



THE ANCIENT FRATERNITY of FREE GARDENERS of EAST LOTHIAN

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by CHARLES MARTINE

edited by W. H. Brown

Friendly Societies are known to have existed in Haddington as early as the seventeenth century, and the Free Gardeners can claim to be among the first of them, for the Lodge was recognising its jubilee on 17th August 1776 though the members of its Committee recorded their belief at the time that the Institution was of much older date. From records of invitations to conventions in the mid-nineteenth century, rarely accepted it appears, it seems likely also that the East Lothian Fraternity was the oldest of its following in Scotland. Many years ago a member explained the movement to the author in the following terms. "The origin of Free Gardenerly is lost in the mists of antiquity: we learn from ancient history that, more than 3000 years ago, the cultivators of the soil in the fertile valley of the Nile formed themselves into secret associations for the purpose of mutual instruction and defence of privilege. Enthusiastic Free Gardeners profess to trace the spread of these Societies from Egypt into Greece, and thence through process of time throughout the continent of Europe, no doubt undergoing great modification in the course of transmission, until they ultimately reached the shores of Britain, and became the progenitors of the Lodges now existing. However, leaving these traditions out of account for the present, Free Gardenerly can still claim a very respectable degree of antiquity."

An important feature of the movement has been its emphasis on mutual benefit, and indeed many Lodges existed for little else, but the Haddington Lodge claimed to be one of the few that also maintained, at least to some extent, the early traditions. It is true that they did not meet for instruction, but they maintained the ancient secret ritual, and by their regular flower shows strove to foster a healthy rivalry among the brethren. Members were at liberty to go into a brother's garden if he were present, and were permitted to ask for a root or cutting of any plant they fancied and it was the duty of the owner to see that the request was met.

The Minute Books

Preserved to-day in the Scottish Records Office are the seven Minute Books of the East Lothian Fraternity, the first of them having the inscription "this Book

belongeth to the Fraternity of Gardeners in East Lothian, and comprehends all done by Ym from ye 16th day of August 1676." The earlier books, while they are informative about the characters and manners of their time, are not written up in much detail and leave a great deal to the reader's imagination. One might have expected discussion of horticultural topics, but these are absent; instead the record concentrates on the two principal aims of the Fraternity, to provide a code of pride, honour and behaviour among local gardeners, and to support "the Box".

At the first recorded meeting, the Constitution was approved and adopted, but, although in May 1677 some rules, perhaps made necessary by subsequent events were added, the next minuted meeting was not held until 29th February 1690, a wholly unexplained lapse of fourteen years. It is to the Constitution, however, that we have to look for the objects of the Society:

*Interjunctions for ye Fraternity of Gardiners of East Lothian
Ye Sixteenth day of August
1676*

1. Inprimis. That none of the said Fraternity presume to admitt or receive any Brethern without the presence of the President or Chairman, or one of the Joint Masters, and if there is a Quorum, ye Clerk always being present, who shall be oblidge to take a Minute of the Quorum, their Names, day, place, and Brethern then admitted, under Twenty pounds of penalty toties quoties.
- Secundo. That none of the said Fraternity presume to curse or swear under the penaltie of Two shillings, Scots, toties quoties, for each oath, to be given in to ye Box for the use of the poor.
- Tertio. At the admission of any of the Fraternity, Gentlemen to pay one half Crown, a Gardener ane Merk, with ane Annual annuity.
- Quarto. That none professing to be handie labouring and working Gardeners be admitted until they be first tryed, examined, and approved of, by a sufficient Quorum of the Fraternity appointed for the effect, that Noblemen, Gentlemen, and others may be sufficiently served with well qualified Gardiners, under the penalty of Twentie pounds toties quoties.
- Quinto. That none of the said Fraternity shall presume to back byte, or speak evill of any of the admitted Brethern to their Masters, nor supplant or take their Yeads over their heads, without the Gardiners leave first had and obtained thereto, and at least acquainted therewith, under the pain of Fourtie pounds, and half to be payed to the Box, and the other half to the party grieved.

