



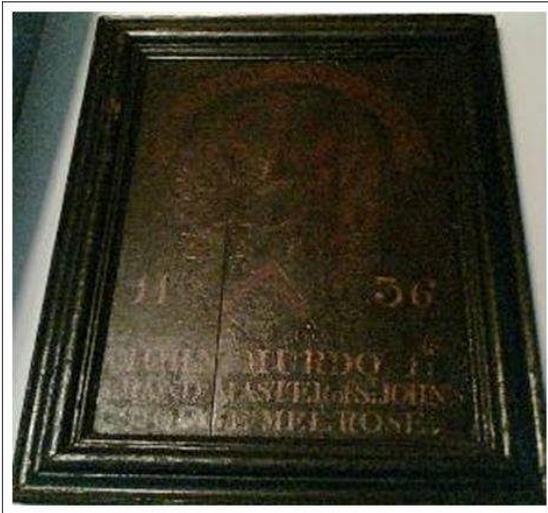
## The Lodge of Melrose St. John No. 12

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Roxburghshire, TD6 9PQ.

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### A Historical Sketch

**Our Lodge is reputed to be one of the oldest Masonic Lodges in Scotland!**



We do not know exactly how old the Melrose Lodge is, but a wooden plaque just inside the entrance to the Lodge bears the Masons' Coat of Arms with the date 1136. Above the Coat of Arms are the words *"In deo est omnes fides"* and below *"John Murdo 1st Grand Master of St Johns Lodge Melrose"*.

Other written evidence to support a claim that the Lodge has been in existence since 1136 is to be found in (a). The Master Mason Diploma issued around 1872 and used by Lodges which were affiliated to the Melrose Lodge and which contained the words *"...Master Mason in the Lodge holding of the ancient St Johns Lodge of Melrose AD 1136 as appears from Authentic Documents in the hands of the Master and Office Bearers of the said Lodge..."*, (b). on the cover of a leather bound volume of *"The Textbook of Freemasonry"* published in 1874 which is embossed with the words *"St Johns Lodge Melrose AD 1136"* and (c). a copy of *"Smith on Freemasonry"* dated 1785 bearing on the

flyleaf the words *"The Property of the Lodge 'St John' Melrose 1136"*.

The earliest minute book extant covers a period from 1674 to 1792 and consists of 285 pages. The entries, however, do not occur in strict chronological order, for example, the entry of the earliest date (28 December 1674) is written on page 4, while the latest (28 December 1792) appears on page 232. The book contains many entries of continuing interest, for example, an important entry made in December 1684 relates to the provision, for the use of members of the Lodge, of a loft and seat in the parish church which at the time was located in the Nave of Melrose Abbey. An amusing entry made on 27 December 1690 reads *"is votted that evrie meason that takes the plase in the kirk befor his elder broyr is a grait ase"*. The Lodge Minutes are intact from 1674 to the present day.

In the early days, the meeting place of the Lodge was located in the nearby village of Newstead. The building, long since demolished, was the home of the Mein family and appears to have been built in 1613 for there was engraved on a lintel of the house the initials "RM" followed by that date together with the letter "M" and a representation of a chisel and a mallet. A Peter de Mein was involved in the building of Melrose Abbey. It has been suggested that he was the founder of the Melrose Lodge, but there is no direct evidence of this. There is evidence, however, that members of the Mein family were active members of the Lodge over a long number of years. A tombstone in the family burial ground in the Abbey bears the inscription *"Heir lyis Androv Mein Meayson in Nevsteid....."*. He Died in 1624 aged 63. A Historical Sketch of the Lodge written in 1912 states that the Newstead house was well adapted for Lodge use "being masonically correct to the compass" A painting of the old house done by William Heatlie and finished by Tom Scott in 1891 following Heatlie's death hangs in the Lodge today.





In 1743, the meeting place of the Lodge was moved from Newstead to hired rooms in Melrose and these rooms were used until 1791 when the Lodge's own premises were acquired.

In 1810, the parish church was moved from the Abbey to a new building on the Weirhill and application was made for seats in the new church so that Masons might sit together. This was granted, and on 23 January 1811 the brethren, having carefully examined the gallery in the old church, agreed that it should be taken down and the wood used to line the walls of the Lodge room and make shutters for the outside of the windows. It is possible that the plaque inside the entrance to the Lodge came from this gallery, but there is no clear proof of this. A minute of 23 January 1802 states "resolved that a painting of the Arms of Masonry be done upon a board or canvas about 2ft square". The minute does not state

whether the painting was to be put up in the lodge or in the gallery, nor is there any other reference to it. There seems little doubt, however, that the plaque now in the Lodge is that which was commissioned in 1802.

An event peculiar to the Melrose Lodge takes place each year in December on St John's Day. This is the Mason's Walk. Brethren assemble at the George and Abbotsford Hotel after the Annual General Meeting and walk in procession, preceded by a band and carrying torches, up the High Street to the Market Cross round which they perambulate three times before making their way to the Abbey where a short ceremony includes an oration. The brethren then return to the Lodge via Buccleuch Street and High Street. The walk is of very long standing, the earliest reference to it being contained in a minute dated 27 December 1745 when it was agreed that all members should attend the Grand Master on St John's Day "*to walk in procession from their meeting place to their Generall place of Rendezvous*". Unfortunately, this minute fails to establish when the walk was first held. The last few words create the impression that the brethren were already in the habit of processing to a place away from the Lodge premises on St John's Day and that place could well have been the Abbey. Another reference (among many) to St John's Day is notable in that the brethren of the Lodge Benevolence formed in Melrose by French prisoners taken during the Napoleonic Wars joined in the procession in 1813. From 1939 to 1945 the Masons' Walk was held in the afternoon. No oration was given, no band was in attendance and no torches were carried. As with most other activities, the walk resumed its earlier form with the return to peace-time conditions.

Although the Grand Lodge of Scotland was formed in 1736, the first reference to it in the minute books of the Melrose Lodge appeared in 1787. From then on, several attempts were made to get the Lodge to affiliate to Grand Lodge without success and it was not until 1891 that a union was effected. On the evening of 25 February 1891, a Commission from Grand Lodge appeared in the Lodge Room for the purpose of confirming the union. Among the conditions of the union was one which stated that "*In consideration of the documentary evidence of the antiquity of this Lodge that the position of No. 1<sup>2</sup> (No. 1 bis) be assigned to it on the Roll of Grand Lodge*".

1986 being the 250th Anniversary Year of the founding of Grand Lodge and the 850th Anniversary Year of the founding of Melrose Abbey, the Melrose Lodge celebrated these anniversaries by arranging for the Freemasons to gather on 7 September at the site of the old Lodge at Newstead where they were addressed by Bro. J M Marcus Humphrey of Dinnet, Grand Master Mason, before walking in procession to the abbey where a divine service was conducted by Bro Rev Hugh Mackay of Talmine, Senior Grand Chaplin.

**Bro. W. A. Drummond, December 1986**