eleven issues each year.

The work is supported entirely by public subscriptions from a wide area and contributions for the furtherance of this work are always welcome and gratefully acknowledged.

The maintenance of the Magdalen Chapel as a worthy historic monument of Scotland's past has recently taken on new meaning and the work of preserving this lovely old building will continue and further work done as funds are available.

Fuller details on this work, either as a Society or in regard to the Magdalen Chapel can be had from

The Secretary,
Scottish Reformation Society,
Magdalen Chapel 41 Cowgate
Edinburgh, EH1 1JR

to whom all contributions may be sent.

Kindly specify work to which any donation is given, e.g. Society Funds or Magdalen Chapel Appeal Fund.

MAGDALEN CHAPEL RESTORATION PROJECT

For a number of years the possibility of undertaking a programme of restoration and refurbishment of the Magdalen Chapel has been discussed by various groups desirous of seeing this lovely old building restored to its pristine beauty. It stands as a telling reminder of our rich heritage and it depicts many aspects of religious, social and cultural life in this rich pageant of history since it was built.

After careful consideration of what would be involved in such a project, and taking expert advice from our Architects, the Committee of the Scottish Reformation Society decided to undertake this work. It is a costly venture and we know a lot of hard work lies ahead before even the possibility of the work commencing. We have been assured of a grant from the Historic Buildings Council which will cover approximately two-thirds of the cost but that remaining one-third falls to the Society to raise.

BEFORE WORK CAN COMMENCE WE REQUIRE TO RAISE £70,000. OUR DATE FOR THIS TARGET TO BE REACHED IS APRIL 1991.

WE NEED YOUR HELP AND WE WILL VALUE ALL SUPPORT GIVEN TO THIS PROJECT WHETHER LARGE OR SMALL.

A Special Fund has been set up for this purpose and gifts may be sent directly to the office or by Banker's Order directly to the Fund. The details are as follows:

Hon. Treasurer
Magdalen Chapel Appeal Fund
Scottish Reformation Society
17 George IV Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1EE.

OR THE ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND
14 George Street
EDINBURGH EH2 2YF

marking all gifts
MAGDALEN CHAPEL RENOVATION FUND
A/C No. 00256552 Scottish Reformation Society.

WILL YOU HELP US TO ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVE. YOUR GIFT WILL BE APPRECIATED AND ACKNOWLEDGED.