- Sexto.** That none of the Fraternity intyse or seduce his Brothers Prentice or Servant, or procure ane service for him without his Masters Libertie first had and obtained, under the penaltie of Ten pounds Scots, toties quoties.
- Septimo.** That if it please God to remove any of the Fraternity, and he leave a Widow and Children, That none of the said Brethern shall enter into the Service without satisfying the Relict for her Husbands loss on the Ground and Propertie belonging to him and there, at the sight of any four of the Fraternity concerned for that effect, under the pain of One hundred Merks, and atone, paying the Relict for the goods on the Ground.
- Octavo.** That all Gardiners of the Fraternity upon their Travells for procuring further science, be intertained by the Brethern unto whom they come, till they have shewn them their labour, Procedure and Skill — if it were for two or three days time, without any cost, under the penalty of Ten pounds toties quoties.
- Nono.** That every one of the Brethern admitted, shall give his best counsell to his Brother for Levelling, Contryving, Planting and Dressing of ground, they being always required so to do, if they have not more urgent affairs of their own impeding them, under the pain of Five pounds, to be given in to the Box.
- Decimo.** That all and every one of the Fraternity shall attend the Yearly Meeting being advertised, or any other Meeting that the Fraternity shall appoint, except he show a relevant excuse, or advertise any of the Masters thereof, under the penaltie of Fourtie shillings, to be paid into the Box.
- Undecimo.** That if any of the Fraternity betwixt Meetings, finds out or learns any art concerning Plants, for furthering their fruits, he shall publicly and openly reveal the same at the Yearly Meeting in presence of the whole Fraternity then present, at least to those who require the same, and worthy and deserving thereof, under the penaltie of twentie pounds toties quoties.
- Duodecimo.** That none of the Fraternity shall presume, or take it upon himself, to accept and receive a Prentice under four Years with ane Prentice fie as may be agreed upon by the parties, and that the Indentore be seen by the Clerk of the Fraternity and Booked, under the penaltie of Twentie pounds toties quoties.
- Decimo tertio.** That all money by Fyns, Entries, Collections or otherwise gathered, to be employed for the use of the distressed Widows, Orphans, and the poor of the Fraternity, and that, by order of the President or one of the Masters, with a quorum of the Fraternity giveth order, is to be subscribed by them for the Treasurer, his warrant.
- Decimo quarto.** That when any Gardiner removes from one Yeard, he shall not transplant, nor take away furth, of any Trees, Bushes, Herbs or any other growth of the Ground, that was planted in the samen, on the Masters charges and

expense, without his special licence had, and obtained thereto, undre the penaltie of Ten pounds toties quoties.

Decimo quinto. In respect there is frequently a thin Meeting, whereby those present are putt to extraordinary charges, that these absent are not only exeemd of, but have the advantage of waiting on the business, Therefor its enacted that whoever of the Fraternity is absent at any of the Meetings shall pay Three shillings Scots every Quarter day and which is the Quarter count is to be putt in the Box and that in place of all former penaltys, and which is to be enacted with all vigor, and no excuse to be admitted, except when any of the Fraternity are called off upon the Kings Service.

Added later in the Year 1759.

Decimo sexto. In respect that many have entered into this Fraternity upon no other design than selfish views, which when they have obtained, desert the Meetings, which is contrair to the Articles of the Fraternity, Therefor it is hereby enacted that all above 36 years are excluded, except those who are children of the Members, or those who has been Members are to be received in to the said Fraternity — and likewise, those who are Members are to attend the Quarterly Meetings punctually, unless they have a reasonable excuse — and all that are absent one Year, not paying up their Quarter Account, with their other public charges that those who attend are liable to, They shall have no more right or title to the said Box, which is done unanimously by all the Members who met January 17th 1759 and subscribed by them

James Nisbet

Benjamin Hall

Will Mertene

Will Home

Alexander Teait

James Roughd

James Livingstone

Thos. Donaldson, Clerk

and further additions — undated.

Decimo septimo. That each Member who are admitted into the Fraternity of the Gardners of East Lothian are to pay into the Box as follows at their admission —
Every Labouring Gardner who is admitted must pay Five shillings ster. into the Box, and one shilling to the Clerk, and sixpence to the Officer.
Every Gentleman, not an acutal Labouring Gardner, must pay at his entry, Ten shillings in the Box, and one shilling to the Clerk, and sixpence to the Officer.

Each Member are to pay to the Box Master Threepence ster. for his Dinner, whether absent or present.

Decimo octavo. No Books to be taken out of the Hall nor to be read in the Hall without an order from the Preses, Office Bearers or a Committee appointed by them.

James Nisbet	James Roughead
Will Mertene	Alex. Teaitt
J. Nisbet	James Livingstone
James Dods	George Nisbet
Peter Roehead	James Tait
Thomas Donaldson	

The Box

The Box was nothing more or less than the Fraternity's bank: into it were paid subscriptions from members, moneys received as fines for misbehaviour, a not infrequent event, and the interest on loans. It was also the repository for loan receipts and for bonds. One of the elected officers was annually appointed Box Maister, and two others Key Keepers, one for each of the two separate locks. These were important appointments for, in the first 150 years of the Society, the chief interest of members seems to have been in the box and its contents, so much so that at one period membership dwindled to a mere handful, intent apparently on operating little more than a thrift and loan shop for their own benefit. Minutes of this period are almost entirely concerned with the calling in of dues, sometimes with the aid of the law, and with the making of loans to individuals. Occasionally mention is made of articles pledged as security, such as watches, but, later, intending borrowers were obliged to find guarantors. There appears to have been no stigma whatever attached to borrowing from the Box, in fact, quite the reverse as at one Meeting when funds lying idle are described as "useless to the Society, and all partook," including the office bearers. But there were also many instances of real charity, some of them with a pathetic ring: 'Given to A. Tait, one shilling for a poor Man' or, again, in 1750 'It was represented to us that John Cuninham, one of our Deacons and James Orchard, one of our Fraternity, were both lying dangerously ill, and in necessity, therefore they gave to William Mertine, out of the Box, 10 shillings ster. to be disposed as he sees need to.' There were probably three boxes during the life of the Society, but the frequent loss of one or other or both of the keys, or the failure of a Key Keeper to attend a Meeting was a continual nuisance. One Minute in 1722 reading 'the Box could not be opened for want of a key' conjures up a vision of a number of

grim faces round the table, and the occasion, a lapse on the part of the Key Keeper, led to the introduction of a fine of 6d. for such carelessness. Frequent changes of locks led to the ordering of a second box in 1750, with a handsome brass plate presented by a member but the keys to this box, in turn were subject to the same losses until finally, on 13th December 1815, the Committee decided to have a third box made, duly inscribed as being the property of the Fraternity. It is this box that is now in the possession of the Antiquarian Society together with what other articles have escaped destruction and loss, such as the jugs used for serving punch or ale that were ordered at the same time as the box, their embellishment to be "a figure representing a Gardener standing at ease with his left foot resting on his spade, with a Tree growing hard by him, the branches spreading over his Head, with the following inscription under his feet: The Gardeners Society — Haddington."

Meeting Places

The Minute Books do not reveal exactly where the early meetings were held, but it is clear that on the completion of formal business, ritual, monetary affairs and the like, the members settled down to entertainment. Those who were in a position to do so took it in turn to provide a room and the refreshments, the cost of which was shared, but the references are brief: "Met at David Andersonne in Hadingtoun" or as in 1726 on one occasion, "Met at Will Thomsons in ye Meal Mercate." This casual arrangement continued until 1783 when it was agreed to purchase for £105 from the Rev. Mr. Buchanan of the Episcopal Church, the "House at Kilpaurs", described as a tenement house. Some difficulty was found in raising the money, but eventually the Fraternity "took infestment by staff and baston" and took out insurance with the Sun Life Company for £120. An upper floor was retained for meetings, but the other rooms were let out, one of them to James Livingstone who "being old and ill (was) given a tenancy of a Room for Life." This was the old Town Piper, said to have been at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745, who died at the age of 80 in 1788. It had been his responsibility to lead processions of members after their Annual Meeting to the Town House or elsewhere for the yearly dinner and also to supply music during the festivities. The House of Kilpaurs, later Kilparis, is, of course, the hostelry still known as the Gardeners Arms which preserves on its frontage the symbol decorating this booklet. Here the Fraternity continued until 1888 when the premises were sold to a Mr Lawrie, one of its tenants, at a price of £450. Reasons for its disposal are not hard to find: its story is one of continuous complaints from tenants and the necessary alterations and renewals must have

been a serious drain on resources. The original entrance was at the side of the present Inn, opening on to the Kilpairs Street and connected with an internal circular stair which leads to the upper floors. The room used as the Lodge is spacious and was created by knocking three smaller rooms into one. Here the regular meetings took place for over a century and the solid old walls must have witnessed many incidents. One such, and there are many similar in the record, reveals that "on 17th April 1793 Bro. Oliver, after insulting the Chair and the Brethern of the Meeting then present in general, afterwards being dismissed from the Hall by force of the Brethern present, returned again and broke the Hall door and threw a piece of the said door at the Members in the Hall."

The Fraternity continued for a time at Kilpairs Street by renting the Hall from its new owner, but growing numbers probably influenced a move first to the Town House and then, in 1891, to the Foresters Hall in Hardgate where they took a ten-year lease of a room on the ground floor. The Town House was probably too formal a setting while, at Foresters Hall, a larger room upstairs was available for flower shows and the Annual Meeting.

Social Events

The Fraternity seem to have been ever conscious of its position as an ancient, if not the most ancient, of local Societies. Like other such bodies, they owned their own seat in the parish church which, it is recorded, was repaired in 1776 and painted 'a neat green colour' with a group of Flowers put upon the 'middle Pannell'. On the demise of a member this seat would be covered with a black cloth, and its upkeep entitled the Fraternity to be consulted in matters concerning the church. This ownership of private furniture seems to have ceased after the considerable alterations made to the building and completed in 1812.

Public affairs also, seem not to have passed unnoticed, and a few instances of this are worthy of mention. In 1792 a meeting agreed unanimously, to draw up "Resolutions" for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and to publish them in Ediburgh newspapers. Six years later, in 1798, thirty six members attended a meeting on 12th June, when the Master addressed them on the Defences of the Country and "by a great majority agreed to give £5: 5/- in the aid of Government to be put in the name of the Fraternity.

Pilferage, or "breaking of gardens" as it was called, is discussed on several occasions in 1799, the Fraternity offering a reward of £3: 3/- for information leading to convictions—advertising of this to be carried out 5 times by tuck of drum. In 1804 the Minute Book records that two boys had been convicted and sentenced to be put on board a man-of-war for this offence and recorded in the

same Minute, "Bro. Muirhead is fyned 6d for swearing in the Hall."

On 24th December 1861, a lengthy letter of condolence was sent to Her Majesty Queen Victoria on the death of her husband, the Prince Consort, and two years later, on 10th March 1863 an oak tree was planted on the Haugh in honour of the marriage of the Prince of Wales to Princess Alexandra of Denmark. On the lighter side, mention must be made of matters that usually followed the conclusion of formal business at meetings. According to John Martine, the Fraternity were noted for their happy social meetings and doubtless the junketings that followed business affairs must have lent attraction to membership in a community where daily life would normally have been uneventful and often humdrum. From the start it would appear that members would arrive with their own supply of liquid refreshment, if supplies had not been provided officially, with the result that on more than one occasion a member had to be 'fyned' for becoming intoxicated in the Hall. A meal was usually provided by the host of the day, but at an agreed price; for long this was 3d. but later it increased first to 6d, and eventually to 1/6d.

The Annual General Meetings held in June, usually attracted a large attendance, 93 being the record in 1803. On completion of business, which included the election of Office Bearers, the meeting would then march in procession to some hostelry or, later, the Town Hall, where a dinner had been arranged. In 1772 the event is recorded:—"For the General Meeting, resolved to have a decent dinner of Beef and Greens Bro. Nisbet is empowered to provide for fifty persons, not exceeding 50lbs. weight, 5 pints of Rum for punch, Sugar and Lemons in proportion, with glasses and bottles, to cost 1/- per head". This practice of supplying a meal plus a glass at an inclusive price was a regular feature, but members were also able to supplement supplies of liquor at their own expense. Before commencement of the meeting at 12 noon, the Town Piper was hired to play through the streets of the Town in order to publicize the event, and to lead the Procession. He was followed by a traditional character nicknamed 'Jock in the Green'. According to Forbes Gray this part of the programme was organised under the auspices of the Town, but this does not appear to have been so for a Minute of 1775 reads: 'Bro. Nisbet to make a bower of Flowers to carry at the procession on 13th June, and all members expected to contribute Flowers for this'. According to John Martine, this bower consisted of a "Headgear or Diadem of Flowers" supposed to represent a bower in the Garden of Eden: the Nisbet family who arranged and carried it for many years ultimately assumed it to be their personal right. It is not known when these annual Processions and the Jock in the Green ceremony ceased but it may have been in 1805 when, due to heavy

expenses over house repairs and grants to members, it was decided to cancel the Procession.

In the preceding Year, 1804, what is described as a Voluntary Festival was held on 1st July. The purpose of this is not disclosed, but individual members were asked to provide specific items for the menu which included "dressed Lamb, Strawberries, Gin, Wine, Fryed Lamb and Pyes, Sows head, Pickled Tongues, Whiskey, Porter, Chickens, Hens, Sallad, Candles, Fat Goose, Salmon, Trout, Gooseberry Tarts, Beer, a Baron Ham, 2doz. Pigeons, and Cash", no mean feast by any standard, and not conducive to gardening on the following morning.

Another regular and popular event was the Hare-Pie Feast held as a rule on the Tuesday before Christmas. Its origins are not known but the last reference to it in the Minutes was in 1897 when cancellation of the function is recorded. An entry in 1847 reads: "Supper for twenty to be on the Table at 8p.m.—1/6. for Supper. Small beer during it and a glass of Spirits after—and Whiskey at 1/3d. for half mutchkin 11 o.p. with requisites for Toddy making."

The Flower Shows

It has been noted that the Minute Books indicate little interest in the early years of the Society in horticultural matters. Perhaps shows or competitions were held but were not considered to be of sufficient importance to be recorded. In 1772, however, it was agreed to institute two competitions each year, one in April for Auriculas and the other in August for Carnations. The competitions had very mixed support and there is frequent mention of excuses such as severity of the winter or backwardness of the season to account for lack of entries. A printed programme for exhibitors was introduced in 1847 and, with it, a first prize of 1/6. and a second prize of 1/- for these classes:—

April	Brocoli; Preserved Apples; Hyacinths
May	Early Cabbage; Pansies; Rhubarb
June	Early Potatoes; Lettuce; Early Turnips; Tulips; Double Wall Flowers
July	Pansies; Roses; Ranunculus; Cherries; Early Peas; Carrots
August	Apricots fit for desert; Green peas; Red gooseberries; Red currants; White currants; Black currants; Strawberries; Cauliflower; Carnations

Sept Marigolds; French and African Jargonell pears; Hollyhocks;
Gooseberries; Apples for desert; Carrots; Dahlias; Onions;
Leeks; Celery; Savoy; Early Greens.

With occasional amendments this programme was maintained thereafter and, although by to-day's standards, the opportunities for flowers were limited, it attracted increasing numbers of exhibitors. It would be interesting to know, indeed, whether the advent of the Fraternity's regular exhibitions was not directly responsible for starting the larger, and open, County Shows held in the Corn Exchange. The second world war effectively put an end to the competitions. There was little activity after the show held on 1st August 1939 and the next entry in the Minute Book in June 1952 records the resignation of the Grand Master and the Secretary and the election of Mr. W. P. Wilson to succeed the Master. A proposal at that meeting to wind up the Fraternity was followed on 28th January 1953 by a circular addressed to the nineteen remaining members pointing out that in view of the lack of interest in the Fraternity, and lack of support at its shows, the time had come when the Fraternity should be wound up and dissolved. Some doubt must have existed as to the propriety of this course of action, but ultimately an unanimous vote in favour was secured. Matters were then further delayed by the discovery that four additional members were still alive though no longer in the district. Their consent had also to be obtained and a further meeting called before the final resolution could be passed on 22nd February 1953, the end of at least 277 years of activity.

That final resolution made provision for the disposal of the Fraternity's effects, the Minute Books to be retained against the time when there would be a local Museum for Haddington, the Regalia to be presented to the East Lothian Antiquarian Society and the remaining jugs obtained in 1815 to be distributed among the members. In view of his past achievements, Mr H. Faunt was to receive the Gilchrist Medals presented annually to the leading prize winner, and in due course they were to be preserved in the Town, their most fitting home.